

They didn't plan to stay any longer than a few hours at best. Frost just wanted to make sure that Hellen and her daughter were still ok. Thankfully, the vibrant blue eyes of the blonde-haired child never faded away. Neither did her mother's.

Frost had enough stories to tell into the following week, but she kept it simple since she didn't want to overstay their welcome. Not that Hellen would mind.

She warmly welcomed them into her humble abode, offering crackers in the shapes of musical notes and delicious hot coffee. They were seated within a simple room where only cushions lined the walls. A small table sat just in the corner of the room where all five of them sat to catch up.

Hellen's eyes glistened, and at times she'd bring a hand to cover her gaped mouth in response to the stories Frost told. Not everything was declassified to her. Frost couldn't go around telling people, "Hey, so I just killed a thousand people and turned into a Corrupted. But I'm all good now!"

Even if it was someone as kind as Hellen, she knew that they'd be forever uncomfortable. So, she stuck with an abbreviated, clean recount of their journey. Their ups and downs, hardships, and inevitable ascension into the Nexus.

Hellen blew her nose into a handkerchief, shedding several tears at the mention of how one of the triplets managed to find themselves and move on. The woman gently brought a hand to Alice's head, patting her as she seemed a little disappointed when she found out that it wasn't Cer.

"All three of them looked like just like Alice when we first went to Grandis. My late husband's home was welcoming but dear Alice was so reserved like her mind was in a different place. Those Wolf girls reminded me of her... and..." She then turned to a picture on the wall.

It was of a younger version of herself, standing beside an identical woman who cradled a child in her arms. That child had green hair and emerald eyes just like Hellen. However, the other woman in the picture had blonde hair and blue eyes, matching Alice's.

"... My nephew a long time ago. My, hearing you talk about yourself has made me want to retell old stories. They're quite tame in comparison. It's almost embarrassing~" Hellen softly laughed.

She then asked Alice to go fetch them some more cookies. Jury was normally reserved but after being offered the greenlight she devoured them like potato chips. Seeing her face melt at each bite made Hellen more than happy to provide.

Meanwhile, Nav stared down at Jury's abs, wondering if her metabolism was crazy because of her build. That was until her eyes then moved to her chest and her tail.

"Storage. Ingenious." Nav said to herself with a nod, causing Hellen to smile warmly.

Hellen went on to ask how Ara was doing. Her love for her niece-turned-nephew was enviable. Frost hadn't met her again, but Jury did and answered positively, noting that she might even be a candidate to become a Moon.

Her excitement, however, was not shared with Hellen. Her face instead darkened slightly.

“... Ara shouldn’t be sent back to fight again. I’m sure he’s already told you that he grew up in the City of Spades.” She said, tilting her head just enough to block the picture frame behind her, obstructing the face of her blonde sister. “A traditional musician suits him the best. He’s proud of his grandfather and always used to say, ‘I’ll become the next best composer! Music is for the soul!’ You’ve seen how naïve he is. I’m scared someone is going to take advantage of him. More now than ever but...”

She trailed off, cupping her cheek as her usual smile returned. It was a mother’s woe. Or aunts for that matter. Regardless, it was a familiar love that Frost admired as she made a promise to look after Ara.

However, the decision of Ara becoming a Moon was ultimate hers. Frost complemented Ara, noting that she was able to see something inside of her where countless others could only see a black hole.

“She has a knack for that.” Hellen warmly said as Alice returned with freshly baked cookies. “Thank you dear.”

“Thanks Alice~” Frost hummed.

“It’s here~! Now – fluff!” The girl hopped behind Jury, cuddling her fuzzy tail.

Frost noticed that Alice’s eyes had become far more lustrous than the last time she saw her. The childish spark was brighter than the stars outside. It was as if those sparkles were all Alice could see as she repeated the phrase ‘White Rabbit’ every now and then.

Hellen went on to talk more about Ara’s unique ability to see the instruments that represented people. It was a way for Ara to tell who to trust and who to avoid, as well as knowing optimal compositions, relationships, and the like.

But she never saw people as instruments like others in her family with the same ability did, most notably her father – Thoven; a man with his heart set on the piano and the acclaim of the late Green Composer. Hellen admitted that most of her family were envious of her father’s legacy. Ara’s father was no different.

He was a man Ara never knew aside from his name. Not that Ara cared, as Hellen claimed. Ara was content with the life he lived up until he turned into a she.

The topic then shifted to Alice as Frost brought up the mystery of the White Rabbit. She didn’t think much of it and mentioned it as a one-off thing, saying:

“I wonder what makes children want to call you the ‘White Rabbit’. It has to be your tail, right?”

“90% positive.” Nav raised her hand. “I heard that children see the world very differently. It’s a scientific fact that they also see it more vibrantly too.”

“Ahaha...” Hellen chuckled. “You’re right. They’re imaginative creatures. Alice has always been like that. Painting the world in her own vision. Black Dove. White Rabbit. Blue

Caterpillar. It sometimes worries me, but when I hear that other children have also called things 'White Rabbits', then it makes me feel at ease. I'm assured that my dear Alice is a normal girl."

"She definitely is. Children tend to let their imagination run wild." Frost assured as Hellen tenderly looked over at her daughter. "Still, I'd be hard pressed to find something that looked like Jury's tail out in the wild."

"Fox girls?" Nav questioned.

"Dragonkin can have fuzzy tails too." Hellen answered as Jury asked Alice why she called her the White Rabbit.

Alice snuggled closely with her tail, nuzzling her cheek into its soft fur as she muffled said: "Because you're the White Rabbit. The real one! I know it!"

"Eh? Huh? Real one? Are the children seeing a fake one?" Frost wondered as Alice nodded firmly.

"Mhm. It's all fake. They're chasing the wrong one! But... everyone has their own bunnies."

Frost's gaze sharpened. An inquisitive look suddenly befell her as she turned to Jury whose chewing slowed as she returned the sidelong glance. What Hellen thought was normal felt off to them.

Alice seemed adamant that this was the case, and Hellen wore a somber expression as she reached out to stroke Alice's head, humming something before cupping her ears shut.

"That's right dear. Everyone has their own bunnies to distract them." Hellen's tone became soft, almost saddened. "My, the mood has changed, hmm? As... Alice's mother, it's worrying that she's so infatuated with the White Rabbit."

"... How many children are seeing this White Rabbit? Do you know?" Frost wanted to understand just what this phenomenon was, although, she recalled it occurring as far back as the first time they entered the Nex Megalopolis.

The White Rabbit was a canard. A simple rumor spread only between children. Apparently, sightings had increased ever since the devastation of the Nex Megalopolis. Frost held Alice's hand, kindly asking to see her palm as she checked her status and issued various healing magic just in case something was up.

As expected, nothing turned out to be wrong with her.

Frost wondered if Jury could peer into her mind using Time Seer. It was a skill that allowed Jury to see the physical origin of Nex, similar to how Frost was able to witness Raoul's assault on the City of Spades.

However, it was not so simple.

A subtle light emanated from Jury's chest as her heart audibly ticked. She too held onto Alice's hand but unfortunately, she was not able to detect anything.

The reason for this was simple.

*"Alice has no source of Nex to unravel."*

*Meaning she's not in a state of distress or anything like that, huh.*

*"Precisely."*

"It's probably the herds of sheep Demi-Humans." Hellen stated, wondering why they became so serious all of a sudden. "My. Please don't worry. It's not Alice and the children will go chasing them down a rabbit hole~"

"I hope not!" Jury exclaimed. "Alice. Don't go following anyone weird, ok?"

"Mhm~!"

"No White Rabbits too." Frost wanted to hammer this into her, causing Alice to pause momentarily before slowly nodding. "Alice... Tell me ok too."

"... ok."

"You don't want anything terrible happening to you." Nav ominously spoke, causing a chill to run down the girl's spine as her deadpan eyes drilled into her soul. "Statistic suggest that children of your age are likely to have your guts –"

"Hey, hey – Nav, how about you don't go telling a kid about statistics." Frost suddenly cupped Nav's mouth shut with her palm, Nav's mouth moving as she continued to speak. "Please?"

"... Mwy shwall wemebwer wat (I shall remember that)."

"Thank you. And you too, Alice. Stay safe and keep close to your mother. Remember, no White Rabbits."

"How about Black Doves? Or Blue Caterpillars!?" Alice asked as she returned to her mother's side, hugging her neck dearly.

"Are we the only ones you know?" Frost asked.

"Mhm~!"

"Then sure. Only us."

This was the first time she had heard of the White Rabbit. And knowing how things worked in this world, the odds of it being a Corrupted was unbelievably high. More so when a number of children believed the same thing.

If it wasn't already a Corrupted, then there was a chance that it could become one soon. Frost nursed her migraine as she stared into the wanderlust eyes of the blonde girl.

Those eyes sparkled like the night sky.

But in reality, there was only but an incandescent orb of light above.

And soon, there would be Stars of the Nexus watching them closely.

Because if the Stars could truly interpret her will, then they'd know that she desires the investigation of this phenomenon.