

BY YOSHINO ORIGUCHI
ILLUSTRATED BY Z-ton

MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR

10

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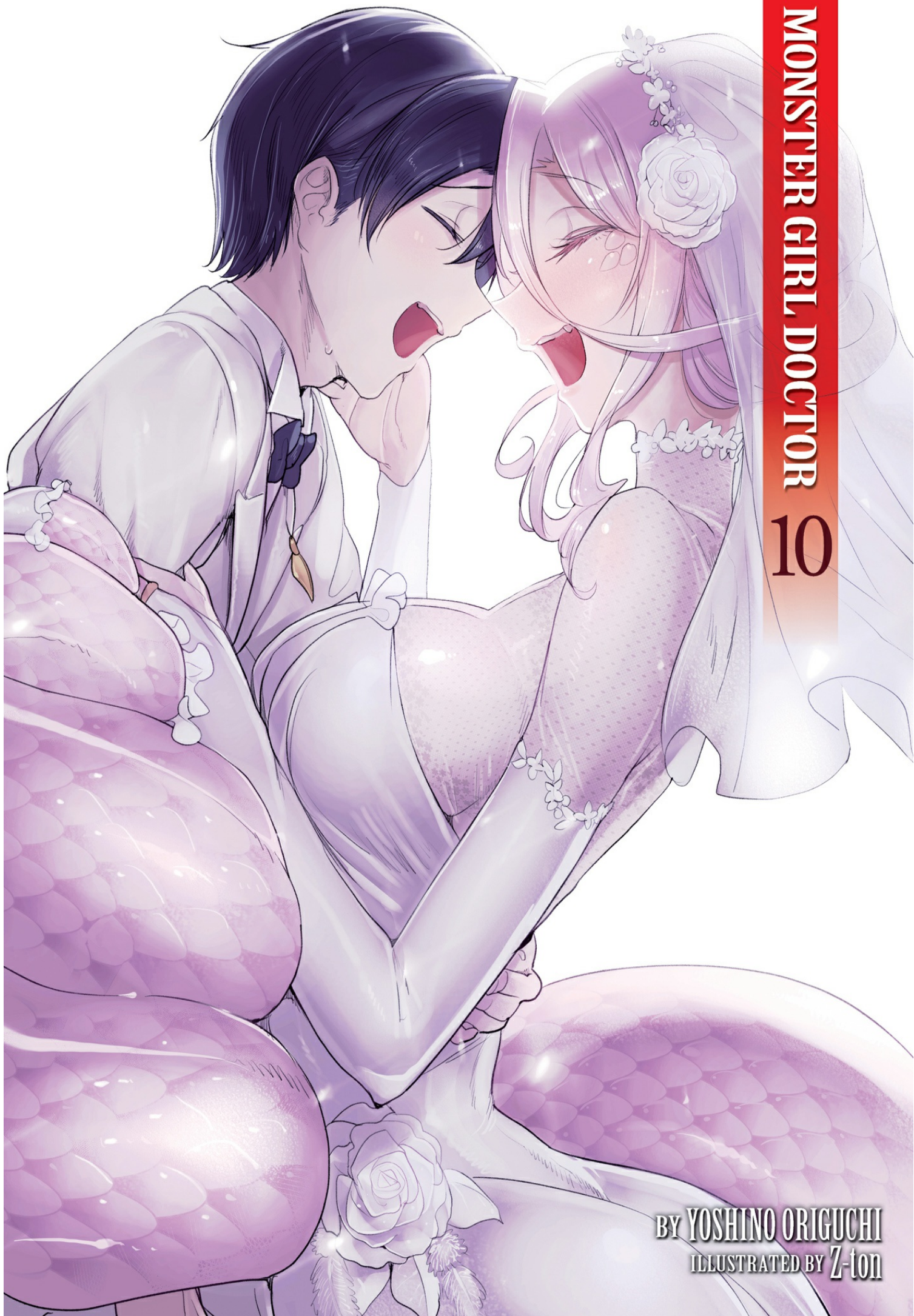
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Lulala had lined up a number of lanterns on the edge of the fountain. Apparently, they were for Sioux, Illy, and Plum, who weren't in Lindworm at that time.

Lulala was singing, surrounded by those lanterns and illuminated by their light. The mermaid's voice echoed throughout the night in the Central Plaza, as if everything was just as it should be.

Sapphee thought Glenn's bed looked like a coffin.

Tisalia, crying her eyes out, held up a lantern to illuminate Glenn's face.

Arahnia knelt by his side, rubbing his chest.



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MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR

VOLUME

10

STORY BY

Yoshino Origuchi

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

Z-ton



Seven Seas Entertainment

MONSTER MUSUME NO OISHASAN VOLUME 10

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Prologue:

A Midsummer Afternoon's Dream

IT WAS HOT. And humid.

Glenn was silent. He gazed around in a daze. He was in his own clinic, in his usual chair in the exam room.

“Umm...” He turned his head, taking in whatever information he could grasp from his surroundings. His first observation was that it was hot. Most of all, it was humid. On the other hand, the core of his body felt cold. The pit of his stomach was so chilly and uncomfortable that he thought he might be ill.

“What—what happened again?” His memory was fuzzy. “I know I was in the clinic... Sapphee was talking about wedding plans, and then...”

Parts of what happened started to come back to him through the fog in his brain.

“Molly came...and then she... my chest...”

Right. He remembered clearly now. The Dullahan—the headless monster—had stabbed him in the chest. The woman had looked a lot like Molly, whom Glenn knew as the manager of the graveyard.

“Er.” Suddenly remembering, Glenn looked down at his chest. There was no wound or blood where he had supposedly been stabbed. There weren’t even any holes in his clothing. If he were thinking logically, he would have figured the stabbing was all a dream. But Glenn was sure it had happened.

I was definitely killed. There was no pain or agony, I just suddenly...lost consciousness!

As a doctor, he had the ability to keep calm, even in the face of his own death. It was an indisputable fact that the Dullahan had killed him.

“But I’m alive...right?”

His body was cold, as if reacting to the muggy air. Though he couldn’t say he

felt just fine, Glenn *did* seem to be alive.

“Is no one...here?”

He didn’t sense anyone else in the clinic, which was usually bustling with patients. Even when there were no patients, there were fairies, and he saw no sign of them. It was strange. Even when the entirety of the town had succumbed to the slumber caused by the Barometz tree, the fairies had been unaffected. This world, with no fairies present in it, felt stagnant and silent as the grave.

Glenn staggered out of the clinic, holding his head. It was hot outside, but despite the heat, his cold body did not sweat. It was extremely unsettling.

He recalled that Lindworm was in the middle of a heat wave, but this was a completely different kind of heat. Or at least, it felt that way to him.

“There’s no one...outside, either.” Lindworm was a lively urban metropolis. The clinic was on the main boulevard, and there was never a shortage of people coming and going on that road. Glenn looked up at the sky, thinking it might be the middle of the night—but the indigo sky of early evening was spread above him. There were no sun or moon or stars to be seen, and he couldn’t figure out what time it was.

There was no sign of anyone, anywhere. What was going on?

“Is this...really Lindworm?” He wondered aloud. This street was part of the town that Glenn knew, but absent all signs of life, it felt like a place he didn’t know at all.

He moved on, dragging his frozen body along.

Sapphee...

There was definitely something strange going on. Subtly but surely, something Glenn could never have imagined was happening. He wondered if his fiancées in the town—especially Sapphee—were all right. Where were they and what were they doing? That was his only concern.

He continued down the streets of Lindworm. At one point, he glanced down

at the waterways. For some reason, the canals that the aquatic monsters used to move around looked deep and bottomless, like anyone who entered them would never come back up.

Something really was strange here. The town looked like Lindworm—but it was undoubtedly a different town than the one Glenn lived in. He knew that much, instinctively, but it didn't help him understand what was happening to him. He had to do something quickly.

But with no idea where to go, all he felt was a growing sense of danger.

“Oh...hey!”

Glenn looked up. He'd heard a voice. Perhaps due to the thin fog, he didn't know where it was coming from, though he was sure it was close. He looked around but couldn't spot anyone.

“Here, over here! Hey!”

Glenn looked all around. The speaker clearly knew Glenn, but he had never heard that voice before. He searched for the speaker, wondering who in the world it could be.

“Down here. Look down!”

“Down?” Glenn looked down at his feet, noticing a small shadow.

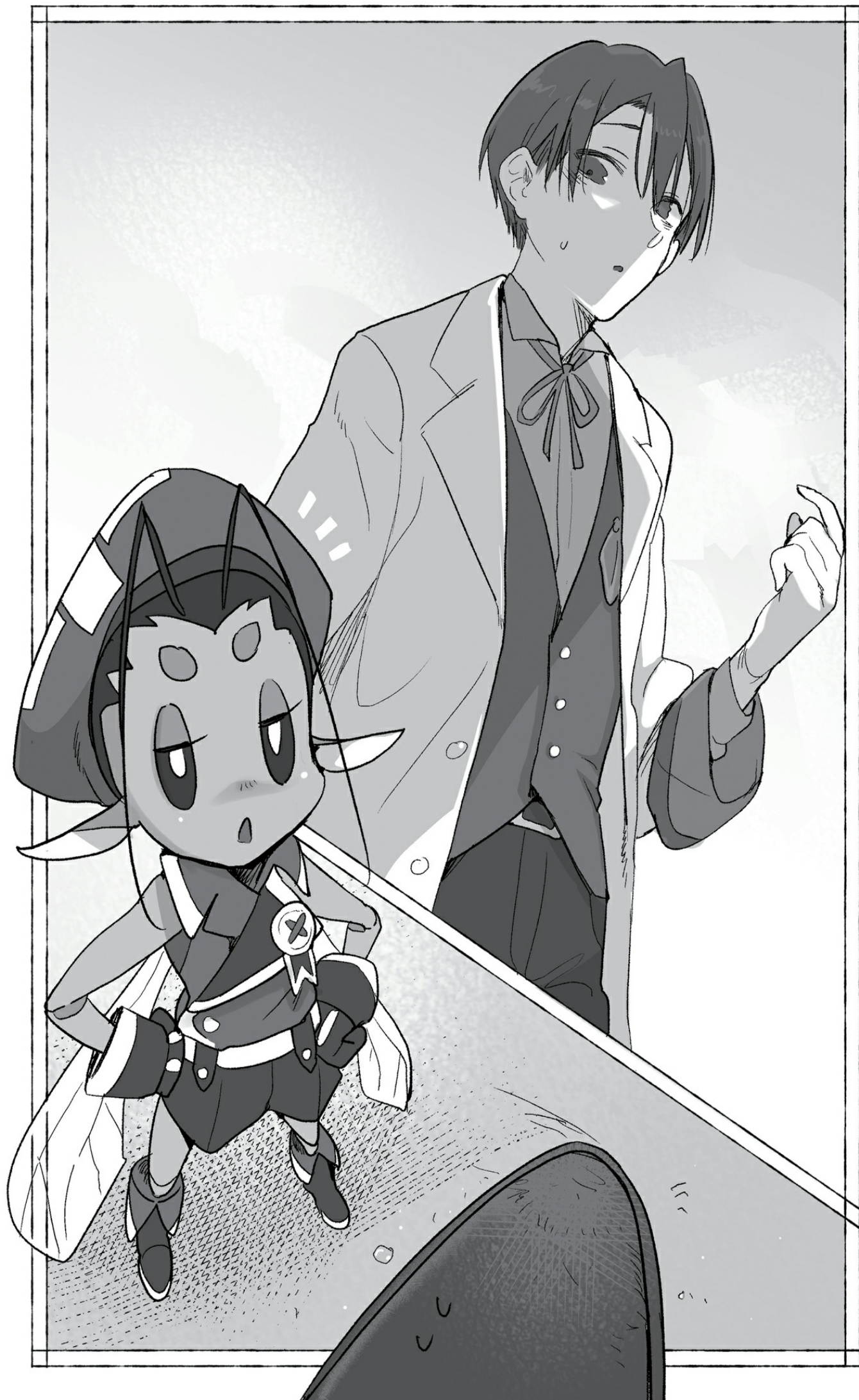
“You finally noticed me! You inferior ignoramus! You are just the epitome of disrespect, ignoring my voice—oh, but we simply do not have time for that right now.”

“A...fairy?”

Before him stood a fairy in a hat. Glenn had seen him before. It was hard for him to tell the fairies apart, but there was one individual who stood out in particular—the one who seemed to command the other fairies in Glenn's clinic.

“You are the clinic—”

“Indeed! I'll have you know, I am Cottingley Bradford the Sixth, brave commander in charge of the Litbeit Clinic Squad!”



“You have a name?”

“Of course I do!”

While Glenn stood there, stunned, the fairy called Cottingley smacked his ankle.

It didn’t hurt, really.

“Wait, but...you’re talking?”

“We have had a cheerful and magnanimous language since the day we were born! It’s just the speaking part that is difficult for us, but compared to your inferior species, our thoughts are—well that is not the point right now!” The fairy named Cottingley floated gently up on his insect-like wings and sat on Glenn’s shoulder. “This is an emergency. You need to deal with this immediately, Dr. Glenn.”

“Yes, I know. I can’t find anyone anywhere and—it’s clear what is happening. I need to find Sapphee.”

“Oh, dear, it’s worse than I anticipated!” the fairy cried out, looking irritated. His wings buzzed and quivered, making a sound like a bee’s. “It’s the opposite of what you think, Dr. Glenn. Everyone is not gone. It’s you who is gone!”

“Wh...at?”

“It is you who is lost! Now Sapphee and the other ladies are desperately trying to save you! Do you not understand that this is why I came all the way to the netherworld?!”

“Uh, sorry. This situation is...” Puzzled as to why this fairy he barely knew was so angry with him, Glenn desperately tried to understand what Cottingley wanted.

“So you understand words but not what they mean! Ignorant humans, you would be lost without us. Fine, I’ll break this down so even you can understand!” Cottingley offered.

“Th-thank you...?” Glenn bowed his head to the self-important fairy, still puzzled.

“Listen, Dr. Glenn. You—died.”

“Wha...?” He felt a wave of coldness come over his already-frozen body. “Wait a second, um.”

“I shall not wait. First, you need to accept your state.”

“It’s just that, I’m talking...and this is Lindworm.”

“Here? I see—so that is what you are seeing,” Cottingley scoffed. “This is not the dragon’s town. It is quite obviously the next world. The place you humans call the netherworld, the afterlife—allow me to remind you again, Dr. Glenn.” The fairy’s low voice reverberated through Glenn’s abdomen. “You died.”

Glenn was silent.

“This is the afterlife. It is not the Lindworm that you lived in. Do you not clearly remember the moment when you died?” Cottingley moved his face closer to Glenn’s.

He did remember the moment he was pierced by the Dullahan. “But...”

Glenn couldn’t find the words. All he knew was that the air around him was hot. His body was chilled to the bone, and he finally realized why he felt that way.

“You have arrived in the afterlife, Dr. Glenn.”

Living beings, as long as they are alive, emit heat. His frozen body had lost its warmth. That was when he realized his body’s metabolic processes were no longer running.

Suddenly, Glenn was terrified of the humid air in the town.

Case 01:

The Missing Dullahan

GLENN WAS FULL OF QUESTIONS.

Apparently, he had woken up in the afterlife. A fairy (who normally spoke only two or three words at a time), had told him so, very eloquently. However—

“Wait a second.” After a temporary bout of nearly falling apart, he had calmed down. But still he couldn’t accept the fact that he was dead. After all, he was *here*, existing and still clearly conscious. How could he believe that he had died?

“If I’m dead...what am I? What is this?” Glenn asked.

“You exist only as your soul. Are you not aware? If your soul stays in your body, you become a zombie or a skeleton, and if only your soul remains in the living world, you become a ghost. Surely, you’ve seen a great many of these beings in Deadlich Graveyard City.”

“That...”

Glenn gave it some thought. Kunai Zenow was a flesh golem made by stitching together dead body parts, and she’d said she could hear dead souls speaking to her. The concept of the soul of a living being existing separately from the flesh wasn’t something that made sense in biological terms, but having remembered the phenomena he had seen in Graveyard City, Glenn couldn’t deny that souls did exist.

“However, some souls remain in their deceased body. And it is rare to make it to the underworld completely intact,” Cottingley explained, turning his head up to look at Glenn.

Glenn wondered about that word—*intact*

“So then—why am I in the streets of Lindworm? If this is the Underworld as you say...does that mean the Underworld is exactly the same as Lindworm?”

“No, that is just how you are perceiving it.”

Glenn looked puzzled. He was confused by the fairy's choice of words.

"It looks completely different to me. I see a quiet, dark, and decaying world. Town, you say? I only see a handful of buildings," Cottingley countered.

"But—" Glenn tried to protest.

"Perhaps you have not completely crossed over yet. Only the truly deceased may gaze upon the underworld in its true form. If you are able to see this realm as a town you know well, perhaps that is evidence your soul is still connected to your physical body," Cottingley offered.

Glenn flinched at that. He wondered how this world looked to Cottingley.

"Sometimes people see the world in a way that is convenient to them. Seeing the Underworld can be too much for a living being's mind to handle, so it is likely they transform it intuitively."

"Is that how it works?" Glenn asked.

"It's a good thing I came. If you were completely dead, there would be very little chance of you coming back to life," Cottingley continued.

Glenn sighed. If Cottingley was to be believed, that meant there *was* still a chance Glenn could be revived.

"So...does that mean you came to save me...Mr. Cottingley?"

"Did I not mention that? Ah, I suppose I did not. Obviously, whether or not a human lives or dies is of no concern to me, but there is no measuring the distress that our dear Miss Sapphee would suffer if you were to die. Furthermore, there was something unsettling about the abrupt visit of the Dullahan. As a fairy, I cannot ignore—"

"Excuse me, can you please get to the point?"

"I...came to save you," Cottingley answered curtly, annoyed. "For now, I need you to get a grasp on your situation. You've been cleanly separated from your body and now exist only as a soul. There is a chance—if only a slim one—that you may come back to life. Perhaps it would be easier for you to understand this as a state of apparent death, or a near-death experience.

"Yes, thank you."

Glenn accepted this explanation. A near-death experience... Those on the verge of death saw many strange things, and as a doctor, Glenn had read numerous such reports. Many had said they saw a river flowing nearby.

“A...river?” He looked at the seemingly bottomless canal. This aquatic sight was part of the Lindworm that Glenn knew well. Perhaps his subconscious was trying to tie this world to Lindworm? “Huh? Er...if that’s the case, does that mean that you are dead too, Mr. Cottingley?”

“Wh-what did you say? Nonsense!”

If this was the afterlife, surely Cottingley being present here meant he was also dead? Such was Glenn’s reasoning. But this clearly angered Cottingley.

“Do not subject me to human criteria! Fairies do not possess the same concepts of life and death in the first place! We are not bound by such rules. The reason fairies can come here is...because this place is extremely close to the fairy realm where we were born!”

“Close...you mean where you came from?” Glenn prompted him for clarification.

“Ah, well of course, when I say ‘close,’ I am referring not to distance but the fact that the dimensional phase is in the same vicinity. In that sense, it is fair to say that we fairies exist in the form of something similar to spirits.”

Glenn looked puzzled again.

“Ah, well, that is not important now. There is a more urgent matter at hand.” Cottingley flew up to Glenn’s level with a buzz. He looked directly into Glenn’s eyes, his own half-open eyes seeming to convey the depths of his knowledge. “Let me ask you, as a doctor. What does it mean to be alive?”

“Right... It means all organs are functioning, and you eat, excrete, sleep, and reproduce. In other words, repeated metabolic processes while also passing life to the next generation,” Glenn answered without hesitation.

Cottingley nodded, seemingly satisfied with that answer. “Correct. And we fairies do not eat or reproduce. Only the Queen Fairy can give birth to new fairies. Common fairies experience neither life nor death. This will not change for all eternity.”

Glenn looked at the fairy quizzically.

“The dead are the same. They are already dead, so nothing will change. They do not grow or metabolize. The Underworld and the fairy realm share similar characteristics, and therefore, I describe them as ‘close.’”

It was a unique perspective.

“For example, all things in the living world disappear eventually. Even zombies and skeletons. That is called ‘change,’ correct? The Underworld is where souls wind up, so there is nothing beyond it. The souls in the Underworld do not eventually disappear, or do anything else, for that matter. That is the world of the dead.”

“Oh...”

According to Cottingley, this world was unchanging and stagnant. It was an abstract worldview, but clearly one that was self-evident to him (or her?).

While Glenn sat there in awe, Cottingley stuck out his chest, “Obviously, the reason we fairies are unchanging is because we are already so perfect that no change is necessary!”

“Uhh...so that’s how the fairies speak?”

“Hmph! The fact that you are able to communicate with me so smoothly is proof that you currently exist only as a soul! Fairies conduct conversations by connecting souls, after all.”

Looking closer, Glenn realized the movements of Cottingley’s mouth did not match up with the words he was hearing. That was when he finally realized the words were being transferred directly into his mind.

“It seems you are still connected to the living world, somehow. But if you don’t return soon, you will truly adapt to the Underworld and become one of the deceased.”

“But what can I do about that...” Glen pondered. “How can I get home?”

For once, the eloquent Cottingley had no reply. Instead, he turned to the side instead.

“Hey?! Wait, Mr. Cottingley?!”

“Insolent! Call me Excellency!”

“Don’t you know how to get me back?! I thought you came to save me!”

“That is true, but...it is not as if you can simply waltz back over to the world of the living! I can only do it precisely because I am a fairy! You seem to not be completely dead, for some reason the another...but that doesn’t mean returning will be an easy feat!”

“Oh...”

Glenn couldn’t help but be a little exasperated by Cottingley’s tone. At any rate, he now understood the situation he was in. He also understood that Cottingley was there to save him, and he was grateful for that, but...without the critical information of how he was to return to the world of the living, he was certainly in a quandary.

“Well, wait a second. You won’t be able to return immediately, but there is one way.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Do you remember the Dullahan who stabbed you? That is the reason why you are here, and why you are only somewhat deceased.”

He was talking about when Glenn was stabbed in the clinic. He hadn’t sensed any fairies around him at the time that happened, though.

“So, you were there watching?” Glenn asked.

“Yes. Due to the arrival of that extraordinary guest, I ordered my subordinates to watch carefully. That Dullahan is not like the living... It is more like a fairy. It must have taken that form to serve as a messenger of death, but I never thought it would be so violent.”

The Dullahan. A rare species sometimes seen on the western part of the continent. Though sometimes called undead or a reaper due to being headless, it was in fact a real, living being.

“It is somewhat complicated, but the Dullahan that attacked you isn’t a monster. It wears a similar shape, but I suppose it should actually be called something else. It was a messenger of the Underworld—in other words, a

messenger of death. It should have been easy for it to annihilate you. So why did it go to the trouble of leaving you with a connection to the world of the living? Given that it's a messenger, it was likely carrying out the will of the lord who rules the underworld," Cottingley reasoned.

"What?"

"Consequently, we can make inquiries with that Lord of the Underworld. Meet with the Lord of the dead and ask questions. Perhaps the Lord will agree if you ask to be returned to life. There have been some extremely rare cases when a deceased has been returned to life after petitioning the Lord of the Underworld."

Glenn nodded. If this was the underworld, it only made sense to ask its leader. "It's just...is the Lord of the Underworld here?"

"Yes. This is the Underworld, after all. This is where the messengers of death and their Lord are based."

"But even so..." There was no sign of anyone.

"This is the periphery of the Underworld. If we direct ourselves toward the center, we will find the souls of the Underworld and the spirit guards. Also, can't you see it? That which does not belong in Lindworm."

"Huh?" Glenn rubbed his eyes.

In the center of Lindworm—where the Central Council was—should have stood a tall steeple. But it wasn't there. Instead, there was a castle. A magnificent castle.

How could such a massive structure even exist in Lindworm? It wouldn't have fit, even if the Central Square were flattened to make space for it.

How did that castle...? It's bigger than the entire area of Lindworm...

It was warping his sense of perception. The gigantic structure in the Central Square confused Glenn's spatial awareness. Cottingley was right—this massive building was proof that this place was not Lindworm.

"That castle is the center of the Underworld and the abode of the Lord of the Underworld. So even *you* can't miss it, then."

“Y-yes. I didn’t notice until now, despite it being so big...”

“Indeed. You noticed it precisely because I brought it to your attention. You are still behaving according to your living-world values, unable to see any Underworld structures that I don’t point out to you. I will serve as your guide and protect you from the threat of the Underworld,” Cottingley said as he returned to Glenn’s shoulder. “Now then, go to the Center, Dr. Glenn! And do give me a ride. It’s exhausting to walk around the spacious Underworld in this body.”

“Uh, okay, understood.”

Fairy in tow, Glenn advanced. If nothing else, it was undeniable that an ally had found him. He was relieved to not be alone in this misty version of Lindworm, even if his companion was a fairy.

Glenn made his way down the streets of a town that looked exactly like Lindworm. Rationally, he knew it was the Underworld, but that truth hadn’t quite sunk in yet. Still, he noticed some things as he walked.

First of all, the town’s layout was a bit off. At some point, he moved from the main street to alleys with intersections that shouldn’t have been there and strange connecting roads. There were even times when he was brought back to streets that he was sure he’d just passed. Glenn was aware that the more he walked, the deeper his sense of uneasiness grew, until it far exceeded what he’d felt when he started.

It really isn’t Lindworm. This is someplace else.

Then, he started to see more people...though he wasn’t sure if he should call them people. As he walked along, he passed by shadows without a clear form. Most of them slipped into the thick fog, leaving him unable to tell what species they had been in life. They were hiding in the fog—or rather, the fog seemed to be deliberately hiding their forms.

When Glenn asked Cottingley about the enshrouding mist, he answered, “The mist is but your own perception. You are still connected to the living world. As long as you are living, you must not know the rules of the dead. Hence, your

subconscious denial takes the form of mist, keeping you from clearly seeing the spirits of the dead.”

“Mr. Cottingley, can you see the dead?”

“Yes. I can see them. But you needn’t worry about that. They are simply residents of the Underworld. That is all. They are not spooky or gloomy.”

Glenn accepted this answer. The Underworld had its own laws, which could only be learned after death. Therefore, he simply accepted that there was no need for him to learn more at this time.

Wait? But in that case...what is happening to me...in the living world? he suddenly wondered.

If he wasn’t dead, then had he been taken to the hospital on the verge of death? If so, Sapphee and Cthulhy must have been beside themselves. He needed to get back as soon as possible, while his body was still warm.

Didn’t Kunai say that she buried dead flesh that no longer had a voice?

Kunai Zenow, a flesh golem made of patchwork flesh, had said she could hear the voices of that flesh. If those voices were souls, it meant that vital soul was not with Glenn’s body in the living world.

I need to get back...

There was no concept of the soul in the medicine Glenn studied. Living beings could fulfill their functions *as* living beings without needing to define what a soul might be. However, considering the existence of Deadlich Graveyard City, he was sure that souls and spirits did exist. There was no guarantee that his flesh would remain safe without its soul, which was why Cottingley had gone to the trouble of coming for him. Glenn *had* to get back to the realm of the living so he wouldn’t make Sapphee sad.

He wondered how far he’d walked. Time and space and everything else were ambiguous in this place. He thought he’d been going quite a while but had no sense of getting closer to the castle he could see in the Central Square. Ultimately, this was probably proof that the Underworld rules Cottingley had mentioned didn’t apply to Glenn. This was completely different from the world he lived in, which led him to assume that the laws of time and space were

different, too.

Then finally—

“We’re here.”

As if in response to Cottingley’s words, the castle that still felt so far away was suddenly right in front of him the moment they turned onto the main road. The road that led to the Central Square was rimmed by iron railings that didn’t exist in the real Lindworm. It was like a clear signal that he was about to cross over into another domain.

There was a figure lingering quietly at the gate that Glenn assumed was the entrance to the castle. He could see it clearly, even through the mist. He could tell it was unlike the others, probably because he had seen her before. It had the form of a headless nun.

It was none other than Molly, who stabbed Glen with a shovel-shaped spear.

“So that’s who brought you here,” Cottingley said, glaring at her through the mist on high alert.

Glenn also observed the being that resembled Molly. First of all, she was headless. He’d thought she had the head tucked under her arm when she killed him, but he didn’t see it now. He wondered where it had gone.

A fluorescent green flame flickered from her neck. The flames transformed into butterfly shapes and fluttered away, mysteriously disappearing into the air. A fitting look for the spirit world.

In the real world, the Dullahan’s body begged many questions—but surely, she couldn’t just come and go from the Underworld as she pleased? Like Cottingley said, she was just a messenger of death that had taken the form of a Dullahan. In other words, a reaper. Though he didn’t know why the reaper had the same face as Molly...

There was silence. The Dullahan Molly did nothing. She simply held her weapon in one hand and lingered quietly at the gate. As Glenn pondered whether he could approach her or not—

“Leeet’s ask!” Cottingley said loudly. “I am Cottingley Bradford the sixth,

servant of the Fairy Queen. Oh, guard of the Underworld, gatekeeper of the Castle of Death, we understand the Lord of the Underworld is here. We would like you to convey that we have an urgent matter—yes, as you can see, it pertains to the town doctor who you brought here!”

“H-hello,” Glenn said, bowing his head slightly.

There was no response from the Dullahan. She kept her weapon in one hand and turned her body toward Glenn. At first glance, she seemed to be wearing the same nun’s habit as Molly, but Molly didn’t have the protective armor on the backs of her hands and feet that this woman did. Her clear readiness to fight made Glenn feel nervous, despite himself. He didn’t know what would happen if she were to kill him here in the Underworld. Maybe what was left of his soul would disappear.

She remained silent.

“Ergh, she’s not saying anything... Hey!”

The Dullahan didn’t answer. The head she had been holding under her arm when she attacked Glenn was nowhere to be seen. The front of her body faced them, but it was unclear what she was thinking.

The hovering woman, with her voluptuous limbs—and headless at that—gave Glenn a feeling he couldn’t describe.

“Mmm, y-you—You dare ignore me, deputy of the Fairy Queen?!” Cottingley was finally getting irritated. He flew at the Dullahan and dealt a staggering blow to her breasts, which were the easiest target to strike.

The Dullahan’s body jerked with surprise. It was reacting to something.

“Hmm?” Glenn watched her.

The Dullahan whipped around, turning first this way and then that, her hands stretched out in front of her. Her body was swinging from side to side, as if she were searching for something, but eventually, perhaps out of fear, she took her weapon up with both hands and started trembling. Her feet were pigeon-toed. Her body had clearly stiffened. She was rigid and Glenn could see that the way she shook was unnatural.

“Just what are you playing at?! Without so much as the courtesy of greeting me, Guard of Death!”

She kept her position.

Cottingley’s words were not getting through. At first, the Dullahan had seemed to tremble with fear at something invisible. Then, she began moving from side to side, clearly flustered. The fairy seemed disturbed by the behavior.

“Ummm,” Glenn had thought of something.

“What is it?!” Cottingley snapped, his voice rising.

“Maybe...this Dullahan has lost its head.”

“What did you say?!”

He thought the Dullahan’s strange response might be because her ears and eyes were in another location.

“I-indeed it is not here, but it’s part of her body! That is not something you just lose track of!” Cottingley insisted.

“Well, I do know someone who had that happen to her,” he said, remembering when Kunai, who was made of patchwork flesh, had lost a body part. “Maybe she can’t respond properly because she doesn’t have her head.”

“Ahhh, right, humans listen with their ears and speak with their mouths. Yes, that is precisely why humans cannot feel sympathy.”

“But the rules could be different in the Underworld. I don’t think we should be struggling to come to a mutual understanding...” Glenn added.

After all, he was conversing with Cottingley with no problem. It was Cottingley himself who’d said they could do so because this was the Underworld.

“Hmph. It is true that this conversation is taking place through the means of your soul. However, it is only your soul—all thinking is done in the head. Without a head, she can’t respond properly. Even autonomous behavior is difficult. This body is only confused because she’s lost her head,” Cottingley finally worked out.

“I see,” Glenn responded.

“Then that means we must search for the head,” the fairy said, giving her breasts another slap. Glenn wondered what he disliked about her body.

Cottingley then walked away without so much as a glance at the scared-stiff, headless torso. Glenn hastily went to follow him, but then stopped short.

“Hey, what are you doing?!” Cottingley coaxed. But Glenn didn’t move.

“Why don’t we bring her along?” he suggested.

“What...did you say?”

“Even if we start searching for her head, we don’t have a single clue where to start. Maybe her body has an idea as to where her head might be.”

Once, when he was searching for Kunai’s body, her scattered body parts had told him where her torso was. It was possible the same principle could be applied to the Dullahan. Above all, this was the Underworld, and they were dealing with a being that was similar to fairies. He didn’t know how much he could count on things working the same way they did in the living world.

“This body that can’t even communicate is going to help us?”

“Well—yes.” It was also difficult to communicate with fairies in the living world, but Glenn decided to keep that thought to himself, not knowing how much it would anger Cottingley.

“Well...if you insist.”

“Let’s go, then.”

Deciding it would be pointless to call out to the Dullahan, Glenn took her by the hand.

It seemed a little surprised. The hand was ice cold. Its chill, despite the humidity of this world, reminded Glenn that Dullahan Molly was dead. This probably meant souls didn’t retain heat.

While the Dullahan seemed confused, she followed Glenn more or less obediently without resistance.

Well...I wasn’t expecting this turn of events...

As Glenn pulled the Dullahan’s body along, he noticed she didn’t seem to

have any thoughts of her own. But perhaps that was only natural without a head.

“Unbelievable! How could a reaper lose their own head...? I do not understand! The Underworld is really beyond our knowledge of the living!” Cottingley was hopping mad as he traveled down the streets of the Underworld with Glenn and the Dullahan.

“So even you don’t know everything about the Underworld, Mr. Cottingley?”

“It may be close to the Fairy Realm, but I have nothing to do with this place, after all. If I didn’t have orders to save you after the strange way in which you died, I would never have come here.”

“Thank you very much,” Glenn told him again.

“Don’t misunderstand. I am not a fan of this Dullahan’s scheme...and I also feel sorry for the newly engaged Lady Saphentite. If you were to die naturally, there would be no way I could help.”

“R-right.” Glenn thought about how he would arrive here someday. But it wasn’t his time yet. Regardless, he understood they couldn’t do anything unless they found the head of the Dullahan he was leading along.

“Mr. Cottingley, do you have an idea where to look?”

“Of course, I do not! How would I know where she dropped her head?!”

“Yeah...” Glenn looked back at the Dullahan he was leading.

She was still gripping her weapon, looking uneasy, while he pulled her along by the hand. He still saw no signs of anything resembling autonomous thought. She wouldn’t even answer his questions, so he had no idea where to look.

But her body is so stiff...

As he walked, holding that soft yet ice-cold hand, Glenn thought the body must be anxious and jumpy without its head. Cottingley flew ahead, his wings buzzing. Glenn didn’t think they would find the head by searching aimlessly, but he said nothing.

The Underworld was hot. But it only felt that way to Glenn because he was so cold. One’s sense of warmth was only relative, and he thought this air might

actually be cold, too.

“Mr. Cottingley, are you hot?”

“What? Hey, don’t try to compare me to the dead like you. It’s on the verge of cold here.”

“I thought so...”

“You barely have any heat left in you. And once that temperature drops, you’ll be the same as a ghost. Be careful.”

Thankful for the advice, Glenn continued to ponder. He had even more questions now. Namely, why was the Dullahan’s hand even colder than his own?

“Hey...I just thought of something,” he said.

“What is it?”

“Maybe the Dullahan’s head fell into the canals.”

“What? Hmmm...go on, explain,” Cottingley directed pompously.

Glenn continued, “Since her hands are so cold, I thought she might be in a cold place.”

“Hmph.”

“The way she’s stiff and trembling reminds me of how a body responds to cold. At first, I thought the body was just frightened due to losing its head. But then I thought, maybe it’s because the head is in a cold place.”

“So, you thought of the canal—I see.” Cottingley nodded.

However, this theory was based on Glenn’s limited knowledge. The only place he could think of that would make her cold was the canals, but the Lindworm he was currently looking at was just something he’d constructed in his mind.

“These aren’t exactly the same as the waterways in Lindworm,” Cottingley continued, “but water is definitely flowing through them. According to various mythologies, there is a river in the Underworld that serves as its border. The reason is obvious—there is a river through which souls actually flow to the Underworld.”

“As I thought...”

“We can search at the water’s edge, but you need to be careful. This canal isn’t like the waterways of Lindworm. Think of it as a river that is even deeper than you could ever imagine.”

“Uh.” Glenn grimaced at the warning. If the Dullahan head was the same as a human head, it should have the buoyancy to float. He wanted to believe it wouldn’t be hard to find, but once again, those were the rules of the living world. He didn’t know if they applied in the Underworld.

“Be careful, then,” Cottingley instructed as he led the way into the canal.

“Right,” Glenn said, following.

The mist in the canal was thicker than on the road. The structure of the canal didn’t look very different from Lindworm’s, but the water was a bit cloudier, and he couldn’t see the bottom. Glenn shuddered at the thought that this was the river of the Underworld.

“Let’s go.” He braced himself and advanced along the river.

To make a long story short, they found her head right away. It was at a fork in the canal. Luckily, the veil of her habit had caught on something and kept her from floating further downstream.

“Yoo-hoo! You’re finally here. I’ve been waiting for you, cutie,” the head spoke.

After all his experiences with various kinds of undead, the sight did not surprise Glenn at all. However, this *was* the very creature that had stabbed him to death. Her casual attitude, as if what she’d done was nothing, left him speechless.

“Oh, and you brought my body for me. Thank you! You’re so sweet.”

“Uhhh—”

“Oh, right, I didn’t introduce myself... Could you just pull me up?”

Ever the worker bee, Cottingley went into the canal before Glenn could. He

grabbed the Dullahan by the hair, veil and all, and pulled her free of the water with a splash. The fairy, who normally handled many of the tasks around the clinic, possessed significant strength despite his small stature.

Cottingley handed the severed head to Glenn.

“Teehee. Nice to meet you...I think? My name is Molly Vanitas. Oh, and I’m not that imposter in the Graveyard City. I’m the real Molly. Nice to meet you, Glenn.”

“Um.” Glenn didn’t know what to say to this self-introduction the wet severed head had just given him. He recognized Molly based on her appearance but hadn’t expected such a bubbly personality.

“Ingrate! What are you so happy about? You’re the one who just murdered Dr. Glenn!” Cottingley cried out.

“Yup, that was me. Sorry, cutie.”

“Idiot!” Cottingley couldn’t hold back his anger at her ludicrous attitude.

She should have been Glenn’s enemy—but she was so cheerful that he lost the desire to pursue her crime. He also thought it would be pointless to demand this severed head, with her tongue sticking out, show remorse for what she did.

That’s not right.

No...his gut told him not to expect her remorse, or even to blame her. Molly was a reaper. Causing people’s death was routine to her, which was probably why she was so casual about it. The first-generation Molly granted death the same way Glenn examined patients.

“Molly,” Glenn said to the severed head in his hands. There was something else he needed to ask her. “I heard...that you were the manager of the Graveyard City before you lost your attachment to life and ascended. But why did you become a reaper?”

“Ohhh, are you interested in me?”

Molly’s first-generation head was spinning round and round by itself. Was that its version of flailing? He found it surreal that the rest of her body stood next to him without reacting at all. Apparently, head and body didn’t move. In

tandem.

“Well, you know, I lost my attachment to the Graveyard City, so I planned to kiss the living world goodbye...but then, you know, the Queen of the Underworld took a liking to me.”

“I see,” Glenn was all ears.

“Thus I began my third life...as a reaper, reincarnated as a fairy Dullahan. I am the adorable first-year Reaper Molly, brand-new to the job,” the severed head laughed.

The face looked like Molly, but for some reason, her eyes remained closed. It was the complete opposite of the second-generation Molly’s bulging eyes. Perhaps she’d originally been a woman with narrow eyes.

“Then, as soon as I took the job, I ended up reaping you, Glenn.”

“Reaping?! Do you hear yourself? This is a young doctor with a future! He was not sick in the slightest! It is unforgivable what you’ve done!”

“Whaaat? But people die suddenly all the time, you know? You know that, right, Glenn?” Molly protested.

“That is not the issue! There is supposed to be a plan for the life of living beings! Was his death really already decided?! The way you talk certainly doesn’t make it sound so!”

“Mmmm, I hate when the little fairies get mad at me like this,” Molly groaned.

“Take us to the Lord of the Underworld! She shall explain!” Cottingley demanded.

“Whaddya want to see the queen for?” Molly asked innocently.

“The queen is the only one with the power to bring Dr. Glenn back to life! It was you who put him in this situation, so we shall persuade the queen to send him back.”

“I guess that makes sense...” Molly’s severed head said. She was quiet for a moment, looking back and forth between Glenn and Cottingley. “I have a lot to tell you but—first can you put me back together?”

“Together?” Glenn was confused. When he’d been killed in the clinic, the Dullahan was holding her head under her arm.

“My body is in independent mode right now. Once we’ve been separated for a while, the connection gets fuzzy. If we can be firmly resecured together one time, I’ll still be able to control my body even if my head comes off again. It’s like reestablishing the connection, I guess?”

“Uhm, oh...”

Glenn didn’t entirely understand, but it seemed to be something Molly needed done right away. What she was saying about her head and body being disconnected didn’t entirely make sense in light of the fact that the head was moving while the body wasn’t—it seemed obvious that it would be hard for her to do anything while her body was moving involuntarily.

“Hey, show some respect! If you’re going to kill Dr. Glenn, then explain yourself at once!” For some reason, Cottingley was angrier than Glenn. “Dr. Glenn, take that severed head! The body will probably just get in the way. The head is enough. Maybe she will speak eventually!”

“Ahhh, don’t say that. It’s not easy for me either, you know? Well, that’s top-secret information, though...”

“Have you no shame...?”

The severed head and fairy were frowning at each other. Glenn wasn’t sure what to do.

“Well, you don’t have to do it, but you know I have the key to the central castle, right? You guys want to meet with the Queen of the Underworld and go back to the realm of the living, yeah? Pretty please? Do it for me? If you don’t, you won’t even get to meet the Queen,” Molly warned.

“Erg...You!” Cottingley’s wings quivered at the threatening words.

“Hey now.” Glenn attempted to calm the fairy down. “Why don’t we do as she says for now? We can’t get into the castle without her, after all.”

“Hmph. Well, that may be so...” Earlier, Cottingley had told Glenn not to misunderstand his efforts to save him as proof he cared about him. But he

clearly *was* very concerned about Glenn.

“Also...I can’t overlook someone in trouble who claims to be ill,” Glenn admitted.

“You never stop being a doctor, do you? That’s *your* sickness,” Cottingley said, exasperated.

“Heh, well...” He couldn’t deny it, but he didn’t have time to think about that now. Besides, he was interested in the physiology of a Dullahan—he had never seen one before.

“So, obsession is an illness that even death can’t cure.” Molly smiled.

“Don’t be cheeky, murderer!” Cottingley cut in.

Glenn couldn’t do anything but chuckle at the severed head’s endlessly flippant words.

“Hm.” He looked back and forth between the upright torso and the severed head he held in his hands. At first glance, the body looked like that of a normal human’s. The only apparent difference was the flame-like substance being emitted from the stump of her neck. A similar substance flowed from the point where the severed head would connect with the neck. The flaming particles transformed into butterfly shapes and danced around in the Underworld air.

“Now then. First of all...” Glenn tried holding the head against the body.

“Ooh!” For some reason, Molly cried out in a sensual, flirtatious voice. “Hey, I’m a lady you know. Be gentle,” she teased.

“Oh, uh, sorry,” Glenn apologized. “Well, I tried to line up your head and neck, but...I’m not sure if it’s because there’s something wrong with the fit, but they don’t join up well.”

“Ohh. Since we were apart for so long, my connection to my body must have been completely cut off. The body is starting to generate a mind of its own. If left alone, we will become completely separate, and a copy of me will start acting on its own,” Molly explained.

“That’s...a thing?” Glenn asked.

“C’mon, it’s not that strange, is it? This is the Underworld. Here, there are

only souls with no form. If something goes wrong, or enough time passes...the form we had in life can change,” she elaborated.

Glenn felt like holding his head in his hands—but his hands were currently full of Molly’s head. It seemed that the common knowledge regarding flesh that the living world was bound by didn’t apply here. Everything was vague and nothing was certain in this world. It struck him all over again that this was the Underworld—the world after death.

“Anyway, it would really get in the way of my work if that happened, so make sure you put me back together,” Molly instructed.

“I tried that, but it didn’t work...” Glenn pointed out.

“It’s fine. Aren’t you a brilliant doctor? Your soul hasn’t changed, you know? There’s definitely a way to put everything all the way back in. Just try a few things...then make sure you put it all back where it belongs, cutie.”

“O-okay.”

Glenn was hesitant. It wasn’t like she’d said anything particularly odd, but for some reason, he felt like the first-generation Molly’s words had a deeper meaning. Maybe he was imagining it.

He thought about the issue at hand again. The rules of the living world did not apply here. He was going to treat a soul with no physical form. It went without saying that he’d never learned about such treatment from Cthulhy. However, according to Molly, she’d once been human. He was sure her head had been connected to her body when she was alive, and even if they were separated now, a reaper Dullahan was still meant to be a single being. Even in the Underworld, he should be able to force her to return her to her ideal form.

“Now then, I will begin,” he said.

“Mmm, ah!”

He pushed the Dullahan’s severed head against the stump of her neck. Molly let out a cry, but her voice was seductive, and sounded almost gleeful. The fact that she was crying out had to mean this was stimulating her—Glenn understood this to mean that he was causing some sort of change in Molly’s soul.

“Er...ugh...oof.”

“Ahh...mmm...oh...ahhh...”

Glenn suspected she was making these sounds on purpose.

He tried wiggling the severed head a bit from side to side. The flames overflowing from the stump of Molly’s neck started to change form slightly. Even close up, the fire had no heat to it. It was probably a completely different phenomenon from flames in the living world.

He remembered that souls were often likened to flames. In the East, they said souls that left their bodies looked like flickering balls of flame.

“Eeeyaaa... Mmaaah... Oww, eee,” she moaned.

He tried wrestling the head this way and that to adjust it. He had no idea what the correct position might be, or even whether he was doing this the right way. He was basically groping in the dark.

“Hmm?”

“Eee!”

Finally, Molly’s body jumped for a second. Her head let out a high-pitched scream, and her hands, which had fluttered erratically, were now quivering.

“Ahh, mmm... O-oh, right there!” Molly cried out, her face now bright red.

Glenn continued moving the severed head, letting the movements of her hands guide him. He discovered something hard in the middle of the meeting point.

Wait, could this be...her spine?

Since she had a human body, it was only natural she’d have a spine. The brain—the most important organ in the human body—used the spinal cord to communicate with the rest of the body. Perhaps the reason just placing Molly’s head on the body wasn’t working was that it wasn’t connecting properly to the spine.

No wonder...

“Mmmm...agh...ohh, I’m trembling!” she declared.

If he could reconnect her spine, it might snap her body out of its current independent mode. It might have been easier if he could see the wound, but it was hidden by the flickering flames. All Glenn had to go by were his own fingers and experience.

“Ahh, yeah... Eee... Oooh...You like to take things slow, don’t you? J-just a little more... There... Oooh...”

It seemed like she was trying to be promiscuous on purpose. Glenn figured that said something about her personality, though it did make him wonder what kind of woman she’d been in life.

“Okay, I got it. Molly, it seems the bones and the nerves that run through them are vital here. I am going to attach your cervical spine and the rest of your spine.”

“You mean, it’s like putting together machine parts?” Cottingley looked puzzled at Glenn’s explanation.

“Not normally,” Glenn answered, as he tried to imagine the positioning of the invisible spine. “Just reconnecting the bones doesn’t fix anything. A human would die as soon as the head and body were severed... But as you said, Cottingley, this is a world made up only of souls. Even if it isn’t biologically exact, if the soul *feels* like it’s been reconnected, it should work to treat the issue—I believe. What do you think?”

“Well, fine. That sounds smart. It makes sense,” Cottingley nodded. He (or she?) didn’t seem certain either, but Glenn decided to go ahead and try.

“Oh, yeah...Y-you’re putting it in? Are...you going to put it...deep inside me?” Molly asked.

The severed head was really being a bit too much. He needed to concentrate, and this was distracting.

Umm...

Glenn grabbed the collar of his lab coat and ripped through it. This wouldn’t be the first time he’d used it to treat someone’s injuries in an emergency.

“Ahh...faster. Treat me, Doctor... Oo—mggh?!”

“Sorry, just a second,” Glenn said as he calmly pushed a cloth into the severed head’s mouth.

“Mmmhmm?! Mmm! Mgggh!”

“I’m sorry, but as I’m working with nerves, there will be some pain. I need to put this cloth in your mouth so you don’t accidentally bite your tongue during the procedure.”

“Mmmggg?!”

He did mean to give her the cloth to bite on as part of his treatment, but it was also true that he wanted her to shut up. Despite the gag, Molly was still mumbling away.

“Now then, let’s start again.”

“Mggg!”

As Glenn pushed Molly’s head against her torso again, he searched for where he thought the spine should be inside her body.

There...I think.

“Mmm, mm, mmm...Mmmgg!”

Glenn went on to adjust the position of the neck, relying only on his fingers and his sense of touch.

“Mmm, mm, mmmmg...Gg! Ahmmm! Mmgg!”

Finally, he found the sweet spot where the spine and the cervical spine fit together.

“Oof.” Glenn continued with his work.

“Mmm, mmm...mm! Mmmggg!” Molly let out another high-pitched scream. The gag in her mouth was soaked in saliva that was now dripping down her chin.

“Here, then.” Glenn pressed the severed head forcefully into the joint he found.

“Mmm, mmggg! Mmm!”

The head locked perfectly into the torso, as if it had been her natural form the entire time. Molly's head was facing the sky and she was trembling.

"Mmm, ggg...gwommm!"

Her body and head shook, but they looked reconnected once more. After a bout of trembling, she finally settled down.

"Whoo..." Molly pulled her hair back over her ears and let out a breath as she spit the saliva-soaked cloth into her hand. "Thank you, Glenn, you cutie. You really helped me out... Do you need this?" she asked, holding out the gag.

"N-no, please throw it away."

"Yeah, right?" Molly giggled, tossing the cloth onto the ground. "Allow me to reintroduce myself—I am Molly Vanitas, a Dullahan, and the cute reaper who murdered you. Would you like me to...show my gratitude?"

She opened her closed eyes just a tiny bit to peek at him.

"I have fiancées, so I'll decline. Please give me the key," he answered.

"Ugh! You're just so good!"

That was when Glenn noticed that, despite her bubbly demeanor, her laugh never reached her closed eyes. His experience with his many patients gave him the feeling he should never let his guard down around her.

"Okay then, two new arrivals, this way!" Molly removed the head that Glenn had just connected. However, the body seemed to be following her head's intentions now, holding it under her armpit. He saw no signs of the trembling or fear the body had been exhibiting when he first met her.

"Hey, will we really get to meet the Queen?" Cottingley didn't sound convinced.

"Teehee. I am a Dullahan, working directly for the Queen. I said I'd take you, don't worry so much," Molly assured them.

"You are not trustworthy!"

Cottingley and Molly clearly did not get along.

"Buuut make sure you don't do anything to offend her. As you know, the

Queen of the Underworld is the concept of death incarnate. She is moody, she's unreasonable, and she relentlessly wields her authority... Got it?"

"Err..." The fairy's face was grave.

Glenn could tell by his expression that the Queen of the Underworld was a truly difficult person to deal with. Regardless of why, he wondered if the Queen would even listen to his plea to return to the living world after he'd already died once.

"Molly..." Glenn called out.

"Wha-at?" she responded in a singsong voice.

"You still haven't told us why you killed me. Can you tell me now?"

"Why do you ask? It's already decided that every living being will die someday, isn't it?" She was stalling.

"If that were the case, you would have said so when Mr. Cottingley asked. Also, you wouldn't be taking us to petition the Queen."

"Well, well," Molly said, sticking out her tongue as if displeased she'd been caught in her lie. "You're right, I can't just keep dodging the question..."

"I thought the agreement was that you would tell us if I put your head back on," Glenn pointed out.

"Teehee, so you haven't forgotten. That reminds me of when I was talking to Skadi—Okay, I'll tell you," Molly said, opening her eyes again only slightly. "That was a test."

"A...test?"

"I wanted to see how good a doctor you really were. There are two reasons I brought you to the Underworld. Firstly, the Queen hates you. She ordered me to bring you to her right away," she explained.

Glenn moaned. Cottingley looked up at the sky. An order from the Queen of the Underworld—in other words, the Goddess of Death. It was like she was telling him to abandon any hope that his pleas would be heard.

"The other reason," Molly said, looking at Glenn with her narrow eyes, "is

that the Queen of the Underworld is sick.”

“Er.”

“You are one of the most extraordinary doctors of our time. I learned that when you treated me just now. So it is my personal hope...that you will cure the Queen of the Underworld.”

Glenn was speechless. He had treated a dragon before, and dragons were often compared to gods. He had also treated a gigas, which were often called Giant Gods. But...a real god?

He wondered if it was common for gods who didn't obey the rules of the living world to get sick. Then he wondered if such an illness could really be cured by a mere small-town doctor.

“I know you're passionate about medicine. Just put that passion into healing the Goddess. Okay, Doctor?” The first-generation Molly grinned at Glenn. She was incapable of speaking in any other manner.

Case 02:

The Bereaved Lamia

SAPHENTITE NEIKES SAT QUIETLY at the Central Hospital, a sorrowful look on her face. She had been in the waiting room for a long time.

It was Sapphee, just home from a wedding planning session, who'd found Glenn. She'd taken him straight to the hospital and left him with Cthulhy. Sapphee had offered to help with his treatment, but Cthulhy turned her away. She said Sapphee was too emotionally involved, and Sapphee couldn't protest, because her hands were shaking.

She looked down to see they were shaking again. She balled her hands into fists to stop it.

"It'll be okay," Arahnia said, putting her arm around Sapphee's shoulders and pulling her close. "He ain't always the most attentive, but the Doc's got a strong heart. He's tenacious, yeah? So you don't gotta worry."

"That's right!" Tisalia said, puffing up her chest. "I was beside myself when the hospital contacted me...but it's our Doctor! He seems sweet and pure, but he's strong-willed. He even handled the giant and the water-poisoning incident without fear! So-so...I'm sure..."

Tisalia trailed off. Her ears were drooping, betraying her true feelings.

"Ah, don't you go cryin' too, Lady. How am I supposed to decide who to comfort?"

"But-buuut, a-aren't you worried?!" cried Tisalia.

"Of course, I am, but it'll be all right," Arahnia answered, her face calm. "She's makin' us wait here, ain't she? Dr. Cthulhy is hard at work, so doesn't that mean the Doc is alive? I don't want to think about it...but if the unthinkable happened, there would be no reason for her to make us wait like this...y'know?"

"I-I guess that's true, but..."

That was when Sapphee noticed that Arahnia's makeup was running. Even

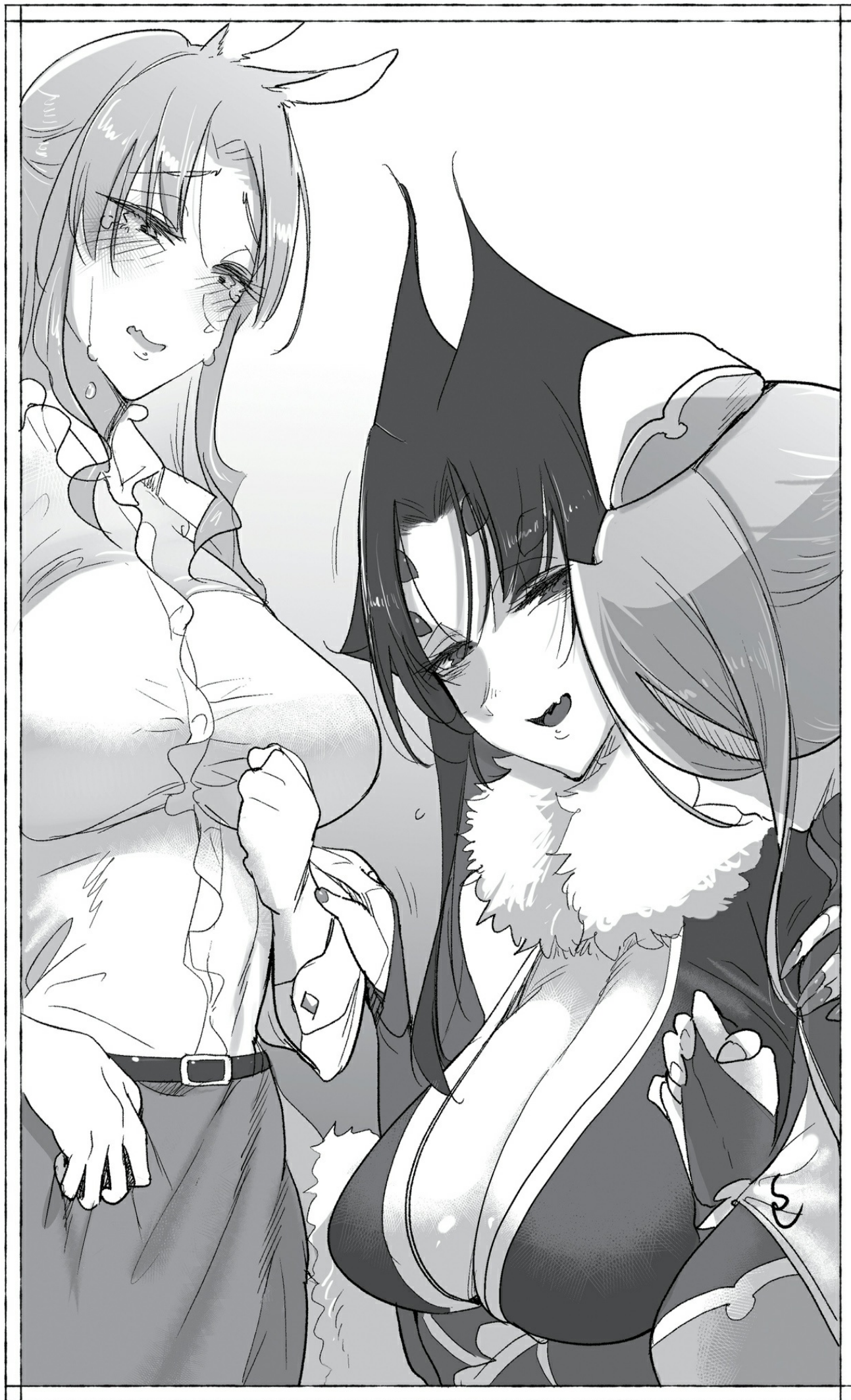
while reassuring Tisalia, Arahnia was not calm on the inside. And still, she put on a brave front to be there for Sapphee and Tisalia. Arahnia really did put others before herself, Sapphee thought.

But Sapphee knew the truth.

Acute heart failure... When I found him, there was no heartbeat or breath...

She tried with all her might to stop her hands from trembling.

I couldn't even give him first aid... He was already dead.



Back when they were at the Academy, Glenn had once suffered an injury so severe that it was life-altering. It was so severe that the extremely special treatment they had given him had left Glenn with no recollection of said treatment. However, he'd still been breathing that time, albeit barely.

I knew when I saw him. This time, Glenn...

He couldn't be saved. Despite knowing this because of her own medical training, Sapphee couldn't bring herself to say it out loud. Tisalia and Arahnia were both hanging onto the belief that Glenn would be fine.

In reality, Sapphee wanted to scream out loud. She wanted to just scream, cry, and wallow in her sorrow. The reason she couldn't do that was just as Arahnia said—for some reason, she and the others were being made to wait.

What is Cthulhy doing? If she's just going to confirm his death, it wouldn't take this long—

Being made to wait this long meant Sapphee couldn't give up hope. Lazy as she might seem, Cthulhy had studied a number of magic arts from various fields. Maybe—

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

Cthulhy finally entered the waiting room and the other three women jumped up. They could see the exhaustion in her face.

"Dr. Cthulhy, how is he?" Tisalia asked.

"The Doc is fine, right?" Arahnia joined in.

Cthulhy didn't answer. Instead, she kept glancing behind her, where there sat a mobile bed shaped like a bathtub. The bathtub was filled with a green, sticky substance—slime. Judging from the color, it was the hospital nurse, Lime. Glenn was floating in the bathtub—enveloped in the liquefied Lime, who was there to protect him.

"Umm...Dr. Cthulhy?"

"Please prepare yourselves, all of you," Cthulhy had a somber expression on her face.

All three women took a deep breath.

Cthulhy sounded emotionless as she delivered her news. “When Glenn was brought here to the hospital, he had no heartbeat and wasn’t breathing. His heart was stopped due to heart failure, cause unknown. Medically, he was already completely dead.”

Tisalia covered her face, stifling a cry. Arahnia slouched down, biting her lips. And Sapphee...

Ahhh.

She knew this day would come. Glenn always worked as hard as he could, striving to accomplish his goals as a doctor. No matter how worried it made Sapphee, he just kept moving forward. Even though he was younger than her, Sapphee did all she could to support Glenn in his quest to become the ideal physician. She knew that the reason he wanted to become a great doctor was for her. But she’d always had the feeling that someday, he would leave her and go somewhere beyond her reach.

I just thought that if we got married, we could stay by each other’s sides and go through life together.

But that wasn’t the case. And for Glenn to go on without her like this...

Why can’t we ever move forward together, Glenn?

Listening to Tisalia’s sobs, Sapphee was surprised at her own lack of sadness. She probably hadn’t accepted the truth in her heart yet. She couldn’t imagine a world without Glenn. Maybe she would just live on and never accept this emptiness.

“Wait a second—”

It was at that moment that Sapphee realized something very pertinent. Cthulhy was being ambiguous on purpose.

“You said ‘medically’... Does that mean from another perspective, he’s not dead?”

Cthulhy narrowed her eyes. She was the authority on modern medicine. Sapphee wondered if a perspective other than “medically” was even an option

for her when determining if someone was dead or alive.

“If it’s about that, I—” Sapphee started.

“She’s here,” Cthulhy interrupted.

Suddenly, a figure appeared at the end of the corridor—a small person with protruding horns that didn’t suit her size. At her side, as always, was her bodyguard.

Sapphee stopped short. “The Draconess...”

“Hello, Sapphee. You must be shocked at this sudden incident.”

“Well...putting that aside. What are you doing here?”

“It’s a good thing I went to Cthulhy. I informed her in advance that something might happen to Dr. Glenn...though I didn’t think it would turn out like this,” Skadi explained. She clearly hadn’t been expecting this to happen.

The fiancées looked at the council representative blankly. Skadi glanced over at her bodyguard, Kunai Zenow.

“Now then, Kunai, You’re up.”

“Right.” Kunai put her hand in the bathtub.

“Ahh!” Lime let out a cry when Kunai’s hand went in her. Kunai ignored this and put one knee on the lip of the bathtub. She extended her muscular arm over to touch Glenn.

She didn’t say a word, but closed her eyes, as if meditating. When she finally opened her eyes, she said, “There have been no changes, Draconess.”

“Yeah.”

“Umm, everyone? What are you doing? What is going on here?” Tisalia asked, her eyes puffy from crying. Despite the tears, she was resolute.

Kunai, a warrior, was unfazed. She looked straight into Tisalia’s eyes. “Dr. Glenn’s soul is no longer in his body,” she explained.

“What?”

“I can’t hear any ‘voice.’ The soul has completely and cleanly disappeared

from this body,” she continued.

Tisalia and Arahnia looked at each other. They couldn’t quite decipher what that information meant.

“In other words...doesn’t that mean he is dead?” Sapphee asked the question everyone else was thinking.

But Skadi shook her head. “When someone dies, their soul remains in the body. Kunai is proof of that—she can hear souls speak to her. The attachment a soul can continue to have to the body after death is the reason there are undead in this world.”

“To put it another way, it is impossible for there to be *no* such attachment—for a soul to simply disappear. Dr. Glenn is dead, but the manner of his death is too clean. Such a phenomenon means something strange is probably going on,” Kunai offered.

The fiancées were all silent. After the sudden loss of the man they loved, being told that his death was strange before they could even come to terms with their grief was too much. All they could do was look at each other.

Kunai ignored this. “His soul should be wandering somewhere, like a ghost. The soul is a condensed form of a person’s memories and personality during life. Normally, it partially dissipates on death, with some residual amount remaining in the body—meaning the portion of the soul that leaves the body is an incomplete existence with only a vague sense of self. In Dr. Glenn’s case, there is a high possibility that he is thinking clearly and fully aware of himself.”

Kunai was one of the people most intimately familiar with death in Lindworm. If she said it, it must be true.

“Therefore, if we can get his soul back, Dr. Glenn will return to life.”

It sounded ridiculous—like trying to catch a cloud.

“Let me say this,” Cthulhy said in tones of disgust. “In medical science, the existence of the soul has never been proven. The fact that undead live in the Graveyard City means there must be *some* truth to the theory—but even if I were to accept the existence of a soul, is there actually a way to get it back? We have been debating this for some time.”

“And Cthulhy just won’t be convinced, so...” Skadi added.

“And why would I be convinced? No one returns from death,” Cthulhy insisted.

“It did happen sometimes, in the age of myths,” Skadi pointed out.

“So what?” Cthulhy sounded exasperated. “Whether there is a soul or not, Glenn’s body is dead. If left alone, it will start to decompose. That’s why Lime is protecting him for now. But if his soul doesn’t return, are we just going to keep him like that?”

“Well, that’s true.” Skadi agreed.

“If there is a way to bring a soul back, I’d like to hear it,” Cthulhy insisted.

Kunai remained silent. She had to be telling the truth. But in the end, the biggest problem was how to bring back the soul.

Then Skadi raised her hand. “It was the first-generation Molly who warned me that something might happen to Glenn,” she offered.

“But the first-generation Molly disappeared,” Sapphee pointed out.

“That’s right. The first-generation Molly cut her connection to her body and went to the Underworld, but she came back at the Harvest Festival to warn me. She didn’t go into detail, but I believe this is the matter she was warning me about,” Skadi said, her eyes fixed steadily on Sapphee’s.

Of course, there was no way any of them could know that Molly had taken Glenn’s soul to the Underworld.

“I’ve done a great deal of research on ways to bring a soul back from the Underworld, but I haven’t found anything definitive yet,” Skadi said.

“This is Skadi’s position. There is not a doubt in her mind that Glenn will come back. We debated it for a long time, but in the end, I can’t dismiss the fact that the first-generation Molly came all the way here to warn her,” Cthulhy disclosed, looking at Sapphee. “From where I stand, though, I have to say that Glenn is deceased. That’s why I want to hear all of your opinions.”

“Ours?”

“If his survivors—meaning his fiancées—wish it, we can store the body for a while longer. If keeping him like this is too painful, we can start to prepare him for burial. Whichever you decide... As the president of this hospital, I will do whatever I can to respect that decision,” Cthulhy explained.

Skadi’s theory was a pipe dream, with no proof to back it up. But she did truly seem to believe Glenn would come back to life—a belief likely born of her trust in Kunai, who could hear the voices of souls, and Molly, who’d come to warn her.

Sapphee closed her eyes. What was she supposed to believe?

As his mentor, Cthulhy was of the opinion Glenn’s corpse should not be left as it was without good reason. With no evidence to prove otherwise, she did not find it logical to leave the body untouched. But then again...

“Ms. Skadi, there is a chance, right?” Sapphee checked.

“At the very least, I believe there is,” Skadi confirmed.

“Understood.” Sapphee nodded. “I will trust Miss Skadi. Glenn’s soul will return. If nothing else...if this were Glenn, as long as there was a chance, he would believe that his patient could recover. No matter how small that chance might be.”

“I see. That’s true. Thank you.” Skadi gave her a small smile.

Apparently, Tisalia and Arahnia felt the same way. There was no need to argue.

“Then I have no choice,” Cthulhy sighed.

But Sapphee, who had known her for many years, noticed there was also a small smile on her lips. Cthulhy wasn’t the type to just give up on her beloved pupil. She couldn’t bring herself to believe that he would recover without conclusive proof, but if that proof was missing, they could bring it into being through their own actions.

“Then it’s decided. Everyone, I would like to request your cooperation in bringing back Dr. Glenn’s soul,” Skadi said.

“Is there anything we can do? Is...there even a way to bring back a soul?”

Arahnia asked.

“I don’t know. But there is someone who might,” Skadi said with confidence. “The second-generation Molly, manager of the Graveyard City, has disappeared. Given how responsible she is, it’s unfathomable that she would just go off somewhere at a time like this. She clearly knows something about Glenn’s death.”

“Molly...”

First-generation Molly was the one who gave the warning about Glenn. Second-generation Molly had disappeared. It certainly was suspicious. It seemed clear that something was happening in this town that even Skadi couldn’t fully comprehend yet.

“I’d like Tisalia to use her legs to search every corner of the town. If she is hiding somewhere, Sapphee’s vision will also be helpful. Will you help me?”

“Y-yes.”

“Of course, we will!”

Sapphee and Tisalia answered quickly.

“Well, I’ll stay behind and take care of Dr. Glenn. We can’t let him rot now, can we? I just need to keep him clean in a cool room, yeah?” Arahnia volunteered.

“Slurp! That will be helpful! I can’t just sit here holding Glenn forever... I can’t even eat like this!” Lime answered from her liquified state, where she was currently enveloping all of Glenn except his face. She looked at Glenn, inside her, with a concerned expression.

“You’re lucky, Dr. Glenn. There are lots of people awaiting your return,” Skadi said emotionally as she looked at Glenn’s corpse. “Come back soon.”

Naturally, Glenn’s body did not answer her.

Sapphee didn’t know where his soul was, but she felt her heart light up.

Glenn...just when I thought we were finally connected, here we are, apart again.

She'd been a hostage in the Litbeit residence, before they were separated. They met again at the Academy, but due to his accident, Glenn lost the majority of his memories of the good times they'd shared in the lab. Then, during the water-canal-poisoning incident, Sapphee had left Glenn for some time.

They'd been repeating the same pattern, over and over again. When she finally thought they'd be married, they were only separated once more.

In that case...

It's fine. If that is our fate, I will follow you anywhere.

Her sadness transformed into a burning rage and passion. She wouldn't let him go this time. Once Glenn's soul came back, Sapphee resolved, she would wrap her long snake tail around him and never let him go again.

Rumors of Glenn's death spread through the town like wildfire. On the other hand, since there was no activity at the morgue, there was an opposing rumor that Glenn hadn't actually died but just collapsed from overwork. Lindworm loved rumors and it didn't take long for this one to take on a life of its own.

"Doctor..." Lulala said to herself at the fountain in the Central Plaza. She looked like she might cry. Even the song she sang that night was stiff and constrained, unlike her usual, carefree demeanor. The audience noticed, but they didn't blame her. Everyone knew that the diva of the Plaza was in love with the young doctor in the clinic.

"I-it'll be fine. Don't be so down—I'm sure Dr. Glenn is fine," her friend Memé offered.

"Mmm." Lulala couldn't muster up any words.

Lindworm's dead were given a funeral once the hospital confirmed their demise. The council also immediately issued notifications of deaths. Large-scale funerals which many were expected to attend were conducted under the supervision of the manager of the Graveyard City. As there had been no such notification, it was likely Glenn was not dead.

On the other hand, however, the clinic that was open 365 days a year was

now closed. Neither Glenn nor Sapphee were anywhere to be found.

It wasn't like Lulala to be so depressed.

"I..." she started, resting her arm on the edge of the fountain. "I always wanted to be Glenn's wife, but deep down ...I knew it wouldn't work out. Even though Miss Sapphee encouraged me, and I thought it could work with her and the Doctor..."

Memé let her go on.

"It always ends up like this. I try to hide it...but the truth is that I'm just really unlucky," she said listlessly, her eyes hollow. She didn't look like her normal self—the diva, the symbol of this town. She had lost her endlessly cheerful smile. "If he did die, I'm sure it was my fault..."

"...up!"

"Huh?" Lulala said absently. She'd been almost talking to herself, not noticing that Memé's large hands were trembling.

"How selfish can you be?!"

"Memé?"

"What did you say? During the Draconess's surgery, what were you doing? Weren't you singing for the Draconess every single night?! What happened to the mermaid that forced me to come out here and listen to her sing?!" The normally shy and reserved Memé was screaming now, not caring who saw her.

"That was me, but—"

Lulala was reflected in Memé's large, tear-filled eye.

"You were full of confidence, saying, 'Everyone listens to my songs.' Where is that Lulala?! You know I'm always shy, and I'm always scared...but it's because you are here, in this town, that I can be just a little bit positive now," Memé cried.

"But I actually—"

"Don't say it!" Memé interrupted, grabbing Lulala's shoulders with her large hands. Although the cyclops were known for their strength, Memé was always

careful with others. “If you’re going to encourage me, don’t just go halfway! You need to hold on and shine bright in a way that I never could!”

Lulala didn’t answer at first. In fact, she was awestruck for a few moments. But finally—

“Gurgle—”

She stuck her face in the water of the fountain with a splash.

“Huh?!”

Memé watched as she stayed underwater for a few moments before eventually bringing her face back up, shivering and wet. She shook the water off her.

“You’re right,” Lulala resolved. She seemed to have had a burst of strength. “It’s just as you said, Memé. I need to make sure I always shine. If I don’t do that, I won’t be worthy of becoming Glenn’s wife.”

Memé gulped and nodded, still teary-eyed.

“Heeey, everyooone! It’s not on the schedule, but I have decided to keep singing tonight! If you have the time, I hope you will listen!”

The audience in the Plaza murmured. The band that had been playing at the bar gathered around the fountain.

“I think this is a difficult time for everyone, so I’m going to blow that all away with my music! Are you ready? Let’s go!”

The audience clapped as Lulala began to sing. She’d chosen a song in the ancient language, keeping time with the music. Memé sat in a special seat next to the mermaid, listening to her sing with a look of satisfaction on her face.

Where are you and what are you doing right now, Dr. Glenn?

Her single eye was filled with anger—anger directed at Glenn.

Meanwhile, in the harpy village, the dozing gigas Dione opened her eyes.

“Hmm?”

She'd woken because she'd caught sight, through the hair covering her eyes, of the panic in the village. The young harpies were setting off to fly toward Lindworm.

"What happennned?" Dione asked a harpy who was waiting next to her.

"Oh, Miss Gigas—"

"Caaan I help youuu?"

"No, I think we're okay. Apparently, the council has requested we search for someone."

"A seeearch..."

Dione chuckled to herself. She would cause chaos just by descending from the top of the mountain. She wasn't built to search for people. She wouldn't be able to help.

"Whooo are they searching fooor?" she inquired.

"I don't know the details, but apparently, the manager of the Graveyard City is missing. The harpies who know what she looks like will search from the sky," the harpy said with a grave expression on her face.

"Ohhh?"

"I wonder if it has something to do with why Dr. Glenn collapsed the other day?" the harpy added.

"Hmm?" Dione didn't know either. All she'd heard was that Glenn had collapsed and been taken to the hospital in serious condition. Some were even saying he had died.

Of course, it's not the first time someone I know has collapsed.

Dione had watched the rest of her species collapse. Compared to the gigas, the lifespans of all other beings were like the blink of an eye. Even Glenn and Illy, who treated her so well—even the young harpy girl she was speaking to right now—were here only briefly, from Dione's point of view.

There *were* some beings with long lifespans, like dragons and cylla. Or the undead.

Molly.

It was the second-generation Molly who was missing right now, but Dione remembered all the times she'd spoken to the original skeleton.

If he's there, please save himmm.

Dione didn't know anything about what was going on, but Glenn had once pointed out that her long life gave her both knowledge and instinct in times of trouble. She knew the first-generation Molly was the key. She had already ascended, which meant she should be in *that* place. If Glenn was in trouble, Dione wanted her to help him. She wanted Molly to save him all the more because she couldn't move or help him herself.

Or maaaybe my species will save himmm?

Dione wondered if her fellow now-extinct gigas were in the Underworld. Even if they were, they all moved at their own slow pace, so they'd probably be no help.

She wanted to do something, but she couldn't move. If only she could take his place...

"If only I could die insteaddd..."

"Huh?" the harpy looked at Dione.

"Ohhh, nooo, it's nothinggg." Dione tried to backpedal, taking back the words she hadn't meant to say out loud. There was no cheating death. No one could take your place on your death bed.

The only thing Dione could do about what was happening in Lindworm was pray it all ended well.

That's why...

She closed her eyes and prayed as she dozed off.

I'm sure it will all turn out just fine.

Dione wasn't a god. But as the woman sat there motionless, offering only her prayers, she could have easily been mistaken for one.

Rumors kept spreading rapidly through Lindworm.

At Skadi's command, the town had been searching for Molly for days. While the patrol group did so in accordance with their orders, there were also private citizens who volunteered to join the search. With summer on the horizon in Lindworm, the searching was sweaty work. But Molly was nowhere to be found.

"We've looked everywhere," Kay groaned as she sipped on some honey water in the Central Plaza. "Why haven't we found her yet?"

"Lady Tisalia is searching the highway." Lorna narrowed her eyes as she sucked on salted candy to replenish her electrolytes. "With our lady's speed, she could easily catch up with her, even on the highway. But do you really think she went that far? Without anyone noticing?"

"They're asking around in the Graveyard City too, right? But..."

Kay and Lorna both grew quiet, thinking. All of Lindworm was searching for Molly in order to help Glenn. But why Molly? How was she connected to Glenn? Very few people knew the truth. The ones who did were Skadi, Cthulhy, Kunai, Lime, and Glenn's fiancées. Kay and Lorna had heard the gist from Tisalia, but they still had questions.

Why did Molly disappear?

What did her disappearance have to do with Glenn?

Skadi had artfully withheld that information while giving the order to search for Molly. At some point in time, baseless rumors began flying around Lindworm, such as, "Glenn will recover if we find Molly," and "Molly loved Glenn too much, so she reaped his soul and ran away." Considering the fact that the first-generation Molly had sent Glenn's soul to the Underworld, that particular rumor wasn't far from the truth—though naturally, the residents of Lindworm didn't know that.

"I never thought it would turn out like this," Kay said.

"I know," Lorna agreed. Both of their faces remained downcast.

Of course they hadn't. Their lady had finally found someone she loved to marry. Her attendants were at least as happy for her as Tisalia was for herself, if

not more so. Glenn would be a very successful doctor. Tisalia would take over the trading company. Both were vital contributors to Lindworm and would lead the town together, as equals. They couldn't begin to fathom how their lady's new life could come apart like this before it had even started.

"I hope our lady is all right," Lorna murmured with a grave expression. "You don't think she would...try to follow him, do you?"

"No, no, wait a second. Dr. Glenn's not dead yet," Kay shot back in response to Lorna's negativity.

"But there's a chance he will die, right?" Lorna pointed out.

"Well..." Kay didn't know what else to say.

There were groundless rumors for every scenario. Even the rumor that Glenn would recover if Molly were found was being laughed off. No one recovered from death.

"Even so, our lady has not given up hope!"

"That's true—but why?"

Tisalia was serious, proud, and a hard worker, always putting her all into everything she did. On the other hand, she did have her weaknesses, and one of those was love. When it came to the man she loved, she could easily fall apart.

"It must be because she's not alone," Lorna said.

"You mean Sapphee? Or Arahnia?" Kay asked.

"Both, I'm sure."

"Yes, you're right." They giggled together.

Kay and Lorna knew how reassuring it was to have companions to help you stay positive. After all, they'd always had each other—though since they were attendants, while Tisalia was their lady, they'd never been her equals despite the three of them growing up like sisters. They probably never would, either. But her two rival fiancées could. They couldn't imagine how much relief their presence must provide her.

"In that case, there are things we must do."

“Yes, you’re right,”

The two got back to business, using their centaur legs to search Lindworm. They weren’t happy about the predicament Glenn was in, but Tisalia had gained companions that were hard to come by.

This simple thought brought a small smile to their faces. All they had to do now was follow their lady’s orders and get to work.

Kay and Lorna were willing to do anything for Tisalia. They bolted off in search of Molly, the sound of their hooves echoing through the streets.

Meanwhile, in the Eastern capital of Heian in the human realm, Souen was clenching his teeth, unable to speak. He had been preparing for a visit from the three ambassadors from Lindworm, including his own sister.

In one hand, he held a secret letter from a subordinate he had sent to infiltrate Lindworm. It had been express delivered by a harpy, the fastest way to get information from the West.

“Souen? What is it?” Saki asked, her head cocked to the side. With the changes in the human realm, she no longer had to hide her horns. She was legally Souen’s wife now, and she always noticed when something was off with him.

“It’s Glenn...”

“Your brother?”

“Glenn collapsed and was taken to the hospital. There’s a chance...he won’t make it,” Souen explained, surprising himself with his quivering lips. He was universally recognized as a merchant as well as a statesman. He never hesitated to use his relatives, even his siblings, in order to advance his own agenda.

It was Souen who’d appointed his sister as an ambassador to improve relations between humans and monsters, and he had no plans to stop using others for his own benefit. Everything he did was so Saki could live a peaceful life. People still held deep-seated prejudice against demons, meaning he had to counter everyone who criticized her.

He wasn't the type to worry about something as trivial as his brother collapsing. Or so he thought...but he couldn't keep his face from going pale.

"That fool...Sioux is coming here in a few days. How am I supposed to explain this to her? Or my father and mother, for that matter?" he complained.

"Calm down," Saki said, taking the hand in which Souen held the letter.

She didn't hold back, but she used her demonic strength to squeeze his fingers. The pain traveled all the way down to his bones. However, that pain helped him think clearly.

"First, you need to confirm the situation. You need to reply to your new Lindworm agent and instruct them to send more details," she said.

"Ahh. Agh..."

"Leave your sister to me. You can meet with her once the color has returned to your face. You might be able to see a stranger like this, but a family member would notice something was wrong," Saki instructed, her reasoning rock-solid.

Ahhh—I almost forgot.

Souen suddenly recalled the moment he became secretary to the Duke. When they were given non-arable land on a deserted island as a joke, it was Saki who illegally established a village for monsters and became its leader. It wasn't logical, but he fell in love with her at first sight.

In the East, where living as a monster came with massive disadvantages, Saki had struggled to carve out a space of their own, all *on* their own. She was so strong. That strength charmed him. He'd trusted his instincts about her, and it had brought them here.

Right...

He couldn't be this pathetic in front of his partner...but she had already seen him like this on many an occasion, and there was no changing that now. Souen suppressed his trembling and rubbed his own face. Afterward, he looked like the hard-headed, cold-hearted merchant once more.

"I'm fine now. I will greet the ambassadors," he said.

"Are you sure?" Saki checked.

"I can't let something so small bother me. Setting that aside, Sioux is astute. Make sure she doesn't catch on to anything," Souen assured her.

"Teehee," Saki giggled. Her tone was teasing, but Souen glared at her.

"I'm sorry, Saki," he apologized.

"I don't know why you're apologizing *now*. I've endured plenty since I decided to be with you."

"Take that back. You should learn to treat your husband with due respect," he warned.

"This *is* me intending to treat you with respect..." she replied, furrowing her brow.

Even that exchange made Souen felt more like his usual self. He allowed himself to smile just a little.

"Now then, let's get ready to greet our guests. I will find out more about Lindworm," he said.

"Understood, Souen."

A few days later, three monster ambassadors to the human realm arrived. Sioux was in great spirits, perhaps because she was going to see her family for the first time in a while. The harpy kept her wings tucked close to her body, and the vampire looked timid, as if they'd been hit with a bout of shyness.

It went without saying that Souen took precautions to keep the three of them from learning about Glenn's state.

The first time Sapphee met fairies was when she was a small child. It had been at her parents' home—in other words, in the Neikes Village.

Great masses of medicinal plants were grown in Neikes Village from which to make medicine. One time, when Sapphee was caring for the herb garden, she came across a small fairy. As a child, it took her breath away.

You heard tales of children seeing fairies sometimes. There were even some

adults who'd seen them when they were children. What Sapphee didn't learn until *she* was an adult was that she had the ability to tame them. It was all because she could still see them, even after she graduated from the Academy—if you could see fairies, you could make contracts with them.

When Sapphee learned that the clinic needed more man power, she made a contract with the fairies. She gave them one bowl of milk a day and asked them to help out with various duties at the clinic. She remembered how one fairy she'd seen around a lot had seemed to be their leader. He'd held his small fingertip up and touched it to Sapphee's. That was probably how they'd made the contract official.

After that, Sapphee had done her own research and listened to other fairy tamers in Lindworm to learn how to better care for them.

It really is helpful to have fairies around, Sapphee thought to herself. Though they were small, the fairies seemed to have very deep thoughts. Their speech was childish, and they sometimes ran into misunderstandings, but they were tenacious and dedicated workers, like army ants.

But I'm sure they see the world differently from us.

Fairies were convenient, but she couldn't rely too much on them. She often heard that from other fairy tamers. They weren't helping out because they *liked* humans and monsters, and she had to remember that at all times when making use of them. Sapphee had taken this lesson to heart. That was why, whenever she asked them to do something, she always made sure to show the utmost respect and gratitude.

"Thank you for gathering here, everyone," she said to all of the fairies lined up in the clinic.

Looking at their formation, she understood something. The fairy who always wore a hat and stood in the front row was gone.

"Something *is* going on, then..." Sapphee said out loud to herself.

If the fairy leader who always served as their supreme commander was gone, it meant this was a crisis situation. And the clinic really *was* in a crisis. Something strange had happened to Glenn.

“Yes.”

“That’s right.”

“But we can’t tell.”

“Right.”

“You can’t tell...I understand,” Sapphee accepted.

The fairies were behaving according to their own logic. She was only asking them to do her a favor. Though she had no idea where Glenn’s soul was, she was sure the hat-wearing fairy was working to resolve the situation.

The fairies valued their contract above all else. Their task was to take care of things around the clinic, and they understood that duty to include resolving any problems that clinic ran into.

“Everyone, I’d like to ask you to search for Molly, manager of the Graveyard City. You know her face, right?”

“We know!” answered a fairy, who was probably temporarily filling in as leader. It raised its hand enthusiastically.

It seemed the fairies were sharing knowledge with each other in some way or the other. When one raised its hand, the rest of the fairies present knew what was happening.

“Understood. Please...I’m sure you know more about what’s happening than I do, but—”

“We know!”

“Understand!”

“Leader...dead...”

“No, not dead.”

“Big sacrifice.”

“Glenn dead.”

“No, alive?”

“Was alive?”

“Hey.”

“Good place.”

“Just once.”

“Want to go.”

“No want go!”

“Not alive”

“Alive!”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to ask something so complicated,” Sapphee apologized.

Apparently, they could not explain the phenomenon that was occurring with fairy language. Sapphee already understood that. Fairies were not good at verbal communication. However, she still needed their skills to search for the second-generation Molly.

“I trust you. I believe that Glenn will come back—and that you will all help make that happen. Is that acceptable?”

“Okay!” the fairies said in unison.

Sapphee to let out a sigh of relief. Now she could do what she needed to.

“Thank you. Now please, get out there and search for the second-generation Molly,” Sapphee concluded and the fairies dispersed. They still had leadership, even without their commander.

Sapphee was anxious. Could she really bring back something as amorphous as a soul? But Tisalia was currently running around the city, and Arahnia was with Glenn’s body. Sapphee decided that she needed to do something too.

Catching a cloud was no different from employing a fairy. As long as she followed the correct steps, she was sure she could recover a shapeless soul. Most of all...

This is your only home. So I will follow you, Glenn, Sapphee thought as she slithered her snake body out to search for Molly, her heart heavy with love.

Case 03:

Fallen From Grace

GLENN LITBEIT STEPPED into the Central Plaza with first-generation Molly.

“This...”

He could see a massive castle before them through the mist. The council hall that normally stood in the Plaza was gone, replaced by the majestic building. Its design was simple, but sturdy, and based on what Glenn knew of architecture, a bit old-fashioned. There was a central tower, but very few other embellishments. It looked more like a fortress on the front lines than the residence of a dignitary.

“The Lord of the Underworld is here?” Glenn asked.

Molly looked back at Glenn, head tucked under one arm, as she opened the gate to the Plaza.

“That’s right, the Queen of the Underworld. No one in the Underworld can defy her, so be careful how you behave. Or you know, don’t say anything stupid, ’kay?”

Considering the cavalier manner in which the severed head always spoke, Glenn wasn’t sure how to react to such a warning.

She opened the gate, and they went in. As they did so, they were surrounded by an ambient buzzing, like the sound of many flying insects.

“Bzzzzz...”

“Buzzz... bzzz...”

A number of dark shadows appeared around them. These were small human-shaped beings, very much like fairies, but with dark bodies and heads shaped like houseflies. The sound was coming from their wings, which also resembled that of a fly.

They flew closer to Molly, still buzzing.

“Ergh, what are you?!” Cottingley said with disgust, perhaps feeling threatened by the fact that they were nearly the same size.

“Teehee, don’t be afraid. They may look scary, but they’re the messengers of the Underworld. Think of them like dark fairies, or... just servants of the Underworld. I mean, I’m a fairy too, so we’re the same. We just look different and do different jobs.”

“Err, fairies? I see. So, they must serve the Queen of the Underworld instead of the Fairy Queen.”

“Right, right. Don’t fight with them, Cotty.”

“Who said you could call me Cotty?! You need to learn some manners!” Cottingley screamed at Molly, unable to curb his anger.

Deeming him a danger, a dark fairy flew directly in front of Cottingley, and they proceeded to glare at each other. The dark fairy’s wings continued to buzz.

“Ugh, I told you guys not to fight,” Molly said as they arrived at the central castle.

“Molly,” Glenn called out as she started to enter the unguarded castle. “Uhh, you said that the Queen of the Underworld is sick. But what is she sick *with*?”

“It’ll be faster if you just see for yourself,” Molly answered.

“I understand. One more thing... You called me here to treat the Queen’s illness. Does that mean when I’m done, I will be allowed to return to the living realm?”

First-generation Molly was silent. That was when Glenn realized she’d made the decision to ask him to treat the Queen on her own. He’d been hoping he could go back once his task was complete, but it seemed it wouldn’t be that simple.

“I’ll tell you one important thing before you meet with the Queen,” Molly offered.

Glenn listened.

“First of all, it was the Queen who called you to the Underworld, not me. The Queen really hates you. She hates you so much she wants to kill you. So all I

really did was use the Lord of the Underworld's authority to bring your soul to the Underworld."

"She...hates me?"

He had no memory of earning the ire of the Lord of the Underworld. He had never even met her.

While Glenn contemplated this, Molly continued. The head under her arm stared straight at Glenn.

"All I did was follow orders. Of course, I wasn't lying when I said that I want you to cure her illness...but *she* doesn't want you to."

So, Glenn was right. That didn't mean he wouldn't treat her, of course. In the past, he had treated Tisalia at the request of Kay and Lorna, and Skadi at the request of Kunai. It wasn't rare for someone other than the patient to request treatment.

"She is the Queen of the Underworld, after all. Everyone here is under her rule, 'kay? If you get on her bad side, she'll destroy your soul. I'm sorry, but if you want to return to life, can you leave it to me?"

"You just say whatever's convenient. We can't trust you!" Cottingley said angrily as he returned to Glenn's shoulder. Apparently, he and the dark fairy had concluded their feud.

"Yeah, I know." Molly sighed, as if she had expected that answer. She turned her head around. Her countenance seemed lonely.

"I...will trust her," Glenn decided.

"What?" Cottingley asked, surprised. Glenn disregarded him.

"Oh, are you sure? I probably shouldn't be saying this about myself, but I *am* an exceptionally suspicious and mysterious young woman," Molly warned.

"Yes, well, I'm not denying *that*," Glenn assured her.

To be honest, he had no good reason to trust her. However...

"I've heard about you from people who knew you. Skadi, Kunai, Dr. Cthulhy... they all praised you. They said you were wonderful. So, for now, I will trust

you,” he explained.

“I see...” the severed head answered without turning to look at him. He wasn’t sure what expression she wore. “Hehe, maybe that means this is one of my charms? In life I was so beautiful that I became so popular I was executed for being a witch...Teehee. Well, at least you know how sexy I am, Glenn.”

“No, that’s not what I—”

“How about I give you a smooch with my severed head to thank you?”

“My wives wouldn’t like that,” Glenn firmly declined. This was all happening before they’d officially gotten married, but he had a habit of referring to his fiancées as “wives.”

“Hmm? I like a faithful man. I’ll do what I can to avoid saying anything disadvantageous to you in front of the Queen of the Underworld.”

“What...” Cottingley was disgusted.

“I’m trying to tell you—” Glenn tried again to protest.

Just then, the door to the castle opened. The Dullahan still wasn’t letting them see her face. Glenn suddenly thought that the reason she was hiding her face but didn’t change the manner of her speech might be because her serious expression didn’t match her tone.

“Now shut up and try not to say anything dumb, okay?”

Glenn and the others followed Molly into the castle. The Underworld fairies were hard at work inside, flying around and carrying things much like the fairies in the clinic did.

They headed to the central part of the castle at the suggestion of one of the fairies. Finally, Molly opened one especially ornate door to reveal a dark throne on the other side of an expensive-looking carpet.

“So you’re back, Molly,” a woman said from the throne.

This was the throne room. Which meant the woman on the throne was none other than the Queen of the Underworld.

Glenn followed Molly’s lead and entered the room. While the air outside the

castle had been muggy, this room was freezing cold.

Ohhh.

He moaned. The source of the cold air was in the center of the room. It was the Queen. In other words, she was losing more heat than any of them.

“Took you long enough,” the Queen said impatiently.

“Sooo sorry, Your Highness. My body got away from me, and these cuties over here had to save me. But I’ve brought them before you now. Here he is. The doctor of Lindworm, Glenn Litbeit.”

“Hmph.” The Queen of the Underworld stared silently at Glenn.

She had a strange look about her. At first glance, she looked human—or at least, something close to it. For some reason, however, her hair was asymmetrical, with only the right side grown out. Her bangs were also long, hiding the entire right side of her face all the way down to her neck. The skin of the exposed left side was pale—but not *deathly* pale, even though she was the Lord of the Underworld. Just white.

Her deep purple dress was asymmetrical too. Her right arm was covered with a long glove that hid every inch of skin, but the only adornment on her left was nail polish. Her right leg was hidden, with a long boot and high sock to further reduce its exposure. However, on the left side, she wore only a sandal with no sock.

Glenn found the asymmetrical fashion strange. The right side of her body was entirely cloaked, while the left side was entirely exposed. As a finishing touch, she was wearing a skull-shaped mask over her face and hair on the right side. Her left eye—the one not covered by her hair—glared at Glenn.

“So, you are the doctor,” she said.

“Yes, that’s right. And he came all the way here, like a good boy,” Molly answered.

“Fine, fine. I would expect him to obey my invitation—all living things die after all, sooner or later. I’m sure he knew it was futile to scream and cry,” said the Goddess of Death, stifling a chuckle. She rested her elbow on the throne

without breaking her self-important stance.

Except for the strangely cold temperature of the room, nothing seemed particularly out of the ordinary. There was a suffocating smell of flowers that didn't seem to fit in the Underworld, though.

The scent of flowers is thick...but wait, this...

The perfume was mixed with another smell.

"Relax, Glenn—I don't like formality. I am Queen of the Underworld, the goddess who controls the afterlife. As a god, I am a perfect being and therefore do not require a name...but if you find that unsettling, you can call me Queen Elle. Just make sure you use the proper title," the Queen explained.

Glenn looked around. The cold air emanating from the Goddess of Death was abnormal. But that was all. He saw nothing else that made him think of death. Her style was unique, but overall, she looked like a normal, human woman.

"Queen Elle, you're so cool."

"Hehe, praise me more, Molly."

"By the way, Queen Elle, Glenn says that he has nooo idea why in the Underworld you would call him down here. Please give him just a little bit of an explanation, won't you?" Molly asked.

"You're really not taking this seriously, are you?!" Elle raised her voice but made no move to discipline Molly. Instead, the Queen let out a sigh and just stared at Glenn.

Despite being one of Elle's subjects, Molly seemed to have a friendly relationship with her.

"Hmm? Mmm? Hmmm?" Elle eyed Glenn. "You...there is something strange about you, yes?"

"Huh?" Glenn was confused.

"It wasn't a clean death. There's something off—have you been on the brink of death before?" she asked.

"I was...on the brink of death back at the Academy once, when I hit my head

hard..." Glenn answered honestly, against his better judgment.

The Queen's gaze never broke. He'd been told the injury was severe, but thanks to Dr. Cthulhy's prompt treatment, he'd recovered without incident.

"Is that all? Hmm? It really is a strange feeling. You've been more than half-dead once, you know?"

Glenn looked at the Queen quizzically.

"Well, whatever, it doesn't matter." She dismissed it.

But it mattered to Glenn. He wanted to know more, but the Queen seemed to have lost interest, coldly waving the topic aside with her left hand.

"Now then, Glenn. You say you don't know why you were summoned?"

"Yes..."

The Queen seemed friendly, but her eyes were like darts. She wasn't just a Goddess in title. "Well, that makes sense. The reason I killed you is very simple. Your meddling thwarted my plans."

"Meddling?"

"That dragon, of course!" Elle roared.

At this, the Underworld fairies all scattered as if from fear.

"All residents of the Underworld—all living beings that have died—are under my rule. They are my subjects. They are my army. That dragon has been accumulating power for hundreds of hears...When she died, my world was supposed to get stronger," she went on.

"Dragon—you mean Miss Skadi?"

"Hmm? Oh, is that her name? Well, whatever. Her name doesn't matter. The point is that I spent a long time winning over the Goddesses of Fate. I even intervened in the living world. Everything was going according to plan. The dragon would be stricken with disease, lose her will to live, and then die. And then you came along!"

Elle roared again, baring eight sharp fangs. She might look human, but the way she was threatening him was more akin to a beast or monster, right now.

Her human surface hid something completely different underneath. He supposed she *was* a goddess, after all.

“You talked her into it!”

“What?”

“It was you! You talked her into it! Into living! Thanks to you, that dragon is living a long, carefree life. Who knows how long it will take before there’s another opportunity for her to die?! The Goddesses of Fate can no longer easily affect a dragon’s powerful vitality. I bet they won’t even listen to me, no matter how many times I order them to change her fate...” Elle complained, stamping her feet on the throne.

Glenn thought she looked about the same age as him—but this behavior just made her seem like a spoiled child.

“The dragon would have been under my rule and strengthened my army,” the Queen said angrily. “Such a precious opportunity—and you thwarted it all, Glenn Litbeit!”

“Huh?”

Glenn looked at Cottingley and Molly beside him, confused by this illogical ire. The fairy commander was just as dumbfounded as him at Elle’s words. Molly spread out her arms and shrugged, despite the head in her arms, not knowing what to do.

“Well...that’s fine. It’s all over, anyway.” Elle readjusted her position on the throne, baring her teeth. “To me, Lord of the Underworld, doctors who cure every little illness are a nuisance. To be honest, I would love to drag every single doctor in the world into the Underworld right now.”

“But you can’t do that, right? Queen Elle’s field is death, but there are other gods that control fate and life,” Molly pointed out.

“Unfortunately, that is correct. In the end you’re the only one I’ve been able to take revenge on, Glenn.”

He was in awe of her utterly selfish reasoning. It was true that doctors protected the health of their patients. From her point of view, the entire point

of the profession was to keep death at bay as long as possible. However, blaming him for treating Skadi and then using that as justification for killing him...then calling it revenge... It was absurd. Although he did find this behavior typical of a god.

Glenn wanted to scream back at her in anger, but he restrained himself. He was facing a god who was capable of calmly and stoically executing this sort of nonsense, and he had no confidence that she would listen to his cries. He had to remain calm.

He decided to go through her points and tackle each difference in ideology one at a time. That was how he'd talked Skadi into taking treatment she didn't want at first.

"Can I...ask you something?"

"I will permit it. What is it?" Elle allowed.

Molly narrowed her eyes, but Glenn ignored her.

"I was not the only doctor who treated Skadi. Everyone in the town, assistants, my mentor...there were many people involved. Why did you single me out?"

"Hmph. It's simple," Elle said, waving her hands. "You were the one who gave the dragon the will to live again and changed her fate. Only the willpower of the living can change fate—weak-willed living things might as well be corpses. You convinced that dragon to live."

"Will?"

"Correct. As Queen of the Underworld, the will to live just gets in the way of everything. Creatures with the will to live just don't go down as easily. They take *forever* to die. I despise it," she elucidated.

Glenn finally understood some of what she was saying. She was a god, and her reasoning was beyond that of living beings. Just as her title suggested, she embodied the phenomenon of death. Even speaking the same language didn't guarantee mutual understanding. Convincing her would be very different from convincing a dragon.

“Long ago, there was a species called the phoenix. They evolved into beings with the uncanny ability of engulfing their cells in fire and coming back to life,” the queen told them.

“The phoenix...” Glenn remembered it as the species thought to be Illy’s ancestors.

“They just messed up all the laws of nature. We did everything we could think of to keep them from coming back to life, including pushing them to cross-breed with harpies to dilute their blood so they’d leave no descendants. Making the phoenixes go extinct was quite the feat,” she bragged.

“Er...” Glenn had nothing to say to that.

“You’re the same, doctor. Life is the opposite of death. I’d love to get all doctors into the Underworld, but there are just too many. If only I could destroy medicine altogether...” The Lord of the Underworld’s tone was nonchalant, even as she said these unimaginable things. “So, long story short...I started with bringing you, the biggest offender, to the Underworld. You’re lucky to get off that lightly after offending a god so.”

Glenn was starting to feel dizzy.

Her resentment was ultimately unjustified, but nothing was more onerous than the unjustified resentment of someone with real power.

Is this...

He couldn’t find the words.

Is this someone who can be convinced with reasoning and pleas?

Even Cottingley had grown pale at what the goddess said. He was sure she wouldn’t even entertain a request to be sent back to the living realm. Glenn felt nothing but despair pressing down on him in the cold throne room.

“What...will happen to me after this?” he mustered.

“Hmm? Why nothing at all,” Elena answered lazily. “As soon as you dropped into the Underworld, my objective was fulfilled. Now you are free to live as you wish down here. There isn’t much, but you’ll have all you need. However, you’ll never have a life like you did in the living world.”

Glenn wanted to go back to the world of the living. It was as if Elle had read his mind and pierced through his thoughts.

“Queen Elle? Shall I prepare a room for him in the castle?” Molly suggested.

“Ugh...that’s fine. If we don’t provide such courtesy for a doctor, it will set a poor precedent, I suppose.”

Glenn now understood. Killing him had been as an act of revenge—but now that it was over and done with, Elle no longer had any interest in him. All she cared about was that he was in the Underworld. She was essentially telling him he could never see Sapphee again, and he was never going to accept that.

It looks like I’ll be here for a while...

Apparently, even Molly wouldn’t make any requests on his behalf here. All she did was bow politely, not showing any emotion.

“Anyway, I’m sure you’re tired from your trip here. Get some rest. Show him, Molly,” Elle ordered.

“Okay. C’mon, Glenn. You’ve met the Queen. I’m sure you’re not happy but... well, you’re dead now, so just let it go, ’kay? If you have something to say, I’ll hear you out later, ’kay?” Molly gave him a wink.

It was her sign to him to leave it alone for now and not to say anything. Even the assertive Cottingley was silent, having realized the Queen wouldn’t listen to any of them. He was probably thinking they should step back for now and come up with a new plan to get home.

Glenn knew that. He knew that, but—

“Excuse me, may I just ask you one more question?”

“Glenn,” Molly warned in a stern voice. She was trying to convey to him that anything further would only anger the Queen.

“Sure. Ask me anything,” the Lord of the Underworld said generously.

“Okay then, just one—”

“Mmmhmm.”

“May I ask where the smell in this room is coming from?”

“Er.” Queen Elle opened her exposed left eye wide.

“It’s being concealed with perfume but—this is the smell of a festering wound. Dying tissue. If it isn’t treated right away, it might be too late. Is someone injured?”

First-generation Molly had said she wanted Glenn to cure the Queen...and there was a faint smell of injury in the throne room. It was the foul, rotting odor of necrotic flesh.

“I did give you permission to ask me anything, so I will not call your question rude,” the Queen started.

“Your Highness, is the injured person perhaps—”

“But I will say that your question does not please me. Molly, take the doctor away. I wish to rest,”

With that, Elle left the throne room. This was no time to request to be brought back to life. The Queen had gone into the back room without even a glance in Glenn’s direction.

“Ahhh, now you’ve done it, Glenn. You stepped on the biggest land mine,” Molly said breezily.

“I can’t ignore someone who is injured,” Glenn replied, continuing to stare at the back room that Elle had disappeared into.

The room Glenn was given to was luxurious, decorated with expensive furniture that reminded him of Tisalia’s room. The bed was soft, but the room was too large for just one person. It would have been a great room if he were sharing it with Sapphee—and if it were not in the Underworld.

“What’s this about a rotten smell, Dr. Glenn?” Cottingley asked as he prepared hot tea.

How typical of a helper fairy to serve him tea despite his arrogant attitude, Glenn thought.

“Yes, well, I noticed the smell of necrotic tissue... Molly, it’s possible the Queen has a large wound that is infected. It also seems that it’s been left

untreated for a long time...is that correct?"

"And you figured it all out just from the smell?" Molly responded, placing her head on her knees and looking around the room. "I underestimated you. You really are a great doctor, after all."

"Please answer the question," Glenn prompted.

"Your observations are both correct and incorrect. One thing I can say for sure is that the Queen is suffering from a major ailment. I don't know if you'd call it an injury or a sickness, though," Molly explained.

Glenn was confused. First-generation Molly was being vague, but it didn't seem like she was evading the question. She probably didn't know how to describe Elle's issue.

Molly tipped her cup, pouring the tea directly into her torso through her neck. Glenn was startled both by the fact that she could eat and drink, and that that was the way she did it.

Molly ignored Glenn's surprise and moved on. "Well to be honest, I was planning to tell you sooner or later. I didn't think you would notice so quickly."

"Sorry..."

"It's fine, it's fine. It's true Elle was annoyed, but that was mostly just an act. In reality, she really wants you to help her."

It was hard to look her in the eye with her head on her lap. Glenn tried to think about what to do as he sipped his tea.

"For now, I'll try to get her in a better mood. She looks scary, but she's really just a spoiled child, so I need to butter her up," Molly said.

"Hey, Molly, you're Queen Elle's attendant, right?" Glenn asked.

"Yep, that's right!" Molly giggled. She sure wasn't very respectful, for an attendant. "I'm used to handling self-important little girls, thanks to Skadi."

"I see," Glenn answered.

Apparently, Molly considered dragons and gods to be the same. From what he knew of her history, she would have been human once. And yet she was

fearless, never shying away from things. He wondered if such fears disappeared once you died.

“But what were you thinking, angering her like that? Didn’t you come here to convince Queen Elle?” Molly pointed out.

“I’m sorry. When I sense someone’s is in bad condition, I can’t help but say something... If the tissue is necrotizing, that’s severe and must be treated immediately,” he explained.

“Uggh, you really are hopeless.” Molly smiled.

Glenn thought for a moment. Would he even be able to treat an injured god? After all, this was the Underworld, where only souls existed. You would think the physiology of the flesh would be irrelevant.

And yet, he’d been able to treat the Dullahan. He resolved that if he could see the ailment, there might be something he could do.

“Molly, you want to cure the Queen’s illness, correct?”

“Yeah...”

“I want you to share with me all the information that you have about the patient without any exaggeration,” Glenn said. This was out of character for him. He trusted first-generation Molly, but she wouldn’t let up on her elusive behavior. Glenn couldn’t shake the feeling that she was still hiding something inside.

“What, everything? C’mon, killing you was the Queen’s orders and I’m in no position to protest,” Molly said quickly.

“Is that really all?” Glenn asked.

“Yes, yes that’s all. You know, if you were to cure the Queen’s illness, maybe she will be so grateful she’ll send you back to the living realm. I’ll make sure to mediate with her for you, then,” she schemed.

Cottingley reluctantly agreed with what Molly was saying. “It is true...that the only one who can send you back to the realm of the living is the Queen. But judging from what we just witnessed...the only chance you have is to make her owe you a debt of gratitude, Dr. Glenn.”

“Right.” As a doctor, he didn’t like the idea of creating “a debt of gratitude” through treatment. However, they were talking about Queen Elle, who’d forced Glenn into the Underworld for revenge. Something like that might be the only way to change her mind.

“Now then,” Molly put down her teacup and smiled. “I will try to talk to Queen Elle. She really is suffering, you know. Until then...wait here like a good little boy, ’kay?”

“But I don’t want to take too long...” Glenn called after her. All he could think of was Lindworm, and his fiancées waiting there for him.

“Mmm...I know you’re worried, but time works differently in the Underworld. You feel like you’ve been walking through it for days...but in the living realm, not even a day has passed. You don’t need to rush,” Molly explained.

“Are you serious?”

Not even a day had passed since he died. There was no day or night in the Underworld. It was a strange space where the sky was invisible and he felt no hunger or fatigue. It numbed his sense of time.

In that case, let’s take this one step at a time, Glenn resolved to himself. His first priority had to be making sure he got home.

“As you can see, both Queen Elle and I are pretty lax about things...so it may take a few days. But don’t get impatient, ’kay?”

“Yes, I understand.” Glenn nodded.

First-generation Molly picked up her head and stood. Carrying her head everywhere looked inconvenient, but she was nimble in her movements.

“Okay then, I’m off to get yelled at,” she said.

“G-good luck...”

Glenn bid her goodbye and then let out a sigh.

“What are you going to do, Dr. Glenn? Until the Queen changes her mind?” Cottingley asked.

“What should we do...?” Glenn gazed out the window at the view of the

Underworld. “There isn’t that much a doctor can do here after all.”

He could see shadows coming and going in the Plaza. The dead of the Underworld. As he gazed at them, he pondered how much this telepathic, mutual understanding could really convey.

Then something occurred to him.

Cottingley cocked his head to the side, trying to figure out what it was.

Some time had passed since that first day—and Glenn’s guest room was now crowded with residents of the Underworld.

“What...is this?”

After hearing a load of complaints from Elle, Molly had regained her composure and come to visit Glenn’s room. Caught off-guard, she nearly dropped her own head—still tucked under her arm—and had to regain her grip on it. She watched Glenn.

“Right, a flesh wound. I will reinforce it with this bandage,” she heard Glenn say.

She stayed there, watching.

“No, no, I don’t need anything in return. Please take care,” he said from the center of the room.

Residents of the Underworld included zombies, skeletons, ghosts, and various other forms taken by the souls of the dead. Beings that had only recently passed away, meanwhile, maintained the forms they had had in life. All of these were lined up in front of Glenn, waiting to be examined and treated.

“Everyone, wait your turn! Do not get impatient. The doctor will see everyone!” Cottingley yelled at those waiting in line.

He (she?) was busy helping in his (her?) own way, including keeping the line in order and helping Glenn with the exams. They had everything they needed—bandages, medication, instruments—but procured from where?

Whoa...

The souls in the Underworld did not have solid forms. However, they could take any form they wished, depending on how much of their self remained—in other words, they took the form of what they perceived themselves to be. As time passed, they would finally lose their grip on their soul and disappear. Such was the undeniable truth of death in this world. Those vanished souls were eventually reborn as new souls, as part of the cycle.

He's doctoring. Unbelievable, Molly thought to herself. Glenn was treating the souls. Considering their lack of corporeal form, the treatment he was giving them was really only psychological in nature, meant to ease their minds.

However...a soul who was a soldier in life was complaining of pain where his arm had been cut off. A small girl who'd died of illness was crying about pain in her chest. Glenn listened to each and every one of them, and then treated them just as he would in life. He was treating them all fairly, regardless of if they were human or monster. He was treating them exactly the same as he had when he was alive.

I just can't believe this kid.

She smiled.

Molly Vanitas was a pseudonym. She'd had a more unique name when she was alive, but discarded it when she was revived as a skeleton.

Molly had been the name of a devout nun. A hundred years ago, before the war between humans and monsters, a scant few humans had lived in the monster realm. Molly, a human woman who was a nun, had been one of them. She'd lived far, far away from the Eastern Capital, where a unique culture and religion were prospering.

Unselfish service was required by the doctrine that Molly subscribed to. Therefore, she served anyone and everyone. She gave charity to those without money, gave food to children who were starving, and listened to many people with troubles. She never made a distinction between humans and monsters. This resulted in her being a poor, shabbily dressed woman who was always on the edge of starvation, but that didn't bother Molly at all. She just wanted to live according to her own beliefs.

Witch hunts were popular in the monster realm at that time. Human women

were easy targets, but it wasn't long before both human men *and* women were being hunted. This would go on to be one of the reasons humans disappeared from the monster realm.

She'd gotten caught up in the witch trials by accident. It started with slanderous rumors, like, "That woman always looks so beautiful, even though she's so poor. She must be a witch." Before she knew it, she was being executed as one. Despite being a nun, she was decapitated and her head was put on display. She wasn't even buried in the church cemetery.

Ahhh...

Every time Molly saw someone being kind to others, she thought the same thing. It was completely pointless. They would all die anyway, and you might never be repaid for your good deeds. Doing this much for other people was pointless. And treating souls? It was comical. The treatment would provide nothing except perhaps some consolation. Souls lost their original forms quickly and then dispersed.

And yet, the scene before her also made Molly, the former nun, happy.

Seeing this...just makes me want to help him out.

Kindness was not always repaid. Fate was not always retribution. All Molly cared about was that everything she witnessed was properly rewarded or punished. That was why she continued her selfless service, even in death.

Everyone is just hopeless...

Molly stroked her neck. This was the form she'd wound up in after becoming a reaper, due to the vivid memory of her beheading. She didn't mind it or make a big deal out of it.

Because I just love doing things for others.

Molly smiled, still holding onto her head.

"Heeey, all of you. You shouldn't be gathering here like this, 'kay? What would you do if Queen Elle showed up here in a temper?!" she yelled, holding out her shovel-shaped weapon.

Everyone stared at her.

“Oppressionnn,” they yelled.

Molly was steaming mad. “Okay, okay. That’s enough. If anyone has concerns, I’d hear you out later. For now, leave the doctor be. He’s been summoned by Queen Elle!”

She swung her weapon, and the dead dispersed, slipping out through the walls and floors. No one ever went against Queen Elle in the Underworld.

“Wow...you know, I’ve never heard of doctoring in the Underworld,” Molly said to Glenn.

Glenn scratched his head at her words. “I’m sorry, it’s just my nature...”

Molly opened her eyes slightly. “Well, it’s because it’s your nature that it was worth bringing you here.”

“Is it Queen Elle?”

“Yes! I’ve finally convinced her. Let’s go see the Queen,” Molly said.

Maybe this doctor could be different. She’d become a fairy and continued working in order to continue her selfless service. But who could she serve? That was something she wasn’t ready to tell Glenn yet.

“Prepare yourself,” she said sternly to Glenn, without her usual lighthearted banter. “I am sure that Queen Elle’s ailment is neither injury nor disease. Despite that, if you still want to alleviate her suffering, as a doctor...then prepare yourself to challenge a Goddess.”

Glenn took a deep breath. Cottingley was looking up at him with concern. He seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then gathered his physician’s resolve and gave an exaggerated nod.

“Oh, it’s you,” the Queen greeted Glenn.

They were in what seemed to be Elle’s private quarters. The interior was more or less the same as the room Glenn had been given, which told him he was being treated like a far more important guest than the other Underworld residents.

Elle sat on her own bed, legs crossed. Glenn was allowed to approach her with Molly present, Cottingley by his side.

“Yes—I will be examining you,” he stammered.

“Fine. I appreciate that you have decided to serve me. However, I don’t think this is anything a doctor can fix,” Elle responded.

Glenn nearly laughed at how much she sounded like Skadi had when he’d examined her once.

“Listen carefully. I am going to show you my right side now. Do not let me see a sour look on your face,” she warned.

Glenn looked at the Queen quizzically.

“I will say it again. The moment I think your face looks sour, understand that I will erase every trace of your soul that ever existed.”

“Y-yes,” Glenn nodded.

With that, Elle uncrossed her legs and took off her right boot. Then she slipped off her high sock. The movements alone were alluring. But then—

“Er!” Glenn opened his eyes wide.

The skin that had been hidden by her sock was severely infected.

“This...”

It was completely different from her left side. It looked like a serious burn. Patches of her skin had formed keloid scars, and there was a clear liquid seeping from her wound. This was the cause of the odor. It even looked like there were maggots amidst the damaged skin—maggots, which were born in festering wounds and ate dead flesh.

What happened here? It’s looks exactly like she neglected a serious wound and wrapped it in soiled bandages. It’s all but rotted away...why is it so infected?!

Elle continued to undress while Glenn sat there, stunned. Next, she took the long glove off her right hand. Just like her leg, her arm was covered in keloidal scarring. She must have been in terrible pain.

“It doesn’t seem that you find it...unpleasant,” she noted.

“May I just ask how it came to this?” he asked.

“Heh heh...how?” Finally, Elle pulled back her bangs on the right side—a rare occurrence. With only the left side of her face showing, she was gorgeous. On the right side, however, her skin was a festering mess, and she couldn’t open her right eye.

He wouldn’t have expected a patient with such severe injuries to even be able to move. Glenn was astonished.

“Because I am the Goddess of Death, naturally. I administer death, and therefore half of my body is dying. Death is ugly, horrifying, and something everyone wants to avoid—my right side simply embodies that concept,” she explained.

“In other words, it is symbolic?” Glenn asked.

“Correct,” Elle nodded. “Gods are symbols. We are concepts. We take on the appearance of what we are. I am the Goddess of Death, so naturally, I must take a form that makes people think of death. That is why I have such a repugnant half, Doctor.”

Glenn was silent again.

“Therefore, this is not an injury or sickness. No matter what sort of treatment you administer, I will remain the Goddess of Death. It is incurable. It cannot be alleviated. If you still want to serve me after hearing that, then do what you like.”

Elle gave him a twisted smile, as if she were looking forward to his reaction. The left side of her lips curved up beautifully. The right side didn’t move, looking burnt and painful.

“I...will do my best,” he answered.

“Oh, so you’re going to give it a try?”

“Yes, of course,” he assured her.

“Good, good. I am a tolerant Goddess. I accept any kind of service. But don’t forget—” She looked directly into Glenn’s eyes. “Now that you’ve seen me like

this, I can never let you escape the Underworld. This is my most despicable secret, which I must keep hidden from all. I keep everyone who learns the truth of this very close to me—like Molly over there.”

Molly bowed, although it was hard to tell, since she didn’t have a head.

First, I need to disinfect it!

Elle’s eyes were speaking to him. They were saying there was no way he could heal her. She was grinning and staring at him all the while, waiting to see what kind of treatment he would administer.

I have to at least do what I can.

He looked at her gangrenous wounds and came to a decision.

At Glenn’s instruction, Cottingley brought in an iron bucket.

Pretty much everything he needed to treat Elle was available in the castle. Everything he had in his room, too, had been found in the castle and brought to him by Cottingley. He wasn’t sure how much good medical treatment could do in a world of souls—but then why were alcohol, tweezers, and bandages of the sort that were necessary for such treatment kept in the castle?

He didn’t have to think too hard about it. It seemed they’d been trying different ways to treat Elle’s wounds, too.

“Excuse me, then.” Glenn got to work.

“Mmmhmm.”

He kneeled in front of Elle to look at her right leg. The skin was rotted through and looked painful, riddled with maggots. Wounds soon festered and became maggot-infested under unsanitary conditions, and though he didn’t think this castle was necessarily unsanitary, her wound had clearly reached that point. He wondered if this was really the embodiment of the concept of death.

“This might feel cold...” he warned her.

“It’s fine. My senses are numbed on my right side, though it can sometimes be very painful. A little bit of coolness is nothing,” she replied.

Glenn closed his eyes as he imagined Elle's pain. The movements of the maggots alone would cause a normal human excruciating agony.

He started by removing the maggots with tweezers, using quick motions to toss the white bugs into the bucket.

"Mmm, mmm...ahn."

Each time the metal came in contact with Elle's festering skin, she moaned just a little.

"Ahh... Mmm...mmm, wow you're good at this," she gushed.

"Do...you think so?"

"The little maggots are cute, but it doesn't actually feel that nice when they're eating me."

Glenn didn't understand how she could think the white, engorged larvae were cute. That said, the fact that she was reacting to stimuli meant her nerves were intact. Terrible as it looked, he thought it possible she might recover.

"I have removed the maggots. Next, I will disinfect the wound."

"Mmmhmm."

"I think it will sting."

"Mmm, mmm...that's fine."

Glenn sprinkled alcohol on the wound to disinfect it. As he was applying it directly to the raw flesh, it had to be excruciatingly painful.

"Mmm..." Elle was in agony from the disinfectant soaking her leg.

This must be torture...

Glenn groaned inside. The Goddess was half alive and half dead—a thing unfathomable in the living realm, but not in the Underworld. The disinfected wound was red and raw, and it hurt her when he touched her with the tweezers. She'd said she felt pain sometimes, but now, he wondered how much she'd been suffering till now.

He remembered what Cottingley had said when he first arrived in the Underworld. He'd said this was a place that "will never change." In the living

world, this wound would heal. Illness could be alleviated. Because things could change.

If nothing can change here...then Elle will be stuck like this forever...maybe.

They were dead, and nothing would change.

Glenn desperately pushed the thought out of his mind. He had removed the maggots and disinfected the wound. There was no reason he couldn't treat her.

"I will remove the damaged skin with a knife. If we leave it, the maggots will multiply again and continue consuming the flesh."

"O-okay."

Glenn started cutting away the rotted skin with a small surgical knife, throwing this into the bucket too. The maggots were unpleasant to look at, but he remembered Cthulhy once saying that they were effective as a treatment of last resort, since they ate dead flesh and pus. However, he was able to provide appropriate treatment now, so they were unnecessary.

Where could she have gotten this wound?

The horribly damaged skin looked both like a burn and a laceration. Either way, he had to do something about the necrosis. Glenn proceeded to cut away at the portions that were most riddled with maggots.

"Mmm...mmm...ahh...." Elle let out a strange sound.

Having pieces of skin cut off couldn't have been a nice sensation—but Elle's face and voice suggested she was getting a massage.

"Ahhh...mmm...that's good, it's good."

"Queen Elle?"

"My skin's been troubling me for so long. You're trimming away the excess so very well—it's a great relief."

"Is...that so?" Glenn figured she must feel sensations differently than humans.

"Ahh, hmnn... Mmm-ahh... Ooh, ahh..."

Each time Glenn cut off another piece of skin, Elle moaned as if it felt really good.

Finally, he had removed nearly all the dead flesh. The skin with keloid scars looked much cleaner too.

“Are you done...already?”

“No, I still need to apply ointment and bandage the wounds—the boot has been encouraging the rot, which I don’t think is very good for the skin.”

“Hmph. I don’t like being wrapped up like an invalid...but I’ll do whatever you say,” Elle said obediently once Glenn had explained her treatment.

It was strange. She wasn’t refusing treatment. There were plenty of medical supplies in the castle, and signs that she’d attempted treatment in the past—so why did it take so long for Molly to convince her? Did she just not want to be seen like that?”

“Mmm... Ahhn...owww,” Elle said as Glenn applied the white ointment.

“Oh, did that hurt?”

“N-no it’s nothing—keep going,” she instructed, and Glenn continued applying the ointment, making sure to get every single wound.

“Mmm...Ahh, mmm... Oh... Mmm-ahh.”

“Queen Elle? Are you all right?”

“Mmm-ah...Don’t worry. It’s been thousands of years since anyone has touched me...Eee, I’m just ticklish... Mmm-ahh...ahhh,” Elle moaned.



Glenn kept applying the ointment as carefully as possible to avoid causing pain. Once he was done, Elle's leg looked much better. The dead skin was more or less gone, and thanks to the ointment, the surface was smooth. Now that it was all clean, there shouldn't be any new maggots. All that remained was to maintain this state.

Glenn started to wrap her leg. *Please heal*, he prayed to himself. He hoped that this would alleviate her pain, even if it was a small amount.

"Hmmm, just as I thought. It's not a pretty sight," Elle said, looking at her bandaged leg.

"I'm sorry. I hope you can put up with..."

"It's fine. I'm good at putting up with things. I've put up with ruling this boring-ass world, after all," she pointed out.

Glenn couldn't figure out if she was just being a masochist. Still, he continued tending to her, treating her right arm and the right side of her face. With each area, he removed the flesh-eating maggots, cut off the dead skin and applied ointment. Elle would sometimes cry out as he applied the medication—and when she did so, she would sometimes eye him and laugh, as if she was enjoying it.

"Teehee," she giggled.

"Uhhh, can I help you?"

"Oh, no, it's nothing. I was just thinking about how passionate you look when you're treating someone. Don't worry about it—it's not like you want to be stared at by a girl with a half-rotting face anyway, right?" she prompted.

"Uh, no—I think you are beautiful," Glenn answered honestly.

Elle's face really was beautiful. It even made him anxious to apply medication to it, as if he were touching a piece of artwork. But Elle probably hated her half-necrotic face, which was why she was always hiding it behind her hair.

"You don't have to be polite—but I will commend your bedside manner," Elle said, a longing expression on her face. Glenn wasn't sure what exactly she was trying to tell him.

After that, he bandaged her arm and then her face. Elle didn't complain at all but genuinely accepted his ministrations.

"You should get better now... I think," Glenn announced.

"Mmm, mm...is that so?" Elle nodded. "So I'll get better, then."

"Yes. And, well, this is awkward to say, but as payment for my treatment—"

"You want to go back to life, right? Molly told me," Elle cut in.

Molly had been standing by, watching him work. Now, she nodded.

"Normally it is unheard of for a dead person to come back to life," Elle started.

Glenn was silent.

"But no one has ever healed me before. Fine, then. If your treatment is successful, I will send you back to the realm of the living."

"Really?" Glenn was surprised. He thought it would take more time to negotiate.

"If you really did heal me—right?"

Glenn fell silent again.

"Don't be so depressed. I never break a promise. The day I am healed, you can go back to your precious world of the living," Elle chuckled. She seemed giddy. "Once you think tomorrow has come, come back to see me. You can check on the progress, my primary physician."

"I understand—" Glenn started.

"Relax. A full day here is a very short time in the living world. Your body will probably still be there by the time you get back. Heh," she laughed.

Glenn nodded. Mentally, he repeated his prayer that the treatment would work and she would heal, over and over again.

He was aware of one painful truth, however. As soon as he started praying that his treatment would work, Glenn knew that he had dropped a rank as a doctor.

Elle had said he could come back the next day—but there was no night and day in the Underworld. He could only go at a time when he thought a full day might have passed, based on his own perception.

When Glenn next walked into Elle's quarters, he was astonished.

"What's wrong?" Elle smirked.

There was pus seeping from her right arm, which was wreathed in so many maggots that they were dropping to the ground.

"Why are you frightened, my primary physician?"

The bandage on Elle's face had loosened and was soaked with pus. She slowly started walking toward Glenn as he stood there, stiffened.

"You will treat me again today, won't you?"

Glenn was stunned. He didn't even need to remove the bandages to tell that she hadn't improved at all. Everything he'd done had been reversed in just one day, and it wasn't that his treatment had been inadequate or that her condition had worsened.

Could maggots multiply like this in a single day?!

He treated her appropriately. He'd disinfected the wounds. There was no way flies could lay eggs that would hatch this quickly, and the skin infection was also progressing far too quickly. The only possibility Glenn could think of was that her condition hadn't worsened, but that she had given herself new wounds. But no...there hadn't been enough time for that either.

After all that treatment, she just returns to this state...

Glenn finally understood. For Elle, being half-dead was normal. Even if he treated her, she would just revert to the same state again.

He finally knew why the Underworld was "unchanging." There was no point in performing medicine in this world. There was nothing Glenn could do for the Goddess that embodied death.

"Did...you know?" he asked Molly.

The severed head being held by her body closed her eyes. “Well, I had a hunch—”

“But...”

“I told you, I am the concept of death. This is my normal state. It’s not an illness or injury, and there is nothing a doctor can do. My body won’t change,” Elle said, pus seeping out of her bandages.

The maggots seeping from the bandages were falling off and dropping onto the carpet.

“Now then, primary physician. Treat me again today. My skin hurts from the maggots eating it. My senses are numb on my right side, but it can sometimes be very painful,” she explained.

Glenn was silent again.

“This is death. This is what everyone hates. You desired to see death and looked at me, and now I will never let you escape. You will continue to treat me in this Underworld for all eternity. You will continue to minister to my body, which will never heal.”

Elle smiled. She looked like she was enjoying herself. She looked like she was having the very time of her life.

So this was a trap. Molly had known all along—did she set this up so that Glenn could never escape? Was she just doing the Queen’s bidding?

No—that’s not it.

Glenn thought back on everything, pursuing that thread of doubt.

Molly brought me here because she really hoped I could treat Elle. Otherwise, there would have been no reason to bring me to the queen—she could have just left me in the outskirts of the Underworld forever.

Molly really *did* want Glenn to cure Elle. But could he even do that?

He glanced over at Molly, the thought reflexively occurring to him that he didn’t want to disappoint her.

I am a doctor, after all.

The type of patient didn't matter. Elle was in horrible pain. She said she needed to face that pain.

I am a doctor, after all...

Glenn bit his lip.

"Dr. Glenn..." Cottingley was looking at Glenn, worried.

The fairies had been working desperately to save Glenn. The fairies were still calling him a doctor. And most of all, wherever he might be, Glenn always needed to be the best doctor he could for Sapphee's sake. Even when she wasn't there.

Even if the patient is death itself, I need to do everything I can.

Glenn bit his lip and looked the Goddess of Death in the eye.

"May I ask you just one question?"

"Fine. What is it?" Elle was smiling. She removed the bandage from her head to show him the necrotic half.

The right side of her face would probably never move again. She could only show her teeth on the left side of her lips. Even though it was distorted, Glenn thought she had a smile fit for a goddess.

"You said that the necrotic half of your body was painful. You also said that you don't want anyone to see that part of you. So then...why do you look so happy?" he asked.

"Teehee, you want to know?" Elle still looked like she was enjoying herself thoroughly. "You promised me that you would treat me. As long as I am not cured, you can never escape. You must remain in the Underworld."

Glenn looked confused.

"I love it when the population of the Underworld increases. Even if my right side is never cured, you will stay here, providing me with treatment that never ends. Now fulfill your promise, my primary physician. For all eternity, as a member of the Underworld," she said.

Glenn let out a sigh. She was only happy to be gaining more residents of her

realm.

“There is no chance it will work—but if you cure me, I will send you back to the living,” Elle chuckled.

She wanted to be cured. She would also honor her promise. She was perverse, but she *did* want to be treated. If that was the case, then there was only one thing Glenn could do.

“Mr. Cottingley, we will perform the same treatment as yesterday. Please bring me a bucket, tweezers, a knife, bandages, and disinfectant,” Glenn instructed.

“Oo-kay, Understood. However—”

Was there even a point? But Cottingley stopped himself before he asked that question.

“Wait... Why?” Elle stopped him.

“Huh?”

“Why are you going to treat me? Don’t you know it’s futile?”

“I don’t know if it is futile or not. I will start by disinfecting and protecting the wound as I did yesterday. Then, I will determine the root cause of your body behaving this way, and solve the issue,” Glenn explained.

Elle stared at Glenn, astonished.

“Root cause... A-are you joking? My body is like this because I am the Queen of Death—”

“That logic may be completely justified here, but I cannot accept it. I will conduct scientific treatment based on medical practice,” Glenn said as he started disinfecting the tools that Cottingley brought to him.

Elle gnashed her teeth.

“It’s a waste. No matter what you do it won’t heal. I can’t even imagine it being healed,” she argued.

“A doctor never gives up. So, I hope that my patients will also not give up.”

“I’ll bet that’s how you got the dragon!” Elle exploded.

She snatched the supplies Glenn was holding from him and kicked the bucket, plus Cottingley along with it. With each movement, more maggots dropped onto the floor.

“I’ve figured out your plan, Glenn! You’re trying to put me in a good mood to change my way of thinking, aren’t you? You think you can get back to the living world without curing me. Do you think I’m stupid?! I will never let anyone who has come to the Underworld out again...”

“No, I just don’t want to give up on treating you. I also want to go back to the world of the living. After I cure you,” he maintained.

“I’m telling you it’s impossible!” Elle was now crying.

She grabbed Glenn’s chest with her left hand, lifting him up. Her right hand was trembling, but she didn’t use it. It probably wasn’t strong enough to grab Glenn.

“Elle, stop!” Molly screamed. She grabbed Elle’s right arm with both her hands, but the Goddess’s hand did not react.

“I hate your face—that face that won’t give up on the living!”

“Yes.”

“Why? You are free. You are free to be a doctor here. Didn’t I give you a great room?! But you can’t go back. The dead can never go back... I will never accept someone leaving my kingdom!”

Glenn remained calm, despite her grabbing his chest.

It was like he could read Elle’s mind. Though she ruled as the Queen of the Underworld, she was only a child. Though she acted arrogant, she was lonely—a goddess who just wanted her Underworld to prosper.

That was why she couldn’t stand being rejected.

Leaving the underworld meant rejecting her—and she wouldn’t hesitate to use sweet promises about coming back to life to sucker in the dead. It made sense to Glenn. He now had the beginnings of an understanding of the concept of death—something he had faced many times as a doctor, but could never overcome.

“I will go home. No matter what.”

“I won’t allow it.” Elle moved her hand to Glenn’s neck.

“Ergh...”

“Queen Elle, calm down!” Molly cried.

“Errr.”

Both she and Cottingley, who flew to Glenn’s aid, tried to loosen Elle’s grip on Glenn. But her left hand was as strong as steel.

“You are already dead! If you are too immature to accept it, then I’ll just shut you away in the cold depths for all eternity!”

“Queen Elle!”

Glenn groaned. He was learning that having your neck wrung hurt, even as only a soul.

“Grrr...”

So, convincing her was pointless. Showing her the force of his will had the opposite effect on Elle from what he’d hoped.

Sapphee...

Glenn closed his eyes. He wanted to succeed in curing Elle, then go back to the living world.

I’m sorry... I guess I’m still no match for the condition of the Goddess of Death.

He struggled to breathe. It was strange, but through the darkness, he thought he could see a light, like a flame.

Case 04:

The Doctor Who Wouldn't Die

SEVERAL DAYS HAD PASSED since Glenn's heart stopped.

The search for Molly Vanitas was underway throughout Lindworm, but the graveyard city manager was nowhere to be found. Not even the speed of the Centaurs or the heat-sensing abilities of the lamia were able to find her. She should have been somewhere in Lindworm...

Now, there was one more person who was visiting the Graveyard City to search.

"Oooh..."

She was trembling, and not just because her body was made slime.

"As I thought... It looks like you're in the Graveyard City, ancestor..."

Her name was Lime, and she was a slime who worked as a nurse in Lindworm Central Hospital. She'd studied with Glenn and Sapphee at the Academy, but due to an unfortunate accident, Glenn had lost part of his memory—only the part that involved Lime.

Until a little while ago, she'd been with Arahnia, helping to preserve Glenn's body. But now...

"Oooh."

Lime kept moving, still trembling. She had received Cthulhy's permission to leave the hospital and gone to search for Molly.

The second-generation Molly Vanitas was a mythical creature called a shoggoth that took over the first-generation's bones. That shoggoth, who had once created quite a stir throughout Lindworm by taking the form of doppelgangers of people in the city, was apparently a distant ancestor of slimes. Their bodies were amorphous and could divide and transform at will.

The shoggoth had significantly greater control over this process and could

perfectly mimic the bodies of others. Slimes couldn't hold a candle to second-generation Molly.

As they were the same organism in essence, Lime knew intuitively that if she got too close to Molly, she would be absorbed into her, losing her own sense of self. Molly also knew this and made sure to stay away from slimes.

"You're here..."

But today, Lime had come to the Graveyard City on purpose to search for Molly. The shoggoth was a being with no fixed form. Even when far from others of the same species, they could sense each other's locations. Slimes that had separated from the shoggoth also had a vague idea of where the shoggoth was.

The moment Lime entered the Graveyard City, she knew. Her ancestor was there. All the cells in her body were quivering, wanting to return to a single existence.

This is scary.

Lime understood that if she were absorbed by Molly, she would cease to be herself. But even so, she needed to search for Molly now. She had to do it for Glenn.

I'm scared of losing my memory and becoming something other than myself. But even scarier...would be not doing everything I could to help.

Lime wasn't a doctor or a pharmacist, but she was a nurse. There had to be something she could do to help the patient. To help Glenn.

She proceeded through the Graveyard City, following her sense of Molly. She finally arrived at the back of the church that Molly worked out of and entered the building.

"A dead end?"

Her sense of Molly was cut off at the altar. In a normal situation, Lime might think she'd been mistaken and give up...but her cells were communicating with the presence of her ancestor. That meant Molly was definitely there.

Molly hadn't gone anywhere, after all—she had been in the church all along.

"That means—there must be a hidden door!"

Lime dissolved the human form she had been maintaining, transforming herself into gel. She tried to cover the wooden altar with her body, finding an ingeniously hidden door in the back. The door was held shut with a strong lock. It looked thick and made of steel, so strong that not even an ogre could break it.

“Hehe, that can’t keep me out!”

Lime slipped through the opening in the door. Locks were useless against creatures as amorphous as slime. Even Molly couldn’t do this, Lime thought, since she had bones.

She put her strengths to use and flowed along.

Is this a basement? An underground tomb?

Lime remembered hearing that the previous manager had been collecting a large volume of corpses that had no place to go for funerals. She also heard that some had been embalmed for the manager’s collection. Subterranean chambers were excellent locations to store corpses, as the temperature and humidity never changed. The constant nature of the temperature also meant a lamia’s heat detection would be ineffective.

Lime continued along, finally arrived at an open space. There were bunk beds with multiple tiers lined up against the wall, and objects wrapped in cloth lay across them. These were probably corpses.

And in the center of the space, Molly Vanitas sat on the floor, doing something.

“Umm...” Lime shyly called out to her.

“You don’t need to get closer, our descendent.”

“Errr.”

Molly rolled her eyes around to look in Lime’s direction. Lime’s body grew protrusions that tried to move toward Molly, like iron sand being pulled in by a magnet. It was trying to join with her.

“It is still early, and our duty is not completed—but you did well finding us. You are welcome here. If you get closer than necessary, we will return to being one. You can speak from there,” Molly warned.

“Ohhh, Ancestor...I am Lime from the Central Hospital...”

“Registered. I recognize you. You did well coming here. We are your ancestor by lineage, but you are our superior in Lindworm. We ask for your help.”

Molly was making something. She was working meticulously on whatever it was—a combination of a wooden frame and metal. There were a number of them already lined up in a row.

“Ummm, you know everyone is searching for you?” Lime tried.

“We understand the situation. About Dr. Glenn’s death, right?”

“He’s not dead yet!” Lime protested, but Molly just rolled her eyes around.

“No, materially, he is dead. That is why Lime was searching for us to resolve the situation. If our understanding is incorrect, please provide correction.”

“Um, what...are you doing?”

“Of course, we are performing our duty to bring Dr. Glenn’s soul back. The necessary volume exceeds our specifications, so the mission required our full focus for completion. We relocated to a place where we can concentrate on our work for maximum efficiency.

“What?” Lime cried out.

Everyone was desperately searching for Molly—but the way she said it, she was just working in a quiet place where she could concentrate.

“The rule is that the dead cannot come back to life. That was true even in our time. But we have confirmed countless cases of the dead’s body and soul separating in the Graveyard City.

“Uhm, oh...”

“Normally, souls scatter. But it seems the first-generation somehow took Dr. Glenn’s soul all in one piece. In that case, we should be able to bring it back here without damaging it. We will soon be finished with the number requested by the first-generation.” Molly looked around at the many lanterns she’d made, nodding with satisfaction.

“Ancestor—do you know? What is happening?” Lime asked.

“To be precise, we don’t actually know anything. Our system lacks sufficient information to accurately analyze the current situation,” Molly explained.

“In that case—” Lime started.

“However, we have an existing memory. This may be...a memory of first-generation Molly’s soul, which probably returned to these bones on one occasion. We are only lodging in these bones, after all. When the original owner returned, it seemed we went dormant.”

“Whoooa.” Lime remembered Skadi saying something about receiving a warning from Molly. She wondered how much the first-generation manager had foreseen.

“We were making the necessary volume of the necessary objects based on that memory.”

“You mean—these lanterns?”

“Correct. The principles and reasons are unknown, but if there are lanterns, Dr. Glenn will return.”

Molly went back to her work, falling silent. She was sure Lime didn’t understand. However, after inheriting the first-generation’s records, Molly was confident in that memory. Even if it wasn’t her own memory, each of the cells in her bones remembered.

That... Lime thought. *That’s a lot like me...*

Back when Glenn was at the Academy, he lost a portion of his memory, forgetting every moment of the time he’d spent with Lime. In order to treat Glenn’s head injury, Lime had reconstructed his brain cells with her own tissue. The memory loss was a side effect.

And yet, she was sure he hadn’t truly *lost* his memory. The connection had just been temporarily severed. Glenn would always have those memories. She believed that, and that was exactly why she couldn’t lose Glenn.

The second-generation Molly was performing this task as an extension of first-generation Molly, despite the idea not existing in her own memory. If it was the same, Lime had to act. She had to trust her own memories of the past

and move forward.

“I will help!” Lime declared as she desperately held herself back from moving closer to Molly. “Please let me help. The faster it’s done, the better!”

“Understood. The materials are there.” Molly pointed at a mountain of wood and glass.

“Okay!” If they just had to be assembled, Lime could help well enough.

“If you don’t know how to do something, you may ask. However, keep your distance, as you will be absorbed if you get too close.”

“I-I know...”

If you are deemed to be inefficient, we will assimilate you, so keep that in mind.”

“No, please don’t!” Lime cried to her ancestor. Molly rolled her eyes around.

“That was a falsehood... We made a manager joke.”

“I didn’t get it!” Lime blubbered, trembling.

She kept working, however, trying to replicate the lanterns she saw. She had always been skillful with her hands, and as a slime she was an expert at copying others.

Glenn’s memories of the Academy was sleeping. She was sure that her cells, in his brain, would recover that memory someday. Lime didn’t want it to end like this, and so she would do everything she could, even if that meant working with her frightening ancestor.

The most important thing was to not give up. Sapphee and the others hadn’t given up on Glenn, either. If there was something they could do, they would do it.

We will save you, somehow—

Lime had no idea if she was being helpful or not. But she chose to trust Molly and kept making lanterns.

Thanks to the combined efforts of Molly and Lime, the lanterns were

completed. It was at that moment that Glenn's soul was in peril.

"Ergh..."

Elle, Queen of the Underworld, was wringing Glenn's neck. He didn't know if souls could even feel pain, or if this only hurt because of Elle's strength as the authority of the Underworld.

"Don't resist. It's all a waste," Elle told him. "Everything dies. No matter what you doctors do, people who are going to die will die, and people who are going to vanish will vanish. Why not? You can be my counselor here in the Underworld. Wouldn't that be easier?"

"Err..."

Molly and the fairy clung to Elle's arm, but it was futile.

"I...refuse," Glenn managed to stammer. "Even if everyone dies in the end, I can be their doctor until that point. It's not a waste just because it will end someday... There are things I have to do to protect life before I die..."

Elle frowned grumpily.

"So, I will go home. My life is not over yet—I can't end it like this and make Sapphee cry..."

"I see. That's too bad," Elle said cruelly.

It seemed no matter how desperately he pleaded his case, it just worsened her mood.

"I liked you as long as you were confined...but I've changed my mind. I will destroy your soul now."

Glenn realized this was the end. Elle's right hand moved.

"My right side is death itself. No matter the being, with my strength, you will disappear," Elle said as her right hand pierced Glenn's heart.

"Uuh."

A cold sensation struck Glenn. He understood he would lose the last bit of warmth left in his body. Neither Molly nor Cottingley could stop the process.

"Ah..."

“It really is unfortunate,” she said.

Glenn closed his eyes, understanding he would die.

“The only thing that could save you now is the strength of the phoenix—”

Then, he saw flames. Glenn’s body was instantly engulfed in flames and shining.

“Huh?”

“Whaaat?” Elle scrambled to pull her hand away. But the flames that transferred from Glenn’s body to hers covered one of her arms, burning redder and brighter.

“This...” Glenn uttered.

“Impossible! This...is phoenix flame! I thought I destroyed all of them!” Elle was confused.

Glenn’s body was covered in warm flames. Even though his skin was burning brightly, he felt calm inside. He had no idea what was happening, but it seemed he had avoided the destruction of his soul for now.

“You! What did you do...? Where... How did you procure the strength of a phoenix? Why is the power of the phoenix being passed to your soul?!”

Glenn didn’t say anything. He didn’t know the answer. He had examined Illy before, and she had phoenix blood in her, but supposedly lacked the power of immortality.

“Queen Elle, that’s enough,” Molly intervened.

She held her severed head and her weapon and stood facing her, ready to protect Glenn.

“Molly! What is going on?!”

“Nothing is going on... The power of the phoenixes you annihilated was passed down to their descendants. That’s all. Glenn just happened to get a hold of that power because he was a doctor who examined everyone without prejudice,” she explained.

“What do you mean?” Glenn asked.

“Don’t you remember? Didn’t you get a burning feather from the descendant of a phoenix?”

She was right. He’d once received a red feather that fell from Illy in the harpy village. It had radiated heat, like it was burning. So that hadn’t been an illusion—it really was a piece of phoenix power.

“The power of the phoenix was engraved on his soul. He saved the child of a phoenix, and so he was blessed. Even the descendants of the phoenixes have enough power to save a soul from destruction once or twice,” she said.

“Did you know this, Molly?” he asked.

“Well, I understood it when I brought you here,” Molly replied, her severed head winking.

“Ugh... Ah, they’re still thorns in my side, even after I destroyed them! But this is the end. You have seen my right side, so I will never let you escape!”

Elle waved her arm and dark fairies appeared out of nowhere. Their wings buzzed as they drew close to Glenn to capture him.

“C’mon now, Your Highness. Can’t you let him go?” Molly suggested.

“So you’re on their side, Molly? You traitor,” Elle glared.

“Nope. I’m not a traitor, and I’m not on anyone’s side. If you insist that I choose a side—then I’m on the side of faith,” Molly answered.

“If that’s the case, you won’t mind being made to grovel before a god! Go, fairies...oof?!”

The moment Elle tried to give her order, the right side of her body exploded in flames. The phoenix flame was violently burning through her body. “The fire... it’s...it’s hot... What is this? How did this happen?”

“Hmmm. Queen Elle, have you ever heard this tale? When a phoenix reaches the end of its life, it burns up along with its own nest, turning into tiny white larvae. Those larvae grow, and the phoenix continues to resurrect indefinitely.”

“What...did you say?”

As Elle suffered, more and more flames erupted from the right side of her

body. Each flame took the shape of a burning bird. The white grubs that Glenn had thought were maggots were the actually phoenix larvae. Each one grew with the flames, turned into a bird, and obstructed the dark fairies.

Then the fire began to spread. It spread from Elle to her throne room, turning everything around them into an inferno...but there was no heat. None of the flames seemed to affect Glenn.

It was the flame of life. The power of life was lighting up the Underworld.

“Now then—let’s take this opportunity to run, Glenn. Guide him, little fairy!” Molly exclaimed.

“Er, very well—but know that I resent accepting an order from you!” Cottingley said before going straight to the door to open it. He’d had flown all around the castle to obtain the tools necessary to examine the dead. He was familiar with its layout.

“I won’t let you... Even if you run away from here, there’s nowhere to go! I won’t let you get away!”

Elle chased after them, half of her body still on fire and a furious look on her face.

“What’s happening?” Glenn asked as they ran. “Is this firebird really...”

“Teehee, I told you. It’s a phoenix. Glenn, how do you think she annihilated a species that doesn’t die?” Molly quizzed him.

“Huh? By diluting its blood...” he started.

“That’s right. By breeding with harpies, the blood of the phoenixes grew weaker. But that’s just their descendants. What about the phoenixes before them?”

Glenn had never thought of that. Creatures with immortal life shouldn’t have disappeared.

“When they reach the end of their life, they are engulfed in flames and then resurrected. They become small white bugs, and those bugs then grow. If that ritual is interrupted...they are destroyed,” Molly told him.

Glenn listened silently.

“Hundreds of years ago according to the living world’s calendar, Queen Elle manipulated fate and interfered with the phoenixes’ resurrection. She did it to each phoenix in the living world, one at a time...but when things die in the living world, of course, they come to the Underworld.”

The last part sounded like a riddle.

“Queen Elle never looks closely at the dead, so she never cared where the phoenixes were. She probably never imagined they were in the shape of larvae, sticking to her own body!” Molly exclaimed.

Cottingley flew ahead and Glenn followed after with Molly. The fire was spreading through the castle, and the birds made of flame were still aiding in their escape.

“The souls of the phoenixes have changed their form quite a bit. They look like birds now...but they seem to clearly understand that you saved their descendant,” Molly noted.

“I’m honored,” he replied. He never thought he would be repaid for helping Illy like this.

“Everyone was waiting for you to come. We believed that if you did, we could destroy Queen Elle’s evil plan with the power of the flame of life. Of course, to do that, I had to let you meet Queen Elle, yah?”

“That’s why I was killed, then?” Glenn reasoned.

“That’s riiight. Once Queen Elle says something, she won’t let it go, so I had no choice but to kill you,” Molly confirmed.

So she’d been planning to save Glenn the entire time. Glenn found he was genuinely grateful. Everything she’d done had been for the sake of sending him back to the world of the living—and because she needed the phoenix power that Glenn held to awaken the phoenixes stuck to Elle.

“Ah!”

Glenn heard a voice behind him as he ran. At the very end of the corridor, still pursuing him, was Elle. Though half of her body still burned, she gnashed her teeth and glared at him.

“Argh—it’s so hot! I hate heat. I’m steaming... The flame of life? That’s a joke. So are the phoenixes...”

“Queen Elle...”

“Don’t look at me like that! You’ve no right to pity me, who cannot die despite hating death so!”

Elle sounded like she was on the verge of tears as she chased him. Her movements were labored, despite being covered in the flames of life.

They finally made it outside the castle. As soon as Glenn slipped through the gate, Molly quickly locked it.

“So sorry, Queen Elle,” Molly taunted her.

“Molly! You dare treat me like this... I’ll never forgive you! And you have no place to go!”

“Well, that’s true, ha ha.” Molly laughed out loud.

Elle grabbed onto the iron fence, still on fire, and glared at Glenn. The hatred he saw in her eyes was extraordinary.

“You plan to go back to life? Well...you probably can with this much phoenix flame! Even without my powers!” Elle screamed, squeezing the iron bars with all her might.

“She can’t pass through this gate. Queen Elle cannot leave the castle,” Molly assured him.

“Molly!” Elle screamed again, wanting her to stop sharing such information. “I’ve...lost. I lost this time! But don’t forget. All you’re doing is delaying the inevitable. Even if you go back to life now, you will die again. You will come back here. When you do...I will never forget the disrespect you’ve shown me,” she warned.

“Queen Elle...” Glenn said under his breath.

“You can’t escape death. Everything dies! When you come to the Underworld again, I won’t forgive you, even if you grovel at my feet.”



“I—won’t run away,” Glenn said, stopping in his tracks and turning around.

He accepted Elle’s hatred and faced it directly.

“I will become an even better doctor in the living realm. I will save many humans and monsters, and then I will die.” He’d already decided what he would say to Elle. After all, he always had but one goal. “I will die, and I will return. When I do, I will have grown into a doctor that can take away your pain and suffering, so...please wait for me.”

“What...did you say?”

“I will heal you,” Glenn said confidently, pitting his faith in medical science against the Goddess of Death.

“What... I-I can’t do that! Cure me?! Nothing can be done about my body! You saw it yourself!”

“But I will,” he assured her.

“Grrr...” She was gritting her teeth, probably caught off guard by what he said. “I will never, ever forget that you said that! I can’t wait for you to die! I’ll be waiting for you. A human life ends in a second... I look forward to the day you arrive, Glenn Litbeiiit!”

“Yes. I will get better before I die,” he said calmly.

Nothing Elle said could upset him. The Queen of the Underworld was left speechless, not knowing what else to say.

“Please wait for me,” he repeated.

“You...” Elle was dumbstruck.

“Okay, let’s go,” Molly said cheerfully.

With that, Glenn ran away without looking back, following Cottingley’s lead. Elle was left alone at the fence, watching Glenn and the others run away.

The flames on her right side gradually died down, perhaps because she’d let Glenn go. She was silent. She watched Glenn and the others with a vacant look on her face.

He was running away. He left the castle, left Lindworm, and finally made it to the outskirts of the city.

It's dark...

Once he had left the fake Lindworm, the world was gloomy. He couldn't see the road. He couldn't see the sky.

Is this...the edge of the Underworld?

They were no longer running and Cottingley wasn't leading the way anymore. Molly had taken the lead. She used her weapon as a cane, looking like a grave keeper as she guided Glenn.

Glenn's chest—his heart—was still shining red where Elle pierced him with her arm. When he touched it, flames spurted forth, though they were faint. This must be the immortal phoenix power.

"Molly..."

"Hmm?"

"How much of this did you have planned? Were you scheming with the phoenixes?"

"Well, it's not like we had a meeting about it, ya know? It was just a coincidence that you had acquired phoenix power. It was also a coincidence that the phoenixes were residing in Queen Elle's body. I just created an opportunity to put you both together, and the immortal power in you set off a chain reaction. The phoenix larvae emit the power of life, which really worked to my advantage." The Dullahan giggled as she lifted her severed head high in the air. "In other words, I had my own agenda. Maybe it looks like I used you?"

"It doesn't... After all, it's because you got involved that I can go home, right?" Glenn assured her.

"That's true. I cut your soul from your body cleanly, leaving nothing behind. That doesn't happen in natural deaths. Your soul can return to your original body without issue."

Molly stopped. She pointed her shovel-shaped weapon toward a dark void.

"Now, go. The immortal power doesn't last forever. If you don't hurry, you

won't be able to return, 'kay?"

"What about you, Molly?"

"Me? Well, I have to go comfort the sobbing Queen of the Underworld, of course." The severed head chuckled, sticking out her tongue. "The second-generation version of me is in Lindworm, anyway. She can take care of the Graveyard City. I already installed the memory she needs."

"O-oh."

He didn't know what the word *install* meant in this context, but it sounded like the first-generation Molly liked the second-generation Molly.

"But I can't see the road. I can't do anything in this darkness. You want us to go alone?" Glenn asked anxiously.

"Teehee. There are tons of myths about how there's only one road of return from the Underworld, yah? One that's very narrow, and if you look back, you'll never be able to return? If you take one wrong step, you might fall headfirst into the abyss, yah?"

"It's hopeless!" Cottingley exploded at Molly.

"It's fiiine. I've prepared for that too," Molly said, pointing again.

Light?

There was a faint, orange light. It felt warm. It felt gentle, and nostalgic, somehow.

"Now, go ahead. Let's meet again someday, when you die. Take care of Skadi and Dione and Cthulhy and...well, everybody, 'kay?"

"Thank you so much," Glenn bowed his head.

She was a strange person, and he still wondered if she'd had her own reasons for doing all this. But Glenn had died at Elle's order. The only reason he could return to the land of the living was because of Molly's help.

"It's fine. I'm on everyone's side," she answered.

"Everyone?"

"Everyone. I want to devote myself to everyone. I want to serve. In life, I

sought paths that made everyone happy, and I sacrificed everything I had for other people's sakes. Even as a skeleton, even without my head, that is my desire. My faith. This is just how I am. You don't need to worry about it," she assured him.

"That's...amazing," he said.

"It's not a big deal. I just like to serve," Molly laughed, licking her lips. "Now, go. You'll run out of time. Head toward the lantern light."

"Yes." Glenn took a step.

Doctors could heal flesh. The mind dwelled in the flesh, so it could also sometimes be healed by treating the flesh. However, he could not treat the true heart—the soul. In that moment, Glenn thought that only people like Molly could do that.

"I will come for you someday. Until then, live a great life. Only look forward and never look back," Molly called after him.

Glenn followed her instructions, looking only at the lantern in front of him.

"Let's go," Cottingley took the lead.

"Right," he answered.

After moving forward even just a few steps, it was pitch dark all around them. They couldn't look back. All he could see ahead were Cottingley and the lantern. All Glenn could do was move forward, aiming for that light. The sense of fatigue steadily disappeared from his body, as if he were floating in the heat.

What is that light?

He thought it was strange. The number of lights increased the further Glenn advanced. The warm light lit his way, as if guiding him.

Ohhh.

Glenn started to understand. Those were the lights that lit Lindworm. They were there to guide souls home. This must have been part of Molly's plan, too. It was thanks to these lights that he could now return to his flesh without hesitation.

He could clearly recall his memory of things that had been dreamlike before. He wanted to go home. The woman he loved should be waiting for him.

You're there, right, Sapphee?

All at once, there was a bright light. Glenn understood what it was in his soul. The owner of that light was Saphentite.

There was a sudden official notice in Lindworm that day.

Anyone with a free hand was to hold a lantern and gather on the main road. Everyone followed this order issued in Skadi's name.

It wasn't as if anyone understood the order. It was the perfect combination of Skadi's popularity and their love for festivals that allowed most of the people to treat it as a fun event. The skeletons and zombies from the Graveyard City handed out the lanterns and everyone lined up on the main road, holding them.

The harpies watched this from the sky with admiration. Later, one harpy was quoted in the Lindworm Bulletin, saying, "There was a path of light stretching from the Graveyard City to the center of Lindworm." Those words would be repeated for a long time to come.

Of course, there were many who understood the situation gathered in the line of lanterns.

"Hey," Aluloona called out, holding up a lantern in her weaving vines. "Skadi, my daughters and subordinates are all holding lanterns too. Is this okay?"

"Yup, that's fiiine," Skadi responded, holding a lantern as well.

"That young'un from the clinic will really come back to life if we just stand here holding lanterns? Don't you think he'd be more likely to wake up if I kiss him?"

"Glenn's fiancées are all around him now," Skadi warned.

"Er...I guess I can't really win against Sapphee and Arahnia. I wanted to have a romp with him at least once before he died, though," she lamented.

"Pervert..." Skadi shot a look at Aluloona, who feigned innocence.

“Well, it’s wonderful to have more married couples. We need people having lots of babies for the economy...so we definitely need the young’un to come back to life,” Aluloona babbled.

“Yeah...” Skadi looked at the row of lanterns. It reminded her of a Harvest Festival of the past. They probably were reenacting that festival. The Harvest Festival also served as an event for the dead to come back to the Graveyard City. They were guiding Glenn’s soul back in the same way. Skadi wasn’t sure if it was even possible to do that, but according to second-generation Molly, it was.

“Why do you look so glum?” Aluloona asked her.

“I don’t know—it bothers me that everything went exactly as first-generation Molly wanted it to,” Skadi said, seeming grumpy. “She just does whatever she wants with no consequences.”

“Ha ha ha. She’s the one who lost her life for serving others, you know? You’ll waste a lot of time if you spend it worried about what she’s thinking. But—” Aluloona said, glancing at the hospital bed in the middle of the Central Plaza. “I hope it does bring back the smiles on the faces of those girls.”

“Yeah,” Skadi nodded. “I do want everyone in this town to smile as much as possible.”

“Look at the self-indulgent dragon, caring about her residents so much. By the way...” Aluloona looked off in the distance.

They could see the Vivre Mountains from the main road. A giant light was swaying halfway up the hill.

“That huge lantern over there, swinging back and forth—”

“It’s Dione,” Skadi answered.

“I thought so. Is there a point to holding a lantern in the mountains?”

“I have no idea,” Skadi giggled.

She felt like it was good for people and monsters who normally wouldn’t interact to talk to each other like this. Skadi had transformed from a dragon to a human form because she liked that sort of thing.

She wondered if she might be able to watch scenes like these play out for another hundred years. Even though everyone here would die before her, she decided she wanted to see it to the end. It was Glenn who'd nudged her toward that, so she wanted him to live as long as possible too.

"Still, it's fun." Skadi laughed and lifted her lantern high as if to respond to Dione's.

Sapphee thought Glenn's bed looked like a coffin.

Tisalia, crying her eyes out, held up a lantern to illuminate Glenn's face. Arahnia knelt by his side, rubbing his chest. Lulala had lined up a number of lanterns on the edge of the fountain. Apparently, they were for Sioux, Illy, and Plum, who weren't in Lindworm at that time.

Lulala was singing, surrounded by those lanterns and illuminated by their light. The mermaid's voice echoed throughout the night in the Central Plaza, as if everything was just as it should be.

And Sapphee... She was calmer than she would have expected. She held the lantern that Molly and Lime had made and stared into Glenn's face.

Without a beating heart, Glenn's face was just a corpse.

"Will this really...save him?" Tisalia asked.

"I dunno, but that's what the manager said. All we can do...is trust her, yeah?"

"Ohh, Doctor..."

The two fiancées were crying, gazing at Glenn with intense grief. But Sapphee just felt angry at him for making them cry.

"Sapphee...your face is frightening," Tisalia mentioned.

"Really?" Flustered Sapphee put her hand to her face. She finally realized how tight her expression was.

"I know you can't believe it, but—"

"No, I do believe it. I believe Glenn will come back," she said.

"Huh?" Tisalia let out a cry, as if it was an answer she wasn't expecting.

Sapphee was massaging her own face.

“Molly said it. She is in charge of the dead, so she must have an appropriate basis for saying so,” she explained.

“Then—why is your face so frightening?” Tisalia asked.

“I was preparing myself.” Sapphee looked at them with her sharp eyes. “If this doesn’t work, and Glenn can’t come back, I was thinking I’d go to hell and bring him back myself.”

“Don’t even think about it. I can’t handle losing a husband and my best friend all at once,” Arahnia said, sounding thoroughly disgusted.

“You’re right... I’m sorry.”

“Ugh.”

“But that is how prepared I am. That’s why, Glenn...” Sapphee stretched her snake body over Glenn’s supine form. “You’re a doctor, right? You’re already an excellent doctor. So, hurry back. If you let the girl you love die, you won’t be qualified to be a doctor anymore...right?”

Glenn didn’t answer.

Sapphee didn’t cry. Partly because she didn’t have tear ducts, but also because she’d decided she would no longer cry. Sobbing and whimpering didn’t suit her. The weight of the love she held within her was the force that drove her. She was born to love Glenn, so she would go as far as she needed to bring back his soul.

“Hey, I know you’re listening. Hurry back, Glenn.”

Sapphee kept talking. She believed he could hear her.

“Hey, Glenn,” she said to the human boy, who said he would accept her overbearing lamia love. “Come back.” She said it over and over. “C’mon—if you don’t hurry, I’m going to die with you.”

“Well,” Glenn moved his lips.

Sapphee’s eyes opened wide.

“Don’t even think about it...I think,” he said.

She was flooded with nostalgia.

It had only been a few days since she had heard Glenn's voice, but it felt like it had been a lifetime.

"I don't want you to die for a long time, Sapphee, so I came back," he told her.

"Glenn..."

He really had come back to life. It wasn't as if she didn't believe it—but to see it really happen left her overcome with surprise.

"Doc..." Arahnia called him.

"Doctor!" Tisalia did too.

"Doctor? Is it really the doctor?!"

Arahnia was bawling. Tisalia was crying and holding Glenn close. Lulala stopped singing.

"I'm sorry—for making you worry. But I'm back now," he said.

"Ohhh—"

And Sapphee...was desperately trying to support her upper body with her snake lower half to keep from collapsing. Glenn reached his hand up to her shoulder.

"I'm home, Sapphee," he assured her.

Sapphee wanted to scream out with glee, but she stopped herself. She always wanted to present a perfect, intelligent face to Glenn. She was a whirlwind of love and delight on the inside, but she was too proud to let it show.

"I expect you to tell me about everything that happened," she said to him.

"Yeah, I know," Glenn smiled.

This boy was sure to continue to make Sapphee worry forever. He could never escape trouble. That was the fate of a doctor.

And she would be by his side the whole way.

A lamia was persistent enough to follow him anywhere, even to the edge of

hell.

She decided to say one more thing to him.

“Welcome home, Dr. Glenn.”

Sapphee was glad she had massaged the tension out of her face moments before, as she was able to smile naturally again.



Epilogue: Even if We Meet Again

GLENN SPENT SEVERAL DAYS in the Central Hospital after coming back to life. He was tested for many things with Sapphee—who refused to leave him—right there, but all the results were fine. The conclusion was that he'd even been in perfect health before he collapsed. The fact that Cthulhy had no idea what had happened was giving her a headache, but there was nothing physically wrong with him at all.

Glenn started examining patients at Litbeit Clinic right away.

"Yes, mother and child are both healthy, Shirsha."

He smiled. The young minotaur wife—Shirsha Theseus—was now a mother of one.

The newborn child was drinking her mother's nutritious minotaur milk and growing well, with an adorable horn emerging from the middle of her head.

"Um, Doctor...Are you all right? There was a lot of commotion and they said you fainted."

"Ha ha. Thank you for your concern, but I'm fine now." Glenn smiled as he answered the laid-back minotaur's question. "I plan to take good care of myself so I can keep all of *you* healthy. I'm sorry for all the trouble."

"Oh, no, it's nothing." Shirsha smiled too, picking up her baby. "I think...you've become a much more capable doctor than before. We will come see you again."

"Yes, please come anytime you're worried about anything to do with your little one," Glenn responded.

He watched Shirsha leave the exam room, then filled in his findings on her chart, face serious.

"She really praised you, Doctor," Sapphee said, slithering up to him with narrowed eyes. She had been in the corner, so as not to get in the way.

“Ha ha—well, it’s true that I had everyone worried. I need to work hard to regain my credibility as a doctor,” he explained.

“You know she’s married,” Sapphee warned.

“What are you talking about?! It’s not like that,” Glenn insisted, laughing.

“I wonder,” Sapphee muttered, staring at him the whole time. Then she dismissed it. “I’m joking—I don’t feel the need to be jealous of every little encounter anymore.”

“Really?” Glenn asked.

“Of course. I am your wife, Dr. Glenn.”

Sapphee giggled mischievously. She was swaying her tail side to side, so Glenn could tell she really was in a good mood.

We’ve been through so much.

Everyone in Lindworm was fed up with the heat wave still racking the city. Shirsha had come by because she was concerned the heat had made her baby ill. The child turned out to be fine, but it was understandable a mother would be worried.

Still, this heat was a natural phenomenon. It was far healthier than the heat he had felt in the Underworld, which stood in contrast to his far-too-low body temperature.

At least I got back somehow.

Glenn and Sapphee would be married at the end of the month. The ceremony Sapphee had spent so much time planning would finally seal their bond. Dying right before his own wedding would have been the unluckiest kind of bad omen.

Although that does sound like something I would do.

It was his nature to find himself in trouble.

He made eye contact with the fairy who was managing the medical exam supplies. It was Cottingley, in his hat. Despite sharing that adventure in the Underworld, they hadn’t spoken since they got back.

“We cleaned up,” Cottingley reported shortly.

“Yes, thank you,” Glenn replied.

The chatty fairy Glenn met in the Underworld was no longer present. His language skills had returned to what they used to be—no doubt he’d only talked that much back then because they were in the Underworld. Still, there was no doubt in Glenn’s mind that he’d only made it out of the Underworld thanks to Cottingley.

“Thank you, really.”

“Next task?” Cottingley prompted Glenn to assign them tasks faster.

Glenn called in the next patient to move things along.

“Brotherrr!”

“Hm?!” He opened his eyes wide at the sound of yelling.

Sioux bounded into the exam room.

“Brotherrr! Sioux heard that Brother died! What happened... And before he could even marry Sister—wait? You are...alive?”

“Sioux, I thought you were in the human realm!”

Sioux’s face was dripping with tears and snot. She stared in blank amazement when she spotted Glenn. A few more familiar faces entered the clinic after her—Souen, Plum, Illy, and even Saki.

“That’s why I told you to listen to me, you boar of a sister—”

“Brother! It really is you, Brother?!”

“Yes, it’s me. I’m sorry, Sioux. I really created a commotion.”

Souen looked at Glenn’s face and let out a huge sigh.

“I heard reports that you had come back to life, but I see it’s true—apologies, Glenn. I planned to keep the details from Sioux, but she eavesdropped on me and heard that you’d died,” he explained.

“I was not eavesdropping! Brother Souen, why would you hide information as important as Brother’s death from Sioux?!”

“Because you rushed back to Lindworm without even hearing the whole story, you idiot! You didn’t even think about how it would affect Lady Plum and Lady Illy!”

“Because it was terrible news—oh, oh?”

Souen’s scolding made smoke plume from Sioux’s head. She swayed, like she was dizzy.

“Whoosh...” Sioux let out a breath.

“Ahh, it’s because you ran too fast—Saki, get the water,” Souen instructed.

Glenn sighed at the sudden increase in patients.

“D-Doctor. For real, Doctor? Man, I was so worried too,” Plum added in.

“It’s true! I was so shocked to hear you died! We rushed back and here you are—are you really alive?!” Illy chirped in too.

“Oh, yes. I’m sorry for making you worry, too. I’m fine now—thanks to Illy,” Glenn assured them.

“Huh, me? Why?”

“Well—I don’t think you’d believe me,” Glenn said.

There was no way he could explain that he’d met Illy’s phoenix ancestors in the Underworld. He hadn’t even told Cthulhy, Skadi, or the second-generation Molly about what happened down there. It all felt like a dream to Glenn now, and he didn’t know how he could prove any of it.

He was now the doctor who’d lost consciousness, then miraculously recovered. The lantern gathering had been a prayer to the dragon for his recovery. That was how everything had been explained to the public, anyway.

“Okay, okay. The doctor still has patients to examine, so now that you’ve seen for yourself that he’s okay, please leave. Saki and Sioux, you can rest on the bed,” Sapphee instructed.

“Yes, thank you very much,”

Saki easily lifted the overheated Sioux onto the bed. Illy and Plum were shoed out. Then there was Souen, who glanced at Glenn.

“Don’t create so many problems,” he scolded.

“Yes, I’ll be prudent...” Glenn dutifully bowed his head. He understood all too well that he really had caused Souen a world of trouble this time.

“But well—I’m glad you’re all right,” Souen said in a low voice before leaving the room.

Glenn laughed to himself at his prideful brother.

Glenn had only told a select few people about what happened in the Underworld. There was one thing, however, that felt off after he’d recovered—and it had to do with Lime, the nurse from the hospital.

Lime was currently at the Graveyard District church, her entire body trembling.

“Tha—what happened?!”

The second-generation Molly was telling her all about how Glenn had traveled to the Underworld, and how phoenix flame had saved him. Molly had now “completed component distinction” to identify Lime as an individual being, so the latter’s body was no longer drawn to the former’s.

“I thought it was strange! Glenn spoke to me about our lab at the Academy like it was something we talked about all the time! He was supposed to have lost those memories...”

“Conjecture: The damaged memory was restored by phoenix power. There is a possibility Lime’s tissue completely assimilated with Glenn’s and regenerated.”

“Ohhh wow! I was not ready for that!” Lime said excitedly.

Molly watched her reaction, expressionless. Now that she was no longer at risk of assimilation, Lime worked with Molly underground. She’d grown quite close to her, enough so that she could ask her about Glenn’s recovery.

“So, what will you do, Lime?”

“Huh?! What will I do...”

“Are you going to try to marry Glenn? Now that his memory has returned, Glenn remembers being close to you, correct?”

“I can’t do something so drastic all of a sudden without a relationship in place!” Lime sobbed.

He had completely forgotten about her until recently. Even if Glenn did have any affection for her, Lime didn’t have the courage to try and marry him. Besides, Glenn didn’t even *know* he’d only recently recovered his memory. He remembered all his experiences of the subsequent years, and the phoenix power had just naturally reconnected everything back together. If anything, he found it puzzling that he and Lime were so estranged.

“So, you will do nothing?”

“I’m thinking about that nowww. Ohhh, Glennn,” Lime lamented.

“We have determined that if you have feelings for him, the optimal solution is to mate immediately,” Molly analyzed.

“It’s not that easy! C’mon, ancestor!”

Lime hadn’t decided what to do about her relationship with Glenn. He already had three fiancées and other prospects, to boot. If Lime added herself to the pile, she’d just be putting more of a burden on Glenn.

Also—back at the Academy, he’d just been a junior she had a crush on. Could she really just jump into a relationship like that?

“According to the laws of Lindworm, you could try polygamy. We have determined that it is acceptable for you to take your relationship with Dr. Glenn slowly,” Molly offered.

“Oh, thank you, ancestor...”

“Of course, there is also a possibility that we will become friendly with Dr. Glenn. It will be beneficial for Dr. Glenn to gain popularity. If we can just procure some intimate time—”

“I was wrong about you! Everyone is trying to get poor Glenn!” Lime snapped. Molly pretended to be oblivious.

But...

Lime sighed.

It is nice to have someone to talk to about it... Maybe there's no awkwardness between us since we were once part of the same species.

Being amorphous life-forms made it pretty easy for the two of them to get along. Glenn's death bringing them together had turned out to be great for Lime.

"Now, we shall complete this friendly exchange of small talk and move to the next step," Molly announced.

"Y-yes!" Lime answered, expression turning serious.

She wasn't visiting the Graveyard District regularly just to ask about Glenn. Well, that was part of it... But today, Lime was serving as a nurse. Now that she was no longer concerned about assimilation, there was something she needed to learn from Molly.

"Next, a dog,"

Molly's body split apart and began to change in both shape and color, eventually taking the form of a small puppy. The puppy's stomach was torn. Its breathing was faint and real blood spilled from the abdominal wound. It was dying.

Even though it was all Molly's mimicry, the reproduction was so precise it could easily be mistaken for the real thing.

"These organs are more complicated than the insect we just did," Molly explained.

"Here I go!"

Lime prepared herself, then slipped her body into the dog the same way she had with Glenn long ago. Even though she knew it was really Molly, the internal organs were physiologically exactly the same as those of a real dog.

She was here under Cthulhy's orders, still researching the regenerative power of slime tissue. It was said that Shoggoths once changed their own bodies to help repair organs. If Lime could master that skill, and other slimes could learn it from her, it would revolutionize the field of medicine.

According to Cthulhy, slime cells couldn't be transplanted into other living beings—apparently, there were compatibility issues at play. More research was necessary, and they needed Molly's abilities to proceed.

My relationship with Glenn has yet to begin...

Lime covered the dog with her own tissue and proceeded to fix its damaged organs.

But I am growing, too... I'm sure I can build a relationship with him, both as a woman and as a mentor!

Lime smiled to herself. Even though the phoenix flame had helped him, there was no doubt it was Lime's cells that had reconnected Glenn's nerves. To Lime, that was what connected the past to the present. Cthulhy's regenerative therapy research was on the right track, too.

The past Lime had kept locked up inside her could finally be released.

She was so happy she could draw on that for the strength to approach the future.

"Unbelievable..."

Skadi looked out over Lindworm from her office at the council. After all the fuss about Glenn's death, the city was back to normal—mostly because *Glenn* was back to normal.

"He *died*, and he's acting like nothing happened," Skadi said with dissatisfaction.

"Isn't it good that it all ended well?" asked her bodyguard, Kunai. "I met with Dr. Glenn. There was no damage to his soul at all—all because of the skill with which the first-generation Molly cut it cleanly away."

"He said it was all planned by the Queen of the Underworld?" Skadi grumbled. "Once I get to the Underworld, I'll give her a piece of my mind."

"So one hundred years from now?" Kunai chuckled.

Skadi looked away, indignant.

“Dr. Glenn will probably die before you,” Kunai supposed.

“Ahhh...It just makes me want to die faster...I want to see the Queen of the Underworld’s stupid face,” Skadi groaned.

“Don’t say that,” Kunai soothed her.

Skadi laid her body on her desk. Her thick tail swayed from left to right, indicating that she was in a bad mood.

“No matter how many centuries it takes, I will join you on your journey to the other world, Draconess,” Kunai vowed.

“Yeah. I’ll hold you to it.” Skadi laughed.

Her will to live was far too strong, which was probably why she’d caught the attention of the Queen of the Underworld. She’d been through a lot as a result, and put quite the burden on Glenn, too.

However, she had never once regretted going through with the surgery. She was glad she hadn’t died.

I am alive.

Skadi had lived so long that she now found life boring. She figured she would probably continue with a dull existence for the sake of the few moments of pleasure she found here and there, even if it meant 90% of her life would consist of just killing time. She *could* choose to live a laid-back life like Dione did, or walk a straight path like Cthulhy, but Skadi had lived for so long that even both those options sounded dull.

However, she wasn’t sick of life anymore. Skadi wanted to live to the full extent of her lifespan, partly so she could issue a full complaint to the Queen of the Underworld.

When I die, I’ll stand right in front of her and tell her that I lived my far-too-long life to the fullest and enjoyed every minute.

And what would the Queen of the Underworld do upon hearing that? Skadi decided it would be most gratifying if the Queen were reduced to grinding her teeth in frustration.

“I wonder what the Queen of the Underworld is like,” she said, wondering

about the goddess she had never seen. Since ancient times, dragons had been the only creatures who could go toe-to-toe with gods.

“Well...according to Dr. Glenn, she resembled the Draconess. In personality, that is,” Kunai offered.

“Whaaat? Gross!” Skadi pouted, kicking her legs like a child. What an affront to her dragon dignity!

Unaware that such a conversation was taking place up in Lindworm, the Queen of the Underworld rolled over in her sleep. To be perfectly frank, she was sulking.

“Hey, Queen Elle, how long are you going to shut yourself away in here?” Molly asked.

“And whose fault is it that I’m like this, you idiot?! I let Dr. Glenn get away after he saw me exposed! And all because of a subordinate I thought I could trust—you! These phoenixes are stuck to me and won’t leave me alone! Ugh! I can’t take it anymore!”

“I said I was sorry, ’kay? But I wanted you to learn that there are things you should and shouldn’t do as the Goddess of Death,” Molly explained.

“I’m done being a goddess!” Elle cried. She was curled up on her own bed, hugging a pillow.

Molly sighed, trying to decide what to do. She’d expected this, but might have gone a little too far with her betrayal.

There was black smoke rising from Elle’s torso—probably residual phoenix power. Even the accumulated life energy of this many phoenixes couldn’t restore Elle’s dead half. They were stuck to her body like maggots, perhaps spent from using up all their power. The phoenixes, which were capable of resurrection, would probably catch fire again if prompted, but it seemed they had reached their limit for now.

Even the dark fairies were stroking Elle’s shoulders and buzzing at her feet out of concern.

“This job sucks,” Elle said, dejected.

Molly sighed. She always wanted to save everyone she could, and this pitiful Queen was no exception. If nothing else, she wanted to lend the Queen her ear, so she could listen to her air every last one of her grievances.

“Oh?”

A dark fairy flew straight to her. The fairies didn’t use language, but their thoughts were conveyed to Molly, the fairy of death. She listened to the fairy’s report and giggled.

“Queen Elle, you have a rare guest,” she called out to the Queen.

“I don’t know who it is, but send them away,” Elle said bluntly.

“Too bad, I already called them in here,” Molly cooed.

“Why, you—!”

The guest entered just as Elle started to get angry. The room filled with the fragrant scent of flowers. The Underworld was deep and dark, lit only in the places where such guests stood.

“Well, you’re having a time, aren’t you, Elle?” a voice said.

“Eh. Fairy Queen.”

“Well, well, is that how you speak to me after I came all the way out here? Have you been using that floral perfume I gave you? My children have brought you some nice tea. Let’s chat,” the Fairy Queen proposed.

Molly took a step back in a gesture of respect for the guest, a woman with butterfly wings on her back. This was the queen who ruled over the fairies. The dark fairies fled from her grandeur and even Molly couldn’t look her directly in the eye. Her light was too strong for residents of the Underworld to face. Elle was the only one there who could speak to her on equal footing.

“What are you doing here?” Elle asked.

“I heard you were hosting one of my subordinates recently. The fairy in question gave me the full story himself, but I thought it would be the perfect opportunity for us to talk. We are neighbors, aren’t we?”

The dimensions of the Underworld and Fairy Village were close, but they weren't exactly *neighbors* in the usual sense of the word. And yet, the Fairy Queen could easily cross the border into the Underworld.

"I'm not in the mood to speak to someone as sparkly as you," Elle declined.

"Teehee. Then I'll just be glum, like you." The Fairy Queen giggled.

"Did you come here to make snide remarks?!" Elle groaned.

The Fairy Queen took a seat at the table in a lordly manner. Elle accepted the challenge and huffily joined her at the table. No matter how angry Elle became, the Fairy Queen paid it no mind.

"Teehee," she giggled again. "I thought you were depressed, but the way you get so worked up—it's like you're back to being your old self."

"Piss off. I hope you all die."

"My apologies, but fairies don't die." The Fairy Queen snickered. "I do have time to talk to you for a few minutes, however. Now, what's got you all full of spite this time?"

"I will bring you to the Underworld someday," Elle insisted.

Molly knew that despite her abusive language, Elle loved the perfume she received from the Fairy Queen. The flowers of the Fairy Realm were effective in hiding the rotting smell of one side of her body...though that young doctor had noticed the smell despite the perfume.

She wasn't one to hope for people's deaths, but Molly really did want him to hurry up and die and become Elle's attending physician. She giggled.

"What are you doing, Molly? Hurry up and prepare the tea," Elle instructed.

"Right away."

Molly smiled.

Everyone deserved to be happy. Efforts made toward that end were never wasted efforts.

Such were her thoughts as she prepared the tea, sending a fragrant scent through Elle's drab room.

When the Fairy Queen said, “My wish is for everyone to live a good life,” the Queen of the Underworld shot back with “Everyone should just hurry up and die.”

When Elle held the teacup, a very thin layer of skin on her own hand—actually just the fingertip—was visible. The incurable malady affecting Elle’s right side seemed to be slowly retreating from the phoenixes’ power.

It will certainly take a long time...an extraordinarily long time.

Molly couldn’t say it out loud, knowing that doing so would anger Elle. But the nun smiled to herself as she prayed.

Please let Queen Elle find some relief.

The bells of Lindworm were ringing.

Glenn stood at the church in the Central Plaza, dressed in a tux. The sky was clear, and the faces of all the attendees were familiar to him.

It was the day of his wedding.

“Doctor.” Sapphee smiled at him, clad in a wedding dress and holding a bouquet. Glenn remembered how glad he was that she’d gotten her smile back. Tisalia and Arahnia stood beside her, all of them ready to hold the ceremony together.

“Yeah.” He nodded.

He would continue being a doctor in Lindworm. And he would have the reliable pharmacist lamia right by his side.

Everyone who lived would eventually die. That was why he wanted them to live well. That was why he worked so hard to be the best doctor he could. In fact, Glenn believed he would be a doctor even after he died—if nothing else, he had to keep his promise to the Queen of the Underworld.

This was his first step toward keeping that promise. Even if he would wind up in the Underworld someday, he wasn’t done living yet.

“Glenn Litbeit—”

Molly was calling him from the altar of the church.

As neither Glenn nor Sapphee subscribed to any religion, they decided to have a wedding ceremony in keeping with monster customs. They asked Molly to officiate, and the nun habit made her look just right for the part. Glenn thought she was the perfect officiant to help them to swear their love till death did them part.

“Do you take this woman, in sickness and in health?” Molly asked matter-of-factly, her eyes bulging. “To have and to hold, until death do you part?”

Glenn glanced over at Sapphee. She was looking bashfully back at Glenn with a hint of uncertainty in her eye, as if afraid he might say no, even after they’d come this far. He silently assured her it was fine.

If you get sick, I’ll cure you. And if you die—

Everyone went to the Underworld eventually. That meant that even in death, they could meet in the afterworld. They would never part, even in death.

“I do, even in death,” Glenn answered.

She looked at him, surprise in her eyes. Though she looked abashed, she ignored wedding protocol and threw her arms around Glenn, skipping right to the kiss.

And it was a long kiss.



Afterword

HELLO EVERYONE, Yoshino Origuchi here.

Thank you so much for reading the final volume of this series. I really, really am sorry for making you wait this long—a year and a month since Volume 9. There are many reasons why it took this long, of course, but every time I try to put them into words, they just sound like excuses. I had a plan for what I wanted to happen in the final volume, but in the end, I just didn't mark off enough time to get it done. I'm really sorry!

So Glenn died, in the end.

To be honest, I've covered all the main themes of this story over the course of eleven volumes. Glenn and Sapphee's love finally bore fruit in Volume 9, and after that, all they could do was get married. So I had to think of something else to write about. I'd written about everything that could happen while they were alive, so all that remained was to write about what happened after death.

The idea of a doctor visiting the Underworld has been around since ancient Greece, so I went with a Hades theme. The Lord of the Underworld is a unique and familiar character, but I think I did a good job with Elle. Then there was the first-generation Molly. She's a Dullahan, of course. She's holding her own head! It's awesome. I think a girl having scales or a head that she can take off and put back on just makes her even more attractive.

Resolving foreshadowing is also important to a story. I had a lot of previous foreshadowing to resolve in this final volume of *Monster Girl Doctor*, tying up all the threads I recklessly threw out during the series. That's how foreshadowing works, anyway. If you don't tie up all those loose ends, people start throwing stones at you.

So what did you think? Was everything tied up? I hope you're thinking, "Yeah, you did a pretty good job." That'll give me some confidence to carry into my next work.

Now there are some people I need to thank.

My editor, Hibi-u-san. Thank you for working with me for all these years. With such a long working relationship, I feel like we're more friends than author and manager. Congratulations on your wedding and the birth of your child.

The illustrator, Z-ton-sensei. There are so many characters and so many weird scenes. This must be a really difficult project to work on, so thank you so much for drawing such attractive characters all the way to the final volume. About 80 percent of the popularity of this series can be attributed to Z-ton.

Comicalize's Thomas Kanemaki-sensei. Also, Mitsuhiro Kimura-sensei from Zero Comicalize. You have both taken such good care of me. Thank you for all your hard work.

I also want to thank all the authors who hang out with me, and the manga artists and illustrators who talk to me on Twitter. Thank you to S-BOW from Jingyi Only and their entire staff. Thank you to all the bookstores. Thank you to the reps at *Comic Ryu* and the editorial staff. Thank you to the reps at Zero Comicalize. Thank you to my family, who have stayed with me all the way to the final volume. And thank you to the proofreaders who fixed all my small mistakes.

Most of all, thank you to everyone who has read this. I am eternally grateful. Thank you so much for reading about Glenn, Sapphee, and the Monster Girls for so long.

There is one thing that an author who finishes a series must say, of course...

I'll do my best on the next series too!

About the Author, Yoshino Origuchi

We made it to the milestone of the tenth volume, and now it's done. I feel like I was able to write about what I wanted to, in the way I wanted to, until the very end.

I hope you enjoyed being immersed in my idiosyncrasies.

About the Illustrator, Z-ton

Ten volumes went by so fast. Dr. Glenn and Sapphee sure had eventful lives as teenagers, but I'm glad I could draw them happy together. I hope their smiles last forever.



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