2473 Comfortаbly Silent  
  
Sunny spent the rest of the day being berated by the captain, filling out paperwork, and receiving reports from the medical examiner — not that there was anything useful to report.  
  
Just like the previous victims, the latest one had various wounds that indicated that the poor young man had been in a desperate fight before being killed. The cause of death this time was severe spinal trauma — his neck had been broken. It was unclear whether the eyes had been removed before or after his death, but it had been done with surgical precision.  
  
'Such a hassle.'  
  
After dealing with these routine tasks, Sunny returned home late in the evening.  
  
…This time, he remembered to power down his archaic PTV before walking away from it. As it turned out, these strange machines had no standby mode and had to be turned off completely every time.  
  
'How primitive. My Rhino would never…'  
  
Entering the apartment, he balanced the bottle on the door handle and sighed.  
  
Turning on the TV — a primitive kind of entertainment center — to hear what was being said on the news, Sunny opened the closet and removed all the clothes from the hangers. Behind thеm, a seemingly chaotic mess of photos and printed documents was revealed, pinned to a large map of Mirage City and connected by red strings.  
  
The Devil Detective had never stopped working the Nihilist case, even if he had been suspended. The photos belonged to the victims of the serial killer, as well as to various persons of interest. The printed documents contained details about their identities, the crime scenes, and the autopsies. The red strings tied it all together… not the Strings of Fate tiеd all of existence together.  
  
It was just that Sunny could not see the pattern that connected all these seemingly disjointed events in the red weave.  
  
He could not see it yet…  
  
The news came and went, containing no useful information at all. There was a lot of fearmongering concerning the Nihilist, as well as a few puff pieces about the Valor Group and its latest initiatives. Tomorrow, though, the news was going to be full of images of Effie, since she was supposed to give a briefing to the press.  
  
Sunny turned back to the map of Mirage City, studying the clues.  
  
Some time later, though, he threw a furtive glance at the TV.  
  
The news report was over, and some kind of romantic fantasy drama was on the screen. Frowning derisively, Sunny looked back at the photos of the serial killer's victims.  
  
Some time later, though, he found himself sitting in front of the TV, watching the drama intently.  
  
"Wow. That… cultivation? Seems extremely bizarre, but does resemble the natural Awakening a bit. What are demonic and orthodox sects, though? Those orthodox guys seem like complete scumbags. Why did they even torture that girl? Just because she saved the Demon King's son? Bah! What a silly show…"  
  
He wanted to return to the clues, but somehow found himself still glued to the screen an hour later.  
  
"What are you doing, foolish girl! That handsome orthodox immortal is clearly harboring an inner demon after you kidnapped him and stared at him the whole night! Knowing that insufferable bore, he will go into seclusion for nine months and expel the inner demon, which will then take human form and come back to haunt you!"  
  
It was like she had never suffered from a mind wraith before!  
  
Outraged, Sunny wanted to change the channel… and yet, an hour later, he was still there.  
  
"No, no, no… don't you see that the Sword Grave is a trap?! You'll never get the Sword of the Lightning Celestial. Instead, you are going to be ambushed by the Ten Orthodox Immortal Sects! What kind of a Demoness are you, fool? And that damn Demon King's son, why the hell is he not advising you better?"  
  
And an hour later:  
  
"Ah, I see. So the Demon King's son has reached the Lower-Middle Pinnacle of the True Peak of the Highest Pinnacle Realm of the Nascent Soul Domain while you were dead. And it only took him five years! Gods… even if you possessed the body of the Celestial Venerable's daughter, catching up to that fool won't be easy! Even worse, you still think that he betrayed you in the Sword Grave… tsk, just kiss already!"  
  
And a bit later…  
  
"No, Inner Demon, no! How can you just go and sacrifice yourself?! That obnoxious immortal spent nine whole months in seclusion expelling you, so you have to livе! For mom and dad!"  
  
...The morning came before he knew it.  
  
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Just like every day, Saint woke up before dawn broke. Her apartment was spacious and sparsely decorated, filled with a comfortable silence. The rain rustled quietly beyond the panoramic windows, and a thin line of pale lilac was spreading across the cloudy sky far in the distance, slowly dispelling the deep darkness shrouding the city.  
  
She did not like to hurry, and so, her life was strictly timed and regimented. Every day was approached with forethought and calm precision, making the most out of each minute. Some people tended to compare Saint to an art piece… she rarely paid attention to their flattery, but she did like to think of her life as a piece of art.  
  
As the artist, she had to craft each day with care to create a flawless masterpiece.  
  
The morning was a time for exercise, personal hygiene, self-care, and nutrition — so, today, like every day, she started her day with an intense, hour-long exercise routine. Her body was the main tool with which she crafted her life; it was also the foundation of a healthy mind, so she made an effort to maintain it in perfect condition.  
  
Exactly an hour later, Saint stopped her exercise and took a ten-minute shower while applying a cleanser lotion and an exfoliating scrub lotion, followed by gentle shampoo and conditioner. Ten more minutes were spent on skincare, followed by ten minutes spent on hair care. Finally, she prepared herself a simple omelet with greens and brewed herself a cup of black coffee.  
  
Saint ate breakfast in silence while reading the news from a well-organized personal feed, marking several scientific articles to be studied later.  
  
Finally, she put on an elegant ensemble prepared for this day at the start of the week and left home.  
  
The traffic was sparse this early in the morning, and she did not listen to music, podcasts, or audiobooks while driving to work. Her car was filled with silence, with only the muted sounds of the waking city seeping inside.  
  
Entering her neat and orderly office after approximately thirty minutes spent in transit, Saint spent ninety more minutes studying patient files and preparing herself for the day. At exactly nine in the morning, the door of her office opened, and her assistant walked in.  
  
"Dr. Saint, your nine o'clock appointment is here."  
  
She nodded.  
  
"Please let them in."  
  
This was the first sound she made since waking up four hours earlier.  
  
Saint took meticulous notes while listening to the patient. After a fifteen-minute break, she saw another client, then left for the rounds in the heavily guarded inpatient wing of her workplace.  
  
Eventually, it was time for lunch.  
  
Usually, Saint would have eaten a nutritious meal she had prepared herself, but today, she had a different commitment — even if skipping a meal was suboptimal, her pride as a professional took precedence.  
  
Leaving the hospital, she drove to a nearby building where she was renting a small private office. Her patient was already waiting for her there, leaning on his dirty, ramshackle car while looking at the vista of the city with a distant expression.  
  
The man himself was quite similar to his car. His clothes were cheap and wrinkled, his hair was disheveled, his complexion was unhealthily pale, while his eyes were bloodshot and red, with deep, dark circles beneath them.  
  
Saint would have been quietly revolted on a usual day, but strangely enough, he seemed quite magnetic despite all that. There was a dark, roguish charm to his messy appearance and cold gaze. Saint also felt a pang of an odd emotion when she saw him.  
  
It was not quite attraction, but more of… longing? Belonging? She could not tell, and was more than a little surprised at her odd reaction.  
  
"Detective."  
  
He looked at her, then smiled faintly.  
  
"Hey, doc. Thank you for making time for me."  
  
'Do I… like this man?'  
  
Saint did not mean it in a romantic or physical sense, but simply as a person.  
  
Well, it was no surprise. If there was one thing she valued in people, it was competence — an exceedingly rare trait, by her standards. Saint was a prideful person who excelled in everything she did, and she judged others by the same criteria.  
  
Detective Sunless was as brilliant as he was broken, and he was crafting his life with the same diligence she was… even if the masterpiece he was trying to create seemed more ghastly than beautiful — full of macabre themes and self-destructive tendencies, but impossibly to look away from.  
  
Saint hesitated for a moment.  
  
Something about him seemed different today…  
  
"Please. Come in."