



# Lost and Found

By Lizaria



## [ Chapter 1 ]

The honeymoon to Japan was everything they had dreamed of and more. However, their friend Evelyn was not able to join them on this trip, as she had an unexpected family matter to attend to. The cherry blossoms painted the landscape in a soft, ethereal pink that seemed to whisper secrets of love and new beginnings. They wandered through ancient temples hand in hand, marveled at the bustling streets of Tokyo, and even managed to squeeze in a trip to a traditional onsen; a Japanese hot spring bath fed by geothermal energy. FiFi, ever the curious feline, had taken to the new sights and sounds with surprising grace, her eyes wide with wonder at the unfamiliar yet fascinating world around her.

But the serenity of their trip was shattered when, midway through their second week, they received an urgent message from the Blackstone Bureau. A young South Korean man named Lee Jun-seo had gone missing in Japan. The case was unusual, with reports of strange occurrences that seemed to defy explanation, and the local authorities had requested the bureau's assistance.

In the quiet, early hours of a Kyoto morning, the scent of blooming sakura filled the air with a gentle perfume that seemed to promise a new day of adventure. Detective Lizaria, with her light-wheat blonde hair and piercing blue eyes, sat at the edge of their hotel's rooftop garden, sipping on a cup of steaming chai. FiFi, her white fluffy Turkish Angora, lay curled up in her lap, her emerald eyes peeking out from the folds of Lizaria's kimono. The cat's tail flicked lazily, tickling Lizaria's nose as she pondered over the untouched tourist guidebook beside her.

"Looks like we're on a case, FiFi," she murmured, stroking the cat's fur thoughtfully. "But first, we need to tell Noah and Hana."

Lizaria found the newlyweds in their room, their heads buried in the pillows, trying to catch up on some much-needed sleep. She gently knocked on the door and waited for Noah to answer, his sandy hair a disheveled mess from the night's rest. Hana, with her ink-black hair and hazel eyes, peeked out from behind him, curiosity piqued. Lizaria quickly filled them in on the missing person's report and the connection to Detective Lee. Despite the interruption, she could see the spark in their eyes, the same one that had brought them together as a team of investigators.

Noah, ever the strategist, immediately began to formulate a plan. "We need to get in touch with TJ and get him to start digging into the background of this Lee Jun-seo," he said, already reaching for his phone. "The sooner we get intel, the better."

Hana nodded in agreement, her eyes sharpening with determination. "And we should notify Detective Lee," she added, her voice soft with concern. "He's going to want to know what's happening."

With a heavy sigh, the couple swung into action. They threw on their clothes, the warmth of the hotel room a significant difference to the cool, crisp air that greeted them outside. Noah stepped onto the balcony and dialed TJ, their tech-savvy assistant back in the states, who answered with a sleepy grumble.

"TJ, sorry to wake you, but we've got a situation," Noah began, laying out the details of the case as the sun began to peek over the horizon.

On the other end of the line, TJ's grogginess disappeared, replaced by his usual professionalism. "I'm on it," he said, the sound of typing in the background. "I'll start with flight records and local CCTV footage around the time he was last seen."

While Noah provided TJ with the necessary information, Hana packed their bags with a sense of urgency. She had a feeling this case would not be a simple one. The thought of leaving their romantic honeymoon behind was bittersweet, but the call of duty was undeniable. They had to help.

After a quick breakfast of fresh sushi and steaming rice, they made their way to the local police station to formally introduce themselves and offer their assistance. The station was bustling with officers, their stern faces a striking difference to the delicate beauty of the surrounding cherry blossom trees. They met with Detective Kim, who was in charge of the case, and shared what they knew about the missing man.

Detective Kim listened intently, his brow furrowed with concern. He had the weary look of a man who had been working tirelessly, with little to show for it. "Thank you for coming," he said gravely. "We've been looking for him everywhere, but it's as if he's vanished into thin air."

The foursome, now with a clear mission, set out into the city. They retraced the steps of Lee Jun-seo, from the airport to the last known location, a quaint little park where he planned to be with his girlfriend, Melody. Unfortunately, she fell ill few days prior to the trip, but

insisted he go and enjoy the cherry blossom festivities. FiFi's keen senses were on high alert, her eyes darting from one person to the next, her tail twitching at every unfamiliar smell.

As they approached the park, the atmosphere grew eerie. The usually bustling area was unusually quiet, the only sounds the distant chirping of birds and the rustling of the sakura leaves in the gentle breeze. It was as if the very trees held their breath in anticipation of their arrival.

In the center of the park, they found a spot where the petals had been disturbed, as if a struggle had taken place. Lizaria's heart raced as she knelt down, her eyes searching for any clue that might have been left behind. FiFi, ever the observant one, padded over to a tree and began to meow insistently.

"What is it, girl?" Lizaria asked, moving closer. FiFi's eyes were locked on a peculiar object hanging from a low branch. It was a small, intricately carved wooden charm, the likes of which she had never seen before. It had to be important.

They took the charm to Detective Kim, who studied it with a furrowed brow. "This is a traditional Korean talisman," he said, turning it over in his hands. "It's believed to ward off evil spirits. It's not something you would normally find here in Japan."

The discovery added a layer of complexity to the case, hinting at a cultural mystery that went beyond simple missing persons. The team exchanged glances, the gravity of the situation sinking in. They were no longer just looking for a lost tourist; they were stepping into a world of tradition and potential danger.

With renewed determination, they decided to split up to cover more ground. Noah and Lizaria would investigate the local Korean community for any leads, while Hana and TJ would dig deeper into the digital footprint left by Lee Jun-seo.

"Let's find him," Hana whispered to FiFi as they parted ways. The cat mewed in agreement, her eyes a mirror of the unspoken promise.

The investigation had officially begun, and with it, a race against time to unravel the threads of a story that seemed to grow more tangled with each passing moment. The cherry blossoms continued to bloom, a silent witness to their quest, their petals fluttering down like confetti on the trail of a vanished life.

Lee Dong-soo, the older brother of the missing man, was visibly distraught when they met him at the local café. His eyes, a mirror of his brother's, were red-rimmed with exhaustion

and worry. He spoke in a mix of English and Korean, his voice trembling as he recounted the last conversation they had. "He said he would see me soon," Dong-soo said, clutching his phone tightly. "He was so excited to visit Japan, to experience the beauty of the sakura with his girlfriend. But she fell ill, and he went alone. And now..."

Dong-soo's voice trailed off, his gaze dropping to the table. He showed them the last photo Lee Jun-seo had posted on Instagram: a selfie with the iconic sakura in full bloom behind him, a wide smile on his face. The post was eerily captioned, "Cherry blossoms alone this year, but she'll be here soon." It had been almost two weeks since then, and no new pictures or messages had appeared on his feed.

"This is highly unusual," Noah murmured, tapping his chin. "If he was an active influencer, his followers would have noticed his sudden disappearance. Have you tried reaching out to them?"

Dong-soo nodded, his shoulders slumping. "I've been trying, but no one seems to know anything. It's like he's been erased from the internet."

Hana took the lead, her voice gentle yet firm. "We'll do everything we can to find him. Tell us about his favorite places, his usual routines, and any friends or contacts he might have here in Japan."

Dong-soo's eyes searched theirs, desperation mingling with hope. He rattled off a list of locations, including a favorite ramen shop and an anime store that Lee had been eager to visit. His voice grew stronger with each detail, as if speaking the words aloud made the possibility of finding his brother more real.

"We'll start there," Noah said, jotting down the information. "And we'll check his social media for any recent activity or clues."



## [ Chapter 2 ]



As they stood to leave, Lizaria couldn't shake off the feeling that there was something more to Dong-soo's story. His good looks, reminiscent of the leading men from the Korean dramas she loved, had momentarily distracted her, but she knew she had to stay focused on the task

at hand. Gathering her thoughts, she turned to Dong-soo. "Is there anything else you think we should know? Anything at all that might help?"

Dong-soo's eyes searched hers, and she saw the desperation lurking within. "Jun-seo had a strange fascination with our ancestry," he revealed, his voice barely a whisper. "He was obsessed with finding out about our family's history, especially our great-grandmother and grandparents who were shamans."

The mention of a shaman sparked Lizaria's interest. "Do you think his disappearance could be connected to this?" she asked, her voice steady despite the flutter in her chest.

Dong-soo's eyes widened slightly, and he nodded. "It's possible. He was always talking about our family's lineage, how we were descendants of powerful shamans. He said he felt a...calling."

Lizaria nodded, her mind racing. "We might need to go to South Korea," she murmured, her cheeks flushing slightly. "To understand his mindset, his obsession with your ancestry."

The room fell silent as the gravity of her words settled in. Hana broke the silence with a decisive nod. "If that's what it takes," she said, her voice firm. "We'll do it."

The plan was set in motion. Lizaria would accompany Dong-soo to South Korea, hoping to uncover any connections to his ancestry that could lead to Lee Jun-seo. Meanwhile, Hana, Noah would remain in Japan to continue the search locally, following any breadcrumbs they could find. It was a risky move, splitting the team, but they knew it was necessary to cover all angles.

As they prepared to leave the café, Lizaria felt a sudden urge to connect with Dong-soo on a personal level, hoping it would provide some insight into the mind of the missing man. She took a deep breath, her hand gently stroking FiFi's soft fur. "Could you tell us a bit about your relationship with your brother?" she asked, her voice tentative.

Dong-soo's gaze softened, and he nodded. "We were always close, despite the age difference. He looked up to me, especially after our parents passed. I tried to be the best role model I could, but he had his own spirit, his own path."

"And your brother's obsession with your family's ancestry," Lizaria pressed, "How did that affect your relationship?"

Dong-soo paused, his gaze drifting to the swaying sakura outside the café window. "We were close, but sometimes, his fascination was... intense. He saw things differently, believed in

things that I couldn't always understand." His voice grew softer, a hint of sadness creeping in. "But I supported him, because that was who he was."

Lizaria felt a strange kinship with Dong-soo, despite their cultural differences. She knew all too well the weight of family expectations and the desire to forge one's own path. "Thank you for sharing that," she said, her eyes flickering to FiFi. "It's important for us to know who we're looking for."

The conversation shifted as they talked more about their shared love for animals, particularly cats. Dong-soo's eyes lit up as he spoke of his own feline companion, an all-black fluffy cat named JiJi with golden-yellow eyes. FiFi's emerald eyes remained fixed on Dong-soo, as if she understood the bond between them. Lizaria couldn't help but smile at the coincidence. "You're a Studio Ghibli fan?" she asked, referring to the iconic Japanese film studio known for its whimsical, often cat-filled animations.

Dong-soo's smile grew genuine. "JiJi is like my little piece of home," he said, his eyes crinkling at the corners. "Whenever I'm feeling lost or lonely, he's there to remind me of who I am."

Lizaria nodded, understanding the sentiment all too well. "FiFi does the same for me," she said, her voice soft. "But tell me, why did you name your cat JiJi?"

Dong-soo's smile grew, revealing perfect white teeth. "It's from one of our favorite Studio Ghibli movies, 'Kiki's Delivery Service,'" he said. "JiJi was the black cat that accompanied Kiki on her adventures. It was a symbol of comfort and protection for us, growing up. When I found him as a stray kitten, I just knew he had to be my JiJi."

Lizaria's eyes lit up with recognition. "My sister and I adored that film," she said, her voice filled with warmth. "It was one of the first animes we watched together. She's always been the adventurous one, like Kiki."

Dong-soo nodded. "Jun-seo was like that too. He had a wild spirit, always searching for something more." His gaze grew distant as he spoke, lost in a sea of memories. "I just wish I knew what he was looking for here in Japan."

Lizaria felt her heart go out to him. She knew the pain of losing someone close, and she couldn't imagine the anguish he must be feeling. "We'll find him," she assured him, her voice strong and steady. "Together, we'll bring him home."



### [ Chapter 3 ]



The flight to South Korea was a blur of anticipation and anxiety. As they touched down, the neon lights of Seoul greeted them, a dramatic change to the serene Kyoto they had left behind. Dong-soo led them to his apartment, a cozy space filled with the scent of incense and the soft meowing of a cat.

As they entered, a fluffy black figure darted from the shadows, its golden-yellow eyes gleaming with curiosity. It was Jiji, and his energy filled the room as he bounded towards FiFi. At first, the Turkish Angora was on high alert, her fur bristling at the unfamiliar presence. But as Dong-soo called out a warm greeting in Korean, she watched as the two cats met. FiFi's ears perked up, and she took a tentative step forward, her emerald eyes wide with curiosity. Jiji approached, his fluffy tail high, and after a brief moment of sniffing and posturing, they seemed to come to an understanding.

The feline greeting completed, Dong-soo led them to a low table in the center of the room, where a photo album lay open. It was a collection of memories from his childhood with Lee Jun-seo. The pages were filled with smiles, laughter, and a bond that transcended time and space. As they turned the pages, Lizaria noticed something peculiar: scattered among the images of family gatherings and school days were pictures of shaman temples and elderly people with kind, knowing eyes.

"These are our grandparents," Dong-soo said, pointing to a photo of a couple dressed in traditional Korean garb. "They were both shamans. They taught us the ways of our ancestors, the importance of respect and harmony with the spiritual world."

Lizaria leaned in closer, her eyes scanning the images. "They look like wise souls," she said, her voice filled with respect.

Dong-soo nodded, a proud smile playing on his lips. "They were," he said. "They taught us so much about our heritage." He pointed to an image of an ornate shaman's mask. "That's a mudang's mask," he explained. "It's used during ceremonies to connect with the spirit world."

Lizaria leaned closer, her eyes lingering on the mask. "I might be able to help with that," she said, her voice barely a whisper. "My team and I have experience with the paranormal. We've solved cold cases with the help of spirits before."

Dong-soo's eyes grew wide with astonishment, and a glimmer of hope shone through the despair. "Really?"

"Yes," Lizaria assured him, her eyes never leaving his. "We've encountered the supernatural before, and sometimes, they hold the answers we seek." She gently placed her hand on the photo album. "Could we visit your grandparents' grave? Perhaps they know something that could help us find your brother."

Dong-soo's gaze grew thoughtful, and he nodded slowly. "It's worth a shot," he said, a hint of excitement in his voice. "But we'll need to be careful. The spirit world can be... unpredictable."

Lizaria nodded solemnly. "We'll bring our own set of tools," she said, reaching into her bag to show him a collection of crystals, sage, and a digital voice recorder that had captured the whispers of the departed before. "And FiFi here," she continued, stroking the cat's silky fur, "has a sixth sense for these things."

Dong-soo's eyes lit up with a spark of hope. "JiJi has always had a strange connection to the graveyard," he said, his voice filled with wonder. "Sometimes, when we visit our ancestors, he'll hiss and arch his back, as if sensing something... malevolent."

Lizaria's mind raced with the implications. "Could it be that your brother's obsession with your ancestry led him into contact with something... otherworldly?" she asked, her voice tinged with excitement.

Dong-soo nodded solemnly. "It's possible," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "Jun-seo was always pushing the boundaries, seeking the truth in the most obscure places."



## [ Chapter 4 ]



The next day, they set out for the cemetery, armed with their paranormal tools and the protective beads that Dong-soo had insisted they all wear. The air grew heavy with anticipation as they approached the ancient graves, the towering sakura trees casting dappled shadows on the well-trodden path. FiFi and JiJi walked side by side, their tails held high, as if sensing the importance of the task ahead.

When they reached the grave of Dong-soo's grandparents, Lizaria felt an intense energy in the air. She knelt down, placing the EVP digital voice recorder on the ground between the two cat offerings of incense and rice cakes. "If there are any spirits here," she began, her voice steady and clear, "please help us find Lee Jun-seo."

The cats remained by their side, their tails fluttered as the wind picked up. Suddenly, FiFi's eyes grew wide, and she hissed, her fur standing on end. Lizaria's hand tightened around her crystal, and she saw that JiJi had arched his back, his eyes focused on a spot just beyond the graveyard's edge. Dong-soo's hand went to his pocket, where he clutched a set of ancient beads.

"Something's here," he murmured, his gaze following the cats' line of sight. "We need to be careful."

Lizaria nodded, her own intuition tingling. "We're ready," she said, her voice firm. "We've dealt with the supernatural before. It's part of our job."

## [ Chapter 5 ]

Back in Kyoto, Japan, Noah and Hana had been diligently piecing together the puzzle of Lee Jun-seo's last known whereabouts. They had spent hours combing through security footage from the various locations he had visited. His digital footprint had led them to an anime and gift shop, a cozy café, and an antique store that seemed to specialize in peculiar items. They had also learned of his frequent visits to a small farmers market, where he had made friends with a few of the local vendors.

The trail grew cold as they approached the fifth day of his disappearance. The CCTV footage from the market showed him getting into a car, but the license plate was obscured by a conveniently placed branch. Noah's frustration grew as he played the same segment of the video over and over, his eyes squinting to make out any detail that could lead them to their missing person.

Hana, ever the strategic thinker, suggested they visit the locations in person, hoping that something would jump out at them that the cameras had missed. They started at the anime

and gift shop, where the clerk, a young woman with pink hair and a bubbly smile, recognized the picture of Jun-seo immediately. "Oh, yes!" she exclaimed. "He came in here almost every day, looking for something specific. He was so sweet, always asking questions about our culture and traditions."

Her words piqued their interest. "Do you have any idea what he was looking for?" Noah inquired, his eyes scanning the shelves packed with anime merchandise and traditional goods.

The clerk thought for a moment before her eyes lit up. "Ah, yes! He was obsessed with shamanism. He kept asking if we had any books or artifacts related to it." She pointed to a section in the back, where a few dusty books and some intricate carvings sat. "He was particularly interested in these," she said, gesturing to a set of wooden figurines.

Noah and Hana exchanged a knowing look. "Could you tell us anything about these?" Hana asked, her voice calm despite the racing of her heart.

The clerk picked up one of the wooden figurines, her eyes misting over with curiosity. "These are known as 'shaman's guardians'," she said, her voice hushed. "They're used to ward off evil spirits during rituals. It's very rare to find them outside of a temple."

Her words sent a shiver down Noah's spine. "Could you tell us more about shamanism and its connection to the places he visited?" he asked, his voice tinged with urgency.

The clerk nodded, her smile fading into a more solemn expression. "Shamanism is deeply rooted in Korean culture," she began, her eyes drifting to the shelves of anime and manga that surrounded them. "But here in Kyoto, we have our own history with spiritualism and sacred spaces. There's an ancient shaman temple in the mountains, not too far from here. It's been abandoned for years, but some say it's still a powerful place."

Her words sent a spark of excitement through Noah's veins. "Could he have gone there?" he asked, his eyes alight with the possibility.

The clerk nodded. "It's possible," she said, her voice filled with intrigue. "But it's a long hike, and the temple is said to be quite... haunted. Not many people go there anymore."

Noah and Hana shared a determined glance. "We'll check it out," Noah said, his voice firm. "We need to explore every possibility."

They thanked the clerk for her information and set out for the mountain trail leading to the ancient shaman temple. The hike was steep and rugged, the dense foliage whispering secrets that only the initiated could understand. As they climbed higher, the air grew thicker, charged with a sense of history and reverence.



## [ Chapter 6 ]



Meanwhile, back at the graveyard, Lizaria and Dong-soo sat cross-legged on the cool earth before the grandparents' graves. Lizaria held the EVP digital recorder in her hand, the cold metal a stark contrast to the warmth of the incense surrounding them. She cleared her throat, her eyes fixated on the dead bell that detects EMF nestled between the cat offerings. "Lee grandparents," she began, her voice echoing softly through the still air, "we need your help. Do you know where Lee Jun-seo is?" "Ring the bell once for yes and twice for no."

The air grew thick with anticipation, and the bell remained silent for a moment that stretched into eternity. Then, a single ding pierced the quietude. Lizaria felt her heart skip a beat. "Is he okay?" she asked, her voice trembling slightly.

For what felt like an eternity, there was no response. The only sounds were the distant chirping of cicadas and the occasional rustle of the wind through the sakura petals scattered across the ground. Then, a second ding, harsher and more urgent than the first, rang out, sending a shiver down her spine.

"Does that mean he's in danger?" Dong-soo whispered, his eyes wide with fear.

Lizaria nodded gravely. "It seems so," she said, her voice tight with concern. "We need to find him quickly."

They packed up their things and headed back to Dong-soo's apartment, where they could regroup and plan their next move. As they walked, the air grew colder, the whispers of the spirits seemingly following them like a chilling breeze. Back in the apartment, they huddled around a map of South Korea, the neon lights of Seoul outside casting an eerie glow through the window. Dong-soo's eyes searched the map, his mind racing as he tried to recall any places his brother might have mentioned during his research.

The sudden ring of Lizaria's phone interrupted the silence, and she fished it out of her pocket with trembling hands. "Hello?" she answered, her voice taut with tension.

"Lizaria," Noah's voice crackled over the line, "we've got a breakthrough. We're in Kyoto, at the base of the mountain with the shaman temple. The trail's gone cold everywhere else, but we found evidence that suggests Jun-seo was here before he disappeared."

Her heart racing, Lizaria leaned against the kitchen counter. "What evidence?" she demanded.

Noah's voice grew more serious. "We found a crumpled note with his handwriting at the base of the mountain," he said. "It mentions something about finding 'the truth within the veil'. And Hana picked up on some faint, residual spiritual energy that matches the description of the charm we found at the crime scene."

Lizaria's eyes widened. "That's it," she said, her voice firm with conviction. "We need to come back to Kyoto immediately."

Dong-soo's brow furrowed in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"The note," Lizaria said, her voice low. "He mentioned finding 'the truth within the veil'. It's got to be connected to his obsession with your shaman ancestors."

Dong-soo nodded, his eyes reflecting the gravity of the situation. "We'll need to prepare ourselves spiritually before we go to that temple," he said. "The veil between worlds is thinner there, and we don't know what we might face."

They decided to leave for Kyoto immediately, their hearts heavy with the weight of their mission. As they boarded the flight, Lizaria couldn't help but feel the presence of the spirits that seemed to be guiding them. She whispered a prayer for their safe journey, her hand resting protectively on FiFi's soft fur.

## [ Chapter 7 ]

The flight was a blur of restlessness and anticipation. Every time Lizaria closed her eyes, she saw the image of the shaman's mask from the photo album. There was something about it that called to her, a siren's song that she couldn't ignore. When they landed, it was with a renewed sense of urgency that they made their way to the hotel where Hana and Noah were staying.

The lobby was dimly lit, the soft glow of the paper lanterns casting dancing shadows across the polished wooden floor. Noah and Hana were waiting for them, their expressions a mix of excitement and trepidation. "We have to go to that temple," Noah said as soon as they saw Lizaria and Dong-soo. "It's our best lead."

Lizaria nodded, her eyes meeting Hana's. "We know," she said, her voice filled with understanding. "The spirits have been guiding us."

The four of them retreated to the hotel room, where they spread out their findings on the low table. The atmosphere was tense, charged with the weight of their mission. TJ, their tech-savvy assistant back in Rhode Island, had hacked into the local network and found some old documents about the temple's dark past.

"It seems that this place has a history of strange disappearances," TJ said over the phone, his eyes never leaving his laptop screen. "And the last recorded case was almost a century ago."

Lizaria felt a chill run down her spine. "We need to be prepared for anything," she said, her eyes flicking to the map of the mountain trail. "We can't go in there unarmed, both physically and spiritually."

They spent the rest of the night gathering supplies and preparing themselves for the climb. They picked up salt, sage, and crystals that TJ had recommended, along with some sturdy flashlights and a first aid kit. They studied the layout of the abandoned temple, the ancient symbols etched into the stones, and the rituals that might be needed to communicate with the spirits that dwelt there. Dong-soo, with his own background in shamanism, offered invaluable insight, his eyes often glazing over as he recounted stories of his ancestors' encounters with the otherworldly.



## [ Chapter 8 ]



The next morning, as the sun kissed the horizon with the soft pinks of dawn, they set out for the mountain. The air grew cooler as they climbed higher, the scent of earth and damp leaves filling their nostrils. The path was steep, and the cats, usually so graceful, had to be carried for parts of the journey. The trees grew denser, the silence only broken by the occasional call of a distant bird or the rustle of leaves underfoot.

The shaman temple loomed before them, shrouded in mist and time. The wooden structure leaned slightly to one side, as if whispering secrets to the mountain it had stood guard over for centuries. The intricate carvings on the pillars and beams looked almost alive in the early light, the faces of gods and spirits watching them with knowing eyes.

"This is it," Noah murmured, his eyes scanning the area. "This is where the note led us."

The shaman temple stood tall before them, a silent sentinel shrouded in mist. Its ancient wooden beams groaned under the weight of time, and the air was thick with the scent of earth and damp moss. Hana nodded, her gaze taking in the eerie beauty of the place. "It's... hauntingly beautiful," she said softly.

Noah's eyes remained fixed on the crumpled note in his hand. "The energy here is intense," he murmured. "I can feel it. This is where he was heading."

"But why?" Hana questioned, her gaze scanning the desolate landscape. "What could he have been searching for?"

Lizaria took a deep breath, the weight of their impending journey settling on her shoulders. "We'll know soon enough," she said, her eyes meeting Dong-soo's. "We're going to find him."

A red Torii gate stood out noticeably against the backdrop of the misty mountain, a crimson beacon in the sea of green. As the detectives approached, FiFi and Jiji grew restless in their arms, their tails thrashed with agitation. They gently placed the cats on the ground, watching as the animals cautiously approached the gate.

The cats' instincts proved correct as they reached the gate. FiFi's green eyes narrowed and she let out a low, mournful meow, drawing everyone's attention to a small wooden figurine lying in the dirt, half-hidden by a tangle of ivy. It was identical to one of the 'shaman's guardians' they had seen in the antique shop. However, this one was marred by a smear of fresh, dark blood. Lizaria's hand flew to her mouth in shock as she bent down to examine it. "What could this mean?" she murmured, her eyes searching the surrounding area.

Dong-soo's face grew grim. "It's a sign," he said, his voice tight with concern. "My grandmother used to say that blood on a shaman's guardian means someone has crossed the veil."

The detectives exchanged a look of horror. "But whose blood is it?" Hana whispered, her hand shaking as she reached for the figurine.

Noah's eyes narrowed as he studied the crimson smear. "It's not human," he said after a moment. "It's too... viscous."

"Could it be animal blood?" Hana suggested, her voice shaky.

Dong-soo's brow furrowed as he studied the crimson smear. "It's possible," he said, his eyes never leaving the figurine. "But the way it's placed, almost as a warning... it feels intentional."

The detectives knew they had to act fast. The cats' keen senses had led them to a crucial piece of the puzzle, and they couldn't ignore the urgency in their meows. Lizaria picked up the figurine, her heart racing as she felt the sticky residue. "This is more than just a coincidence."

They decided to split up again. Noah and Hana would continue the search around the base of the mountain by the ancient wooden temple, while Lizaria and Dong-soo would head straight to the abandoned temple with the figurine. The tension in the air was strong as they parted ways, the mist swirling around them like a living entity, hinting at the secrets it held.

## [ Chapter 9 ]

The trek to the temple was grueling, the steep path challenging even for the most seasoned hikers. Lizaria and Dong-soo moved swiftly, driven by the urgency of their mission. FiFi and JiJi stayed close, their fur standing on end as if sensing the unease in the air. They could feel the energy growing stronger with each step they took, the veil between worlds thinning before them.

Suddenly, Lizaria's foot slipped on a moss-covered stone, sending her hurtling towards the precarious edge of the cliff. Time seemed to slow as she watched the world around her spin, the vibrant colors of the cherry blossoms blurring into a kaleidoscope of panic. But just as she was about to plummet into the abyss, a strong arm shot out, grabbing her firmly around the waist.

Dong-soo's quick reflexes had saved her from a grisly fate. He held her tightly against his chest, his breath warm against her neck, as the two of them hovered over the edge. For a moment, she could feel her heart thundering in her chest, a symphony of gratitude and fear playing out between them. His grip was like a lifeline, anchoring her to reality.

As she regained her footing, Lizaria couldn't help but blush at Dong-soo's concerned gaze. The way his hand lingered on her waist, the warmth of his touch, sent a jolt of electricity through her body. The urge to lean in and press her lips to his cheek was almost

overwhelming. But the gravity of their situation slapped her back to reality. Time was ticking, and they were no closer to finding Lee Jun-seo.

FiFi and JiJi looked up at them, their tails gliding in unison as if they had felt the shift in the air. The cats stared at Lizaria and Dong-soo with a peculiar curiosity, as if they too were piecing together the puzzle of their growing bond. Lizaria knelt down, stroking FiFi's soft fur and whispering sweet nothings into her ear. The cat's eyes closed in contentment, and for a brief moment, she allowed herself to imagine a future where the four of them were a family, their lives intertwined by more than just this mysterious case.

## [ Chapter 10]

The sound of a ringing phone shattered the quiet moment. Noah's phone, nestled in his pocket, had come to life with an urgent call from Detective Lee back in Rhode Island. His eyes widened as he listened to the information, and he quickly relayed it to Hana. "Detective Lee remembered something," he said, his voice hushed. "When he was our age, he visited this same temple. He saw a lady spirit in a red dress, and she whispered something to him. It was in Japanese, but now he thinks he knows what it means."

Hana felt a chill run down her spine. "What was it?" she asked, her voice barely a whisper.

Noah repeated the chant in a hushed tone, the words feeling foreign yet eerily familiar on his tongue. "The veil is near, once your through, coming out won't be easy," he murmured, his eyes searching hers for understanding.

Hana's gaze was distant, lost in thought. "If he found it...if he's stuck..." she trailed off, her mind racing with the implications. "We need to find Lizaria and Dong-soo," she said decisively, her hand reaching for her phone. "We can't let him suffer in that limbo alone."

As she dialed Lizaria's number, she couldn't help but feel a deep sense of foreboding. The mountain was vast and unpredictable, filled with ancient spirits that didn't take kindly to intruders. Yet, she had to trust that their bond and the power of their combined skills would guide them to the truth. The phone rang once, twice, and then Lizaria's voice filled the line, sounding faint and strained.

"Lizaria," Hana said, her voice urgent, "we need to talk. Detective Lee remembered something about a spirit in a red dress that could be connected to the veil."

Lizaria's heart skipped a beat. "We're on our way to the temple," she said, her voice strained from exertion. "What did she say to him?"

"The veil is near, once you're through, coming out won't be easy," Hana translated, her eyes scanning the dense foliage around her. "It sounds like a warning."

Noah nodded gravely. "And if he found it..." He didn't need to finish the sentence. The implication was clear: Lee Jun-seo might have ventured into a realm where he didn't belong and was now lost.

The line grew quiet for a moment before Lizaria spoke again, her voice tight with urgency. "We're almost at the temple," she said. "The found figurine with blood on it. We think it's connected to the veil."

Hana's grip on the phone tightened. "We think he might have gone through," she said, her voice filled with a mix of dread and hope. "We have to find a way to bring him back."

Dong-soo's eyes grew distant as he pondered the words. "My parents..." he murmured, his thoughts racing. "They left me a box of shamanic artifacts. They knew I might follow in their footsteps one day."

Lizaria looked at him, hope sparking in her eyes. "Could that be the key?" she asked, her voice hopeful. "Could there be something in there that can help us?"

Dong-soo nodded. "I think so," he said, his voice firm. "We need to get to my place and find that box."

## [ Chapter 11]

They made their way back down the mountain, the gravity of their findings weighing heavily on their minds. As they reached the base, Lizaria's phone buzzed again. "It's Detective Lee," she said, her eyes widening as she read the new message. "He's found something in his old family records about the veil and the shaman's guardians. He's sending us the information now."

The group gathered around Noah's laptop, the glow of the screen the only light in the quiet hotel room. The documents were in Korean, but TJ's quick work translated the text to reveal ancient rituals and incantations. Lizaria's eyes scanned the pages, her heart racing as she recognized the symbolism of the guardian figurines and the red dress mentioned in the spirit's warning.

"This is it," she murmured, her finger pointing at a passage. "A ceremony to open and close the veil between worlds. It requires a shaman's guardian figurine, sage, and the pure intentions of those performing the ritual."

"But we're not shamans," Hana said, her voice tinged with doubt.

"But we have the bloodline," Lizaria pointed out, her gaze intense. "And with the right tools, we might be able to pull this off."

The group nodded, a collective determination settling over them like a cloak. They had to get to Dong-soo's place in South Korea, where the box of shamanic artifacts could be the key to saving Lee Jun-seo. The cats seemed to sense the gravity of the situation, their eyes wide and alert as they listened to the humans' plans.

The flight back to Seoul was fraught with tension. Each passing minute felt like an eternity as they combed through the documents and artifacts that had been sent by Detective Lee. The cats curled up in their laps, purring gently, providing a small semblance of comfort amidst the turmoil of thoughts.

Upon arriving at Dong-soo's apartment, they immediately set to work. The box was exactly where he had left it, dusty but untouched. Inside, nestled amidst ancient scrolls and talisman, lay a shaman's guardian figurine. It was smaller than the one they had found at the base of the mountain, but it resonated with the same power. The air in the room grew thick with anticipation as they placed it on the low table before them.

Dong-soo's eyes searched the scrolls, his finger tracing the delicate lines of a ritual that spoke of opening the veil. "This is it," he murmured, his eyes alight with determination. "We can use this to find him."



## [ Chapter 12 ]



The group returned back to Tokyo and gathered at the base of the mountain temple, their spirits heavy with the weight of their mission. The shamanic artifacts from Dong-soo's box were laid out carefully before them, the figurine sitting proudly at the center. The sun had dipped below the horizon, leaving the sky a canvas of deep purple and inky black.

Lizaria and Dong-soo studied the scrolls with a newfound focus, their eyes darting over the ancient symbols as they prepared to perform the ritual. The air grew thick with the scent of burning sage, the smoke curling around their forms as they chanted the incantation that would, hopefully, lead them to Lee Jun-seo.

The cats, sensing the shift in energy, sat up straight, their fur bristling as they stared at the shaman's guardian figurine. Their eyes glowed with an otherworldly light, and they mewed in unison, almost as if in response to the incantation.

With trembling hands, Lizaria and Dong-soo lit the sage and began to chant the ancient words. The flames danced in the breeze, casting flickering shadows across their faces. The air grew colder, the mist thickening around them as if the veil itself was drawn closer by the power of their words.

As the incantation grew louder, the cats' mews grew more insistent. Their tails lashed back and forth, and their eyes grew brighter, almost seeming to glow in the dim light. The detectives could feel the energy building, the very fabric of reality stretching and warping around the small clearing.

The veil grew thinner, and for a brief moment, they caught a glimpse of the spirit world beyond. It was a place of supernatural beauty, where the vibrant colors of the living world were replaced by a monochromatic palette of ghosts and whispers. Figures danced in the shadows, their movements eerie and mesmerizing.

With the shaman's guardian in hand, Dong-soo led the chant, his voice strong and steady. The incantation grew in intensity, each syllable resonating through the mountain air. Lizaria felt her own power surging, her ancestry awakening within her as she joined him in the ancient words. The cats, their eyes now piercing points of light, stood guard, their mews a harmony to the human voices.

The veil grew thinner, and the shadows grew restless. They could see figures moving beyond the veil, their forms indistinct but their intent clear. The detectives' hearts raced as they approached the final lines of the ceremony. The pressure was immense, but they had come too far to turn back now. They had to trust in their bond and the strength of their conviction.

As the incantation reached its crescendo, the air around the shaman's guardian grew electric. The figurine began to vibrate, the bloodstain pulsing in time with their hearts. The cats' mews grew louder, almost a battle cry, as the veil shuddered and parted before them. For a moment, the world held its breath, and then, with a sound like the tearing of silk, the veil split open.



## [ Chapter 13]



On the other side of the breach, they saw a figure in a red dress, her eyes glowing like embers. She was beautiful yet terrifying, her long hair flowing like a river of fire. The detectives stepped forward, the power of the shaman's guardian resonating through their bodies, and the cats eyes locked on the spirit.

The lady in red looked upon them with a mixture of curiosity and warning. Her voice echoed through the air, the words in a language none of them understood, but the intention clear. She knew why they had come. Lizaria stepped forward, the figurine in her hand vibrating with power.

The spirit's eyes narrowed, and the mist grew colder as she raised a hand, pointing at the detectives. The veil shimmered and grew more unstable, as if sensing the intrusion. "We're here for Lee Jun-seo," Lizaria said firmly, her voice carrying the conviction of their quest.

The lady in red cocked her head, considering their words. Then, she turned and glided through the veil, beckoning them to follow. Lizaria and Dong-soo exchanged a tense glance before stepping through the rift, the others close behind. The world beyond was a drastic shift to the colorful Kyoto spring - a realm of whispers and shadows, where the only sound was the soft rustle of leaves and the distant echoes of long-forgotten laments.

The path was narrow and treacherous, winding through a forest of ancient, twisted trees that seemed to watch them with knowing eyes. The air grew colder, and the cats' fur stood on end as they sensed the unseen dangers lurking just out of sight. They pressed on, driven by the flicker of hope that grew stronger with each step.

As they approached the Tori gate, the detectives felt the power of the veil pulsing around them like a heartbeat. FiFi and Jiji grew restless, their tails wagging as they stared into the dense underbrush. Lizaria paused, her hand on the gate's wooden frame. "We must be careful," she warned, her voice low and steady. "The spirits here are not to be trifled with."

Noah nodded solemnly, his hand tightening around the handle of the shovel he had brought from the box. The sharpened edge gleamed in the moonlight, a silent promise to protect his wife and colleagues. Hana held a bundle of sage in her hand, the smell of the herb strong

and reassuring. Dong-soo had the figurine wrapped in a red cloth, a symbol of the spirit's dominion.

They approached the Tori gate with reverence, the air thick with anticipation. FiFi and JiJi grew increasingly agitated, their eyes darting around as if they could see the unseen. "This is it," Lizaria murmured, her voice barely carrying over the whisper of the breeze. "We're going to find him."

Dong-soo held the shaman's guardian high, its power intense in the air. "Let's move quickly," he said, his voice firm despite the tremor in his hand. "We don't know how long the veil will remain open."



## [ Chapter 14 ]



They hurried through the gate, the cats' eyes scanning the shadowy landscape. The spirit world was not a place for the faint of heart, but the bond between the humans and their feline companions was unbreakable. The path grew steeper, the trees more twisted and ominous, as if nature itself was trying to deter them from their quest. But the detectives pushed on, driven by the knowledge that a life hung in the balance.

The red-dressed spirit reappeared, guiding them deeper into the woods. The cats' mews grew louder, a constant reminder of the supernatural presence surrounding them. They followed her through the mist, the only color in the monochrome world coming from the crimson of her garments and the pulsing aura of the shaman's guardian in Dong-soo's hand.

The path grew narrower, the trees more menacing, their branches reaching out like skeletal fingers. The ground beneath their feet felt unsteady, as if it could give way at any moment. The air grew colder, the scent of damp earth and decay mingling with the acrid smell of burnt sage. They stumbled upon an ancient, moss-covered stone structure, the shamanic temple they had been seeking.

Dong-soo stepped forward, the figurine in his hand vibrating with a power that seemed to resonate with the very stones beneath them. He placed the figurine at the base of a statue of a fierce, four-legged creature, its eyes gleaming in the moonlight. Lizaria and Hana laid out

the other items from the box: a string of beads, a feather, and a small dagger that glinted ominously.

The incense they had brought began to smolder, casting a pall of sweet smoke over the clearing. The cats' meows grew softer, almost reverential as they recognized the sacredness of the place. The detectives formed a circle around the artifacts, each taking a deep breath to steady their nerves. The instructions from Detective Lee's ritual were clear, but the stakes had never felt higher.

The ancient scrolls spoke of purification and respect for the spirits, and so they began. Lizaria took a handful of rice and scattered it around the perimeter, a simple yet profound offering to the unseen guardians of the temple. Hana lit the bundle of sage, letting the purifying scent fill the air as they all chanted the provided incantations. Dong-soo held the shaman's guardian aloft, his voice resonating through the night as he called upon the ancestors for their guidance and protection.

The red-dressed spirit hovered at the edge of the clearing, her eyes never leaving the detectives. The cats remained close, their tails twitching with the intensity of their focus. They knew something momentous was about to happen. As the incense smoke grew denser, the air grew colder, and the shadows around the temple began to stir.

Dong-soo stepped forward, the ancient scrolls in his hands trembling with the power of the words etched upon them. He spoke in a language long forgotten by most, the incantation for opening the veil to the spirit world. Lizaria followed, her voice clear and strong, reciting the words that would bind their intentions to the ceremony. The cats' meows grew softer, almost a purr, as they felt the energy coalesce around the shamanic artifacts.



## [ Chapter 15]



As they reached the climax of the ritual, a distant cry pierced the quiet of the night. It was faint but filled with a desperation that resonated deep within their souls. The red-dressed spirit's eyes narrowed, and she gestured towards the source of the sound. The detectives looked at each other, knowing that the moment they had been preparing for had arrived.

The cats' mews grew more urgent, their eyes locking onto the spirit in the white gown as she emerged from the shadows. Her form was ethereal, her gown a soft, luminous white that stood out purely against the dark backdrop of the forest. FiFi and JiJi leaped into action, darting through the veil and disappearing into the spirit world, their eyes alight with an inner glow that mirrored the spirit's own.

The detectives followed, their hearts pounding in their chests as the reality of their mission hit them. The cats led them through a labyrinth of whispers and shadows, the cries growing louder with every step. They found themselves in a small clearing, the air thick with sorrow and regret.

At the center of the clearing stood two figures, their forms shimmering in the moonlight. FiFi and JiJi raced ahead, their eyes locked on the figure of a young man in a state of despair. It was Lee Jun-seo, his eyes red and swollen with tears. He knelt beside two graves, one marked with his mother's name, the other his father's, their dates of passing too recent for the moss to have grown.

The spirit in white hovered above him, her eyes filled with compassion. As the detectives approached, she turned to them, her gaze expectant. Lizaria and Dong-soo felt a surge of understanding. They had to guide him back, to show him that his time had not yet come. The cats, now silent, stood by to the weeping man, their tails swung gently in a sign of comfort and support.

"Lee Jun-seo," Lizaria called out softly, her voice cutting through the silence like a knife. The young man looked up, his eyes widening in shock and recognition. "It's okay," she said gently. "We're here to help you."

The spirits surrounding them grew restless, their whispers shifting into harsh screams as the tension in the clearing built. Noah and Hana stepped forward, their eyes filled with a mix of concern and resolve. "You're not alone," Noah assured him, extending a hand. "We're going to get you out of here."

Lee Jun-seo's eyes searched theirs, desperation clinging to him like a second skin. "I can't," he choked out, his voice a raw wound. "I have to be here for them. I can't leave."

Dong-soo stepped closer, his heart aching at the sight of his brother's pain. "Jun-seo," he said, his voice firm yet gentle. "Our parents are at peace now. They wouldn't want you to stay in this limbo. They would want you to live, to be happy with your girlfriend."

Jun-seo's head snapped up, his eyes brimming with hope and doubt. "Hyung," he whispered, "are you sure?"

Dong-soo nodded solemnly, his eyes never leaving his brother's. "Yes," he said firmly. "They're at peace now. They wouldn't want you trapped here."

The air grew colder, the whispers of the spirits surrounding them becoming more insistent. Lizaria and Hana shared a knowing look; they had to act fast before the veil closed. "Your girlfriend is worried about you, Jun-seo," Hana said, her voice filled with empathy. "She's sick, and she needs you. Please come back with us."

The mention of his girlfriend seemed to break through the fog of grief. His eyes searched the detectives' faces, and he finally nodded. "Alright," he whispered, his voice cracking with hope and fear. "I'll go."



## [ Chapter 16]



The red-dressed spirit approached, her fiery eyes now soft with understanding. She reached out a hand to Dong-soo, and he took it without hesitation. The veil shimmered, the barrier between worlds growing thinner. The detectives could feel the tug of reality trying to pull them back, but they held firm, their resolve unyielding.

"You must come with me," Dong-soo told his brother gently. "Our town needs shamans to maintain the balance. We can honor our parents by continuing their legacy."

Jun-seo's eyes searched Dong-soo's, hope and doubt warring within. "But what about my life? My girlfriend?"

Dong-soo's grip on the figurine tightened. "Our life as shamans is about balance, not abandonment," he explained. "We can still have love and family. It's just a different path now."

The spirit in red nodded solemnly. "He speaks the truth," she said, her voice echoing through the clearing. "Your duty calls you home."

With a heavy heart, Lee Jun-seo took a step towards the veil, his eyes never leaving his brother's. "Dong-soo, if I go back, will you promise me one thing?"

Dong-soo's gaze was unwavering. "Anything, hyung."

Jun-seo's voice was a tremor of hope. "I'll come back," he said, "but only if you promise to train me. To help me understand this... this gift. I don't want to be alone in this."

Dong-soo's eyes filled with a warmth that seemed to dispel some of the cold from the spirit world. He nodded firmly. "I promise, hyung. I'll be there for you every step of the way."

With that assurance, Lee Jun-seo took a deep breath and stepped through the veil, the shimmering curtain of light parting before him. The detectives followed closely, their hearts pounding as the spirit world grew more tangible. The cats remained at their side, their eyes still aglow with an otherworldly energy. The veil closed with a soft sigh, leaving them in the quiet of the Kyoto night.



## [ Chapter 17 ]



The moment they were back in the physical world, the cats' meows grew insistent. They knew that time was of the essence, and they led the group to a nearby shrine, where the air was thick with the scent of incense and the sound of prayers. The spirit in red had told them that the only way to fully release Lee Jun-seo from the veil was to perform a second ceremony, one that would anchor him to the living world and seal his fate as a shaman.

Jun-seo looked around, his eyes wide with wonder and fear as he took in the unfamiliar surroundings. "Hyung," he whispered, his voice shaking. "Is this where we must perform the ceremony?"

Dong-soo nodded solemnly, his eyes never leaving the spirit world beyond the veil. "Yes," he replied. "We must anchor you to the living world before it's too late." He turned to Lizaria and Noah, who were busy setting up the artifacts from the box. "Thank you for bringing him back," he said, his voice thick with emotion. "Now, let's make sure he stays with us."

The group worked quickly, their movements precise and purposeful. They set the artifacts around a makeshift altar, the spirit in red watching them with approval. FiFi and JiJi sat at the base of the altar, their eyes still aglow, purring softly as if in support of the coming transformation. The air grew heavier with each passing moment, the veil between worlds pulsing like a heartbeat waiting to be released.

Lee Dong-soo took his brother's hand, his gaze steady and strong. "You can do this," he said, the conviction in his voice unshakable. "We'll face this together, just as we did when we were kids."

Lee Jun-seo's eyes searched Dong-soo's, and he saw the truth in his brother's words. The spirit world was not a place for the living, no matter how much comfort it provided in the face of grief. With a deep breath, he nodded, the weight of his decision etched into the lines of his face.

"Hyung," he whispered, his voice shaking. "Thank you for bringing me back. I'm ready."

Dong-soo's grip on his brother's hand tightened, a silent promise of support. "We're in this together," he assured him.

The air grew heavy with anticipation as Lizaria began the final incantation, her voice carrying the weight of their collective hope. The spirit in red hovered over the altar, her eyes fixed on the shimmering veil. The incense smoke swirled around them, carrying the prayers of those who had come before, and the cats' mews grew softer, a gentle lullaby to soothe the transitioning soul.

Jun-seo's gaze was locked onto the veil, the reality of his decision sinking in. The cries of his ancestors grew louder, urging him to step back into the world of the living. His brother's hand remained firm, a lifeline through the swirling chaos of doubt and fear. "Remember," Dong-soo whispered, "our family's legacy lives on through us."

The incantation grew stronger, the words weaving a net of protection around the brothers. The spirit in white watched from the other side of the veil, a silent sentinel ensuring that no harm would come to them. The red spirit's eyes flared, and she nodded once, the gesture a silent signal that it was time.

With a final burst of energy, Dong-soo recited the ancient words that would bind his brother to the living world. The veil shimmered, and for a brief moment, the cats' eyes grew wide with anticipation. The spirit in red stepped back, her task complete, and the veil grew thinner until it was nothing more than a shimmer in the air.

Lee Jun-seo took a tentative step forward, his hand in his brother's firm grasp. The world around them grew brighter, the shadows retreating as the veil of the spirit world receded. The whispers grew quieter, the air warmer, and the cats' meows grew more distant as reality took hold once more. The detectives watched with bated breath, their eyes never leaving the brothers as they took the final step back into the realm of the living.

## [ Chapter 18]

As they emerged from the shrine, the first light of dawn kissed the sky, casting a soft pink glow over Kyoto. The cherry blossoms, now silent witnesses to their supernatural quest, seemed to sigh in relief as the veil closed behind them. The spirit in red hovered for a moment longer, her eyes lingering on the spot where the veil had been before dissipating into the early morning mist.

The cats' meows grew more insistent as they approached the real world, their tails quivering with excitement. They had felt the shift in the energy, the balance restored with the successful completion of the ritual. FiFi and Jiji looked up at their humans with a sense of pride, their eyes still gleaming with the residue of the spirit realm's power.

As they exited the shrine, the first light of dawn painted the sky in a soft, tender pink. It was as if the world itself were celebrating the reunion of the brothers and the continuation of their shamanic lineage. The cobblestone streets of Kyoto were empty, except for a few early risers who paid them no heed, lost in the whispers of their own mundane lives.

Lee Jun-seo couldn't help but feel a profound sense of regret. "I should have been there for Melody," he murmured, his voice thick with guilt. "I should have never come to Japan without her."

Dong-soo placed a comforting hand on his brother's shoulder. "You were meant to come here, to find your true calling," he assured him. "But now, you must go back to her. She needs you."

Jun-seo nodded, his eyes brimming with determination. "Yes," he murmured. "I will. And I'll bring her back here one day, so she can see the beauty of this place." He reached into the pocket of his jacket and pulled out a small, elegantly wrapped package. It was a traditional Japanese hairpin with cherry blossoms, and a delicate jewelry set, a gift for Melody that he had bought before crossing the veil. The items were tangible proof of his love, a promise that despite the path he had chosen, he had never forgotten her.

The cats' meows grew softer, their eyes reflecting the understanding that their journey was drawing to a close. The detectives gathered their things, the weight of their experience heavy on their shoulders. The air of the spirit realm grew colder, urging them to hurry. They had to get back to the living world, to Melody, who was undoubtedly waiting for him with bated breath.

Lee Jun-seo clutched the small package tightly, his thoughts racing. He had been so consumed by his grief that he had forgotten the warmth of love waiting for him in the waking world. The guilt of his absence weighed on him, but he knew he had made the right choice. He had found his true path, one that would bring him closer to his ancestors and allow him to honor them in ways he had never imagined.

## [ Chapter 19]

The detectives made their way back through the city, the cobblestone streets now bustling with the early morning energy of Kyoto. FiFi and Jiji darted through the crowds, their spirits light with the excitement of a job well done. They had played their part in restoring balance, their meows a silent cheer of triumph.

The sun had fully risen by the time they reached their hotel, the cherry blossoms in full bloom outside, casting a pink glow on the detectives as they said their goodbyes. Lizaria felt a pang of sadness as she looked at Dong-soo and Jiji, their eyes filled with a mix of gratitude and longing. They had formed an unbreakable bond during their supernatural adventure, one that transcended the boundaries of friendship.

"Thank you," Dong-soo said, his voice gruff with emotion. "For everything."

Lizaria nodded, her eyes misty. "It was an honor to help," she replied. "Your family's legacy is safe now."

"We'll keep in touch," Lizaria assured them, her voice filled with a warmth that seemed to chase away the lingering shadows of the spirit realm. "And I expect a full report on how the Shaman training goes," she said, winking at Dong-soo.

With a final exchange of hugs and promises to stay in touch, the detectives parted ways, each returning to their own lives. The honeymoon that had been so unexpectedly interrupted had left its mark on Noah and Hana. They had not only found themselves but had also played a part in a tale that was centuries old, bridging the gap between the living and the spirit world.

Lizaria couldn't shake the feeling that she had left a piece of herself behind in Kyoto. Her heart felt heavy as she boarded the flight back to Rhode Island, the weight of unresolved feelings pressing down on her. She had grown close to Dong-soo, the bond between them stronger than any she had known before. His confession echoed in her mind, a whisper of what could have been.

The plane took off, leaving behind the city of cherry blossoms and ancient secrets. The detective gazed out the window, watching the clouds swirl into patterns that mimicked the swirls of emotions within her. FiFi, sensing her human's distress, curled up in her lap, purring softly, offering warmth and comfort.

"You did good, FiFi," she murmured, stroking the cat's soft fur. "We both did."

Lizaria leaned back in her seat, her eyes drifting over to the small souvenir she had bought for TJ. A USB stick in the shape of a cat, a cheeky smile painted on its face. It was a token of their shared experience, a reminder of the uncanny abilities of their feline companions. She knew that when they returned to the office, TJ would be eager to hear every detail of their journey into the spirit realm.

The flight home was a blur of memories and unspoken emotions. Lizaria couldn't shake the feeling of longing that had settled in her chest, the same longing she felt when they had said their goodbyes to Dong-soo and Jiji. Despite the whirlwind of the past weeks, she knew that the bond formed with the Dong-soo was something special, something she wasn't ready to let go of just yet.

## [ Chapter 20]

As they touched down in Rhode Island, the crisp New England air was a considerable change to the warm embrace of Kyoto. The honeymoon that had been so abruptly interrupted had left its mark on Lizaria, and she knew she would never be the same. The cold cases waiting for her at the Blackstone Bureau felt almost trivial compared to the grandeur of their supernatural quest, yet she knew that justice waited for no one.

The detective looked over at Noah, who was scrolling through his phone, his thumbs moving with practiced efficiency. Despite the gravity of their recent adventure, he remained as focused and grounded as ever. Hana sat beside him, her hand in his, a quiet strength that anchored him. They had faced the unknown together, and their bond had only grown stronger.

When they arrived at the Blackstone Bureau, the lobby was eerily quiet, the only sound the hum of the fluorescent lights. Lizaria's heart skipped a beat as she saw Detective Lee waiting for them, his eyes alight with excitement and relief. "You're back!" "Thank you for finding him.", he explained.

Lee rushed over, his handshake firm and grateful. "I knew I could count on you all," he said, his smile genuine. "And to hear that you've helped him embrace his destiny... well, I couldn't be happier."

The detectives shared a weary smile, the gravity of their journey etched into their faces. "It was quite the adventure," Noah admitted, his eyes flicking to Lizaria. "But we couldn't have done it without your guidance."

Detective Lee's smile grew wider. "You've done more than enough," he said, his voice filled with warmth. "And to know that my nephew is safe, that he's found his true path... it means the world to me." He looked at Lizaria, his gaze filled with a mix of pride and hope. "Lee Jun-seo is going to make an excellent shaman, I can feel it."

Lizaria's eyes searched his face, her mind racing with the implications of his words. "Your... nephew?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. The realization hit her like a wave, filling her with a mix of joy and regret. They had been so focused on the case that she had never considered the personal connection between the detective and the missing man.

Detective Lee nodded, his eyes misty. "Yes," he said, his voice thick with pride. "Lee Dong-soo and Lee Jun-seo are my sister's son."

Lizaria felt a warmth spread through her chest as she absorbed the revelation. The connection between her and Dong-soo went deeper than she had ever imagined. She had not only helped solve a case but had also played a role in bringing peace to a grieving family. The thought of seeing him again filled her with a sense of comfort and excitement. "We'll make sure to visit," she said, her voice filled with genuine warmth.

Detective Lee's smile grew even wider. "You're always welcome in our home," he assured her. "And perhaps, in the future, you could help us train him. After all, you've proven yourselves to be quite adept at navigating the spirit world."

The thought of returning to South Korea, of seeing Dong-soo and Jiji and his newfound family again, filled Lizaria with a warmth that seemed to chase away the shadows of the recent weeks. "I'd like that," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "I'd like that very much."

The detectives made their way to their office, the familiar sights and sounds of the Blackstone Bureau grounding them back into reality. The pile of cold cases waiting on Lizaria's desk was daunting, but she felt a newfound determination as she sat down, FiFi curling up at her feet. These cases were a reminder that the world didn't stop turning just because she had been on a supernatural adventure. There were still people who needed her help, and she was ready to give it.

As she sifted through the stack of files, her mind kept drifting back to Kyoto, to the spirit realm and the bond she had formed with Dong-soo. It was a bond that she knew would never truly fade, no matter how many miles separated them. Her eyes fell on a local case that had been gathering dust, and she felt a spark of excitement. It might not be as grand as the one they had just solved, but every case was important, and she was eager to dive back into the rhythm of her detective work.

## [ Chapter 21]

The phone on her desk rang, jolting her out of her thoughts. She picked it up, expecting it to be another cold case waiting for her attention. Instead, it was a call from South Korea. Her heart skipped a beat as she heard Dong-soo's voice on the line, thick with emotion. "Thank you," he said, his words heavy with unspoken feelings. "For everything you've done."

"How is he?" she asked, her eyes drifting to the small photo of the two brothers she had placed next to her computer.

"He's... different," Dong-soo replied, his voice filled with a mix of wonder and awe. "He's learning so quickly, and the spirits... they've accepted him."

Lizaria felt a pang of longing, her thoughts drifting back to the vibrant spirit in red and the solemn white spirit who had guided them through the ritual. "It sounds like he's exactly where he needs to be," she said, her voice filled with a gentle smile.

Dong-soo chuckled, a sound she hadn't heard since they had parted ways. "And I can't thank you enough for everything. You've given us both a chance to honor our ancestors and carry on the family's legacy."

Lizaria felt a warmth spread through her, the weight of their shared experience anchoring her firmly to the present. "It was an honor," she said, her voice filled with sincerity. "And I can't wait to see what you both do with your newfound abilities."

Dong-soo's chuckle was infectious, and Lizaria couldn't help but smile in return. "And when you're ready," she added, "we'll be here for you, FiFi and me."

After the call ended, she took a deep breath and turned her attention to the stack of paperwork. The local cases, while not as exotic as their recent adventure, were a comforting return to the familiar. Each file was a puzzle waiting to be solved, a story yearning to be told.

The first case was a missing person's report, the name and photo of a young woman with a bright smile staring back at her. The file was thick with unanswered questions and cold leads. FiFi's green eyes met hers, and Lizaria knew she was ready to tackle the ordinary with the same fervor as the supernatural. The cat had always been more than just a pet; she was a partner, a silent witness to every twist and turn in their investigations.

With FiFi's purr of encouragement, Lizaria dove into the paperwork, piecing together the details of the young woman's life. Her thoughts drifted to Jiji, wondering if he missed their adventures as much as FiFi did. The bond between the two cats had been obvious, a silent kinship formed in the spirit realm.

Lizaria dove into the case with renewed vigor, her mind sharper than ever after their otherworldly escapade. Each detail, every scrap of information, was pieced together meticulously. FiFi sat atop the desk, her tail rocked gently as she observed the detective's work, her emerald eyes occasionally darting to the photo of Jiji that Lizaria had placed next to the computer for her.

The bond between the two cats had been unmistakable in the spirit realm, a kinship that had transcended the veil and remained even as they returned to their everyday lives. FiFi's thoughts often drifted to her feline companion, the way his golden-yellow eyes had gleamed with understanding and courage as they faced the supernatural together. It was a bond that neither time nor distance could weaken.

## [ Chapter 22 ]

While Lizaria worked tirelessly on the cold cases, FiFi would often find herself staring out the window, her mind wandering to the streets of Kyoto and the warm embrace of the shamanic world. She longed to feel the soft fur of Jiji against her own, to hear his comforting meow that seemed to say, "We're in this together."

One evening, as the detectives wrapped up their day, FiFi's eyes lit up as an email notification chimed on Lizaria's computer. It was from Dong-soo, with a picture of Jiji sitting majestically atop a pile of shamanic scrolls. The caption read, "Missing my partner in spirit sleuthing." A

warmth grew in FiFi's chest, and she let out a soft meow, a silent message that traveled the thousands of miles to her friend.

The image brought a smile to Lizaria's face as she read the email. "Looks like you've made quite the impression on him, FiFi," she said, ruffling the cat's fur. FiFi purred in response, her tail shaking with excitement. The bond between the cats had grown stronger during their time in the spirit realm, and it was clear that the separation was taking its toll.

Weeks turned into months, and the emails from South Korea grew less frequent, but the connection remained. Every message from Dong-soo included an update on JiJi, along with tales of their new life as shamans. The cats had become a symbol of the unbreakable bond between the two.

"What is it, FiFi?" she asked, stroking the cat's fur. But FiFi only meowed louder, her tail twitching with excitement. Lizaria followed her gaze to the framed photograph of Dong-soo and JiJi that they had taken in Kyoto. The realization hit her like a bolt of lightning. FiFi wanted to go back.

Her mind raced with the possibility of a reunion. Could they really visit them? Would their shamanic adventure allow for such a personal trip? The more she thought about it, the more it made sense. They had uncovered a part of themselves in Kyoto, and FiFi's bond with JiJi was as real as any human friendship. Plus, it would be a chance to see how the young shaman was faring in his new life.

Without hesitation, she composed an email to Dong-soo, suggesting a visit. The cats had become an integral part of their journey, and she knew FiFi would be thrilled to see JiJi again. The email was filled with excitement and hope, a silent promise that they hadn't forgotten their friends across the sea.

Days turned into weeks as they awaited a response. FiFi's meowing grew more insistent, her eyes pleading every time Lizaria checked her inbox. Finally, one rainy afternoon, the reply arrived. Dong-soo's words were warm and welcoming, his anticipation palpable. The thought of seeing them all together again, humans and cats united in friendship and purpose, brought a smile to Lizaria's face.

The months leading up to their visit were filled with meticulous planning. They had to balance their workload with the excitement of the upcoming reunion. FiFi's mood swung with the seasons, her anticipation growing with each passing day. Whenever Lizaria spoke of South Korea, her eyes would light up, and she'd pace the room, her tail swishing like a metronome keeping time with their shared excitement.

As the date grew closer, FiFi's behavior grew more peculiar. She'd stare at the suitcase in the corner of the room as if willing it to pack itself. Lizaria chuckled at her antics, but there was a hint of understanding in her gaze. They had both formed a bond in that spirit realm, one that was not easily forgotten.

## [ Chapter 23]

The flight to South Korea was a mix of excitement and nerves for FiFi. She had never been so far from home before, and the thrill of seeing JiJi again was almost too much to bear. She curled up in Lizaria's lap, her eyes wide and alert as the world outside the window grew smaller and smaller. When they landed in Seoul, the cacophony of the city was overwhelming, but she remained steadfast, her eyes searching for the familiar face of her feline friend.

The moment they stepped off the plane and into the bustling airport, FiFi's ears perked up. The smells and sounds of South Korea were vastly different from Rhode Island, but there was something comforting about them, something that spoke to the adventure they had shared. She could feel the buzz of energy in the air, a pulse that seemed to resonate with the spirit realm's vibrations.

As they navigated through the crowded streets of Seoul, Lizaria held FiFi tightly in her arms. The cat's eyes darted here and there, taking in every new sight and sound, her tail whooshing with excitement. Lizaria couldn't help but feel a thrill of anticipation herself. The city was a living, breathing entity, filled with stories waiting to be told.

When they finally arrived at the small shamanic village where Dong-soo and JiJi lived, the air was thick with incense and the distant sound of traditional instruments. FiFi's eyes grew wide as she took in the colorful decorations that adorned the streets, her whiskers twitching with curiosity. The moment they stepped through the village's archway, the bond between the two cats grew stronger, a silent call that resonated through the air.

As they approached the small house that had become a sanctuary for the new shaman, FiFi's heart raced. And then she saw him—JiJi, sitting on the porch, his fluffy black fur groomed to perfection despite the dreary weather. His glowing eyes met hers, and she felt the connection snap back into place, as if they had never been apart. With a joyful meow, she leaped from Lizaria's arms, landing gracefully on the ground and racing towards him.

The two cats met in a flurry of fur and purrs, their tails entwined in a dance of joy and relief. JiJi's golden-yellow eyes, once haunted by the weight of his newfound destiny, now sparkled

with life and mischief as he playfully swiped at FiFi. The bond between them was profound, a silent conversation that only they could understand.

Lizaria watched the reunion with a smile, her eyes misty with happiness. It had been a long road to get here, one filled with danger and discovery. But as she looked at her fluffy feline companion, she knew it had all been worth it. Dong-soo emerged from the house, his eyes crinkling with warmth as he took in the sight of the two cats reuniting.



## [ Chapter 24]



Their first days in South Korea were a whirlwind of sightseeing and laughter. Dong-soo had carefully planned a journey that balanced the spiritual with the everyday, ensuring that Lizaria and FiFi had a chance to experience the beauty of his homeland without the shadow of their recent case looming over them. They wandered through bustling markets, marveled at ancient palaces, and even took a trip to a picturesque tea garden that seemed to have been plucked straight from the pages of a fairytale.

The evenings, however, were reserved for something more intimate. Dong-soo had a fondness for romantic comedy K-dramas, a guilty pleasure he hadn't shared with anyone else. As they all curled up on the floor of his cozy living room, surrounded by plush pillows and warm blankets, the TV screen flickered with tales of love and laughter. It was a simple pleasure, but one that brought them closer together, bridging the gap between their worlds with shared giggles and sighs.

The first night, they watched a classic K-drama that had Dong-soo's eyes gleaming with nostalgia. FiFi and JiJi cuddled close, their purrs a harmonious soundtrack to the unfolding romance. Lizaria felt a warmth spread through her as she leaned into Dong-soo's embrace, his arms strong and comforting around her shoulders. The tension of the case, the months of separation, it all melted away as they lost themselves in the story.

Before starting the next episode, Dong-soo turned to her with a shy smile, his cheeks slightly flushed. "There's something I've been meaning to tell you," he began, his voice low and tentative. Lizaria's heart skipped a beat, her eyes searching his for any hint of what was to come. "Lee Jun-seo... he's proposed to Melody."

Her eyes widened with surprise, and she couldn't help but let out a gasp. "What? That's amazing!" she exclaimed, her hand flying to her mouth. "And she said yes?"

Dong-soo chuckled, the sound rich and warm like a cup of ginseng tea. "Of course, she did," he replied, his own eyes sparkling with happiness. "They're also expecting a little girl. And business... well, let's just say the spirits are eager to help someone who has embraced their destiny so wholeheartedly."

The news filled Lizaria with a warm glow, the kind that comes from knowing you've played a part in someone else's happiness. "A daughter," she murmured, her gaze drifting to the cats who were now chasing a glint of light across the floor. "It seems like everything is falling into place for him."

Dong-soo nodded, his eyes following hers. "And for us too," he added, his voice a gentle rumble. "Our paths intertwined in a way I never could've imagined. We're not just colleagues anymore."

Lizaria looked up at him, her heart racing. "What are we, then?" she asked softly, the question hanging in the air like a cherry blossom petal caught in a spring breeze.

Dong-soo took a deep breath, his eyes never leaving hers. "I was hoping," he began, his voice a gentle rush of words, "that you might consider becoming more than just colleagues."

The room grew still, the only sound the steady rhythm of the cats' purring. Lizaria felt the weight of his gaze, the unspoken question hanging in the air like the scent of the incense that had become a staple of their evenings together. Her heart pounded in her chest, the beat echoing the pulse of the shamanic drums that had guided them through the spirit realm.

"I would be honored," she whispered, her voice barely audible over the TV's soft hum. The words slipped out before she had time to think, as if they had been waiting for the perfect moment to be spoken. Dong-soo's smile grew, lighting up his eyes. He leaned in, his hand finding hers, and she felt the warmth of their connection surge through her.



## [ Chapter 25]



The rest of the trip was filled with a newfound understanding and closeness. They talked late into the night, sharing stories of their pasts and dreams for the future. The cats had grown inseparable, their antics providing a lightness to the gravity of their newfound relationship. FiFi and JiJi would curl up together, their tails twitching in sync as they listened to the murmur of their humans' voices.

The final night before their return to Rhode Island, they gathered in the small garden behind Dong-soo's house. The moon cast a soft glow on the pebbles, and the air was thick with the scent of blooming azaleas. Dong-soo had set up a small altar, a reminder of the spiritual journey they had embarked upon together.

"Lizaria," he began, his voice low and earnest, "I want to tell you something." She turned to him, her heart fluttering with anticipation. "I've been holding onto this for a while, but I can't keep it in any longer." His hand found hers, and she felt the warmth of his palm, the same warmth that had comforted her through the darkest moments of their case.

He took a deep breath, his eyes searching hers. "You know how much the spirit world respects those who honor their heritage. Well, my business has been booming. They see me as a true guardian now." He paused, his gaze never wavering from hers. "And it's all because of you."

Her heart fluttered in her chest, the warmth of his words seeping into her soul. "What do you mean?" she asked, her voice barely a whisper.

Dong-soo took a step closer, his eyes filled with a vulnerability she hadn't seen before. "I want to be more than just colleagues, Lizaria. I want to share my life with you, in this world and in the spirit realm." His thumb traced gentle circles on the back of her hand, sending shivers down her spine.

Lizaria's breath hitched, the weight of his words settling in her chest like the petals of a cherry blossom. The air was thick with the sweet scent of azaleas, the soft glow of the moon a silent witness to their confession. For a moment, she was transported back to Kyoto, the whispers of the spirits echoing in her mind.

"Dong-soo," she began, her voice a soft caress, "I never thought that our partnership would lead to this." She took a step closer, their fingertips grazing. "But here we are, with FiFi and JiJi as our silent witnesses." She glanced down at the cats, their tails swaying in unison, as if they had always known that their humans would find love in the unlikelyst of places.

"Will you?" he asked, his voice hopeful and filled with the gentle strength of the spirits that surrounded them.

Lizaria's eyes searched his, her heart pounding in her chest. The words hovered between them, a bridge built from the threads of fate and friendship. She took a deep breath, feeling the cool night air fill her lungs, the same air that had carried her through the spirit realm, the air that had whispered secrets of love and destiny.

"Dong-soo," she said softly, her voice a melody that resonated through the quiet night, "I would be honored to be your girlfriend." His eyes lit up, the warmth of his smile reaching out to her like a gentle embrace. In that moment, she knew that their bond was not just one of duty and shared experience, but of something deeper, something that transcended the boundaries of the mundane world.

As she packed her bags for the return to Rhode Island, the weight of their newfound love felt lighter than a cherry blossom petal on the breeze. FiFi, ever the intuitive feline, sensed the change in the air, her purrs a soft crescendo of happiness. She knew that she would be seeing JiJi again, not just in the spirit realm, but in the warmth of a real, tangible home.

## [ Chapter 26]

The flight back was filled with a mix of joy and contemplation. Lizaria's thoughts swirled with the delicate dance of cherry blossoms, picturing her new life with Dong-soo and JiJi, and the looming conversation she would have with the Blackstone Bureau. The idea of transferring to South Korea had taken root in her mind, whispering sweet nothings of adventure and a chance to delve deeper into the shamanic world that had captured her heart.

FiFi, ever the perceptive feline, sensed the shift in her human's emotions. She curled up on Lizaria's lap, purring softly, her eyes half-closed as if in a contented dream of chasing butterflies and fireflies through the spirit realm with JiJi. The anticipation of living with her feline soulmate was almost too much for her to contain.

As the plane descended through the clouds, Lizaria felt a knot in her stomach. The thought of breaking the news to Detective Lee and the Blackstone Bureau about her relationship with Dong-soo and her desire to transfer to South Korea filled her with both excitement and trepidation. Yet she knew that this was a path she had to tread, a destiny that had been laid before her like the petals of a cherry blossom tree, guiding her to a new chapter in her life.

The airport in Rhode Island was a radical shift to the vibrant streets of Seoul. The familiar scent of the ocean and the cool embrace of the New England breeze greeted them as they stepped off the plane. FiFi's whiskers trembled with anticipation, her eyes searching for any sign of the life they were about to re-enter. Lizaria couldn't help but feel a twinge of sadness

at leaving the mystical land of South Korea behind, but she will soon return with big hopes and dreams under the new protection and love from Lee Dong-soo and the spiritual-realm.

The drive back to the bureau was filled with a mix of excitement and nervousness. Lizaria's thoughts were a whirlwind, swirling with images of cherry blossoms and the gentle hum of shamanic chants. She rehearsed the conversation she would have with Detective Lee, her words a delicate dance around the revelation of her new relationship and her desire to transfer to South Korea. The weight of her decision rested heavily on her shoulders, but the thrill of the unknown whispered sweet promises of adventure and growth.

As they stepped into the cool, sterile hallways of the Blackstone Bureau, the contrast with the vibrant spirit of South Korea was stark. FiFi's eyes scanned the room, her whiskers twitching as she searched for familiar scents. Her tail flicked back and forth in anticipation of the reactions to the news they brought. Lizaria took a deep breath, bracing herself for the conversation she had been dreading.

## [ Chapter 27]

The moment she saw Detective Lee, she knew she couldn't keep her secret much longer. His sharp gaze searched her face, looking for any hint of the transformation she had undergone. The weight of their shared history and the unspoken bond between them made the words stick in her throat, but she knew she had to speak. "Sir," she began, her voice firm despite the tremble in her hands, "I have an announcement to make."

The room grew quiet as the other agents looked up from their paperwork, sensing the gravity of the moment. Detective Lee leaned back in his chair, his expression unreadable. "What is it, Lizaria?"

Her heart racing, she took a deep breath. "It's about the case... and something more personal," she began, her voice steady despite the tumult of emotions within her. She recounted the details of Lee Jun-seo's proposal to Melody, the warmth of their love resonating through her words. "They're expecting a daughter," she said with a smile, her eyes shining with happiness for the young couple.

Detective Lee's stern facade cracked into a grin, revealing the rare softness beneath. "That's wonderful news," he said, his eyes lighting up. "It seems the spirits are indeed smiling upon him." The room echoed with murmurs of congratulations and smiles. Lizaria felt a sense of relief, the first part of her revelation met with acceptance.

With a deep breath, she continued, her voice carrying the weight of her decision. "And, sir, there's something else. Dong-soo and I... we've become more than just colleagues." She paused, "I've agreed to be his girlfriend."

The room grew still, the only sound the distant tick of the clock on the wall. Detective Lee leaned forward, his eyes searching hers for any hint of doubt or hesitation. But all he saw was the unshakable resolve that had made her one of his most trusted detectives. "Congratulations," he said, his voice a mix of surprise and approval. "But what does this mean for your future here?"

Lizaria took a step forward. "Sir, I've been thinking a lot about this. After what we've experienced together, I feel a strong pull towards the shamanic world. And with Lee Jun-seo and his family's blessing, I believe it's my destiny to help bridge the gap between our worlds." She took a deep breath, her heart racing. "I would like to transfer to the South Korea bureau next year, to work alongside Dong-soo and continue learning from the spirits."

Detective Lee steepled his fingers, his expression thoughtful. "I see," he said, his eyes never leaving hers. "That's quite a decision. But one I respect. Your dedication and bravery have not gone unnoticed." He paused, then added, "And I suspect the cats have had a hand in this too."

The room chuckled, and the tension eased a notch. Lizaria couldn't help but smile at the mention of FiFi and JiJi's influence. "They've certainly played a significant role," she admitted, looking down at FiFi, who was now purring contentedly on the floor, her eyes closed in a blissful cat nap. The thought of her fluffy companion living with her soulmate, JiJi, in South Korea brought a warmth to her chest that seemed to melt away any remaining doubt.

"Very well," said Detective Lee with a sigh. "You've proven yourself in the spirit realm and here in the office. I'll put in the paperwork for the transfer, but I'd appreciate it if you could stay and help us close out some cases before you go." His eyes twinkled mischievously. "And maybe even train your replacement."

Lizaria nodded solemnly. "Of course, sir. I wouldn't leave without making sure the transition is as smooth as possible." Inside, she was elated. The thought of being able to stay in the place she had called home for so long, even for a few more months, filled her with a bittersweet joy. She knew that this was the right decision for her and Dong-soo, but leaving the Blackstone Bureau and her friends behind would be hard.

## [ Chapter 28]

The next few months flew by in a blur of paperwork, case-solving, and language lessons. FiFi took to the new routine with feline grace, often curling up next to her as she studied Korean and Japanese, her green eyes watching the characters dance across the pages.

The day finally came when Lizaria received the case file with a sigh. The cold case in California was a grim reminder that she had unfinished business before she could start her new life. It was a disappearance, a young girl named Lexi, who had vanished without a trace six years ago. The case had been handed to her by Detective Lee, who knew the heat of a California summer was not ideal for a sensitive soul like hers. But she accepted the challenge, knowing it was her last hurrah before the big move.

Audrey, her young, eager and bright-eyed replacement, watched from her desk, her blonde hair framing her porcelain face. She had been shadowing Lizaria for weeks, absorbing every detail and nuance of her methods. The bond between them grew stronger with each passing day, as if they had known each other for a lifetime. Audrey's passion for the paranormal was obvious, and Lizaria took comfort in knowing that she was leaving the bureau in capable hands.

"You're going to do great, Lizaria," Audrey said, her voice filled with admiration. "This case... it's going to be your masterpiece before you leave us."

Lizaria offered a small smile, her eyes lingering on the case file for a moment. "Thanks, Audrey. But it's not just about solving it," she said, her gaze shifting to FiFi, who sat up on her haunches, her green eyes gleaming with understanding. "It's about making sure we bring Lexi home."

The young girl's picture stared back at her from the case file, a ghostly echo of a smile frozen in time. Lizaria felt a pang of determination. This was not just any case; it was a promise she had made to the spirit world to balance the scales of fate. "FiFi and I are in this together," she said, stroking the cat's soft fur. "We're a team, and we're going to crack this wide open."

FiFi looked up at her, her emerald eyes gleaming with a fierce intelligence that seemed to say, "Let's do this." Lizaria couldn't help but chuckle at her feline partner's unspoken confidence. It was moments like these that made their bond so special, a bond that had been forged in the spirit realm and tested in the fires of the most bizarre and challenging cases.

Turning to Audrey, she said, "You're coming with me, rookie." There was a glint in her eye as she spoke, a hint of the excitement that lay ahead. Audrey's blue eyes widened, a mix of

nerves and thrill playing across her features. "But don't worry," Lizaria added, her smile reassuring, "I'll be right beside you. FiFi and I are not letting you face the supernatural alone."

Audrey nodded, her heart racing with the prospect of her first real case. "Thank you, Lizaria," she said, her voice steady. "I won't let you down."

With a determined stride, the trio headed out of the bureau, the late afternoon sun casting long shadows behind them. FiFi's tail fluttered in the breeze, her eyes scanning the horizon as if she could already sense the whispers of the spirit world that awaited them. Lizaria knew that the journey to California would be fraught with challenges, but she had faith in their unconventional partnership.

The future forecast for California in the coming weeks, would be in the mid-nineties. They'll need to plan accordingly to help beat the summer scorching heat and solve this cold case and find Lexi. Detective Lee also assigned TJ, their trusted tech-savvy detective to join them. They will need to solve this case quickly, before triple digit temperatures hit California. Luckily, they will all be able to stay cool, refreshed and comfortable at this luxury hotel, thanks to the Blackstone bureau.



# Lost & Found

