

160 – Faceless II

The Locating Compass ritual that Oliver showed Saoirse and I was relatively simple. The Dullahan had rightly demanded that no one but the three of us should be allowed to know the sigil that described the Demon.

We were in a small basement that Oliver had gotten us access to with surprising ease. The rest of our party were waiting above, while we drew out the ritual on the stone floor, using my blood chalk and a small vial of blood that the Witch Hunter carried on him.

“To think so powerful a creature could be defined by such a straight-forward symbol...” Oliver muttered. “How did you come to know of its true name?”

“I have my ways,” Saoirse replied vaguely. She lifted the chalk away from the centre of the Locating Compass, which was, quite literally, like a big drawn-out compass with the four cardinal directions, and a few curling lines of script around the circle that held the name of what we were seeking.

The sigil for *‘The Faceless Shadow Which Collects The Masks Of People To Wear While It Pretends To Dance Amongst Them’* was like half a circle, three dots in a triangle pattern within the top-half, three curling S-shaped tendrils growing from the flat left side of the half-circle, and then a line bisecting the whole thing at a very precise angle, which ended in a hook past the rounded right side of the half-circle. I wondered how exactly it was descriptive of the Demon, but Saoirse had said it was, and she was the expert after all.

“I haven’t used this ritual often,” Oliver commented, “but we should only need to perform it twice and then check where its lines cross to find its source, particularly because we are searching such a small area.”

He was holding an exquisite silver compass in his hand, which had been used to draw out the ritual accurately, and nearby he had a map of Sanctum Island, as the innermost part of Evergreen was apparently called. There was a dot on the building we were in and we’d be using it in tandem with the ritual to draw out the direction that the Locating Compass indicated.

I was watching from nearby, as the two of them did the work. It surprised me how skilled the Witch Hunter was at drawing clean ritual lines, and it was interesting to know that their kind indulged in rituals, despite those being tied to the very people they were created to hunt.

“The last step,” he said, before pulling the stopper out of his vial and letting a single drop hit the centre of the Sigil. He took a step back and raised his hands towards the drawing.

In a lilting tongue that reminded me of the way that Elye spoke, he invoked the ritual:

“Locating Compass, take this blood and bond it to the True Name I have inscribed.”

“Let this named blood seek its other half and reveal to me its location.”

The ritual lines glowed with a dull reddish hue, while the drop of blood in the middle squished itself flat like a pancake, before returning to a droplet shape that began to circle around the sigil. It made four revolutions and then returned to the centre.

Nothing happened for about ten seconds.

Then the droplet shot itself in a direction, drawing a perfect line from the centre-point and through the axis of the compass Oliver had drawn.

“North-northeast,” he muttered.

I used the pen next to the map and borrowed his compass, then drew a thin line in the exact direction.

“Excellent,” he said. “The fact that it worked is a good sign. It won’t track something that is dead, as it seems a True Name is bound to the soul of a person and not their physical body.”

I nodded. This made sense to me. Although I doubted I would find a use for it, I drew down the ritual and its invocation in my Encyclopaedia.

“Did Owl give you that tome?” Oliver asked me.

I was suddenly reminded of our first meeting in Ochre, when he had apprehended Lukas, Rana, and I on suspicions of sedition. It was a scary memory. Since then he had changed a bit. In Helmstatter, when we’d fought the Mimics, he’d been arrogant and heartless, but not overtly-hostile. And now, thanks to being reunited with his sister, he had mellowed out and become more reliable, or so I thought.

“He didn’t give me this one. I took it from him.”

He grinned in response. “Ludwig told me you put a stop to Owl’s machinations.”

Before I could reply, Saoirse said, “Let’s go to the next location. Talking can come later.”

Our group moved directly north through the Jewelsmith district. We had started in the southwestern corner in the basement, and now we were in the northern part, standing in the middle of the shopfloor of a store that sold high-quality dresses.

Emily, Elye, and Kally were in the backroom, looking at the work-in-progress dresses and I could hear them fawning over one piece in particular, while Elye was trying to get their attention about a

different dress that she claimed was using an Elfin design. Although the Sorceress was clearly jealous of Emily’s raw talent, they still seemed to get along well, but Kally made no show of hiding her annoyance with Elye.

Renji, Potts, and Armen were outside the store, keeping watch. Just in case the Demon went on the offensive. The Exorcist had accepted the blame for the current situation, but we’d all agreed that he couldn’t help that he’d been spellbound by the Princess’ voice. I still remembered how Torvalder’s voice had made me reveal the existence of the Music Box, and made Rana admit to bringing Myrabelle into the Helmstatter.

I had been allowed to draw out the ritual this time, but Saoirse had to correct me several times as I drew the sigil. The line that bisected the rest of the drawing was extremely-difficult to draw correctly, thanks to the very precise angle required, whereas the rest was simple enough.

“It looks correct,” Oliver commented.

“It’s not,” Saoirse replied, pushing me out of the way and erasing the sigil, only to redraw it in an identical form.

“I can’t even tell what the difference is,” I said.

“But I can,” she explained. “Both of you need to practice your linework more.”

“I’m still confused as to why a Blademaster knows this much about ritual work and Demons...” Oliver said, a tinge of suspicion in his voice. When he saw my expression, he quickly added, “But I will not pry too deeply. Now is not the time.”

When the ritual was done, he handed me his vial of blood and I let a single droplet hit the centre, before invoking the Locating Compass.

After the last syllable left my lips, we watched the blood go through the motions and then return to the middle of the sigil where it stayed still for ten seconds.

Oliver was ready with the compass and pen to add the new line to the map, when the blood shot out in a direction, painting a perfectly-straight line from the centre and the marker for ‘west’.

“...That’s not right,” Oliver muttered. He added the line to the map regardless of the fact that it clearly didn’t point anywhere close to our first line.

“The Demon must’ve relocated,” I said, confused since it didn’t match our expectations of it hiding in a nest somewhere.

“It knows we are attempting to track it,” Saoirse then commented ominously.

“How is that even possible?” Oliver asked and I nodded in agreement. I’d never heard nor read about something like that.

“It is ancient enough to have a sigil to describe it, instead of Demonic Script. Thus it must possess unique powers that have allowed it to escape notice for all this time,” she surmised.

“What do we do then?” the Witch Hunter asked.

“We should track the Prince instead,” I answered. In hindsight, it should’ve been our initial plan, because there were signs that the Demon could tell when it was being tracked, since it had reacted to us following its scent.

“Tracking a human is a bit complicated,” he replied. “We need to know his full birthname, as well as the names of his parents. No one knows who his mother is...”

Instinctively, we both looked to Saoirse.

“I know their names,” she confirmed, unsurprisingly.

I’d love to possess your power... I muttered internally.

My Truesight is not for a human like you to possess.

After removing all signs of the previous Locating Compass, we drew out a new one and Saoirse added the Prince’s full name and progenitors to the centre in the Mundane Script. It felt rather strange to add simple text to a ritual, but, in essence, ritual script, like Chthonic and Demonic were also just text, the languages were just older and carried more inherent power. Or at least that was my guess. Perhaps it was possible to write everything in the Japanese Hiragana alphabet and still have it work.

The name she added read as follows: *‘Hother Egilson Gyldenrose, son of Egil Haraldson Gyldenrose and Lythia Seveth’*.

“Lythia...” Oliver said. “She’s an Archpriest ranked high in the Church I think.”

I filed the knowledge away for later, but it definitely raised a lot of uncomfortable questions.

We performed the ritual again, and this time the line drawn by the Locating Compass pointed very slightly south of east. What’s more, this line bisected the first line.

“I think we should do it one more time, just to be on the safe side,” Oliver said, “But this is promising.”

We moved to a third location that was straight southeast of the dress shop, but instead of picking a store or a basement, Oliver chose just a random plaza. Everyone stood nearby or sat on the stone benches that were placed around a large decorative fountain. It was still shooting streams of water out of open-mouthed gryphons and into a central cauldron, despite the fact that the sun had gone down an hour ago.

A few Peacekeepers patrolled the streets with lamps, and when they spotted us they almost seemed on the verge of causing a big fuss, until Oliver explained that we were on a quest to locate a missing child, given to us by the Princess. None of the men seemed to question why we needed nine people for something like that, which was fortunate.

As the ritual completed, the line pointed almost directly northeast. We added the line to the map and it overlapped with the other two intersecting lines. We had an actual location now.

Oliver looked up from the map and said: “We know where the Prince is.”

Where the three lines crossed each other was a small church.

It was named ‘Lady of Hope’.