

Chapter 120: Workhouse

“There is the presence of supernatural factors...” Klein’s eyes returned to normal, and he looked at Leonard and Frye.

Leonard suddenly chuckled.

“Very professional, and deserving of the title of Seer.”

Are you trying to hint at something... Klein muttered in his head.

Frye opened his suitcase and took out a silver knife and other tools. He paused and asked, “The corpse tells me that she really died of a sudden heart attack. Do you have any way to divine a more detailed answer?”

Klein nodded seriously and said, “I can attempt to combine a mediumship ritual and a dream divination. Hopefully, I’ll be able to obtain something from Mrs. Lauvis’s remaining spirituality.”

Frye maintained his cold and reserved state. He took two steps back and said, “Give it a try.”

He turned his head sideways and looked at Klein. He suddenly sighed without much fluctuation in his tone. “You’re getting more and more used to this kind of situation.”

It’s not like I wanted it... Klein had an urge to cry. He then took out the bottles of extracts, essential oils, and herbal powder. Then, he quickly set up the mediumship ritual.

He chanted the honored titles of the Evernight Goddess in the middle of the spirituality wall and recited his prayers in Hermes.

Soon, wind spun around him and the light grew dimmer.

Klein's eyes turned entirely black, and he repeated the divination statement, "The cause of Mrs. Lauwis's death."

"The cause of Mrs. Lauwis's death."

...

He entered the dreamland whilst standing and 'saw' a translucent spirit lingering around the corpse.

Then, he extended his illusory right hand to touch Mrs. Lauwis's remaining spirituality.

In an instance, light burst out in front of him as scenes flashed past, one after another.

There was a skinny and sallow lady dressed in ragged clothes, busily making matchboxes.

She suddenly paused and held her chest.

She was speaking to her two children.

Her body wavered as she gasped for air.

She was buying black bread when someone suddenly patted her.

She was having the symptoms of a heart attack again and again.

She was feeling weary and got into bed, but she never woke up ever again.

Klein observed every single detail, intending to look for a trace of the supernatural factor. But when everything ended, he still hadn't gained any clues. As the blurriness shattered, Klein left the dreamland and returned to reality.

He dispelled the wall of spirituality and said to the waiting Frye and amused Leonard,

"There were no direct symptoms. Most of the scenes revealed that Mrs. Lauwes had a heart ailment a long time ago. The only scene that was different was when Mrs. Lauwes was patted on the back by someone. The hand was fair and slender, apparently a woman's."

"For such a family, they wouldn't go to a doctor unless they're very, very sick. Even if they were to queue at a free charity hospital, time is not something they can afford to lose. A day without work might mean no food on the table the next day." Leonard sighed emotionally like a poet.

Frye looked at the corpse on the bed and sighed lightly.

Before Klein spoke, Leonard quickly got out of his pensive state and said thoughtfully, "Are you implying that the supernatural factor came into play when Mrs. Lauwes was patted? It came from the slender hand of a lady or madam?"

Klein nodded and replied, “Yes, but this is merely my interpretation. Divination is always unclear.”

The conversation ended. He and Leonard stepped back to the other side of the bed and allowed Frye to take out his tools from his suitcase without any disturbance, so he could do a further examination.

After Frye was done, they waited as he packed up his tools. After cleaning up and covering the corpse, he turned around and said, “Her death was caused by a natural heart disease. There’s no doubt about it.”

Upon hearing the conclusion, Leonard paced back and forth. He even walked to the side of the door, paused for quite a while before saying, “That’s it for now. Let’s head over to the workhouse in West Borough. We’ll see if we can find other clues. Maybe we can link the two incidents together.”

“Okay, we can only hope,” Klein agreed, still filled with puzzlement.

Frye picked up his suitcase and while skipping and walking, he carefully went across the two floor mattresses without stepping on anyone’s blanket.

Leonard opened the door and walked out of the room first. He told Lauwuis and the tenant, “You can return home now.”

Klein thought for a moment before adding, “Don’t be in a hurry to bury the body. Wait for another day, as there might be one more thorough examination.”

"A-alright, Officer." Lauwis bowed lightly and replied in a hurry. Then, feeling numb and lost, he said, "A-actually, I... I don't have the money to bury her just yet. I have to save for another few days, just a few more days. Luckily, the weather is turning cold."

Klein was shocked and asked, "You plan on letting the corpse remain in the room for a few days?"

Lauwis forced a smile and replied, "Yea, thankfully, the weather became colder recently. I can move the body onto the table at night. When we eat, I can carry her to the bed..."

Before he finished what he had to say, Frye suddenly interrupted, "I've left you money for the burial next to your wife."

After saying those words in absolute calmness, he exited the apartment directly, unbothered by Lauwis's shocked expression and gratitude that followed.

Klein followed closely and thought of a question.

If the weather was still as hot as June or July, how would Lauwis deal with his wife's corpse?

Pick a very dark night with strong winds, throw the corpse into the Tussock River or the Khoy River? Or just dig a hole and bury her?

Klein knew that the law requiring a cemetery burial had been established more than a thousand years ago, at the end of the previous Epoch. The seven major churches and imperial households from each country had approved the law in order to

cut down on the number of water ghosts, zombies, and restless wraiths.

Each country provided free land, while each church was in charge of keeping watch and patrolling. They only charged minimum fees for cremation and burial in order to pay for the necessary labor force.

But even so, the truly poor still couldn't afford it.

After leaving 134 Iron Cross Street at Lower Street, the three Nighthawks and Bitsch Mountbatten parted ways. Silently, they took a turn to the nearby workhouse in West Borough.

As they got closer, Klein saw a long queue. It was just like when the people from the Foodaholic Empire on earth queued for a shop that gone viral on the Internet. The place was packed.

“There’s about a hundred, no, closer to two hundred,” he muttered in surprised. He saw the people queuing were in tattered clothes with numb expressions. They only occasionally looked towards the door of the workhouse impatiently.

Frye slowed down and said coldly, “There is a limit to the number of homeless poor each workhouse will accept daily. They can only take them in based on the queue order. Of course, the workhouse will examine and refuse entry to those who fail to meet the criteria.”

“The economic recession in the recent months has played a part too...” Leonard sighed.

“Those who don’t manage to queue will have to figure out a way

of their own?" Klein asked subconsciously.

"They can also try their luck in the other workhouses. Different workhouses have different operating hours. However, each one has the same long line. Some of them would wait from two in the afternoon." Frye paused. "The rest of the people mostly starve for a day. Then, they lose their ability to find a job and fall into a vicious cycle that leads directly to death. Those who can't withstand the hardship end up losing their struggle to stay on the good side of the law..."

Klein fell silent for a few seconds before letting out a sigh.

"The newspapers never publish any of this... Mr. Frye, I hardly ever hear you speak so much."

"I was once a pastor in a workhouse of the Goddess." Frye maintained his cold attitude.

When the three of them arrived at the door of the workhouse in West Borough, they showed their identity documents to the doorkeeper, who was eyeing the queuers arrogantly, before they were taken into the workhouse.

The workhouse was transformed from an old church. There were mattresses and hammocks all over the Mass hall. The pungent scent of sweat mixed with the smell of Athlete's foot permeated every corner.

In and out of the hall, there were many poor families. Some swung hammers to break rocks, some picked oakum; no one was free.

“In order to not let poor people rely too much on workhouses and turn into scoundrels, the Poor Law established in 1336 enforced a rule whereby every poor person can only stay in the workhouse for five days at most. Any longer than that, one would be cast out. During the five days, they have to do manual labor, such as breaking rocks or picking oakum. These are the same tasks that criminals in prison do,” Frye explained to Klein and Leonard briefly without much emotion.

Leonard opened his mouth, and no one was sure if he was teasing or explaining, “When they leave this workhouse, they could go to another one. Of course, they might not be able to move in. Heh, perhaps, to some people, poor people are like criminals.”

“...Picking oakum?” Klein was quiet. He didn’t know what else to ask.

“The fibers of old ropes are actually a great material to seal the gaps in boats.” Frye stopped and found a burnt mark on the ground.

A few minutes later, the director and pastor of the workhouse rushed over. They were both men in their forties.

“Salus started the fire here and only burnt himself to death?” Leonard asked, pointing at the ashen mark on the ground.

The director of the workhouse was a man with a broad, bumpy forehead. He scanned the area where Inspector Mitchell was pointing with blue eyes and nodded in affirmation.

“Yes.”

"Before that, did Salus act strangely in any way?" Klein asked.

The director of the workhouse thought and said, "According to the person that slept next to him, Salus had been chanting 'The Lord has given up on me', 'The world is too filthy', 'I have nothing left', stuff along those lines. He was filled with resentment and hopelessness. But no one expected him to break all the kerosene lamps and start a fire to burn the place down while everyone was sleeping. Thank the Lord, someone found out in time and stopped his wicked act."

Klein and Leonard then found a few people who had slept next to Salus the night before, and they also found the guard that stopped the tragedy. However, those people didn't have anything new to tell them.

Of course, they used Spirit Vision, divination, and other methods to check if any of the people were lying or misleading them.

"It seems that Salus long had the idea to take revenge and self-destruct. It seems to be a very normal case." Leonard waited till the director and the pastor left to express his opinion.

Klein pondered and said, "My divination tells me that there wasn't any supernatural factors influencing this case."

"Let's eliminate Salus's fire case temporarily," Leonard concluded.

Just then, Frye suddenly said, "No, maybe there is another possibility. For example, Salus acted at the instigation of someone else, a Beyonder who didn't take any supernatural measures."

Klein's eyes lit up as he echoed, "It's very possible, such as the Instigator from before!"

Instigator Tris!

But that wouldn't have any connection with Mrs. Lauwis's death...
He thought, creasing his eyebrows lightly.