

Chapter 46: Portrait

Eugh! Eugh!

Klein squatted there, vomiting involuntarily. He was soon done with his puking since he did not eat breakfast.

At that moment, a tin-colored square flask that looked like a cigar box appeared in front of him.

The mouth which had lost its stopper emitted a mixture of smells akin to tobacco, disinfectant, and mint leaves. It cleared up Klein's nose and rejuvenated him.

The pungent smell continued to linger, but Klein no longer felt nauseous. He soon stopped vomiting.

He traced the tiny flask up and saw a pale hand that did not seem to belong to a member of the living. He saw the mouth of a black trench coat's sleeve and saw Corpse Collector Frye with his cold and dark bearing.

“Thank you.” Klein recovered completely and with his hands on his knees, he stood back up.

Frye nodded without any expression.

“It'll be fine once you are used to it.”

He put back the flask's stopper and put it into his pocket and turned around, walking to the highly decomposed corpse. Without gloves, he began examining the old woman. As for Dunn Smith and Leonard Mitchell, they paced slowly around the room, occasionally touching the table's surface or newspapers.

Old Neil pinched his nose and stood outside the door, grumbling in a muffled voice, "Seriously gross. I'm going to request for additional pay this month!"

Dunn turned his head over and touched the wall beside the chimney with his gloved right hand. While doing so, he asked Klein, "Does this place look familiar?"

Klein held his breath and constructed the silver pocket watch in his mind to calm down.

With him already in his Spirit Vision state, he immediately felt different. A scene that came from the deepest recesses of his memories flashed past his eyes.

Chimney, rocking chair, table, newspapers, the rusty nails on the door, the tin cans inlaid with silver...

The scenes were dark and dull, like a documentary from Earth. However, it was even more blurry and illusory.

The scene quickly stacked against what Klein was seeing. The feelings of *déjà vu* and having been here before presented themselves clearly. An illusory and ethereal scream seemed to pass through invisible walls:

"Hornacis... Flegrea... Hornacis... Flegrea... Hornacis... Flegrea..."

“It feels a little familiar.” Klein answered honestly while his brain felt a stabbing pain. Thankfully, he quickly tapped his glabella twice.

Hornacis... The Hornacis mountain range that appeared in original Klein’s diary?

That is content that was deciphered from the Antigonus family’s notebook...

The murmurs were very similar to one of the previous ones. It involved the word ‘Hornacis’ Is this a form of enticement?

Klein was gripped by shock as he did not dare think deeper, afraid that he would place himself on the trajectory of losing control.

Dunn nodded slightly and walked to a cupboard. He suddenly reached out his hand and pulled open its wooden door.

The bread inside was moldy and there were about seven gray, stiff dead rats.

“Leonard, go downstairs to get patrolling cops and explain the situation here,” instructed Dunn.

“Alright.” Leonard turned and left the apartment.

Following that, Dunn opened the door to two other bedrooms and did a careful search.

After being certain that there were no clues as well as any sign of the Antigonus family's notebook, Frye also stood up. He wiped his hands with a white handkerchief he brought along with him and said, "The time of death was more than five days ago. There are no external injuries nor are there any clear signs that it was a result of Beyonder powers. The exact cause of death will require a postmortem."

"Did you discover anything?" Dunn turned to look at Old Neil and Klein.

The two who were no longer in Spirit Vision state shook their heads in unison.

"Apart from the corpse, everything else is normal. Actually, no, there was an invisible energy sealing the apartment in the beginning. As you know, there will usually be similar processes when we use ritualistic magic," Old Neil thought for a few seconds before adding.

Dunn was just about to say something when he looked outside the door. A few seconds later, Klein and Old Neil sensed something and turned to look at the stairwell.

A few seconds later, faint footsteps grew louder as Leonard walked up with a policeman.

The policeman's expression changed once he caught the noxious smell. He immediately cooperated with his "colleague" from the Special Operations Department and began knocking on the doors of the residents on the second floor to gain an understanding of the situation on the third floor.

Moments later, the corporal with his two silver chevrons looked at the corpse on the rocking chair.

“Katy Stefania Bieber. Between 55 and 60 years old. Widow. Has rented this apartment with her son, Ray Bieber for more than ten years.”

“Her husband was formerly a gem artisan. Her son is about thirty years old and is single. He inherited his father’s trade and earns about one pound and fifteen soli a week. According to their neighbors, they have not seen them in more than a week.”

Before the policeman continued, Klein already knew the critical point that followed.

Missing. To be more precise, it was unknown where Ray Bieber had gone to!

The ancient notebook could very well be on him!

“Do you have a picture of Ray Bieber?” Dunn looked at the police officer. He was acting as the role of a high-ranking inspector.

However, it was not really acting since he was indeed a high-ranking inspector on the police department’s roster. His salary and various allowances were also paid according to his rank. Of course, it did not include his salary from the Church.

The police officer shook his head nervously and said, “I’m not sure... I’ll have to return to the station to search for it. It’s not typical for us to have pictures of every single person.”

“Got it. Continue questioning the residents on the first floor. Ask them in detail.” Dunn gave the order.

As he watched the police officer leave, he closed the door and turned to Old Neil.

"I'll leave the rest to you. If not, we will have to make all the residents sleep and obtain Ray Bieber's looks. Yea, I don't really trust sketches based on verbal descriptions."

Old Neil nodded. He took out a few thumb-sized bottles from a pocket in his black classic robe and scattered the liquids in a particular order.

Immediately following that, he pulled out a clump of powder and scattered it in a circle around him.

Strangely, a biting smell spread and was not influenced by the nauseating smells in the room. Klein also suddenly noticed that there was an invisible forcefield around him. It separated him from the environment and everyone else. It was like the room in its previous state.

Old Neil half-closed his eyes as his lips mumbled a soft and indiscernible incantation. Without being prepared, Klein vaguely heard the words, "Goddess, give me strength," "We look forward to the protection of the Night..."

Hum! A sudden wind tore through the windows and blew up the powder.

Klein's heart quaked suddenly as he felt goosebumps all over him. He found it difficult to describe. A terrifying "smell" that made him afraid of looking directly spread rapidly.

He was confused as he tensed up, unable to relax. It felt as

though he had plunged into a state similar to what one would have after working on a highly advanced mathematical problem.

Suddenly, Old Neil's eyes opened, his eyes pitch-black.

He took out a fountain pen from his pocket and began drawing on a piece of scrap paper on the table. He was so fast that his entire body was trembling.

Klein focused his gaze and saw a face with recessed eyes and a tall nose bridge rapidly appear.

When the natural curly short hair was done, Old Neil wrote a single line beneath the portrait.

“Black hair, deep blue eyes. Left of his mouth is a fully ceramic tooth implant.”

Pada! The fountain pen in Old Neil's hand fell onto the paper as his body convulsed a few times.

“This is the image of Ray Bieber according to what's left in the room.” Old Neil whispered as the color of his eyes restored rapidly.

Then, he turned back to his original spot and slowly circled it. The invisible forcefield that isolated things immediately dissipated in the form of a breeze.

“Praise the Lady.” Old Neil tapped his chest in four spots, forming the shape of the crimson moon.

Klein's taut nerves relaxed as he made more acute observations. He discovered that there was nothing special about Ray Bieber's facial features. He had a relatively mild bearing. The only thing was that his philtrum sagged clearly.

"I'll try using Dowsing Rod Seeking." He picked up the portrait and found male clothes in the bedroom and spread them onto the ground.

Dunn, Leonard, and Old Neil did not stop him as they watched him place the black cane above the clothes and portrait. Frye was as silent as always.

Klein's eyes turned from brown to black as he finished his recitation, only to release his grip.

The black cane stood silently like it was embedded in the ground.

"Ray Bieber's location." Klein silently repeated to himself again.

With the sound of humming wind, the cane fell down but kept changing directions while falling. Finally, it began spinning in slight circles.

Without any external help, the black cane stood stably again.

Klein repeated a few times with the same outcome. All he could do was shake his head at Dunn and Old Neil.

A strange power was interfering with his "divination..."

Dunn took off his black glove and said to Leonard and Klein, “Take Ray Bieber’s portrait and inquire the residents for a final confirmation. Following that, we will issue a warrant of arrest against him for the murder of his mother.”

“Alright.” Klein held his cane and bent down to pick the portrait.

After the neighbors confirmed that the portrait was indeed Ray Bieber, Dunn instructed Leonard and the police officer to finish the procedures at the station. He and Frye headed to a few bars in Tingen City to seek help via other means.

Klein and Old Neil returned to Blackthorn Security Company on a public carriage. It was not even eight by the time they arrived; Rozanne had not even clocked in.

After closing the door, Klein cocked his head at Old Neil and, hoping to learn and answer his questions, asked him, “Why would I send the Antigonus family’s notebook to Ray Bieber’s home?”

This was completely in a different direction from Iron Cross Street where Welch stayed.

Old Neil walked to the sofa and chuckled.

“Isn’t that obvious? Who knows what powers inside the notebook you invoked; maybe you did some described ritual out of curiosity and ended up provoking a strange existence that you should not have. The motive of this existence was to have the notebook sent to Ray Bieber and sever all clues, to prevent anyone from discovering it.”

“Therefore, apart from you who were selected, Welch and Naya committed suicide; regarding you... To be frank, I still have no idea how you survived.”

“I would like to know too...” Klein sat down as well as he deliberately replied with a wry smile. “I’ve also thought of the guesses you have of the proceedings. However, there’s one thing I don’t understand. Why did I have to hand the notebook to Ray Bieber?”

Old Neil shrugged and said, “Perhaps his Life Path Number [1] matches the requirements, or maybe he’s one of the last remaining descendants of the Antigonus family. In short, there are too many possibilities... And why the notebook was sold to Tingen City would have similar reasons.”

“I believe it’s the descendant reason.” Klein suddenly felt enlightened before he sighed. “Unfortunately, I did not discover immediately, and Ray Bieber and that notebook have vanished.”

Old Neil laughed.

“This is something that Dunn has to worry about. As for you, it’s something good.”

“Why do you say so?” Klein frowned in puzzlement.

1. A Life Path Number was proposed by Pythagoras which is established from the date of birth and describes the nature of one’s journey through life.