

Chapter 1

Standing here in front of the statue, I couldn't help but feel a sense of unease wash over me. The smoke from a lit incense did nothing but fuel my frustration further as I stared at the gold-plated statue of a buddha smiling at me. Its expression seemed to be mocking me, a perfect symmetrical sneer crafted by some master artist. A human making something divine, laughable.

Blood from a hole in my abdomen had trickled down my legs staining the wooden floorboards. The sirens were still blaring and occasional shouts could be heard from the officers surrounding the lonesome temple. Red and blue lights invaded through the windows, banishing the shadows in this dimly lit room.

"You are surrounded! Come out with your hands up!".

A familiar voice echoed through the night by the way of a megaphone. It was the detective that has been chasing me for the past weeks. I had a nagging feeling of being watched and got my suspicions confirmed when he showed up at the temple I stayed at. Grinning as he asked me a bunch of questions. I couldn't help but stare at his peculiar scar over his left eye.

In this bustling concrete jungle of a city, stood the temple on top of a hill surrounded by nature. Having nowhere else to go, I eventually found myself walking to this place. A monk sweeping the grounds had greeted me, introducing himself and the history of the temple. I couldn't do naught but stand there and listen to the whole history lesson from the more and more increasingly cheerful monk. I guess even monks get lonely from time to time.

Having learnt the whole in and outs of the temple, I got invited to have a meal as a reward for listening so attentively, something my rumbling stomach accepted for me, eliciting a chuckle from the monk. Stuffing my face with food for the first time in a while, my tired state hit me like a truck. The monk watching me, offered a room I could use as it had gotten late. The room was for monks-in-training but none had shed their modern life in recent years.

The sounds of footsteps coming closer and closer were like a noose tightening around my neck, depriving me of oxygen. No wait, I was just lightheaded from all the bloodloss.

Glancing at my blood-stained knife in my hand, I debated which way to die was less painful. Stabbing myself in the neck or getting shot by those officers outside.

The monks at the temple were a little surprised that a new face had popped up overnight, thinking that I must have been a new trainee. With all the information I got from chatting with them, I could have really been a real monk-in-training but something fundamental stopped me from becoming one. The five precepts.

If I'm going to die anyway, prison was not an option, maybe I could spare one of them from committing the act of taking a life. But wouldn't stabbing myself also be an act of killing? I should've asked when I had the chance.

Having lost strength in my legs, I opted to lay there, in the middle of the room. This was my first time in this room. It was as if something invisible had blocked my consciousness from entering the main room. Maybe the sight of the towering statue acted as some talisman, forbidding a murderer like me from entering.

"Death is not the end and life is not the start, all of us will be affected by the wheel of reincarnation", the monk had said. Maybe I will be a cat or something in my next life. That would be fun, I thought to myself as my consciousness flickered in and out. In the end, I couldn't chose to kill myself.

"Detective, is this really her? The killer making waves in the headlines lately?"

The officer couldn't help but ask, seeing the still body of the girl. He had a daughter about her age and all she did was chat with her friends and stay up late.

"Don't let her appearance fool you, we have four confirmed murders and three unconfirmed"

"Wow, how did a girl like her turn into this? She must have been possessed or something", rubbing his arms, he glanced around.

"Just look where she chose to live. It gives me the creeps I tell you"

"Enough chatting, wrap it up and give me a report later. The media and higher ups have been on my ass ever since that incident".

"He had a promotion lined up and all...", the officer couldn't help but lament, watching the back of the detective leaving and lighting up a cigarette.

"Good riddance", draping a sheet of cloth over the girl, the officer began to write his report.

"Priest this can't be, my daughter will wake up won't she?"

Having looked over this girl for the past few days, I came to a conclusion. There was no possibility of saving her.

"I'm sorry to say this, her heart has stopped. There is nothing more I can do"
The wailing woman holding onto her now dead daughter, the sight of a parent losing a child is never easy. But as a devout follower of the goddess I must bring her soul peace.

"I will now begin the prayer"

"No! Wait! What are you saying, she can't be dead yet! Oh, goddess, she hasn't even come of age." TK awkward expo

"The teachings of the goddess states that a soul will wander the earth if not given guidance, eventually turning malicious"

TK "you must calm yourself, crying like this will only make it harder for her soul"

"I don't care, she is not dead!", shrieked the mother, as she shielded her from me. Protecting her from me. Laying a child to rest is never easy.

"Oh my baby, please open your eyes. What am I supposed to do without you!"

It was a few days ago when the mother visited our church while carrying her child on her back. A high fever had put her body into exhaustion, putting her into a coma. A rare illness had rendered all healing magic useless and medicine had no effect. What a tragedy.

She must've only been in her mid-teens at the most. Her appearance laying there in bed was at least peaceful compared to the past few days, the sign of pain nowhere to be seen. Her blonde hair inherited from her mother, clinging to her damp forehead, and her blue eyes staring at her mother. It was as if she was a smaller version of her mother. Wait... Staring?

"Don't leave me too!"

"What..."

"Huh?", flinching from the sudden sound from her daughter, she couldn't stop but freeze.

How can this be? Her heart stopped, how is she able to open her eyes and speak?

“A miracle... A miracle has happened!”,

“Oh my baby, don’t scare me like that!”. A joyous scene, a drastic contrast to a few minutes earlier unfolded before me. Hugging her daughter that has come back from the dead, her tears flowed like a waterfall. My eyes were too, starting to tear up. Until the next words stopped them in their tracks.

“Who are you?”

The first thing I saw when I woke up was a crying woman. I didn’t know who she was but she held onto me nevertheless. The next was a man. He must have been a priest or something similar according to his clothes.

But the most shocking thing was my body. I was sure I died so how come I’m laying in bed with these strangers watching over me. My body still felt like I was dying but compared to actually dying, it was nothing.

Moving my hand revealed another shocking view TKedit. It was smaller. Smaller than the hand I had before. A sudden feeling of unease came over me. Whose body is this? Where am I? And “Who are you?”, even my voice wasn’t the same.

Holding a bowl of porridge its warmth seeped into my hands. The grayish color didn’t invite one to have an appetite, although the steam wafting up to my nostrils turned that thought around real fast. A subtle sweetness enveloped my tongue as I ate under the watchful eye of the woman from before. The priest had after examining me excused himself, saying he had something important to do, whereas the woman had prepared some food. Good as it was, this body couldn’t finish the whole bowl. Leaving a bit over half left.

“How is it?”, she said, smiling at me.

“It’s good”

“Im glad, I used to make it for you whenever you got sick”

Patting my head, I couldn’t help but stare at her. She was supposedly my mother. A pretty and blonde woman with brilliant blue eyes reminiscent of a cloudless blue sky. Her appearance made one wonder if she really was a mother, her age doesn’t show at all.

According to my new mother my name was Esther, 14 years old, and I had been a frail and sickly child since birth. It was especially bad this time putting me on the

edge of death, evident by a priest stopping by. When asked about why a priest would visit us, Victoria, my mother, said only priests could use healing magic, but that it had no effect on me.

Magic. I suppose it makes sense seeing as I inhabited a new body. This country was called TKcountryname which I've never heard of before. The answer I got from asking which year it was solidified my suspicions, year 563 of the empire. This wasn't earth as I knew it.

Three days have passed since I've taken over Esther's body. Everything feels... normal. I wake up, eat some food, talk to Victoria, fall back into sleep, and then wake up for another meal when she comes back from work. My body aches less for each day but my restlessness grows by the same amount. I've never felt this long before. My previous life didn't have time for that.

"Mom I have a question", it was still awkward to call someone that. It made me shy for no reason.

"What is it?", I had asked her dozens of questions these last few days. It was honestly amazing how she answered all of them. She must really believe that I was her daughter and had lost my memories. Sorry, but your daughter is probably dead.

"Do I have a dad?", where was he leaving his sick daughter and wife alone.

"Oh, didn't I tell you yet? Your father is out hunting monsters to earn gold", I could see in her eyes how she adored him.

"Monsters? Aren't they dangerous?"

"Your father is stronger than you think. Why do you think I've married him", sticking her nose in the air praising her husband, I couldn't help but let out a little chuckle.

"When is he coming back?"

"He should be heading back now, tomorrow should be the day."

"Do you think he will be glad to see me?"

"Why do you say that?", her hand patted me as she sat on the edge of the bed. It felt oddly comforting.

"I don't remember him at all", she made that same face whenever I said I couldn't remember something. Anxiousness, but quickly put on a smile as if to reassure me.

"It doesn't matter, we love you all the same, and we can always make new memories", she said, pulling me into a hug. My mother seemed to like hugs.

Chapter 2

My first thought was that TKmother had a good eye. Handsome, that was my first impression of this body's father. A clean-shaven face with raven-black hair, sharp eyes reminiscent of obsidian, and overall attractive features planted on his face. They really looked like the perfect couple standing there and play-dancing with each other.

"Heya kid, how you doing?", ruffling my hair with hands twice the size of my face was a smiling man.

"Pretty good", I could sense a hint of TKpity on that smile of his. But soon it was gone. They must have talked with each other earlier when he came home while I had my afternoon sleep.

"Being on bedrest must be pretty boring right? Luckily I got something perfect for this occasion", sandwiched between his hands were a couple of books.

"I heard you were interested in monsters? Here this is my gift to you". TKrewrite

"Whoah", trying my best to act like a kid, "thanks! This is so neat". Honestly, I didn't need to act, it was a pretty cool book. A monster lexicon with pictures and descriptions. Flipping through the first few pages, I understood why mom didn't worry about her husband being out there slaying monsters. A rabbit with antlers, a deer with four eyes and other assortment of animals with some added or subtracted features. Well, I guess you could call these weird beasts monsters.

"Wait, do you remember how to read?", I guess his mask couldn't stand it any longer. Anxious. They had made the same face.

"TKsomethingsomething"

The weird thing was that I could really read and understand the things written in the book. I've never seen this type of alphabet before but nonetheless, the contents streamed through my brain. Could this be another type of magic? Or just the innate abilities of the late Esther.

"Honey, how did you get enough money to buy these books? Aren't they expensive?", one practically see her calculate the budget in her mind. "We can't afford that"

"Well you know the guild I joined right? They gave each of us a book on monsters for free, saying it's to make sure no accidents happen or something. And the other ones I got while exploring some ruins". TKrewrite

"Is that so?"

"So that is, have you ever seen me lie to you dear?"

"Oh, hush. How am I supposed to see a lie", my mother could do naught but blush at her husband's words. TKrewrite, makes no sense to blush at the line above

Seeing the both of them being so happy together made me feel a bit conflicted. Was this how normal parents act?

They really should go get a room, but seeing as I am already using their bedroom, perhaps not. Unless they want to "use" my room, which only has a bed my size. Last night I managed to gather my strength and snoop around a bit. A two-story house more akin to a cottage with two bedrooms on the second floor, and a bathroom on the first floor, an unwelcome fact thanks to my wobbling legs.

My room didn't have much, a bunch of plants littered about the desk and the windowsill, and a closet where I suppose my clothes were. Victoria was currently using my bed and I was not to be a child who woke up their parents for no good reason. Careful not to make a sound, I arrived back into bed with sweat covering my back. Quickly falling asleep from the workout.

With our worries about money being put on hold for a while, peaceful days continued on and a week had passed.

My body had gotten much better with all the food and rest I've got, now being able to walk around for a bit. There were no mirrors in the house making the fact that I had a new body not really sink in. On the surface of a pond near the house, a face resembling Victoria was absentmindedly staring at me. Pretty.

"Esther!", mother was calling from the kitchen window, "Want to help mom with breakfast?"

"Coming!"

Squatting up too fast got me a bit lightheaded - a now familiar feeling.

It was yesterday that mom suggested I help her with cooking by cutting some vegetables. She probably suggested that seeing that all I did was lie in bed reading

the few books available. The most interesting being the monster book and a book on the Goddess.

"Here cut these carrots into cubes, want me to show you how it's done?". It seems she has gotten familiar with my amnesia as her face maintained a perfect cheerful expression.

"I think I got it"

It has been a while since I last held a knife.

Holding the knife in my hand I couldn't help but smile. The feel of my fingers wrapping the handle, the weight of the blade. It had been a while.

"Maybe the knife is too heavy?", concerned with me just standing there —

Personally, I would have liked it to be a bit longer, one centimeter more would be perfect. Snapping out of my reminiscence, I made quick work on the carrots, cutting them into suitable pieces.

"Wow, I didn't know you were this good at cutting, you must have gotten it from me", ecstatic, my mother couldn't help herself at giving me a quick squeeze.

"Mom, it's dangerous to do that while I'm holding a knife". I liked Victoria

"Sorry, sorry, you're just too cute!", releasing me from the hug, the warmth also got released.

"But really, are these stars? Where did you learn to do them like this?", holding a piece of a carrot in the shape of a star my mother asked. "Pretty cute"

I guess I overdid it a bit, but I had the perfect excuse in these situations.

"I think I got the idea from the books, I can't really remember".

Sorry for ruining the mood but I can't really say I got it from my previous life. Thank goodness she didn't ask about my knifework skills.

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"What's for breakfast today?", asked my father groggily, slumbering toward the dinner table.

“Fried potatoes and some salad I got from the garden, now take a seat, you better wash up afterwards, you really smell of alcohol”

“What smell, I didn’t even get a sip yesterday, come here!”, father launched a surprise attack on mother.

“Kyaa, let me go! You smell horrid!” It’s super effective.

“I must say, did your cooking get better these last few days? You didn’t put something weird in it did you?”. The dishes were wiped clean, not even a crumb remaining.

“What nonsense. Why should my cooking be better because of something weird. It’s all because of Esther. She has been helping me a lot in the kitchen lately.”

“Really? My child is now all grown up…”, fake-wiping his fake tears, he gave me a few pats.

“Hmm, what should I gift my all grown up daughter, anything you want?”

“I don’t really need anything”

“Really? She really did go and grow up. How about this?”. Rummaging through his pockets, he pulled out a silver coin.

“Isn’t that a bit much, honey? You could buy a day’s worth of food with that”

“This is nothing, you know the people I met yesterday? They had a really good idea to make a lot of money”

“Really? Are you sure?”

“Yeah, hearing them talk about it, It sounded guaranteed to make some money. You know my talents don’t you? In a few months’ time, we won’t ever have to worry about money again!”, father said gleefully.

“This sounds too good to be true”, my mother couldn’t help but be suspicious. The same for me. This sounds like a scam, but what do I know? Maybe scams weren’t that frequent in this world. Anyway, silver coin acquired. I wonder what I can buy with this.

Chapter 3

“Hey kid, you want to buy something?”

I was currently standing in front of a street vendor selling meat skewers. I haven’t had grilled meat in a while so following the smell I arrived at this place.

“Go ask your parents if you’ve got no money”

Three coppers for a skewer. That’s nearly half of my silver coin. I didn’t really like to use money on things like food, but maybe an exception could be made this time. Wiping my drool, I was about to open my coin pouch tied to my waist which my mom sewed for me.

“Do you want me to buy you one sweetie?” Mom had finally arrived with her considerably fatter pouch.

“Yeah, can I get one?”

The meat tasted amazing, a bit gamey maybe. I wonder what meat it is, maybe it was the deer like monster I read about.

“Is this from the four-eyed deer monster?”

“Oh you know about them monsters, kid? You should probably know monsters aren’t edible”

“I heard they were poisoned by the goddess to protect us”, mom added.

“Really?”, the meat had vanished. “Wouldn’t it be good to get more food?”

“Worry about yourself, kid. All bones and no muscle, here take another one, on the house”. The vendor eyed my mom suspiciously.

“You’re too kind, mister! Remember to say thanks Esther”

“Thanks, mister vendor. I’m thin because I’m always sick”, I had to protect mom’s honor.

“Whatever, scurry off now”, the vendor shooed us away grumpily.

“Thanks, Esther”. A smile suited her better.

With two empty skewers in hand, I accompanied my mom to buy stuff for our house. Arriving in front of a shop.

"Why don't you wait on the bench over there, this will probably take a while", where she pointed to was a bench being shaded by a big tree.

"Don't you need help?"

"I appreciate the thought, but aren't you tired?" I wonder how she knew. I thought I was hiding it pretty well. Nodding to her comment I went to the bench.

"Come find me if there is anything!" shouted my concerned mother.

Sitting on the bench and people watching was pretty interesting. There were some guards with leather armor and spears patrolling here and there. People were haggling to the vendors but the most striking were the different hair colors. Red, blue, green a bunch of colors littered the heads of the passerbys.

"What's a young lady like you doing here? Never seen you here before"

A young lady, wasn't that a title to be used for nobles or important people? Well I did wear a pretty fancy dress and hat. Anyway, who's this kid?

"I'm not a young lady, my name is Esther. And I've never seen you before either"

"Is that so? I'm Eric, I live in that house over there", he was pointing to the house next to the shop my mom was in. "I'm 14"

Is this how you are supposed to introduce yourself?

"I live outside town, I'm 13"

"Hah, looks like I'm older than you", he was practically showing off his teeth with the way he is smiling.

"Are you lost or something?"

"I'm waiting for my mom".

"I see", said the boy and took a seat beside me. He was a whole head higher than me.

"This is boring, wanna go and play?" It hadn't even been a full minute.

“Mom said not to go with strangers”

Well Victoria wasn’t the one who said this but the point still stands, I think.

“I’m not a stranger, I know your name and you know mine. Oh I know”, the boy was rummaging in his bag, eventually taking out something wrapped.

“Dad said to give a gift to make someone their friend. Here it’s dried fruit”

Dried fruit. Sugar. I read in the books that sugar was pretty rare and fruit were therefore expensive.

Putting one piece in my mouth it began to burn with how sweet it was. Sorry mom, but this is too good.

“There, we’re now friends”

“Is that how that works?”, I said, sneaking another piece into my mouth.

“Hey, don’t take all of them!”, what a shame, he took them away.

“Who’s this Esther? A new friend?”. Mom walked to us with a bag in her arms.

“Yeah, he gave me some dried fruit”.

“Did he now? Well thank you for that”. Victoria was really pretty when she smiled.

“O-oh it was no problem. My name is Eric. I live over there”. Whoah, his face nearly turned into the same color as his hair.

“Mom, can I go play with Eric for a bit?”

“Hmm, sure. Meet us by the fountain on the next bell, okay? I will go find your father in the meanwhile”

“You heard her, lets go Eric”

“Oh, sure”

I took the lead with Eric in tow while mom gave us a wave. Mom, you shouldn’t smile like that to other men besides dad.

“Hey where are you going, that’s the wrong way”

“Really? I don’t even know where I’m going”

“Weirdo” Eric gave me a funny look. “This way. There’s a bunch of us playing over there”.

Snaking around some alleys and streets, we arrived into a clearing, meeting a group of kids talking and running around.

“Hey guys! A brought another one to play with”

“Eric!” a girl came running up to us. “I told you to stop bringing over random kids!”, she said grumpily.

“I befriended her this time, isn’t that fine? Anyway she looked pretty bored so I brought her”. Rubbing his nose, it looked like he thought he did something heroic.

“Ugh, well what’s done is done. I’m Karrie by the way”.

“Karrie?”, I couldn’t help but be a bit taken aback with the name. Lifting my sunhat to finally take a look at her as it had been blocking my view,

As I lifted my sunhat to get a view on this girl, the sight shocked me to my core.

“What? What are you doing here?”, my thoughts exactly.

“You know her?”

“She’s my neighbor. I haven’t seen you lately”

Chestnut-brown hair cut into a bob. Double lidded eyelids, TKdetails. I remember those same eyes staring at me and gradually losing their shine as she laid there dying staring at me. It was my first kill. I could never forget seeing her laying in her casket, with her family and friends mourning. Did she get reincarnated too?

“Hello? Are you sick again?”, she was waving her hand in front of my face.

“Oh, sorry. Nice to meet you, I’m Esther. I live outside of town”.

“Yeah I already know that, why are you introducing yourself again?”. Tilting her head to the side. You could tell she was confused

“Did you know me? Sorry I lost my memories a few days ago. I don’t really remember anyone”

“Are you joking? How’s that possible”

“I don’t know, the priest didn’t either”

“You called a priest? Must have been serious then...”.

“Whoah, that’s so cool!” Smiling at me was Eric.

“Did you remember your parents?”

“Hey! What are you saying!”. Seeing her slap Eric on the back resurfaced some old memories. Should I test her a bit?

“When I woke up I just saw this pretty lady looking at me”

“Yeah, she’s really pretty!”. This brat.

“But I also remember that I used to live in apartment 3 on floor 5”.

“A-puht-ment 3, flour 5? What’s that?” Karrie asked. She seemed to really not understand what I meant, or she just had a really good poker face. Nevermind, I doubt that.

“It’s fine if you don’t know, but when are we gonna play?”

“Oh right, you said something so shocking I forgot. Any ideas?”.

“Well, there’s only three of us for now-”

“Wow, you gonna ditch the others?”

“They only do tiring stuff, I don’t want to get all sweaty in this weather. You know any games Esther?”

“I don’t remember”

“Wow... I bet you use that often”, Eric said incredulously. Karrie glanced at me and couldn’t help but agree.

It may sound ridiculous, but I really didn’t know any games. I have really never had a chance to play with others, so remembering them was just wasted energy I could use to survive instead. Well, there was one game I was subjected to against my will.

“How about truth or dare?”, I spat out.

“You serious?” They said in tandem.

“Sorry, that was a joke...”

Chapter 4

“Well I see you still make bad jokes...”