

THE ROYAL ARCANUM SERIES

BOOK THREE

What would you do
if you were given
a divine power to
rectify your past?

A glowing blue rose is the central focus, set against a dark, starry night sky. Below the rose, a mountain range is visible, with a forest of dark trees in the foreground. The overall color palette is dominated by deep blues and blacks, with bright blue highlights from the rose and stars.

ROSES
BONES

KEEFE R. D



ROSES BONES

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BOOK THREE

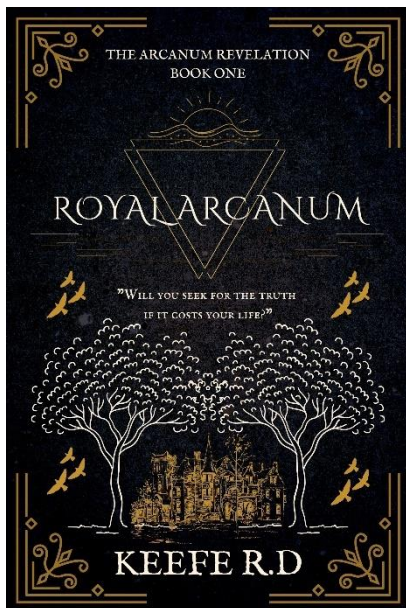
KEEFE R.D

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!

[Read on Google Play Books](#)



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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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THE ROYAL ARCANUM SERIES



2 ALTERNATE STORY



ROSES
BONES

KEEFE R.D



Golden Arch Books
Jakarta, Indonesia

For those who have faith in God, and in themselves.

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The Mystical Roses

*The myth shall be truth, and from truth,
comes "Black Roses".*

*It is said like the potion of freedom, has a
mystical power to save many souls, for those
who need a salvation from the darkness of
hearts. Beneath the shadow of bushes, there
are roses as black as night. The roses are
grown closely to the path of heavenly place;
the Shallow Blue Lake. And to the dead
end, where the water ventures, reflecting fairy
dusts in the air. It is below the bluish sky,
and stars, in the unseen world. Between the
letter O and W, the treasure shall be found
from within. But to earn a healing virtue,
one must survive the hurricane and the barren
of life. Memories shall last into nothingness.
Not much but pride for mankind, only to
lose one's fear.*

*The triumph awaits those who fight for the
sake of goodness.*



PROLOGUE

IT WAS THE LAST DAY of winter 2012 in Manhattan.

People kept on humming their melancholy chanting. Their eyes were heavy with tears and anger. People were obligated to wear black coat in this Remembrance Day of Lydia Brimham's Death. Those who won't obey the rule would be ostracized by the folks here. It was like a culture—black symbolized respect upon her death.

The sky turned kind of dark at nine a.m. in Time Square. The Gregorian chanting was ended at the same time the snowstorm came uproar, and slowly, people dismissed themselves.

There was one who covered her neck with a red scarf, walking confidently among the crowd. Her long straight hair mingled with the snow color. Her emerald green eyes stared at the avenue, sharp and eager. She knew best how to approach, and in the count of three, she came.



Sylvie Elle was hiding her face under the red umbrella, walking in the middle of the crowd when the sky had turned bright again. She wore a black coat and a red scarf.

She had to help restoring the perfect puzzle, and her mission was to be continued. She knew how to find the right person. But then, it came a distraction, her mind went off when something wasn't fall into place.

A week ago, she had observed the place before this Remembrance Day was held. It took place in a coffee shop with a brown canopy across the road. He was there every morning, sitting alone with the latest newspaper and a bitter cup of coffee. She always noticed his movement with her hawk eyes. And behind the glass window, she had waited for him.

Five minutes later, he walked out from the coffee shop. He was an old man, carrying newspaper in his armpit. He wore a gray flat cap and a black coat. When Elle followed him walking from behind, he turned his back suddenly to notice that something was off.

"How long have you been following me around, *angel*?" His voice sounded hoarse, and he chuckled afterward. "Well, if you call yourself an angel."

She chuckled sarcastically.

"What is it that you want?" He approached her a little closer "—but firstly, I knew that you've been following me for a while. I don't think such an angel would have time to grab a coffee."

"You've noticed," she murmured.

“Oh, so you think I wouldn’t know even you covered your pretty face behind your umbrella, and watching in the corner of the pavement from afar?”

“You’re smart, but—” she smiled, “life won’t just stop there. The political issue and family matters, which you couldn’t run away from all that.”

“I saw them on the television these days, still as phenomenal as they used to be,” his eyes stared away at the tall building next to them as he spoke “—making a huge mistake that goes public. They are poor little souls.”

“You’re right, it is a matter that related to your family—the Aloise,” she shouted agreed with him. “You need to be there for them.”

He glanced sorrowfully at her, but he decided to take a deep breath and just left her behind. Nonetheless, Elle followed him persistently.

“How’s she?” He asked without staring back at her. “My affection for her will be unjust with this partition between us.”

Elle could read his thought like a shallow river, since she knew instantly of whom he was referring, “Catherine is doing fine.”

He stopped walking to face her, and his mouth went crumpled along with his wrinkled forehead, and he spoke, “I don’t know if I’ll be able to meet her before I die. I’m too old for this matter.”

Elle stared pitifully at him, “You’ll find out when the time is right.”

I

METAMORPHOSIS

Her favorite place in here was the backyard terrace, which added with a beautiful view full of lavender flowers and the invigorating smell. New Rochelle neighborhood was only a temporary living place for her. This was Aunt Sarah's place, located in the Bronx.

Her eyes stared boldly at the pretty flowers, looking for inspirations, and the words suddenly echoed on her mind, it was something that Elle had said before she disappeared, *"You might have wondered, why this life has been leading you to a new perspective. This is the real world."*

After that day, it felt like a fresh start, as if everything had been erased from her mind. She almost forgot all of the sadness and tragedy that happened in the past. However, she felt something was missing, but she didn't know what it was, like there was a hole in her heart.

The strangest thing, she couldn't retrieve some moments she had with Elle and Marissa. All that she could remember that they were the caretaker of the Aloise family by now.

But after all, it was just her own thought that bothered her.

There was no precise thought at the time, especially for leaving her Dad alone in Brooklyn. She hadn't made up her mind about what to do with her apartment in Bronx, so she decided to live with Aunt Sarah for a while.

She had been attending college regularly, so ordinary, and boring. She was in the middle of her third semester now.

Life had changed swiftly. She would turn nineteen soon this October 2013. She hadn't planned anything significant for her future, but she already had a part-time job twice a week as an errand girl. Life seemed hard at the time that she had no idea of what to do next.

The next hour, she went away from home. The library was there—a desolate little place. She had been through this cold street for many times. She had been working since the beginning of July 2013, which this was the third month. The generous owner, Matilda Carline had let her working part-time as an errand girl, for delivering some papers and books, or even just buying a cup of coffee.

She wanted to do something else besides going to college, not only for the money, but to get her mind busied for a while. She knew that her dad already took a good care for her tuition fee, and Aunt Sarah already prepared good food every single day, but her mind was one thing she needed to take care of.

It was the frustration. She wanted a freedom from the sadness she carried away for the last twelve months. It was about the death of her mother. Next month was her mom's death anniversary. If only she could get ready—at least for her heart.

She went home in the afternoon, greeted by her aunt at the front door.

“I’ll make lasagna for our dinner,” Aunt Sarah said, and she added as usual “—or do you want anything else, Cathy?”

“No, it will be fine,” she nodded, always agreed as usual.

Cathy ran to the backyard terrace, trying to breathe in the fresh air. When she saw a blue butterfly flew above the flowers, she wrote something on her notebook.

“Metamorphosis”

She had no idea what it was that came across into her mind. It might be the flying butterfly that triggered her mind, but it felt like something more.

“Transformation”

“Life and death”

“Cycle”

“Can this be more than that?” Cathy murmured to herself. “Life’s changing.”

Afterward, she heard her aunt knocked on the wall behind her, interrupting her contemplation.

“Hi, what are you up to?”

Cathy narrowed her eyes for a second at Aunt Sarah, who suddenly asked her in a friendly way of talking like never before.

“Nothing important, I guess,” Cathy chuckled.

Aunt Sarah sat next to her, facing the backyard view. For a second, she stared at Cathy, as if she was waited for the right moment to start the conversation.

“We could barely meet like this. I’m sorry for my absence,” she said, eventually.

“Isn’t this like the first time ever that you chat with me, well, in a normal way?” Cathy confronted, her words were like a sharp razor.

Aunt Sarah sighed in annoyance, as if she carried a burden on her shoulders, and so she spoke, “Actually, I’m here to tell you about something important.”

“Say it,” Cathy demanded firmly.

“There’s a book that your mom left for you,” she said hesitantly. “Your mom wrote a journal, one that she called as a small part of the universe.”

Cathy truly took a heed to her words with a wreckage heart.

“My mom wrote another journal book, and I don’t know anything?” She kept her rage between the lines. “Is it published publicly?”

Aunt Sarah shook her head automatically, “No, it’s a private journal for the family. You can never imagine how the public might react about it.”

“Would they think the journal has a threatening story?” Cathy wondered.

Her aunt nodded, smiling awkwardly, and said, “Haile kept many things on her mind. She decided to write it out when we were younger. I could tell that she was still twenty-one at the time.”

“Where’s the journal now?” Cathy asked curiously.

As soon as Aunt Sarah’s phone rang on her pocket, she knew it would be the end of this conversation.

Aunt Sarah rose up hurriedly as she patted her shoulder, and murmured quickly, “It’s stored in Matilda’s Library. You can go check on it tomorrow while working part-time.”

Just like that, Cathy was left alone again.

The next morning, she woke up as usual. It was Monday the seventh October 2013.

She had classes as usual, had lunch as usual, just like every day normal again. College life seemed too way stagnant if it was compared with her complicated thoughts.

When she was sitting alone in the midst of the university green field, her mind always wandered somewhere far away as if she had lived in her own world.

She recalled all of the things that Eleanor had said to her. That day—in front of the university terrace, Eleanor suddenly approached her. It was the young lady's usual sarcasm that disturbed her mood, but the words she said sounded even cruel. Eleanor came to warn her about what happened last year in Austria. It was between both of them, and between their family matters. She wanted Cathy to forget everything, like starting all over again. She wanted it to be like the day where they were just strangers to each other. That would be better, she said.

Surely, it stabbed Cathy in the heart. Forgetting everything was bad, but to act as if nothing happened was worse.

It was like Eleanor had her own personal problem to deal with. As if she was embarrassed to be seen around with Cathy or something. It sounded cliché, but the truth was bitter. Therefore, they had been acting like strangers since they attended their second semester in the same university.

In the noon, Cathy walked toward the college wall magazine, and she saw the schedule for the new

seminar next week. It was called; *The Seminar of Metaphysical Theology by Professor Auben de Clure*. She cringed at the poster, which seemed strange to discuss that kind of topic around here, and the name of the speaker sounded familiar too. However, it would be more likely for her to attend the seminar with her best friend—Josh Kingsley.

At the end of the day, she returned home to New Rochelle, and she usually slept early in the evening.



The next day, it was Tuesday the seventh October. Cathy walked down the street in Manhattan with her favorite brown satchel bag after she finished attending the morning class. In the middle of the pavement, she got stopped as her eyes almost popped out surprisingly to encounter a familiar man.

She remembered to meet those sharp gray eyes somewhere. He treasured Eurasian look, just like her. He had strong jawline. He wore a black backwards cap, and he seemed muscular behind his black varsity jacket. He wore double silver rings on his left ear.

He was walking toward her. She was nervous though. It wasn't like she thought that they would remember each other, but the familiar sensation was strong. Nevertheless, Cathy pretended as if she didn't see him coming. She tried to avoid any eye contact.

It was like the right time when she unexpectedly stopped in front of an electronic store, which showing many of rectangular televisions on the shop window. Her focus turned rapidly to find another familiar face on the television screen. The televisions broadcasted a

rerun program from a few years ago, showing a talk show between international lawyers. She couldn't understand if this was a mere coincidence or something else, since it was the face of her aunt that she had never seen for a year—Laura Margaret.

Cathy recalled the day she stayed in Austria last year, when she heard the conversation between Aunt Sarah and Aunt Laura. They were talking about the people that worked for the Invisible Project;

“Chantel Herron?” Laura chuckled coldly. “I always knew her in the past. She was someone who always defended the criminal against the good one. Unfortunately, she always won every trial court without a drop of hesitation.”

“Chantel was a profound lawyer that scared many of her colleagues,” Sarah added, “but you’re also a lawyer, Laura.”

Cathy saw her appeared on these televisions now, and it had confirmed of what her grandaunt once told her about Laura’s occupation as an Austrian lawyer.

“You. I remember you,” a deep masculine voice shouted beside her.

Cathy froze as her heart got trembled. She knew it would be like this. Slowly, she turned to see his face from up close. He was very tall against her, about one-hundred-eighty-five centimeters.

“We’ve met before. Don’t you remember me?” He kept bragging. “I haven’t introduced my name that day—”

“Really?” Cathy snapped. “Do we really know each other?”

He went silent for a second, staring in disbelief at her.

“I mean, do you know me?” She asked for reassurance. “You do look familiar, but somehow I can’t remember.”

He chuckled in huge disbelief as if this small talk sounded like a mockery in the face.

“Are you pretending now?” He asked. “I remember you very clearly. Your name is Catherine, am I right?”

He had a cold vibe that almost scared her away. Her mouth went agape before she talked stammering to him, “Ye-yes. I prefer Cathy.”

“Well, we’ve met in the backyard of the Morizza chapel last year. You were gone the next day,” he recalled the memory for her. “You know, they only allow a special visitor to stay in their place. You must be very special back then.”

Cathy chuckled as soon as she remembered the last day she stayed in Austria last year. It was him for sure, the mysterious man with gray eyes.

“I was like having a study tour in there. Felt like staying in a museum,” she said.

“Did you have fun?” He tried to endure his laugh.

She narrowed confusedly at him, whether to take his question as an insult or something else. “I did pretty much have fun. What about you?”

“Don’t you think one will find the place as a misery?” His question sounded rhetorical, and he chuckled. “I’ve been to that place for too many times. I felt only boredom.”

“What a pity,” Cathy muttered, feeling defensive against his cold vibe.

For a second, she stole a glance at the television screen again. “Isn’t she—Laura Margaret, my aunt?”

He squinted in bewilderment at her. “She’s my aunt, Catherine.”

“No, she’s my aunt too—whether she wants to admit it or not,” Cathy argued.

He laughed again since her presence could amuse him, even though he felt bewildered against her words. Oppositely, Cathy found him disturbing somehow. Despite the fact, he was truly handsome that some walkers bothered to peep more than twice at him.

“So, are you living in New York now?” She asked curiously.

“I’ve been living in here since I was sixteen. I guess I’ve been aging enough these past few years.”

Cathy just noticed that he had a white scratch mark on his bottom lips. It was like a bitter sign on him.

“Enough about me,” he snapped. “What about you? You seemed so young though, are you still in high school?”

“What nonsense—” she muttered in annoyance that he was mistaken her baby face too much. “I’m attending college for sure. It’s Fordham University.”

“What a small world!” He looked excited somehow while talking. “Isn’t it located in the Bronx?”

Cathy nodded, and got curious with his sudden happy look.

“I’ll have the martial arts show this Thursday. The place is near to that university,” he chuckled. “There’s a big chance that we will walk past each other in there.”

Cathy shrugged as she had no idea at all. “Who knows, right?”

For a moment, she felt that the conversation was about to end, and so she had to know one more thing, “So, what’s your name?”

The strong cold vibration emitted throughout his presence. His smile was full of mystery.

“It’s Gavin,” he said in a mysterious way. “Just call me Gavin.”

2

NEW CYCLE

SOME DARK SIDES of this library felt damp. The air smelled like lemonade and citrus. Cathy walked past to the aisle, organizing some heavy books to their right shelf.

The next hour, she came to help the owner's main job, "No, please let me bring these for you. I'm kind of used to this job now," she said as soon as she grabbed the newspapers from her table. She got a good spirit and enthusiasm as an errand girl.

The owner was this old lady—Matilda Carline Heisler looked very well-reserved as an elder. She still appeared bright and fresh at her age that already turned sixty-seven this year. She was surely born as a pretty lady with manner. Cathy always felt that odd charismatic vibe whenever she saw her, but the unseen matters between the lines seemed to be appeared boldly, and it was unreadable. The thing was—Matilda got her own mysterious side that hard to be read.

Matilda stared at her naïve face for a second. She hummed a heavy sigh and said, "You don't have to do this. It's not like I need an employee."

"Just sit tight, because I want to work hard," Cathy smiled with kindness that could always touch her heart.

Subsequently, she paused for a minute from packing the newspapers into the box when Matilda muttered longingly, “You sound like the old Eleanor. I miss her so much.”

Cathy felt a tremendous remorse for all of the moments that had been happening, for all the pain that she couldn’t count on last year. “I’m sorry.”

“What for?” Matilda smiled, baffled. “Just do your job now, my child.”

A minute had last after she packed the box neatly. She came again to face the owner with a tingling question she kept since a few days ago. “Madame, can I ask you about something?”

Matilda was sitting on the corner of the room. Behind her was a window that faced the desolate street. Now, she glanced at Cathy curiously, “Go on, dear.”

“I... can I—” she sounded awkward for a moment that it seemed hard to get the words out. “Aunt Sarah said that my mom’s private journal is stored in here. I’d like to see it, may I?”

Matilda smiled inscrutably at her—unreadable. She looked taller than her when she rose from the chair, plus, she wore five centimeters black stiletto heels.

“Of course you can,” she walked to another section of the bookshelves, taking out a leather brown book for her. The book was placed in the first row of these bookshelves. “Your mom had a spectacular writing potential within her. I’m impressed, actually.”

Her hand felt trembled as soon as she received it. Just by touching the book, it could spark her reverie about the days when her mom was still alive. However, she tried to hide her sadness.

“Do your best, Catherine,” Matilda pitied her, and she patted her shoulder before leaving her alone.

Cathy sat on the chair that Matilda took before. She was aware that Matilda got busied in the front desk now.

The pages she opened were not dusty like the other books in here. It seemed this book had been opened very often. Thereafter, she wanted to crack the mystery of the universe inside the book, which Aunt Sarah had mentioned before. It was indeed a journal from the inside, just like what Aunt Sarah had told her.

She found it again. The word was written in this journal too.

All the three kinds of things in life that one would want to achieve; metamorphosis, the mystery of truth, and solitude. We all want to achieve something greater, at least for once in our life.

She remembered to have a pointless doddle on her notebook, when she wrote the word—*metamorphosis*. She didn’t want to believe in coincidence, but for synchronicity. Now, she thought this would be a lesson to learn.

It’s a transformation and change of direction. It can be the key to unlock the mystery of truth, somewhere you never thought to be found. Within oneself, there’s always a possibility. It is in you, the secret is buried deeply.

It sounded like a heavy charade.

She was about to close the book, but then a paper sheet fell off from it. It looked like a piano sheet music with the song entitled *Crystal Winter*.

Cathy remembered the day when her mom showed a hidden talent of playing a piano. It was a good

memory she always treasured. But she didn't know that her mom could also write a song.

"You know—" Matilda approached her and spoke after the solitude manner had broken through. "You don't look like a girl at your age."

Cathy stared up at her, feeling awkward eventually. She got confused of what to say.

"What I'm trying to say is—you need to go on a holiday break," Matilda said and chuckled. "Take some time off from work."

"Do you think so?" She asked. "Do you talk to me as if I'm a girl with a depressed look?"

"Oh, cut it out," her tone sounded like an admonishment. "There will be Bonfire Party in Manhattan's East Village, it will be held in the end of the year. You should come with your friends."

"Thank you, I'll consider it," Cathy nodded and rose from the chair as she was done working for a day.



On Thursday the tenth October, she woke up early in the morning. She had her everyday routine to have a breakfast together with Aunt Sarah.

The television was placed against the dining room. Cathy had her eyes focused on the television screen as the news channel broadcasted the newest information regarding the continuance of Lydia Brimham's death case. Both of them got surprised.

The news anchor reported that the president of Brimham Newspaper wanted to have justice by bringing the continuance case into the trial court. That was

being said; Trisden Brimham wanted to sue White Foxes for sure.

“I thought it has been settled,” Cathy murmured while chewing her omelet rice.

“It is the fight full of heat and anger—” Aunt Sarah said, “even after the Remembrance Day for Lydia Brimham had been done a few months ago.”

“I guess people must’ve been wondering,” Cathy said as she rose from the chair, taking her satchel bag as well. “I’m going now, bye.”



The college life went as usual. Cathy walked past the university field, near to the wooden benches where she saw that man again. She remembered his name—Gavin. That was it, no surname.

She didn’t try to approach him or anything since he was surrounded by some muscular men. She observed the situation around here, and that was the second she saw Eleanor Heisler came across to the walking trail.

“Oh my God, look at you,” Eleanor shouted mockingly at her. “Do not ever speak to me again, Charlotte.”

Cathy stared at her confusedly, “I haven’t said a word—”

“It’s just a warning, duh,” she snarled. “Just in case that you don’t know, so I’ll say this in advance—” she muttered so fast that she sounded like gargling, “You should attend the seminar of Metaphysical Theology on Monday. It’s a rare event.”

“I see,” Cathy remembered about the seminar. “You’re into that too.”

Eleanor smirked at her.

Some students walked past to the walking trail. Before this sarcastic young lady left her, Eleanor exchanged glance with him from afar—Gavin. It felt strange, although they didn't know each other. They glanced in a strange way that made Cathy wondered of what was going on between the two of them, as if something was in the air. However, Cathy didn't bother to ask her further since it could turn into a pointless dilemma.

After Eleanor walked away, he glanced at Cathy curiously. She didn't know how to act like a social person, so it just turned really awkward between them. He smiled from afar and waved at her. She could only nod at him, smiling stiffly.

Cathy recalled their last conversation when he said there would be Martial Art Show somewhere near Fordham University. Judging from the look, it seemed that the muscular men around him were into the show as well.

As expected, he approached her first. He smiled widely, but still surrounded by his cold unfriendly vibe. He wore black clothes again. His gaze was even colder each time they stared.

"I told you so, there's a great chance we'll meet," he greeted. "How are you, Cathy?"

"I... I am fine, and you?" she talked stammering as feeling nervous.

He looked excited. "I am doing great by the way."

"Is there any Martial Art Show around this university?" She asked curiously. "I mean, what kind of show is it?"

He got tingled by her naïve question. “It’s more like a boxing arena, it’s near this place. I’m here to see some friends that also will participate in the show,” he explained as glanced back at those muscular men from afar, “I’m into that kind of martial art,” he snorted, and continued talking, “I should’ve been asked you to grab a coffee together yesterday. I guess, we’re destined to meet, don’t you think?”

Cathy sighed in disbelief at his manner, “Unbelievable. Are you asking me out?”

“Is it wrong to have a coffee together?” He chuckled. “It’s a sunny day, you know.”

“We’ve barely met, and I don’t know you,” Cathy confronted.

“Exactly,” he said enthusiastically, “I’ve got a feeling we’re going to run into each other very often.”

“It seems you’re totally a social person than I am,” she sighed, pitying herself though. “Maybe we can talk later.”

“Yeah, I’d like that,” he murmured while taking his phone out from his pocket jeans.

Cathy bulged out when he thrust his phone for her to fill out her phone number, “Are you serious?”

When she finally gave him for her phone number, he laughed at her naivety. “I’m not going to bite you, Cathy.”

“Do you like to insult me that much?” Sometimes she felt his intention was like testing out her social skill or something.

He shook his head in disbelief, chuckling alone. “Let’s see if I’m the kind of person like what you’re thinking of—” he took out a name card from his pocket

to give it to her. "I want you to see my boxing show. Come and watch."

It wasn't his name card, but more like a gymnasium address in Manhattan.

"Are you planning to show off your talent?" She chuckled. "Why would I want to watch your boxing show, anyway?"

"Come this Saturday and find out yourself," he challenged her.

"You're a man full of mystery," Cathy sighed. However, she wasn't sure if she could trust him or not. He seemed complicated. It took her a second to decide. "See you later, Gavin."

3

PROPAGATION

A FEW DAYS HAD PASSED. On Monday, 14th October 2013, the seminar event was finally about to start. The attendants were walking toward the auditorium while chattering about the odds of the seminar. The view was crowded.

The huge room was reserved for the only seminar that day. The ceiling lights were stroking sharply against the podium and the semi-brown floor of the stage, where the important guests had just walked through it.

The attendants gave a silent respect toward the guests.

Josh squinted surprisingly at the guests, the same feeling happened to Cathy. In front of them, some lecturers were mumbling about their awareness of this event. One of them was the well-respected professor from psychology division, she muttered astonishingly, "Auben?"

They couldn't keep quiet to mumble about how merciful they were to have *him* return in the education industry in this country. Seemingly, only the professors and a few lecturers that knew very well about his history. He was a noble man from France.

However, they bluntly wondered about his healthy state after all this time. Everyone in the industry knew that he had a deep sickness that put him forever in the wheelchair, but now, he stood strongly on the stage with his beloved wife—Lady Marie de Clure.

“That’s impossible. He shouldn’t be stood still so great without a miracle,” the words blurted among those lecturers.

“Doesn’t he have a cancer?” A female professor with a short blonde hair asked. “Some of our colleagues thought he’s dead. It’s so tremendous for our surprise now!”

One of them sighed and spoke with hatred, “He’s the most trustworthy professor in the occultism field, but for our worry, he should’ve been realized how absurd the words he would say to our children in Fordham.”

Josh chuckled at their confrontation. Cathy stared at him without given any thought.

“Since when did Fordham hold a seminar about *metaphysical theology*?” He asked about the possibility.

Cathy shrugged unsurely. “He’s just going to give us a one-time seminar.”

“Doesn’t look like that,” Josh blurted out his own paradigm. “They have a mission, right?”

“What do you mean?” She narrowed her eyes instantly, bewildered.

“Cathy,” he stared worriedly at her, and whispered “—they’re after you, they’re trying to look for you and the rest of the Aloise family.”

As they stared at each other, Cathy felt sick just by hearing his insecure thought.

Josh didn't want to give her a depression, so he added quickly, "But you'll be alright, I know it for sure."

Cathy pretended as if she didn't hear him saying anything since it was hard to respond.

The opening speech was started in the next ten minutes. At the time, Josh saw her sat silently while hugging her arms, and so he muttered, "This room isn't that cold."

"No, of course," she sighed and loosed her arms right away. Her navy-blue coat was surely felt warm enough, but it was rather about her insecurity that felt cold. "I just...I don't know what to think about your speculation."

"It is not a speculation, but the truth."

She glared back at him, feeling mad. "I'm not debating with you in here."

"I know. You try to run away from your fear—from them."

"Josh—" she felt annoyed already, and so she whispered, "they are like dangerous animals—*White Foxes*."

He gave her a pity look. She sighed heavily while watching a quick performance from the choir club before the real speech would begin soon.

"At least someone in there has to be the chosen one. Everyone will finally know what she is—" Josh pointed out his chin at the guests that sat behind the stage curtains, "Eleanor looks different now."

"Because she's—"

Josh stared instantly at her eyes, seeking for the mystery that she was about to say. "What?"

"I can't tell you about this one—it's too hard."

"Come on, what is it?"

She bit her lips spontaneously. “She might turn out like Chantel Herron. There’s evil—”

“No, no, no,” he sounded denying everything that she would say next. “She can’t be. It’s so bad to be true.”

At the second Josh realized that Johanna sat beside him since the very beginning, however, she peeped hardly on their conversation, and he made eyes gesture of warning to her about being polite. Luckily, there was other friend that invited her to chat together, saving her from being embarrassed.

Slowly, he continued talking with Cathy, “Does her grandmother know about that part of evilness?”

“I have no idea. It’s like a deal from the Devil you can say—” Cathy said well-wary.

“Chantel the Witch,” he said that name in disgust. “Why is she targeting on Eleanor?”

“I’m not sure why, but there’s must be a way to help her return to her senses, for becoming good again,” Cathy murmured.

“Since when she’s that good?” He chuckled, adding his personal joke.

“She is. There’s always probability,” Cathy nodded, wanted to be sure about it too.

“My attention will hum along when the choirs will stop their mystical chanting,” he mumbled annoyingly like usual. Meanwhile, Cathy just needed a time to think for everything.

The audience sat frozenly as keeping their eyes on the stage, watching the choirs, who kept their beautiful melody with a mysterious and cryptic vibe. The melody was kind of reminded Cathy about the Aloise’s chapel in

Austria, and to make sense everything that happened last year.

She saw Alex just came from the exit room. He stood two lines in front of her seat. Their eyes caught each other, which had the same shade of a deep chocolate color. Before he went to sit with the other lecturers, he smiled at her without anyone noticed. At the time, the chanting was ended, the room went silent immediately.

“I hate to say this but they’re all look like businessmen that travel from Atlanta—” Cathy didn’t bother with his mumbling moment, even though Josh would always bluff out of his own stupidities, “with those white robes they look—”

Lady Marie walked to the podium. She wore the finest pink suit of her favorite, and a pair of black pump heels, and her pinned up white hair was glowing under the stage lights. Everyone applauded respectfully for her presence.

She had a charismatic speech that made people could agape at her. Subsequently, she welcomed her husband to take a lead, “I present to you—my husband, Professor Auben de Clure.”

Lady Marie smiled at him—the figure of an old man took the microphone excitedly.

“My name’s Auben de Clure,” he paused to clear his throat, and continued talking in a deep wise voice, “I mustn’t know about the most presumable incidents that had diagnosed me as a sick man for these past twelve years.”

Cathy noted instantly that he was sick since the early time when Eleanor’s parents died.

“—but what bring all of us here, despite my presence? It’s about *metaphysical*,” he continued. “I want to introduce to all of you, for this upcoming fact of our human history. It’s resonant in our ears for the lesson and truth that metaphysical is about the study of the unseen,” his eyes furrowed along with his skeptical smile. “Let’s begin with this penmanship first,” he clicked on the remote with his other hand, showing a handwriting image on a huge projector screen behind him. The audience chattered boisterously, echoing their confusion altogether.

It was an image of handwriting with black ink calligraphy that written “hallow nostrum” in a papyrus paper.

“Anyone knows?” He asked.

Everyone stared surprisingly at Johanna, who suddenly raised her hand so high, and shouted, “It’s a hypothetical medicine that’s used in a strange culture— if you refer it to our theme today.”

“Metaphysical—that’s true,” Auben agreed, and all eyes followed his nod.

“The Romanian gypsies used to be remaking this hallow nostrum as the water purify to cure their children from a deathly disease called Gastric Antrum, or we know it as a painful stomachache,” everyone laughed along with his joke, “Nowadays, it inspires many researchers and professors to learn about their secret ingredients.”

Another young woman in a front row raised her hand, and shouted, “Excuse me, Mr. Auben de Clure, but I thought gypsies inherit *Ataxia*—a lack of muscle coordination.”

“Let’s count on to that one, because I’d like to bring out the topic,” the audience chuckled along with him. The screen dissolved into the next black-white picture of gypsies in their weary looking faces. “They’re people who believe in metaphysical rather than logical thinking.”

The screen projected random black-white pictures of Romanian gypsies, and then he paused at a picture of a small bottle enclosed with cork. Auben continued explaining, “Our researcher team is currently managing this water. We try to prove it, whether it’s just a medical joke or not, and turns out as this—”

It was just a picture of ordinary blue water in a white cup, but when he zoomed in the screen, everyone astonished with its detail.

Josh whispered at her, “Those sparkling crystals on the water seems like a discovery from a phenomenal researcher from Japan.”

Cathy shrugged, confused. “Do you think so?”

“It looks a bit different though. That one is like a needle-snowflake rather than flower-snowflake,” Josh argued.

Auben tried to calm the audience that was in shock for the fact, “All of you must’ve been wondering what’s so metaphysical about it?” He chuckled alone, and said, “Well, does anyone in here remember a fairy tale story about a fracture dimension?”

He walked to the center of the stage to give the projector screen remote to Lady Marie.

“When we were children, superstition appeared to be part of our world that couldn’t be separated from us,” he said further as the next pictures on the screen showed some of mystical creatures, planetarium, and

stars. “It consists of children’s demanding questions: Is it true? Does it exist? Is it happening in our world?” His smile looked irresistible about this topic. “My lecture today is not inviting you to argue with ton of dissemble fairy tales, but to show you what the truth is.”

Josh covered his mouth with hand to chuckle. He whispered to her, “He must’ve been crazy.”

Cathy was naively whispered back to him, “He must have a reason behind all of this.”

The screen showed another picture of archeologists’ activity in a desert, and he explained, “For example, Egypt keeps their own secret as much as everyone does. Their government paid a strict attention for that dimension,” the next picture was a huge portal in the midst of Egypt desert. “This is no sublime.”

It seemed like no one got attached with his story. The room went silent again.

Lady Marie clicked on the remote to change the screen with another mysterious picture of people’s activity in the lab.

“Some scientists didn’t get their revolving door to be succeeded to prove another existence like that Egypt portal, so they ended up as a nonbeliever,” Lady Marie spoke solemnly in the podium. “The scientists won’t help us based on their lack of experience about the study of theology and metaphysical, but when they saw what we called—”

They looked at each other, and spoke concurrently, “*Hallow Nostrum.*”

Auben smiled at her, and continued talking on the stage, “They’re finally agreed to retest and deal a contribution. As everyone has a secret too—”

They stood still to stare observantly toward the people in this huge auditorium, as if they were waiting for the exact moment to say something. The audience could see a remarkable suspicious smile craved on their faces.

Auben spoke in the podium, "I present to you, what we called as *Moisés-de-Clūse*."

Everyone got speechless, but at the same time they murmured in hysteria. The same thing happened to Cathy and Josh, who got agape after they saw one picture had finally gone public.

"They're insane," Josh shook his head in disbelief, "and they took a picture of it?"

He turned to check on her numb expression. Cathy went paralyzed for a second, as if her heart got stabbed and betrayed.

He punched her shoulder lightly, "What's wrong?"

"They're exposing what should've been hidden. I don't understand," Cathy muttered.

On the screen, a sophisticated picture of an ancient portal was seen clearly. The portal door was opened widely, showing a winter ground. It was exactly the same one inside the abandoned castle in Austria.

"It's the Aloise property. Don't you think it's like stealing?" Josh asked in disbelief. "Plus, they're revealing the secret to our university?"

"Whatever you do in a metaphysical world, no one can sue it with the law enforcement," Cathy said sadly as she gazed at his eyes, "I'm not sure how House of Aloise would handle it if they sue White Foxes now."

"If I were you, I would jump out from this chair," Josh muttered. "I feel sorry, Cathy."

"Don't be."

He could feel her unspoken sadness, even though there was nothing he could do to stop the devil from playing a tantrum.

The audience still whispered and argued toward the news. Auben hadn't finished his speech yet, "*Moisés-de-Clūse* is the source where we got *Hallow Nostrum*. It's located in Lower Austria."

The projector screen showed some words in Latin, with the explanation;

The origin word Moisés is derived from mōsheh in Hebrew, meaning 'drawn out from the water' and in Spanish is 'from the water', and in French is 'born of'.

Meanwhile,

The origin word Clūse is from Old English, meaning 'enclosure' or 'close'. The earliest meaning of Clūse is a dam being, where in French word has a meaning as canyon, it is 'sluice' in English nowadays.

Auben walked closer to the middle of the stage as he spoke, "In other words, it exists inside the abandoned castle in Austria, where the secret portal is hiding in there as an enclosed place that drawn out from the water. So what we called it, *Moisés de Clūse*."

When Detective Chantel Herron walked on the stage, gathered together with White Foxes, the audience saw a mere hesitation in this seminar. The last session had finally arrived. The attendants went outside to the exit door as the event had finished.

There was still a feeling of disgust that left within these two adolescents, since they knew very well of whom the real puppeteer was. They looked back and forth around the room, and some students were just passing by from behind. This place went silent immediately like a cave.

“They brought us alive, but some people won’t notice their hesitation,” Cathy said, it sounded out of place somehow.

Josh stared at her, confused.

“Elle said that, I only quoted her words.”

“You mean—*they* are like angels?” He asked, although he actually understood somehow, but it was hard to decode.

She nodded and sighed. “You know, like Chantel, she holds dark secrets beyond all of things than White Foxes ever do.”

“If the devil ran the show, how would the angels manage that?” Josh wondered.

“Then, they’ll be watching us,” she said wearily.

He got bewildered, narrowing his eyes at her.

“I mean, we’re human. We should’ve been the one who could manage things around us. The angels are guiders, not the one who take control,” she explained.

He sensed her worryment. “Yeah, you’re right.”

And then, he dragged her shoulders hurriedly when a security guard demanded them to get out from this empty auditorium.



In the corridor, people still chattered noisily. Some of the guests from the seminar had gone, except Professor Auben de Clure, who stood across the corridor among other professors by now. When his eyes came across with the two adolescents—Cathy and Josh, eventually, he whispered to a female professor beside him, who seemed admiring him the most. Afterward, she glanced

oddly at the one that he referred—it was Cathy Charlotte.

“I think he’s talking something about you,” Josh noticed.

That female professor, who majored in psychology division walked forward to approach them. She was the same professor that sat in front of them in the seminar, wearing a purple suit, and she had a ponytail brown hair.

“Are you Catherine Charlotte?” She asked hesitantly.

Cathy baffled. “Yes, ma’am?”

She thrust her hand to have a handshake with both of them. “We haven’t properly introduced. I’m Mrs. Mississippi, a professor from psychology division.”

“Is there something wrong, Professor?” Josh asked wonderingly.

“Oh no, I’m sure the students from English program are excellent,” she couldn’t stop smiling widely while talking. “It’s just... Professor Auben de Clure wants to speak privately with Catherine, if you mind?”

“Uh, what’s the occasion, ma’am?” Cathy asked, baffled.

“I have no idea,” she shook her head “—but it will be a huge honor, if you just take a minute. He’s someone very important.”

Cathy looked away to find Professor Auben stared intensely at her from afar. She noticed the oddity from there.



In the lecturers’ lounge room, she sat in a comfortable sofa, oppositely from that gray hair old man, and he

looked a bit different from closer—more fragile. There was no one except both of them in here.

“It seems you take the same major as my granddaughter—Eleanor,” he spoke first.

“Yes—”

“My presence in here isn’t for a classy small talk,” he interrupted. “I want to warn you radically.”

Cathy narrowed her eyes, baffling.

“This is about my wife’s madness,” he said carefully. “You must be careful.”

“What are you trying to say, sir?” Cathy asked.

“She’s planning a tour for the revelation of *Hallow Nostrum*. She wants to speak the truth to the world, opening no gap at all,” he informed. “There will be no parachute left for those who have been the secret keepers.”

“Of *Moisés-de-Clūse*?” Cathy perplexed, “—but you’re part of it. In the seminar, you were the one who revealed the secret that should be hidden.”

He smiled. “You were there, weren’t you?”

The silent followed their solemn encounter.

“I knew it. I saw you sat on the auditorium with conscience eyes,” he said calmly. “It seems you’re not aware about the magical water, but you’re aware of the danger it will cost, am I right?”

“You exposed almost everything to people, even if they couldn’t understand yet—” Cathy grimaced, “you and your family are insane.”

“Do you think I want to do this all?” He raised his tone now, he got angry. “If Marie didn’t force me—”

Cathy saw his desperation craved on his wrinkled face.

"I've been enduring stroke for a long time. Maybe this is the only chance I can stand on my feet, to see my children," he said pitifully. "Marie has her own motive to raise me up."

Cathy shook her head hesitantly, "I don't understand, Mr. Auben de Clure."

"My wife would rather kill me in the first place, if I couldn't be an instrument for her," he said and exhaled deeply. "I got healthy after she drank me a spoon of Hallow Nostrum," he said. "You see now, I disseminate the royal secrecy because of her."

"Are you trying to convince me about your wife's evilness now?" Cathy confronted him.

"I don't want to see Eleanor fall into a black hole too. I know what Marie has been looking after. She has wreckage motives."

"Why are you telling me this?" Cathy baffled.

He went silent for a second.

"Why should I trust you, Mr. Auben de Clure?"

He closed his mouth tightly, and the next second, he went impulsive to say, "Because you're *the destined child*," he paused for a while, and continued talking "— because it's only you who can stop all of the madness."

"What's my occupation?" She talked back. "I am no savior."

"Believe me, I don't want to encourage the public with her secret plan for threatening *Caecus*," he said. "Marie has a phrase; if she can't empower the unseen world, then the whole union must be destroyed altogether."

"She wants Caecus for herself?" Cathy gawked. "Why?"

“You see the female detective beside her?” He chuckled. “She always attach like a bee, as if she was ready to sting.”

“I know Detective Chantel Herron,” she said distinctly.

“Ever since she appears in our family, Mrs. Herron seems to influence my wife greatly like her personal adviser,” he sighed heavily. “Marie believes everything she speaks of,” he talked while staring intimidatingly at her sleepy eyes, “—since then, the word *welfare* always echoes in her ears.”

“Is it because she thought that Caecus can give her power and welfare?” Cathy wondered. “Perhaps, Lady Marie is being manipulated—”

“The Witch,” he said it firmly.

Cathy stared at him in a tremendous astonishment. “You knew?”

“Who do you think it is from, the rumor of the destined child that arrived at our door so vividly?” He leaned closer to her face, talking solemnly. “Once we read the Royal Council’s statement about it, she convinced White Foxes,” he sighed and talked, “she seemed to know a lot.”

“Please, if you think I’m the one, you are very wrong,” Cathy assured him.

Cathy was about to take her leave, but he shouted quickly, “House of Aloise has a second thought about you, child.”

She turned her back to see him once again. At the time, she realized he had binary blue eyes.

He informed, “This is only a rumor. Don’t believe it from me, but your aunt—Laura Margaret takes a vote to eliminate and exile you from House of Aloise.”

“What?” Cathy astonished, and it stabbed her heart. “She won’t do that.”

“Remember, *there’s no one you can trust*, even the people closest to you,” he said firmly.

“Is this how White Foxes playing their trick?” She infuriated.

“I am not,” he insisted. “I’m telling you this to save you, so you can be well-prepared,” he stood as well. “For Eleanor too, I want to see her as the right thing.”

“I’m grateful for your information, but it’s not helping to suggest any solution.”

“Well, if they’re right about the destined child—you’ll find your way.”

Cathy still had her heart pumping hardly after Auben left the room. She couldn’t be consented with their private conversation.

Josh had waited outside the room. He demanded to know what happened, “What did he say?”

“Secrecy.”

“So?” Josh stared at her in a great curiosity, and Cathy sighed heavily at him. “You don’t want to tell me?”

Cathy shook her head. “It’s just too complicated. You wouldn’t understand.”

4

CONTEMPLATION

THE MYSTERIOUS FOGGY mist sparked on her brown eyes. The oddest, it was surrounding her bed, and the trees were coated by the mist from afar. A woman stood against the bed, leaning down to surprise her.

“Look at you, growing up to be a beautiful girl,” that delicate voice gave her a tingling sensation, it sounded too way familiar, but then she saw it was her mother—Haile.

“Mom, what are you doing in here?” She blinked twice, bewilderingly.

“Happy birthday, my child. I wish you to be happy forever,” she spoke and caressed her cheek gently, the warm touch felt surreal for her.

“You don’t need to be sad. There are certain things in life that you need to understand. I want you to know that I’ll always stay by your side to watch you growing up,” and the way she spoke was too vivid to be heard.

“Mom, I don’t want you to go. I need you,” Cathy begged pathetically.

Her mom smiled kindly, and said, “I won’t be away from you—for a long time.”

Cathy woke up with headache. It didn't feel pretty bad though. She remembered today—of her birthday on 20th October 2013.

She walked out from her bedroom to the kitchen, where the delicious smell of smoked beef was so nice.

As she hurriedly sat on the dining room, Aunt Sarah glanced at her while stirring the pan.

“Are you alright?” Her aunt asked, and looked worried. “It seems you have a bad dream again.”

“I don't know if that was either bad or good,” Cathy mumbled, “I dreamed of my mom's visit for my birthday.”

“She has greeted you first, I guess I'm late,” Aunt Sarah chuckled as she tried so hard to hide her worry. “Happy nineteenth birthday, my beautiful niece—you've grown up to be a beautiful girl!”

“That's what she said in my dream,” Cathy murmured sadly.

Aunt Sarah stopped stirring the smoked beef as she glanced worriedly at her, and subsequently, the bell rang.

“Are you expecting someone?” Aunt Sarah baffled.

Cathy had no idea either since this house rarely had any visitors. She rose up from the chair, and said, “Let me see it.”

The cheerful face of the red hair woman at the doorsill had shocked her. They stared longingly at each other's eyes with happiness. She wouldn't know this woman would visit the house on Sunday morning for celebrating her birthday. They hugged each other immediately.

Cathy almost sobbed in her arms. “Marissa, I don't know you're coming!”

As soon as Sarah turned off the stove, she noticed her arrival.

“Happy birthday, my darling,” Marissa greeted her warmly, sparking a good vibe. “The schedule for our picnic had been settled. Matilda has organized it for you.”

“Grandma Matilda?” She couldn’t believe how happy she was now. “It’s in the Central Park, isn’t it?”

“You bet,” Marissa said and messed her hair like a little kid. She went to the kitchen to greet Sarah.

Cathy returned to sit in the dining room while observing them for preparing the morning breakfast.

Sarah served the smoked beef in a big plate, while Marissa took out a box she carried that was full of ribbons and confetti.

“She had a dream last night—” Sarah whispered to her.

Marissa stared back in bewilderment, and then she approached Cathy affectionately, “You have a lot of things on your mind. Today is your birthday,” it was too sudden that Cathy was astonished to hear her words. “She visited you.”

“My mom—she said she’ll stay by my side for a long time,” Cathy sighed and said, “but it was just a dream that felt so real.”

Marissa half smiled, ignoring her curious thought for a second. She went to check on the box again. Meanwhile, Sarah went to the dining room, preparing the plates, forks, and knives.

“Oh, these are gifts from Matilda—” Marissa shouted while taking out one package of creamy milks, “she couldn’t come here, so she asked me to send these for you ladies.”

“But, is it true of what my mom said in my dream?”
Cathy kept demanding.

Both of them stared at Cathy in astonishment.

“Are you still worrying about it?” Aunt Sarah confronted her. “I don’t think someone have to be sad in their birthday.”

“I don’t want you to be stressed out in your birthday,” Marissa added.

Cathy sighed, annoyed. “I’m asking you if it’s true—about my dream.”

Marissa stared pitifully at her, but all she could do was just nodding concurrently. “Your mom will always be in your heart, Catherine.”

“Great, can we start our breakfast now?” Aunt Sarah shouted between them.

Subsequently, they sat together in the dining room, enjoying the small birthday party.



On Monday morning, Cathy had to undergo her most delicate boredom, which was going to college. The first schedule was English Literature class. After a couple of hours had finished, the students burst out toward the corridor, finding their own way to their next class, and some of them went to have lunch in cafeteria.

Cathy was about to walk out toward the exit door at the time she came across with Johanna, who was her senior in college.

That curly blonde girl dressed in green parka, and she was busied looking for something inside her green backpack at the time Cathy approached her.

It was a rare feeling that she wanted to have a little chit chat with her, but it was a curiosity that had been tingling on her mind since the seminar of Metaphysical Theology that was held last week. She saw how eager Johanna was toward the magical story that was being told that day.

“Hey—” Cathy felt rigid to start the conversation.

“What is it?” Johanna shouted without staring back and still busied with her backpack, but when she saw it was Cathy, she turned stiff, and got surprised. “Oh, hey you, it’s rare to see you get socialized. What’s up?”

“Don’t get me wrong, but I keep thinking about the last seminar we attended. I’ve heard that you’re into his research,” she said curiously.

“Aha, the magical water of Hallow Nostrum. Why do you ask?” Johanna turned focused at her now.

“What makes you believe in his fairy tale?” Cathy asked, pretending to be stupid. “It’s not like it appears before your eyes.”

Johanna nodded, thinking for a while. “I have faith,” her smile seemed sincere as she talked, “*You just don’t get to see it every day.*”

For someone who wasn’t involved directly with the alternate dimension, her answer had a deeper meaning than she probably realized it by herself.

“What makes you believe in apocalypse?” Johanna asked in return. “Isn’t it because of faith as well?”

“Because it shows,” Cathy smiled.

“However, Professor Auben de Clure is still part of White Foxes group—” Johanna said while wearing her green backpack again, “it seems his research toward the unseen matter is dangerous for some people who know the story behind Hallow Nostrum.”

“Are you saying that they want to keep the main secret for themselves?” Cathy wondered.

“Alright, I don’t really know anything, but I am a huge fan of history,” she said well-wary, “so, I don’t recommend you to go further than what they’re already told us. They are royals after all.”

“I remember, since the phenomenon death case of Lydia Brimham, people got so scared,” Cathy knew how everyone seemed trembling against the power of a royal family.

Johanna chuckled as she talked, “You know how weird it seemed that there are bunch of top universities in New York, and yet, White Foxes held their premiere seminar in here,” she grinned, as if she knew the reason behind it. “Everyone knows they have a mission.”

“Indeed,” Cathy nodded as she repeated her words “—people just don’t get to see it every day.”



The next day, she decided to move on to her old place. Cathy had just told Aunt Sarah the night before she moved, surely her aunt got surprised for this sudden decision. Her aunt wanted her to promise to take care after herself when she wasn’t there. Soon after, it would be the busiest end of the year for Aunt Sarah to get back to her job as the Aloise press secretary.

It was her apartment in the Bronx. The room had been vacant for a year, and the place felt like abandoned for a very long time. Fortunately, she only bought two boxes full of her clothes and books to New Rochelle, so it didn’t burden her when she finally moved again to the Bronx.

She would enjoy a solitude company in here, with a twist of milky coffee and some books to read. She would always love that.

At the same time she arrived in front of the room number five-o-four, the old man Swiss Donald greeted her as he just walked out from his room next door. He remembered Haile, her mother that had passed away last year. He said that he missed Cathy and her mother so much after all the sorrow. Nevertheless, he was ready to help her cleaning up the room since he knew there would be many cobwebs and dusts on the wall. He would always be the nicest neighbor she ever knew.

It took many hours to clean up the whole room. She was tired, but felt very grateful with the help of Mr. Donald in here.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, everything already set up neatly. After Mr. Donald left her apartment, she went to take a shower.

There was another bell rang when she finished cleaned up after herself. She didn't have much thought when she opened the door, and again, she got surprised.

"Marissa, I didn't expect you to come—" her eyes bulged out happily. "What is it?"

She knew that curly red hair woman brought a bag that was usually filled with homemade food, and surely, she got it right.

"I bring your food," Marissa lifted up her bag to show her. "Will you let me in?"

"Of course," Cathy welcomed her to walk inside.

Marissa moved quickly to the kitchen, preparing what she brought in. Meanwhile, Cathy already acknowledged that pretty woman like her own family.

There was no big deal for Marissa to act like her second mother at home.

Another minute, Cathy sat on the windowsill in the living room. She brought her mother's journal in here, which she took it from Matilda's Library.

Her eyes wandered back and forth to the opened book and the sky. There was so much to learn. She couldn't decide whether to read the pages further or to have a break for a while. She was almost given up at the time her eyes caught the sparkling dots among the bright blue sky. The view reminded her with the old days, when she sat and talked for hours with Josh about it. The flying dots were such energy, and usually appeared as the positive, while the flying black amoeba as the negative. She missed the day she spent in Bisbee, Arizona.

She couldn't eliminate her sorrow feeling. It was stressing her out.

Marissa came to break her silent reverie. Her eyes caught the big plate on the table in front of her. It was three big layers of red beef lasagna that could tickle her stomach, and the delicious smell was evaporated in the air.

"You can cook?" Cathy squinted wonderingly at her.

"No, of course—" she smiled delicately. "Mr. Donald did the work."

"Since when did you two get acquaintance to each other?" Cathy baffled.

"Once upon a time, it was a long story," Marissa chuckled. "Probably, since you left this place."

Cathy didn't know that Mr. Donald would get along with Marissa. It was unexpected.

Another hour, when she had finished her food, it was the time to contemplate what she left behind, but it would be hard if she kept the complicated thoughts on her pretty mind.

Until then, some days had passed. It had been four days since the day she moved back to her apartment room. The tranquility really helped to reduce her stress level. She craved for the solitude, and loved the ambience she built in here.

On the other side, Marissa kept on coming back to her apartment. These days, she became sentimental and loved to take care for Cathy, just like a mother would do for her child. She made everything felt good, as if she had been growing a pretty flower in the cold winter.

Nevertheless, Cathy could think of her like a second mother, although no one could really replace Haile, but she was grateful for everything that came into her life now; *she makes this environment alive. She makes me remember the feeling of having a family again. I'll treasure her in my heart, always.*

5

THE MYSTERY OF TRUTH

IT SHOULD'VE BEEN two weeks ago that she visited the boxing gym in Manhattan. She just didn't trust that man, and she didn't have much courage to go alone. He could be a psycho maniac or anything like that, if she judged him only by his look, especially when he had a dark cold vibe that scared her to death.

It was a sudden change of heart that made her agree to go. She drove her car throughout Manhattan's downtown that morning. The boxing gym was hard to find at first, she already checked on the address that was written on the name card he gave her. At the second glance at the urban street, she recognized the small building with cream brick walls, where a single black board hung red gloves logo written *Suburban Boxing*. It might be the place that she was looking for.

There were some motorcycles parked against that building. Some people walked in here, either male or female were wearing the kind of rock and roll clothes that was a garage band alike. They looked rather scary. The place also emitted a dark and uneasy vibe.

Cathy cringed at the creepy thought of walking around here alone, and she did anyway. She never

came to this side of Manhattan before. It was like challenging her adrenaline rush.

She saw some men went inside that place. Some punk girls on the wall stared oddly at her presence that was way too innocent to be here. She could go jittering all day long to stand too close with them, so she opened the door hurriedly.

The light was dimmed out inside the building, but she still could see the boxing rings—one big ring in the middle of the room, and some small rings in every corner of the room. The place looked huge from the inside, she got surprised.

“Hello, miss—” a man in a trainer uniform approached her, “I don’t think this would be the kind of place for you to visit.”

“Ah, sure—” Cathy went stiff to explain, “I’m actually looking for someone I know. He told me to meet him in here. His name is Gavin.”

He looked astonished when she mentioned the name, as if it wasn’t something usual to be happened around here.

“Are you really his friend?” He narrowed his eyes in disbelief, judging her naïve look.

“I just knew him a few weeks ago,” Cathy said while feeling conflicted whether she should leave or not. “Is he in here now?”

From the backdoor, Gavin walked so manly when he greeted her. The man in a trainer uniform squinted oddly at him, demanding a good reason for the sudden presence of a little girl, but he only nodded secretively.

As soon as that white man left them, Gavin spoke, “I thought you would never come. What’s made up your mind?”

"I'm just curious," she shrugged her shoulders confusedly. "I thought you wanted to show me something, remember?"

"Oh, I remember it well, but the invitation was two weeks ago. You're pretty damn late," he snarled, although he didn't show his disappointment.

"Should I serenade and bend down on my knees for you now?" She was joking, and it got him laughing so hard.

"No need for that, but I really want to show you my performance. The schedule is supposed to be tonight, but I don't think you will wait that long for me, huh?" He had expectation whatsoever.

"I don't get it, eventually," she chuckled awkwardly. "What is it has to do with me?"

"Nah, I have a hunch that we can be a good comrade to each other," he said jokingly.

"Is that supposed to be a clear answer?" She baffled. "If that's really the case, then we can go hangout in downtown and grab a coffee."

"It's too crowd. I hate that," he muttered. "Anyway, I have one more practice to do, after that, we can go nagging along the cross river."

Cathy narrowed her eyes, baffling against his words. "Do you mean Manhattan Bridge Cross River?"

He chuckled. He didn't give further clue for what he was saying. Afterward, he demanded her to sit while watching him to start a boxing practice. Some men in here stared at her wonderingly. They didn't have any idea why Gavin wanted a girl to watch over his back. It was unusual.

Cathy noticed the girl with pastel purple double Dutch braid hair had been watching her near the

backdoor. She had a gothic appearance, her lips were black, and she wore a very tight purple t-shirt written *You Owe Me* on the chest. She got that vicious look on her face, and she stared in huge dislike toward Cathy.

“Hey, let’s go!” Gavin shouted. After an hour of boxing practice, he got all sweaty.

Cathy blinked bewilderedly at him as she stared at his dripping sweat from workout. “Aren’t you going to take a shower first?” She chuckled. “You’re smelly.”

Gavin burst into laughter.

A man in a trainer uniform got surprised, thus he glanced oddly again at Cathy. He thought the girl must’ve been bringing a lot of magical charm to the man, but it was the mystery. However, Cathy herself didn’t feel like she was making a joke that he could laugh like that.



After twenty minutes lasted, and he already took a shower, they went outside. They walked toward the Manhattan Bridge that was located near to the boxing gym. It was already eleven o’clock when they arrived to walk along the bridge together.

“Who’s the purple hair girl in the gym?” Cathy asked suddenly.

He smiled and stared away at the road, “Ah, she’s my manager’s assistant, all at once his niece.”

“Why do you have a manager?” Cathy had her own assumption that he might be a freelance model if she judged him from his manly figure. “Are you into some kind of modeling?”

“It’s not like that. I’m a boxer player,” he chuckled, “I’ve been a professional athlete in the boxing industry for about seven years. I met Willis, my manager, when I was nineteen-year-old.”

Cathy seemed to think for a second before she shouted, “So, does it mean you’re twenty-six now?”

He nodded and stared at her with an inscrutable smile. He had an unreadable emotion to show.

“I was just wondering, what’s your involvement with that purple hair girl?” Cathy asked. “She looks protective of you.”

“Is that your judgment?” He chuckled as he felt amused to hear Cathy’s innocent thoughts recently. “It seems you have good eyes,” he said, “The girl has a name—Welma. She’s sort of *left out* in our team.”

“Is she like the people in a garage band concert, those with heavy gothic make up?” Cathy wondered.

He laughed again, “You must be a good comedian, are you kidding me now?”

Cathy squinted bewilderedly at him, “I’m so confuse. I never joke with you. I mean it, every word I said.”

“When I said left out, she’s not an outsider even though she’s a gothic style maniac,” he shouted solemnly. “She’s a meddlesome to me. I guess you got it right, that’s her involvement.”

His cold vibe felt sharp when he was serious.

Nonetheless, Cathy wanted to find out more about him since he seemed to have a complex personality. “Does she trouble your private life, like getting very involved?”

He stopped walking to glance at her, chuckling. “It seems that you put a lot of interest toward me now. I’m flattered, Cathy.”

They stared observantly at each other. She realized that this whole question and answer session had crossed the line, but her curiosity was bigger than her pride.

“If you’re not comfortable to talk about Welma, then—” she changed the topic immediately. “Do you know Eleanor Heisler?”

“I feel like you’re interrogating me,” he muttered and half smiled.

“Don’t get me the wrong the idea. I’m not a close friend of Eleanor, but I know her.”

“Alright, I barely knew Eleanor,” he chuckled. “Her family was hosting a charity event in German three months ago. My family and I attended their event, then I got to know Eleanor, but we’re not as close as you think we are,” he chuckled, knowing that Cathy was too naïve.

They started to walk along the bridge again.

“Oh, really?” Cathy walked backward while facing him. “You’re not dating her?”

“Practically, I’ve met you first, in Austria last year.”

Cathy blinked out stiffly when he didn’t want to confirm his relationship status with that young lady. “What’s the answer, be honest?”

He laughed against her persistency. “It’s like nothingness.”

She wanted to be skeptic against his words, but something was definitely in the air. Despite all the odds, every matter of life would have an answer in time.



On Sunday morning, she drove her car to the most desolate street in Manhattan, her job had been waiting on the corner of the black building—it was Matilda’s Library.

“You come early today,” Matilda greeted her in the front desk. She was wearing black dress, and a high bun hairstyle.

Cathy nodded, smiling shyly. She came and dressed in hot pink tartan covered with loose denim coat, and she got her mahogany-brown wavy long hair messed up as usual.

“It’s the end of the month. Don’t you think such a good holiday will suit you best?” Matilda half smiled as she talked.

“You already suggested me to have fun in Bonfire Party a few weeks ago. I won’t have any for the current time,” Cathy chuckled since she wanted to be a hard-working girl.

Subsequently, she went to the arched doorway, finding bookshelves. She grabbed some books from the shelves to the table, some entitled myth and legend of random fairy tale. She sat behind the window, and started turning the pages. She enjoyed sitting alone in this dimmed room, where the bright sunshine was the only light behind her back.

Matilda walked from the opposite direction while bringing a few of leather-bounded books in her arms.

“Oh, such a bunch of heavy books,” that old lady with blue eyes muttered suddenly. “Can you imagine if I pull these books in a dungeon?”

“I’ll be sure to help you with that,” Cathy chuckled.

She placed those books on the table in front of Cathy. Matilda breathed deeply from exasperation before she spoke, "This is what people called as *chauvinistic*. You believe of what they told you."

"I know, you're just joking," Cathy giggled. "I'm just wondering how chauvinistic people can determine what they really demand of toward others."

"Royal is one of the highest ranks in human social hierarchy," Matilda spoke in a wise and comfortable voice, "Such demanding is undeniable to be rejected in anyway."

"It's because people are afraid against the existence of the royals," Cathy added.

"You can't even tell if they can win any political issue," Matilda crossed-arms as she spoke, "That's why, no one dare to compromise against the royals."

"Is that included the Aloise and Heisler family?" Cathy asked, wondering.

"Indeed—" Matilda cracked an inscrutable smile on her pale cheeks, "the world is more complicated than what you think it is. There's knowledge that you can consume—good and evil, which is part of being chauvinistic."

"They deliberately show their superiority to hide their dark secrets. It's such a fascination and tiresome at the same time," Cathy murmured.

"Royal Arcanum are one level of darkest stratum," Matilda said and sighed, "I can't compile words to finish the topic once I talk about it."

Cathy shrugged her shoulders, "Not that I know of."

Matilda saw a desperate look on her young face. "Child—" she spoke again when the atmosphere turned solemnly. "Do you really want to know the truth?"

Cathy stared at her warm gaze for a moment, she nodded fatefully. She had been keeping a silent mind, although she once demanded her to tell her the truth about the Aloise family.

Before Matilda started it out, she walked with her confusion thought, back and forth in her black stiletto. Even though no one was into the sense of forcedness, Cathy felt like she had to let go of all her unspoken curiosity.

“First thing—” Matilda suddenly spoke, and she went to the book cabinet near the arched doorway, she pulled the drawer to take a black book.

“Do you remember my journal about the Emerald stone?” Matilda asked and approached her.

She remembered the journal that Eleanor took forcibly from a demon’s house, turned out it was a book about the myth of Emerald stone, it wasn’t a guidebook of how to find it. Cathy stared at that book in her hand as she nodded. “Yes, is it related with that book you’re about to show me?”

Matilda handed the book. The cover was embossed with crossed golden keys symbol.

“The story you’ve heard—versus reality,” Matilda spoke, “some truth remains silent, until somebody finds it.”

Cathy was about to open the black book when she shouted alertly at her, “Hold still. Before you read the book, I want you to know about the essence of the truth.”

“Does the truth will scare me?” Cathy asked well-wary, remembering the moment when she found the truth that her mom was part of a royal member, and

she got scared about it. “The last time I found out about my mom’s secret, it gave me goosebumps.”

“Everyone is scare of a truth,” Matilda spoke in her wise voice.

“So, what’s the truth about this book?” Cathy held up the book against her.

“Since the past few months, I’ve been seeing you a lot with books alone, sitting in the corner of my table,” she said affectionately, “ and then I thought to myself, *this girl has something more than she appears to be.* But there’s one thing you don’t know about royals.”

Matilda took away the black book from her hand, and she flipped the pages until she found the right page, and she showed an odd illustration to her, it was a portrait of black flowers that had bones.

“This is called *Roses Bones*,” Matilda said. “The myth and legend told that Roses Bones treasures an immense power, which can make the hand that touches it empowering the unseen world,” she explained further “—the black color depicts the shade of immortal, while the bones create a shattering illusion. That means, the essence of truth inside Roses Bones is a royal heritage. The myth and legend said, it could reconvene royals into a peaceful life, washing away our demons.”

Cathy got fascinated, along with her rapid growing curiosity. “Is this also the book you wrote, like about the Emerald stone?”

“No, this is published under the authority of the Royal Council, written by their team members,” Matilda said, “I just want to relate this one with the book that I wrote, because both are talking in the same perspective of myth.”

“Are you saying that Roses Bones can save our family from malevolent souls?” Cathy baffled. “But, is there really such a flower with bones that exists?”

“One can only imagine how they can prove the existence of Roses Bones,” Matilda said and sighed, she sounded disappointed. “The mystery is in there.”

Cathy stared wonderingly, “Where’s the Roses Bones now?”

Matilda chuckled at her, as if her question was a joke. “It’s only a myth, Cathy,” she reassured her. “No one ever found the real embodiment of Roses Bones, but many stories written in the old books would make you believe that it is the real thing.”

“I want to believe it,” Cathy murmured.

And the next hour, she finished her part-time job. She was about to leave the library when Matilda went in her way with warning eyes.

“Remember, you cannot tell the Aloise that I told you about this,” Matilda warned her carefully.

Cathy stared at her, baffled, “Why?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” She asked in return, “They will not let you to encounter me again for a certain reason—the secrets.”

Cathy always wondered when people warned her not to tell a tale, but something was off, and all she could do was nodded gracefully and said, “Don’t worry.”

6

TRIAL BY FIRE

CELINE

ON THE FIRST week of November, New York Supreme Court was crowded with the attendance of reporters from various media. The subject they were looking for was on absolute raging. The reporters went crumbling as they alluded in their own noises, breaking and pushing against the crowd.

“Ms. Attorney, what’s your opinion about this continuation case?” A reporter shouted, thrusting her microphone to a tall and slender woman in black suit and she wore a silver ear cuff. “Why would Trisden Brimham throw a restraining order against White Foxes family?”

Another questions started shouting in the air—unstoppable. Some men in black suit tried guarding that young woman from the flashing cameras.

“No comment, please—” the woman begged pathetically as she was being brutally pushed in and out by the reporters.

It took her a few minutes to reach the white terrace, where the reporters weren’t allowed to step further by the security guards. The situation made her hardly breathing.

She walked to the aisle among the people in random business suit. Her heart was beating faster than any other day she had in this place. She was about to open the door of the courtroom when a man in his forty shouted at her name.

“Celine Margaret, wait!” He was out of breath, and it took him a minute to continue talking, “You should be ready.”

She sighed and murmured, “I have anticipated for such a thing.”

“This wouldn’t be easy,” he said worriedly “—but I’ll always have your back.”

For a second, she chuckled at him. It was a frustrating idea to hold on only to his words since he was Rowland Strandex, the president of the Strandex Law Firm based in New York City, it was widely known as the excellent law firm in town.

Before she left him at the door, she murmured gently, “You always say that, boss.”



Two hours ago, the situation felt hectic in the trial court.

Now, Celine had returned again to her private office in the Strandex Law Firm. Her life got busied with heavy task every single day. There were many documents she had to read, and even for making a simple decision seemed harder for her.

The office was pretty much busied as usual. The employees worked in their dark suit, walking back and forth from one corridor to another.

Celine was just wearing her black coat before she went home, but someone already knocked at her office door again. An employee informed her that Trisden Brimham wanted to meet her. She surprised for his sudden arrival since they already met in the Supreme Court this morning.

“Oh, I thought you went home,” she blinked out, baffled. “What can I help you, Mr. Brimham?”

He went to sit on the sofa before she said further. “I just need a minute with you—”

“If this is about your case, don’t bother. The final agreement is almost settled by the judge, we just need to wait at the right time to lose it,” she talked firmly.

“You need to reconsider your decision,” he said.

“Please, Mr. Brimham, you know things don’t work that way,” she muttered.

“Can you still call yourself a professional lawyer?” Trisden snarled before she pulled out the door. “Was it a lie when people said you got the highest rank and the most wanted lawyer in New York City when it was just your first year of working?”

She turned back to face him again, and said, “It seems you don’t understand. It’s not an easy thing to do.”

“I can raise your payment as much as you want,” he muttered in despair.

Celine shook her head. “Will the money still worth it, if I die fighting them?”

He sighed. “You just need to try—”

“This is the very first case that I won’t be able to handle,” she bent down to him, showing her apologetic expression, “I don’t want to kill myself in the trial court,

Mr. Brimham," she sighed. "Whatever you'll do, just forget it, and move on with your life."

"Won't you help me?" He begged. "I don't believe that my daughter committed suicide. She was murdered for sure."

"The Remembrance Day for her had been held for good. The whole nation already acknowledged her death. What you're asking for—it's the impossible thing for me," Celine said, pitying him. "You want to know the secret?"

His eyes glossed while bewildering at her question.

"You need to stay away from them. You're lucky that it's only your daughter who died, not your whole family," her words gave him the creeps. "I've heard that White Foxes never give second chance, and they don't pity anyone."

"I just want you to help me finding the evidence, of who is the murderer."

She stared at him pitifully, it took her a minute to say goodbye. "I am sorry. I can't help you with this."



It had been a week she hadn't met her client, but she knew it that Trisden Brimham kept on being persistent with his belief that something wasn't fall into place. He believed it wasn't suicidal.

The time would prove everything, but with anything wasn't floating on the surface, that would be a hard way to go. The whole frustration and anxiety over this case got into her mind. She kept on thinking about it all night long that she couldn't sleep well.

That night, she called her boss on the phone, asking for a second chance. “What if he’s right that everything was a set up?”

“You call me in the middle of the night just to blurt out about his case?” Rowland yawned while talking on the phone. *“There’s always a possibility in everything, but take my advice—just forget it.”*

“I thought I can use your help, you said you’ll have my back—” she sounded hesitant to say further, but she knew what she was doing would be the right thing. “I will need to look up on some files. I have to discover more proof about the truth of Lydia Brimham’s death.”

“You will have to go to an extra mile for this damn case. Fighting the royals isn’t an option, Celine. Everyone knows that,” he said in annoyance.

“Did White Foxes bribe Strandex Law Firm to hide their past or something?” Celine snarled in return. “Why are you so afraid?”

“You can save your insolent manner for yourself—” he sighed heavily while murmuring, *“but things won’t turn smoothly if you take this path, for going on with your justice act,”* he seemed frightened for his own words, about the thing he would tell her, *“There were many cases in the past, of those people who fought against White Foxes, they were gone nowhere, vanished into thin air.”*

His story frightened her whole nervous system. She had no idea that their track record would sound really scary, and fortunately, no one was ever dug into their graves.

And that night, she was sleepless.



Another week, after the fifth trial court session had ended, Celine flew to Vancouver. She needed a comfortable voice that could give her strength. Therefore, she always went away from the hectic city to the peaceful town.

The place was located in a deep solitude area in Vancouver, Canada. She visited that place every month to reunite along with her family, but usually, it was only her uncle that she met alone in there. Other members in the family only visited his place during the holiday, usually before a winter season.

It was a huge manor land. The front yard was full with green bushes, trees, and some flowers. Behind the garden was a black building that looked melancholy.

This mansion was built widely to the east wings, so it would make any visitor had to wait for about ten minutes for somebody to open the front door.

Celine came neatly, dressed in black coat, and her dark hair was half pinned up. She rang the bell on the door, and waited about eight minutes for a servant to welcome her.

Her uncle—Nathaniel von Aloise, he only had one servant when this huge mansion would need more helper to clean up some spaces. But it was a matter of solitude, one would be enough.

Celine and her uncle usually had dinner together, either in downtown or just staying in this mansion. After a moment of reunion had lasted, she finally told him about her job, and the most crucial thing was about her current client.

Uncle Nathaniel told her some things she never heard about White Foxes, besides the fact, everyone already knew that they were born from a powerful royal family, which they were House of Heisler. It was the first time she ever heard the real thing about White Foxes family. She only heard some people mentioned their name, but none about their frightening past.

When it was time to talk about the case of Trisden Brimham, the atmosphere turned suffocated from the uneasy vibe he gave her. Uncle Nathaniel didn't agree with her decision, since it was a matter of life and death.

"It's a risk for saving him, you know well the case is involving White Foxes," his eyes glimmered against her hesitation. "You will risk the Aloise family if you're going further. You're going to kill all of us into damnation."

He observed her silent expression well-warily.

"Are you only going to save this one person—or our family?" He asked again, although it sounded rhetorical.

"He needs help—"

Nathaniel sighed at her bold decision, "It's alright. You're mature enough to understand about the situation."

When he rose from his chair immediately, Celine stared up at him in huge bewilderment, and she was also worried for his rejection.

"Choose it wisely my child," he said while wearing his gray flat cap "—you will have a decision to make."

"Uncle—" she rose quickly from her chair and she grabbed his arm before leaving her alone in this lonely room, "I am sorry, for everything."



On the third week of November 2013, she returned to New York for her regular workaholic life. Celine wanted to be settled for what she was about to do, even though it would be a nightmare.

Life in the office went as usual, everyone busied as well.

On Monday morning, Celine determined to visit Sally, her assistant to look up on the archived documents that had anything related with Brimham family. It was indeed a hard job, but Sally already told her that the reports were already written officially by the local police. Everything she wanted to know, everyone already knows. It was suicide. Thereafter, Sally could only give her some papers that might be useful for her finding.

The next hour, Celine slammed the door as she brought a few papers in her arm, then throwing those files on his desk. Rowland bulged out astonishingly with her sudden arrival in his office.

She shouted firmly, confronting him, "I will find the evidence for this man."

He was mad with her bold determination. "You're not a detective, you're a lawyer. Just do what's supposed to be your job, or you'll get fired."

Celine gazed observantly and she was aware that her boss would regret to say all that, but there was something beyond this uncomfortable conversation that must be done.

"I wouldn't mind to fire you, Celine," he muttered. "There are million people out there who want your job."

Even though I admit, it would be hard to find an excellent lawyer like you are.”

Celine stared in disappointment at his response. In fact, he also felt uncomfortable to speak like that.

“You don’t know what you’re getting yourself into. They are White Foxes,” he warned her.

“Oh, and you do know them?” She talked back.

He shook his head in annoyance, and said, “Everyone knows what they are. White Foxes have a track record. Just look at Brimham Newspaper Company that almost vanish from the earth,” he sighed, “You won’t risk this whole company—by any means, you will kill me, your family, and your future.”

Celine couldn’t speak up for that truth.

He continued talking “—and before that happen, I will fire you.”

She got froze while feeling the horror from his admonishment. There would be nothing to object again, and the papers she brought were just a total waste of time. And so, she walked out from his office with a broken heart.

0 0 0

In the evening, she went home to her desolate apartment in New York.

She sat on the corner of the sofa, pondering alone. Behind the window, it was raining outside. The thunder didn’t shock her. She was in the midst of her gigantic mess and depression. She couldn’t make up her mind, and cried a lot in this quiet room.

“I never failed on most cases before, but this one is really hard,” she muttered to herself.

At the time, a slight feeling of warmth touched her back, as if someone was hugging her shoulders, it felt relaxing for her.

"It's okay to lose on something that makes you become good."

That sudden whisper encouraged her, waking up her mind from a tremendous anxiety. When she turned her head, there was no one behind her, but it was just a lonely room and she was all by herself.

7

THE MANOR ON THE HILL

DURING THE COLLEGE fall holiday, all of the classes were closed on the whole November. Cathy was about to visit her dad's place in Brooklyn, but Aunt Sarah invited her to visit their relative's place in Vancouver at the same time. It was frustrating when she had to decide. After a second thought, it would be the very first time for her to get to know the other Aloise, if she chose to go with her aunt.

There was always something she wanted to know about the Aloise family. They were all looked secretive in a dark way, and it might be, in a way no one could ever understand. Even though it would be a long trip to go, that was why she agreed, because she wanted to find out what was beneath the dark.

On the seventh November, their airplane landed in Vancouver around seven in the morning. Once they walked to the airport's parking lot, eventually Cathy just knew that Aunt Sarah always left her black Mini Cooper in there, besides the fact, her aunt also left another car in New Rochelle. Sometimes she wondered about her aunt's mysterious life that also looked secretive.

As the car window opened widely beside her seat, she could feel the fresh air kissed her cheeks softly, and

she hummed along when the radio played a melancholy lullaby.

The view was somewhat beautiful, with the sky turned melancholy for a while, and the pine trees lined on both sides this asphalt road.

“There’s really a place like this in Vancouver,” Cathy murmured, amazed.

“That’s because you’ve never been here before. You see now,” Aunt Sarah said and smiled while driving her car throughout this long path on the middle of the woods. There was no other car on the road.

Cathy pictured a charade on her mind that the road might be a shortcut to the hidden woods or something, but Aunt Sarah told her for the fact, this was the only path to go to the oldest manor around here, and that place was established long before her grandmother, Linda von Aloise was even born. At the time she mentioned that, Cathy recalled the beautiful portrait of Linda, with a face that was so memorable.

For the rest of the trip, they remained silent. Soon, Cathy fell asleep when the radio started playing the next classical song.

It felt like a short time when Aunt Sarah woke her already. “Cathy, we have arrived.”

As she opened her eyes slowly, the first thing she saw was a big gray house on the hill. It was a desolate manor. The gray stone wall covered with wild vines.

Before she left the car, she grabbed her wrist, making Aunt Sarah stared bewilderedly at her.

She looked worried while muttering, “The last time I visited the Aloise, they didn’t seem to like me. What about this time?”

Aunt Sarah smiled and tried to comfort her, “He’ll like you,” she stroke her cheek gently, and bent down to kiss her forehead like Cathy was still a little girl.

She finally came out nervously while Aunt Sarah took out the suitcases from the car trunk. It was already nine o’clock when they arrived in this desolate manor. Thereafter, she followed her aunt to the walking trail. Aunt Sarah pushed the wrought iron entrance gate that was unlocked. The atmosphere felt intimidating when they stepped inside, as if they were being watched by something.

The front yard was grown with green bushes, and at some parts of the garden felt damp. There were many black pots of flowers on the yard. Her eyes captivated by the beautiful and melancholy view of some violet flowers on the pots, especially with the view of wild vines on the wall that creating the feeling of being in a sacred place.

As their pace began to break the silent air, the wind blew lightly, welcoming their arrival in here. Aunt Sarah stood knocking on the entrance door, and then she shouted, “Cathy, come here.”

Cathy had prepared herself for this encounter. She dressed neatly, wearing a long black coat. Meanwhile, her aunt was wearing a black suit, pretty much business-like.

The male housekeeper welcomed them to get inside the manor. Aunt Sarah introduced his name ‘Mayhem Lawford’ that made Cathy cringed strangely with his first name, if she looked it up on a dictionary, she would have felt strange with the meaning of his name that sounded conflicted. Her aunt told her that he had been working for more than twenty-five years in

this big house, and as the only servant in here. He was an old man.

Subsequently, Cathy had her eyes amazed at the house interior design. The big white flowers in the antique vase placed in the midst of this huge foyer. The wallpaper was scorched blue that matched with the dark ceramic floor tiles. Seemingly, there were many corridors in this place.

She would get a severe headache by looking out at the whole view. This manor was too big and creepy for a person to live alone.

Aunt Sarah was still talking with Mayhem the housekeeper in the foyer, and Cathy couldn't wait longer to explore another side of this place. She left them to a corridor that eventually led her to a hall of huge steel glass windows, which both of sides were facing the view of garden. The cathedral architecture in this manor felt haunting somehow. The more she walked further, the air felt damp, as if there was not enough oxygen in the air.

Another part of the house, she went to a small hall that only two people could walk through it. The double glass door in the end of the hall led her to another garden, but this one didn't look alive. The wind chimes rang concurrently when she opened the glass door. There were many hanging flower baskets, and the vines grew wilder in here. The garden tools were scattered on the ground, which seemed untouched for a long time. On the west side, there was an abandoned fountain with angel statue.

No one was wandering around here. This was a lonely place.

Aunt Sarah was calling her name from far away, searching her deliberately. Cathy went immediately since she didn't want her aunt to be worried for too long.

Cathy approached her, and shouted, "Hi, I was just sightseeing—"

"Where have you been, seriously?" She looked pissed off as she handed over her black suitcase. "I want to show your bedroom."

They went to a hallway where there were six guest rooms. Cathy chose the first room since she felt creepy with a dimmed ceiling near the last door.

Before Aunt Sarah opened the door for her, she admonished her again, "You know this manor is very big, you have to stay alert when someone is looking for you."

She shrugged innocently, "I'm sorry."

Afterward, Aunt Sarah helped her to clean up the room. She went to change the bed sheet for her.

"Well, I haven't told you a lot about our relative," Aunt Sarah said, "His name is Sir Nathaniel von Aloise. He's the owner of this manor now, living alone with the housekeeper. Every time the other family members visit him during holidays, the housekeeper returns to his hometown in England."

"I guess, nobody's here yet," Cathy murmured, wondering. "Isn't this the holiday time?"

Aunt Sarah nodded agreed. "Maybe they'll come soon."

"So, what is the family relationship between Nathaniel and you?" Cathy wondered.

“He was my grandmother’s cousin,” Aunt Sarah seemed to think for a while before she answered her “—he should be your first-cousin-twice-removed.”

“That’s complicated,” Cathy sighed to imagine the family tree among them.

Before she left her room, Cathy shouted, “Will we meet him tonight?”

“Oh, please call him as your uncle,” she smiled. “And yes, we’ll meet him during dinner.”



An hour later, Cathy wandered throughout the manor again, exploring some parts that seemed pretty haunting. Whenever she saw the housekeeper, she pitied him for his lack of movement. He was a hard-working old man.

The next stop, she walked again to the abandoned garden behind the small hall. The place surely had a frustrating view, but somehow, Cathy wanted to pick this place as her momentary reading room. She had been carrying her mom’s journal that she got from Matilda’s Library. As soon as she sat on the wooden bench, she opened the book randomly.

The page showed a black and white sketch illustration of an antique emblem. It was oval-shaped with the symbol of three flowers engraved below two flags. There was a caption below the illustration, but Cathy couldn’t understand because it was written in German language. She sighed for her lack of knowledge.

Eventually, the understanding came when she read the next page. The emblem was importantly related to the secret society that was called as *the Royal Council*.

The journal stated that the emblem was a treasure that had a great value, but with its great power, the secret beneath the emblem itself could be a danger to anyone who held it. There was a greater meaning, something she didn't understand when the journal tried to relate the word *immortal* with that emblem.

She had heard some people mentioned *the Royal Council*, but she didn't have the courage to ask about it to her aunt. Cathy knew she wouldn't get the best answer from her aunt, or worse, she wouldn't get the answer after all.



The time for dinner was ready. Aunt Sarah escorted Cathy to the dining room, where Mayhem was serving them with a delicious menu of baked barbeque chicken. The lamp room was dimmed out, replaced by the light from candles.

Uncle Nathaniel already sat there on the leader's chair. Cathy glanced at him, wondering what kind of person he would be. She was still traumatized by the last family meeting she had in Austria back then.

At first, they greeted each other just like a normal family. Aunt Sarah kissed him on the cheek, while Cathy shook his hand politely. But then, when he really took a good look at Cathy, he seemed taken aback.

"Uncle, this is Haile's daughter. I've told you earlier," Aunt Sarah reminded him.

"I know her," he said with a weak voice. "I just can't believe you really bring her to my place."

Cathy was bewildered as she exchanged glance with her aunt.

“If Haile was still alive, this child wouldn’t be here. I know she won’t allow it. She was a protective mother,” he said and chuckled.

“It’s my understanding this encounter seems very late for us to have, but she’s here after all,” Aunt Sarah argued.

They were concerned for his health once he started coughing a lot. Subsequently, he stared observantly at her, and said, “You know, monsters are everywhere. You should watch your back, Catherine.”

Cathy blinked out surprisingly that he had knew her name before she introduced herself. She would guess that he probably remembered what Aunt Sarah had told him before this day. On the other side, Aunt Sarah seemed offended by his words.

After an hour of silent, the dinner went normal. He demanded Aunt Sarah and Mayhem to leave the dining room since he wanted to have a private conversation with Cathy. They understood and left immediately. Cathy was on the edge of her seat to feel pretty nervous. He spoke fiercely at first, demanding her to sit in front of him instead having to sit far away like a stranger.

“My body is not strong enough to stand still,” he said and sighed. “I’d like to give you something important, because I need at least one of the Aloise descendants who can handle the truth.”

She narrowed her eyes at him, baffling. He took out a large brown envelope beneath his black coat, subsequently, his hand grope something out from inside the envelope. Her eyes followed his hand on the table.

“These photos and papers can show everything you need to know about the family,” he told her solemnly. “A decision of learning will always depend on you.”

“Why me?” She baffled. “I mean, I know that I barely familiar with the Aloise family, but if this is about some secrets that my mom didn’t want me to know—”

“Isn’t that the whole point?” He shouted, and his voice was wise and solid “—of knowing what you haven’t known.”

“You said my mom won’t allow me to be here. Is it because of these photos and papers?” She asked, baffled.

“These photos and papers are just a mere media. The point is the truth itself,” his answer was all felt pointy in her ears.

As soon as he rose from his chair, Cathy locked her eyes at the scattered photos above that large brown envelope. She was left with her own uncomfortable feeling, alone in this room.



Cathy had been staying here since a week ago, which she assumed that she probably spent the rest of fall holiday in the manor. There was no challenge or anything around this desolate place. She felt pretty bored and lonely.

The housekeeper spent most of his time to work in the kitchen and garden, while Aunt Sarah left the manor frequently to somewhere she won’t tell Cathy. The last, Uncle Nathaniel spent a lot of his time reading in the front yard garden.

The progression of event happened on Monday the second week of November, when she finally finished reading her mom's journal. She could relate some events that occurred in the past, which she got from the writing on the papers that Uncle Nathaniel gave her, they contained with family matters. Although some puzzles hadn't cracked the message open for her.

As she headed to the living room, the noisy sound came from the foyer. She walked quickly to see what was going on, and she found a new arrival of a family member. Mayhem had just welcomed the new guest to come inside when Aunt Sarah was rushing to hug her tightly. They seemed close to each other—just for a while. Subsequently, that tall and slender woman caught Cathy's eyes that stared observantly.

"Oh, hey, is this—" that dark hair woman seemed lost in thought, but she looked excited as well. She blinked out for a second and glanced at Aunt Sarah to confirm, "I know, this must be the girl we've talked about, you are Cathy Charlotte," she approached her to have a handshake, "I'm Celine von Aloise. We're cousin."

Cathy was almost jittering to act so awkward in front of her. "It's very nice to meet you—"

"Please call me Celine, I'll be glad," she said with a sincere smile, at the same time Mayhem took her suitcase to the guest room.

The next five minutes, Cathy spent her time wandering around the manor again. She came across Mayhem the housekeeper, and this time he didn't avoid her, but he approached her with observant eyes.

“Miss, if I were you, I wouldn’t go to the back of the manor alone,” he said solemnly. “Every place has a history.”

“Pardon me, but why is it?” She baffled.

“It’s just too dark. You’ll only find dusts and cobwebs in there,” he joked.

The farthest corridor she went through was that door that linked to the abandoned garden. She didn’t know there was still another dark place. He might be right since he had lived long in here. It probably wasn’t a good idea to wander alone. It felt haunting.

The next minute, she went to the living room, where a green sofa was placed against a huge flat screen television that was adjacent on the back of tall windows. Aunt Sarah and Uncle Nathaniel sat together, having a little tea party. They stared at her arrival.

“So, have you travelled to Downtown?” Uncle Nathaniel asked her.

“I have not, but I’d love to,” Cathy exchanged glance at her aunt that seemed to have a contrary opinion.

“I haven’t seen you walk outside the manor either,” he said, “I can tell that you feel bored.”

“I don’t think that will be a good idea, we have to wait for the others to arrive first,” Aunt Sarah snapped.

“And what day will they arrive?” Cathy asked, at the same time felt annoyed with all of the rules her aunt gave her. “And how many are there?”

“Not many,” he answered “—and we don’t know if they will visit my house, or maybe some of them have returned to Austria.”

“Uncle, they’re not like that—” Aunt Sarah sighed at him, she seemed disappointed with his response. “We have talked about this.”

“Just admit it, there’s only Celine in here,” he argued. “She’s the only one who cares if I’m still breathing or not.”

Cathy astonished when he talked emotionally. It felt like a huge anger that had been buried long underneath his patience.

“I know that you’re only using this house like your private hotel, come and go as you please,” he said ragingly, “you think I don’t know, that you’re only here to go to the Royal Council.”

“What is that place, the Royal Council?” Cathy confronted her aunt. “Why are you sneaking behind my back?”

Aunt Sarah squinted furiously at her, “I am not sneaking. It’s just a place I visit regularly.”

“It is important that you know—your aunt is a member of the secret society known as the Royal Council,” he informed “—a hell place.”

“Good speech, Uncle. But how could you say that when you’re one of the committees in there?” Aunt Sarah snapped emotionally.

“Stop the argument!” Cathy exclaimed. “We’re here for a good holiday.”

“Alright, so are you really wanted to go that bad?” Aunt Sarah rose from the sofa, standing a little bit taller than her since she wore five centimeters black heels. “Are you really that brave to travel around Vancouver alone?”

“I...can I go?” Cathy wondered, but at once felt annoyed. “How could you expect me to go alone?”

Celine walked into the room. She bewildered with the tension in the air. “Hey, what’s with the nagging?”

“Nothing, really,” Aunt Sarah shouted.

“Yeah, keep on pretending like nothing ever happened in your life,” Uncle Nathaniel muttered as he rose from the sofa, and he left them immediately.

“It’s like he has a menopausal transition. I guess that’s impossible, right?” Celine tried to break the tension in the room, she went chuckling by herself, and then Cathy followed along.

“So, I’ve heard that Cathy wants to travel around Vancouver?” Celine asked.

“No, she has to stay, because the others will be here soon,” Aunt Sarah shouted.

Cathy rolled her eyes in annoyance, feeling distressed.

“Well, I guess you hear your aunt,” Celine surrendered. “I’ve already called my brother too. He’ll be here by tomorrow.”

“Whatever,” Cathy shrugged at them as she left the room quietly.

8

UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

AFTER SHE STOLE her aunt's black mini cooper to drive to downtown, she would probably regret it. The car was parked safely near to the shopping district.

The area was pretty much crowded. The noisy chattering surrounded this place. The metropolitan view of downtown made her felt like in New York. Many buildings covered with neon lights.

Her eyes caught a view of one bright place. It was a black building that emitted a mysterious vibe, and it was luxurious with white neon board written '*Demeanor Bar*' on the top of the building. She realized there was another building adjacent behind the bar, looking plain and average, but more crowded. That place seemed more like a pub, with pinky neon board written '*House of Eve*'.

Cathy knew she shouldn't go to a place like that, even though she had an ID card to show that she was nineteen-year-old girl. Only this time, she wanted to try something different.

When she was about to open the double door entrance of Demeanor Bar, a muscular bouncer dressed in black suit was blocking her way. Even in a dark of night, he wore black sunglasses. Cathy squinted bewilderingly at him.

“Do you have a member card to go to this bar?” He asked.

“Do I have to own a member card?” She bewildered. “I am nineteen, just for your information.”

“My apologies, but at least you should have an invitation to get inside. This is an exclusive bar. Only members are allowed,” he acted cold and vicious as he spoke. “For your alternative, there’s a non-exclusive pub behind this building—it’s House of Eve.”

“So I can’t really go to this place. What a pity,” she muttered and peevied.

Cathy moved on with disappointment. She walked slowly on the pavement while sightseeing, but then the bouncer called her from the door. She turned her back to feel excited that he suddenly allowed her to come inside the bar. She didn’t even think twice to ask him the reason. She won’t turn down the opportunity and walked in immediately.

A woman was singing *Autumn Leaves* on the stage when she walked into the main floor. Cathy felt awkward for a moment. She confused of what to do inside the bar.

Once she settled to sit alone on the corner of the room, a waitress brought her a menu. Her eyes felt swirling to read each title of the food and beverage on the menu. It was confusing. She didn’t feel familiar with the phrases they used. In fact, she didn’t want to end up looking naïve by asking for water, and she wasn’t a drunkard, so she ordered a hot coffee latte instead.

It was the tastier coffee she had, but she regretted to ever buy it, because it cost pretty much expensive for just one cup. Besides, she sat alone, feeling stupid and stiff.

There were not many people in the room. Some gentlemen dressed with black clothes and black flat cap

were occupying the front row table. They seemed sophisticated with the performance of that beautiful singer with the kind of jazzy hairstyle of short black bob with bangs.

Cathy didn't pay enough attention to the singer when she pulled of the cup clumsily into her black coat. No one seemed to witness her clumsy scene, so she could run to the bathroom with no shame.

Five minutes later, she came back to sit on the bar stool. When the bartender approached her, she was all jittering, but she finally asked for a lemonade squash.

She realized that the song had changed. It wasn't the same deep voice from before. She looked at the stage to find another woman took over the microphone while singing a jazzy song.

"Don't go alone all nights. A tiger may hunt you down."

Cathy startled to see that beautiful singer already stood charismatically behind her. From a closer look, she possessed the beauty of Cleopatra, somehow seductive. That Latina woman was wearing black V neck mini dress. Even with seven centimeters heels, she looked way taller than the bartender and most women in here.

"No tiger tonight," Cathy said and smiled awkwardly.

"What I'm saying is to take care of yourself—" that woman with red lips said, at the same time she ordered a glass of wine to the bartender, "I bet I'm not the first person to tell you this."

Cathy could only smile awkwardly.

"Most of the time, people are like canvas, easy to read," she said mischievously while picking out a red cherry from the counter table, "only a few that appear mysteriously," she turned her face at her now,

continued talking “—like you are now, only your front glass that shows.”

For an obvious reason, Cathy had nothing to say.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you,” she said, feeling bad for herself. “What do I know about life, especially yours,” she shrugged her shoulders. “I’m just a stranger.”

Cathy felt insecure. “Is it that obvious?”

“Anyone could say already that you let your emotion to show,” she said.

Cathy squinted at her, feeling unsure.

“Take my bet. Benson!” she murmured as she snarled at the bartender “—tell me what you see in her.”

“What?” He baffled for a second, but then he understood. “Did you just have a bad day?”

Cathy was agape, but she tried to fake her smile as soon as he went to serve another customer.

“Did your boyfriend just ditch you or something?” She asked and giggled.

“No, it’s... family matters, and my mother passed away,” Cathy half smiled, and all at once she could only stare down on her shoes.

That woman almost got speechless. “My apologies for asking—”

“That’s okay. You don’t know me.”

“No, it’s really something to lose someone,” she said. “I feel really sorry.”

Cathy sighed and smiled widely.

“I’m Suzan de Cartier, by the way,” she thrust her warm hand, and as Cathy returned her handshake, she spoke confidently again, “I’m a regular singer in here, and also as the eyes and ears of this place.”

“Nice to meet you, I’m Cathy Charlotte.”

Suzan narrowed her eyes curiously at her, “Ah, are you from around here?”

“No, I’m just visiting my uncle’s place for a while, and I’m probably return to New York soon,” she explained shortly.

“Please cheer up. This is such a good evening,” Suzan said as she tossed a glass of wine with Cathy’s glass of lemonade squash, but then she murmured a phrase that felt familiar, as if Cathy had heard it somewhere before, “—*I, for one.*”



Cathy returned to the manor, and she carefully parked her aunt’s black mini cooper in the garage, but then she saw a black sedan had parked in a driveway. She wondered whose car was it.

She entered the foyer hurriedly to see Mayhem walked passed her, bringing some antique suitcases. At the same time, Aunt Sarah was looking after her. Just like any other time, she was mad and got annoyed with Cathy’s sudden decision, especially to drive her car unnoticed.

“Laura and Carmelia are here. They’re just arrived,” she informed.

Cathy shrugged, bewildering what manner she should have toward the sarcastic Laura later. “Great. So what now?”

“Just be yourself.”

She heard the chattering sound from the living room while Aunt Sarah was escorting her to go there. The strange and good smell was filling the air.

“What smell is this?” Cathy baffled.

Aunt Sarah smiled as she answered her, "It's the rosemary herbal. They have a tea party."

As soon as they entered the living room, everyone already gathered together, sitting on the green sofa.

All eyes turned to see Cathy, looking a bit surprised.

"Here you are, the most awaited member in the family," Laura said mockingly.

Carmelia sighed toward her daughter's sarcasm. Subsequently, she greeted her grandniece warmly, "It's been a long time since we've last seen each other."

Cathy came to hug her and said, "Yes, it's been a year ago. I miss you."

When she glanced at Laura, it was just like a staring competition. Everyone in the room knew that Laura disliked her presence.

The heat atmosphere changed when someone burst into the room. All eyes watched the new guest carefully. It was like he was about to rob a bank or something, instead he scratched his head like a little boy.

"Ah, another one has coming. What a big reunion," Laura chuckled, and there was a disgusting tone beneath every word she said.

Celine rose from the sofa to kiss him on the cheek affectionately, "I know you will come, brother."

Cathy blinked out as she was bewildered when Celine called him as her brother. She got twisted in this encounter since he looked a lot like the man she just got acquaintance with. It couldn't be.

He came to hug Uncle Nathaniel and Grand aunt Carmelia. It seemed he ditched on meeting Aunt Laura. Seemingly, they were not in a good term as well.

But then, he saw Cathy. They exchanged a baffling gaze.

“What... what are you doing in here?” He asked, bewildered.

“I want to ask the same thing,” she muttered.

Celine baffled with them, and she noticed immediately this wasn't their first encounter, and she said, “Okay, we're here for family reunion.”

“Oh, cut the crappy chat,” Laura rose from the sofa to confront them. “For your good sake information, both of you are *cousins*. Do not ever think about romance between the two of you, that won't happen.”

He smiled mischievously against her aunt, which sounded like a joke. The others followed laughing out loud. The atmosphere felt normal again.

Everyone spent chatting while having a rosemary herbal tea together. At the same time, Gavin sneaked out to ask Cathy to walk outside. He said he needed a real confirmation with her.

They walked into the front garden. The view of woods was surrounding the manor from afar. The moon and stars looked bright from above. There was only the sound of night crickets around them.

“So, how come we don't know each other as cousin?” He started the conversation.

“Hmm, I wouldn't be the one to know why,” she murmured.

“You know—” there was a long pause as he chuckled alone, making her bewildered, “I was about to ask you for a date, or something like that.”

“Yeah, things switch suddenly, just like a blink of an eye,” she chuckled, “but you didn't think I'd say yes for a date, right?”

“I guess that makes sense, when I saw you in the Morizza Chapel from a year ago,” he said as they

walked around the garden's porch. "I was wondering, but then I didn't have a second thought to ask you."

"Yes, it was the first time I got to know the Aloise family, after my mom died," she reminisced the past while talking, and she tried not to shed tears, "things in the past weighs me down," she glanced at him as hiding her pain beneath her weak smile, "it's just not something good to talk about."

"The misery—" he murmured, "it's something that I can relate," he convinced her, "if you can talk about it, then it's not a lifeless thought."

Cathy smiled, feeling comfortable with his words, and so she murmured, "I'd wish I can go to Austria next month. Aunt Sarah said that my mom's grave will be transferred to the Aloise's cemetery, you know, the one behind the chapel."

"The Aloise only has one cemetery, as far as I know of," he informed. "Well, and that's a good idea to visit your mom's new grave, greeting the death one."

"I wish she was here, breathing," she muttered in a melancholy "—which that's not possible."

Gavin stared at her while she was gazing at the moon. He had a strong feeling of empathy for her loss, only that he couldn't say anything in return. The comfortable words wouldn't be enough to heal her pain. He had been there too, he knew the feeling.

9

ARCANE STORIES

ON WEDNESDAY MORNING, Cathy came across with Uncle Nathaniel in the reading room. He was sitting there, enjoying the solitude with a book and coffee. The view triggered her mind, and it made her missing the day she worked at Matilda's library.

He saw her coming, but Cathy didn't know how to make a good conversation.

"I have a story to tell," he stared up at her, carefully. "If only you want to hear."

She got surprised when he talked to her. It took her a second to regain her sense from being too awkward. "I want to hear it, please."

"I have a loving memory about Erica von Aloise," he stared at her, who still stood in the arched door "— which I'm sure, you have learnt about her existence from the papers I gave you."

She couldn't recall every name on the papers, but she tried recalling the brief history of the Aloise family. She remembered that the papers only mentioned as far as the Austrian royal lineage.

"I guess I kind of remember her name on the papers. Are you about to give me homework now?" She sounded insecure about it.

He found her pretty amusing. It felt like a long time since he could laugh out loud. Subsequently, he demanded her to sit on the sofa with him.

“The first time I got to know her when we had a conversation about the history of the Aloise family, as I recall, it was around the year of 1945,” he was recalling the past, of all the good and bad memories he had about his so-called cousin. “I was 15 at the time we got close to each other, and I was living in England.”

“How old she was?” Cathy asked.

“She admitted herself as 22-year-old English girl, well, *apparently*,” he said.

Cathy narrowed her eyes when he emphasized his last word. The backstory continued as he spoke about the day he met her in a library. Cathy tried imagining the scenario he told, but somehow, when she was listening to him, it felt as if she was there with them.

Erica and Nathaniel sat on the floor, facing each other behind bookshelves at a small library in England. They had been discussing the early history about House of Aloise. It was the first time they ever talked to each other;

“I can’t seem to find where they’ve been hiding the paper of act number seven,” he cringed while turning the pages of a thick book. “What a history!”

“The silver spoon crossed behind the gown, after all,” she said and smiled “—that’s the quote you’re looking for.”

He stared bewilderingly at her. “How do you know that?”

Her lips pursed for a second, and then she said, “I am a librarian.”

He still couldn't believe her, so he confronted, "Even a librarian wouldn't know it. It stated here in the book that only the young princess who knew it."

She stayed silent, staring observantly at him.

"I've learnt all of the information regarding Princess Francesca," his eyes beamed with excitement when he spoke, "the books, manuscripts, and everything," he spoke so fast, "the last thing, I've seen the painting of her."

Erica didn't seem have much to talk. She liked to keep things to herself. She avoided eye contact with him for about a few months. Nathaniel was disturbed by how she treated him as an outsider. They were cousins, but he only knew her existence when he was twelve-year-old. Until for some days they had a book club session together, they became close, and the truth finally revealed;

"You wouldn't believe me, for the truth," Erica murmured and stared hesitantly at him.

"I want to believe you," he said, "I want to trust you."

The silence between them felt like forever. The time seemed to stop for a second.

Erica flickered, feeling nervous before she spoke again, "I am Princess Francesca."

Her confession surely startled him. It took him a second to digest what she was saying. He gazed into her honey brown eyes, searching for an assurance, but then he felt something—her sorrow.

"How could you manage to live for four-hundred-years?" He asked without hesitation.

Erica stared at him, feeling hesitant to explain further, but she had no reason left. She told him what

he deserved to know, although he didn't know if Erica was really honest about everything, if she didn't leave out anything. The next day, she came to meet him in the library, looking all hasty while feeling frightened;

"I saw Prince Carmellot at the Royal Council today. He looks as immortal as I am," she talked insecurely "— but how could it be possible?"

Nathaniel shrugged his shoulders, baffled with her confusion. "If strange things could happen to you, why it couldn't be happened to him?"

Afterward, Erica started telling him about what happened that morning she visited the Royal Council, where she was invited to attend the inauguration of new royal members. In that winter day, people stood in the field during the inauguration. For the first time, Erica saw the new representative from House of Heisler, which was no other than Lady Marie von Heisler, who still looked very young with her black hair. At the time, Erica exchanged a surprising gaze with his past lover, who should be died a long time ago. Seemingly, he was aware of her presence as an immortal too. His eyes were no longer possessed with kindness and compassion, there was only hatred.

"His name is August Horvick now. He comes with the new candidate in his family, she's Marie von Heisler," she muttered with dreadful eyes.

"Erica, please don't panic—" Nathaniel couldn't seem to comfort her insecurity.

"You should be aware that our real enemy is the Heisler family," she shouted.

He saw her gloomy eyes looked tremendously terrified. Soon, he hugged her in his arms, and he said,

"From now on, don't walk alone. We have to stay together."

Since the day Erica told him about that unexpected encounter with her past lover, she seemed to appear on and off. He knew there was something wrong, and he expected her to trust him. It wasn't easy for her. After several months of living in a misery alone, Erica suddenly came in front of his door. He was bulging out in a horror way, astonished with her bloody brown coat. Her skin was bleeding terribly. It was midnight, and there was no one around them.

"Bloody hell, who did this to you?" His face turned furious.

"Don't open the box," she said while thrusting the wooden box to him. "Someone will come for it," she warned him, "keep it safe for our descendants."

"Are you nuts?" He muttered in frustration.

"They'll come again to hunt me down," she talked breathlessly. "I think my time will come to an end."

He went hysteric as soon as she gave him the final warning. "No, Erica, I don't want to lose you!"

It was the last time Nathaniel ever saw Erica. The next day, she was found dead in her room.

Cathy saw the sparkle in his eyes when he talked about Erica. There was something between the two of them, but also, the story about Erica's unfortunate life seemed odd. She died tragically.

"Are you saying that Erica had been living her life as an immortal in the past?" Cathy asked in disbelief.

"I know, I told Celine about her, and she worried if I hadn't taken my pills," he chuckled. "You probably think so."

Cathy recalled the day when Aunt Sarah informed her about his sickness, he was still suffering from Alzheimer. However, it didn't mean he created his own memories, or his own reality.

"Did you fall in love with Erica?" Cathy snapped the question, inevitably.

Nathaniel stared at her, and he got frozen for a second. "I did, but it was all in the past."

She nodded, trying to understand the connection. "When you told me she was being chased, the story gave me the creeps, but what was the box she carried at that time?"

"*Roses Bones*," he answered her straightly, "at least no one knows if it's the real deal or not."

Her eyes wide-opened when he mentioned it, about the magical box she had heard from Matilda before.

She felt the adrenaline rush to find it out. "Where is it now?"

He squinted surprisingly at her sudden excitement. "Do you even know what's *Roses Bones* supposed to be?"

"I've heard about it recently, well, from a book. I wish to know more."

He sighed. "I buried the box—somewhere. I'm too old to remember it now," he sounded secretive about it, although she didn't know whether he was intentional or not. "Everyone in the Royal Council wants it, for their goddamn sake," he chuckled. "Don't think they can fool me."

"What do you mean?" Cathy baffled. "Was Erica being chased by the people from Royal Council?"

“She suspected the Heisler family,” he said. “Well, the Heisler is still the member of the club,” He looked angry whenever *Royal Council* was brought in the conversation, as if he held grudge against them. “The committees have settled that the last family who knows about the existence of Roses Bones would be House of Aloise. What can I say then?”

“May I know, what makes Roses Bones to be the most wanted item among them?” She asked.

He laughed for a second. Once again, he amused with the way she asked him a question. “Roses Bones contains with secret recipes of sacred knowledge, came from the hands of archangel. The good one believes, the knowledge can be used to cure the dark hearts, while the bad one believes, the knowledge can be used to empower the world.”

“So, most people would be willing to kill themselves in order to get the box,” Cathy wondered. “Erica died a hero. She saved the box from evil people.”

He nodded agreed with her. “Knowing certain great things can turn someone to be evil.”

“Because there’s sacred knowledge inside the box,” Cathy murmured, frightened with the idea of evilness “—that’s the problem.”

The next minute, Uncle Nathaniel invited her to have a tour around the manor, but he was being specific about it. He wanted to show her something that only a few people knew.

Cathy followed him walking throughout the hallway, into the back of the manor. She remembered that the housekeeper warned her not to go alone in there, but now she got Uncle Nathaniel beside her. This was the farthest she ever walked inside the manor.

Her eyes turned blurry when she walked under the dimmed lights throughout this hallway. The solitude gave her the creeps.

Uncle Nathaniel got stopped as he tapped his walking stick at a huge portrait painting on the wall. The tingling sensation crawled all over her skin as her eyes were wide-opened to see it.

She observed the painting wholly; three figures dressed in navy-blue robes, and there were golden rectangular adornments in their sleeves, their vague faces looking down, the painting background looked noir.

“This is the painting of three archangels,” he murmured. “As you see it, this ancient masterpiece is passed down from generation to generation.”

There was a caption writing *Chandelier Order* in below corner of the painting. Cathy narrowed her eyes, bewildered.

“Is this how our ancestors depicted the figures of Chandelier?” She asked.

He glanced at her, nodded. “The Italian painter named Yudas created this painting. His imagination was running wild.”

“Italian?” Cathy baffled. “Was he our relative?”

“No, he was a close friend of our ancestors,” he said, and at once he wondered about their previous topic, “Have you already known about the Angels of Chandelier?”

Cathy gawked for a second as she wasn’t ready for that question.

“That’s a *myth and legend* everyone doesn’t want you to know,” he chuckled, “believe me.”

“Do you mean the people in Royal Council?” She asked.

“Those people are greedy,” he said and nodded “—and many things got complicated inside the Committee’s room, since the day Marie de Clure and her husband revealed the forbidden knowledge about *Hallow Nostrum* to the world.”

Cathy surprised to hear it again since the last time she attended their seminar in her university. It was hard to believe that a cold war happened inside the Royal Council because of that.

“Lady Marie de Clure and her husband held a seminar in my university. They were sort of talking about their founding of *Hallow Nostrum*—the magical water inside the alternate dimension, I guess,” she told him, and she recalled the moment after the seminar when Auben de Clure warned her about his wife. “I didn’t know she would create such a mess with it.”

“Of course her family always does. The Heisler is a virus for the fraternity in Royal Council,” he smirked and chuckled with a huge dislike toward them, “it’s like a bad genetic that passes down from generation to generation. You can’t change that.”

Cathy shook her head in disbelief while listening to him. She couldn’t believe that Lady Marie did bad things not only in public, but also among royals.

“The elders already forbid her not to cross the line, but she always does, again and again,” he said. “If she doesn’t want to listen to the Council’s final warning, it’s up to her.”

“What does it mean with the final warning?” She baffled.

“Death will become her,” he said emotionlessly.
“What can I say then?”

The consequence that the Council would give to Lady Marie, it sounded scary. Cathy couldn’t even imagine the horror of it.

“Does Lady Marie also after Roses Bones?” She wondered.

“I told you before. Everyone wants it,” he said, and paused for a second when he was coughing badly again. Cathy stroke his back gently before he spoke again, “Nevertheless, Roses Bones is related to Chandelier Order, since those angels were the one who started the whole thing in the first place.”

“I think I’m beginning to feel familiar with the story,” Cathy said, contemplating. “Three things that seem secretive; Hallow Nostrum, Roses Bones, and the last—Chandelier Order,” she said, and he smiled proudly at her, “It will be like soul-searching to understand them.”

“Things will take time, Catherine,” he said wisely. “Believe me.”



In the afternoon, Cathy walked around the garden. She was at the west wings of the backyard. There were tall windows on the porch, facing toward her back.

The ambience invigorated her mind for a while. It was probably the effect of many flowers in here. She tried to breathe the fresh air under the bright sunshine.

The flashback of Erica’s story hovered on her mind. She blinked out of confusion. She didn’t know that her backstory really got into her. There was something in

the past that felt inevitable to be denied. The riddles and secrets were complicated.

The writing on her mom's latest journal about the Royal Council flashed on her mind too. As if there was an answer through the writing. She battled with her headache from recalling the riddles on the journal, and then she remembered the book with the crossed golden keys symbol.

Cathy hadn't really read it since she came to Vancouver. For a second, she took out that little book from her satchel bag. She started to search for something inside the book while sitting on the porch floor. Some pages talked about the seeking of Roses and Bones, which was a mere myth for some people, but the writing on the book convinced the reader that it was a real thing.

It was no big of deal for Cathy at first, until she found a page where it told her about the holy land where Roses and Bones were buried. The thing was—Roses and Bones were apparently a singular item, becoming one. That was why, eventually, they called it Roses Bones.

One page depicted the landscape of what this holy land supposed to look like. There should be a mark of crosses on the soil land, which could prevent it from evil kind. It was sealed and locked with an invisible power, like a spell.

However, the writing was kind of similar with what her mom had written about a sacred emblem. She created a mind map inside her head, imagining how the soil land would look like if it was here.

Cathy walked to the garden again, where the bushes and pots surrounded the land. She grabbed the

nearest shovel, and she got stopped in the midst of the soil ground. She bent her legs down and started digging the land with eyes closed.

It felt crazy, like an unstoppable adrenaline rush all over her body. She kept on digging, and when it felt deep enough, her fingers went skimming on the soil. She got surprised when her fingers touched something protruding from the soil. It felt hard and rough.

Cathy wasn't ready to open her eyes, but when someone shook her arms harshly, she got annoyed. She opened her eyes and astonished to see Celine already squatted against her.

"What are you doing?" Celine confronted her, sounded a bit angry. She caught her in action and handled it with anger.

Cathy resented her for asking in an annoying way, and she muttered, "Nothing."

Their eyes locked on the small pendant on her grip. Eventually, it looked similar with the illustration of an emblem on her mom's journal. However, her surprise moment was pretty late.

"Did you see something when you touch it?" Celine asked forcefully, but Cathy needed a second to understand why she got really mad about it, but then she shook her shoulders harshly again, "I said, did you see something?!"

Cathy nodded weakly, "Ye... yes."

"Oh God," she tremendously astonished. "Don't let anyone find out that you know about this, especially from Laura and Sarah."

Cathy had no idea whether she was saying the truth or not. "Why anyone cannot know, even from my aunt?"

“Because it’s dangerous, you never know what they will do to you,” Celine looked worried.

“Why should I trust you?” Cathy talked back, observing her expression. “You’re also the family.”

“Uncle always trusts me. He can see that I won’t be like the rest of the family members. I know greatest secrets he embraces,” Celine said without blinking. Every word she said sounded absolute and final “—howsoever, you don’t have to trust me.”

Cathy knew that Celine was the only one in the family that always took a good care for Uncle Nathaniel.

“I can see that you’re confused,” Celine said carefully, “I’m always good at keeping a secret. I won’t be the highest paid lawyer, if I couldn’t pay my clients with a good trust for their privacy, don’t you think?”

It was hard to believe if such a great lawyer like Celine would lie at this level. Subsequently, she asked, “Tell me the exact reason why can’t anyone know?”

Her eyes beamed with fear before she murmured, “Because they won’t believe in the destined child.”

“What is the destined child?” Cathy baffled.

Celine took away the emblem from her grip immediately, and she hid it inside Cathy’s black pocket coat. “Just stay put this in your pocket first.”

“Seriously, I need an explanation,” Cathy confronted her.

Celine forced her to rise up from the ground. She stared earnestly at her before saying anything further.

“I promise I will tell you everything once we return to New York,” she said convincingly. “There’s also a place you need to see in there.”

“Oh, right. You live in New York,” she recalled the conversation during the family reunion yesterday.

“Then, you have to keep your promise. I’m expecting the truth, Celine.”



The holiday time in Vancouver was over. They packed up their suitcases on Thursday morning.

During the car trip to the airport, Cathy recalled what happened yesterday, before Celine caught her finding the sacred emblem. There was a clear vision, like some kind of a flashback when she touched the emblem for the first time. She was definitely not imagining thing, and she knew that. She recalled the vision inside her head when Aunt Sarah drove her car while listening to 70s song on the radio.

Erica’s hands were trembling as she grabbed a piece of paper and pen to write her secret message—about all of her turbulent sorrow.

*For everything that I’ve been through,
Please save the roses and bones...
For this mercy will be laid upon us,
I can’t keep it here. They’ve found me.
I can’t hide forever beneath the dark.
Please, save the souls from the darkest hearts.*

*—Love,
Erica von Aloise*

As soon as she finished writing it down, she threw the letter into the wooden box of Roses Bones, and she ran toward the door while carrying the box.

The vision dissolved, and Cathy felt as if she was there for a moment, while in reality, she still sat beside

the car window, looking out at the view of wild pine trees.

She got bleeding terribly after some male figures in black clothes appeared out of nowhere behind her door house and one of them stabbed her with a dagger, and fortunately, she was able to run away.

Her skin and brown coat covered with so much blood as she ran away into a dark tunnel. The only place she could think of was Nathaniel's house. She went there, making him terrified. He let her come inside his house, and she felt safe for a moment.

"I know who's going to kill me," she said tremblingly with dreadful eyes "—the Heisler."

Nathaniel had never felt terrified before in his life. He was scared for her. "Erica, I don't want to lose you."

The flashes were gone again, and Cathy returned to her senses. When she opened her eyes, Aunt Sarah was already calling her to get their suitcases out. The airport was only a few steps away from this parking lot. Soon, they would be returning to New York.

IO

BONFIRE PARTY

FOR THE REST of the winter holiday, Cathy spent her quality time with Josh—her forever best friend. It was the first day of December 2013. They were playing together under the rainy snow, at the park near Fordham University.

Josh stood on the ground full of cold snowflakes, running wildly like a child. He always got prepared, wearing his thick blue coat when the weather was pretty cold outside, and Cathy also dressed in her thick brown coat.

“It’s winter!” He shouted out loud to her. “Where do you want to go?”

Cathy stared down, thinking assertively. “I want to visit my mom’s grave.”

Josh gazed at her in astonishment when he thought this was supposed to be a happy moment, but in the end, he sympathized her feeling. He approached her and hugged her tightly.

She leaned on his chest, and murmured, “Sorry.”

As they visited the cemetery in New Rochelle, Cathy recalled the decision among the Aloise family that her mom’s grave would be transferred to Austria immediately. She would miss her mom so much, for all

eternity. After an hour of grieving had done, they were settled to go outside and to be happy again.

Josh took his bicycle on the snowy road, while walking side by side with Cathy. The sunrise had passed them, and it was nine in the morning.

“Okay, hop on!” He demanded.

Cathy narrowed her eyes at him as she wasn’t sure what he was saying. “What?”

He smiled widely while sitting on his bicycle, and said, “I’m asking you to stand up on my bike and enjoy the ride. It can be fun.”

He helped her to find her balance as she threw her feet on the back pedals hesitantly, while her hands rested on his hard shoulders.

“Well—” she sighed, feeling terrified. She stood behind his back, while he started cycling the bicycle slowly, and the cold wind blew on their faces. She was about to scream when he went faster, but then he slowed it down again. “Are you sure you don’t want to kill me?”

“Trust is the key. Do you trust me?” He asked.

“You know I trust you,” as she said that, they were giggling afterward.

“Try to spread your hands,” he demanded.

“Are you insane?” She wasn’t sure to accept his challenge, but slowly, she opened her arms like a bird set free. She could feel the air swept her lips gently.

For a second, she wanted this peaceful moment to be eternal.



In the evening, Josh told her that he needed to go working. He just got a part time job in a coffee shop.

Cathy was wondering with the view of the place, therefore, she wanted to be his company for a while.

They opened the glass door of a small coffee shop that was located in Grand Concourse, which was the nearest downtown Bronx from their living place.

As soon as Josh wore his green apron, he returned to see her in the bar counter. Cathy sat in a bar stool while observing some colorful decoration inside this coffee shop. There were some young customers in the room, and there were only three employees, including Josh.

“This place looks good and pretty classy for the local folks,” Cathy commented.

“Don’t get this place a wrong judgment,” he snapped. “It’s kind of boring here.”

“I don’t believe you,” she argued. “At least this place is not too crowded.”

“Yeah, and too bad, I got the night shift,” he said, cringing in disappointment.

“Of course you should. You have to go to college in daylight,” she muttered, and for a second, she sighed. “Being in here reminds me about that bar.”

Josh heard her murmuring, and then he snapped his finger at her, ruining her reverie.

“What bar?” He shouted, narrowing his eyes in disbelief at her. “Don’t tell me that you’ve gone to a bar, and alone, and—”

“God, Josh!” She snarled while he was wiping some of glasses. “It’s not like what you think.”

“Okay, care enough to tell me about your holy vacation in Vancouver?” He asked and raised his eyebrow.

She already told him about the manor and the family encounter, but the part that she left out was going to that bar in downtown. It was because she didn't know how to tell him without being clueless.

"I went to a place that is called *Demeanor Bar* in downtown, well, you're right, I was alone at the time—"

"Where were your aunt and the others?" He sounded curious.

"They were still in the manor, and for your information, I kind of stole my aunt's car, knowing she wouldn't let me go."

"Of course she wouldn't. You're an easy target for a hunter," he threw the napkin on the counter as he suddenly acted like her old man—"you do look like a lost puppy sometimes. If only you know that, Cathy."

"Shut up. You should listen until the end of the story," she argued.

"Well, try me," he shrugged and felt peeved.

She knew he would be reacted exaggeratingly. He always had the need to be protective of her.

"I was bored by only staying inside the manor. I wanted to see the world, so I went outside," she had a reason to be told, "and then I went to this bar, where the bouncer didn't let me in at first, and I didn't know if I had flipped a switch or something, he suddenly invited me in," she said while observing his heedful expression, he surely got a pretty face to see, even from up-close—"I was greeted by a female singer in there. I remember her name, Suzan de Cartier."

"You've met Suzan de Cartier?" He looked excited suddenly. "She's a great bar singer. She's been covering various old songs for many years."

“Do you know Suzan?” She wondered. “Is she popular?”

“Who don’t know her name, seriously?” His eyes brightened as he talked. “Although she’s not well-known among teenagers, but her presence is a big rumor,” he was rolling his eyes, feeling ashamed for talking like a fan girl, “well, I follow up the local music news in the internet, so don’t be surprised.”

“No, don’t worry,” she shook her head, since she was more surprised at herself for hearing this information for the first time. “Do you think it’s odd for someone like Suzan de Cartier to approach me?”

“Of course it is,” Josh gazed boldly at her for that strange question, and then he chuckled and said “— unless you’re a model that usually appears on the street billboards.”

Cathy sighed peevishly at his joke.

“Seriously, who would approach a nerdy bookworm, wearing black clothes, and looking invisible at the corner of the room?” Josh added.

“Right, I was invisible enough to sit still at the corner of the room, and yet, it was odd that Suzan would talk to me on that day,” Cathy said and chuckled.

“I don’t know, Cathy,” he shook his head. “It could be there was something special she saw in you. There’s always a possibility in everything.”

Cathy could hardly believe, since that unexpected encounter was still hovering on her mind. “Really, is it so?”

“Anyway, I’ve heard a rumor that Suzan hates having her picture taken,” he said in bewilderment “— weird, for someone so gorgeous like her.”

“Maybe she has her own reason. We don’t know why,” Cathy responded.

The next minute, she ordered a glass of soda drink through him. When she looked around the room, the customers chattered noisily. It was better off when a pop music was played on the speakers to reduce the noise. After he returned with her drink, the conversation continued.

“She mentioned a phrase that I feel familiar, I think it’s something related with the Royal Council,” Cathy recalled the time when she read some of the family papers that Uncle Nathaniel gave her, which gave a little clue about that secret society. “If I’m not mistaken, she said; *I, for one.*”

“What does it mean, and what is the Royal Council?” He confused.

“My uncle said it is a secret society among the royal families, and everything about it sounds secretive and inscrutable,” she muttered.

“It sounds like you almost cross into a mystery movie or something,” when he said that, she punched his shoulder lightly as annoyed with his joke. However, he smiled happily for her, “So, you’re finally getting to know your family better.”

“I guess, probably,” she was still feeling unsure.

“Hey, what about that Bonfire Party you told me?” He reminded her. “It will be held tomorrow evening.”

Cathy stared wonderingly at him. “You’ll have a night shift tomorrow. Do you really want to go?”

“The party sounds interesting, so I’ll be going to bail for once,” he giggled as stealing a glance at the other employees.

“Alright,” she nodded excitedly for the upcoming event, “it’s settled, then.”



The next day, Cathy and Josh went together to Manhattan’s East Village. It took them about two hours by car trip from New Rochelle, and they arrived at five p.m. eventually.

White tents built in the midst of the park. It was like a camping site. People chattered outside the tents. Everyone looked enthusiast waiting for the midnight fireworks.

Cathy dressed in her usual long black coat, sling bag, and sneakers, while Josh dressed in a blue tartan blouse, brown jacket, and brown boots.

They waited for the party to start while spending time together by sitting on the grasses. When Josh went to buy some snacks and drinks in the bazar, Cathy gazed at the walkers around her. And five minutes later, he returned with beef hamburgers and soda drinks.

“Glad, we’re arrived early before the field got occupied by everyone,” Cathy said jokingly.

“I was thinking more about the weather. Glad, it’s not raining,” he mumbled. “Just imagine if a heavy snowfall happens during the Bonfire Party—”

“Bad idea,” Cathy shouted.

The silence between them was last momentarily after they finished their hamburgers.

“Sitting like this in here, reminds me of Austria,” Cathy said, although she endured not to sob in front of him.

“Life is about moving on, Cathy,” he admonished her, knowing that she still had the attachment toward the past “—and yet, you haven’t let her go—your mother.”

She couldn’t even stare directly into his brown eyes as her heart got shattered. As the silence filled the air, the wind breezed got through.

“Neither do you,” Cathy said “—of Martha.”

It had been so long since anyone ever mentioned about his grandmother. It tickled his stomach to recall the past—that she was gone already. However, he won’t be drowning too deep like her, for the sadness. “I have. She knows I already let her go.”

“Like that one time you’ve said about failing in cooking a cold porridge at your dorm?” Cathy reminded him. “You said you’ve let it go, but you went mad.”

He chuckled as it was painful to admit.

“This is the life we’ve been through,” she was almost lost in thought while murmuring. “I ought to count on how this sadness would end up as mercy.”

The time seemed short for them to drown into this conversation. Two hours later, the park was crowded and filled with the arrival of local folks.

Another few tents were built near the bonfire. It was a huge bonfire with many of flaring firewood. The folk party was celebrated once every year. They held many of fun session like food bazar, arcade games, and campfire storytelling.

This was the first time for Cathy since she never really came to such event before. She was glad that she came with Josh, because he was a person that could make her feel safe. He was like a brother and protector

at the same time. She could never be thankful enough to have him by her side. She was grateful.

Cathy and Josh walked toward the bonfire site. People started gathering together in the midst of the park, chattering noisily.

“They are serious to make the Bonfire Party happens in the winter,” Josh muttered while watching some men were lighting a fire on kindling woods.

“Isn’t this party only held once every year?” Cathy baffled with his statement, but when he started mumbling pointlessly, she glanced around at the view of the night.

At the time, she was conflicted and surprised to see a familiar figure in here. Her mind wondered acutely, and she just needed to be assured whether that female figure was really someone she knew or not.

That person was wearing a navy-blue coat and black sling bag. Cathy touched her shoulder to greet her, eventually it was rather unexpected.

She was mistaken her familiar appearance with someone, “My apologies. You two look like a twin from afar, I thought you’re Sylvia Elle.”

“What’s with the new style?” Josh muttered behind her, as he followed to stare at the vintage classy appearance of Eleanor Heisler, which she clipped her blonde-platinum bangs with a black hairpin, similar with Elle’s hairstyle.

“Oh God, please. Save the chaos on your mind,” she snarled sarcastically at Cathy. “Haven’t I warned you not to talk to me?”

“It can’t be helped,” Cathy chuckled awkwardly.

For a second, the image of Gavin’s figure crossed on her mind. Cathy remembered that day, when

Eleanor stared oddly at him. There was something in the air, as if they already knew each other. It was just her assumption, but she was also curious for the truth.

“Are you waiting for him?” Cathy asked boldly, “I mean the guy with gray eyes. You’ve come across with him in the university’s park.”

Eleanor bulged out at her. “Are you deaf?” She felt the annoyance that Cathy would nail on her serious warning not to talk with her. “What does it look like?”

“I was wondering if you really knew him. His name is Gavin,” Cathy said.

Eleanor shot her with a sarcastic look, and said, “sort of.”

“She has a boyfriend?” Josh whispered at her. He got baffled as well.

Eleanor surely could hear him since they only stood a half meter away. She sighed heavily, and shouted at them, “Duh, are you two never heard about the adolescence time?”

“Oh, is it dumb things like dating and kissing for the first time, isn’t it?” Josh laughed out loud all by himself when the girls stared stiffly at him. “Come on, it’s a funny joke!”

“It is not,” Cathy muttered at him, rolling her eyes in annoyance.

The bonfire session was about to start. The men in tartan clothes were playing a guitar, humming a country song. The melody was beautiful as the fire cracking sound was heard on the background. Some people started dancing on their own, slowly and steadily. It was like a romantic moment at night. Everyone looked happy.

Cathy and Josh danced like everyone in here. It was a platonic love between them, so it would be odd to think more than that.

Josh sighed, "I've been thinking about this. We did this romantic dance once, in Syracuse festival."

Cathy nodded, "I remember. We made a good team, and even now."

Josh chuckled, but deeply in his heart, he had always been caring for her, as in a way of real affection. He loved her, but she seemed not to care about it. She wanted their relationship to be like brother and sister. It sounded like a one-sided love.

In the midst of their dancing, Gavin had just arrived. When he approached Eleanor and greeted her in a flirty way, Cathy stole a glance at them. It was odd for Cathy to believe that they already knew each other.

"Is that him?" Josh wondered as he noticed too. "You said his name is Gavin."

"Yeah, that's him," Cathy nodded. "I guess that's make sense."

"About what?" Josh baffled.

Cathy stared at him and said, "Eleanor is kind of all dress up differently."

He chuckled, finding it funny. "Don't you think every girl will do the same?"

Cathy shrugged naively that she didn't have any idea about it.

At the time, the new couple seemed so into each other that he didn't glance at her this time. Cathy wondered since when they had been seeing each other. It wasn't like she wanted to middle in someone's business, but she still had a gut of feeling about Gavin, as if he kept something dark within him that felt so

dangerous. But honestly, he still had that sort of magnet that made people could fall deeply for him. Not everyone owned that kind of weird vibe.

The next hour, Cathy and Josh went to sit down on the wood, facing the storytellers on the bonfire site. They were the same men in tartan clothes who played guitars, and now they started to tell a tale.

“Do you believe the stories they told on the bonfire party?” Josh asked while his eyes were gazing at the storytellers.

Cathy bewildered and squinted at him, “Why not?”

“I think it sounds like a practical bullshit,” he talked solemnly that it made Cathy got that terrifying feeling, especially in the middle of listening to their creepy story about ghosts.

“You shouldn’t be like that. Being open-minded is good,” Cathy murmured.

“Listening to the campfire story while facing the bonfire, kind of giving me the creeps,” Josh said, “It reminds me of your little friend suddenly—Sylvia Elle.”

Hearing her name made Cathy frowned to herself.

The wind breezed lightly on their cheeks, followed by the cracking sound of the bonfire as their conversation continued.

“I thought she’s possessed a psychic ability at first, but somehow she’s more than that,” Josh murmured. “I know there’s something off with her. I just can’t say what it is,” he sighed, feeling stressed out with the mysterious riddle. “I’m trying to be practical, believing what you’ve said that she’s really *an angel*, but that doesn’t make sense.”

“She could be—” Cathy struggled to say the words, but deeply she also wondered, “some angels don’t

appear with wings. So they can camouflage with human.”

“Where did you get your conclusion that Sylvia Elle is not human?” Josh asked in a huge bewilderment.

“No one has ever mentioned it, but I feel it,” Cathy said, “something is just not falling into place.”

Josh sighed in disbelief. “Just think of her as a person with strange personality. That would be easy.”

Suddenly, a soft voice was calling her name. As she turned her face, Celine was already appeared behind her.

“Wait, what are you doing in here?” She surprised, but feeling excited to meet her again.

Celine did have wide lips, thus every time she smiled, her thin lips looked pretty wide.

“It’s time for fun, I suppose,” Celine said.

Cathy almost forgot to introduce her to Josh, who looked curious with her presence. So on, she spoke, “This is my cousin, Celine von Aloise. I’ve told you yesterday.”

“Nice to meet you, please call me Celine,” she said while thrusting her hand to him for a handshake.

He greeted her politely too, “I’m Josh Kingsley, Cathy’s best man.”

“Oh, like a boyfriend?” Celine squinted curiously at her, but Cathy rolled her eyes as feeling ridiculous “—ups, my bad for this awkward moment.”

“Nope, don’t worry,” Josh said while rising up from the ground, “I’m thirsty now. Do you guys want a drink?”

He left quickly after they nodded, still feeling awkward.

“That’s what I call a friend zone. The way he looks at you is irresistible,” Celine muttered as she could relate the feeling, since she wasn’t that much older from Cathy. She was twenty-eight this year.

“By the way, you have to keep your promise,” Cathy reminded her.

“Of course, I let you know soon,” she said firmly. “I got occupied with a heavy job these days, so I can’t be sure what time I’ll catch up with you.”

“Take your time,” Cathy believed her fatefully since she didn’t want to push something before its right time. “And by the way, does the emblem mean something to you?”

Celine nodded hesitantly. “You’ll know the reason soon. For now, we have to enjoy this event.”

“Your brother is in here. I thought he’s dating—”

“Ah, I just met him earlier. Yes, he seems into that girl—Eleanor Heisler.”

“You knew Eleanor?” She surprised.

“Among the royal families, it’s like everyone knows everyone,” Celine said, “Especially if it’s just Eleanor Heisler, the sarcastic young lady.”

Cathy almost laughed out loud at the latter. “You got it right.”

After Josh returned with some soda drinks, they continued listening to a creepy story together that gave them the creeps for a night.

II

HOPE AND DESPAIR

CELINE

AT THE KIND of stressful time like this, she would greatly appreciate the good news she received from Matilda by phone message. It was a few weeks ago when the old lady said that the local event of Bonfire Party would be held soon in Manhattan's East Village. It would probably be a good time to recharge her energy. Celine also told her that she wanted to visit her place. It had been a long time since they hadn't met each other, and there were some things she would like to catch up.

When she arrived at the Bonfire Party, she unexpectedly met her brother, Gavin. She looked surprised to see him with a girl, which no other than the sarcastic lady that everyone in the royal niche had known about—Lady Eleanor Heisler.

They surely never greeted each other before, even though they came across inside the Royal Council for a few times. Eleanor was never nice to anyone. Of course, Celine didn't expect to be treated respectfully by someone like her.

Gavin, on the other side, he didn't really know about the whole things among the royals. He was never

part of that fraternal society. He once said to her, *I choose freedom*. But here was the thing; Gavin didn't know who he was facing with. Celine tried to convince him for thinking twice about hanging out together with White Foxes' favorite child. It would be like the worst scenario between both of them.

Since she couldn't confront his stubbornness, she left them to join with other people by sitting on the ground while listening to a creepy ghost story. At the time, she saw a familiar body silhouette of Cathy Charlotte, which she could recognize immediately. It just took her a minute to find out, and as she tapped her shoulder, that girl was really Cathy, looking surprised and excited at the same time.

She was introduced to the boy next to her, Josh Kingsley. Soon after, the awkwardness boiled away in the air when she thought him mistakenly as Cathy's boyfriend. And so on, Josh excused himself to grab some drinks when he actually tried to cover up his own embarrassment. As he went away, the girls got to catch up a little bit.

"I live in a Manhattan apartment. Well, alone, just like you," she giggled and realized that they shared something in common.

"Living alone is kind of pathetic, isn't it?" Cathy asked rhetorically.

"If you're living in NYC, then you should really make up your mind about it," she said assuredly.

"What is it like to be the highest paid lawyer?" Cathy asked innocently, not knowing there was an impact she gave to Celine, who currently feeling her worst time.

“Being a lawyer is kind of my dream job,” Celine said passionately. “So, it feels nice, even in the rough times.”

“I’ve heard from TV news, you’re Trisden Brimham’s lawyer—” and this time, Cathy realized the heavy burden that Celine felt. “Do you think White Foxes are innocent?”

She smiled for a second, holding on to her most tremendous pain to face the truth. “I can’t be sure.”

For a second, they were silent while listening to the crackling fire from afar.

During the storytelling of a ghost story, Cathy murmured to her again, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be meddle—”

“I’m still working on the case, but it just never works out,” Celine seemed to lose her hope, feeling her greatest despair. “There’s just something in the dark that I cannot see,” she muttered, “White Foxes replaced their lawyer at the last second of the final court, which doesn’t make sense.”

“The trial court keeps going on because of that?” Cathy wondered.

“Indeed,” she sighed. “It’s like a battlefield, full of terrifying things.”

For a second, Cathy didn’t seem to be focused on their conversation, and she kept on stealing a glance at a certain view.

“Hey, wait, I thought I keep on seeing a woman that looks exactly like you—” Cathy glanced behind her back, peeping over the crowd.

Celine astonished, and she followed her gaze immediately, but there was just a bunch of teenagers

with colorful spray paint all over their faces. “What are you talking about?”

“She was there just yet,” Cathy seemed hesitant, “I thought she’s your twin sister. Do you have one?”

Cathy was assured to see that woman in the middle of the crowd, wearing all black, a silver chain ear cuff, and her pretty loose long dark hair. On the contrary, Celine was wearing a casual white sleeveless blouse, and a similar silver chain ear cuff as the woman, and with ponytail hairstyle. But still, they looked alike.

Celine stared down insecurely. The hectic feeling hovered inside her mind, thereby, she muttered to convince herself, “That’s not possible.”



The black building was facing the lonely road in Manhattan, as if this area was a haunted section or something. However, the black building was a special library that was owned by Matilda Carline Heisler, as well as her living place.

After a few minutes Celine came knocking at the front door, the landlord finally let her come inside.

“You’re arrived early in the morning. Don’t you have to go to work?” Matilda asked.

“It will be just a minute,” Celine said, and then she hugged her longingly. “I need your warm company.”

“Oh, as usual, the stressful life is bothering you again,” Matilda muttered as she went to the front desk, pouring a hot tea from her antique teakettle in the two cups.

“I’m sure you already know about White Foxes’ battle in the trial court,” Celine said, and then she

sighed heavily for a second, feeling stressed out. “I have to work harder since they replaced their lawyer. The trial will be continued this week.”

“One should know their games in order to win justice,” Matilda murmured as she brought the two cups to the coffee table “—but I thought you already knew that.”

Celine sat oppositely from her, and said, “I’ve heard some people mentioning their family, but truly, I have no idea what they are.”

“If you’re often visiting the Royal Council, you’re supposed to be aware of their presence,” she said as taking the cup with her wrinkled hand.

“Whatsoever, I’m no more than a visitor in that society,” Celine muttered. “It’s been a while since the last time I’ve visited that place. Are you still keeping in touch with them?”

“Sometimes,” she answered as rolling her eyes inscrutably, “and remember—you don’t want to scare people off with the current issue.”

“Do the committees say something about the trial?” Celine asked curiously.

“Rules are rules,” as Matilda said solemnly, her gaze was intimidating. “The committees will take further action if Marie de Clure persists.”

“Oh, curse the pertinent rules!” Celine peevd, and then she swallowed a cup of hot tea in one shot, making her lips swollen.

“Easy, my dear—” Matilda surprised at her careless act, “you don’t want to hold the grudge toward White Foxes. They’re just unworthy of your precious mind.”

For a second, a flash of yesterday memory crossed on her mind. She had fun in the Bonfire Party by

listening to the storytellers with their creepy ghost story, and she also danced with the folks, but still, she couldn't be happy with everything. Her distressful thoughts were tremendous to be borne alone. Until at the end of the night, only one thing stayed on her mind.

"I lose with nineteen-year-old girl. Can you make sense of that?"

Matilda narrowed her eyes, baffled. "Who is it?"

"There's a new member in our family, she's Cathy Charlotte—"

"Oh, God, I know that child," Matilda snapped off before she finished her words "—she has been running errands in my place. She has a good determination at doing something."

Celine surprised. "So, you already met her."

"Her soul doesn't look like nineteen though," Matilda was being defined in her words.

"I'm sure Cathy isn't ordinary, judging from her look—" Celine murmured, "but yesterday when we met in the Bonfire Party, she saw someone I wouldn't expect to be seen around—at least for a long time."

"Oh, my, is it—" Matilda paused from drinking the hot tea when she astonished with the news, "that's impossible."

"Yes, it was Sircas," she muttered with sadness and yearning in her voice. "I wish I could see her, but I can't anymore."

"If someone other than Nathaniel can see her presence, there will be a question to ask," Matilda wondered.

Celine was recalling what Cathy had told her at the night they were sitting in front of a bonfire;

"I know this sounds strange, but that woman, I can feel her voice somewhere, keep on echoing your name inside my head," Cathy suddenly mumbled a lot, as if a message she tried to convey was truly meant for Celine to hear heedfully. "She wants to talk to you, if you're allowed her."

Celine was tremendously baffling. "I don't understand. If you're talking about spirit or ghost, I don't believe any of it."

Cathy was silent for a second, searching for the answer through her brown eyes, and then she spoke again, "You won't cry right now, if you don't believe."

Celine stared back at her in astonishment as she wiped her tears, and there was a terrified feeling she held. "I don't know who you are right now, Cathy."

"Even if you don't believe in her, she believes in you," Cathy won't stop telling her. "She'll be there whenever you need her, helping you out."

"Where do you know everything you've just said?" Celine confronted.

"I told you, when she stared at me a minute ago, it was like the voice got inside my head, I was hearing her voice. Is her name Sircas?" Cathy got bewildered by herself. "It's a strange name. Okay, I can't be sure though," Cathy glanced away from her, embarrassed with all the talking she did. "It's like I was imagining things. Please, forget it."

It was the strangest conversation she had with Cathy. Everything that girl said, it seemed impossible to be perceived, but eventually, it was the truth.

Deeply in her heart, it was hard to admit if she would deny, but it was just a matter of time.

The surest thing, Celine knew who Sircas was.



SIRCAS

It was the last day of winter 2012 in Manhattan.

In New York City, Nathaniel was only visiting an old friend, and also to watch over the ongoing ceremony among the folks that was caused by his long distant relative. It was no other than White Foxes. Almost everyone in the world knew who they were.

Before he went home to Vancouver that day, an angel came to meet him.

The mystery—was the first thing that led them to encounter each other for the first time. After the death of Erica von Aloise, a strange white-haired girl came to him out of nowhere. He didn't know anything about her identity, and he couldn't even guess who the girl was, but one thing for sure, she came to bring a message to him. It was about saving Roses Bones.

After the Remembrance Day for Lydia Brimham was held a few hours ago in New York's Time Square, they encountered each other inside the special guest room at a coffee shop. They talked for hours, about the reality that had been happening in the Royal Council lately. It was about a serious matter.

The conversation continued after he drank his mocha latte, and then, as he promised, he would love to introduce someone to her.

“You may come out here,” he called on someone who had been hiding behind the brick wall of this small room.

The woman appeared slender and tall in black coat, she kind of treasured a Hispanic profile with her tan skin, her long black hair styled straightly loose, and she looked utterly odd wearing a silver chain ear cuff. There was something cryptic beneath her black eyes.

Sylvia Elle rose from her chair as she stared like a hawk at the woman. They acted defensively against each other.

He immediately noticed the uneasy atmosphere in the room, thus he said, “Don’t be afraid, *Sircas*.”

“You brought a Djinn?” Elle bulged out in disbelief at him.

They were silent for a second.

He sighed heavily as he assumed things would turn mess up. Subsequently, he tried to explain, “She comes with a good intention. She works in a Totem way, as you already know.”

“You know things wouldn’t work that way with the opposite entities, right?” Elle warned him, firmly in her words.

“Light against fire—you’re right, Angel,” he understood what she meant, and then he sighed, “Angel wins, but in here, we have more important case to deal with. She has someone to be guarded too.”

Elle stared keenly at *Sircas*, who didn’t dare to look back and only stood tremblingly. As a matter of fact, he couldn’t make peace between both of them.

“I don’t do war, Angel,” *Sircas* glanced at her, and she finally had something to say. They stared up at her surprisingly. “I come for my beloved one, just like you have a certain mission.”

“I can see your honesty,” Elle murmured.

“I detect there’s something malevolent in the air, that will be a real danger for the Aloise children,” Sircas said worriedly.

“You better do a good job, Sircas,” Elle grimaced at her.

Sircas smiled warmly, and she was being sincere for everything she did. She knew how not to play a game, since she was the type of entity who loved to do a serious work. Her job was being a protector, and maybe some people knew it as a spirit guide. She was here to make a shelter for her beloved one, but unfortunately, it would take time to make the right approach of how and what to do next. It took her everything to success in her mission.

“Marie de Clure, she works under the Devil’s manipulation,” she spoke in rage, and they could hear her groaning. “It would give a wreck for every royal, and also, about the ongoing trial—”

“Oh, she’s a lawyer?” Elle shouted as she could read the situation already. Surely, it shocked Sircas that an angel could understand better. “She’s the kind of human being who doesn’t believe in the universe, being guarded by a Totem like you. Would it work out if you introduce yourself to her in that kind of circumstance?”

“There’s always a way to try,” Sircas argued.

“You’ll have to make a gigantic effort to protect her from danger, and you already know from whom,” Elle warned her.

“I know it’s about the time.”

Elle smirked, but then her expression turned solemn, “Remember, you cannot fight fire with fire.”

Sircas nodded, although there was a slight feeling of dreadful that she felt in order to prepare a fight between good and evil. She had contemplated every

possible circumstance in the near future, and so she would be ready to face anything.

I2

THE TWO-FLAGS EMBLEM

SOME STUDENTS WERE still yawning from their sleepless holiday as the winter class was held on Monday, 30th December 2013.

Cathy was in a good spirit to seek for knowledge today. She already planned to visit Fordham University Library. She wanted to read some old books that might help her to understand the emblem that she kept in her pocket coat.

The library was very quiet in the morning. She could enjoy her own company while reading a book.

There were some old books she brought to the table, hoping she would find something good. She highlighted some writings into her mind, and tried to remember it. Various versions of ancient emblems were written in these books, but none of them had a precise connection to the emblem that she found at Nathaniel's manor. This seemed like soul-searching that frustrated her.

She paused from reading a book, trying to refresh her mind by walking through the aisle of bookshelves.

For a moment, she stole a glance at a tall man behind the bookshelves. His figure seemed familiar, with a dark hair and white skin. She didn't expect to

meet Alexander MacLain in here, but it felt like a long time since she hadn't met him during the last holiday.

As he caught her staring at him, the awkwardness happened between them, but he still tried the effort to make a friendly approach.

"Cathy Charlotte, it's been a long time," he waved at her.

"Good morning, Mr. MacLain."

"I told you, call me Alex," he chuckled.

"We're still inside the university. It would be inappropriate, *Mr. MacLain*," she argued, emphasizing his name in a formal way.

Cathy wanted to have a normal relationship between a lecturer and student, but the strong feeling that they had known each other before, it still bothered her.

"You see, there's no one here but us," he said, giggling.

"What should I say then—" she was joking in return, "that your wish is my command?"

Suddenly, she could feel his eyes on her fist, while clenching the emblem beneath her grasp.

"Hey, what's that?" He wondered.

Cathy hid her hands behind her back as she talked spontaneously, "Nothing."

As Alex stared suspiciously, he tried to reach for her hand by force, and she leaned backward in astonishment.

"I think my father has a similar emblem as yours," he told her, smiling understandingly. "I'm sorry to bother you."

Cathy blinked out as she bewildered at his confession. "No, it's my apologies."

The tension in the air slowly vanished, and so they could exhale for a moment.

They sat oppositely at the table where she occupied before. At the same time he gazed curiously at the books on the table, Cathy asked him, "What's the story of your father's emblem?"

Alex half smiled to her, knowing that she would be interested to listen in the end, "My father's emblem is displayed inside a glass box at our home in German. He got it from a royal auction for foster charity since a long time ago."

He was flattered when she listened to him heedfully, as if they had this exclusive conversation, just reserved for the two of them.

"My father and *Madame Dupont* arranged the royal auction at the palace. They used to have a good partnership together since she's also a royal relative."

"Does the emblem belong to her?"

"Honestly, I don't really know in particular," he chuckled "—but she gave it as a gift to my father."

Cathy had given a thought to show him the oval-shaped emblem with the symbol of three flowers and two flags engraved on it. When she did, he raised his eyes wonderingly.

"This emblem seems like the inheritance from the Aloise ancestor," Cathy murmured. "I just don't know what to do with it, but I'm curious to find out what it is."

He touched it, studying the shape of that broken-white emblem, and he murmured, "There's must be a history behind this emblem."

“Yes, my cousin said this is sacred among the royals,” she informed, “and the Royal Council might want to have it if they found this out—”

“Have you been to the Royal Council before?” He baffled. “I mean, do you know about their existence?”

Cathy shrugged innocently. “I’ve just learnt about their existence from my uncle.”

“Is he—Sir Nathaniel von Aloise?” He asked, and she nodded. “He’s one of the important committees in the Council. *A strange man on his own*, that’s what the elders thought of him.”

“Oh, really,” she wasn’t truly surprised since she already knew it. “I didn’t know you know a lot about Royal Council. Are you part of them or what?”

“Well, sort of.”

Cathy surprised that he seemed to know a lot. She wondered how much he knew about everything.

“Anyway, Uncle Nathaniel didn’t know that I found it in his yard,” and soon, she regretted to say that to him, because she just remembered about the rule of *tell no one* from Celine.

He blinked out, baffled. “Is that a bad idea?”

“I just realized about the emblem after I read my mom’s journal. She said vaguely in her writing that the emblem seems to hold a certain power,” Cathy said and sighed. “If only I can understand it better. I want to find out the truth.”

“Maybe if we ask about this emblem to Madame Dupont in person, we will get the answer.”

“Madame Dupont?” She raised her eyebrow, baffled. “And we... do you mean, as in together?”

He rose from the chair, and muttered, “Please tell me, you don’t have any class to attend this afternoon?”

“No, but—”

“Great, I pick you up at the gate.”



After the lunch time had finished, he picked her up at the university gate. Some people were eyeing them oddly. It could be that some of the English students got surprised to see them together after class. They were being together—it was just a rumor that no one could easily believe.

She was a bit surprised to know that they were going to meet Madame Dupont in the Royal House. It was a small building owned by the Royal Council in New York City. It seemed the royals had built many places for their own niche.

He told her a brief history about the woman they were about to meet. She was known as Madame Dupont de Brach. She had a royal French lineage. The annual foster charity among the royals was held under her name since she was the main host. Besides her life as the important committee in the Royal Council, she worked as a fortune teller as well.

Alex told her before his father had a professional relationship with Madame Dupont, they both worked as the important committees in the Royal Council. They did earn a lot of money together. However, it was all in the past. They didn't make a good team anymore since there was an internal matter among the royals. It was being said, there was a meddlesome royal family between them. He mentioned it had something to do with House of Clementine, but Cathy wasn't really

listening at what he was saying. Everything was still new for her. She couldn't understand all at once.

They arrived at two o'clock in front of the brown brick building with curved windows that looked pretty old than the rest of the buildings in downtown.

There were many black suit men at every corner of the door. He said they were bodyguards. And she was also nervous to meet that woman, but he convinced her that everything was going to be alright. But apparently, it wasn't true.

When they met Madame Dupont de Brach in her private office, she frowned at the presence of Cathy Charlotte.

Alex hugged that old woman immediately as soon as they met.

"It's been a long time, Alex," Madame Dupont said with a strong French accent, and her voice was deep and hoarse. "How are you, son?"

During their small talk, her eyes were still eyeing Cathy with a vicious look.

"I am good," he released his hug from her, and spoke "—hope everything's okay with the Council's committees."

"Oh, everything's just like usual," she chuckled, although there was a hesitation in her tone.

"Madame, I'd like to introduce you to my young friend, Cathy Charlotte," he said, pointing out his hands at her.

Cathy smiled stiffly.

"We're here to ask you about the antique emblem," he eyed Cathy, telling her to show off the emblem.

For a second, she was hesitant since this seemed going too far, she was about to break the rule again. After all, she had to know the truth, so she gave it up. She dropped the emblem on her office table.

Madame Dupont held her breath as she seemed to know something beneath her controllable emotion. “Where do you get this from, young lady?”

“Well, I found it in my uncle’s yard,” at the time she said that, Alex whispered to Madame Dupont. She heard him vaguely, mentioning *Nathaniel*.

“I believe this is must be the Aloise’s property,” Madame Dupont said firmly. “What is it that you want to know from me?”

Cathy hesitated to talk, but she really needed to know, “If you don’t mind me asking, is it related with the Royal Council?”

“Honestly, it has sort of to do with the Council, for our *plan book*, there is,” she said inscrutably.

Cathy glanced wonderingly at him, who stood beside her now.

“Plan book is the Committees’ final decision that’s concluded from their meeting. They do it frequently in Vancouver, at least in the end of every month,” he explained.

“Sir Nathaniel von Aloise has not spoken a word about it, but we truly expect his modesty,” Madame Dupont said solemnly “—I didn’t expect, it would come from you.”

Cathy felt the horror as the guilty feeling was crawling all over her body. It felt tremendously wronged to let this person know about the existence of the sacred emblem. There was something off with this Madame, as if she wasn’t being honest at all.

“Don’t worry. I’ll take care for it—”

Before Madame Dupont took it away from the table, Cathy grabbed it quickly. They stared astonishingly at her wary movement.

“Cathy, what are you doing?” He baffled.

“I... I guess it’s best that I carry this with me. I’d like to find the history of this emblem by myself,” she said tremblingly.

Madame Dupont smirked loathly at her decision. “If you think you’re so clever—”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be rude,” Cathy added.

Madame Dupont stared at her fiercely, but it seemed to be her true nature to appear vicious. She did look scary, especially when she wore a black feather hat and dress like the people in 18 century, it was precisely an Edwardian dress, and she wore a pearl necklace. She was a corpulent woman, and not pretty much tall. She seemed very old, probably in her late sixty.

Subsequently, it was just like what he told her earlier, about Madame Dupont’s occupation as a fortune teller. There was a pack of tarot cards on the coffee table at her office.

After Alex requested her psychic reading, she invited both of them to sit on the sofa as she started opening her tarot deck.

Even though he said it was just for fun, Cathy felt the horror atmosphere in this place.

He wanted the three cards reading, it would show the past, present, and future. He chose the cards after she welcomed him to do so. She gazed at him with her sharp gray eyes before she explained the meaning of his chosen cards.

“I would say that your life is still stagnant since the last time you pick your cards, but there’s a slight difference now,” she glanced at Cathy as she said the latter, “I see, there’s a girl.”

Alex couldn’t seem to hide his curiousness after he saw that it was the lover card. “What is it, Madame?”

“I can tell—” she said inscrutably, “this girl will bring you a bright future. One would say; a tremendous luck for life.”

“Who could it be?” He baffled, but he stole a glance at Cathy, wondering if it was her.

“The ancient knowledge believes in the story of *soulmate*,” she informed “—but if you can find her soul, you’ll be set free from the agony of yearning.”

For a second, nobody said a word. The classical piano instrument was heard on the background.

“Don’t ask, but seek, for yourself,” she emphasized every word to him, and then she glanced at Cathy, “and you, little child, please pick a card.”

“Is it just one card?” Cathy baffled, but after she gave her chosen card to her, Madame Dupont frowned uncomfortably against it. The image of a grim reaper was on the card, it was the card of death.

“Easy, it is not about the death itself,” she informed. “It can mean as a new phase of something in your life, but it feels unclear to me—of what will become of you,” she stared at her, looking surprised. “You will get through something terrifying before you can see the light.”

“Why the reading doesn’t sound good?” At this time, she realized her question was rude, but she had to confront her for the truth.

“You’re the one who pick the card. The answer lies in your soul.”

The last time she got a card from a fortune teller, it was also bad, and now she worried. “Why it sounds like the end of everything, if it’s not about the death itself?”

“I didn’t say it as the judgment day, but your life will depend on every action you take,” she said firmly. “I see the flashes; you will have to face the struggling days on your own. It seems those days will have something to do with your family.”

“Madame, please—” Alex warned her not to continue the talk.

She sighed heavily before she spoke, “Just one thing; please don’t bother to involve yourself in the Royal Council. It will not be necessary, as you see.”

Cathy felt as if her heart was stabbed deeply with a knife. It was painful to hear the harsh words from this woman.

“Alex did say he’ll bring a girl, but honestly, I am shocked to meet you,” she raised her eyebrow while talking harshly. “Alex just told me that you’re the Aloise child.”

“Madame, she’s not part of the Council yet,” he shouted.

“Don’t bother. We don’t need another Aloise in our beloved society,” she rose up from the sofa, and spoke for the last time, “Enough is enough, so if you understand, you know where the door is.”

0 0 0

At three o’clock, they went to have a coffee together in New York’s downtown. They talked a lot about life outside college. Alex always seemed excited whenever

they were together, but Cathy drowned in her own mind, and it was bugging her.

"I don't understand why she hates me," Cathy muttered.

"She's not usually like that, maybe she was in a bad mood," he convinced her, "don't worry too much, Cathy."

"So, are you going to tell me that she's actually a nice person?" Cathy confronted him.

He giggled, somehow he couldn't agree as well with that statement, but he didn't want to make the tension in the air.

For a second, Cathy remembered when she saw a wall magazine that was full of random clips at the Royal House earlier. There was one wide newspaper clip that talked about the current issue between Trisden Brimham and White Foxes, and the next clip was about the cryptic topic.

"I saw the newspaper clip at the foyer earlier—" she said finally, "about the founding of Hallow Nostrum. Do they talk about it a lot?"

Alex glanced surprisingly at her after he drank his black coffee. He seemed to think twice before he spoke, "The committees always have their own way to deal with this kind of problem."

"Such problem had happened before this?"

He smiled carefully to cover his knowledge about the matter. However, Cathy noticed his vigilant behavior since they talked about the sacred emblem.

"It wasn't the exact same problem, but a similar circumstance had happened a long time ago."

"My cousin said that White Foxes have created such a mess. They seem to anger the committees."

“Every media has already published the news about it,” he said worriedly. “According to the Royal Council’s rule, Hallow Nostrum is not supposed to be known publicly,” he glanced at her baffling expression, “and now, the revelation provokes some people to hunt down the peculiar water.”

“So, what will happen next?” Cathy wondered. “Because it’s not only about the magical water, but also the portal to the alternate dimension that White Foxes have revealed publicly,” she added.

“You can’t get Hallow Nostrum without crossing the portal. That’s the idea. White Foxes need to tell almost everything,” he said, feeling concerned. “It’s the astonishing truth for everyone.”

“So, does Madame Dupont in such a bad mood because of White Foxes?”

He giggled at her sneaky question. “I was in Vancouver for Royal Council’s meeting, and I witnessed her deliberate anger against Lady Marie de Clure, who seemed persistent in whatever she’s been doing,” he sighed for a second before talking again, “Madame Dupont was yelling at her in front of many people in the room,” he chuckled. “That was a hectic situation. Nobody dared to speak during their fight.”

She followed to chuckle along, and muttered, “I couldn’t imagine the tension you felt.”

I3

THE HIDDEN PARAGRAPH

CATHY TRIED SO hard to think of a keyword, but then she just wrote it naively; *royal sacred emblem*. The search engine on the internet showed a few links to certain articles with the same keyword, but none of them seemed to be related with what she wanted to find.

At the library computer room, she gazed back and forth, looking at some students. Meanwhile, the administrator kept on stealing a glance at her. It was frustrating when someone sneaked on her, thinking she was a thief or something. She didn't care, and kept on searching for what she needed. On the next page of the search engine, there was one link with the name she found familiar—Petunia Breckenwood wrote a guest post for the university blog, and it was related with the emblem.

The article also showed a picture of the sacred emblem besides Petunia's portrait picture, exactly like the one she kept in her pocket. At first, Petunia was actually writing about her career as a writer that didn't seem to work out for her, so she just wrote poems for her inner circle, surely as a hobby, and then she told the readers that she wrote some unpublished journals. She

wrote a private journal these days, although she mixed it up with poems as well.

At the end of the article, she mentioned that in one of her journals, she wrote the fantastical prose about a royal heirloom in the form of the same oval-shaped emblem as the one that Cathy kept. It made her bulging out astonishingly. It couldn't be that Petunia also knew such a thing, unless she spoke about it as a fiction, but she truly did.

Afterward, Cathy went to the parking lot, and suddenly, there was Gavin that blocked her in the way.

"I'm sorry, I don't have time for this," Cathy spoke rashly, trying to get away from his big body "—not right now."

"Wow, missy, where are you going?" He snapped. "Let's go grab a coffee."

"Gavin, I beg you not to bother me for a second," she grimaced, annoyed.

"If I insist, you'll know it," he chuckled mischievously, "you won't be able to avoid me."

"If that's not such a big deal—" she said hesitantly, but she had no time to argue, "we have to grab a coffee in Queens, because I have to visit a friend in there."

"Are you mad?" He frowned. "It's very far from here."

She raised her eyebrow in annoyance.

Before she barked, he shouted quickly, "Alright, alright, let's do it."



The radio played a pop song, and Cathy started the conversation while she was driving, "What are you doing earlier in Bronx?"

“I was just passing by after having a gym class,” he informed, “I wanted to catch up with my boxer friends at first, but turned out they were busied.”

“Oh, is it the gym that I once visited you in Manhattan?”

He nodded, just like that.

She felt that Gavin had a passive-aggressive behavior, sometimes he was fun, and sometime he turned very cold. It wasn't a moody thing like her. He just seemed different than most people she ever encountered on the planet.

It took them an hour and half because of the terrible traffic jam on the road. When she parked her car near the Sunnyside Neighborhood gate, Gavin said he would wait in the car until she returned.

This was the first time she looked out for Petunia's residence. The architecture of the residential houses in here looked similar, and most of them were painted broken-white and grey.

A few second after she pressed the doorbell, Petunia opened the door astonishingly.

“Hey, I'm sorry, I don't have your phone number, so I just—”

“Cathy Charlotte, are you alone?” She was still shocked. “What do you want?”

“Well, I am alone now,” she shrugged her shoulders, knowing that she came with Gavin during the car trip. “I just read your guest post on my college blog, about your journal on the heirloom emblem. If you don't mind, can I borrow it?”

Petunia stared at her hesitantly, and the next second, she welcomed her to get inside her bedroom. When they were passing through the family room,

there was a sick woman in a wheelchair. She was Ms. Lennox, Petunia's mother. Her mom sat frozenly by the glass window, looking out at the street view. Petunia said she had been doing that for many years. She looked sad, but Petunia and her aunt couldn't do anything since she didn't talk at all. Petunia lived with her aunt as well, but she wasn't around when Cathy arrived.

The small bedroom felt cozy. There were two bookshelves, one to keep all of her journals, and the other to store random books by various authors. Her chosen books seemed to influence her writing, which mostly about spiritual and supernatural journey.

Cathy sat on the fluffy bed, while Petunia was searching for her journal. It took her a minute to find it, and when she found it, she hesitated to give it up.

"I'll return it by the end of the month," Cathy shouted.

Petunia sighed. "You can borrow it as long as you want, but I just have a gut of feeling suddenly."

"What is it?" Cathy rose from the bed to stand closer to her.

"Why do you want to read this?"

Cathy raised her eyebrows as she wasn't prepared for the answer. "I... thought I should learn a lot of things—"

"You're not saying the whole thing," she confronted her. "There's more, isn't it?"

Cathy hated the circumstance where she was forced to answer about something, and now, she felt really gawky. In the end, she had to show her the emblem.

When Petunia touched it, she frowned and bewildered. “This can’t be—it feels real.”

“Of course you can touch it. It’s not invisible,” Cathy snapped.

“No, Cathy—” her eyes bedazzled to see it, she brought it along as she sat on the bed. “This is the real deal. This was owned by the first *Vesperian* family.”

“What are you saying—that you wrote a camouflage story on the blog?” Cathy demanded her for the truth. “I’ve heard *Vesperian* somewhere too. I just don’t get it—”

“It’s truly meant to be fictional for the guest post. I wrote that post like three years ago, hoping somebody like you to find it,” she informed. “You know, the truth cannot be known just like that.”

“How do you know everything you wrote, Petunia?”

“I saw flashbacks of the story,” she said solemnly. “My mom and aunt knew about the emblem history before I did. Well, turns out they are coming from the *Vesperian* lineage,” she chuckled in disbelief. “It does make sense, right?”

“Your ancestor was *Vesperian*, so you have the bloodline.”

“Don’t you know it?” Petunia stared up at her, still looking bedazzled. “*Vesperian* family was the first root of House of Aloise. I know that you’re part of the family too.”

Cathy astonished where she got that information from. “Wait, do you know about me through your visions too?”

“No, actually, I knew it from my aunt when she visited the Royal Council. Everyone in there had been

talking about your existence. It was so hectic back then.”

“Yes, it was because of White Foxes’ current problem, *not because of me*,” she argued.

“You have no idea. Believe it or not, they’re going to hate you, Cathy,” there was no emotion when Petunia said it, but her voice sounded firm “—a lot of time.”

Cathy crossed her arms immediately as soon as she felt insecure.

“It’s just like about that heirloom, I wanted to remember what I’ve seen, so I wrote it,” Petunia murmured, “you can learn about a little part of Vesperian family from my journal, and don’t worry, I’ve crossed check my visions with the real documentation in the Royal Council’s archive room,” she informed. “You can rely on my writing.”

“Wait, just wait,” a huge confusion hovered on her mind, Cathy sat on the bed immediately. “So, if we share the same bloodline, does it mean you’re my relative after all this time?”

“It seems so. I’ve just found it out recently,” Petunia informed. “My bloodline comes from my maternal side, just like you.”

“Two years ago, we were only strangers when we met at Bisbee Hospital,” Cathy surprised, and amazed with this sudden knowledge, “and do you remember when you met Sylvia Elle, talking about nightmares and monsters?”

“Oh, strange, I couldn’t really recall that white hair girl, but—” Petunia chuckled as she recalled the past. “It felt like one of those days, when you have unstoppable nightmares.”

Cathy smiled, "You're not the only one who dreams of nightmares."



At twelve o'clock, they went to an elite coffee shop in Manhattan. Cathy was surely bulging out at the price list.

As they were decided to sit on the corner of the room, Gavin said, "A few months ago, Celine invited me to have a breakfast menu with her in this place."

"I can't believe we're here," Cathy muttered while her eyes were exploring the interior. "This place is crazily expensive."

The coffee shop gave special offer for a college student on Tuesday, so Cathy bought two sweet croissants with special price, while he would pay the bill for their two cups of coffee.

Cathy was about to swallow her second bite of croissant when he asked her about a serious matter, "Does it make you proud to be part of the Aloise family?"

For a second, she stared back at him. "It's not about being proud or even for prestige, but it's about becoming who you really are."

"Is that so?" Gavin smiled, staring down at his plate. He thought hardy about her answer.

An hour later, they visited a small park behind his boxing gym in Manhattan. They sat side by side under the sun, while watching some boys playing soccer at the field. He seemed really lonely sometimes, he just needed a company.

“Why do you like boxing?” She asked out of curiosity.

“Distraction,” Gavin answered her instantly, and he chuckled afterward “—from boredom, and my empty life.”

Cathy stared at him pitifully.

“I let you know my secret,” he smiled as he rolled up his gray hoodie sleeve, his arm looked very muscular. “Here’s my good luck tattoo.”

She saw a dragon tattoo on his right upper arm. The dragon skin on upper body was black, while on lower body was red.

“Since the day I have this dragon tattoo, it always helps me to win my tournament. As if it works like a shield, for protection,” he informed.

“So, you always feel safe. It sounds like Totem, but why did you get a tattoo?”

“I feel bounded to a dragon myth. I feel connected with it,” he stared away to the boys at the field, and then he continued telling her, “I’ve heard my dad had a history with it, like you said, *Totem*.”

“What’s the story with your dad and dragon Totem?”

“I don’t know. I only heard Celine mentioned it when we were children,” he seemed sad when he remembered his childhood memories. “It was all in the past. After my mom died in a car crash, my dad left us,” he grimaced for a second, he was angry now “—I hate him.”

“There are no real parents that will hate their children,” Cathy murmured, “even if they show all the hate, they will love you from the inside,” she smiled sincerely at him, “Especially your dad.”

He sighed heavily, looking out at the view of green grasses in front of them.

Cathy was a bit taken aback with his life story that was hidden beneath the dark. He seemed strong from the outside, and yet, his heart was crying.

“Don’t tell about the dragon to anyone, alright?” His hopeful gray eyes were demanding her to promise. “It’s just between us.”

She glanced at him for a second. “Why did you tell me all of this?”

“Maybe because I trust you,” he smiled.

Soon after, they were walking passed to the neighborhood houses. When they reached a small desolate alley at the backside wall of a coffee shop, Gavin stopped her.

“You know what, if only we met yesterday not as a cousin—” he smiled mischievously, making the scar on his lips looked bold, “I would have dated you back then.”

She crossed her arms and spoke, “Are you always having this kind of charisma, so people will hardly get mad at you?”

“Not that I can help it,” he shrugged, smiling mischievously.

When she finally smiled along, he giggled.

“It feels like a long day that I’ve just seen your smile, Cathy,” he said sincerely. “You’re my type of girl. Just so unfortunate, you’re happened to be my cousin.”

Cathy had just realized that his words felt intense, and he really meant it.

The atmosphere slowly changed uncomfortable when he tried to lean on her. She jolted by his warm

breath, and she pushed him hardly to the wall before it was too late.

Her eyes bulged out madly. “Why are you tried to kiss me?”

“Oh, did I?” He pretended to act naively. “I’m sorry. You just so different from anyone, and this feeling stays with me, I feel the need to protect you.”

“It’s because we’re happened to be family. You’re like Josh to me,” she muttered quickly.

“Is he your little boyfriend?” Gavin chuckled.

“No, he’s my *best friend*.”

He raised his eyebrows in disbelief. “Don’t you know that a boy and girl are not meant to become friends?”

Cathy sighed at him. “I don’t buy it. It’s not happening to me.”

He threw his hands in the air, trying to ignore her belief system.

As they walked out from the aisle, she asked him, “By the way, I saw you the other day at the Bonfire Party. I was just wondering, what’s your relationship with Eleanor Heisler?”

“I’m still thinking about it as well. Our relationship is unclear,” he chuckled. “Also, Celine warned me not to get close to the Heisler, and whatsoever, her admonishment didn’t seem to scare me.”

“Well, you should be. She’s part of White Foxes.”

Gavin stopped to face her solemnly, “Why everyone keeps saying that?”

“You can watch them on TV of how White Foxes appear to be—”

He stared sharply at her, “Alright, because I don’t get you as my date, now you’re mad—”

“It’s not like that, for God’s sake, Gavin!” She exclaimed. “They’re scary, more than you can think of.”

“I’d appreciate a great advice for something else, but my love life is none of your concern, Cathy.”

Just like that, he headed back to the boxing gym, leaving her alone in the street.



Cathy finally returned to her apartment at five o’clock.

After she changed into her pajama, she went to grab some snacks, and she threw herself on the sofa in the living room.

Her eyes bulged out surprisingly at the television when she saw Matilda Carline Heisler on the news channel. That beautiful old woman was walking toward New York Supreme Court, and she was being guarded by the police since the reporters surrounded them. It was chaos when people shouted and screamed out at her name, throwing her with a bunch of questions. Eventually, the news announced that Matilda was forced to be White Foxes’ witness in the trial court.

Also, it was reported that she was accused by Lady Marie de Clure of knowing the secret of the royal’s property. It was no other than the revelation of Hallow Nostrum and the secret portal. The news disseminated like bees to all over the world. The problem turned hectic when many scientists and researchers demanded her to give out the fact, not fiction.

People were still conflicted by the founding of Hallow Nostrum. They didn’t know if they could believe it or not. Some people suspected that they probably created such news to distract public from following the

ongoing trial between White Foxes and Trisden Brimham.

Cathy gawked as she saw the current news. She didn't believe that Matilda was dragged into White Foxes' matter. Her mind felt too hectic to follow the news that she needed to turn off the TV immediately.

A minute later, she started reading Petunia's journal. She surprised with what she found in her writing. Petunia surely mentioned the word *Roses Bones*, a lot of times. She didn't know that everything really connected the way it supposed to be.

Cathy remembered some things were similar; between what Petunia wrote, and her mom's journal. They wrote that the emblem was the key, which could open a secret room in the Royal Council, where Veperian's treasures were stored in that room.

The Vesperian themselves were a great Italian royal family, and they lived around 400 B.C. which made Cathy realized, and now she could make sense why the Aloise looked way Eurasian when they actually had Austrian blood, that was because their very first ancestor was Italian.

There were divine words that she couldn't understand in Petunia's journal;

With Vesperian, comes Roses Bones.

From black roses, comes agony.

In darkness, comes light.

It was being stated, Petunia saw a vision about the existence of *Roses Bones*, or she would likely mention it as black roses as well. She believed there were the real magical black roses. Through her visions, she could see things that people couldn't know.

The fact that everything had left Cathy hanging all by herself, she was in a tremendous confusion. Now, she wanted to believe in the existence of Roses Bones. It must be somewhere out there.

I4

VISITING THE MUSEUM

ON WEDNESDAY, THE first of January 2014, after the busiest time in Celine's life, she could finally fulfill her promise to her niece. They promised to meet at the Central Park, where she would pick up Cathy in her black sedan.

She wanted to show her a place, where it had something important that related with their family. Apparently, it was a local museum that located in New York City, and the place was called as the Royal Museum.

During the car trip, Cathy still felt the need to reassure about the rule of keeping the emblem safe from anyone. "The Aloise is still our family. Why can't we just let them know?"

Celine half smiled. "Sure, but they won't be the same after knowing what you really are, especially with the knowledge you just have about the emblem."

Her eyes were studying the embodiment of that antique emblem in her hand, and then she wondered, "What else this thing can do, besides showing us a vision?"

"Actually, only certain people can see the vision after they've touched it for the first time," Celine

informed. "When I was a little girl, I touched it, but nothing happened."

Cathy glanced wonderingly at her.

"Uncle Nathaniel showed it to me, and told me that the emblem could only be used by *the Puissant*, but later on, he buried it somewhere until he forgot it," she sighed to recall her memory, "and then you've found it in his yard, just like that."

"You said, *Puissant*. Do you know about it?"

"Not much, but he told me that they are the powerful royal," Celine said. "If you're born Puissant, then you can access the forbidden knowledge among the elders as easy as flipping a switch someday. Things just seem natural for Puissant."

"So, if that's the case, what do you want to show me in the museum?"

"I want you to take a look around the museum. Observe the paintings and some stuff in there," Celine said while driving. "FYI, some people may be wearing the similar emblem on their clothes. They're the member of Royal Council."

"Are they working in the museum?" Cathy baffled.

"They have co-ownership of the Royal Museum," she chuckled, "but it's a fair share with the government."

Cathy amazed to learn about them. "Royal Council is surely having many properties. They must be really rich."

"I guess, wealth isn't their main concern anymore," Celine joked.

And at the next stop, she stopped her car in front of the white building. The place looked pretty huge from the outside. Some banners were placed at the

entrance door, showing the name of the place; Royal Museum.

“I’m very sorry, Cathy,” she said wearily. “If I didn’t have a client meeting today, I would’ve accompanied you.”

“I’m old enough that I can walk by myself,” Cathy smiled stiffly since she was disappointed.

“Cathy, it seems that you’re a natural Puissant. You’re a quick learner,” Celine stroke her shoulder affectionately. “Maybe we don’t know enough, but who knows about it?”

After she stepped out from the door, Celine called her from behind the car window.

“I’m sorry,” she said regretfully, “I’ll pick you up in two hours.”

Cathy nodded as she slammed the car door gently.



It was unlike any other day that she felt to dress up, she came up with a dark scarf on her neck, and she dressed in a yellow floral cardigan and blue jeans. If only her long wavy dark hair didn’t look too kinky, her appearance would’ve looked better.

Cathy walked to the lobby, but she was confused since all of the visitors walked straight ahead to the aisle, but when it was her turn, she got stopped by a woman who dressed in black suit at the front desk.

The woman seemed to be in her mid-thirties. She had blue eyes, curly blonde hair, white skin, thin body, and not very tall even she wore high heels.

“Hello, dear,” the woman greeted, she had a high pitch voice.

“Oh, hello, Ma’am—” Cathy didn’t really know what to say, but when she noticed the oval-shaped emblem on the top of her blazer, her eyes bulged out surprisingly, “I’m sorry, but do you know Celine von Aloise?”

That woman’s blue eyes squinted studiedly at her face.

“I got a recommendation from her about this place. I thought you’d know.”

“Right, just like what I thought. You must be Cathy Charlotte,” she smiled widely, greeting her in a good spirit. “Celine already called me yesterday that you’ll be here.”

Cathy nodded, relieved.

“Please call me Stacey. I’ll be your tour guide for ten minutes, and then you can look around as you please.”

As they walked out from the main aisle, Cathy stared up at the ceiling that had a remarkable view. It was like a divine creation with the paintings of many angel figures with wings, flying among the clouds in the blue sky, as if the visitors here were walking under a heavenly place.

Actually, as she looked around the foyer, the feeling of yearning was strong, and dreamy. This place reminded her of the library that she once visited in Austria, only that there were no bookshelves in this room.

A gigantic motherly figure of an angel statue was placed in the center of the foyer. The figure looked down and posed with praying hands.

“The statue is a spiritual symbol of greeting the loved ones,” Stacey informed her. “We honor our visitors.”

“She looks sad,” Cathy murmured, thinking oppositely.

“Not all the greeting has to begin with a smile, dear,” Stacey said, and then she asked her to follow along to another section of the room.

From the speakers, a classical Italian opera song was played as they walked closer to another aisle.

This was the showcase room. There were antique items displayed inside glass boxes. A few Victorian dresses were displayed in the corner of the room. There were even boxes displaying cute tiny dolls made of clay, portraying some simulations of certain events in the past.

Some people only looked, and some people really came to study.

“In here, you can study the royal history,” Stacey informed, “it’s starting from the first aisle, imagine the past, and—”

Cathy walked side by side with her, tried to focus between listening to what she said and the classical song they played in here, which sounded kind of buzzing in her ears.

Until they reached at the end of the aisle when the song volume was reduced, Cathy exhaled comfortably. She was finally able to think of anything else besides meeting the eyes of strangers.

“I see that some people here are wearing the same emblem as yours,” she murmured. “Does the emblem represent a symbol or something?”

Stacey glanced, studying her naïve expression.

“To tell you honestly, the emblem that each of us has in here, it’s a replica from one of the greatest instruments in the royal history,” Stacey told her easily as if nothing was a secret “—when you use it as an individual, it’s symbolized a strength and greatness, but in the original myth, the emblem is believed to be the key to open a secret room full of royal treasures.”

“Were they the Vesperian, the one who owned the key and the secret room?”

“Ah, now you remind me, let’s go then, I’ll show you—” Stacey demanded her to follow along to see the painting room.

There were various royal paintings. Different faces, different clothes and style. Stacey got stopped in front of a divine painting that depicted a pale woman with a gold crown on her red curly long hair.

“This is Empress Vesperia. She was the first Imperial Princess in Vesperia Empire. The one legend that is almost forgotten,” Stacey admired the painting, amazed with the old history. “Since there was a huge war between royals in the past, all of the documentations about House of Vesperia were gone,” she explained, “now there are only some paintings and books that left.”

“Where are the books?”

“It’s only the inner circle who can access the books in the Royal Council. They keep it locked inside the Archived Room.”

Cathy was still wondering. “Have you read those books?”

“I am not the initiate, so that’s why I’m working here instead sitting in the Council,” she chuckled.

Cathy stepped a little closer to whisper at her ear, “So, the Committees actually don’t let anyone other than themselves to know the real truth?”

“Oh, silly, everyone knows that,” she almost laughed out loud, “They only said it to the rest of us, that the inner knowledge of their past history is forbidden to be told, because of the danger it might cost.”

“Is it really all that?” Cathy frowned in disbelief. “Do you believe them just like that?”

“What do you expect, Miss Charlotte?” She said peevishly. “They’re much older than we are. Why would they lie to us?”

“My apologies, but there seems to be something more than just the plain story they’ve shared to the world, and what about the myth of that emblem you’ve told me?” Cathy was being critical since she felt something was missing in the story they shared in this museum. “Alright, if they don’t lie to us, is there really a secret room full with the whole bunch of Vesperian antique stuff somewhere?”

Stacey blinked out in astonishment at her bold argumentation.

“Your persistency is unbelievable. That’s why they called it as a myth—” she answered her, while still feeling the astonishment pumping her heart strongly, but then she came closer to whisper cautiously at her, “but if you really want to know, I know one dark secret.”

Cathy stared wonderingly at her.

“Black roses,” Stacey murmured carefully while some visitors were passing by. “It is one thing they don’t want the world to find out,” she looked terrified

with the words she said by herself. “Since the day the Vesperian followed the ancient knowledge of mysticism, the black roses were born.”

“Is it other word to say Roses Bones?”

“God—” Stacey dragged her shoulder quickly, walking out from the painting room, and until they stopped by at the lounge room where there were only a few visitors sat on the sofa, she spoke again, “How *deep* do you know about it?”

Cathy stared back and forth in the room before she spoke. “Why does it matter?” She confronted. “You’ve been acting like you don’t know, and now—”

“No, I really didn’t know at first,” she shouted, “but since the news about the founding of Hallow Nostrum by White Foxes has been disseminating publicly, I’ve accidentally heard some Royal Council’s committees talked about the solution to handle that case, with Roses Bones they said, it could save their people.”

Cathy sighed heavily to hear the truth. “They believe that there’s Roses Bones out there?”

“Yes, but it’s been missing.”

“I’ve also heard that the Council has been seeking for Roses Bones since a long time ago,” Cathy muttered, “I don’t know why I feel worry about it.”

“It is not only to save them, but the great power will come from Black Roses,” she said terrifyingly. “Some committees said, if it falls to a dark soul, the world will end into doomsday.”

Cathy confused for a second. “Even if you’re not the initiate, you’re still the royal member. So, why can’t you know something beyond that?”

“Indeed, I was born from House of Wisconsin,” Stacey said proudly, but then she grimaced, “but it

doesn't mean every royal can get their hands on the secret society."

For a while, Cathy was silent as her mind got occupied by all the complicated thoughts of the mysterious black roses.

"Listen, whatever it is that you're trying to get, just forget it," she gave her a horrifying advice. "Black Roses isn't something for *normal people* to understand."

"Let's say that I don't want to be normal for a second, I want to know the truth," Cathy opposed her.

There was no other way to understand the mystery, but to fall down into a dark hole.

Stacey smiled widely before she ended the conversation, and then she muttered, "Then, you need to find your own way to seek for the truth."



On Thursday, after Cathy finished her class in the afternoon, she was running errands again at the library. At the time, she remembered about the previous news on the television, and Matilda had just finished her publicity business with White Foxes. It seemed as if nothing was happening since Matilda acted so calm.

As usual, after Cathy had done cleaning up the library and running some errands, she brought a book and sat alone on a single chair behind the window in the corner of the room.

This time, Matilda was hovering again, telling her the usual fairy tale of Roses Bones. It had been a few times since the day she told her a lot of things about it. Matilda believed that it was just another myth, with the eternal existence that couldn't be proved. The oddest

of all, she kept on telling her about it, even though she seemed to deny it.

Cathy stared up at her, and spoke in bewilderment, “You said that Roses Bones can be found somewhere out there in the holy mountain—”

“Do you want me to tell you a secret?” Matilda shouted and smiled in a mysterious way. “There’s the truth in the mountain, but remember that you cannot go out alone. You need an angel to accompany you.”

“Angel?” She raised her eyebrow, baffling. “Is it another myth?”

Matilda shrugged. “Some says so, but if you decide to believe in, that will be your truth.”



After Cathy finished taking a shower, she sat on the living room’s sofa in her apartment.

For a minute, she tried to find the courage to dial a number on her cellphone. She wanted to catch up with Grand aunt Carmelia, asking about her health condition, and probably she would tell her grand aunt about her holiday plan this year.

Eventually, Seth was the one who received her phone call and told her that Carmelia wasn’t available at the time. She was disappointed, but suddenly, a sparkle of idea came into her mind. She remembered the day when she suspected him as an angel being, but her idea to say that might sound ridiculous. He did act so calm in the old days. It was the reason she liked to study him, and finally, she came to a conclusion that he might be appeared as something else.

There was still a hole in her memory, but it was like a scratch, and something felt missing as she couldn't recall it out.

However, since he was also a temporary librarian in the Morizza chapel, Cathy ended up asking him about the myth of Roses Bones instead.

"Roses Bones is located in the mountain, which I cannot tell you about. It is known as the key to the Angel's Gate," Seth spoke.

He mentioned the word of angel, just like what Matilda said too, but Cathy ended up flummoxing all by herself. "What's the Angel's Gate, and why can't you tell me about it?"

"As far as I can tell you, Catherine," he said on the phone, *"you cannot go there alone. You need an angel to get through the place."*

"How could I suppose to know any angel?" Cathy muttered peevishly.

And then, he hung up.

I5

SEEKING FOR TRUTH

ON FRIDAY MORNING, she dressed neatly in black coat and blue jeans, and with loose dark hair. Cathy was determined to visit Petunia again in Sunnyside, Queens. It wasn't because she wanted to return her journal, but she wanted to demand her about the truth in her writing.

Petunia opened the door with her eyes almost popping out, and then she snarled peevishly, "What is it this time?"

"I want to borrow your poetry books."

"Why?"

Cathy couldn't find a good excuse, so on, her mouth worked faster than her mind, "It's for my English task."

"There are a million poems in any library. You can take a look one by one," Petunia said sarcastically.

Cathy held the door persistently before Petunia closed it. "No, I need to see yours."

"Why do you have to read my book?" She grimaced.

"It's because... you always mention *Roses Bones* in your papers. I was wondering, and it's also about your mom's writing that you've quoted in your journal,"

Cathy spoke rashly. "Please, it's important," she begged helplessly. "Can I come in?"

Petunia didn't seem to welcome her, although she didn't have a choice against this persistent girl. Afterward, Cathy was welcomed to get inside the house, and she followed the landlord to walk through the small corridor filled up with fettuccine scent in the air.

In the family room, they encountered a fragile woman sitting in her wheelchair.

"My mom's still sitting by the window every now and then," Petunia said as they walked passed to Mrs. Lennox, and Cathy gave a single nod that she understood. "It feels like forever."

As soon as they went inside her bedroom, Petunia hurriedly came searching for her book throughout a bookshelf. It took her a minute to find a thin black notebook. Cathy saw the longing expression on her face when Petunia touched it like a long lost friend.

"What's with Roses Bones?" Petunia confronted her.

Cathy locked her lips, but then she answered her helplessly, "I need to check on something that I'm not really sure about."

"And then, you remember me?"

"Yes, and I'm recalling the first verse of poem that you wrote when we met in Bisbee Hospital."

"So?" Petunia baffled.

"You also read some poems aloud at Fordham's auditorium last year," Cathy said, recalling the past, "I saw the goodness in you, from the way you've expressed your poems wholeheartedly."

“It was the attribute for the university event. My mom had her part as well,” Petunia stared down sadly. “Unfortunately, she couldn’t write more after she had a disease.”

“Was the attribute actually your mom’s poems?” Cathy tried to connect the dot.

“Most of the poems that I submitted are mine,” Petunia cringed.

“By the way, I’ve read your mom’s poem about a mountain in your journal.”

“Mountain,” Petunia murmured and stared down at the floor while she was recalling something. “Firstly, do you know what most people say about mountain?” Petunia asked her like it was a riddle. “I mean, in a mystical term.”

Cathy shook her head innocently.

“Do you know about *Iodes* folklore?”

“What?”

“It’s a goddess legend that exists in the holy mountain,” Petunia giggled at her own words, and feeling absurd about the myth, “but I don’t believe that.”

“Well, I don’t know anything, but there’s must be a possibility between what’s real and what’s not,” Cathy murmured.

Petunia was thrusting out the notebook to her, and said, “It’s just a story.”

“And this is just a poetry book,” Cathy repeated.

“I’m not sure what you want to learn from my poems,” Petunia said while studying her naïve expression.

“Neither am I,” Cathy agreed. “It’s just my guts telling me to come here.”

Eventually, their conversation had to stop when there was a sudden knock at the door. They got surprised by the presence of the mid-thirties woman with a frustrated look that was standing at the doorsill. She had a ponytail hairstyle, and wore a plain gray dress.

She stared surprisingly at the house guest. "What are you doing here?"

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Lennox, I supposed?" Cathy wasn't really sure how to address her. "I'm about to leave. Don't worry."

"Aunt, please," Petunia got annoyed.

"I heard you mentioned *lodes* folklore," she muttered.

Both of the girls got froze while standing side by side.

Cathy shook her head and muttered, "It's just a folklore that I don't know about."

"It doesn't exist," Petunia shouted. "It's just an old legend story."

"When the Aloise child is the one who asks for it, then it's not just a story," she argued, and then she stared intensely at Cathy, "follow me."

Cathy exchanged glance with Petunia, asking for explanation with what happened with her aunt. However, they just followed her to go to the family room where Petunia's mom was still sitting with a blankly stare against the tall glass window. There was a fireplace, dining table, and some wooden cabinets in the room.

The atmosphere remained awkward for everyone as they stood barefoot on a burgundy wool rug.

She locked her eyes at Cathy, and spoke, “Why are you bringing up that topic?”

“No, I was the one who mentioned it,” Petunia argued.

Cathy stared bafflingly back and forth at them, and so she explained, “I’m just here to borrow her book, so—”

“Truly, you’re here to know about something, aren’t you?” She snapped.

Cathy gawked, feeling uncomfortable when someone put her on the spot, and Petunia also got confused at her aunt’s behavior.

“I... I want to search for something in the mountain,” Cathy finally confessed to them.

“Alright, it’s surely not about an English task, aye?” Petunia finally realized.

Cathy felt bad as she stared at her with a huge remorse feeling.

On the other side, Petunia’s aunt asked her cautiously, “Did someone tell you to come here?”

“No,” Cathy baffled against her strange question.

“Is it Lady Matilda?” She kept on guessing. “She must’ve been telling you something, right?”

Cathy narrowed her eyebrows against this woman’s cautious behavior. “Yes, she did tell me about the secret legend of Roses Bones, and I feel it’s not just a mere myth,” she hadn’t decided to go on with this plan, but she was determined to know the truth, and there was no turning back. “I’m planning to go on hiking to the place where there’s Roses Bones, but I don’t know which mountain to go.”

“It’s related with this folklore,” Mrs. Lennox sighed, and then she nodded. “Iodes means violet in Greek

word, and in Greek mythology itself, anything associated with violet color is the color of God," she explained. "Some says it's related with wealth, power, and *royalty*."

Cathy was assured she heard this Eurasian woman emphasized the latter.

"The origin story was coming from Odin legend, which also means God in Greek mythology," Petunia added.

"That's the legend you should look forward," she said.

For a second, Cathy baffled alone. "Alright, then how do you know that I've talked about it with Lady Matilda?"

"I've heard some people in the Royal Council talked about your arrival, and then there's also this rumor about the mysterious presence of Lady Matilda. I'm just guessing that you might be related."

"Are you the member in the Royal Council?" Cathy raised her eyebrows, surprised.

"I'm part of the caretaker, not the committee," she informed, and as they stared at each other, she shouted again, "Sorry for my rudeness, I haven't introduced myself, my name's Melinda Lennox."

Cathy nodded and smiled slightly, but then her curiosity appeared again, "We're relatives after all, but why don't you have Aloise as your surname?"

"It's safer if you're not relating your name with them."

"But you're working in the Council," Cathy argued.

"For money, of course, and to stay aware with the latest news," Melinda said insecurely.

"It seems that your existence got everyone hyped up in there," Petunia muttered mockingly.

"About Lady Matilda, she didn't say anything about the Council to me—"

"Of course, because she thought you're clever, and you do," Melinda said. "Your instinct has brought you here."

Cathy didn't want to feel restless, but everything was confusing, and now, she only wanted to pursue the truth. "Can I know which mountain that related to Odin legend?"

"If you're really want to go there, you cannot go alone," Melinda warned her. "You need a company."

Cathy recalled what Seth had told her before—*angel*, but it was just hard for her to make sense.

"I'm only saying that you're a girl, and hiking alone won't be a good thing," Melinda added. "All I can tell you from the legend story, it's somewhere in *Minerva Mountain*."

"Where's Minerva Mountain?"

Melinda exchanged glances with her niece. They seemed confused how to tell her about it.

"I guess, it will be your homework," Petunia said.

"Do you think Odin legend has something to do with Roses Bones?" Cathy baffled.

"I was seeing a mountain in my vision a long time ago, but I didn't know if it was Minerva," she muttered.

"Children, I think you both have homework to do," Melinda repeated the joke. "It's also a rumor that Roses Bones exists in there. No one really knows."

"This is confusing," Cathy muttered.

“—but according to the ancient story, I believe that Odin legend exists in Minerva mountain,” Melinda shouted.

Until at the end of their conversation, Melinda still didn’t want to be precise with what she knew about the mysterious mountain.

Afterward, Cathy greeted Mrs. Lennox before she left the house. She saw that woman was sitting like a fragile statue in a wheelchair, but there was no response as she said hello to her. Just like what Petunia had told her; Mrs. Lennox hadn’t spoken since a long time.

She knew that it was the time to go.



At three o’clock, Cathy went to the university library.

She sat about half an hour in the library computer room, searching for some articles that might be related with Minerva Mountain. It was frustrating that nothing seemed to be right.

“Do you know something about the Alps of Roses Bones,” she had to mention it so boldly at the female librarian in order to get it right.

The librarian was a woman in her forties. She had a bun hair, the color of light-brown. She had a name tag written *Balthy Moore*, pinned on her hot pink blazer.

For a second, she stared away from her computer screen as she got distracted. She put a smiling face after she sighed peevishly, “Commando, which Alps of war is it?”

“No, I mean—” Cathy hesitated to explain further, but she got tired of it. “Do you know about Odin legend?”

“Ah, are you talking about the place where Roses Bones is buried?” She raised her eyebrows as soon as she noticed. “Some says it’s buried in a snowy mountain, but it’s just such a skeptical rumor.”

“Please, do you know where I can find any articles about it?” She was astonished when Cathy asked firmly. “There seems nothing when I clicked some links from the university digital library. They’re dead end.”

“I don’t know that you’d be so serious about it,” there was a slight of fear in her voice, even though she was giggling. “It’s just a mere story.”

Cathy finally gave up forcing the librarian. She turned to see the computer screen with a perplexing mind, and then she noticed that the librarian had sent her a chat message.

Balthy Moore [Admin]: I know. *La Moissure de Creux*.

“Why don’t you take the keyword that I gave you,” Balthy murmured, almost whispering, “don’t tell anyone that I told you about it.”

Cathy didn’t move her fingers, but shot her with a surprised look. The librarian glanced back to warn her about the anticipation.

She hadn’t much thought to say in return, but kept her body fidgeting, “Th... thanks,” and then her fingers typed rapidly on the keyboard to search for the result.

A few of the articles were written in French. Her eyes kept on exploring the computer screen, until she found the only English article that mentioned what she had been searching for.

La Moisissure de Creux was found in the quarry. Everyone said to go high climbing to a mountain in North America, but the treasure was found as the contrition instead. The founders said it was located in one of the rocky mountains around Marble, Colorado. For the hideout they said; the lost French gold and some superstition legends...

Cathy frowned from reading the article to stare at the librarian, and she muttered, "I'm not looking for the lost French Gold, Ms. Moore."

"If only you want to look again, scroll down, and you'll know what I mean."

She was still perplexing as her fingers moved lightly, scrolling down the searching result of the articles. As soon as she saw a black and white picture of the skeleton rose, her heart pumped faster. She clicked on the picture to read further;

The legend story had been known as a secret for many years among the royals. The holy Roses Bones is buried under the dark penumbra. Some says it's located in Minerva Mountain, in the place they called it as La Moisissure de Creux (Hollow Mold) that has been buried for about four-hundred-years. As opposed to the legend, the similar site was found in Crystal Village, Vancouver. The local villagers believed that Minerva Mountain doesn't exist in human world, whatsoever.

In 2007, the village was closed as the restricted area after a huge blizzard destructed the land. A few months later, when the local villagers had returned, they found some pieces of a shiny emerald green stone in the quarry. The Emerald stone is like a purgatory in that land, and some calls it as the key to the Angel's Gate. Some archeologists tried to challenge the rumor

of the secret. However, it's still remained unknown until now.

Cathy got bewildered when she searched again with the keyword *Minerva Mountain*, and the real fact got her surprised, and so she muttered, "This is confusing, the real Minerva Mountain is supposed to be in Alaska, but the article said—"

"I told you, it's just a story," Ms. Moore whispered.

"And then, how come the writer has a picture of Roses Bones if it's never been found before?"

Ms. Moore blinked confusedly at her. "Our university got a privilege from the Royal Council to publish the picture, thanks to Mr. Auben de Clure, he took care for that article," she sounded proud when she mentioned him. "He has distributed the knowledge. He's the real benefactor."

"Being a benefactor from telling a lie?" Cathy narrowed her eyes, bewildered.

"Oh, what do you mean as a lie?" Her eyes popped out disagreed. "Just think about the article as a fiction with a touch of philosophy behind it."

Cathy took a few seconds to enlighten her own mind. As she rose up from the chair and grabbed her satchel bag, she said quickly to her, "Thanks for everything, Ms. Balthy Moore. I got to go now."

After she went away, Balthy dialed a number on her cellphone. "She got it on her way."

A woman sighed on the phone before speaking with a wise voice, "You did a good job."

As the phone call ended immediately, Balthy was looking back and forth around the computer room as if she was afraid anyone would've listened.

In the evening, the woman with red curly hair came knocking at the door when Cathy was about to cook her own spaghetti Bolognese. She didn't get surprised anymore ever since this woman, Marissa had been visiting her living place frequently, at least twice a week. This time, she didn't bring a bag full of meals in boxes, but she was just here to help cleaning up the kitchen.

Cathy remembered that she was a librarian, who seemingly had read a lot of old books. There was a possibility that she would know something about the myth of Roses Bones. As she was making her milky coffee, they started talking about it, and then Marissa looked restless in return.

"Once you open the Roses Bones, everything you know—" it seemed hard for her to say it, "*will be disappeared.*"

Cathy held her breath, feeling insecure as those words echoed on her mind sharply.

"The royals believe that Roses Bones can be used to save them from the dark hearts," Marissa informed. "Everything can be neutral, but for the better or worse, in some cases it won't work out that way."

"What is it exactly that will be disappeared?" Cathy asked terrifyingly.

"Knowledge," Marissa answered restlessly "—and some sequences of memories in your life."

Cathy couldn't be more afraid to know it. "So, if I touch it, I will forget some memories in my life, really?"

"Yes, your latest memories, but it will be accordance and it depends with your main purpose as you first touch it," she explained.

“Roses Bones can be used for the extermination, but it’s scary—”

“Without a strong purpose, it won’t be a good idea to use it,” Marissa shouted.

For a while, Cathy had given a lot of thought since yesterday she had visited Petunia, especially after she found out about the possible place where Roses Bones was buried.

“Marissa, I know this is only a rumor on the internet, but there’s one article that said Roses Bones might be buried in Minerva Mountain,” she said carefully, trying not to scare Marissa with her idea, “I have a plan to go hiking in that place.”

“Please tell me, you’re not this stubborn,” Marissa sat on the dining room’s chair as she closed her eyes for a second.

“I know, and the article said, Minerva Mountain is like a cloistered place in Crystal Village, and it’s a small area in Vancouver,” Cathy sounded excited. “We can go together. I need a company.”

“No,” Marissa opened her green eyes again, staring angrily at her. “It’s such a dangerous place to go. You don’t know anyone in there, and you don’t know the land.”

Cathy shrugged, annoyed at her reaction, “I definitely don’t know how to get there, that’s why I’m asking you to accompany me.”

“You can’t go there.”

Marissa gave her a sharp answer, but it won’t be the end of her persistency.

16

DEPARTURE AND FAREWELL

CATHY DIDN'T KNOW how to start a conversation without kept on fidgeting, and she didn't know if this was a good idea to tell him about what she had just found. On the contrary, Alex had been telling her a lot about what he taught in his class. It was like listening to a summary of his lecture all over again.

It was eleven o'clock at Central Park. Some people went jogging, and a few people brought their pets in there. Meanwhile, here they were, walking side by side on the walking trail after class. They spent more time to share about their passion in life.

Alex told her that he wanted to be a painter when he was a child, but it was epic failed, so he had given a thought to change a direction to be a pianist. He loved arts, in so many ways. He told her there was a grand piano in his childhood home in German, where his father always taught him to play various classical songs. Sometimes he missed the happiness in his childhood time.

When it was her turn to speak, she was still jittering. She thought that there wasn't much to tell, especially since the day her mom died, everything had changed. But she did tell him that she loved drawing some things like random faces, or just a view of nature,

and sometimes she wrote poems. Cathy started to like writing since she saw her mom wrote a lot in the old days, even though she didn't know what her mom actually wrote, and now she might assume it was probably some of those secretive private journals.

After all the personal talk, Cathy breathed deeply before she changed the topic.

"About the emblem—" she sighed for a second, as it felt hard to talk about it, "I've just found out that it might be associated with the myth of *Roses Bones*."

He stopped walking and glanced surprisingly at her. "What did you say—*Roses Bones*?"

"Yeah, have you heard anything about it?"

"The committees have been talking about it for ages. It's a critical topic among them."

She wasn't suspicious at him until he mentioned the people in the Royal Council. It made her thinking twice about what he actually did in there, and what his real occupation besides being a lecturer.

"What makes you think it might be related with your emblem?" Alex asked bafflingly.

"Just think about what the old books said; if the emblem is the key to find a treasure hunt, I believe the same pattern happens with *Roses Bones* that is known to be a box full of ancient papers, and there must be the key inside the box as well."

Alex seemed to hold his laughter, but he respected her thought. "Do you think it is the same key to open something, like what you said, a treasure hunt?"

Cathy frowned as she disagreed, "No, I'm saying both of them might lead us to the same root of history."

“Most hunters would choose gold coins and pearls, and what are you after if not the treasure itself?” He smiled mischievously.

Cathy felt annoyed that he thought about what she had been saying only as a mere joke. It was an insult. Thus, she answered firmly, “The knowledge and truth.”

“There is no knowledge behind those keys,” he talked solemnly now. “People only chase after royal heirlooms to get them rich.”

“Just think about it. If Roses Bones is used to bring the goodness for everyone, then—”

“I’m not supposed to say this, but the emblem is owned by House of Aloise. I think it is wiser for you to talk about it with Sir Nathaniel,” Alex shouted, giving her a little advice.

Cathy was speechless as she stared peevishly at him. When she walked away, he chased her quickly, trying to get her attention again.

“Look, I’m sorry, Cathy. I didn’t mean to hurt you,” he apologized sincerely. “I think it’s the best for you not to tell this stuff to anyone.”

“That’s right, I should’ve not told you earlier,” she muttered.

“That topic is only allowed for the inner circle,” he tried to follow her quick pace while talking. “I believe Sir Nathaniel has his own reason, of why he doesn’t want to tell the committees about anything related to the Aloise’s heirlooms, especially about that emblem.”

Right in front of a fountain, she stopped to glance back at him, “Oh right, was that why Madame Dupont looking so surprised to see the emblem?” She recalled. “What is going on, Alex?”

He scratched his head, and sighed heavily.

“I’m just trying to understand the hidden secret within my mom’s family,” she muttered peevishly. “I feel so distant, and I hate it.”

“Why do you have to tell me about it, Cathy?” He confronted.

She gazed bafflingly at him, and then shrugging. “I just... I don’t know, I thought because you’ve been in the Royal Council, you might know something.”

“The talk about Roses Bones and any valuable royal heirloom, they can be very dangerous. There are more people with bad intention that want to seek for it, and do you know why?” He said carefully “—because of what they’ve heard from the myth and legend story.”

Alex grabbed her shoulders as he talked, “and I don’t want you to come across with these dangerous hunters.”

“But the people in Royal Council seem to believe in the myth and legend,” Cathy said. “They’re looking after Roses Bones, aren’t they?”

He sighed, trying to convince her, “If it’s out there, then the hunters exist as well.”

After they were getting tired of walking when the sun was overhead, Alex bought two soda cans for both of them. They sat on the bench, and gazing at the view of grasses and bright sky together. They started another conversation again, this one was easier.

“When I first saw you in class, I thought you looked familiar, but until now, that feeling still remains the same,” Alex said wonderingly.

Cathy stared at him, recalling the odd feeling she felt at that day too.

“I always fear the mystery of the unknown,” he continued, “I thought I’d never find the answer, but seeing you here, I feel I’m going to know it.”

The atmosphere felt intense, and his face was pretty close that she could feel his breath caressed her nose.

“May I know it, Cathy?” He asked for her permission, but his equivocal question made her confused.

She startled when he suddenly pecked her lips, and she felt weird with his intense lip-locking. They didn’t move at all, and even the time seemed to stop for a long time.

The world was no longer a place for anyone. There was just the two of them. They breathed into each other, feeling each other’s warm skin.

The sudden flashes of random visions blew off her mind. She saw weird things that weren’t supposed to be there; people in tuxedos and gowns were dancing, kissing, chattering. The visions moved too fast, making everything look obscure, and then, there was a mirror with gold frame in the midst of the ballroom, showing a reflection of a man and woman danced passionately. They kissed romantically, like a prince and princess. And the murmuring voices were too loud, until the sound of a gunshot echoed in the sky, which remarked the end of these wild visions.

When he released his lips slowly, she opened her eyes in a tremendous bewilderment.

“What was that?” Cathy baffled. “Did you see it?”

He blinked out nervously. “See what?”

“Your kiss—it feels like *déjà vu*,” she muttered, gazing at his brown eyes, “there’s a strange sensation.”

Alex was worried when she was acting so strange. “Have you ever been kissed before?”

She stared blankly straight at the city view, and muttered, “Not on the lips.”

It took her a few seconds to regain her senses before she spoke again. Meanwhile, he wondered about what she had been thinking after he kissed her.

“When you kissed me earlier, I saw weird visions, there are people in fancy dresses, they’re dancing—” she told him, trying not to sound ridiculous, “but the feeling like I knew them is strong, and it feels like I knew the place, the people,” and then she glanced at him, observing his baffling expression.

“I didn’t see anything, Cathy,” he said and shrugged. “However, if you said *déjà vu*, could it be that you were recalling some kind of a slip memory?”

She shook her head assuredly. “I would’ve remembered, but I didn’t.”

“At least my kiss has triggered your memory, don’t you think?” He giggled, teasing her.

She punched his arm lightly, and they giggled along.

“Do you think the visions have something to do with us?” He asked. “When I said I feel familiar with you, do you feel the same?”

She stared at him for a second, and breathed deeply. “You look familiar, but I just don’t know where the feeling comes from.”

“Maybe it’s from your soul, and my soul,” Alex said solemnly, and then he rolled his eyes with humor. “Alright, it’s not my intention to sound so spiritual.”

“Don’t worry, Alex,” she chuckled while observing him. “The way you talk when you’re not a lecturer,

you're more like a spiritual guy, and a deeper person from the inside."

"That's a great judgment," he smiled "—pretty close to my reality."



Cathy heard the sad news once she returned to her apartment. She received a phone call from Aunt Sarah, telling her that Hadley Heisler died, and her family held the funeral in New York this afternoon.

She was still feeling the hangover from seeking for the truth about Roses Bones, and now, her aunt added the exhaustion by telling her a vicious rumor that Lady Marie de Clure could have been a murder, who killed her own daughter.

Anything could be possible within the White Foxes family, and she even wondered of what Eleanor Heisler thought about it. However, it was still a rumor that no one could prove, and Cathy chose to ignore the obscure news.



Day by day, Cathy and Alex spent time frequently. They started seeing each other, talking for hours about life or anything. They had so many things in common, like books, movies, and music with all the similar taste.

All the laughter they shared, it was all meant for something deeper. They were like lovebirds, attaching to each other so well.

However, he never clearly stated about his social status as a royal member. Sometimes, Cathy got confused to keep up with his mysterious side.

When the family topic was brought in the conversation, Alex finally confessed the truth. He was born royal from House of Bosch, the German family from his paternal side. Also, his mom was born from France royal family known as House of Brach.

She was amazed with his confession, but one thing was on the contradiction since he used MacLain as his surname instead using Bosch. Therefore, Alex convinced her that it was only for his publicity matters.

On the other side, when she told him about her family—House of Aloise, he seemed to know a lot about them more than she did. He admitted that the intense meeting always happened between the committees in the Royal Council, whenever they brought the Aloise family in the conversation. Surely, the Aloise family was out of number against the others, there were not many descendants that left.

That fraternal organization was truly defined as the secret society, since he never clearly confessed anything significantly, and he just kept talking in a mysterious way.



A week had passed. It was time for her to get back into reality.

College would be closed for two weeks in the end of January. That seemed like a good time to go travelling, but she hadn't settled whether she really wanted to go or not.

However, Cathy had not forgotten about her idea to go hiking to mountain.

She had talked again with Marissa about her plan to go to Crystal Village, and she tried to find Elle, who always disappeared like a ghost in the wind. Everyone seemed to be busied in their own business, and she was left alone. And it would be like a risky business if she told her plan to her dad, or even to Aunt Sarah.

The only people she ever told about her plan were just Petunia and Melinda. So on, the one she asked to accompany her, it was just Marissa, who definitely forbade her to go. There was nothing she could do to convince that red hair woman to accompany her. Marissa always said that it would be a dangerous trip for a little girl.

And now, she was bewildered alone.

Her eyes gazed at the bowl of chocolate cereal. She was still deciding what to do next. It was seven in the morning when she looked at her watch.

It would be now or never.

She had done her research, and now would be the time for the realization to begin. It would be hard not to bother by her excessive curiosity.

So on, she packed her suitcase immediately, throwing some thick clothes and her notebook, in which she had written her research about the myth and legend of Roses Bones.

She wanted to prepare herself in advance, so she quickly changed clothes into a thick coat, denim jeans, and finally, she wore a beanie hat.

After everything was prepared neatly, she felt there was still something missing.

For a second, she sat at her study desk, recalling what it was. Suddenly, the handsome image of Alex came across into her mind. It was definitely him. She forgot to tell him about her travel plan, but there was no time to meet him in person, since she needed to buy a train ticket before it sold out. Considering this was a weekend time, she needed to be hurried.

She wanted to show him some old books that she had read about *Roses Bones* as well, to tell him that it might be real. Truthfully, she wanted to tell him directly about this, but because there was no other way, she wrote him a letter before she left New York.

*Dear Alex,
I think I know where I must find it.
I told you about *Roses Bones* before.
The key has passed to my account.
This is my decision. I'm sorry to leave you.
You know how much my love for you, it means forever.
But I need to go.*

*Sincerely,
Cathy.*

P.S: I leave you with 'the black book' written by Royal Council. I told you, they believe in it.

Right after she kept the letter inside a white envelope, she packed it in a paper bag, along with a book with crossed golden keys symbol that was given by Matilda, and she left the apartment hurriedly.

There was no time to have a conversation with him, or to find out what his reaction would be like, and she didn't even know his home address, so she sent it

hurriedly to the nearest post office to mail the packet to his office in the university.

And the last thing she would do was to call Josh, but he hadn't picked up his phone since a few days ago. She didn't think to ask him to go with her, since he was busied doing his part-time job these days. But now, she felt odd by his absence. She had checked on his dorm yesterday, but there was only Jordan, who told her that Josh had been staying in other place for a while, not knowing what he was up to. It was unusual, because Josh had never went away without informing her in the first place.

She felt insecure that she couldn't reach out for him. There was no time, and she needed to go to Grand Central Station.

Once she got her seat on the train, she could feel relieved for a while. Her eyes were gazing at the view behind the train window, and slowly, she closed her eyes, falling asleep.



At three o'clock, she arrived in Vancouver, and from the terminal, she asked the taxi driver in there to escort her to the main destination.

As soon as she saw the welcome board of Crystal Village, the terrifying feeling hovered. This must be the most terrible idea to go, because she had never traveled alone before.

The landscape view of the village looked refreshing. There was no pollution, no city life, and no crowd. She felt safe for a moment.

The first thing she needed to do was looking for the local inn, but before she threw herself to a comfy bed, she toured around, walking across to the only traditional market in the village, where they sold fresh fishes and vegetables. She was still felt uncomfortable to meet the eyes of strangers. Some people stole a wondering glance at her.

She walked out hurriedly from the market. As she walked further, she got tired, and finally stopped by in the border of the hills. There was nothing but the view of bushes and snowy desert land, and with cows on the other side of the land. And from afar, the pine trees that surrounded the hills were covered with solid snowflakes.

The air was getting colder at dusk. Her body started shaking.

A fortune finally came to her when she encountered a woman dressed in thick clothes and sleeveless vest. The woman introduced herself as Lara, the mountain keeper, who had been staying for a long time in the woods.

Eventually, as Cathy told her that she was going to stay for a while in the village, Lara offered her sincerely to stay at her place. Lara lived inside the cabin woods, which pretty far from the heart of the village.

They had a quick introduction before stepping inside the house. Cathy told her that she would be going hiking tomorrow. Thereafter, Lara admitted that she knew the land, and she was like the eyes and ears around the mountain and hills. Cathy felt lucky that she could be her tour guide. Also, Lara welcomed her like a family, and allowed her to make the cabin woods like her second home.

Cathy sat against the fire place, warming herself while imagining what she would do by tomorrow morning. As her eyes gazed at the crackling fire, she let herself slipped into a deep sleep.

I7

THE CAMPFIRE STORIES

AS THE NIGHT had passed, Cathy woke up with the comfortable feeling, knowing that she felt lucky enough to stay in this house that wouldn't take too far to reach the mountain and hills. She had prepared herself early in the morning. She took a shower and changed her clothes into another thick jacket.

Afterward, she met the landlord to the small room that adjacent next to the kitchen. There were two chairs placed oppositely in the room. Cathy sat on the chair that adjacent next to the wall. Meanwhile, Lara sat on the chair behind the window after she returned from the kitchen, bringing an apple in her hand.

"I'm not originally staying in this place," Lara said.

"So what have you been doing around here?" Cathy wondered. "Are you like a hiker?"

She always nodded inscrutably ever since Cathy asked her specifically, as if she didn't want to give a clear answer to her.

Afterward, she started a new topic, "I've heard about the phenomenal news, White Foxes have been bombarding New York with their case. It's seems hasty, with the episode of a murder story."

“Is it really that phenomenal?” Cathy baffled since this village lacked a facility to reach out for the news. “How do you know the news from?”

“There’s a mini station to connect with the internet, you will need to walk a few miles to reach the place.”

Cathy nodded, understood.

“Since you’re coming from New York, do you know anything about them?” Lara asked while she masticated the apple in her mouth.

“Not really.”

“It doesn’t seem like that,” Lara muttered while observing her expression, as if she tried to read her mind.

Cathy disagreed to discuss this topic since she was uncomfortable about the news. “I just don’t want to talk about them, okay.”

Lara half smiled, and as she rose from the chair, she asked, “Do you want a French Toast?”

“You can cook?” Cathy furrowed her eyebrows.

She rolled her eyes in disbelief. “Of course I can.”

“What did you do during blizzard?” Cathy wondered as she walked behind her. “I mean, there must be no signal, and most people would freeze alone in that kind of time.”

“You know what—” she stopped at the arched door before stepping into the kitchen, “the only thing we can enjoy during the blizzard time would be this *radio*,” she smiled mischievously as she took the small rectangular machine from the high table, and it took her a second to tune the frequency before the buzzing sound stopped. “If it’s not working, then I’ll read that bunch of books.”

Cathy followed her stare at the cluttered cabinet in the corner of the room. She had observed the inside of that cabinet before, which mostly filled with boring books about mountain, winter, and grizzly bear.

“I can’t imagine it,” Cathy sighed.

After the breakfast time had finished, Cathy asked Lara about the mountain and hills around this area. She wasn’t sure which path to take, but if she really had to ask her, she had to risk telling her about the main plan.

“I want to go hiking, but this is my first time,” Cathy said, “I’m terrified.”

“Don’t be,” Lara shouted and smiled “—as long as you know what you’re doing.”

“Alright, you said you know the land around this place. I really need someone to show me the way to Minerva Mountain—”

“I don’t think there is such mountain,” Lara snapped. “Are you here after you’ve heard some crappy stories from an old man or something?”

Cathy was taken aback with the way she spoke so harshly. “No, I get it, there’s no such mountain in here when I looked at the map, but I really need to prove it by myself.”

“You’re not the first one that ever came here, bragging about the myth of Minerva Mountain like a whiny little child,” she got so defensive, while Cathy stared breathlessly at her, “but whatever it is that you’re looking for, it’s not here.”

Before she took her bag and wanted to go outside, Lara shouted behind her, “Do you really come far away to get here, just to see that mountain?”

Cathy got stopped in front of the front door, breathed deeply, and then she stared at her hopelessly. "Yes, I do."

"I'm telling you, don't waste your time, but you'll be more grateful to visit the local campfire folk in the village. It's like their tradition from time to time. Sitting by the bonfire, while talking about the retelling legend story about it," Lara said and rolled her eyes in a mocking way. "They hold the event every single night."

"There are also the people in here, who believe it too?" Cathy wondered.

"I know right, that's just ridiculous," she said.

Cathy felt absurd to stand in there as if she was a superstition lunatic, but she had already settled to work on her plan this time.

Lara approached her, standing closer to meet her sleepy eyes, and she warned her, "You have to think twice before searching for the mountain alone. You need to be sure of what you know."

Cathy realized that she couldn't stay somber for too long, and so she shaped up her excitement again. "Great, thank you for your information. I'd like to visit the campfire folk tonight. Are you going to come too?"

"Oh no, I'd rather go hunting in the woods," Lara chuckled.

Cathy frowned in disbelief. "Really, does it have to be at night?"

"I got my night vision eyes with me, do not worry," she spoke with humor. "By the way, if you still want to go hiking, the blizzard is predicted to happen soon," Lara warned her. "You can't go alone, and I won't escort you to the mountain at the time."

“I still want to go. I’m not afraid,” Cathy said persistently. “There’s something I need to find.”

“You’re a brave girl. Whatever,” Lara sighed.



She craved for the solitude, and it was right here, in this place. It was like a reminiscent of Bisbee City. There were not many people walking outside on the side of the street, and the environment felt invigorating to be around.

There was only one building in the center of the village that looked kind of urban. They called it The Station, where anyone could have the internet and payphone. Alongside the building, there were some local stores, where they sold groceries, books, music CDs, and clothes.

Cathy came to the grocery store, looking for instant meals and soda cans. Once she got everything she needed, she had to wait in line at the cashier for a pretty long time when an old man moved slowly while picking up his grocery items.

“C’mon, old man, not again,” the cashier boy snapped and frowned, “I’m just doing my job. You should pay properly this time.”

Cathy peeped at the scene and she learned that the old man didn’t pay enough for his grocery shopping. A few people had been waiting in annoyance behind her as well. It was pitiful.

She didn’t think further when she took over the problem. She paid for him as soon as she paid for her own grocery shopping. The cashier boy and the old man stared surprising at her action. It took a huge courage to

cross the line, and thus she left the store immediately without looking back at them.

After a few steps away, she finally had to look back when she heard the old man hollered in pain. He fell on the ground pathetically, along with his grocery bags. There was rarely anyone who wanted to approach him. Some people were just glancing eerily at him, as if they were scared with that old man or something.

Cathy sighed as she didn't know if it would be a good thing to come in contact with him, but she helped him to stand up anyway.

She handed out the grocery bags to him while wondering why this old man didn't get enough luck today. "Are you alright?"

"I'm old enough to be asked if I'm alright," he chuckled with humor, "but thanks to you, I got to bring these groceries for my beloved wife."

For a second, Cathy wanted to run away since it was hard to make a pep talk since she rarely got herself socialized. All she could do was nodded at his mumbling.

He had a gray bushy beard, and his head covered with a dark beanie. His skin was all wrinkled, but with his very bright blue eyes, his face looked rather angelic.

"Oh, and—" he grabbed her arm suddenly while talking, "Would you like to come over to my house?" She noticed that he seemed like a somber person, but now, he looked way better when he smiled widely. "I'd like to repay for your kindness, little child. Oh, what's your name again?"

"It's Cathy Charlotte," and for a second, she thought it might be a good thing to know a local villager. She needed someone who could tell her about

the campfire event as well. "Thank you for your invitation. Where's your house, Sir?"

"Just a few blocks, across this lot," he said while leading her to the pathway.

The next five minutes, they arrived in a quiet neighborhood. He lived in a small wooden house. The smell of chamomile tea was strong in his house. She walked into the foyer and greeted by an old woman named Fray, wearing a bright blue sleeveless dress covered with a purple scarf, and a gray ponytail hairstyle.

At the dining table, the old woman sat oppositely from her after she served three cups of hot tea and a plate of cookies. Cathy really felt like home. They seemed like a nice person that she didn't understand why some people were afraid to approach him.

"So, tell me," Fray spoke in a very delicate voice she ever heard, "why are you travelling here?"

"I want to seek for a holy mountain," she said carefully, "the legend story believes that it's located in this land, it's called Minerva Mountain."

The old man shook his head firmly. He seemed to know something, and thus he stared at her eyes observantly.

"Why are you really here?" He asked wonderingly. "What are you trying to dig in that mountain?"

Cathy stared gawkily when his question was right on the spot.

The old man said again, "I believe that everyone comes here for something valuable. But with different motivation, what you get can be very much surprising."

Cathy stared down at her barefoot, thinking for a while. She felt it wasn't necessary to tell them about

the whole thing, but her time might be running out, and the blizzard might be happened in any time soon before she knew where the mountain was.

After he took a cookie, he leaned on the stone wall, where some family pictures hung perfectly, and so he told his wife what happened earlier in the grocery store, he said he got lucky when Cathy helped him generously. Cathy had just known his name was *John* after his wife had mentioned it.

The togetherness she shared with them felt homey. It made her missed her family so much. But there was no home for her. Her mom already died, and her dad tremendously busied with his work. The time had passed in a blink of eyes. She never imagined a life without being around her parents before. And in the end, she ended up living alone.

“Why don’t you come to our campfire site tonight” John spoke suddenly, reminding her about the event that she had not asked yet. “We’ve been regularly discussing about a local folklore. We’d love having a new guest.”

“Of course, I’d like to come,” she nodded.

“If you come to see me after the storytelling session, I’ll tell you what I know about the holy mountain.”

Cathy felt relieved for the invitation, but then, her curiosity grew wilder again, “Do you think Minerva Mountain really exists?”

“For some of us, *it is*,” there was a secret behind his smile, such a complicated feeling he carried whenever he spoke of the unknown. “I’ve been leading the tribe that our people called as *Yebah*. We told our children of what we know about the ancient myths and legends.”

“The campfire site is created by Yebah. But please don’t think poorly of the tribe just like the people in here. It is not at all occult,” Fray added and frowned.

Cathy gawked as soon as she realized the reason why most of the villagers looked down on him earlier. It was because they thought that he was involved with the occult tribe.

“I hope I won’t think of that, Ms. Fray.”

They smiled and relieved that the new guest could be open-minded about it.

After a few seconds of silence, Cathy asked curiously again, “What can I know more about the Yebah tribe?”

“Yebah is descended from the ancient Hebrew people. As a word, it means animal,” Fray spoke delicately.

“But in the nowadays, Hebrew commonly refers as a language rather than ethnicity,” he added.

Subsequently, they enjoyed a small talk while having a good brunch together.

Before they had a farewell, Fray said to her at the doorsill, and the way she talked was full of the warm feeling, “You have to be sure of what you’re looking for, because anything you seek can turn to be the greatest thing.”

As Cathy nodded concurrently, John shouted out loud from the kitchen, “Make sure you don’t come late tonight!”



At seven in the evening, she walked alone to the village since Lara said she would rather go for animal hunting

in the north side of the woods. For a matter of fact, she really saw her walking away into the trees near the cabin house before they got separated. Lara probably didn't lie about going hunting at night.

She went across to the lot, behind this neighborhood there was the path to the woods. John said that he would be waiting for her at the site.

The tall trees were everywhere, and it was hard to see in the dark. From a few meters away, she heard the chattering sound, and she smelled a roasted beef as well, until her eyes finally caught the bonfire site that surrounded by trees and bushes.

As soon as she approached the place, there were people sitting by the crackling fire, and some others gathered at the lake, while the women were grilling beef. This site looked like an outdoor party, where everyone gathered like a family to each other. There were probably more than thirty people in here.

Cathy acted all gawky since she was confused how to socialize, and where to start looking for the old man John. Until she approached some kids who played with darts, to ask them about his presence, and then they pointed out their fingers at the bonfire view. She surely missed it after all the confusion and the hectic mind. He was there all along, sitting by the fire with the others.

Under the starry night sky, she sat along with them, and started listening to the storytelling by their leader. It was about the local legend story that she never heard of. They believed in the old folklore about God of ancient wisdom.

She remembered what Lara said before, that the campfire site had always been telling the same story

over and over. And no one looked bored in here, even though they had heard it for a million times.

After the storytelling had finished, some people started playing guitars and singing, and some of them came to eat the roasted beef.

On the other side, Cathy approached the old man to ask what he wanted to tell her earlier in the morning. Sometimes, he appeared in a delirium state, chuckling alone when nothing was funny, and sometimes he just got very quiet.

“Your name... is stand for Catherine, isn’t it?” He chuckled again and again.

Surely, he kind of scared her. She couldn’t guess it wrong or right whether this man was really mad or he just knew too much things in life.

She nodded, “Well, yes, but I prefer Cathy.”

“Have you listened to our legend story earlier?” He asked. “It can be very boring if you come for three nights in row.”

“Sure, but I don’t see anyone in here feels that way,” Cathy baffled.

“That’s the key of life, not to be bothered with the cliché,” He smiled and said. “It’s about repeating the same damn things. Life is just a full circle.”

“Why are you kept on telling your people about the folklore of God?” Cathy asked curiously.

“You must have been thinking it’s like a doctrine. But it’s not,” he giggled. “I wouldn’t say I’m not propitious. I could be the leader in this life and the next, but for all the damn matters, I am just a crazy old man.”

“But why... it’s all the people that believe in the same story,” Cathy shook her head as she didn’t understand. “My friend told me about the lodes

folklore too, the ancient story of God that I don't know of," she told him carefully, "and in the campfire, you told us about the battle between good and evil, that eventually leads to the ancient wisdom, which foreseen as God," she stared at him with a huge wonderment "— I just don't understand everything."

"Sure, there are many versions about the story of God," he nodded and smiled inscrutably. "Such a divine story always has its root, don't you think?"

John was thrusting a piece of wood branch into the crackling fire before he talked again, "In the past, many battlefields had ended in pain. Humans started their own war, and created such a humongous story to satisfy their spiritual need," and his bright blue eyes reflected a melancholy as he glanced at her, "they needed to seek for a refuge, to calm their mind," he started explaining, "and among the ancient Hebrew people, it is a matter of what is good and what is evil."

Cathy was listening heedfully to his words while trying to connect the dots. It was still hard for her to understand the enigma.

"We believe our ancestors—the Yebah came in direct contact with God, receiving a divine revelation to be conveyed to their descendants," his voice sounded hoarse, and his lips sometimes moved so fragile when talking, "and it was this story, about God of ancient wisdom. He enlightened all of us through his very first existence, which is *Odin legend*."

The latter in his words had just triggered her mind to remember when Petunia and Melinda said that Iodes folklore was also called as Odin folklore, which meant God in Greek mythology. Her mind was enlightened, giving her a tender understanding about it.

“Does Odin legend related to the holy mountain?” Cathy wondered. “The myth says it’s in this land. And with this tribe that believes in it, don’t you know where the mountain is?”

“One says it’s a paradise, but could be a hell place for a rogue soul. You still want to prove it, don’t you?” He chuckled. “Minerva Mountain, or as some says, it’s the border land to the Angel’s Gate. It’s really here.”

Her eyes widened, her heart pounded faster, and she was ready to find out where it was.

But then he asked solemnly, “Are you a believer, Catherine?”

She didn’t blink for a minute. She was surprised with the question, as if it was a trial before she could go forth.

“Yes, I am,” Cathy answered him assuredly. “I come here to seek for the truth.”

“You can only find the truth, if you believe in what you’re looking for. Nothing works but faith itself,” his words were full of wisdom and certainty.

For a second, they got distracted by the bursting laughter from some teenagers in the campfire. The view was crowded, but it felt warm and affectionate.

The old man John followed to laugh along as he saw their happiness, but then he got back to her again with a serious question, “So, tell me, if you’re able to find Minerva Mountain, what you will do in there?”

Cathy glanced gawkily at him. She wasn’t ready to tell, but she needed his help, “I’m looking for Roses Bones.”

John leaned backward subconsciously as he looked surprised. “Are you joking with me?”

She looked at him bewilderingly. “No, I’m not—”

“We’ve heard about such a myth from the mad people,” he stared down against the fire, thinking hardly. “We’ve locked two prisoners in our basecamp, who keeps murmuring about many of hilarious stories. Until the day when the craziest of them spoke of *the mystical roses*, we shook our heads against them.”

“Wait, what’s with the prisoners and their stories?” Cathy baffled, and astonished at the same time. “Why do you keep them in your basecamp?”

“It’s because they were stealing stuff around the village, bothering and scaring people,” he said pitifully. “The reason why we keep them instead hand them over to the local police, is because one of them is enormously mad, his name is Pafola,” he informed her, “he talks all the time even no one talks to him, and he knows a lot about the ancient secrets. He knows about the history of our ancestors as well. He’s a scary person.”

“What about the other one?” Cathy asked.

“Not much, he rarely talks, and oddly, he dresses like a priest,” John said. “When we first found him, he was following Pafola, lurking in the shadow and preaching like a mad man. His name is Father Osborne.”

“You call him Father, because of the way he dresses?” Cathy wondered.

“I guess so, it’s just happened that way,” he chuckled, and then he drank a bottle of water.

For a second, he stared solemnly at her again, “One day, they fantasized about *the immortal legend*, telling us that in the past, they were working for the immortal people, and for Pafola, he had once become their loyal slave,” he shook his head in disbelief. “And they told us,

those immortal people are seeking for the mystical roses, which you say, Roses Bones.”

“How absurd, I’m not an immortal being,” Cathy argued and felt ridiculous.

“No one believes them either. Don’t take it to your heart,” he giggled. “Their stories are way too miraculous for the commoners.”

It was an intriguing idea to hear them talking directly, especially Pafola. She didn’t want to miss the opportunity to gather more information, even from the absurd people.

“Can I meet them?” She asked.

“Not this time, child,” he said while standing up from the ground, and she followed him, “but if you think you can find the mountain through them, go ahead, face them fearlessly.”

“Yes, and you haven’t told me which path I can take to get to Minerva Mountain.”

John held his laughter for a second, and said, “That’s because none of us has ever been there before,” he spoke assuredly, “It doesn’t always mean we can see what we believe. It’s the imperfection that makes us human.”

As they walked to get their roasted beef, in the waiting line, he stood smaller than her. During the outdoor dinner, he told Cathy that she could visit the prisoners by tomorrow evening, when he would be prepared mentally to face those mad men.

18

THE IMMORTAL BEINGS

THE MORNING SUNRISE was just at the top of the hills. Cathy could see the view beautifully behind the foyer's window. She had been leaning on the windowsill for half an hour, while thinking what she would do next.

Just for a second, the glimpse of thought hovered in her mind, she felt as if there was no sign of life in this cabin woods, and as if this place had been vacant for a very long time. There was really nothing in this house, and the television was dead, except for a radio, and a bunch of traveller books for a little enjoyment. Even the food and beverage seemed to be supplied in the first day she stayed here. She wanted to be skeptic about the oddity, but it was certain that something seemed off.

After Cathy finished her breakfast, she saw Lara in the living room. She was observing what that girl had been doing. Lara was lifting some oval-shaped pots to be placed next to the television. Eventually, when Cathy took a closer look on the floor, she saw those pots filled with black seeds.

“What is that?”

“The result of my night-hunting—the wild berry seeds,” Lara said, and she wiped her hands while rising up from the floor. “Pretty, isn’t it?”

“Didn’t you say about an animal hunting last night?” Cathy baffled.

“Well, I changed my mind,” she smiled mischievously. “I got to go hiking in the north hills for these pretty seeds.”

“They’ll look yummy if they’re grown. Do you want to plant the seeds during winter?”

“Sure. Are you going to help me out?” Lara asked while she approached the tall cabinet to take two shovels.

As Cathy nodded, Lara handed over the shovel to her.

“When will you start hiking?” Lara asked again before they went outside. “I’m telling you, the blizzard can be so unpredictable.”

Cathy sighed. “I visited the campfire site last night. They could only believe in the myth, but they don’t know how to get to Minerva Mountain.”

“Pity,” Lara cringed. “What are you trying to do in that mountain, anyway?”

“I want to find Roses Bones,” she confessed finally.

“Roses Bones?” Lara cringed and stared in disbelief at her, and at that moment, Cathy got the impression that Lara thought of her as a ridiculous person. “I don’t believe in such a thing.”

“But it sounds real to me,” Cathy opposed.

“It’s the oldest myth among the hikers, but nobody has ever found it yet,” Lara said, in a mocking tone “—because it’s not real.”

"If that's so, do you know which mountain in here?" Cathy asked curiously. "You said you know this land."

She held her breath, and sighed. "Surely, people believe it to reside in a holy mountain."

"Is it really Minerva Mountain?" Cathy asked for assurance.

For a second, Lara stared without blinking to her. Cathy stared back too, trying to figure out the meaning of her unreadable expression.

The conversation continued as they went to the front yard and started planting the seeds in front of the terrace house. Cathy tried to tell her again about what she knew from the myth and legend that related to Roses Bones, but it just didn't work out.

"I don't believe in lodes folklore, and I don't care about that crap," Lara muttered.

Cathy was placing some black seeds on the soil ground, exactly in front of the fence. Her hands were shivering from cold. Subsequently, Lara helped her to shove the snow, only with bare hands, strangely.

They were working quietly for a few minutes, until Lara spoke again, making Cathy surprised suddenly, "There's another rumor that they have it somewhere around *Courchevel* land."

"You said you don't believe in such a thing," Cathy held her chuckle as she spoke. "Why are you telling me this now?"

"It doesn't mean I don't know, child," Lara chuckled while shoving the snowy ground.

"Stop calling me a child. Our age isn't that different," she was annoyed. "Anyway, where's the land?"

“It’s in France,” Lara giggled. “I mean, you have to get through Tarentaise Valley as well.”

“Are you kidding me?” Cathy frowned in disbelief. “France is very far away from here.”

“Like I said, it’s just a stupid rumor, and most of the hikers believe what buries in the mountain are just gold coins and antique stuff,” she informed. “It’s unlike anything you want to find.”

At the same time Cathy finished planting the seeds, she said assuredly to her, “Yes, and it’s the myth of Roses Bones.”

When they stared solemnly to each other, Lara felt a strong determination from her, and the overwhelming feeling to go on finding the mystical roses seemed undeniable.

“If you’re really that bold, let’s go hiking to the hills together,” Lara said challengingly. “See it for yourself.”



They walked carefully throughout the slippery walking trail. The only shortcut to get to the hills was through the wild side of the woods. The view was surrounded with wild grown trees and green bushes covered in thick snow.

For a second, Cathy was walking behind her, observing the same clothes that Lara had been wearing, it was just like the first time she met her. It was odd that she kept wearing the same jacket after three days of sweaty hiking. Meanwhile, Cathy changed her clothes just like a normal human supposed to be. As for this day, she wore a dark beanie, and a thick jacket covered with a sleeveless brown vest.

As soon as they reached to the lower hills, they saw that some parts of the area weren't covered by snow. They could see the view of the green mountains and hills. Lara was left behind as Cathy walked ahead to explore the environment all by herself.

At the top of the hill, she stopped there to stand still, looking down at the view of the village from above. She was standing at the edge of the steep hill. Her melancholy eyes stared out with a yearning feeling for going places.

"That's Crystal Mountain, the tallest one in here," Lara shouted as soon as she stood beside her.

They were facing the tallest mountain peak, which located at the north side of the woods. There were different shapes of mountains and hills in here.

"What Minerva Mountain would look like then?" Cathy baffled. "I read that Minerva is a gigantic mountain, almost as tall as the Himalayas."

"This is way you can't only rely with books. You have to travel the land by yourself, which is you can see, there's no such a thing in this land," Lara assured her.

Cathy rolled her eyes at her, feeling annoyed.

"The myth among humans, and the way they blow up such a story, that's what *ridiculous* sounds like," Lara chuckled, as she enjoyed mocking the absurdity.

It wasn't about what Lara said that peeved her, but because of the pathway to seek for Minerva Mountain was hard and seemed impossible.

"I read that Minerva is located in a very cold place, that's why the books described it as a snowy mountain. Also, the pathway is rocky and slippery," Cathy

murmured. "But the only similar mountain as described in the books, it's supposed to be in Alaska."

"And then why don't you travel to Alaska?" Lara asked.

Cathy shrugged her shoulders unsurely, and then she muttered, "Because Roses Bones is buried in this land. Well, the books say it all."

Lara half smiled as she couldn't make sense of it.

"The hikers are usually traversed through this path before they climb Crystal Mountain," Lara informed. "This is as far as you can go. As you see, there's no other way."

Cathy wasn't really listening when her eyes suddenly caught a strange view at the horizon. From afar, she narrowed her eyes toward the twin hills at the northwest side of the woods. For the second time, when the silent lightning thunder hit between those hills, she saw a glimpse of swirling water in the air.

"Did you see that?" Cathy baffled.

The transition of the nature phenomenon passed too quickly, and it made the illusion as if there was an invisible gate between the twin hills.

Cathy didn't want to end up with a hilarious conclusion, and Lara would probably think badly of her, but she just couldn't ignore what she saw so vividly.

"Hey, how do I get there?" She asked while pointing out her finger at the northwest side of the woods.

"Forget it. You're not going there," Lara shook her head assuredly.

"Why?" She confronted.

"It's a restricted area now. That place is surrounded with stormy water," Lara informed her carefully. "There

was a massive damage to the electricity network a few years ago. The hydropower from the old watermills was broken, causing the river to be polluted.”

Cathy was disappointed with the bad news, but her curiosity was bigger than her fear. “So, does no one go climbing to the northwest side of the woods since that day?”

“If there’s anyone crazy enough to cross the stormy water, they will have to die afterward,” Lara said and chuckled.

Cathy closed her lips tightly when she imagined the horror of it.

“The villagers have been warned about the sudden electricity cut off. It usually happens once in a while at night,” Lara added.

“Good to know,” she nodded hopelessly while staring at the twin hills.

And now, she was feeling pathetic.



In the evening, she visited the old man John at his house. As soon as he said goodbye to his wife, he led her to the basecamp.

The place was located not far from his house, and it was near to the campfire site. They were heading to a house that was built in the east side of the woods, which surrounded by many of wild trees. A mini caravan was parked next to the house, and the lamplight was bright behind the caravan window.

A few people were sitting by a crackling fire in front of the house. They welcomed their leader with a warm regard.

She wondered what the people in the Yebah tribe had been doing in such a desolate place, and far from the crowd. It seemed obvious that many of the local villagers didn't accept their presence, because of a negative stereotype that had been passed down through generations about them. However, Fray already assured her that the tribe didn't have anything absurd like an occult ritual. Cathy chose to look at the bright side, and she wanted to seek for the truest wisdom she could learn in this land.

John invited her to get inside the house. For a second, the interior was decorated neatly just like his house in the village. It was almost too normal for a community house. There was everything anyone ever needed as a safe house. And even in the dining room, the old female caretakers had prepared several plates of ribs steak. However, they didn't stop there for a yummy dinner.

John stopped by at the lounge room, talking with two muscular men in their mid-forties. Subsequently, those men stole a glance at Cathy, and their eyes always seemed to be bulging out oddly like some kind of mafia gangsters.

Cathy was standing alone a few meters away while observing the appearance of those men; the skinny one, but with muscular arms, he has a thick brown beard, sort of bald hair, tan skin, and dressed in a plain white shirt and jeans, while the other one was Caucasian man, dressed in a red plaid blouse and jeans.

"Do you think it's safe?" Cathy heard the man in a white shirt muttered. "She's still a little girl."

"They're locked inside the iron bars, why so afraid?" John snapped with his humor.

After half a minute of a serious conversation, those men invited her to walk behind them. When John walked beside her, she caught his excited expression slightly, and his amusement seemed rather odd.

“Are you ready, Catherine?” He asked, chuckling again like a crazy old man.

“Of course I am,” but from the inside, her heart was pounded hardly.

As soon as they went to the backside of the basecamp, all of them got startled when a skinny man inside the iron bars stood suddenly, and he hit himself to the bars like a raging storm. His watery eyes bulged out astonishingly when the first time he saw her.

“Remarkable!” He muttered. “*Grazie, Dio.*”

“Sometimes he speaks Italian,” John informed. “Lucky us, we have Mucho in here. He’s half Italy.”

He referred to the man with white shirt. It did make sense why Mucho had a Latin look, because he was half Hebrew and half Italy.

“Pafola said; *Thank you, God,*” Mucho translated his words while staring at her.

Now she knew who the man named Pafola was. He looked like a street bum with torn clothes and dirty face full of charcoal. He looked like an Italian man in his mid-forties as well. He had a watery brown eyes, thick eyebrows, and short messy brown hair with bangs, tan skin, and he has a very thin body, as if he had anorexia.

“My Lady, it is you that I see,” Pafola said after he bent down loyally against her, “God knows I’m here. He sends you here!”

“It’s not like you’ve never seen a girl before,” the Caucasian man shouted, and they were laughing along.

Cathy was the only one who didn't laugh along with them, instead she asked bewilderingly, "What is he talking about?"

"He's a lunatic. Always mumbling about crazy stuff," Mucho said.

As soon as Pafola stood up and pulled himself toward the iron bars, everyone got startled again. He behaved like a raging thunder. His eyes bulged out, while smiling widely against her.

"You're surely not Princess Kathleen," he muttered. "But I know you—" and he paused to giggle crazily. "You must be the last of them, the savior beneath the shadow of night. It is you, my Lady!"

Cathy was truly astonished by the way he mumbled so dramatic and formal, and it was unexpected that he knew about the death princess, which was no other than her ancestor.

John tried to explain when she glanced at him with a huge bewilderment, "Pafola has been talking about the legend of the royal family he used to work for," and then he shrugged his shoulders, "but I don't know what he sees in you, why he's thinking you're part of the family."

Cathy knew the answer. He had such a thought of her, because Princess Kathleen looked a lot like her. At the first time she saw the painting of the princess, she also got astonished with such a facial resemblance, as if she had a twin.

"In the world of the mumbling cowards, all you see are lies," Pafola shouted dramatically, "but for I, however, the redemption among the sinners is what matters the most," he grinned and said, "and only the

destined child will make us wide-awake, and we'll be set free at last."

"He's been repeating the verse from the royal prophecy book. He speaks about one's reincarnation," a man in the next cell shouted firmly "—about the salvation for all humanity."

All the eyes in the room glanced at the man dressed neatly in black clothes, and he carried a cross in his hand. Cathy had just realized there was his existence beneath the dark room. He had a bald hair, white skin, and corpulent body type. He had a grumpy look. He was the priest named Father Osborne, the one that John had mentioned before. He had been there all along, listening to Pafola's madness.

"I will not fear the darkness!" Pafola screamed out suddenly. "For I am the slave of God."

"Does such a thing exist?" The Caucasian man snapped in annoyance "—or these men are just really lunatic."

John patted his shoulder, and said, "Andrew, behold your anger. Let the man speak."

"Why he keeps on telling all of you about it?" Cathy wondered.

"He's a desperate man, wanting a holy refuge to run away from the one who hunts him down," Father Osborne answered her "—*the immortals*."

Mucho and Andrews were bursting in laughter after they heard him talking.

For some people, they only heard nonsense, but for a few, they heard the truth. And that what Cathy saw, a certain pathway through them.

“Are you both running away from *the immortals*?” As soon as she threw the question, Mucho and Andrew frowned at her.

“They’re after Pafola. It’s just happened that I ended up here with him, like a pathetic man,” Father Osborne said. “Because of so many secrets he holds dearly, and now, he becomes their fugitive.”

“Yes, and yes, they will not find it before the destined child!” Pafola muttered like a drunkard. “Oh, *the mystical roses*, thou shall not be found by the dark hearts. For all the eternity, this damnation is just a mortal cycle.”

“What’s it all about?” Cathy bewildered. “Could it be that you know about Roses Bones as well?”

Pafola bulged out again, as well as Father Osborne, who stared astonishingly at her.

“Oh, you don’t speak of Black Roses so easily, dear,” Pafola muttered as he pulled his head in between the iron bars. “It’s just a dead end. You’ll probably die before you reach the cold mountain.”

“I told you, they know,” John said to her.

“Through the border of the Angel’s Gate, where it’s buried,” Father Osborne spoke solemnly while sitting alone in his cell, “in the never ending cold place they called it, *Minerva Mountain*.”

“When it’s called the Angel’s Gate, is it literary meant an angel?” Cathy wondered.

“The ancient legends have said a lot about the true existence of angels,” Father Osborne said, his voice sounded wise and deep, “In all religions, they teach us to believe in the unseen matters. But everyone’s belief system is different,” he paused for a second, staring intensely at her, “and as for me, I believe so.”

Andrew laughed as he said, “Nonsense with your preaching, old man!”

“Can you tell me, how to find Roses Bones?” Cathy asked after she squatted against his cell. “Many sources from old books suggest me to look after Odin legend firstly, and some says the legend only exists around the holy mountain.”

“No sublime in the mankind, no forgiveness,” Father Osborne muttered while staring blankly at the floor “—says the royal prophecy book,” and he said again, “no one really knows how to find it.”

“Stop quoting the prophecy book, this ain’t a comedy parlor,” Mucho shouted. “These men always talking shit about it,” and then he stared at John and Cathy. “Tell us, John... such a book is just their fantasy.”

“We are the believers. Of anything these men have been said till this second, they’re not all wrong,” John said wisely. “The first time we caught these men, they told us eloquently about the history of Hebrew people, and also about the Yebah,” he reminded them. “What makes you think such a man would act all crazy when he knows a lot of damn things?”

Mucho and Andrew stared down at their own feet, feeling disgraced after they had such a negative thinking.

“What are the secrets that Pafola carries?” Cathy wondered. “What the immortals want from him?”

“You have no idea,” Pafola muttered creepily. “It’s because of the mystical roses. They think I know where it is, but I don’t,” he said while approaching her more closely behind the iron bars, “The mystical roses, Black Roses, and now as you called it, Roses Bones. They all mean the same thing,” he grinned for a second before

he continued talking, "it will lead you to a mystical power, which no one can ever imagine."

"The power to rule the world," Father Osborne added. "But if you're looking for it, you have to be ready for the unknown. You never know what will come after you," and then he stared up at her with horror in his dark eyes. "Just like how Pafola runs all of his life from *monsters*."

"In other words, there are also many people who are seeking for it," John shouted.

"Why do you call the immortals as monsters? How they look like?" Cathy asked and narrowed her eyebrows. "Am I going to be hunted by them, if I try to find Roses Bones?"

"They look exactly like us, so human. But most of the immortals have lost their humanity after so many decades, and because of that, they choose to be powerful," Father Osborne said. "Roses Bones is the knowledge that comes from the hands of the angels. It's forbidden, and it's only for certain people," and he stared up again at her before he spoke, "whether you'll be hunted down or not, chances are small, but you'll be living a hell of life if you have it."

"I have lived a thousand lives for them!" Pafola screamed out again, "they want me dead," he was almost crying as he spoke, "being a prisoner in here is easier than living too many lives."

Cathy baffled. "Are they wanted to kill you because of the secrets you know?"

"It's not just secrets," he giggled crazily. "There were things in their life, those *royals*, dark secrets that have something to do with good and evil."

"Royals?" Cathy frowned.

“Didn’t I tell you before?” John reminded her. “Pafola used to work for the royal family, and he believes that some of them are immortals.”

“*Vesperia*—” Pafola murmured creepily, his voice sounded ghosting somehow. “The greatest empire I’ve ever seen. It was a heavenly place before it befell by the Devil.”

Cathy got startled when he mentioned it. She had read a few things about Vesperia family through Petunia’s journal. It was unexpected that she found the legendary family to be involved constantly in the seeking of Roses Bones. However, it did make a perfect sense, because after all, House of Vesperia was her very first ancestor.

But one thing she didn’t understand. “If that’s so, are you saying that you’re also an immortal being?” She stared back and forth at the two prisoners. “Both of you?”

Everyone in the room got surprised by her bold confrontation.

“Will anyone ever believe that?” Father Osborne muttered pathetically.

No one spoke as they were breathless for a second.

Subsequently, Andrew snarled, “Is this girl also a lunatic, John?”

“Then, I am no different,” John chuckled, making a humor out of it.

Cathy tried not to be bothered with his sarcasm. She wanted to be focused with her purpose in here. “Please tell me, how do I get there?”

Father Osborne astonished by her great persistency, but it wasn’t like she was the first person

who ever wanted to seek for it, but because she was the youngest of all, and the boldest one.

“From what I’ve heard from one of the royals, Roses Bones is buried in this land,” Father Osborne informed, “but wherever you look, there’s no Minerva Mountain, because it doesn’t exist in our world.”

She could hear Mucho and Andrew were mocking about his madness as they stood behind her back, while John was still listening heedfully, just like her.

“There’s an alternate dimension. It’s the unseen one, the unknown location, in a never ending cold place—” he continued informing, “the pathway is in the woods, there should be a portal somewhere.”

At the time he said that, she recalled the unseen world of Caecus, which was also a cold place, where almost all of the area covered with heavy snow. Subsequently, when a glimpse of memory hovered, she remembered seeing the strange swirling water in the air, between the twin hills in the northwest side of the woods.

“I guess, that could be possible,” she agreed. “I saw a strange spot when I went hiking this morning, there’s something in the northwest side of the woods. It’s between the twin hills—”

“Come closer, darling. I tell you the secret between the twin hills,” Pafola said, beckoning her over with his finger.

Cathy glanced silently at John, asking for assurance if that would be okay. After he nodded carefully, she stepped forward to the cell, and unexpectedly, Pafola grabbed her collar jacket, and pulled her closer to him, until her body hit to the iron bars roughly.

“Kathleen deserved to die, after everything that happened. And you too,” his eyes popped out frighteningly while whispering the words to her.

As everyone got startled by his sudden change of attitude, Mucho and Andrew pulled her out hurriedly from his strong grasp. Cathy was breathless and astonished at the same time. She locked her eyes at Pafola, who was staring at her with a tremendous hatred now.

She was assured that Father Osborne was the only who heard Pafola cursing earlier, and thus he stared at her frighteningly.

Mucho said at last, “I told you, he’s a lunatic. Don’t believe everything you’ve heard.”



In front of the basecamp, Cathy and the old man John were sitting by the fire, enjoying the sound of the rustling winds and crickets.

He asked if she was still terrified with what happened yesterday night. However, Cathy could tolerate Pafola’s madness, since he seemed like mentally unstable, even though his changeable attitude still scared her.

Eventually, John confessed to her that he believed of everything those mad men had been saying after all this time. John was the man that never stopped learning, he wanted to understand everything. Because of Pafola said a lot of things, John finally knew about the history of Vesperia family, and until the end of their lineage.

She was listening to him, while staring at his beautiful bright eyes, and she couldn't stare away because of his crystal eyeballs looked very angelic. It was calming to sit here with him.

"Why are you telling me this?" Cathy wondered.

"I don't really know what happened, but whatever it is that you're looking for in the mountain, and if everything those men have said all true, that will make you the chosen one," he said carefully. "You're the only one who can save your family."

She was startled when he had that sort of conclusion about her. "Are you still thinking that I'm part of the family, which Pafola used to work for?"

"If Pafola didn't make a scene earlier, I wouldn't be sure about you," he said and chuckled, "Why would people chase after the mystical roses if they were not one of the descendants?"

"Why?" Cathy confronted.

John stared observantly at her before he spoke, "It's the kind of story that will only pass down secretly to their descendants, only the inner circle who would know," and he giggled "—and if you're wondering why some of us in the tribe already know about the story, that's because Pafola has a big mouth. He must be a strange creature that ever lives."

Cathy stared at him, contemplating his words.

And then he said again, "*House of Vesperia*, that's what he mentions every single day. He said that they were the one who started the creation of immortal beings," John muttered, looking at the crackling fire. "One of the great knowledge of immortality is locked inside Roses Bones. That's why Pafola have said to us; the last of the immortal people are seeking for it."

Cathy remembered that she just knew about Vesperia family from Petunia. She was still surprised that she was one of their descendants, and Petunia was her relative after all this time. It was all made sense for her now, why she wanted to seek for Roses Bones. There was a meaningful reason, and that was about saving her royal family from the dark hearts. This journey might offer her a great wisdom. If that was the case, she had to face the unknown threats that might appear before her eyes.

Cathy stared down at the crackling fire, and murmured, "I don't have the power to save everyone. I am not a strong person."

"Don't give up easily," and he gave her wisdom, "if you learn to know yourself, you'll find surprising things in life. Everything that's happening is destiny, and you are part of that destiny, Catherine."

"And what is it about destiny?" She asked naively.

"Yesterday, you were looking for Odin legend, weren't you?"

"Yes, I did, because the old books said that the only way to find the holy mountain, I'd have to seek for the God of Wisdom, which is the truth to find the path," she said and sighed. "Do you think it's just a mere philosophy?"

"Here's the only thing that I know about seeking the truth; *you can only find God, if you believe in Him,*" there was a deep feeling when he said that. "It's about faith, Catherine."

Cathy felt distressed, and sometimes she wasn't sure if she could finish what she started. And thus, she asked him skeptically, "How do I know if I can find it?"

“There’s this thing called *the voice from within*, which is intuition. It wants you to find Odin in your heart, to find God within you,” he said wisely, “you’re already here, and you’re already heard many of absurd stories—” he smiled at her before he spoke again, “that is destiny.”

Cathy was silent while staring at the fire again. She was contemplating about what he said.

After a minute had passed, he said suddenly, “I was just wondering, about the cabin house where you’re staying currently, there are not many people in the west side of the woods, and the hikers usually stay after winter,” he looked puzzled as he spoke. “Are you sure you’re alright?”

Cathy shrugged her shoulder, baffling against his words. “I am fine.”

“You can stay at our house until you find your mountain,” he said sincerely.

“I’m staying safely in there. The owner seems like a good person,” she assured him again. “I wonder if you know a girl named Lara—”

“Lara... not many people have that name,” he stared down, looking sad suddenly. Cathy baffled with the sudden change of his expression. But when he spoke again, she could finally understand perfectly “—the only Lara that I knew in this village would be my granddaughter, but she already died a long time ago, well, the blizzard killed her,” and for a moment, he felt the nostalgia, “Lara was a history student, she loved doing expeditions, she used to go hiking in here.”

“I’m sorry for your loss, Sir.”

“What do you have to be sorry for?” He giggled, trying to raise his mood up. “You have nothing to do with her.”

“With all due respect, Sir,” Cathy said softly, “my apologies to bring up this conversation.”

He stood up from the chair, and said, “I think it’s time for you to leave. Sleep tight.”

There were still a lot of questions she wanted to ask him. And that night, she couldn’t sleep for thinking too much, for a possibility that could appear before her eyes.

I9

THE QUEST OF ROSES BONES

THE HOUSE WAS very quiet. It was six in the morning, and Lara just went outside.

It wasn't a strange thing, but her mind kept on banging noisily about the possibility to investigate the old cabinet in the reading room. There was a strong urge to sneak out, and she couldn't understand why.

Cathy peeped through the window, looking out at the view of Lara's trace. When her footsteps seemingly had gone into the woods, Cathy hurriedly explored the cabinet that filled with many books about mountain and grizzly bear.

Her hands moved too rashly, and so some books fell on the ground. She saw a letter among the stack of those books, it was half folded in a diary journal.

She knew she wasn't supposed to open it, but the urge kept on coming back on her head. However, there was a mystery that she needed to know about Lara. As soon as she opened it, she saw the old-fashioned italic handwriting on the letter.

I was drifted in the land of no man and no sea, howling cautiously upon the holy storm. No rage in the winter, but they were chasing the adrenaline, so rashly with everything they could have.

In April, the people of Yebah tribe guffawed about the rattle they said made of wood. It was funny, but no more than a nightmare.

It's bizarre to have a blizzard in here, for every year and then. It makes my skin so trample from cold.

I wanted my parents to read this, but they probably shouldn't.

Lara.

It seemed that Lara tried to describe what it felt to live in this village, meeting with the tribe, and living in here during blizzard.

Cathy continued to take a look at the diary, where she found a few photographs of Lara with her friends. There was one picture that looked strange, and Cathy needed to think twice to realize what John and Fray were doing with Lara in this lovely photograph of them, hugging each other, and smiling widely. At the back of the photograph, it was written *my grandparents and me*. The statement was clear as perfect evidence, something was definitely off.

And Cathy just remembered; John said that he had a granddaughter named Lara too, but she already died a long time ago.

The tickling sensation came rough into her lungs. Cathy felt the eerie now, for thinking if the real Lara was the owner of this cabin house, it would mean she was supposed to be dead.

Cathy opened the diary journal hurriedly, trying to find anything that could support that evidence. Almost every page told a story of Lara's life as a history student

in college and a brave hiker. She spent a lot of time in a mountain. She was a girl who loved a wild adventure.

Half of the diary journal was still blank pages. The last time Lara wrote a diary was four years ago. The last entry was about her encounter with John and Fray Yebah in their house, having a good dinner and playing board games together during winter. It was stated clearly in the diary that John and Fray were her grandparents.

And then, the front door creaked loudly, making her jumped away from the cabinet.

Cathy hurriedly returned all of the books into the cabinet again. When she pulled out the drawer, her eyes bulged out to see a small gun in there. She just took it with her jittering hands, and hid it quickly inside her coat's pocket without thinking.

Lara had returned with some mineral bottles for Cathy. When they met in the living room, she asked enthusiastically, "So, tell me, what time will you go hiking today?"

Cathy was still jittering from reading the diary journal, but she had to appear as if she was clueless, so that person who disguised as Lara won't suspect her for anything. And so, she said firmly, "I'm about to go. Glad you come back earlier."

"Sure," Lara said as she gave her the mineral bottles. "It's better to go in the morning, the wild animals still asleep."

0 0 0

They were going up to the hills in the west side. Cathy walked behind her, while thinking a lot about what she read in Lara's diary journal, but she tried to understand

the situation. It was odd that they looked alike, and she guessed that Lara probably had a twin. And now, she was with her, it was time to be assured.

Cathy remembered the photographs in the diary journal, where Lara had a different look than what she appeared now. The old Lara had a calming look with sweet eyes, but the now Lara, her eyes looked contented and sharp, and there was something cold with her gaze.

Someone could change after a few years, or could stay as they were. But Cathy was still persistent to think that something was definitely going on with Lara. The evidence was just too clear to make her believe about Lara's death, and John said she was killed by blizzard.

The way Lara talked in the diary journal was so different, compared with now. Cathy obviously noticed that. It was like two different people, where one was too mature than the other.

Somehow, Lara reminded her with the girl she once knew, Sylvia Elle. Their behavior mirrored each other. It was so obvious, with the way they talked like an old person, always behaved one step ahead, and always gazing so observantly. Furthermore, something about both of them was so inhuman, they just didn't move like human. Cathy should've noticed since the beginning with this oddity, but she wondered if it was true.

"Wait!"

They stopped at the border of the hill. Lara turned her back, glanced down confusedly at her. "What is it?"

"I need to talk to you," Cathy said firmly, while her hand already groped the gun carefully in her coat's pocket. "Isn't there anything you want to tell me, about you?"

“I already told you, of what you need to know,” she said, sounded bored.

Cathy raised her eyebrows, and stared up at her in disbelief. “I saw it all; the diary journal and some photographs. The real Lara died a long time ago.”

At that second, she grinned. There was something very cold with her inscrutable smile. “You almost caught me off guard, Catherine,” she chuckled.

“You’re not Lara. Who are you?”

It was odd that she was acted calmly as she spoke, “You’ve found out.”

For a second, she didn’t say a word while looking out at the view around her. And then she shrugged before she spoke again, “They are right, of what they said about you,” she smiled, slightly mocking “—you’re clever.”

“What are you talking about?” Cathy baffled.

Lara kept on giving her an inscrutable look. They stayed silent for a few seconds, until Cathy got frustrated with this situation, and then she took out the gun, and pointed it out at her.

“Don’t play with me!” Cathy shouted, while her heart was trembling alone. “Lara is dead. Who are you?”

She made a guttural sound, clucking her tongue irritatingly.

“I’m the mountain keeper. I already told you that,” she said, as if nothing to lose. “I was sent here to watch over you.”

Cathy frowned, slightly losing a grab of the gun. She got baffled against her words. “Who sent you here?”

“There’s someone who told me that you’re a bold person to deal with. And I can see that,” she said and stared observantly at her.

Cathy only told a few people about her plan to go hiking. She couldn’t think of anyone who would send someone to be a spy to follow her down to this path.

“Please, tell me the truth, who is it?!” Cathy exclaimed peevishly.

She rolled her eyes in annoyance. “I don’t think it’s necessary for you to know. You should just go home if you can’t find anything in here.”

“Is it also a lie—when you told me about the northwest side of the woods?” Cathy confronted her. “There’s no stormy water, right?”

“Even everyone in the village knows. Why would I lie about it?” She looked dead serious. There was no joke in her tone anymore.

They stared at each other when the tension was in the air.

She stared down carefully at the gun, and said, “You won’t shoot me.”

“The thing is... I can’t trust you, but—” Cathy muttered, and then she threw away the gun on the snowy ground, “I am here with purpose.”

“Oh, right. A little kid who wants to seek for the myth of Roses Bones,” she shouted.

“The only path I haven’t seen, it’s in the northwest side of the woods,” Cathy muttered. “I need you to show me the way.”

“There’s nothing but wild animals out there. Don’t bother yourself too much,” she said irritably.

A visual glimpse of the twin hills struck into her mind suddenly. Cathy remembered to see something

odd like the swirling water in there, as if there was an invisible gate between the hills. There could be gold coins or precious treasure in that land. Nobody would ever know, because no one had ever crossed the land since a very long time.

“I don’t have time to argue,” Cathy shouted, staring up at her, “I will go there, even I have to go alone.”

“Catherine, don’t go!” She exclaimed while chasing her down through the pathway.

Cathy was running as fast as she could, before the fake Lara could drag her back to the cabin house. The chasing game felt exhausted, but she got to do it faster.

There was a small gap in the barbed wire fence with the restricted area sign, and so she trespassed hurriedly.

Suddenly, there was a magnetic feeling hovered on her mind. She couldn’t blink out, and her whole body started to feel jittering. It was all confusing for her. But then, when she looked back, Lara wasn’t there.

However, she followed the pathway, until there was an old watermill across the river. It looked abandoned for a very long time.

For a second, her eyes squinted hardly to focus at the view in front of her. Now she understood why it was called the stormy water. From afar, the river was covered up by a visible wave of wild electricity. The area was surrounded by a strong magnetic field.

She had to think twice to walk over there. It would be a matter of life and death.

Eventually, she walked further to another area in the woods, and there was nothing but wild trees, bushes, and insects. She ran out of breath, and her legs started to feel weary.

She decided to rest under the tree for a while, before she started to seek for the path to go to the twin hills again. At the time, she pulled out the inside of her bag, trying to find anything that would be usable for this trip. Subsequently, the sacred emblem was protruded among the stack of her books about the myth of Roses Bones. She almost completely forgot about it.

For a second, she took it to observe the detail shape of the emblem. At a glance, there was nothing special about it, but then she thought that it could be a valuable heirloom, but she still couldn't understand if such a small item could be used as a key to open a secret room.

The emblem felt warm in her grip, and she felt a sudden headache. The uncomfortable feeling appeared again to make her whole body felt jittery and weak. It felt like there were random voices whispered in her ears, making her confused, but none of the voices sounded clear. Cathy hurriedly took all of her stuff into the bag again.

As she walked away like a drunkard, the voices were still ghosting in the back of her mind. It felt like her mind was playing a trick on her.

She tried to calm herself, and closed her eyes for a minute, and the dizzy feeling slowly disappeared. But then, a delicate voice whispered clearly to her;

Black Roses...

Cathy opened her eyes, at the same time she got astonished by the sudden whisper.

Buried... on the ground...

She was looking alertly at the view around her, but there was no one. She was all alone.

Cold snow is the path...

Her legs started to follow the direction of the voice. She tried to walk steady alongside the snowy ground.

La Moisissure de Creux...

As the last voice sounded ghosting, she stopped walking, and her eyes stared down bafflingly.

“It’s impossible—” Cathy muttered while remembering one chapter in a book that covered with the crossed golden keys symbol, which mentioned the same epithet of *La Moisissure de Creux*.

She remembered what it meant, “*The hollow mold*, where Roses Bones is buried.”

However, that part was written by Professor Auben de Clure. It made her recalled the day when he warned her about the finding of Hallow Nostrum, and about what would happen to the portal if the evil plan that Lady Marie had created was successful. It would be doomed.

After all this time, everything was connected. It was about seeking for the truth.

She hurriedly took the book from her bag, and she opened the pages rashly, trying to find that chapter.

One page showed an illustration of the land that was believed to be *La Moisissure de Creux*, and it was literally meant as something to dig in the hollow. The myth said that between the rocks, an image of a head rose was engraved on the solid ground, hidden in the snow. That would be the place where Roses Bones was buried.

The illustration inspired her to imagine the head of rose as a mark. But she was still all confused, and worse, she didn’t know which path to take.

For a second, she breathed deeply, while staring up at the bright sky. She was hoping for a sign, for anyone to show her the way.

Some black birds flew at the top of the trees. They made a noisy sound in the air.

The view was like a flashback, reminding her with the terrifying experience she had in the forest a few years ago. After all the terrible moment in the past, Sylvia Elle was still there, protecting her from danger. But now, that white-haired girl was nowhere to find.

Cathy was all alone in here. Nobody was looking out for her, and Lara probably had lost a track of her trace.

The black birds were chirruping again. They flew exactly above her now. She stared up bewilderingly at them. She didn't want to think about the possibility if those birds wanted to show her the way. She had enough of ridiculous moment, and this one wouldn't be counted as a sign.

"Black birds," she muttered, while recalling something.

It was like an omen, or it could be worse. In the past, the thing that caused her to come into the wild forest was also a black bird, and to be exact, it was a raven that Sylvia Elle believed as a demon in disguise.

Suddenly, the sound of gunshot exploded in the air, making her startled to death. It was pretty loud to make her heart almost jumped out.

There could be a hunter near her, dressed fully with his weapons. But when she looked around, there was still nobody. She took that as a sign to move on.

It took her a few miles before she found some rocks behind the hills. Alongside the woods, there were

no rocks until she reached the border of the northwest side. They were the only one, and the view looked exactly like the illustration in the book.

Cathy approached the land carefully as she looked back and forth whether there was anyone that watching her.

Among the rocks, there was a flat ground, covered with a heavy snow. She tried to shove the snow with her bare hands. It felt like a suicide, since the cold snow stabbed her skin terribly.

She didn't prepare the stuff she needed to go hiking. It was pretty reckless to go unprepared. However, her motivation was stronger, and she had no choice but to fight the pain.

Until then, it was really there. Auben de Clue didn't write a fiction after all. She saw it vividly with her own eyes; the head of rose was engraved beautifully on the ground.

What she needed was a shovel now, but it was impossible for her to go back to the cabin house after such a long trip. She was a bold person, and she already settled her mind not to give up. There was no choice left, but to dig it deep with her bare hands again.

The feeling of death might feel this way—painful at first. She was freezing, but she won't stop digging.

"There you are, Catherine!" Lara shouted out as she finally found her.

Lara walked closer to see what Cathy had been doing on the ground, and so her eyes almost popped out in astonishment, and muttered, "It can't be—"

Cathy paused from digging the ground to see Lara's gawky expression. She took a deep breath before she shoved the last snow on the hollow mold, until she

could feel something underneath the snowy ground, it felt hard and rough on her touch.

The box was there, buried deeply underneath the dark. It was a rectangular shape of an old brown wooden box engraved with roses design.

She lifted up the box carefully as she glanced at Lara. "I told you, Roses Bones is real."

"It's impossible, but—" Lara was still gawking, but then her expression turned firmed, "we're crossing the line."

Cathy frowned at her, bewildered. But when she followed where those sharp eyes were gazing, her heart got startled terribly to see the sudden appearance of a rocky mountain from afar. The bluish ambience surrounded the snowy mountain. It was like seeing a magical land.

"We're here, in the border area of Minerva Mountain. This is close to the Angel's Gate," Lara informed, as she stood behind her.

"You said that the place is nowhere to be found, but what is happening?" Cathy sounded panicked.

"Something has triggered the breaking point, causing the flimsy area in other dimension to be opened," Lara spoke, half believing of what she said herself. "You've opened the line."

She rose from the ground and muttered, "I don't understand."

"The vibration comes from you," Lara assured her again "—with something you brought up here."

"You're weird. What are you, really?" Cathy stared at her with a huge wonderment, still thinking that her presence was so inhuman.

“What did you do before you found that box?” Lara asked wonderingly.

“Nothing, I guess—” she muttered, but then her mind was recalling the image of the sacred emblem. The ghosting voice came after she held the emblem in her hand. Her eyes stared down blankly while picking up for the puzzles.

The sound of a gunshot exploded again in the air. Cathy was the only one who got startled. Meanwhile, Lara was so well-reserved with her sharp eyes looked well-wary, looking up at the sky.

“It’s better for you to get out of here,” Lara said alertly, “before we’ll get a problem.”

20

THE MYSTICAL ROSES

THERE WERE NEITHER wild animals nor hunters. It was probably something else, since the state of the woods was so quiet. Lara had warned her to return, however, Cathy still had her full attention toward the box she carried in her arms.

The pathway she took was different as Lara guided her to walk out from this place. There was a soil ground, half covered by green weeds and snow on the other side of the land. It seemed like a good spot to take a rest.

Cathy ignored whatever Lara said. She just went to sit under the shady tree, while Lara preferred to keep an eye on the woods while waiting for her.

She needed a time to think. Her eyes studied the antique shape of the wooden box, and carefully, she opened up the top of the cover to see what was inside. At a glance, the box only contained of some old papers and a few tiny glass bottles, surrounded by black flower petals.

Underneath these items, the mark of three-legged spirals was engraved incisively on the baseline of the box. It was like the ownership symbol of something, and Cathy recalled that was the symbol of Triskele,

represented a trinity of wisdom. Some old myths and legends believed that it could mean as three realms of triple goddesses. She once learnt something about three leaders in the Chandelier Order, which was the myth of archangels. They were represented with Triskele symbol by the Austrian local culture. It was odd that everything was pretty much connected.

However, she didn't know the value of these items, until she took one of the papers to study it. The cursive handwriting on the sepia paper was hard to read. It was like the kind of elderly style of penmanship.

Each paper had a different title. And the one she picked, it was entitled as *the Mystical Roses*. It was like a perfect synchronicity when she took the paper. It felt like she was destined to find the box. She found what she was looking for, but the final wasn't nearly to be found.

Before she read it, her eyes slightly explored the other papers. She read them randomly, and found some terms that were odd to be used; *the Shallow Blue Lake*, *Hallow Nostrum*, *The Life of Elesias*, *Immortality*, and some more that sounded orphic.

As she got back to the first paper, and read it fully, her eyes popped out against the way it was written in such an old English language. It was still hard for her to understand. She thought that the papers were probably written since some hundred years ago, far back in the past.

The Mystical Roses

*The myth shall be truth, and from truth,
comes "Black Roses".*

*It is said like the potion of freedom, has a
mystical power to save many souls, for those
who need a salvation from the darkness of
hearts. Beneath the shadow of bushes, there
are roses as black as night. The roses are
grown closely to the path of heavenly place;
the Shallow Blue Lake. And to the dead
end, where the water ventures, reflecting fairy
dusts in the air. It is below the bluish sky,
and stars, in the unseen world. Between the
letter O and W, the treasure shall be found
from within. But to earn a healing virtue,
one must survive the hurricane and the barren
of life. Memories shall last into nothingness.
Not much but pride for mankind, only to
lose one's fear.*

*The triumph awaits those who fight for the
sake of goodness.*

Somehow it would be absurd if she believed everything that was written in the paper. Touching the rose would be like pressing the rewind button to help neutralized the life of mankind. It had a great side effect of erasing people's recent memories.

However, the paper only gave a little clue about Black Roses. It was told that those roses were grown near a strange place called the Shallow Blue Lake. It would be like a scavenger hunt if she really went to search for it.

But then, slowly, she remembered seeing something strange between the twin hills. The place was probably not too far from here. It reminded her with the hidden world named Caecus, and she had been there twice, and ended up with a terrifying experience. No matter how great the idea, her guts faded after she asked Lara about the pathway to get there.

"The closest you can get to the twin hills is through the path behind the old watermills, where you have to cross the stormy water," Lara informed, slightly mocking.

"Isn't there any alternative way to cross the water?" Cathy argued. "Maybe like a bridge or something."

"Yeah, through the only old brittle canal bridge," she snapped, giving her no hope, "which too old for anyone to walk through it."

As Cathy rose up from the ground, she shouted out, "We have to try anyway."

"Alright, what do you have in mind?" Lara asked and stopped her from walking. "This is a stupid idea for self-murder," and then she said alertly, "you've found your box. Just go home already."

“There’s more than just a box—” Cathy was about to argue, but then she reminded herself not to tell her with the whole thing. Lara was a stranger that she couldn’t trust after all. “I’m sorry, I have to go now.”

“Hey, stop there!” Lara shouted in annoyance as she followed her down the pathway. She kept on yelling out, reminding her about the danger it could cost.

“Whatever, Lara, or whoever you are—” Cathy stopped at the edge of the river to confront her once again, “I have to do something that I should do in here. So, where’s the canal bridge?”

Lara looked at her peevishly, and then she shrugged, seemingly gave up against her boldness. “At your nine o’clock, it’s connected to the power house.”

Cathy glanced away to the west side of the area, and there she saw a small brittle bridge above the water. She walked nervously, while feeling afraid with the panic attack she might have later. It only took her a few meters to get there, but then, a strong grip grabbed her arm. She was about to yell out, but her guess was wrong, it wasn’t Lara.

“Wait—” She got startled so badly to see a familiar girl suddenly appeared behind her back. “What are you doing in here, Elle?”

That slender girl still dressed in an old-fashioned way, with a thick long brown coat, and a pair of black boots. Her platinum hair still looked the same, long straight and loose.

Sylvia Elle, the strange mysterious girl, who once she knew as her distant relative, but eventually, it wasn’t that. Every time she tried to remember the memory of her, there was always a black hole slipped inside of her mind. As if something had been taken out

from her memory, and she couldn't connect the dots. There was nothing about her, except the memory when they visited a beach together in the old days, and also their trip in Austria. Now, she only remembered her as a long lost friend.

"I'll take this little girl from here. You can go now," Sylvia Elle said firmly to the woman who disguised as Lara.

"So, you're the one who told her to spy on me?" Cathy frowned at her, and then bulged out at that woman. "Nice work, by the way."

"No time for discussion. Now, let's get you home," Elle talked sarcastically as usual.

"I don't want to go home. I already got this far. I have to get Black Roses," she argued and stared up at her sharp green eyes.

"That is a myth—" Lara shouted. "That's not possible to grow Black Roses in this land."

"Yeah, like a myth like you said about Roses Bones, and turns out real," Cathy argued.

They stared at each other for a second, while the birds made a noise in the woods again.

As she glanced at the gun that Elle carried in her arm, she recalled the exploded sound of a gunshot earlier. "Were you the one who pulled out the trigger in the woods?"

"We should be careful. The watchers are in the air," Elle said, giving a secret gesture at Lara.

Cathy looked at them in bewilderment. "What's going on?"

"Since the gate got triggered by something, there's a gap between the dimensions," Lara explained again. "*Demons* sense it as well."

Elle sighed at her. "It's your job now, to keep the cold mountain safe from them."

"Wait, just wait—" Cathy got tremendously baffled. "The cold mountain you refer is possibly Minerva Mountain. And about *that* something, are you talking about this—" and she took out the sacred emblem from her coat's pocket to show them.

"No, it's because you took out Roses Bones. It was sealed safely by your family, in order to hide it from anyone in the Royal Council," Elle explained. "It's not an ordinary box. When you took it out from the ground, it emitted a vibration that crashed landed, causing the gap to open for a while."

Cathy stared at her in disbelief, while thinking how Elle would know about the secret in her royal family. It was odd since they didn't see each other for a pretty long time.

"Minerva Mountain appears transparently in human world because of that," Lara snapped. "I was surprised that someone like you could find Roses Bones."

"The emblem has a function like a pointer, to find the royal treasures," Elle informed. "It could also lead you to the box."

"It was," Cathy muttered, "and now, the box is in my bag."

"Good, I can take my farewell from here," Lara said.

"You're not from this world, aren't you?" Cathy asked, and suddenly stared longingly at her. It was a weird feeling. "I mean, what's with being the mountain keeper? It sounds inhuman."

Lara stole a glance at Elle, as if they communicated by telepathy. Eventually, she just gave her an

inscrutable smile, and just like that, she was gone into the woods.

Subsequently, Elle forced her to go out from this area. As they passed some wild trees and bushes, Cathy started to ask her with a bunch of questions.

“And how did you know about my plan to go here?” Cathy asked her, while trying to match her pace with that girl. “I figure out that must be Marissa who told you, right?”

Elle stayed silent while she dragged her out from the woods.

“As a good friend, you must understand my purpose of coming here,” Cathy kept on talking breathlessly “—many sources say that *Black Roses* could save everyone in the family from evil people. It’s still a myth, but I’d like to try it out by myself.”

Suddenly, Elle stopped, and turned her back while looking mad.

“What do you want to do with Black Roses, anyway?” Elle confronted her, sounded mad. “You know nothing about it.”

“Whatever Elle, I have consumed a lot of crazy stuff for the past few months. So buckle up, and be ready,” she muttered, and her arm was released slowly from Elle’s strong grip.

Elle got astonished with her braveness, and she studied her naïve face for a second.

“You’re not as brave as you look like, aren’t you?” Elle confronted, while staring intimidatingly at her.

“Well, let’s find out,” Cathy said, without even thinking for any possible risk about it.

Elle caught her shoulder again before she walked away.

“I’ve read the paper in Roses Bones’ box, there’s a chance to save the royals from hurting each other, and as it stated; from *the darkness of hearts*,” Cathy shouted first, and tried to convince her. “It can be done with Black Roses.”

“You think you can save your family, change them, and make them smile at you?” Elle asked rhetorically. “Do you even have any idea with the meaning of *the darkness of hearts*?” Her tone stabbed painfully like a razor sharp knife. “I don’t think you do.”

Cathy was almost speechless. Elle was right that it was too much to take.

“Life is full of damnation. Either you take it or leave it,” Cathy muttered. “As for me, the truth is something worthy to fight for,” they stared intensely to each other, “I’ll be able to understand about my family, and everything.”

“So, I tell you in advance, Catherine—” she said firmly, “the darkness of hearts comes from those who don’t preserve conscience in their life. With that in mind, you can only save those who want to be saved,” her words sounded sharp and heavy “—not everyone.”

Cathy stared peevishly, while her lips trembled, along with her hands.

“And what you will do, will not be worthy,” Elle added.

“Let’s prove it then,” Cathy muttered, and then she ran away from her sight, and returned to the northwest side again to find the canal bridge.

She heard the creaking sound as soon as she stepped on the old bridge. It seemed that the bridge wasn’t strong to hold her weight as she held on the railing. She kept on walking boldly, even though her

heart got trembled with fear. She glanced nervously behind her, where Elle stood alone outside of the bridge, staring well-wary at the situation.

She could feel the bridge was about to fall apart. If that happened, she would be drowned into the stormy water, and the last thing, she probably died.

The black birds screamed out in the sky, suddenly flew above them. They made the situation worse. And Elle had to prepare her gun, pointing it out at the sky.

Cathy froze after she saw the ropes started went off from holding the bridge. The panic attack finally came, making her body jittered. At the same time the gunshot exploded at the sky, Cathy screamed out of fear when the bridge was half fell down.

“Hold on there, don’t move!” Elle shouted loudly at her, trying to rescue her.

She held on tightly to the wooden railing. She was panting while feeling the horror of seeing the storm spouted out from the water under the bridge.

Cathy wasn’t sure if she was just imagining a thing, but there was definitely a black smoke that flew around Elle, and seemingly tried to attack her. It was odd that she saw Elle fought it back. Something emerged from that white hair girl’s pale hand, like a thunder bolt.

The scene had triggered a certain memory on her mind, and it was flung away like *déjà vu*. As the memory played back, she saw Elle was fighting some strange scary creatures with the same thunder bolt coming from her pale hands. They were in a forest, a place that was far from people. And then, the black hole slipped again on her mind, preventing her from recalling the past.

She recalled it once more, and heard something;

They're demons. It was Elle's voice, strong and firm in her memory.

Eventually, everything flipped like a switch button. Those memories had been long forgotten. It was all in the past. They had been there before, fighting demons in Austria, the part that was gone from her memory. She could remember the part when they visited her uncle, but the part in the wild forest, the abandoned castle, and everything supernatural was long gone. And now, she understood the missing piece; Elle was no ordinary, because she was never human.

A glimpse of memory flung again, it was the terrible scene she had with a bogus police who attacked her a long time ago in Bisbee City. He called Elle; *an angel*.

She remembered now. Elle was part of the Chandelier Order. She was an archangel, who was sent to guide her to the right path in life.

And now, while Cathy fought to cross the bridge, she wondered how she could forget it all when it was the grandest turn of events in her life.

Suddenly, Elle already got her back, and they hurriedly ran toward the power house. At the last minute, she saw the bridge was half broken. The bridge was the only path that connected this land and the next. Her heart shattered with a great fear, while thinking the way to get back there, to the cabin house.

"Now, that's what I called a luck," Elle muttered, staring peevisly at her.

"We're trapped," Cathy said hopelessly, "but maybe we can find another road to get back."

Subsequently, they hadn't talked to each other during the trip, and they kept on walking straight, following the only pathway in the woods.

Soon, they found the twin hills behind the wild trees. Cathy gawked to see the view, where the gap shaped like 'U' word between the hills, it had the swirling water that looked huge from closer, and it was real.

"This nature phenomenon—" Cathy baffled as she stared up at the gap between the hills. "Is it linked to the stormy water?"

"Yes, there was a little accident in the past," Elle said pitifully, "the hikers who believed in a supernatural stuff thought that they could cross the hidden dimension by creating a portal, possibly using a massive energy from the power house, the power canalized through the river in order to open the gap—" she sighed for a second, staring up at the twin hills, "but they had no idea with what they did, and so the accident happened. So that's why, this is a restricted area now."

Cathy wondered how would Elle know so much about it, but then her memories explained everything, it did make sense now; Elle was an angel.

"That hidden dimension is connected to *Caecus*, right?" Cathy asked.

Elle stared observantly at her, and then she half smirked.

"I remember what you are," she confessed innocently. "Something tried to block my mind from remembering it all. It's weird that I have to say this to you—"

"You got your memory back," Elle muttered. "Your heart is stronger than I thought, that's why your mind is able to recall the memories."

“Why did you do this to me, like the way my mom did in the past?” Cathy asked, while shaking her head peevishly. “You were messing up with my memory.”

“It is safest for you not to remember anything about me,” Elle said, and then she smiled affectionately “—at least you got your normal life back for a while.”

“I did, but now we’re here, about to get inside that invisible gate,” Cathy said and pointed out her finger at the gap between the twin hills.

“We’re going back. It’s dangerous for you to get there,” Elle warned her.

Cathy sighed for a second, and then she looked back and forth to the hills and Elle, and the last thing, she muttered, “Try me.”

It was hard to run away from the eyes of an angel, but her stubbornness gave her the power to fight back. She was able to release herself from Elle’s strong grip.

But when they approached the gap, they felt their body was being lifted up, as if there was a strong magnetic field around it that was able to suck anything up into the invisible gate.

Cathy felt like it was the end of her life, the last thing she remembered was only a dead end of blankness.



It was a misfortune.

Cathy was lying down alone above the wild grasses. Her body felt weary, and her eyes were still hazy from blankness. She didn’t know where Elle had gone.

Once she had returned to her senses, her eyes explored around the strange environment. Although

the green trees looked normal, but the sky was dark and gloomy, but it was strangely blue with many stars, and no clouds.

Across the grasses, there was a strange lake, it was also blue, looked brighter than the sky, but it was also sparkling.

For a second, she thought to herself if she was dreaming. She shook her head, and pinched her cheeks for many times, but the view hadn't disappeared from her sight.

Cathy walked closer, and then she bent down at the edge of the lake. The water was sparkingly blue, the reflection emitted fairy dusts, precisely like what the paper had described. One thing that was left out from the paper; there was a giant crystal ball in the midst of the lake, spouting out a raging thunder from the inside.

She just realized that the sound of the thunderclap was coming out from that thing, and sometimes, the sound of the screaming birds followed, making her startled and scared.

"You're the child," a woman said across the land, and bulging out frighteningly that almost scared Cathy away.

"What are you doing here?" That woman snarled out. "You're not supposed to be here, don't you know that?"

Cathy couldn't really see her figure, until she stepped away from behind the crystal ball. The dazzling light from the blue lake was so bright that the water reflected flashily on their faces.

Nevertheless, she was still able to see that woman, who seemed like in her mid-thirties. She was wearing a

plain long dress of a rose-apple color. She had a dark ponytail hair, pale skin, and a pair of bright blue eyes that seemed always popping out scarily.

“Pardon, do you know me?” Cathy shouted out, and then she rose up from the ground.

“Human. I sense you,” she spoke with disgust,” the crystal ball showed me your reflection. I knew you’d come,” but then her expression turned weary, “why do you have to involve yourself with the Chandelier?”

Eventually, she remembered about Sylvia Elle. “I probably couldn’t get here without her presence, but what is this place?”

“The Shallow Blue Lake,” she answered almightily, “and you are talking to the keeper of this place.”

Cathy squinted in bedazzlement against her presence. “My apology for not knowing who you are, but—” and she looked around the environment again to find it beautiful and strange all at once, subsequently, she faced her again and said, “I wish to find Black Roses, if you mind to show me the way.”

“I thought so. Some people only came here for the roses,” the Blue Lake keeper said, staring down at the water with her melancholy eyes. “However, use it at your own risks,” she warned her “—because such a power inside the roses could bring devastation for many people that related with your niche.”

“I understand, please,” Cathy begged.

She sighed for a second, with her eyes still popped out creepily, and she muttered, “Follow me.”

While they walked on the pathway between the trees, Cathy made a conversation, “Do you know her, the Chandelier you’ve mentioned before?”

“Pretty much, but we prefer to stay out of their business.”

“There are others like you?”

“Indeed, I’m not the only keeper. There are also other places in Caecus, in the need of safeguarding from bad entities.”

“The lake is part of Caecus?” Cathy wondered. “And that makes you as—”

“I am no angel, if you must know,” she shouted firmly. It seemingly she disliked this part of conversation. “I am Djinn.”

It was kind of made sense for her, of why the Blue Lake keeper seemed to disapprove the presence of Chandelier Order. However, Cathy asked one thing that she didn’t understand, “Why do you fear Chandelier?”

“It’s... none of your concern,” her voice shivered.

Cathy frowned, baffled. “It’s not like they bite you out of nonsense—”

The Blue Lake keeper stopped suddenly in the middle of the way. Cathy was almost hit her neck, and soon, she stared up bafflingly at her.

“There are rules that do not let us involve with each other. Even without rules, they’ll still disgrace against our presence,” she said firmly, and then her eyes moved quickly, staring up at the trees and all around the view. “I can feel her eyes watching us now. Maybe she’s just waiting at the right time to appear for you, little poor thing.”

After a few steps they took into the gloomy woods, she showed her the lawn full of black roses at the back of those skinny trees. The roses were grown luxuriantly, and indeed, Black Roses were no myth.

"I told you, use it at your own risks," she warned her again.

Cathy rolled her eyes in annoyance. "Isn't there a manual book about this, what should I do afterward?"

"The only advice I can give you; think about your purpose," she said, her voice still shivered, "once you have a single rose in your hand, just imagine what you wanted to do if you were given a divine power to rectify everything in your life, and for your people."

"The darkness of hearts," Cathy murmured, remembering the words on the paper. "Will this work like a rotation of clockwork, like turning back the time?"

"If you've studied enough about Black Roses, you should've known," she snarled out. "There's no turning back, but the time will go on to rectify the unwanted things in life."

She just remembered about Marissa, who was part of the Chandelier Order as well, and also the one who told her about the terrible consequence of using the power from Black Roses, which could deliberately erase the latest memories of everyone who involved with the Royal Council, and also the people in her life.

For a second, she hesitated, but she already stepped closer to pick up one of the roses.

"Remember the keyword, dear; *rectification*."

Cathy glanced at her, nodding with fear. She picked up one of the black roses. At a glance, it was no different from a regular rose, only the color was black, and it also had a thorny stem.

A touch from her tiny finger had caused the terrifying effect. The dazzling blue light emitted brightly from the rose, crashing into their eyes painfully, and the next second, a heavy mist was emerging in the air. The

birds screamed out again in the woods, followed by the raging air that made all the leaves on the ground blown away with fear.

The Blue Lake keeper seemed to shout out the word "*Careful!*" for a lot of times, but Cathy couldn't hear everything clearly after the mist hit her eyes.

Everything felt like madness for her. She coughed a lot as her eyes went hazed with fear. She couldn't take it any longer. She finally fell on the ground, feeling the cold and pain, alone.

21

THE RECTIFICATION EFFECT

THERE WAS A NOISY sound that bothered her, like it was coming from a television. Especially when the cold air was killing off her skin, making her body went paralyzed.

As she cried out the pain, a warm hand held her tightly, trying to comfort her. The vivid touch on her skin was enough to convince her that she wasn't dead yet.

Soon, as she opened her eyes, she saw a woman dressed in black coat was staring worriedly at her. Aunt Sarah was there, looking out for her with terrible eye-bags.

"Where am I?" She asked.

"We're in the hospital," Aunt Sarah said tremblingly, and there were tears behind her eyeglasses. "You've been in coma for two weeks."

At the same time she heard that shocking news, a great pain stabbed her like sharp needles on the back of her head, Cathy rested her hand on her forehead, and soon she realized that a bandage was covering her head.

"Two weeks is a long time," she sighed.

“I know, sweetheart,” Aunt Sarah said while caressing her cheeks tenderly. “You were found with a terrible bleeding on your head. You need to rest now.”

The noisy sound distracted her attention, and so her eyes stole a glance at the television in front of her hospital bed. The news channel broadcasted an important event among the white hair people that dressed in fancy blazer, and also, they were all looked familiar.

“Are they—White Foxes?” Cathy wondered.

“It’s Pristine Heisler, who has been handling a charity event for the poor. She’s the representative of the Heisler family. Some of the members stay in Manhattan,” Aunt Sarah informed, pointing out at the television screen, when there was a woman with a slick back hairstyle, who physically looked alike with the rest of female born in that powerful family “—but she’s not part of White Foxes.”

For a second, there were strange memories that appeared like flashes. She saw things that weren’t supposed to be happened in reality, it was as far as she could recall them. They were things like memories in the past, but she wasn’t really sure.

And it was like an elastic magnet, the memory flung away into her mind, and she remembered about the box that full of old papers and black flower petals. She had found Roses Bones. However, the last thing she could recall before the blankness, it was when she touched the mystical black rose. She was still in Caecus at the time. But then she recalled what the Blue Lake keeper had told her about something crucial, it was about *the rectification effect*. There was supposed to be the significant alteration, like the turn of events.

Something should change everyone's past that involved with the Royal Council, and those who were part of the royalty. It was her main purpose—to save her family from malevolent souls.

“Has everyone been well?” Cathy wondered.

Aunt Sarah stared away from her, as if there was something she tried to hide.

“Is there any news from the Royal Council, and what about White Foxes?” Cathy asked her constantly, making her aunt shudder.

“Since when do you involve yourself with the council?” She stared at her in bewilderment. “White Foxes family has gone on holiday in Austria. You know, it's their tradition every year.”

Cathy was trying to understand the circumstance, whether the rectification effect was good enough to change everything. She still didn't understand how it would work on everyone. But one thing she wanted to find out the most was her own past. “Where is my mom?”

Aunt Sarah frowned. “Your mom—”

She didn't like her melancholy expression, it wasn't a good sign.

“She died a long time ago. Don't you remember?”

Cathy couldn't wipe her tears properly, and the headache felt painful. Now she understood that the effect wasn't meant as a time-travelling button, and the Blue Lake keeper already said it all.

“I shouldn't have asked. I thought I had a nightmare, turns out, it's the reality calling me home.”

Aunt Sarah snorted, trying to endure her tears too before she spoke, “Your mom once told me that life is

all about waking up from a nightmare. I guess, it's where we start living."

For a second, she tried to avoid her gaze, but then her aunt muttered peevishly, "You should've called me for help. Why did you go alone to Vancouver?"

"What happened to me?" Cathy wondered. "I was with—"

"The girl who introduced herself as your friend—" Aunt Sarah recalled the moment, "Sylvia Elle came knocking at the mansion's door, with you in her arms," she informed, "I know her before, one of the caretakers in our family."

Cathy narrowed her eyes, confused. It was odd that Elle had a side job as a caretaker like Marissa as well. They seemed mysterious.

"So, are we still in Vancouver now?"

Aunt Sarah nodded, and caressed her shoulder softly.

"And how did she know about the mansion?" Cathy baffled, and then her memory recalled the truth. She closed her mouth tightly then, as she realized that girl wasn't human after all.

Before her aunt said a word, there was a knock on the door.

As they glanced concurrently at the visitor, her aunt spoke, "Your friend has been waiting to see you. He stayed up late for you, since he arrived here three days ago."

He was Josh, dressed neatly in a black blazer and blue jeans. He looked at her anxiously.

"I guess, I have to tell the others that you're already awake now," Aunt Sarah said while taking out her cellphone from her black purse.

He nodded politely to her. "Take your time, Ms. Aloise."

After she left them alone, Josh sighed heavily as he sat on the chair beside her bed.

"You were gone, not saying anything to me," Cathy snapped peevishly.

He chuckled, and shrugged his shoulders. "What are you talking about, Cathy?"

"Don't you think this is awkward?"

"What's so awkward about a friend who wants to see his sick friend?" Josh said peevishly, but he managed to calm himself.

"We're not friend anymore. You've stopped talking to me since you took part in a *boy-scout* thing," she said, making him baffled. "Don't you think it will be bothersome if the Royal Council found out where you are now?"

"Wait, what is a boy-scout that you mean?" He asked, and then he burst out laughing. "Since when did I have something to do with the royals?"

She frowned, staring at him in disbelief. "Don't laugh."

For a second, she just realized that she said all those things without even thinking. It was like a memory slip, as if it happened somewhere in her life, but oddly, she couldn't remember the exact moment of it.

Before she woke up, there was a series of vision that she saw. They were all seemed convincing, as if she had lived in the moment of *déjà vu*. All of the strange circumstances that weren't supposed to happen, but she saw them in advance. One of them was the memory when she found out that Josh was recruited by Madam

Dupont to work as the royal spy, and it was odd that he would've agreed to take the job.

Because of the memory lapse, some things had confused her.

"Cathy, seriously, I don't know what nightmare that you had, but this sounds like a joke," he said in disbelief. "You haven't awoken for a long time, maybe that's why you had some sort of bad dreams."

"You betrayed me since the day you've worked for the Royal Council, for scouting on my family secretly," she tried to explain. "And it's not a dream."

He couldn't stop laughing until it got his stomach hurt. "Okay, here's the deal; we've been having a good college life together. You're the one who encourage me about going for the band with Jordan the Nerd, and so lately, I've been building up my solo concert three weeks ago," he kept on mumbling, "and the last thing we had in Fordham before you went into coma, it was the seminar—"

Cathy noticed his sudden bafflement. "What?"

"Wait, this is odd, I can't remember what happened after that."

She got the same wondering look as he was. Both of them were trying to recall their memories. "Was it the seminar by Professor Auben de Clure?"

"Yes, it was," he said, while giving her a blank look.

"Oh God, I guess it's working," Cathy muttered surprisingly, making him baffled. "I had touched one of the black roses, with a purpose to rectify everyone's past memories that involved with the royals."

"What are you talking about?" He frowned.

"It's also to prevent a trouble that the Heisler family could've caused."

“You never even talk to Eleanor Heisler,” he giggled. “None of us does.”

The whole confusion made her headache got worse, but she had to fight it off. “I need my journal. I wrote things sometimes. I need to take it in my bag.”

“Where is it?” He rose from the chair, and started looking back and forth for her bag.

When she realized it wasn’t in the room, she got panicked. “It’s probably left in my uncle’s mansion. We need to go.”

“Are you nuts?” He bulged out at her. “You can’t leave the hospital.”

“I can prove it to you that I’m not imagining things.”

“Alright, so you have a secret diary now,” he rolled his eyes in annoyance.

She got distracted again by the noisy sound that came from the television, but when she realized that the leader of White Foxes was waving at the outdoor podium on the television screen, she asked him to turn up the volume.

Lady Marie de Clure stood in front of many people, while the cameras were flashing wildly, she declared the words that sounded familiar in Cathy’s ears “—*what has been done by today, will be done by tonight.*”

“It’s from the poem of curse verses,” Cathy recalled.

He stared bafflingly at her. “What is that about?”

“She quoted Petunia’s poem. I’ve read her journal.”

“Are you referring to Petunia Breckenwood?” He wondered. “It’s such a long time, where’s that poor girl?”

She squinted bafflingly at him. "You remember Petunia?"

"Got any idea?" Josh talked back, and frowned at her. "The last time we met her was in the Syracuse carnival, when we went there with Jordan."

"So that's how far you remember your memory," Cathy muttered, still trying to understand the charade of the rectification effect.

An hour later, Aunt Sarah came back with Celine. Surely, Cathy still remembered of having a cousin from House of Aloise, there was also Gavin, but he wasn't here.

Once Josh left the room and let them to talk privately, Aunt Sarah informed her immediately, "Oh, Laura can't come here. She can't leave Mrs. Carmelia alone in Austria."

"She has to take care of my grandmother," Celine added, and then she stood closer to grasp her hand affectionately. "I was really worried about you."

"I'm sorry to make everyone worried about me," she murmured wearily. "And how is my dad?"

"I just told him. Your dad will pick you up tomorrow," Aunt Sarah said. "He wants you to stay with him in Brooklyn."

"I can't, I have to go to college," she argued. "And what's about Uncle Nathaniel? Did I make him mad this time?"

Aunt Sarah exchanged a glance with Celine. When the atmosphere filled with tension, Cathy knew that they were hiding something.

"I know this isn't the right time to tell you. You've just woke up, and we want you to regain your strength first," Celine said carefully.

“Tell me about what?” She blinked out, while confronting them with fear in her heart. “What happened to him?”

“He left an important letter for you—” Celine said with an obvious sadness engraved all over her face. “Once we’re all back to the mansion, I will tell.”

“Just tell me now. I won’t wait forever,” she argued.

It really bothered her when they exchanged a secretive glance again.

Aunt Sarah hesitated to tell, but subsequently, she had to answer her, “Uncle Nathaniel had passed away.”

The obituary got her heart pumped hardly, and she couldn’t care less with her own pain for a second.

“When?” She asked, trembled.

“A week ago,” her aunt said “—when you were still in coma.”

Celine caressed her palm hand, and said, “You didn’t make him mad, Cathy. He was worried about your condition, just like all of us,” and she stared down sadly, “but when the time came, as if he could predict his own death, he wanted me to always stay by his side.”

Cathy was recalling all of her memory lapse, trying to figure out the puzzle. It was harder every time. She didn’t know how Black Roses would really work, whether her uncle’s death might be related with the effect or not. Nevertheless, she was determined to find the missing pieces once she returned to the manor house.



The next day, on Wednesday morning, Aunt Sarah was preparing for her check-out. Cathy was being told by her aunt to wait in the lobby, but waiting was such a great boredom for her. And so on, she decided to walk out alone to have a fresh air. It had been a long time she hadn't seen the sunrise directly. It was beautiful, and being outside was refreshing.

Cathy was just going to have a quick tour around the place, but then, she saw a flower shop that was located next to the hospital building. It made her remembered about Uncle Nathaniel. She felt like to buy a package of beautiful flowers for honoring his death.

The wind chime rang at the doorsill as she went inside the shop. There were flowers everywhere inside the pots. Soon, Cathy was welcomed by the owner, the pretty lady who had a long red hair, oval-shaped face, fair white skin, wearing eyeglasses, and dressed in a long brown coat. It seemed like she was at the same age as her cousin, Celine.

"Welcome, customer," she had a delicate voice, sounded fragile. "What flower are you looking for?"

Cathy got baffled for a second since she couldn't name the exact flower, but then, she just tried to be direct. "Can I have the flower for the dead one, please?"

"Oh," she looked surprised, "there are some selections, from white lily, rose, and—"

"What's this?" Cathy pointed out her finger at the incurve gold flowers beside her. "It's beautiful, and sad."

“Good choice, it’s called Chrysanthemum. Each color has a different meaning,” she informed, and walked closer to her, “but people usually give that flower to the living one.”

Cathy gawked, she felt really stupid to ever think of anything.

The owner giggled to see her surprised expression, “Oh, please, but you have a good intuition. The gold one has the meaning of honoring the deceased, besides it’s also a symbol of sorrow.”

“I’d like to have them, please,” Cathy said, and smiled shyly.

The owner started to pack up the chosen flowers for her, and then Cathy followed her to the checkout counter.

“My name’s Nadja, by the way,” she said to Cathy while thrusting her business card. “You’re always welcome to return here.”

“Probably this is my last week in Vancouver, but I’m hoping to see this place again.” Cathy muttered sadly.

Nadja gawked for a second. She seemed to get surprised easily. “Oh, it’s sad, remembering that I also have someone who died recently. Do you mind if I ask who has just passed away?”

“Well, I wasn’t close to him, but I really miss him now,” Cathy closed her lips, and stared down, feeling the sadness. “He was my uncle.”

“What a coincidence. Someone that I’ve referred before was also my uncle,” Nadja said wearily, and patting her shoulder. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

Cathy took her package of flowers, but then Nadja shouted again, “Those flowers also represent a joyful beginning of winter, feeling the happiness.”

“Yeah, but the winter is almost up now,” she said emotionlessly.

Cathy was about to walk out after she paid for the bouquet of gold Chrysanthemum, but then she turned back, “Hey, Nadja—”

Nadja still smiled so warmly at her, staring wonderingly.

“My name’s Cathy. It’s really nice to meet you.”

“I wish we can meet again, Cathy.”

Thereafter, she had to go when her aunt kept on calling her phone.

22

LAST WISHES

CATHY WAS ALL alone again in the manor while waiting for the others to arrive. It had been a day, and she already got bored. She was also waiting for the mysterious letter that was written by her uncle. But there was no news, until the next day, she got surprised by the first person who arrived in front of the entrance door.

She stood gawking for a second, and then staring at the bouquet of white lilies in that person's arms. "Nadja, what are you doing here?"

"Oh, I don't know that you stay in here—" Nadja also gawked at her, feeling surprised, "anyway, my cousin called me yesterday to come here, she said that there will be a family meeting."

"You have a cousin in here?" She baffled.

"Wait, it can't be—" Nadja stared wonderingly at her, "you're the girl that she has mentioned before," and then she chuckled, feeling sparked by the strange coincidence. "Celine told me that she will announce something important today—it must be about you."

"Yeah, she said to me too about waiting for the news," Cathy said.

As they continued talking in the family room after she let her in, Nadja started gazing around the room after Mayhem the housekeeper left them with two cups of chamomile tea.

Nadja returned to sit beside her on the sofa, and said, "It is nice to feel home, where there's someone to talk to—" she paused to drink the hot tea before speaking in her British accent again, "my mother is out-of-town for a while, so I've been living alone in Vancouver."

"Some family members came here last November, but you were not here," Cathy recalled.

"I got to deliver packages of flowers to my customers. I think I'm a true florist at the time," she seemed like an easy going person from the way she talked so friendly.

"So, yesterday you were talking about Uncle Nathaniel's death, right?" Cathy changed the topic.

She held her own smile, staring sadly now. "Yes, I didn't know we had the same Uncle, Cathy," and she slowly put down the cup on the table again. "What a small world."

"Did you attend his funeral?" Cathy wondered. "I wasn't there, because I was in coma."

"Oh, God, that was terrible, what happened to you?" Nadja looked really surprised, but she already felt that way since they met at the doorsill. "Well, I did come to his funeral. It was only for the inner circle."

Cathy nodded. "Yeah, I didn't know I would asleep in coma. It was just a misfortune."

"Celine didn't tell me anything, except to come today," she looked worried now. "What's actually going on here?"

Soon after, Aunt Sarah arrived with Celine, and they were all greeted each other in the room. Celine told them that there would not be many relatives that agreed to attend this family meeting. The others seemed really busied, but they would be glad to receive further information by phone.

On the other side, Cathy wondered if there were really the others in the family apart from them, since Grand aunt Carmelia once told her that there were not many that left.

But then, she heard Celine was whispering to both of them, leaving her like an outcast. They seemed to be expecting someone that no one in the family would like to encounter. Cathy didn't dare to ask further when their faces started turning pale. There was fear in them.

However, Cathy couldn't just do nothing. It was so unlike her. She felt the need to confirm about something as well, and so she asked, "What was the letter about?"

"Hey, don't be too surprised once you found out, promise?" Celine spoke, looking worried.

"I believe he will always surprise me," she said instantly.

"Please, Cathy, I need you to stay calm once some relatives arrive here," Celine talked while enduring her restless feeling. "Not everyone will like what they are about to hear, so I need you to play your part."

"Play my part for what?" She chuckled in disbelief, thinking that Celine was acting like they were in a drama club. "Can I just read the letter, please?"

Celine sighed, and then she took a brown envelope from her purse, and she made Cathy to swear before

opening the letter. Once Cathy agreed to stay calm, her niece finally gave it to her.

As she opened it, the letter was written in a piece of sepia paper, very old school. He had a cursive handwriting style that reminded her of the handwriting on the papers inside Roses Bones' wooden box, although this one was easier to be read. Her heart started beating faster as she read his letter;

Dear Catherine,

I'm writing to you, because I am running out of time. I was trying to reach you a few days ago, but you seemed to go somewhere. Celine and I are worried about you.

I wish we have more time to catch up, and I'm going to reminisce on some old stories that probably will bore you. But it is no play time now. Someone has encouraged me, and inspired me to write this letter to you. I have no idea what I should do later, but I know my time.

I want you to take my place in the Royal Council. You are going to be the leader for House of Aloise.

Once you seal the letter with a drop of your blood, you'll pronounce yourself as the savior of our family. Celine has been preparing the legal documents for your sake. Everything's going to be alright.

I know it's hard to understand. But you're the only one that I can count on. I can only believe in you. There will be some members in the family who oppose to this, but they will have no power over my testamentary. It is bounded by law.

You know you can save everyone.

You are the destined child.

I wish you a good life, Catherine.

*Yours sincerely,
Sir Nathaniel von Aloise.*

“Is this his wish letter?” Cathy baffled while staring at her.

“Personally for you, yes,” Celine answered confidently, “but the legal testamentary papers are with me.”

“He said that someone encouraged him to write the letter, who was that?” Cathy asked with a trembled voice. She almost lost control over her overwhelming emotion. This whole thing sounded more like bad news. She couldn’t be assured if she would be alright or not.

Before Celine said a word, she stole a glance at Nadja and Aunt Sarah, who busied talking to each other about this family reunion. But then, she returned to face her warily.

“I wasn’t sure, but he once said that there are these people he called as *the Watchers* in the backdoor of Royal Council,” Celine said, and quoted the words with her fingers “—and he called a few of them as the caretakers, who visited him once in a while to give him the enlightenment about what he should do.”

“Were they more like guiding him, or brainwashing him?” Cathy baffled.

Celine sighed as she grasped her shoulders again, and said, “They are not like that. These caretakers are the one we can trust. They rarely appear on the surface. They live under a code name.”

“In other words, they are spies,” Cathy said and crossed her arms. It took her a second to take a deep breath. “Celine, I will never be ready for this part in my life. This is too much to take.”

“I know—”

“I am like nobody in this family, and yet, he expected me to be the leader of the Aloise?” Cathy got

so mad with this sudden circumstance. It was like a destiny slapping her face. “How could you expect me to be calm in this situation?”

Before Celine could calm her, the bell rang loudly in the manor. Everyone hurriedly set up their appearance before the visitors walked into the room.

Celine grasped her arm tightly and said, “Don’t say a word, until I explain everything to them.”

Subsequently, they saw Mayhem the housekeeper escorted a visitor into the room, and that was Laura alone. There was no one behind them. It seemed like Celine and Aunt Sarah had expected someone else besides her.

Everyone could predict what kind of situation they would have if Laura was presence in the room. She was that sarcastic person, very idealistic in her own opinion. She was already stood in the middle of the room, looking cold and unfriendly.

“So, tell me, why am I in here again when the landlord is already dead?” Laura asked, smirking to all of them.

“My apologies for this sudden turn of event—” Celine talked on everyone’s behalf, “it’s just about the time to announce Sir Nathaniel’s testamentary trust.”

Her face got lightened as soon as she heard that. “Oh, good, I’ve been expecting that part.”

Laura went to put her long black coat on the table, but then she turned at her again with a baffling look. “But why do you need to keep it secretive?”

“I can’t tell you that,” Celine said.

“You could tell me earlier, so why should I wait?” Laura asked, clenching her jaw, and crossing her arms altogether. “I believe that his statement on the papers

should be crystal clear. We all know it's about announcing his replacement," she smirked for a second, and said, "in other words, by selecting the most credible candidates to be the leader of our family."

At the moment everyone went silent nervously, Laura realized something was in the air, and so she kept on chasing the answer for herself, "Oh, my... he already chose someone. Who is it?"

"As I am his legal trustee, please believe me to do this properly," Celine said. "I'll tell you as soon as the others arrive."

Laura chuckled, and said, "So diplomatic, now that you're acting like a lawyer with your family."

Nevertheless, everyone should wait for the right time, but two hours had passed for nothing. The air filled with tension again when Laura kept on forcing Celine to announce it ahead of time, and finally, the bell rang at the same time they argued.

Everyone was wondering what it took Mayhem so long to escort the next visitor. Thereafter, Aunt Sarah wanted to check it out by herself and asked everyone to stay in the room.

After a few minutes of awkwardness between them, some people finally came here. Mayhem was there, bringing a couple of vintage suitcases into another corridor, while Aunt Sarah escorted two beautiful people into the lounge room.

Nadja was the first one who looked shocked with their arrival, followed by Celine and Laura as they rose up nervously from the sofa. Meanwhile, Cathy couldn't even move herself when her whole body went paralyzed as soon as she saw them coming.

They were two women dressed in all black. They looked very charismatic and charming, but there was also something mysterious and frightening underneath their beauty.

One of them looked way older than anyone in this manor, probably a woman in her fifties or could be more, and she looked even colder than Laura. Even with the wrinkle all over her pale white skin, her profile still looked strong as an old person, and her brown eyes possessed the kind of all-knowing look. Some of gray hair appeared within her pinned up black hair. She was slender and tall, about one-hundred-seventy-five centimeters, and could be a bit taller with her five centimeters black heels that she wore.

The other was way taller, probably about one-hundred-eighty centimeters, and also added with her seven centimeters black heels, making her the tallest person in the room. She had a classic look of Latina woman, tan skin, oval-shaped face with hard jawline, and black bob hairstyle. But something about her smile always looked naturally mischievous, and her almond-shaped brown eyes looked as if she also had that all-knowing look.

When Aunt Sarah was about to help bringing their purses, the older woman said instantly, "Please, don't bother yourself, we'll be quick in here."

And at the time, Cathy thought to herself that the woman was so cold and frightening.

Celine stepped ahead, standing closer against them as she spoke to the older one, "Thank you for coming, Lady Tatiana Rosemary. We've been expecting your presence in here."

“I’ll concern myself in here—” Lady Tatiana said while her eyes kept on staring at Cathy, “I see there’s a new child.”

Cathy noticed there was something familiar, and it took her for a second to realize the woman behind Lady Tatiana was a bar singer she once met in Vancouver, and she still remembered her name was Suzan de Cartier. According to Josh’s confession, that woman was a pretty popular singer, but oddly that not many had seen her photograph or at least knew what she looked like. However, she was confused by the presence of that woman in here when this was supposed to be the meeting between House of Aloise only.

“Are you Haile’s daughter?” The sudden question distracted her reverie, and everyone already got jittered when Lady Tatiana asked so calmly. “Are you going to be our new leader?”

Cathy rose up hurriedly from the sofa, and said, “As I was being told, Ma’am.”

“Oh, should I address you as *Your Royal Highness*,” she said and bowed to her, slightly mocking.

Cathy felt awkward and embarrassed by her sarcastic treatment.

But then she asked firmly again, “Is it official yet?” while staring back and forth at everyone in the room. “Have anyone heard the official amendment?”

Cathy glanced confusedly to Celine and Nadja.

“She’s talking about the inauguration,” Aunt Sarah explained it for her instead.

Nadja spoke subsequently, “It’s not necessary, as it—”

She cut her off sarcastically, “As it stated in the letter, or as what?”

“Mother, please don’t be like that!” Nadja grimaced.

Cathy was the only one who looked surprised to hear that. She never thought Lady Tatiana was Nadja’s mother, since they looked pretty much different in everything.

“The testamentary letter that was written by Sir Nathaniel is final,” Celine shouted firmly. “As his trustee, I am responsible for it.”

“Oh,” she curved her red lips, “However, for whatever reason, such testamentary is prohibited if the inauguration has not been done yet,” and she turned to stare at Cathy while talking, “because your status as the family member will be questionable in the Royal Council. You can be dumped easily just because such a little event is missing from the list.”

Everyone gawked as soon as the Lady had finished her speech. They were all started to contemplate hardly since Lady Tatiana had an obvious reason, but also it was hard to guess whether she was actually also agreed or oppose to this decision.

Cathy couldn’t feel her intuition working in this circumstance, to know on whose side those two women chose. But sometimes she saw Lady Tatiana slightly smirked in a sarcastic way. Her figured seemed so cold and untouchable.

During this conflict, Aunt Laura added the heat in the air, making her own argument, fighting everyone with her own opinion that she thought more ideal to solve the problem.

“Can a little child be our representative in the Royal Council?” Aunt Laura argued. “It’s not right to make her as our leader. Think about it.”

“Are you saying that you’re the more suitable candidate to replace him?” Lady Tatiana confronted. “If we really have to vote, I can tell it will not be you either, dear.”

“She is just a child!” She exclaimed in anger. “How could everyone just agree to whatever it is in the testamentary trust?”

“It is sealed legally by Sir Nathaniel. If you want to go forth with this, you have to break the law,” Celine shouted, trying to endure her tantrum.

Suzan acted just like the watcher behind this tantrum. She did nothing but watching, which making Cathy bewildered of what role she had in here.

However, Cathy couldn’t argue back, but her heart wanted to scream out. She didn’t want to take part to be the head of this family, which probably like throwing herself into a cage full of mad lions. It could be scary. But she couldn’t endure to hear everyone kept fighting each other, she got to say something too.

“Please, stop this nonsense!” Cathy exclaimed to them. “I am willing to retreat myself. I believe there’s a better candidate to take his place.”

“See—” Aunt Laura smirked, feeling the small victory for a moment.

“You can’t say that, Cathy. He believed in you,” Celine squinted at her nervously “—and the letter is final.”

“It will not be, if she refuses the agreement legally with her blood,” Aunt Laura snapped.

“If there’s no good solution to this, why don’t we just trust Lady Tatiana to take part,” Aunt Sarah said hopelessly.

“I can’t, and I won’t,” Lady Tatiana said firmly. “I’ve been asked a long time ago by Sir Nathaniel himself to take over his position, but as you see, I’ve got my own burden as the third ministry of Royal Council.”

It was surprising for Cathy to know that Lady Tatiana was really someone very important among the royals, even though it could be said by seeing her look in overall, that charisma was really something.

“I was wondering myself, why all of the people, he chose Cathy?” Aunt Sarah also doubted her own niece, but it was no surprise for Cathy herself, and so she convinced the Lady again, “There’s no one with great authority and influence as you are.”

“Silent!” Laura exclaimed again. “I suggest that we bring this case to the Royal Council. Cannot anyone see the right thing in here?”

A few seconds afterward, Lady Tatiana approached her closely to speak up, “And do what?”

Surely, Aunt Laura seemed to fear her the most. There was something about the Lady that couldn’t be denied. It was her power to take down people with just a few words. It was like the invisible sword she carried everywhere, making many people nervous to be around her.

Soon after, Celine didn’t want to waste time, and so she tried to consult the testamentary trust with Lady Tatiana. Until then, they finally came up with the new solution to create another companion letter for the testamentary.

During the process when Lady Tatiana was writing the letter, everyone seemed anxious, and Cathy kept begging her niece not to involve her in the matter. They argued a lot, but Celine tried to convince her that

everything would be alright. Celine believed this was the only way to solve the problem, and at least, the future inauguration could work smoothly.

As soon as Lady Tatiana signed the agreement letter, everyone in the room followed to settle upon the decision. Since everyone had lost for hope, so they would be agreed with whatever that was written in the letter.

“I hereby inform Catherine Haile Charlotte as the future leader of House of Aloise, will prepare herself in the probation before the inauguration day, and to participate in the initiation program that is provided by Royal Council as the mandatory requirement to enter the membership in the Committee Room,” she paused to take a deep breath, and glanced keenly at Cathy as she continued reading the letter “—and will be guided by the potential mentors during three months of probation time to study the leadership and any related subjects to Royal Council. With this, I seal the agreement with respect and honor.”

When it was her turn, she felt her voice couldn't come out. Her hands quivered while holding up the paper. Everyone stared bewilderingly and impatiently at her. Even though she would be trembling a lot, she had to read the last sentences to finish the agreement.

“I, Catherine Haile Charlotte, hereby declare myself agree to participate in the series of events conducted by the potential mentors in Royal Council. With this, I seal the agreement with respect and honor.”

Cathy wanted to believe her cousin that she could just bail out from the part after a few years afterward, but after listening to the agreement letter, the future days wouldn't be easy to undergo. She was still

trembling, and everyone in the room also felt the same way.

In the midst of everyone chattered noisily in the room, Cathy tried to reach out at her cousin again. “Hey, Celine, what the letter means by the initiation program?”

“Don’t worry,” she patted her arms and said. “It’s the basic thing for any royal who wants to join the secret society. You just have to follow the procedure.”

“I get it,” Cathy sighed, feeling terrified. “And what kind of probation that will I have?”

“Here’s the thing, the Lady told me that you have to stay in this manor during three months of probation, because you will need to go back and forth from here to the classroom in Royal Council, where the initiation program is held.”

“Great, I almost forgot that the Royal Council is in Vancouver,” Cathy muttered. “So, Lady Tatiana wants me to stay here until April, right?”

Celine stared down for a second, slightly looked worried.

“What’s wrong?” Cathy bewildered.

“No, I’m not sure—” she was thinking, “if you’re going to be the official leader, I don’t think you can go back to stay in New York, Cathy.”

“What are you talking about?” Cathy frowned, baffled. “I have to go to college, I am in my fourth semester now, and I still want a normal life.”

Celine shook her head and stared in disbelief at her. “You’ve signed yourself for this, Cathy. He wanted you too.”

“I can’t just bail out from college.”

“There’s a lot that’s going on in the Royal Council, and without Uncle Nathaniel’s last wishes, House of Aloise might have a collateral damage.”

“You know I didn’t want to,” Cathy bulged out at her, feeling mad. “I didn’t have a choice.”

“Well, well, ladies—” another woman came behind them, her voice sounded a bit heavy and strong, “I see there’s a collateral damage between you two.”

“Madame Suzan,” Celine bowed at her respectfully.

Cathy got surprised since she didn’t think this charismatic woman would stand so close, and now she knew her name was really Suzan.

“May I speak with our future leader?” She asked politely, staring sweetly at Cathy.

Celine nodded and left them awkwardly.

“Life is hard, and yet surprising, isn’t it?” Suzan asked and smiled mysteriously. “People are seeking job hardly after they’ve graduated, but you, it’s already in front of you. It’s not like you’re winning a lucky lottery.”

“Pardon me, but I don’t think you understand my situation,” Cathy said firmly. “Everything happens so suddenly, and I haven’t finished my college.”

“Excuse me—” Celine approached them again while carrying some papers in her arms. “I’ve asked Lady Tatiana about it, and she said that it’s better for you to take accelerated classes in college, it will make you graduate early.”

Cathy sighed. “I want a normal life. Don’t you get it?”

“It’s the only better option for you,” Celine said pathetically. “Alright, I got to work on some papers. I’ll call you later, Cathy,” and she bowed to Suzan again, “Madame, thank you for your presence today.”

After she walked out from the room, Suzan spoke again, "I thought I was wrong when I saw you at the bar, but it is really you; *the destined child.*"

Cathy wasn't being heedful at her last words since she still gawked and surprised to see her very tall figure from up close.

"I don't know that you're the Aloise descendant."

"I am more like a distant relative to the Aloise, not that too close with the family though," she informed. "However, Catherine, I'd love to work along with you in the future," something about Suzan was hard to read, especially when she smiled in a mysterious way. "Until then, see you soon."

When Lady Tatiana came, Suzan gave them a privacy to talk.

"Celine will contact you shortly about the details. For now, do not be brooded over future. Just live your life like before," she informed. "It will not be easy, but if you really need a little piece of advice, don't be shy to ask."

And by now, Cathy realized something about Lady Tatiana; the thing that made her scary, it was because she never raised her voice.

23

GRIEVOUS DAYS

ELEANOR

A GREAT CONFLICTION had been haunting her mind. The street view behind the car window looked shallow for her taste. The chauffeur didn't even dare to say a word while driving her to Manhattan.

Eleanor locked her blue eyes at the small brown envelope on her lap, while wondering why the letter was returned to her address. Strangely, it was stamped and signed clearly by her aunt's signature, Hadley Heisler.

She had sent the letter to her aunt's residence in California since a few weeks ago. This was really mattered to her that she needed to know what really happened.



On Friday, the third January 2014, Eleanor was still wondering alone.

A day after the letter was returned, it was like the universe gave her a sign when her other aunt, Sofia Heisler told her by phone that Hadley got into coma.

Hadley just got transferred from a hospital in California to New York, and that was all that her aunt said.

Eleanor hurriedly drove her own black Mercedes to the hospital. She couldn't wait any longer to know what happened with her aunt.

She thought that there must be something wicked happened behind her aunt's sudden sickness. The horror thought crippled in the back of her mind. She didn't want to buy it, if everything Hadley had done was only to save her. And from all of the thoughts, she could only think about the probability if this had something to do with her grandma.

As soon as Eleanor arrived in the hospital, she ran throughout the corridor. She endured her suffocated lungs along the way as she got panicked while trying to find the right room. Until she saw a group of people gathered at the end of the corridor, they were White Foxes.

At the time she got there, she heard the sorrowful news from the doctor who just came out from the patient room. She found them grieving, and she saw Aunt Sofia tried hiding her tearful face, and the last thing was about the absence of her grandma, which was hard to believe at the time like this.

Before the doctor and nursed left them, Eleanor got in their way. She glared at the doctor, and started confronting him, "I need to know what's wrong with my aunt."

"We lost her. We did everything we could—"

"It's not true!" She yelled at him.

As she punched his chest, he shouted out, "Miss Heisler, please calm down—"

The other nurses also ran to them, trying to hold Eleanor so hard when she kept on fighting everyone. She screamed and pushed them out so madly. Some of her family also tried to calm her down.

When she was dragged forcibly into the lounge room by a male nurse, Aunt Sofia followed along. Until they were alone, her aunt glanced at her in a great sadness.

Although Aunt Sofia hesitated to start a conversation, but she had to, “I don’t know what to say anymore, Eleanor. You need to accept what happens.”

“And you do?” Eleanor talked back in frustration. “Do you accept that your own sister is murdered?”

“She isn’t murdered!” Aunt Sofia got exploded in anger. “Neither of us knows what really happened back then. The police still—”

“Stop it, I know your stupid game,” Eleanor shouted. “You knew she did it, and you let her. Who’s to blame now?”

“No one,” she sighed.

“It’s all Marie’s fault,” Eleanor spoke confidently as she addressed her grandma so rudely. “I want to talk to her soon.”

Aunt Sofia grabbed her tiny wrist immediately, and then staring at her messy look from head to toe. “Trust me—you don’t want to talk to her while you’re looking like this.”



Lady Marie had been waiting for the latest news while sitting in her bossy chair. She was looking out at the window when Eleanor burst into her private office

room. She sensed the rough atmosphere when her grandchild stood while panting heavily in front of her desk.

“Hello, Eleanor.”

“You killed her. You killed your own daughter.”

Lady Marie chuckled and stayed calm. “You have no proof, my dear.”

Eleanor stared astonishingly when in this kind of situation her grandma didn’t show any grief feeling.

Her grandma walked to her, standing against her trembling body. They stood oppositely with the same height, but truthfully, Eleanor would look taller if she didn’t wear flat shoes at the time.

“There’s no mother would kill her own daughter. You’re insane,” Eleanor said bravely.

Instantly, Lady Marie laughed at her face.

This encounter neither gave her confirmation nor information. It didn’t change anything even she already confronted her grandma. She got exhausted with this lying game. And in the end, her effort was still useless.



An hour had passed since Eleanor left her grandma’s private office, and so she decided to take a walk outside to the city. Eleanor was still wearing her pink tank top, black sweater, black short pants, black stocking, and her platinum hair was also half pinned up messily.

She came across with random people in the street. She tried not to wail over her sadness, she kept on walking and walking ahead, ignoring the pain on her feet. It was also a distraction to get over her sorrow feeling.

It was around four in the afternoon when she got exhausted, and so she stopped by at the Central Park. She was lying down on the green grasses under the striking sun. It was a gloomy day, and she was bothered by her own insecurity. Just for a moment, she fell in a deep sleep.

She probably spent fifteen minutes asleep unguarded. Once she opened her eyes, she found someone already sat next to her. She recognized her familiar face, the white-haired angel. They were stumbling upon together while feeling the same agony.

“Why are you here?”

The angel stayed silent as she landed her head on her warm shoulder.

When in the gloomy days, this angel would sometimes come by to her side, and sometimes would sing her a childhood lullaby. Eleanor remembered that some people called her *Sylvia Elle*, although it was just a nickname. She also recalled how they met for the first time, and all of the happy days in the past. Her presence could comfort her for a second.

But then Eleanor understood the meaning of her presence. It was a pure compassion. For there were sadness days, there were also love.



In the end of January, on Friday morning, Eleanor wanted to do something different in the mansion. She still tried to get over her grief toward her aunt's death. She still tried so hard to distract her overwhelming emotion.

She was in the middle of organizing the books in the basement library, and something encouraged her to stop wailing when she came across with a bunch of witchy books. Eleanor didn't know how she got the sparkling feeling when her hands opening the pages randomly, which led her to see weird symbols inside one of the books. The writing about witchcraft and dark arts had reminded her about the original root of her royal family.

That was being said before, although the witch lineage was half breed from her grandma, they were all still part of the Heisler family. It was hard to believe since the myth and legend told that royal and witch were supposed to be natural enemies, and yet, her family was part of the best of both world.

Surely, the thing about witchy stuff had distracted her mind for a while. It was like the universe kept on shifting to tell her about something, or so she thought.

The dark side of her family reminded her with the relationship between Lady Marie and Detective Chantel Herron. She was being told by her grandma that Detective Chantel was their distant relative as they shared the same bloodline from their Romanian ancestor. Nevertheless, Eleanor heard about Detective Chantel was on vacation in Austria this year, and it was like that detective always returned to that place every time she needed to hide from the world.



As the night had come, she walked down to one of the underground bars in Manhattan. It was the kind of luxury place for the rich people only. She visited that

bar once in a while, and she always made sure none of her grandma's black suit men would be following her along.

She didn't come to the bar to go wailing, or even to pity herself. She wanted a distraction. She even did her best make up to go here; hot red lipstick, pinky blush on, and smoky eyes. But her preference of clothes looked too formal if she only wanted to drink for a night; cream-brown long coat, black scarf hanged loosely on her neck, and seven centimeters black pump heels.

As soon as she got her glass of red wine, a man dressed in suit sat next to her on the bar stool. She didn't try to glance back at him, although knowing that he kept looking at her pretty face.

Until then, she got enough of his attention. "Stop looking, your eyes could go rotten."

He was a bit offended when she snarled without even looking at his eyes.

"It's a waste if you put a grumpy face all night long."

She finally stared back to confront him, "What do you want?"

For a second, she felt familiar with his face and figure. It was like she had met him once or a few times perhaps.

"Do I know you?" Eleanor squinted at him.

"I came here, representing Detective Chantel Herron. You can call me Richard," he informed. "She said that you will need a company in here."

Eleanor frowned and confused with what he said, of how could the detective knew she would be visiting this bar.

“Go away. I can be with myself.”

“As you see, we’d like to see people with value. I’ve also heard about people who get tired with their life, and go seeking refuge somewhere.”

She was annoyed that he kept barging into her comfort zone.

“I know, my grandma said she’s on vacation. So what are you doing in here, exactly?” But for a second, she baffled at him. “And how did she know I am here now?”

“That’s the mystery of life,” he smiled inscrutably. “I’m also being told that you’re going to need my little help, if you allow me to.”

“Just spit it out,” Eleanor said sarcastically, “I don’t like wasting my time with stranger.”

“She said it’s about the right time to meet you,” he said boringly, “You’re in the midst of digging the dark side, and I know about your ancestor, the Romanian witches.”

She glanced sharply at him, feeling astonished. “What do you know?”

Suddenly, she just remembered the day when he once visited her grandma’s private office with Detective Chantel. They were together in doing the Invisible Project. He was the strange one, she knew. It could be that he knew something dark about her grandma.

“You said you know something about the witches,” Eleanor reminded him.

He stared calmly against her demand. His finger was swirling his own chin, while thinking how he would tell her in a simplest way. “It depends, which part that you want to start with.”

She stared back at him silently.

He studied her expression, looking at her deepest fear that she tried to hide. “What if I told you that you don’t need to learn about all the matters, but in a single flip, you can know everything you want to know,” he was literally flicking his fingers while talking “—like magic.”

“Don’t joke with me.”

“I may like to laugh, but—” he murmured while taking out a piece of paper from behind his gray pinstripe suit. “Does this paper look like a joke to you?”

He let her to see the paper, but he didn’t let her to touch it.

“What does it mean?” Eleanor frowned, baffled.

“A *well written contract*, young lady,” he said.

“Why should I care?” She confronted him. “I don’t want to play your stupid game. I just want to know the real knowledge about the witches, and how they work their magic.”

He creepily laughed at her demand. “You really *just* want to know?”

She frowned at him, while still deciding if she should finish this conversation till the end.

“I’ve heard some human children say the word of *just*, so easily,” and then he finally stopped laughing, and faced her firmly, “but as for you, my young lady, please accept this contract as a good deal between us.”

She baffled. “A deal?”

“Oh, if you come to a demon like me, there’s nothing free,” he muttered while observing her indecisive expression, clenching her jaw so hard. “By signing this contract with us, you shall get what you expect.”

As he said the word of *demon*, the strange sensation suddenly slapped her on the face, as if something was really scary about this man. However, she didn't know if he really meant himself as a demon creature, or it was just a mere metaphor to represent his devilish character.

The stillness was filling the air.

Richard was being patience enough to wait for her answer. He swirled his own chin again, while gazing deeply into her blue eyes. She was still staring down at the paper, feeling tensed and conflicted. But then a sharp needle hovered into his mind, it bothered him a lot.

"That little angel of yours seems to be in your head lately," he could feel the vibe was all over Eleanor's hectic mind. "You're worried, but she's more than worried."

It was even more strange when he said something like that out of the blue. But at the time he said that, the image of Sylvia Elle came across into her mind.

She didn't even flinch while staring back at him. Subsequently, he took the paper and pushed it down to her chest. She was disgusted by his forcedness, and so she pushed his hands backward more harshly. She took away the paper quickly, and said, "I'll consider it."

He rose up from the bar stool, making her bewildered. She could feel his warm breath when he walked passed her.

"She'll be gone forever if you can settle your mind," he muttered, "gone like the wind."

Eleanor doubted his knowledge about Elle, but he seemed to warn her again. Nevertheless, she always felt the strange eeriness every time he did his scary

chuckling, but his words still whispered in her ears like a lullaby at night.

Soon after, she took the paper to her sling bag and walked out from the bar. Before she walked up through the alley to get her car, there was someone standing in her way. She recognized that person's figure that appeared with a slick white hair and a slender body type.

None of this encounter seemed like a game of destiny, but she always felt like something or someone was watching every step she took, especially with the moment she had with that scary man earlier. For the first time in her life, she had never been so conflicted in making a decision.

As she got back to reality, she still saw that person stood there from afar, gazing observantly at her. Suddenly, random voices whispered into her mind like the whirling winds. It was her hunch telling her to stay focused.

Sylvia Elle. The name echoed on her head so loudly.

She almost ceased to realize, that angel came to save her again.

EPILOGUE

THE THRONE

THREE MONTHS HAD passed since everyone in the family had heard about the agreement letter. They had prepared everything for the inauguration day. It was about the time to be ready.

The only thing she could feel was fear. She was never ready for this part in her life. She lived like a dead mannequin after all those days she had been studying about her family and the Royal Council. It was like a roller coaster feeling that she experienced all of the terrifying things. And yet, there were still a lot of things she didn't know about her family.

When she returned to New York City before doing the probation, Celine told her on the phone that there would be a change in the ownership of the manor, and it was one of the last wishes that Sir Nathaniel gave to her. It was so surreal for Cathy, but it really happened. Surely, after the other members in the family found out, they hated her for that. They said that she didn't deserve it.

The day she encountered the other members in the Aloise family, she noticed that some of them had been showing their disapproval expression against her existence. It was like she had never been wanted in the family, and she felt like an outcast. She knew it was hurting her to stay, and she didn't have any choice but to hold on. There were no easy days.

The inauguration day was held on Monday, the fifth of May 2014, in the manor's backyard. It was held privately by House of Aloise. She could see every last of the Aloise family stood together. She realized there were really not many of them that left.

Nevertheless, she was told in advance about the important part in the agreement letter, which it was not only in the change of the manor's ownership, but she was expected to change her family name as well. She couldn't imagine living under the name of Aloise instead of Charlotte, and she knew it would hurt her dad so badly too.

The change of name sounded impossible for her to do, however, it would still be held during the inauguration, and she would also receive her royal title. This was necessary in order to make her as the legal representative of the Aloise before she set foot on the Committee Room. Fortunately, the change of family name wasn't bounded by law. She wouldn't need to use it publicly, except at the time she came to meet the people in Royal Council.

Her dad, Manson Charlotte was still in a great shock after he received the news about her royal inauguration. He said that it was like he almost losing his daughter to the strangers. It was frustrating. He still couldn't believe it, and neither did she.

Meanwhile, her best friend, Josh Kingsley could not agree more with her decision to take part in the Royal Council. It was also still strange to him, since he didn't even realize he was recruited as the intelligence stuff by Madame Dupont about a few months ago. He couldn't even remember his latest memories. It was all thanked to the side effect of Black Roses. Life also happened so fast to him.

It was all started from the journey that brought her to find Odin Legend, which she was expected to understand about the existence of God. She learned that if she wanted to find such a great treasure, all she needed to do was to *believe in*.

Roses Bones had shown her a tale about the mystical black roses, and it really worked out. The people in Royal Council, and everyone who involved with them had lost their recent memories, especially for those who had evil intention and plan. But such a thing only lasted for a moment. Some people almost regained their consciousness, and some people almost noticed the strangeness that happened to them.

Cathy didn't even realize that she sought Roses Bones with her unconscious mind. It was like a precautionary measure, as if her intuition knew what to do before something really happened. Black Roses had done her a favor by protecting the good people from malevolent souls. It was a pretty clear idea for her, and now she understood what it really meant.

She learned during the last three months that her family was in danger. There were people who would want to kill the rest of the Aloise family. They would do it for power, welfare, and for those secrets that her royal family had been keeping. Those mysterious

secrets could make them to be at the top of the world. Some said the secrets were only a long forgotten history, but the truth, nobody ever knew. Some said that the secrets were just appeared in the shape of knowledge, the one that was forbidden, and buried for so long.

Cathy couldn't make sense of it when those kind of evil people were also existed inside House of Aloise. It seemed terrible. Sylvia Elle was right; *you cannot save those who don't want to be saved.*

And in that sunny day, after Cathy dressed up beautifully in her black uniform, she stood at the small podium, facing her family tremblingly. They were all looked anxious rather than happy. Nobody ever agreed to this decision, and most of them also didn't believe in her.

However, Cathy felt calmer when Lady Tatiana and Madame Suzan were already stood next to her. They might seem less care toward her, but they were the one who always guided her every step of the way. She knew it was hard to believe until this second.

Lady Tatiana was currently the highest authority in House of Aloise, who could inaugurate an initiate. It seemed that everyone only relied on her for help. Lady Tatiana always felt like she was too old for playing the hero part, and so it was time for her to have another helper besides Suzan alone. And it turned out to be Cathy, the girl who didn't know that she would involve herself in such a dangerous world.

As the final words was being said by Lady Tatiana, everyone clapped respectfully.

But then, everyone got stopped when Laura suddenly rose from her chair. Even after the

inauguration went successfully, Laura still had something to argue about.

Everyone in the backyard, and also her mother, Carmelia tried to calm her down. Just by looking at the flame in her brown eyes, everyone could tell that Laura was boiled in a great anger. With that in mind, Cathy realized how terrifying the days she would have in the future.

And it was worse when Laura exclaimed earnestly in front of everyone, “I strongly disagree with this decision. I see that no one is brave enough to object the authority, so I said it all first.”

“You’re a disrespectful child,” Lady Tatiana shouted out. “Don’t you think it’s too late to oppose over the agreement by now?”

“This is just the last reminder for all of us,” Laura said and smirked. “I hope we’ll not be making the wrong move in the future—*ever again.*”

Even though most of the members in the family disapproved of Cathy’s presence, there was only one that really strongly hated her as a person, and that was Laura Margaret.

Since the first day they met each other, Cathy couldn’t know what made Laura really hated her. There would be no obvious reason but now, and that must be about taking the throne in the family. It was cliché between the royals, but it was also awful.

As everyone got back to their seats, Cathy was invited by Lady Tatiana to finish her last speech as the new official leader of the Aloise family.

Unlike what she encountered back in high school, she knew everyone here really was listening to her speech. She was tremendously nervous since all the

eyes were watching her observantly. She felt like she stood there while carrying a heavy burden on her shoulders. What it took was only a few words to finish her closing speech, and so on, everyone clapped along.

The ending felt like the taste of storm, fire, and ice, all commingled together, where she felt all the bitterness first. She was scared of the unknown future, and for all the things she couldn't understand. After all, she had to fight it off, and she had to survive because there were also people who believed in her. She didn't want to be such a disappointment for everyone.

For a moment, she exhaled deeply as gazing back at all of them. She was counting her nervousness backward, and then at the corner of the porch wall, she saw two pairs of angelic green eyes stared back at her— Sylvia Elle and Marissa, there was a victory in their smile.

It felt comforting for her to see them again. She kept on reminding herself that they had always been there for her, no matter what happened. In the midst of chaos, they were like the fallen stars, shining bright between the darkness.

But for all she knew, there would be no easy days.

For if the stars shone so bright from above, the darkness unveiled.

STORY

GAVIN

HE LIKED TO call himself as a loner.

Gavin was the kind of man who kept everything to himself. He was the complicated one. Sometimes in life, he wanted to be a practical man. He tended to leave out anything that wasn't his own business, and most people who came across with him, they saw him as a cold person.

Gavin was born on the ninth of April 1987 in Austria, two years younger than his sister. All that he knew about his parents were only a tragedy. His mother died from a car accident, while his dad disappeared afterward. No one ever knew what really happened to his dad. Some believed he left to abandon his children, and some believed he was long gone into ashes.

After the incident, Gavin and his sister lived their childhood life in the Morizza Chapel. They were being taken care of by their grandmother, Carmelia Margaret, and their aunt, Laura Margaret.

At the age of sixteen-year-old, Gavin moved to New York City to live alone. He left his hometown in Austria to get a distraction from his family, since he always thought that the Aloise was just too pathetic to live their sad life endlessly.

It wasn't because he didn't like them, but he wanted to get away from their frustration. He knew that his family was always in the state of mourning for the dead. Thereafter, his sister ended up to live up the

same way as he did. She was Celine, who finally made herself as the professional lawyer in town. After the childhood moment they shared together in Austria, they decided to live separately as they grew older.

Gavin physically appeared as a tall and muscular man. He had pale white skin, black hair, and gray eyes. He had a white scratch mark on his bottom lips, which he got from a terrible fight in one of those scary alleyways in New York City.

Life wasn't always bad for him. There was also one of those moments when his inner calling told him to get something good, and he finally got a black-red dragon tattoo on his right upper arm. Since that day he lived with the tattoo, it appeared like a lucky charm for him.

Also, it was like he couldn't live without wearing his black jacket, black jeans, and black-white cap backwards regularly. His all-time favorite color was forever black.

Later in life, he found a new thing to do for himself. He needed money, but also for more distraction. It was all started when he used to visit a small pub in Manhattan. Many people came and gone as they pleased. It was like the life he was living in. It was empty and hollow. But until then, when he often heard some people talked about a good game of boxing, they said it was the only thing around here that men were interested to bet a lot of money for. After all, it was all just a theory between those men.

When a nerdy waiter kept bugging on his ears about it too, and so Gavin wanted to know what he would get from a boxing life. But the waiter bluffed it all like it was just a mere hope and dream. There was no certainty in being a boxer player, apparently.

The conversation was buried inside his head for a year. He never looked back, until there was a sudden strange urge that told him to go on about it.

At the time, he was nineteen-year-old. Gavin decided to be settled, and he came to that same nerdy waiter again. That kid in the pub said that he knew the man who could bring him to the boxing industry. It didn't take him so long to dial the phone number, and then the man agreed to meet him.

Gavin stood on the pavement alone. He was asked to wait for somebody to approach him, but no one seemed to appear from behind the gym's stainless door after a while.

An hour ago, that nerdy waiter from the next pub had told him about the good game to play in a boxing gym across to Manhattan's desolate road. He would need a manager to play in the ring, and yet, he didn't have anyone on his shoulder.

It was already an hour and a half since he stopped by in front of the gym. He felt tired to stand there while gawking alone, especially when the night dusts stumbled into his eyes, hurting him poignantly.

This was his decision. Although it felt reckless and stubborn, he needed a new adventure. He would do it for fun, and also for money.

Until then, there was an old man dressed in his finest brown suit, just walking out from the gym door. When their eyes met each other, the old man approached him warily.

"Hey son, are you Gavin—the one who called me earlier?" The old man asked, and stared observantly at his gray eyes. "Let's see, I think I saw you in the pub next door, maybe a few times."

Gavin stared back at him, studying his profile; he was perhaps African people, he had black skin, thick lips, bald hair, potbellied body type, and he wasn't very tall.

"Are you Willis Murray?" He snapped out his first question.

The old man nodded. "You're dealing with the right man, son."

"It's nice to meet you, sir. I'm the one who called you. My name's Gavin von Aloise," he said while thrusting his hands enthusiastically to him for handshake, "I've heard in the pub, you're looking for a new player."

"I know you'd call me. Someone has recommended you."

"Oh, really?" Gavin raised his eyebrow wonderingly. "It's strange since I don't really know anybody there."

"Perhaps, you don't know this person yet. He's our company's benefactor," Willis informed, "he likes to take a bet on our game."

"Oh, so he's like the boss," Gavin assumed.

For a second, Willis was studying his eyes. "I like your eyes. They show strength and power, it's like killing your first opponent just by staring off."

He chuckled, and thought it sounded absurd. "What do you mean?"

"You want to follow me, son?" He sometimes talked like a rapper, and his voice sounded heavy. "I know you want to be our player. I can see your potential through your eyes."

After Willis said it all, he just sort of walked away from his sight. He walked slowly, as if he waited for Gavin to call him out.

Indeed, Gavin got bewildered with the ending of their conversation, but then he just ended up shouting at him, "I've heard about you from the pub's waiter!"

Willis turned to glance at him again, and smiled understandingly.

"Does it sound like a recommendation to you?" Gavin said.

"That makes the two of us," Willis said to him before coming back to the gym.



Until then, it was his third time to play in the boxing ring. His boxing management company was still studying over his fighting skill. If he failed them, there would be no next time.

His sweat soaked all over his body. His emotion got heightened when he heard the cheering sound outside the room.

On the other side, Welma Murray, the girl with a gothic appearance was helping him to get a bandage on his right hand, but then she got startled when he muttered at her solemnly.

"Don't worry about me. It's not like I care about you."

"It's not you I'm worried about, but my uncle, Willis."

He chuckled sarcastically as he rose from the wooden bench. At the same time, Willis just walked into the changing room to see him.

“I want you to know that I’m not working for both of you, but you’re working for me. I work hard for this, for my own money,” Gavin said.

They astonished to hear him out, and it sounded like an acute statement.

Welma was the one who wanted to admonish his rudeness, but her uncle stopped her in the way.

“I know you’re going in the ring with your own sweat, but we’re here, because we don’t want you to get killed, and let me reminds you again; I am your manager, son,” Willis said carefully.

“I got it,” he said firmly, clenching his hard jawline.

After they watched him walked away to the stainless door, Willis turned to see his niece, who already looked pale.

“Don’t you remember what I’ve told you?” He asked peevishly. “You can’t talk to him. He is not someone you can particularly talk with.”

Her eyes went glossed. “But I’m just—”

“His father is our company’s best ally. He is just like my son from now and then, so I know him very well.”

“Gavin doesn’t even know about his father!” Welma snarled. “For how long will you keep it from him?”

Willis sighed at her. There was nothing he could say forward when it was the truth, and it was the last time she ever heard her uncle got worried over her painful insecurity.



Lee Watson

The next game was about to start. The audience was cheering loudly while watching the new players stood oppositely at the corner of the boxing ring.

The scoreboard was reset to zero again, along with the name of the players were showed in the flat panel display; *Lee Watson versus Gavin Aloise*.

The audience clapped all over again while watching them warming up in the boxing ring, accompanied by their each manager.

Lee Watson was the type that would never back down. He had a bald head, and he had a pretty tall body height, he also looked muscular and strong. He always carried his confidence everywhere he went. But only one thing that might distract all of those great features; his manager was the one who always got on his nerve.

“You see that dragon,” his manager secretly pointed out his chin at their opponent in the ring. “It’s not just a tattoo. I’ve seen it a few times. They’ll beat you to dead,” he glanced again at Lee, and said “—I think you’re ready to die.”

Lee got turned on from being desperate, and now he was in rage. He chuckled at his manager. “Do you think I’m going to give up just because you said that?”

“Listen, Lee—” his manager stood closer to him and said, “I’ve told you before, the people with that mark tend to have something with them. Some said it’s the one that keeping them alive; *a dragon totem*.”

“And you believe so?” Lee smirked mockingly. “Don’t be ridiculous. There’s no such a thing.”

At the last second, his manager was only patting his shoulder, giving him a warning.

Lee stared keenly at his first opponent, but then, once that pair of gray eyes stared back at him, he felt the sudden eerie sensation. Perhaps, all the crappy talk he had with his manager was right all along.



Gavin could smile all day long as he wished. The victory fell on him. The reporters came abruptly to take his picture. He would never get used to the bright flashes from their cameras. It was the first local competition he won since he joined the boxing management. His manager was very proud of him.

At the same time, he saw the real rage engraved on the face of his opponent—Lee Watson was defeated in the game. Strangely, Gavin got a gut of feeling that he would meet that bald looking guy again in the future. It was just a matter of time.



Every year, Gavin visited the Morizza Chapel in Austria. It was like a tradition that he had to respect the elders, especially the one who took care of him during his childhood time. This time, at the age of twenty-five, he was there to visit his family and also for his personal business.

Several months had passed since his manager kept on asking him to be settled about his professional boxer

name. Surely, seven years had passed since he joined the boxing industry. He was only participating in a local game after all this time, but next year, the company of his boxing management would want a real upgrade for him, to make him participate in some of international competitions. It bothered him to involve his family, but the company of his boxing management wouldn't be able to get him more jobs before he filled a contract form.

But then, before he met anyone else in the chapel, there was a young girl. He saw her walking alone in the backyard. He would have remembered if there was anyone in the family that looked like her, but she was a new visitor in the chapel. They encountered each other in the end of December, it was winter.

He saw how fragile that girl looked like, and perhaps looking too naïve for the girl at her age. When he saw her more closely, there was a feeling of wonderstruck, or perhaps some kind of magnetism that came to him. Gavin wasn't sure about his own feeling, since he never felt that way toward someone before.

But as soon as he heard her delicate voice, it was so breakable that he fell instantly for her. There was a special feeling, like he wanted to protect her from danger.

When the caretaker suddenly came to pick her up, he finally knew her name, which was Catherine or Cathy as she preferred it. As he remembered, there was no one in the house that was born under the name of Catherine. He couldn't guess it further when the caretaker suddenly acted so protective of her.

At the time, he just realized that Cathy also looked defensive when they first met. It could be that he was

the danger itself. It wasn't the first time he ever saw someone get really scared to face him. Honestly, most of people did. He couldn't know what made them so afraid of his presence, but Willis said that he got something within his gray eyes, that they looked killing, and unfriendly.

On the other side, he felt strange to see another caretaker in the chapel, besides Seth alone. The only thing he knew about the new caretaker that her name was Marissa, and she had a flaming red hair that could be noticed easily. Nevertheless, he felt like he had seen her sometimes, when he visited the chapel in the last few years. But it was the first time he really noticed her presence, at the same time he met Cathy.

After they got separated, he returned to his main purpose again. He wanted to get permission for using his family name, but everyone seemed busied in here, and so he could only meet his aunt at the time; Laura Margaret.

He knew this encounter wouldn't turn pretty, just like he always predicted. His aunt always started a good war before even it began.

"For how many times should I tell you, Gavin?" She asked, sounded peeved. "It is important that you know, the existence of the Aloise family would be at risk if people found out about your identity—well, our identity."

"I'm sorry but—"

"You're not allowed to use Aloise for your boxing business," she shouted firmly, "This will be the last time we talk about it. I hope you can respect and obey the rule."

But then, she didn't stop mumbling at him "—don't remind me again; it was your fault that your parents died."

It was her sarcastic tone that got on his nerve. He clenched his jaw and fist hardly.

At the time she kept on mumbling about unnecessary stuff, he started staring keenly at her. It took him another minute before he cut her off, "You know what... I'm sensitive about my parents. I'm sorry that they died because of me."

His rage was boiled from the inside. He couldn't let go of his anger that he needed to punch the wall next to him. As the wall got cracked instantly, Laura got startled. His cold anger made her trembling.

And so on, he left her speechless alone in the room.



Day after day, he lived his life for boxing now. He had to earn more money to stay in New York. It wasn't easy, but he always motivated himself to work harder. It was worse when Willis also pushed him about participating in some of international competitions. However, Gavin already told him that he wasn't there to be a celebrity, he just wanted the money.

He already got a complex life because of his royal family that no one in his boxing management company even knew. That was why he wouldn't want to add his own frustration.

It was also the time when he started to notice there was something off with the way Willis treated him

so nicely. He kept wondering alone, but he couldn't bring it over because there was no evidence.

A year later, he turned twenty-six. There was a time when a strange girl suddenly came to the boxing gym, confronting him to fight her off in the ring. He frowned at her stubbornness over her request for a challenge.

It was odd because she was a very young girl, and all of her body features looked seemingly small and fragile. She looked like a kid, perhaps most people would've thought she was about fifteen-year-old, but she said persistently that she was a girl in her early twenties.

Also, he couldn't really determine whether she was born Eurasian or Asian, since she looked kind of Japanese with that short black bob-hairstyle with bangs, and her light skin was so pale.

He remembered that her name was *Lurka*. It was a strange name—*Lurka DeLowery*.

They fought each other in a boxing ring. He knew he shouldn't underestimate a little girl who came with a great effort. She had a skill to show off. She was really good in the first round, but that was it, only in the beginning, and after the next round, he was able to defeat her easily. She was nothing to him, but a little scrappy girl that laying down on the ground.

Until then, *Lurka* fell down on the ground, feeling the pain all over her bruises. She was wasted. He bent down closer to whisper in her ear, "This isn't the right game for you."

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After the boxing battle had ended in the afternoon, she stood leaning on the wall, outside the boxing gym on the pavement. Gavin followed her quickly. He was still curious toward her strange presence, and he thought it was rare for a girl to participate in a boxing game.

“Is this your first time in the ring?” He muttered wonderingly. “Who asked you to fight me off?”

Lurka didn’t seem to surprise by his direct question, she chuckled instead.

“You have similar tattoo like mine,” he recalled the image of a black dragon tattoo on her backbone, when she was just wearing a tank top and tight pants during their fight.

They stared at each other for a second.

At the time, he observed her fashion sense that looked too girly for the kind of person who would go into a boxing arena. She wore a yellow floral cardigan that similar to kimono, which also looked pretty thin to cover her black tank top. She also wore black hat and black wedge shoes.

But one thing that made him cringed again, and that was when he caught a view of a dragon pendant on her necklace, he seized it away from her.

She startled, and shouted instantly at him, “Hey, it’s mine!”

“Is this important for you?” He asked curiously.

She rolled her eyes, and muttered, “It’s an heirloom, so of course it’s important,” she saw that he looked interested with it, “give it back to me, now.”

“Tell me firstly, who are you?” He challenged.

Lurka smirked at him, and said, “I’ll tell you after I get it back,” thereafter, she just took it forcibly from his grasp.

He looked at her observantly, trying to understand her motivation by coming to him. As he followed her to walk along on the pavement, she started telling him a story about herself.

“For the last few years, I felt happy to be able to stay in Vancouver,” she smiled lightly “—but then, the circumstance has changed, there’s a new regulation. But it’s not fair when they apply it only to me.”

“Who are they, and what is it about?” Gavin asked curiously.

“My family—House of DeLowery,” Lurka said and glanced slightly at him, “but it’s actually our leader, he gave me a limited choice; either to send me back to our hometown, or I can stay in Canada by obeying his order,” she chuckled for a second, and then muttered, “and so I chose the latter.”

“Are you here because your leader told you so?”

“Yeah, it’s kind of complicated. He wants me to find you, actually.”

At the second she said that, Gavin squinted in disbelief at her. “Do I know him—your leader?”

“Technically, you do,” she said clearly, “but since I know so little, it’s probably more appropriate if you meet him in person.”

He tried to recall anyone in the past that might involve him with anyone under the name of DeLowery, it could be some of mafia gangsters, or from many of terrible fight he used to encounter in New York’s alleyways, but there was none that he could remember.

“That’s why I’m here. He wants me to send you to him,” Lurka said hopelessly “—or else, I’ll be sent straight to Yosemite, my hometown.”

“You know I don’t follow what you meant by the existence of the leader in your family. It does sound like secret society stuff—” he shrugged for a second, feeling confused, “rather than a family.”

“Yeah right, we appear more like a group of organization, but really, we’re all related by blood,” she admitted.

For a while, he realized that Lurka shared something similar to him—the pain about seeing their hometown. And so he wondered, “What’s the deal with your hometown?”

“I just don’t want to go back. I want to stay in DeLowery’s flat in Vancouver. They offer much better stuff than the one in Yosemite.”

“Such a pity,” he murmured empathically, even though he didn’t really know anything about her yet.

And then, she suddenly stopped him, and talked firmly, “It’s not an option for me to bring you to him. If you refuse, I’ll force you, even it will take both of us into the boxing ring again.”

“You’re mad,” he chuckled, although knowing she was dead serious.

“Of course not,” her tone sounded lackluster.

“Lurka, don’t get so worked up. I’ll come to your leader anyway.”

“Just that’s it?” She raised her eyebrow, amazed. “Aren’t you supposed to interrogate me first about my family?”

“I know, stranger is dangerous,” he murmured, “but I got the feeling that we’re going to be a good friend from there,” and then, he gazed curiously at her “—but sure, I wonder what’s with the regulation you said before. What are they, apart from being a family?”

“You’re pretty conscientious,” Lurka amazed, but she seemed hesitant to tell him further. There seemed to be some things that should remain quiet, but she just needed to tell a little clue. “Promise me that you won’t run away, and don’t be so surprised.”

“Just spit it out,” he challenged.

“Alright—” Lurka smiled widely, as if she was being set free from her burden for a second. “Our family is a group of *professional assassins*. You’ll know more if you’re there.”

“What is it again—oh, right, the assassins?” Gavin almost laughed out loud to hear it all.

She stared at him in disbelief. “Stop laughing!”

“Don’t tell me that your leader wants to offer me a job?”

“I told you, I know so little,” she said firmly. “He got his eyes on you for a very long time. All I know is that he wants you.”

“But for what?” He wondered.

“Just come with me, I beg of you,” Lurka said, trying to convince him again.

From there, he agreed for what the girl had asked. The reason why he was interested, because it sounded challenging for him. It was risky to walk along with a stranger, but he would venture more, because he needed more adventure.

Nonetheless, Gavin wasn’t as excited as he looked like at the time, because he was actually hiding his emotion from Lurka. He couldn’t believe that the girl he met was an assassin. It was shocking for him to realize what the meaning of being *an assassin* was. It was something about the killing, the hunting, or perhaps, the world with more scary stuff.

Perhaps, life was about to offer him with something more. What waited him on the other side was a mystery. And it was one thing about Gavin; he would never find out if he never tried.

The future was the unknown.



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The Alternate Stories of The Arcanum Revelation Series:

Book 1, Royal Arcanum

Book 2, White Foxes

Book 3, Roses Bones