

Inevitability 121

Chapter 121 Salle de Bal Brise

Lumian didn't swivel or hesitate, striding confidently toward the public carriage sign. He scanned the area nonchalantly, his eyes settling on the glass window of a nearby café.

Him in a dark jacket was reflected there, and not far from him, another figure in a canvas jacket and a cap.

Lumian averted his eyes, abruptly quickening his pace as if trying to catch the departing double-decker carriage.

As expected, he felt the man in the blue cap break into a jog.

The public carriage glided away silently, turning down the street. Lumian knew he couldn't catch up and halted abruptly.

Using the shop windows lining the street, Lumian caught sight of the cap-wearing man stumbling to a stop. Seizing the moment, he spun around and surveyed the dance hall opposite.

As Lumian passed the public horse stop sign, he gave an almost imperceptible nod.

Continuing on, he ducked into a shadowy alley blocked by a barricade.

The man in the cap pursued him, vaulting the ramshackle barricade with ease, but Lumian had disappeared.

His quarry seemed to have evaporated into thin air.

Just as the cap-wearing man prepared to give chase, Lumian sprang from his hiding place in the corner, like a predator pouncing on its prey. He seized the man's shoulders and yanked him backward, driving his knee into his back.

Crack!

Lumian's knee connected with the man's waist, contorting his face in pain and buckling his knees.

He collapsed to the ground with a thud, stirring up a cloud of dust.

Lumian crouched and gripped the back of the stalker's head. In a gravelly voice, he demanded, "Who got you to follow me?"

"I'm not! I'm just taking a shortcut!" the man in the cap protested anxiously.

Lumian chuckled, grabbed his head, and slammed it into the ground.

The man in the cap howled in pain, his forehead bruised, swollen, and bloody.

"Who sent you to follow me?" Lumian pressed.

The man in the cap felt indignant.

"I'm not following you! I don't even know you!"

"Alright." Lumian released his grip.

In an instant, he struck the stalker behind the ear.

The man in the cap crumpled, unconscious.

Lumian hoisted him up and thoughtfully lowered his hat to cover his tightly shut eyes.

Then, as if aiding a drunken friend, he strode out of the alley and rounded the corner. There stood an entrance to the underworld.

Lumian had “waited” for the stalker in the alley knowing he could slip underground if needed, and the setting was suitably “quiet.”

When the man in the cap came to, his vision was swallowed by darkness. Only a faint light in the distance weakly revealed his surroundings.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! The sound pierced his ears, approaching and receding through layers of obstacles.

As a native of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, he was no stranger to such a scene. He suspected he'd been taken underground. A steam subway passed through the “street” next door, providing the faint light.

Lumian sat in the shadows, eyeing the man in the cap. He grinned and said, “You have two choices now. Either tell me who sent you to follow me, or I'll take you deeper underground and bury you there. You should know that many people go missing in Trier every day. You won't be the only one.”

Seeing the stalker's silence, Lumian knew his mental defenses were wavering. He added, “As for me, I'll navigate these underground streets and move to another district.”

Realizing Lumian had an escape plan and was ready to silence him forever, the man in the cap's fear overwhelmed him. He blurted, “I-it's Baron Brignais!”

Baron Brignais? The boss of the Savoie Mob and a creditor of Osta Trul? Why is he tracking me? I met him at the apartment on Rue des Blouses Blanches last night and didn't even speak to him... Lumian was baffled and at a loss. This convinced him the man in the lying. If he wanted to fabricate a story, he cap wasn't wouldn't have chosen a mastermind that Lumian couldn't fathom.

Lumian frowned, asking, “Why is he following me?”

“I don't know,” the man in the cap replied, trembling. “He just wants me to follow you and see where you'll go.”

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked, “Where is Baron Brignais now?”

“If there's nothing else, he's usually at the Salle de Bal Brise on Avenue du Marché.”

The man in the cap strained to read Lumian's expression, but the light was too dim. Salle de Bal Brise? Lumian recalled the landmark buildings in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman from his recent recon.

Avenue du Marché was the main road connecting Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman to the Suhit steam locomotive station, stretching two kilometers. Salle de Bal Brise was near the market district, its unique statue at the entrance unforgettable. Lumian's lips curled into a smile as he told the stalker, “Take me there. I want to talk to Baron Brignais.”

The man in the cap sighed in relief, feeling as if his life had been spared.

Who would hold the upper hand or be “accidentally” killed at Salle de Bal Brise was no longer his concern.

Salle de Bal Brise occupied the bottom two floors of a khaki-colored building. The second floor housed a café, while the first was a bustling dance hall-though it had just opened and few customers were present. A white, spherical statue composed of countless skulls greeted visitors at the entrance. Inscribed in Intis were the words: “They sleep here, waiting for the arrival of happiness and hope[1].”

Lumian surveyed the scene and trailed his 'guide' around the statue to the dance hall entrance.

Two burly men in white shirts and black coats stood guard. They simultaneously rested their right hands on their waists and questioned the man in the cap, “Maxime, who is he?”

“H-he's here to see Baron Brignais,” Maxime stammered.

Under the guards' suspicious scrutiny, Lumian replied coolly, “It's up to Baron Brignais to decide if he wants to see me or not, not you. Do you want to bear his wrath?” After a moment's hesitation, one of the guards turned and entered the dance hall.

As they waited, Lumian casually asked Maxime, “What's up with the statue and the inscription? They don't match the dance hall at all.”

Of course, it was cool. Maxime nervously glanced at the grinning Lumian and explained, “This was originally an moved annex to the cathedral. Later, the bones were to the catacombs, leaving the area empty. Then, this building was constructed. “Although those bones were purified or just ashes, the Savoie Mob found it too creepy after buying this place. We had no choice but to commission a statue symbolizing death and an inscription representing the dead to appease any lingering bones that might remain underground and unexcavated.” Lumian found the idea of people dancing here amusing, considering it could disturb the skeletons below, essentially dancing on their heads.

Just then, the guard returned and informed Lumian, “Baron Brignais will meet you at the café on the second floor.”

“Alright.” Lumian held his head high and strutted into the Salle de Bal Brise.

First, he noticed the dance floor encircled by railings and the half-height wooden stage up ahead for singers. Then, his attention was drawn to the haphazard seating and the various perfumes and cosmetics wafting through the air.

Maxime hesitated before following Lumian. He felt compelled to report the situation to the baron, lest he end up missing in the underworld.

Upon reaching the second floor, Lumian recognized the gentleman he had encountered the night before.

In his thirties, the man sported a black, thin-tweed formal suit. His brown hair appeared naturally curly, and his brown eyes held a confident smile. His features were sharply defined. Baron Brignais set down his coffee and grasped the mahogany pipe with his diamond-adorned palm.

“What would you like to drink?” He was surprisingly polite and generous.

Eyeing the four thugs with their hands on their waists, Lumian addressed Baron Brignais, “Why did you send someone to follow me?”

last Baron Brignais smiled and admitted candidly, “I saw you at Rue des Blouses Blanches night and again near Rue Anarchie today. The more I observed you, the more familiar you seemed, so I had Maxime follow you to confirm your intentions in the market district.

“You were searching for Osta last night too, weren't you?”

“He tried to scam me out of my money,” Lumian replied before inquiring, “Why do I seem familiar to you?”

Baron Brignais took a puff from his pipe and grinned.

“To experienced individuals like us, your actions can hardly be considered a disguise.

“Once we grow suspicious and connect the dots, we'll naturally recognize you— Lumian Lee, a wanted criminal with a 3,000 verl d'or bounty.”

My bounty is only 3,000 verl d'or? Lumian's initial reaction was confusion.

As the source of Cordu's time loop, how could his official bounty be lower than that of the padre and Madame Pualis?

“However, merely providing information about you is worth 500 verl d'or,” Baron Brignais added with a smile. “Young man, you need a book called Men's Aesthetics. Don't be embarrassed. In Trier, it's quite normal for men to wear makeup. It'll help you conceal your true identity.”

This “gentleman” had also applied eyeliner and powder.

Lumian smirked.

“Are you planning to capture me for the bounty?”

Chapter 122 Each With Their Own Plans

Baron Brignais didn't immediately respond to Lumian's question. Setting down his mahogany-colored pipe, he calmly took a sip of coffee.

After a moment, he smiled and said, “I'm not an official. I have no obligation to help them capture wanted criminals.

“Turning over anyone who's wanted would cost my Savoie Mob a great deal of valuable talent.

“More importantly, your bounty isn't impressive. It's far from tempting me. However, if you cause any trouble in the market district, I won't hesitate to tie you up and hand you over to the police for a considerable bounty.”

The unspoken message from Baron Brignais was clear: There were many wanted criminals in the Savoie Mob. As long as you behaved, he could turn a blind eye.

Lumian understood. "You had someone tail me to confirm my intentions?"

Baron Brignais nodded approvingly.

"I'm glad you comprehend."

Lumian scanned the faces of the thugs, then calmly stated, "You've seen my wanted poster, so you've seen the others.

"My sole purpose in Trier is to find them."

"Excellent." Baron Brignais recognized that Lumian had no intention of crossing the Savoie Mob.

He gestured to the chair opposite the booth.

"Care for a cup of coffee?"

"No need." Lumian declined the offer. "I just want to locate those people as soon as possible."

He spread his arms wide and proclaimed, "Praise the Sun for allowing us to live in the light!"

With that, Lumian turned and strode toward the stairs, unconcerned about the hidden guns of the thugs.

Once his footsteps vanished down the staircase, Baron Brignais turned to the reserved Maxime and said gently, "Tell me exactly how you were discovered and coerced by him. Spare no detail."

With the mahogany-colored pipe back in his mouth, Baron Brignais leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

Trembling, Maxime recounted his ordeal from start to finish.

After hearing the account, one of the thugs asked indignantly, "Baron, why didn't you teach that punk a lesson? Why let him walk away so easily?"

Baron Brignais tapped the mahogany pipe on the table twice and inquired with a smile, "Teach him a lesson? Do you know his Sequence, his abilities, or his weapons?"

"I don't," the thug admitted.

Baron Brignais rose, gripping the mahogany-colored pipe and smashing it against the thug's head.

Blood flowed from the gash in the thug's forehead, but he didn't dare to cry out or dodge. He stood there, terror etched on his face.

Baron Brignais withdrew the pipe and regarded him coldly.

"You dare challenge him without knowing anything? Go ahead, take my place. Let's see how long you'll survive!"

Ignoring the thug's response, Baron Brignais smiled again.

As he wiped his pipe with a folded white handkerchief from his chest pocket, he casually remarked, "Didn't you notice something off about Lumian Lee's wanted poster?"

"The difference between the bounties for capturing him and providing information is too small. One is a mere 3,000 verl d'or, the other 500. "What does that mean? It means the authorities don't want us handling Lumian Lee directly. They want us to provide intel so they can act themselves.

"Two possible reasons come to mind. First, Lumian Lee is incredibly dangerous. Allowing bounty hunters to pursue him would cause widespread casualties and unnecessary losses. Second, he possesses something valuable that officials don't want to end up in the hands of the bounty hunters.

"If I had just taught Lumian Lee a lesson, the second scenario would've been fine. But if it's the first possibility, what do you think our chances of survival are?"

The thug nodded repeatedly, not daring to argue.

Baron Brignais sat back down, picked up his coffee cup, and continued, "Moreover, based on how he dealt with Maxime and his audacity to approach me directly, I can tell that he's ruthless, decisive, and utterly confident in his abilities.

"I wager that if I had threatened him, demanding his total submission, he would have attacked without hesitation. He's the type who won't hesitate to kill.

"Heh, this is both his strength and his weakness. Unaware of my capabilities or the number of traps laid here, he still dares to confront me with the intention of killing me to ensure my silence. Sooner or later, he'll pay the price."

Baron Brignais sipped his coffee and closed his eyes.

"Let's wait and see if we should offer him assistance and protection. This ruthless country boy with a warrant on his head could prove to be a very useful weapon.' Outside the Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian glanced back at the white spherical statue made of skulls and headed toward the nearest public carriage station.

On his way here, he had already devised a plan to deal with them, but ultimately didn't execute it.

He had expected that if Baron Brignais threatened him with the wanted poster or showed any hostility, he would feign fear and reveal that he was wanted for stealing a powerful Beyonder weapon from Cordu's ruins.

He'd offer to hand it over in exchange for protection.

If Baron Brignais was strong and confident, and allowed Lumian to approach with the weapon, Lumian would launch a fake assassination attempt, a ruse to actually hand over the Fallen Mercury to the other party.

In that case, the unsuspecting Baron Brignais would become the evil dirk's puppet due to his gloveless hand. Having interacted with and occasionally “communicated” with Fallen Mercury for some time, Lumian had earned a degree of control over it. As long as it didn't conflict with its instinct to find a knife wielder, it would follow Lumian's orders, even when in someone else's hands.

Eventually, Baron Brignais would abandon his animosity and become an ally. After a few days, when no one suspected Lumian, the baron would mysteriously vanish into the depths of Underground Trier with a handful of his subordinates who knew about the matter, never to be seen again.

If Baron Brignais didn't allow Lumian to approach with Fallen Mercury and instead sent one of his thugs to retrieve the pewter-black dirk, Lumian's strategy would be to first transform the thug into the wielder. Then, he would use cunning to hide the abnormality and give Fallen Mercury the corresponding instructions.

In the future, if he made the puppet attack Baron Brignais, the baron would inherit the fate of being the wielder. After completing this task, Lumian would escape if possible or surrender and wait for the fate exchange to finish. Even if the puppet died due to exhaustion, as long as Fallen Mercury wasn't severely damaged, the fate exchange wouldn't stop.

As for the torture he might endure after surrendering, Lumian didn't mind. As long as he wasn't dead, he would fully recover by six the next morning. Regarding the possibility of Baron Brignais becoming a wielder and turning into a zombie with evident signs of decay, Lumian had a solution.

Baron Brignais himself had mentioned that men wearing makeup in Trier was common, and he was likely an avid reader of Men's Aesthetics.

Cologne could mask the stench of decay, and cosmetics could conceal rotting skin! Truth be told, Lumian had struggled with whether to act in the café on the second floor of the Salle de Bal Brise. Ultimately, he decided against it because Baron Brignais had shown a degree of kindness to a wanted criminal like him.

Such kindness from a villain often meant they wanted to exploit him.

If Baron Brignais truly wants to use me, he'll definitely help me conceal my identity and inform me of any unusual movements from bounty hunters in advance... As Lumian thought, he smiled.

This was a good thing!

As for the risk of ending up in a dangerous situation due to being used, Lumian already had a plan.

By then, he should be well-acquainted with Baron Brignais. Familiarity made striking easier! Lumian had only one option when being used for dangerous and unthinkable tasks: kill Baron Brignais.

Phew... Lumian exhaled and considered how to better disguise himself.

Initially, he had been confident in his disguise. As long as he didn't “reveal” his connection to the padre and Madame Pualis like he had with Anthony Reid, he wouldn't be recognized. However, the incident with Baron Brignais made him realize that he had underestimated other Beyonders.

If there were Hunters adept at tracking, there might be other Sequences even better at recognizing people.

Baron Brignais or one of his subordinates must possess similar abilities... Lumian nodded imperceptibly.

This was confirmed by the fact that Osta had relocated several times.

With this realization, Lumian halted at the stop sign and boarded a brown double-decker carriage. He paid 30 coppers to secure a spot inside the carriage. Had he chosen a seat on the roof, it would have cost him only 15 coppers. The carriage gradually moved toward Quartier de l'Observatoire.

Lumian gazed out the window, taking in the sight of hurried passersby dressed in various attire.

He observed ringing bicycles, rental carriages from different companies, and humanoid machines composed of gears, valves, pipes, and levers. The metal backpack on its back spewed white steam, propelling it forward step by step.

“Praise the Sun!”

The blazing sun beat down on the pedestrians, their arms outstretched in the street. Clang! Clang! Clang! The nearby cathedral bell chimed. It was noon.

Chapter 123 Organizer

Lumian initially planned to scope out Mason Café before noon to ensure he'd know where to escape after his treatment the following day. However, the incident with Baron Brignais had significantly delayed him. He had no choice but to find Osta Trier first and visit the Quartier du Jardin Botanique later in the afternoon.

Osta was in his usual spot, by the entrance to the catacombs, a bonfire flickering against a stone pillar.

The sound of footsteps approaching caught Osta's attention, and he looked up from under his black hooded robe.

Expecting to make a quick buck, he instead froze in place.

Quickly recovering, he stood up and forced a smile. Before Lumian could speak, Osta preempted him, saying, “I contacted the organizer this morning, told him I have a friend who's into mysticism and wants to attend the gathering. He hasn't replied yet.”

Lumian nodded, not questioning how Osta had reached out to the organizer. He walked over to the bonfire, found a rock, and sat down. Casually, he asked, “You've duped plenty of people, but you're always in the same spot. Aren't you scared they'll track you down?”

Osta laughed and replied, “Most of the time, it's not really deception. As a true Beyonder and Secrets Suppliant, using my spirituality to perform divination for them isn't a scam.

“My predictions are far more accurate than most in the mysticism club!

“Sometimes, different folks need different strokes. If I'm ever exposed, I can always talk my way out.”

“How?” Lumian inquired with a smile.

Osta coughed.

“The key is to not be too clear or absolute from the start. That way, you can accuse them of misunderstanding your intentions.”

Lumian's smile deepened.

“When it came to the Samaritan Women's Spring, you agreed too easily and made your promise too definite.”

Osta's expression fell.

“Yeah, I was cornered by Baron Brignais. I just wanted the money right away.

“The right approach would've been to say I had a solution, but it was difficult to achieve. After you begged me repeatedly, I'd reluctantly accept your cash, warning I couldn't guarantee success...”

Evidently, Osta had pondered his mistakes the previous night, considering how to avoid risks if he had to start over. He grew more animated as he spoke, only stopping when he noticed Lumian's subtle grin.

How could he openly tell this dangerous man how to swindle him? Osta awkwardly smiled and said, “But I doubt this would've fooled you either. You're the most cautious person I've ever met.”

Lumian smiled and shook his head. “You really picked the wrong pathway.”

Osta didn't dare to carry on. Instead, he asked, “I thought about it last night. I never mentioned gatherings when we talked. I just said I bought the potion's main ingredient. How'd you know it was a mysticism gathering?”

Lumian chuckled.

“It was just a gut feeling.”

Internally, he criticized, Aren't there only two possibilities? Either a one-on-one deal or a gathering. There was at least a 50% chance of guessing right! It was just a casual comment.

No harm done if I was wrong!

Osta stared at Lumian, increasingly fearful.

It was becoming harder to guess this dangerous man's Sequence. He appeared skilled in combat, possessed strong spirituality, and had an intuition bordering on precognition.

Lumian savored the warmth of the bonfire and offhandedly asked, “How did you get involved with the mysticism gathering?”

Osta's face took on a nostalgic expression.

“Everyone comes to Trier with hope. Painters dream of having their works chosen by the World's Artists Exhibition, but most fail. Every year, some succumb to madness or

suicide. "Poor authors living in cheap apartments hope to replicate the success of best-sellers like Aurore and Meniere, but they end up selling their stories to small newspapers. They're forced to bear scathing reviews like 'trite,' 'mediocre,' and 'cliché.' Many of them have even stooped to writing smut for underground booksellers, risking arrest by detectives.

"Over a decade ago, I came to Trier from Cécilis Province, eager to make a fortune. I lived in a leaky attic, climbed scaffolding, worked in factories, smuggled illegal books, and sold soda. I made some money, but with each passing year, I realized I'd never be rich. Owning a home and enjoying leisurely mornings before work were impossible dreams.

"Eventually, I discovered mysticism magazines like *Psychic* and *Mysteries*. Perhaps I still fantasized about gaining superpowers overnight and changing my fate, so I started attending gatherings with fellow enthusiasts. Those magazines would publish the relevant information.

"Earlier this year, a friend from the group asked if I wanted to join a gathering with real Beyonder powers. I couldn't refuse. You know the rest."

Lumian listened without interrupting Osta's account.

When Osta finished, Lumian asked, "Is that friend the gathering's organizer?"

"No," Osta shook his head. "The organizer goes by 'Mr. K.' He always wears a massive hood, practically covering his entire face."

"Mr. K..." Lumian committed the codename to memory and pondered for a moment. "What abilities has he shown?"

Osta shook his head again.

"I've never seen any. But after becoming a Secrets Suppliant, I sensed I was facing shadows and deep darkness when meeting him. I think he's very powerful." He seems powerful. I wonder who's stronger— him, the padre, or Madame Pualis...

Lumian mused before asking curiously, "Did you sense anything special around me?"

Osta hesitated before admitting, "No, but your dangerous aura frightens me more than even Baron Brignais." Lumian glanced at his left chest and smiled.

"That's good."

Osta was taken aback, not understanding Lumian's meaning.

Lumian changed the subject. "Have you heard of the Montsouris ghost?"

"Of course." As a con artist posing as a warlock, Osta knew many stories about Underground Trier. "Legend has it that an evil spirit lurks in this dark, vast

underground. It always travels alone, never seeming to reach its destination. Those who encounter the ghost either die instantly or suffer mysterious deaths along with their families within the year.

“Those who've claimed to see the Montsouris ghost went mad and died within a year. I've heard both Church factions sent experts to search for the spirit, but they found nothing.” It sounds plausible... Lumian didn't inquire further. Standing, he told Osta, “I'll catch up with you tomorrow night or the following morning.”

“Alright.” Though Osta didn't believe Lumian would harm him now, he couldn't help but sigh with relief at the departure of the dangerous man.

No ordinary human could feel at ease around a tiger!

On his way back to the surface, Lumian carried the carbide lamp and passed by the entrance to the catacombs. Once again, he saw the arch adorned with white bones, sunflowers, and steam symbols.

Looking at the words “Stop! The Death Empire lies ahead!” Lumian cautiously approached the natural doorway separating the inner and outer chambers.

Suddenly, a figure emerged from behind the stone arch and bellowed, “Halt!” The figure donned a blue vest and yellow pants. He was an elderly man with gray hair and wrinkled skin.

His light-yellow eyes, slightly clouded, locked onto Lumian.

“Can't I go in?” Lumian feigned the innocence of a foreigner.

The old man scrutinized him. “You need to purchase a ticket upstairs and bring a white candle with you.”

“I have a friend buried inside. Do I need to buy a ticket to pay my respects?” Lumian fabricated a friend on the spot.

The old man eyed him suspiciously, “Don't tell me you're one of those Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative college students? Those troublemakers always concoct lies to sneak into the tomb. They sing, dance, and feast in the ossuary! Fine, go in. Just remember to bring lit white candles like them. That's my only demand!”

Lumian once worried that if he attended university, he'd be too different from his classmates. Now, it seemed his concerns were unfounded.

Those students were even wilder than he was! “Alright,” Lumian feigned disappointment. “I'll bring a white candle next time.”

The old man nodded, relieved. Lumian turned and followed the restored path to the stairs leading to the surface. Over a hundred meters away, he suddenly spotted a black shadow from the corner of his eye.

The shadow hunched slightly, shuffling behind a row of stone pillars on the left. Lumian glanced over and noticed its intangibility, as if it were almost illusory.

Instinctively, he raised the carbide lamp, casting a bluish-yellow glow. The shadow disappeared, as though it had never existed.

Lumian quickly scanned the surroundings but found nothing.

Is it an illusion or an underground ghost? As Lumian pondered, he suddenly wondered: Could it be the Montsouris ghost? Did I encounter the Montsouris ghost?

His pupils widened, and his expression grew unusually grave.

Moments later, Lumian erupted into laughter, nearly doubling over. He laughed until tears threatened to spill from his eyes. "Haha, come on, come at me! I want to see how you'll kill my entire family and how you'll cause my mysterious death!"

Chapter 124 Method of Self-Protection

As planned, Lumian circled the vicinity of Mason Café in Quartier du Jardin Botanique before making his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré on Rue Anarchie. He headed straight for the third floor and arrived at Room 310, where the lunatic resided.

Bang! Bang! Bang! He hammered on the door.

"I'm dying! I'm dying!" The wailing from inside grew frantic.

"I'm f*cking dying too!" Lumian spat, his face expressionless.

Startled by his response, the lunatic fell silent and offered no reply.

Lumian didn't knock again. He produced a small wire he carried with him, inserted it into the keyhole, and fidgeted with it.

With a click, the grimy brown wooden door swung open.

Inside, Lumian found the madman, clad in a linen shirt and yellow pants, kneeling with his thick black beard nearly covering his eyes.

Lumian entered and casually closed the door. He crouched before the lunatic and lowered his voice.

"I've encountered the Montsouris ghost too." The lunatic visibly trembled, his fear-filled blue eyes showing the faintest glimmer of lucidity.

After a few seconds, he caught his breath and asked in a deep voice, "Are you sure it was the Montsouris ghost?"

He's in that state of intermittent lucidity Charlie mentioned? Lumian smirked and replied, "I don't know. That's why I'm asking you to confirm it.

"What did the Montsouris ghost you saw look like?"

With a shiver, the lunatic described, "A black shadow, like a lonely old man. Its back was slightly hunched, and it moved very slowly.

"After I spotted it, it vanished into the darkness. I didn't realize it was the Montsouris ghost until my parents, my wife, and my children started dying one after another..."

It's eerily similar to my experience... Lumian frowned, suspecting that he had indeed encountered the Montsouris ghost.

He contemplated for a moment.

“How did your family die? Were you attacked?”

The lunatic hastily shook his head.

“I-I often felt something watching me from the shadows. But I didn't face anything else. Otherwise, I wouldn't have made it this far.

“My child became gravely ill and died in the hospital. We had just cleansed and interred him in the catacombs when my wife-my wife, snapped and hanged herself in our room.

“That's when I recalled the legend of the Montsouris ghost. I took my parents to the cathedral and asked the padre there to protect us.

“The Church took it very seriously and assigned three clergymen to stay at my home. Nothing happened during that time. I thought the nightmare was over.

“But after the New Year, the clergymen left. Soon after, my father strangled my mother and ended his own life with a table knife. I can't remember much after that. Sometimes, I wake up and realize that I moved here at some point...”

The lunatic's blue eyes revealed unmasked anguish. Lumian felt like a tightly wound spring, ready to snap at any moment.

“They said the Montsouris ghost would kill anyone who encountered it back then. But this lasted until the New Year.” Lumian keenly noticed the lunatic's account differed from the legend.

The lunatic shook his head.

“I don't know why it happened. I thought the nightmare was over. Otherwise, the three clergymen wouldn't have left...”

A curse with no time limit until all targets are dead? Lumian formed a new hypothesis about the Montsouris ghost legend.

He stood up and told the lunatic, “I might have encountered the Montsouris ghost too. Let's see which one of us lasts longer. If I figure out how to break this curse, you can pay me to help you.”

“A way, a solution...” The corners of the lunatic's mouth twitched as he echoed Lumian's words, caught between tears and laughter.

He raised his hands and clutched his hair.

“I'm dying, I'm dying!”

Lumian intended to ask the lunatic's name, something to inscribe when he was laid to rest in the cemetery or catacombs, but he shook his head, opened the door, and left Room 310 instead.

Back in Room 207, Lumian sat on the bed, mulling over how to break the curse brought by the Montsouris ghost.

Although theoretically, the curse might not take effect until year's end, leaving no urgency for now, Lumian couldn't rely on the Montsouris ghost's apparent delay. Moreover, he had no immediate family, so he stood a high chance of being the curse's first victim. It could happen in the latter half of the year, next week, or even tonight.

Come to think of it, that man might still be alive. If the Montsouris ghost could help me kill him, I'd owe it a debt of gratitude... Lumian's thoughts raced, and he suddenly laughed at himself.

In the dream, he had lied to Ryan and the others, claiming he'd forgotten his original name. He simply wanted to avoid mentioning or remembering it.

When he was young, his family had been well-off, but the man he called father turned out to be a philanderer and later a gambling addict.

His mother died from grief-induced illness, and his grandfather went bankrupt. They lived together in the slums until his grandfather's death a few years later.

Thus, after being adopted by Aurore, Lumian had willingly asked to take her last name and change his own.

Lumian didn't know if the man who had only provided genetic material was dead or alive. If he was dead, it was a blessing. If not, he hoped the Montsouris ghost would step up its game. As for himself, Lumian dared not assume the Montsouris ghost wouldn't harm him just because he harbored the taint of an evil god and the mark of a great existence.

As long as it didn't possess him, the ghost could do anything! According to Madam Magician, Lumian was convinced that many Beyonders and monsters could easily kill him, but they would have to face the ensuing corruption as a consequence. I'm not certain if this is a curse or not... But I can't just sit here waiting for death. I have to take action... Aurore used to say that the best skill for the weak or underage is 'finding their parents'... With this in mind, Lumian's eyes brightened. He stood up and walked to the table to find a pen and paper.

He planned to update Madam Magician on the mission's progress. Simultaneously, he would mention his encounter with the Montsouris ghost, questioning if he had been cursed and how to address the issue.

Though the woman with the Magician code name wasn't his parent, she was undoubtedly his superior in the current circumstances. It was logical to seek assistance from his superior when in trouble!

Lumian pondered for a moment before writing: "Esteemed Madam Magician, "I have followed your instructions and gained Osta Trul's trust. I've also requested his introduction to Mr. K's mysticism gathering... "On my return from the catacombs, I regrettably encountered the legendary Montsouris ghost. Of course, I cannot be certain. "The specific legend is as such... "I seek to know if I have been cursed by the Montsouris ghost or if another influence is at play. How should I proceed?"

Towards the end, Lumian intentionally added the code name “Seven of Wands” to remind the recipient not to overlook his status as an external member of their enigmatic organization.

Lumian deduced this from the lady's use of the tarot cards' Magician code name and his Seven of Wands.

He suspected Madam Magician might belong to a clandestine organization symbolized by tarot cards and devoted to a powerful entity. The Major Arcana were official members, possessing formidable abilities. The Minor each Arcana served as peripheral members who undertook various missions.

After folding the letter, Lumian meticulously cleaned the room. He crushed a few bedbugs that had crept in from next door and disposed of them in the bathroom trash can. Once done, he lit the candle and conjured a spiritual barrier to summon Madam Magician's messenger in his name.

Before long, the candle flame transformed into a deep blue hue.

This time, an arm-height, doll-like messenger in a light-gold dress materialized atop the flames, floating there.

Its unfocused, light-blue eyes scanned the surroundings before gently nodding. “Much better than last time.”

The voice was otherworldly and ghostly, far from human-like.

“Truth be told, I'm not fond of those bedbugs either,” Lumian chimed in.

The doll messenger smiled. “Right? No creature appreciates those pests!”

Lumian sensed a shared sentiment, as if both sides despised the same thing. With that, the doll messenger extended a pale-white palm, devoid of any skin texture, and the letter floated up.

Lumian watched the “doll” seize the letter and vanish like a bursting bubble. He sighed with admiration and thought, Having a messenger is so convenient... After concluding the ritual and tidying up the wooden table, Lumian returned to the bed, awaiting the messenger's response. As time passed, the night outside deepened.

Songs echoed from the underground bar, but Lumian received no reply from Madam Magician. This made him furrow his brow. Does Madam Magician have other matters to handle and no time to read my letter?

I can't keep waiting. I must devise other ways to protect myself...

Neither Hunter nor Provoker grant me the power to combat curses—if it is indeed a curse...

Dancer doesn't either. Unless I genuinely pray to that concealed entity after the sacrificial dance. But how would that differ from suicide?

Ah, if I can't pray to that hidden being, I can seek out that great existence!

I bear His seal upon me. I even obtained His permission when I claimed the boon. I'm not afraid to beseech Him again!

Yes, I can entreat Him to help me lift this curse.

Lumian acted swiftly, setting up the altar. Since Madam Magician hadn't specifically outlined the ingredients for the great existence's domain, Lumian believed that whatever he employed wouldn't impact the final outcome, as long as it didn't invoke other deities.

He arranged orange candles made of citrus and lavender. Two symbolized the deity, and one represented himself.

After completing the preparations, Lumian stepped back and examined the three yellowish candles. He recited in Hermes, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck..."

Chapter 125 Struggle

As Lumian intoned the three lines of the honorific name, a faint gray fog materialized around him, radiating an unnerving aura.

The orange candle flame adopted a bluish tinge, casting a sinister, deep glow over the entire altar.

In that instant, Lumian's thoughts seemed to decelerate. He felt an itching beneath his flesh, as if something was on the verge of burrowing out.

A distant, inscrutable gaze from an unfathomable height appeared once more. Collecting himself, Lumian resumed his prayer. Adhering to Madam Magician's instructions and incorporating sacrificial knowledge from Aurore's witchcraft notebook, he recited in Hermes, "I implore you. I beseech you to lift this curse from me..."

In all honesty, Lumian yearned to request the great existence's protection for a year, shielding him from all harm. But that was clearly unattainable. He had not yet mastered the necessary Hermes phrases to counter the threat of the Montsouris ghost. Thus, he could only allude to the curse plaguing him.

As the ritual culminated, Lumian began to draw upon the power of the herbs on the altar.

In the following moment, his vision blurred, as if a seraph with twelve pairs of luminous wings materialized before him.

Descending from above, the seraph extended its arms, enveloping Lumian in an embrace.

The wings of light closed around him, enfolding him layer by layer.

Lumian shook off his stupor and noticed the bluish candle flame had reverted to its original orange hue at some unknown point.

Recalling the surreal encounter, it felt like a dream. He couldn't help but murmur to himself, Did I just see an angel? Did that great existence send one of His angels to protect me and lift this curse?

Until today, Lumian had only heard of angels in the sermons of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church. He never anticipated experiencing an angelic embrace firsthand.

According to Madam Magician, this was at least a high-level Sequence 2 entity. Even if only a fraction of its power had been projected from afar, it was still angelic in nature... Lumian felt an even deeper reverence for the enigmatic organization that employed tarot cards as their moniker and the great existence that had sealed the corruption within him.

Simultaneously, he breathed a sigh of relief.

If the Montsouris ghost had truly inflicted a curse, it should no longer be an issue. How could a ghost that dared not confront the protection granted by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church's clergy and was confined to wandering beneath Trier compare to an angel?

Nevertheless, trepidation still gripped Lumian's heart. He had prayed for the curse to be lifted. What if the Montsouris ghost employed a different method of killing than a curse?

He waited until midnight, but Magician's response never came.

Unable to risk sleep, he lay on the bed, shutting his eyes just to rest.

Staying awake all night posed no challenge for him. At six in the morning, his body and mind would simultaneously reset.

This was both a curse and a blessing.

It wasn't until the latter half of the night that the cacophony of Rue Anarchie died down. Lumian discerned the faint chirping of insects in the distance and an even more remote whistle.

Abruptly, his body felt leaden, and breathing grew labored. It was as if someone had swaddled him in a blanket and weighed him down.

This isn't good! Lumian tried to rise, but he could only move his arms.

His eyes wouldn't even open!

His arms felt restrained, barely able to lift a few centimeters off the bed.

In the next moment, Lumian's body turned frigid, and his nose felt damp. It was as if he had been stuffed into a sack and hurled into the depths of a river.

His breathing faltered, his chest tightened with pain, and his thoughts decelerated.

Lumian's desperate attempts at resistance flashed through his mind-entering Cogitation and activating the black thorn symbol on his chest.

He dismissed the idea in an instant.

Firstly, he would likely lose control. Secondly, the Montsouris ghost bore no connection to the covert entity known as Inevitability. It might not be deterred by the black thorn symbol. Unless left with no alternative and teetering on the brink of death, Lumian wouldn't gamble his life on this seemingly futile method.

His lips and nose turned icy, as though an invisible hand was pressing them down. Paired with the sensation of drowning, Lumian found breathing impossible. His lungs were on the verge of bursting.

Words like Hunter, Provoker, Dancer, corruption, seal, and Fallen Mercury flickered through Lumian's mind, each forming fleeting thoughts before dissipating.

Fallen Mercury... Fallen Mercury! At last, Lumian had a revelation. He strained to shift his gloved left palm to the side.

He had already positioned the evil dirk in the most accessible location to handle potential emergencies.

A few seconds later, Lumian, gasping for air with his mouth agape, made contact with the hilt of Fallen Mercury and hoisted the pewter-black dirk.

Fallen Mercury was no longer shrouded in black cloth. The intricate patterns on its surface overlapped, inducing vertigo.

With every ounce of his strength, Lumian hoisted his shoulder, bent his arm, and plunged Fallen Mercury above his body.

There was nothing there. Not even a scratch, let alone blood!

Without hesitation, Lumian gritted his teeth and angled his arm toward his body. With a sickening pop, he drove Fallen Mercury into his left waist.

Crimson blood oozed out, staining the blade of Fallen Mercury. The phantom mercury droplet symbolizing the fate of immolation penetrated Lumian's body.

The pain shocked Lumian's oxygen-starved mind to consciousness. His vision blurred as the enigmatic river, composed of innumerable mercury symbols, emerged. This represented his own fate.

Ignoring the need for precision, Lumian cast his gaze downstream of the illusory river, toward a current on the verge of engulfing the other tributaries.

He then infused his spirituality into Fallen Mercury, allowing it to agitate the complex mercury symbol birthed from the river's entanglement.

In the next moment, Lumian saw himself lying on the bed, his face a purplish hue, teetering on the brink of death. The mercury symbols abruptly constricted, solidifying into a droplet that seeped into Fallen Mercury's blade. Almost instantaneously, Lumian felt his entire body relax. The sensations of drowning and suffocation vanished. Simultaneously, pain enveloped him, and he couldn't help but emit a soft groan. Flames erupted from his body, searing his flesh inch by inch.

He had utilized the pain of being incinerated stored in Fallen Mercury to trade for his fate of being assaulted by a Montsouris ghost. He had successfully escaped a state where he couldn't even struggle, and the attack didn't come again! Fallen Mercury could stab others or Lumian himself, replacing an unwanted fate!

He was ignited, reliving the agony of battling the flaming beast.

Braced for the onslaught, Lumian rolled beneath the bed.

Thumping against the floor, he rolled back and forth to smother the flames engulfing him. After a while, it was unclear whether Lumian's strategy had worked, if the fire brought on by the fate exchange had run its course, or if it was a combination of both, but he was no longer consumed by the scarlet inferno. However, his clothes were in shreds, and his body was marred with charred wounds. His nose teetered on the edge of detachment, and his singed hair emitted a burnt odor. For an ordinary person or most Low-Sequence Beyonders, this was an injury beyond resuscitation-death was the only outcome.

Lumian strained to keep his eyes open and focused, fighting the urge to pass out. As time ticked away, he sensed his life rapidly ebbing.

He clung to consciousness, gasping for air. After an indeterminate period, Lumian finally heard the eerily beautiful chime of a bell.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The bell struck six in the morning, Trier time, its peal echoing through Rue Anarchie and beyond. Dawn's first light crept over the horizon.

Lumian snapped to attention, his pain abruptly gone.

His body and mind had completely reset! Phew... Lumian exhaled in relief and stood. He looked down at the tattered remnants of his once crisp linen shirt and dark pants. His skin had returned to normal.

Already in a financial bind, he couldn't help but sigh.

He needed new clothes—a fresh expense! Still, he'd managed to survive the Montsouris ghost's initial attack. This was likely a first in the annals of its dark legend.

From the looks of it, it's not a curse... Lumian changed into fresh clothes and stepped into the washroom to splash cold tap water on his face. Gazing into the mirror, he noticed that some of his hair had shortened, and the golden dye had faded in places.

These external changes couldn't be reset. After washing up, Lumian returned to Room 207 and was startled to find another letter awaiting him.

The folded piece of paper lay innocuously on the wooden table.

Lumian muttered under his breath, Isn't it too early for a reply? You didn't sleep again last night. Did you just get home?

With a shake of his head, Lumian picked up the Magician's response and unfolded it. The handwriting was messy, but he could just make out that it belonged to a woman. “Excellent work. Engage more with Mr. K and exhibit your wild, fanatical side until he converts you and extends an invitation to his organization.

“The Montsouris ghost is not a curse. There are three solutions for your current predicament: “First, die before it. Use the corruption within you to destroy it and avenge the fallen. “Second, trade your fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost with your dirk. Haven't you ever considered using that blade on yourself? “Third, take refuge in a particular cathedral of a certain Church and never leave its sanctuary.”

Chapter 126 Finding Prey

Lumian quickly scanned Madam Magician's message, committing the essential points to memory.

It was evident that the first and third solutions to the Montsouris ghost dilemma were jokes. The only viable option was the second: using Fallen Mercury to swap his fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost.

In all honesty, Lumian hadn't considered stabbing himself with Fallen Mercury to proactively change his destiny. Only when he was cornered by the Montsouris ghost, teetering on the brink of death, did this desperate strategy surface in his mind.

Time was of the essence, and Lumian had to act fast. He'd only managed to exchange his fate of being attacked by the Montsouris ghost, not completely avoiding one. He'd narrowly escaped the first crisis but still lingered in death's shadow.

Given the choice, Lumian would have still opted to exchange the fate of being attacked by the Montsouris ghost instead of just encountering one. The attack had already occurred, and he couldn't be sure it would cease with a mere fate swap. He needed the most reliable plan to save himself.

In simpler terms, what if the Montsouris ghost killed him and realized it had never met him and targeted the wrong person?

I need to find someone to trade the fate stored in Fallen Mercury for a better one. Then, I'll prepare thoroughly, and when I'm ready, I'll stab myself to complete the exchange. I'll seal the Montsouris ghost encounter inside Fallen Mercury... Lumian combined his experience with Madam Magician's advice and quickly devised a way to escape his predicament.

When the time came, Fallen Mercury, also known as the Cursed Blade, would cause whoever was stabbed to suffer the fate of their entire family dying, including themselves.

The drawback was the time it would take for the effect to occur.

Lumian drew Fallen Mercury from his waist, eyeing the blade wrapped in black cloth. He felt the Beyonder weapon's potential more acutely than ever.

He seriously contemplated finding experts to repair Fallen Mercury. Otherwise, the enchanted dirk would only last until year's end.

Maybe Mr. K's Beyonder Gathering could provide the resources he needed.

My suspicion is correct. Madam Magician's intention for me to meet Osta Trul is to use him to attend Mr. K's Gathering and join the secret organization behind it... Lumian donned a wide-brimmed hat and a black shirt resembling formal attire before leaving Room 207 and descending the stairs.

As a Hunter, he needed to start his search for prey.

Upon exiting Auberge du Coq Doré, Lumian spotted Charlie sitting on the three-story staircase leading to the street. Pale-faced, he gazed at the sky, melancholic, with a lit cigarette in his right hand.

"What's wrong?" Lumian asked, casually sitting beside Charlie.

Charlie didn't look back. He inhaled from his cigarette and sighed.

"I feel like I've lost my soul. It's gone."

He wore a white shirt, red vest, and a black suit jacket draped over his left arm—a hotel uniform.

Lumian grinned and got to the point.

"Did you sleep with that older woman?"

Charlie turned to Lumian and emphasized, "Please call her Madame. She's only in her fifties."

He took another drag and exhaled a smoke ring.

"Did you know? She gave me a diamond necklace worth at least 1,500 verl d'or. I couldn't resist. She was so dazzling and seductive that she went straight to my heart."

"It," Lumian corrected.

Charlie smiled sheepishly.

"Madame Alice is captivating too. It's quite a feat to maintain her elegance at her age. She mentioned she'll stay in Trier for six months and can offer me 500 verl d'or a month...' As he spoke, Charlie's voice grew somber, and his eyes took on a melancholic hue.

Just as Lumian thought Charlie would sigh over his lost soul, a long exhale escaped him.

"Why can she only stay for half a year...' Lumian patted Charlie's shoulder, saying earnestly, "Take care of yourself."

Charlie's eyelids twitched.

"There's a need for moderation. Madame Alice is far too enthusiastic. I was so exhausted last night that I didn't even have that beautiful dream."

Lumian chuckled and said, "You openly mentioned obtaining a diamond necklace worth 1,500 verl d'or. In Rue Anarchie, that's enough wealth to make many people go mad.

Aren't you afraid I'll steal it?" Charlie laughed.

"I had to share it with someone, or I'd feel awful.

"I've noticed you don't seem short on money. You're even quite generous. You wouldn't commit a crime for a mere 1,000 to 2,000 verl d'or." Lumian grinned, retorting, "Is there a chance I'm pretending not to lack money to lure someone like you into lowering your guard?"

Charlie's expression froze as the dying cigarette nearly burned his fingers. Lumian changed the subject, asking casually, "Is there anyone you despise so much that you think they deserve to die?"

Charlie snuffed out his cigarette on the stone steps, puzzled, "Why do you ask?"

He intended to pocket the extinguished cigarette butt but decided against it, tossing it aside instead.

A nearby vagrant darted over, grabbing the warm cigarette and taking a few drags. Without waiting for Lumian's response, Charlie continued, "The person I despise most is our head attendant. You've no idea how detestable he is. Haha, I've never thought of wanting him dead, but I just wish I could hood his face and beat him up one day.

"I don't think many people truly deserve to die. One is Baron Brignais, the market district's Savoie Mob leader. He colludes with loan sharks, driving many to

bankruptcy. A friend of mine jumped off a building in desperation. But what did that accomplish? His son vanished mysteriously, and his daughter was forced into the Salle de Bal Brise. Although she's supposed to only sing, in reality, well..."

"That's right. If he had the courage to kill himself, why didn't he think of a way to kill Baron Brignais and the others?" Lumian nodded slightly. Charlie stared at Lumian, taken aback.

"Your thoughts are a little extreme."

He added, "The second person deserving death is Margot, leader of the Poison Spur Mob. He manipulates people into swindling women new to Trier. After bleeding them dry, he forces them into prostitution. That's how Miss Ethans in Room 8 on the fourth floor ended up in the motel. Most of the money she earns is taken by Margot. She's tried to escape several times, but she's been beaten within an inch of her life before she could leave Rue Anarchie."

Market district has quite a few mobs. No wonder it's chaotic at night... Lumian glanced at Charlie, saying, "It sounds like you sympathize with Miss Ethans."

Charlie puffed out his chest. "True Intis gentlemen empathize with ladies in tragic situations and offer help when appropriate." Lumian tersely acknowledged. "Do you know where Margot lives?"

"I don't know." Charlie shook his head. "But he frequents the motel in the evenings, extorting money from Miss Ethans. If you hear a woman crying, shouting, and cursing on the fourth floor, that's Margot and his thugs."

Lumian nodded pensively and inquired, "Who else do you think deserves to die?" Charlie considered for a moment, replying with a contorted expression, "Monette, that Islander. He swindled me out of 10 verl d'or! "Can you imagine? I'd been unemployed for some time and hadn't found a new job yet.

That was my last bit of savings. I nearly starved to death because of him!"

"Where does he live?" Lumian asked nonchalantly.

"He was staying at the motel initially. But after know scamming me, he moved out. I don't where he went." Charlie's anger flared as he spoke. "I was waiting for him to hook me up with a job..."

Once he'd calmed down, Charlie eyed Lumian quizzically, "Why's your hair different?"

There were strands of varying lengths, gold mingled with black.

"Don't you think it's rather stylish?" Lumian asked earnestly. Charlie snorted, his expression dubious. His experience with the Idiot Instrument made him instinctively question Lumian's intentions in such matters.

After a few moments, Charlie glanced at the street vendors and waved his hand.

"I've got to head to the hotel. I'll see you tonight."

Lumian stayed put on the stone steps outside the hotel, waving at Charlie's retreating figure.

That afternoon, Lumian took a public carriage to Quartier du Jardin Botanique. After walking over 300 meters, he reached Mason Café.

The café occupied the ground floor of a beige four-story building near the botanical garden. Green plants twined around the building's exterior. The ground-floor shops were set back nearly a meter, with pillars supporting an outer walkway for pedestrians.

Mason's Café boasted dark green walls and large windows. Sunlight streamed through the glass, illuminating the tables and chairs outside.

Lumian, dressed in a dark suit and wide-brimmed hat, entered the café. The first thing he noticed were the intricate plant sculptures on the wall, interspersed with Intisian sentences: "Who holds supreme power in the country? The president or parliament?"

Chapter 127 Café

Lumian couldn't help but smile when he saw the "slogan" on the wall.

It reminded him of something Aurore had once said: "In Trier, the café holds a unique status. It's the birthplace of riots, the sanctuary of conspiracies, and the wellspring of scandals." Throughout Intisian history, innumerable riots had been sparked in cafés, and countless literary works and political struggles had brewed within them.

Unlike the neighboring Loen Kingdom, Intis had its own private clubs, but they were fairly exclusive or high-end, with limited access. Be they former nobles, current members of parliament, high-ranking government officials, financiers, bankers, industrialists, renowned authors, newspaper editors, military generals, or university professors, everyone enjoyed frequenting different cafés to engage in spirited conversations, presenting a more approachable side to the public. After all, the Republic's political slogan and image were built upon "freedom, equality, and fraternity."

Naturally, the cafés frequented by various social strata were vastly different, often distinguished by location, price, and style. So, when Lumian heard from Charlie that Laurent had used his mother, Mrs. Lakazan, to seek opportunities in upscale cafés, he wasn't surprised or puzzled. Many people did this, often becoming archetypes for novelists, but only a few succeeded.

At the same time, banquets and salons were all the rage in Trier. If any high society member didn't host a salon once a month, others would assume something had befallen their family or that a financial crisis had jeopardized their political future.

Aurore, who clearly adored this metropolis, stayed away partly because artists like authors, poets, painters, and sculptors seemed like tamed butterflies, fluttering about the salons of various politicians, financiers, and officials. It appeared that only by gaining their approval could the value of their work be realized.

The amalgamation of salons and cafés supplanted most club functions.

In this system, taverns, beer houses, dance halls, and cafés shared similarities, but the latter held far greater significance, leaning more towards the upper classes.

Upon seeing a customer enter, a female attendant in a grayish-white dress greeted him with a smile.

“Do you have a favorite seat, or are you meeting a friend?”

Lumian nodded.

“Cabin D.”

The female attendant led him to a secluded corner.

Beside a window, he could see a lush, tree-filled botanical garden.

“What can I get you to drink?” The female attendant presented a brown-covered wine list.

Lumian opened it, momentarily taken aback by the dazzling array of choices.

Fermo Coffee, Highlander Coffee, Reem Espresso...

Sibe Black Tea, Marquis Black Tea, West Balam Black Tea...

Fruit Slushy, Frangipani Cocktail, Ambergris Lemonade, Venus Sacred Oil...

Summer Wine, Kirsch, Rose Dew, Walnut Spirit, Orange & Lemon Wine, Cherry Spirit...

Absinthe, Fennel Absinthe, Gin, Bitter Curaçao, Apple Brandy, Grape Dregs Brandy...

Sweetwine: Perfect Love, Barbarian Cream, Little Rose, West Pyro...

Considering he had a psychologist's appointment later, neither alcohol nor coffee seemed fitting. Lumian thought for a moment and said, “Ambergris lemonade.”

“Four licks,” the female attendant inquired.

“Do you need cake, bread, or other food?”

“Not for now. I'll decide when my friend arrives.” Lumian surveyed the surroundings of Mason's Café and noted the absence of customers at this time.

The lunch crowd had cleared out by 2:30 p.m., leaving more than an hour before teatime.

Soon, the female attendant returned with a tray, placing a glass filled with a colorless liquid and a few lemons on the table. Lumian eyed the empty seat across from him, picked up his cup, and took a sip.

A sweet, elegant fragrance filled his nostrils, and the refreshing sour taste invigorated him.

As the minutes passed, Lumian noticed the wall clock nearing 3:30 p.m. He couldn't help but glance at the café entrance.

Green plants adorned the area, but no customers entered.

Just as Lumian looked away in disappointment, a soft female voice sounded from the booth behind him.

“I'm already here. Good afternoon, Mr. Lumian Lee.”

Lumian assumed the woman didn't want a face-to-face conversation, so he didn't turn around. He lowered his voice and asked politely, "Good afternoon. How should I address you? Can you hear my soft voice?"

"No problem," the gentle female voice replied. "You can call me Susie."

"Hello, Madame Susie." For some reason, Lumian felt relatively calm facing this psychologist. His usual habit of inward commentary dissipated.

A familiar uneasiness washed over him a second later.

"What's wrong?" Susie, seated behind him, inquired gently.

Lumian pondered for two seconds and didn't conceal his feelings.

"I'm a little uneasy. It's an odd yet familiar sensation.

"Yes, I must have experienced something similar when I met an information broker yesterday."

Susie spoke rapidly, apologetically, "Sorry, I'm used to reading your thoughts. That might be causing your discomfort.

"Your body is infused with intense corruption and is in a delicate balance. The slightest disturbance triggers a reaction. In other words, you're highly sensitive to hidden and invisible influences, surpassing Beyonders of the same Sequence or higher."

"Is that so..." Lumian wasn't angry. In his view, a psychologist needed to read thoughts for effective treatment. Rely on words alone?

He then furrowed his brow. "Was Anthony Reid also reading my thoughts back then? I'm referring to the information broker."

"I know." Susie understood. "Where did Anthony Reid come from? What did he do before becoming an information broker?"

"He had a West Midseashire Coast accent, a retired soldier," Lumian recounted. After a brief silence, Susie said, "If he's truly from West Midseashire Coast, it's indeed possible he's a Beyonder of the Spectator pathway."

The Spectator pathway... Lumian had read about it in Aurore's Warlock notebook, but she only knew that its corresponding Sequence 9 was called the Spectator. They possessed remarkable observational abilities, deciphering true thoughts from subtle expressions and body language.

So a Sequence above the Spectator pathway is a Psychologist... As this thought crossed Lumian's mind, he heard Susie correct him.

"It's Psychiatrist."

“That sounds more reassuring.” Lumian smiled. “What Sequence is Anthony Reid?” After learning the other's pathway, he felt Anthony Reid should have recognized him and sensed his anxiety, concern, and attempts at intimidation.

“According to your description, he's at least a Sequence 8,” Susie concluded.

Lumian smirked. “If he's really a Psychiatrist, that's interesting. He didn't even treat the aftereffects of his battlefield trauma.”

“It's not unusual. When a Psychiatrist suffers severe psychological trauma, it's incredibly difficult for them to recover alone. They often need the help of another Psychiatrist, and treating a Psychiatrist is far riskier than usual.

One misstep can result in the infection of the patient's mental illness,” Susie explained succinctly.

As the conversation shifted and the atmosphere lightened, Lumian gradually relaxed, no longer feeling uneasy or anxious.

He took the initiative to say, “Shall we begin the treatment?”

“Talking is part of the treatment.” Susie's gentle voice hinted at a smile.

Realizing that the first stage of the treatment was simply conversation, Lumian eased further. He leaned back against the booth partition and asked, puzzled, “I know it was a dream, but there are many details I can't comprehend.

“Since it's my dream, how can I know the various abilities of the three official investigators? Why am I so familiar with the unique abilities of the padre, the shepherd, and company?”

Susie's tone was warm as she replied, “The three official investigators were forcibly drawn into your dream. It's as if their subconscious came close to yours, in a semi-open state.

“They would actively participate in the dream, revealing all sorts of information they know. Even if they only think about it, your subconscious can sense it.” In other words, with Ryan, Leah, and Valentine's involvement, certain parts of the dream are created through “interaction?” Their responses are a collective creation of my subconscious and theirs, adhering to unspoken rules? Lumian considered this as he pondered previously unresolved questions.

Susie's voice remained steady as she continued, “You must have some suspicions about why you know the abilities of the evil god's followers, right? But you're just unwilling to confront them?”

At this, Lumian's eyelids twitched involuntarily.

“Based on the information Madam Magician provided, most of Guillaume Bénét and Pierre Berry's abilities stem from the evil god's Sequence, Contractee. So, it's impossible to predict their abilities beforehand. It depends on which creature they've signed a contract with,”

Susie gently analyzed. “In other words, we can rule out the possibility that your subconscious obtained corresponding knowledge from the seal's corruption. Without a knowledge base, you couldn't imagine those abilities nothing. They're not imaginary.” The woman's tone suddenly turned grave.

from “Clearly, at some point before Cordu was destroyed, you saw Guillaume Bénét, Pierre the others use their abilities. Moreover, you were neither harmed nor Berry, and traumatized. Otherwise, it would have manifested in the dream.

“From the dream's analysis, what truly left a scar on you was Pualis and company's actions. “How do you think you witnessed those evil god followers using their powers?” Susie's words were like sharp arrows piercing Lumian's memories, making the sturdy barrier waver.

Lumian's face twisted slightly. Amidst excruciating pain, he saw images surface from the depths of his memories.

It was the third floor of the administrator's castle.

The walls were adorned with pale, translucent faces, but the fighters were no longer Ryan, Leah, and Valentine. Instead, it was Guillaume Bénét, Pierre Berry, and Sybil Berry!

Chapter 128 In the Dream

Blood-red flowers bloomed on the pitch-black vines hanging from the ceiling, sealing off the third floor of the castle.

Guillaume Bénét, Pierre Berry, and Sybil Berry fought off the 'midwife' and her accomplices as they charged towards the tower.

A series of fragmented scenes flashed through Lumian's mind.

In a tower filled with bird-clawed infants, the invisible Guillaume Bénét touched the midwife's shoulder with the help of Shepherd Pierre Berry. The midwife exploded as if a bomb had been planted inside her.

Though Sybil Berry had been killed by the lady's maid, she was reborn in the other woman's body and took control of it.

Floating in the air, Louis Lund gave birth to a child in the room.

Unfazed, Louis Lund teamed up with Administrator Béost to subdue Shepherd Pierre Berry.

In the wilderness leading deep into the mountains, the padre, Guillaume Bénét, was surrounded by countless undead in linen garments...

Lumian's face contorted in pain. These memories felt like a sharp weapon piercing his soul. Extracting them would do more harm, making him instinctively resist recalling them further.

Eventually, the scenes faded, and Lumian panted heavily.

“How was it? Did you find anything?” Susie's voice was gentle, as if inquiring about today's breakfast.

Lumian pondered and replied, "I remember the battle between the padre and Madame Pualis's subordinates. The scene was chaotic and fragmented..."

"Sometimes, I feel like I'm watching in person, and at times from afar via certain means..."

This left him deeply puzzled about his position and role in these events.

At times, he seemed to be part of the two groups, embroiled in the conflict. Other times, he appeared to be a mere bystander, unconnected to either side.

Susie asked, leading him on, "Besides that, is there anything else you don't understand about the situation in your memory?"

Lumian said as he recalled, "I don't think I saw Madame Pualis... She only appeared when the padre was surrounded by a horde of undead in the wilderness..."

"The padre and his allies seemed drained after dealing with Louis Lund, Cathy, Béost, the midwife, and Madame Pualis's subordinates. If Madame Pualis had joined, I don't think they could have won..."

"Why did Madame Pualis willingly give up and leave Cordu without stopping the padre and his allies..."

"Not willingly, but forcibly sent away," Susie corrected him. "The ritual in your dream to send the Spring Elf away should be about sending Pualis away. The Spring Elf symbolizes a bountiful harvest, the end of a harsh winter, and the budding of new life. It's very similar to the abilities displayed by Pualis's group."

"That's even stranger..." Lumian's voice grew pained as he clenched his fists, feeling unable to remember any more.

Susie said gently, "If you don't want to recall, don't. Recovering all your memories isn't something that can be achieved in one session of therapy. Take your time. There's no rush."

Phew... Lumian slowly exhaled a sigh of relief, his body relaxing.

After he had calmed down for nearly a minute, Susie said, "You can sleep and see if you can find more answers in your dreams."

At first, the Psychiatrist's voice was gentle in Lumian's ears, but then it became increasingly ethereal, as if it had receded and entered another world.

His eyelids grew heavier and heavier until they finally closed.

Lumian's eyes snapped open to the familiar ceiling above him.

He bolted upright, taking in the reclining chair, the wooden table by the window, the small bookshelf, and the wardrobe with its full-length mirror.

This was his bedroom, his home in Cordu.

For a few seconds, Lumian stared blankly before leaping out of bed and sprinting from the room.

He flung open Aurore's bedroom door and found the desk littered with manuscripts, papers, fountain pens, ink bottles, and other items, just as he remembered. He noticed the chair with the pillow was empty.

His gaze shifted to the vacant bed before slowly retracting.

Quietly, he closed the door and moved to the next room.

No familiar figure awaited him in the study either.

Lumian raced downstairs.

He dashed through Cordu Village, arriving at the entrance of the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral.

Not a single villager crossed his path. Every house was eerily silent.

Gazing up at the onion-like dome, Lumian strode into the cathedral.

The altar had been altered, adorned with tulips, lilacs, and other flowers. A black thorn symbol was etched into it, seemingly with liquid flowing on its surface.

Still, nobody was here.

Lumian searched the padre's room before heading to the basement.

Piles of bones and sheepskin lay around, just as in his previous dream, but the altar in the middle remained untouched.

He examined it cautiously but felt no burning sensation in his chest.

Realizing this was a dream, the power representing the past, present, and future seemed to have vanished.

Having gained nothing, Lumian stood by the underground altar, deep in thought. He then dashed up the stairs, out the side door, and into the nearby cemetery. Guided by the memories of his previous dream, he quickly located the tomb where the owl had flown in. Crouching down, he pushed open the stone slab sealing the entrance. Without hesitation, Lumian descended the stairs, traversed the passageway, and found the black coffin in the shadowy tomb.

No owl was present, nor was there another Lumian. Only the faint light seeping in from outside illuminated the scene.

In a daze, Lumian turned his attention to the black coffin.

The lid had already slid to the side, revealing its contents.

Hesitating for a moment, Lumian recalled Aurore nearly losing control in his dream when she spied on the dead Warlock's corpse in the coffin.

Two or three seconds later, his expressionless steps carried him forward, approaching the black coffin. He cast his gaze inside.

A corpse quickly appeared before his eyes.

With golden hair cascading down its sides and eyes tightly shut, the corpse's pale-white face was adorned with a light blue dress.

It was Aurore!

Aurore lay in the coffin of the dead Warlock!

Lumian's pupils dilated, his face contorting with horror.

The scene before him fractured, crumbling inch by inch.

Lumian's eyes snapped open, his expression a mix of bewilderment and dread.

“What did you see?” Susie's voice echoed in his ears.

Lumian replied in a distant tone, “I saw Aurore lying in the coffin of the deceased Warlock... “How can this be...”

Susie reassured him, “This is more symbolic.

“Consider this: there's no real Warlock legend, and in the dream, the story you subconsciously created transformed your and Aurore's home into the Warlock's former residence. Aurore knows nothing about this or the legend. “Her loss of control was because she wanted to see the Warlock's corpse in the coffin clearly.”

“So, the Warlock who died in the legend represents Aurore. What does the owl symbolize? What does the entire story signify?”

Questions flooded Lumian's mind, each like a sharp blade tearing at his head. Lumian instinctively raised his hands to clutch his head.

“You might need to recover more memories before you can analyze it. Moreover, sometimes, multiple layers of symbolism exist in a mixed state,” Susie said gently. “That's enough for today's treatment. Your subconscious is already resisting. Continuing may backfire and harm your mental state.

Would you like the second treatment in two weeks or a month?” Lumian didn't hesitate.

“Two weeks from now.” Susie paused for a few seconds before adding, “Lastly, I must remind you that you have a strong tendency for self-destruction.”

“Self-destruction...” Lumian repeated the words, his expression unchanged. Susie's voice carried warmth again. “I understand why this happened, and I don't want to forcibly eliminate it. Unless you're willing to let me erase all memories at the root of the problem, every treatment will only alleviate, not eradicate it.

“I just want to remind you that Aurore loves living and life.

“She has many unfulfilled wishes. She wants to see you attend university. She wants to travel to Trier as an ordinary person for a while. She wants to find clues about her home. She wants to resolve her issues with her parents. She wants to savor all of Trier's delicacies, every concert, and experience every art exhibition.

attend “She's one step away from complete death. If she's conscious, I don't think she'd give up. She's like someone who's fallen into an abyss, clinging to the cliff edge with one hand. If even you

give up, no one will pull her up again.” Lumian's expression shifted, but he couldn't show any defined emotions.

It seemed he had forgotten how to smile or cry.

Susie didn't pressure him to respond. She sighed softly and said, “Many times, suppressing pain and despair isn't helpful. Humans need to vent and relieve stress. “Alright, that's it for today. We'll meet again for the second treatment, same time in two weeks.”

Lumian closed his eyes.

“Thank you, Madame Susie.”

Susie didn't reply, as if she had already left.

After more than ten seconds, Lumian slowly exhaled and opened his eyes.

He instinctively glanced outside Mason's Café and saw a golden retriever with a small brown bag vanishing around the corner.

A female figure appeared to be beside the dog.

Lumian lingered for another ten minutes before finishing the remaining ambergris lemonade. He stepped out of Mason's Café and made his way to the nearest public carriage stop.

A green double-decker carriage pulled up, inviting passengers to board.

Lumian paid 30 coppets and found a window seat, his gaze distant.

“Read all about it! Only 11 coppets each!” A child in old clothes approached the window, hoisting a stack of newspapers in his hand. Self-destruct... live... self-destruct... live... Lumian's mind replayed the psychiatrist's words. He felt like a walking corpse, oblivious to the newsboy.

Suddenly, he noticed the newspaper's title— Novel Weekly.

That's right, it's Sunday... Lumian snapped back to reality. He handed the child two 5-coppet copper coins and one 1-coppet copper coin, opened the window, and grabbed a copy of Novel Weekly.

Unfolding the newspaper, Lumian began to read, illuminated by the bright sunlight streaming through the window.

As the carriage slowly rolled forward, a message caught Lumian's eye: “Obituary: “Our eternal friend, the renowned bestselling author, Aurore Lee, has been confirmed by our editorial team to have passed away in an accident in April...”

Lumian's gaze froze, his hands trembling.

Abruptly, he lowered his head, raised the newspaper, and shielded his face with it. A wet mark materialized on the newspaper's surface in the afternoon sun.

More and more wet marks emerged, merging into one splatter.

Chapter 129 Neighbor

Rue Anarchie, Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Lumian tossed the wrinkled newspaper onto the table and slumped onto the bed.

After a few moments, he collapsed onto the mattress. Exhaustion coursed through his veins, making it nearly impossible to resist the urge to sleep.

He reset his body and mental state each day, but never his mind.

Too tired to bother undressing, he kicked off his leather shoes and closed his eyes.

Lumian slept deeply, dreamless.

The acrid scent of sulfur roused him from his sleep. The sun was still setting outside the window.

Lumian turned his head to gaze at the glass window, tinged with a golden-red hue, and whispered sarcastically, "Could it be that I've slept for a day and a night?"

It was clearly impossible; he always woke up automatically at 6 a.m.

Though the obituary had helped vent the sorrow in his heart, Lumian still felt somewhat despondent.

He knew that grief wouldn't simply vanish, and pain would inevitably resurface. He had to maintain a stable mental state and face his emotions without spiraling into self-destruction.

As for extreme, mad, and self-destructive tendencies, he accepted that these were inevitable, as long as they weren't severe.

I have to undergo psychiatric treatment regularly in the future. Otherwise, I'll completely lose my mind before I complete my revenge and find a way to revive Aurore. Lumian sighed and got out of bed.

He picked up the wrinkled Novel Weekly again and studied the obituary on the front page, seeking to reawaken the familiar pain in his heart.

Then, Lumian noticed an issue.

This paper was from last week.

The paperboy had sold him an outdated newspaper!

Impossible. It's impossible for a paperboy to keep a newspaper copy that can't be sold... Lumian furrowed his brow, finding this odd coincidence inexplicable.

He carefully recalled something that Psychiatrist Susie had said: "Many times, suppressing pain and despair isn't helpful. Humans need to vent and relieve stress..."

Suddenly, Lumian understood.

This was part of his psychiatric treatment!

Madame Susie had first identified my unstable mental state and strong self-destructive tendencies. Then, she used the hope of reviving Aurore as an initial counsel. Finally, while I wallowed in my pain, she arranged for the paperboy to deliver a week-old obituary. She shattered my defenses with

cold, hard facts, allowing me to release the pain and despair I had buried deep inside... Lumian mused silently.

Realizing this, he was grateful for encountering a highly skilled and professional psychiatrist. Without her, escaping his mental quagmire would have been nearly impossible.

As Lumian's gaze drifted, he noticed a few bedbugs scurrying into his room.

His keen sense of smell told him the sulfur in the neighboring room had been lit to repel the bedbugs, but the vermin mostly fled elsewhere.

Lumian chuckled at the thought of him and his neighbor inadvertently "attacking" each other by driving the bedbugs into each other's rooms. He slipped on his leather shoes and strode out of Room 207, heading for Room 206.

On the second floor of Auberge du Coq Doré, nestled in an alley behind Rue Anarchie, a washroom connected rooms 201 to 204. Opposite Room 204 was another washroom, with rooms 205 to 208 on the other side. A sizable balcony graced both sides of the corridor, so the third, fourth, and fifth floors each held ten rooms and two washrooms.

Knock! Knock! Knock! Lumian rapped his knuckles on Room 206's door.

"Who is it?" A slightly flustered voice called from inside.

"I'm from Room 207 next door," Lumian replied, grinning. "I want to get to know my neighbor."

Moments later, the door creaked open, revealing a lanky young man before Lumian.

Barely 1.7 meters tall, the man wore a faded linen shirt and black suspenders. Oversized black-framed glasses perched on his nose, and his unkempt, greasy brown hair looked as if it hadn't been washed for days. His dark-brown eyes betrayed his wariness.

"What can I do for you?" the man inquired.

Flashing a smile, Lumian extended his right hand.

"I'll be staying here for a while, so I figured I should get to know my neighbors. What's your name?"

The young man hesitated before reaching out and shaking Lumian's hand.

"Gabriel, and yours?"

"Ciel." Lumian glanced into Room 206, feigning curiosity. "Why are you burning sulfur now? It's already evening-time to head out for food."

Gabriel adjusted his glasses and offered a wry smile.

"I'm a playwright, and I'm planning to write all night."

"An author?" Lumian raised his hand to his chin, abandoning his plan to play a prank on his neighbor to break the ice. Gabriel clarified, "Playwright, actually. I specialize in writing plays for various theaters."

“Sounds impressive,” Lumian praised sincerely. “I admire people who can write stories. My idol is an author.”

Gabriel, flattered by the praise and Lumian's genuine expression, scratched his messy brown hair and sighed.

“This line of work isn't as glamorous as it seems. I poured my heart into my last script, which I think rivals the classics, but no theater manager will give it a chance.

“So I take on requests from tabloids, churning out trite stories to pay rent and avoid starvation. Right now, I'm rushing to finish one of those manuscripts. The editors just want steamy scenes with the female characters -that's what their readers crave...” Perhaps it was because he had triggered a scar in his heart, Gabriel was driven by an urge to share his struggles.

Lumian listened intently before responding with sincerity, “I've read many authors' biographies and interviews. Most of them experienced hardship, living in cheap hotels or cramped attics. I believe you'll find someone who appreciates your work and helps you become a renowned playwright.” Gabriel removed his glasses and rubbed his face. “You're only the second person to encourage me. Everyone else mocks my dreams, accusing me of being out of touch with reality.” If it weren't for the fact that you share a profession similar to Aurore's, I would've mocked you too. And my mockery would be worse than theirs... Lumian thought, before asking curiously, “Who was the first person to encourage you?”

“Miss Séraphine, from Room 309,” Gabriel replied, glancing at the ceiling. “She's a figure model. I haven't seen her in a few days. She might've moved out.”

The same figure model Ruhr and his wife mentioned? Lumian nodded and extended an invitation.

“How about a drink at the bar?”

Gabriel was sorely tempted but ultimately declined.

“Another time. I have to submit my manuscript tomorrow.”

“Alright.” Lumian waved and returned to his room.

Peering out the window at the bustling Rue Anarchie, Lumian resolved to find a restaurant and indulge in Trier's culinary delights.

Just then, a shrill female voice echoed from upstairs: “You bastard! You pig!

“Your mother spawned you with a devil...”

The cursing halted abruptly, as if silenced by force. Lumian's heart raced as he flung open the window.

“If you're so fond of women, why not go to your mother?”

This time, Lumian pinpointed the voice to the fourth floor.

Miss Ethans, the one forced into prostitution?

He recalled Charlie's description. That also meant Margot-the leader of the Poison Spur Mob-had arrived with his henchmen to collect their dues.

In the Intis Republic, there were two types of prostitutes: the registered ones in places like Rue de la Muraille and Rue de Breda, and the unregistered, illegal ones. The latter, who neither paid taxes nor could do their business without the authorities stepping in, outnumbered the former by ten or even twenty times.

After some contemplation, Lumian donned a dark suit and positioned himself between Rooms 202 and 203. A staircase led to the next floor.

He retrieved the cheap cologne he'd purchased from Bigorre, intending to pour it on the wooden steps for Margot and his henchmen to tread upon as they passed.

Unsure when the Montsouris ghost's next attack would strike, Lumian was desperate to find his prey and complete the fate exchange. a brief moment, he abandoned the idea of directly pouring the cologne, opting instead for a more discreet approach to avoid detection by After any Beyonder powers.

Lumian loosened the lid and feigned a clumsy slip of his hand, failing to grip the thick glass bottle securely.

With a clang, the cologne bottle hit the bottom step, and some liquid seeped out, the pungent fragrance filling the air.

Lumian crouched down, feigning frustration, picked up the bottle, and screwed the lid back on.

He smeared the spilled cologne with his palm, rubbing it against his body to not waste it.

Soon, most of the liquid had evaporated, and the night breeze pouring into the balcony swept away the lingering scent. Only then did Lumian retreat to Room 207. He concealed himself by leaning against the door frame while keeping an eye on the stairwell.

After more than ten minutes, footsteps sounded from above.

By now, the cologne in the corridor had significantly dissipated.

A thin man led four others down the stairs.

With closely cropped yellow hair, single-lidded blue eyes, a prominent nose bridge, thin lips, and faint scars on his face, the man suspected to be Margot wore a red shirt and a dark leather vest. His hands were tucked into his milky-white pants as he descended step by step.

A bulge on his left waist hinted at a hidden weapon, and his feet were clad in strapless leather boots.

Suddenly, the man frowned and deftly leaped over the two steps and a section of the second-floor corridor tainted with cologne. The three male thugs trailing him failed to detect anything unusual and trampled the remaining traces of the scent. Lumian's heart pounded at the sight. Is Margot acutely sensitive to smells, with a strong aversion to being contaminated by peculiar odors?

Chapter 130 Tracking

Lumian recognized Margot's actions all too well.

He would have done the same!

Then, he remembered Aurore mentioning that Beyonders from the Hunter pathway were relatively common in the Intis Republic. Lumian suspected that Margot might also be a Beyonder from the Hunter pathway, but he couldn't determine his Sequence.

A mob boss wouldn't have a high Sequence unless necessary... If Margot is truly a Hunter pathway Beyonder, he shouldn't surpass Sequence 7. Furthermore, the likelihood of him being a Pyromaniac is slim. Leah and Valentine, only at Sequence 7, are already considered elite investigators. Could they be inferior to a high-ranking thug who patrols the territory, abducts women, and bullies prostitutes? Lumian pondered silently as he stepped back and averted his gaze.

Although it seemed improbable that Margot had reached or even exceeded Sequence 7, Lumian dared not be careless.

What if his Sequence title was something like 'Scoundrel' which required him to act like one?

What if the Poison Spur Mob was more complex than it appeared, merely an extension of a secret organization or underground cult with ample resources, deliberately avoiding ostentation to evade official scrutiny?

The odds were slim, but lacking information and relevant mystical knowledge, Lumian had to remain vigilant. He couldn't eliminate the possibilities or gauge their likelihood.

In the second-floor corridor, the man suspected to be Margot—clad in a red shirt and black vest with his hands in his pockets—turned to his three subordinates.

Frowning slightly, he seemed puzzled and mildly displeased by their unnecessary contact with the cologne.

He glanced at the ground and sniffed.

The cologne wasn't confined to the stairwell; it brazenly led to Room 207. Moreover, the bottom step bore fresh marks of being struck by a light, small object.

In an instant, the man presumed to be Margot reconstructed the scene in his mind based on the environmental clues: The tenant in Room 207 might have visited the washroom or a neighbor. On their way back, they intended to apply cologne but dropped the bottle on the stairs. Then, they spread the cologne on their body, leaving only faint traces.

This was consistent with the mindset of Auberge du Coq Doré's tenants.

The man thought to be Margot dismissed his suspicions and instructed his three subordinates, "Remember to change your shoes when you return to Salle de Gristmill."

"Alright, Boss," the trio replied almost in unison.

It wasn't surprising; they were frequently asked to do something similar.

Salle de Gristmill... From Room 207, Lumian overheard their conversation and grew increasingly certain that the man suspected to be a Hunter pathway Beyonder was Margot. After chatting with Charlie that morning, he strolled around Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman district, conversing with vendors and bar patrons. He learned that Salle de Gristmill at 3 Rue Anarchie was one of the Poison Spur Mob's strongholds.

Only when Margot and his crew reached the bottom did Lumian don his wide-brimmed hat and leisurely exit the room. He trailed the lingering scent of cologne, venturing deeper into the street.

Seven or eight minutes later, he arrived at Salle de Gristmill. The faint odor of cheap cologne confirmed that Margot and his subordinates had returned.

Salle de Gristmill lacked the grand statue and inscriptions of Salle de Bal Brise. It merely occupied a section of the street and featured a golden-hued lobby.

Gas lamps encased by glass covers and black crossed bars on four stone pillars illuminating the entrance hall dispelled the evening's darkness.

At that moment, the dance hall buzzed with activity. Lumian heard singing, raucous laughter, and the strumming of instruments before stepping inside.

The layout resembled Salle de Bal Brise, with a dance floor in the center surrounded by small round tables and chairs. A low wooden platform at the front held a sultry woman.

Clad in a provocative short white top, her bra's row of bows was clearly visible. A black mole adorned her lips, and her brownish-yellow hair was swept up in a bun. Her makeup emphasized her large, deep-set blue eyes, creating a seductive, decadent allure.

Softly crooning, she occasionally kicked her right leg. Her cream-colored, fluffy knee-length skirt enticed patrons to try peeking beneath it.

“The consulting physician has an alluring air, “He'll first prepare by pushing up his sleeves with care, “It takes me back to my initial romance, “But this fine medic, he stands apart with just a glance, “He locates the sweet spot with such finesse and speed, “Discerning, my love, his touch is skilled indeed.”

Amid the suggestive and captivating performance, Lumian approached the bar counter and asked the bartender, “What's there to eat?”

The bartender smiled and inquired, “How about Rouen Meatloaf? Or do you prefer standard fare like sausages, bread, and smoked meat?” Lumian, already aware of the Trieriens' fondness for meatloaf, nodded. “Then, two servings of Rouen Meatloaf.”

“And a glass of apple punch? It can counteract the richness of the meatloaf.” The bartender sensed a generous customer when Lumian didn't inquire about the price and suggested a slightly pricier drink.

Punch was a fruit juice cocktail. Lumian smiled. “Sure.”

With nearly 200 verl d'or remaining, Lumian didn't need to be overly frugal with his food and drink. In any case, scrimping wouldn't be enough to cover the outstanding payment for information broker Anthony Reid.

“3 licks for each Rouen Meatloaf and 12 licks for the apple punch,” the bartender quickly quoted the price.

Lumian nodded and pulled out a verl d'or silver coin, adorned with a small angel relief and a diffused line on the surface, tossing it to the bartender.

After pocketing the two 5 copper bronze coins in change, he waited patiently.

By then, the female singer on stage had finished her performance, and the band played a slightly intense drumbeat.

Customers flocked to the dance floor, swaying to the rhythm, releasing the day's pressure, fatigue, and pain.

A man sitting nearby grinned at his companion and said, "I love this atmosphere so much. I wonder who invented this kind of gyrating dance. It's far more appealing than the old quadrille! Can you imagine? I'd often have a partner in my arms, only to wait ages for my turn to dance. My enthusiasm would've cooled by then."

The quadrille, or square dancing, involved four men and women forming a square and dancing to a violinist's performance before circling each other. Another man chuckled and said, "I still prefer the Can-can and Striptease." The Can-can, popular in Quartier de la Princesse Rouge, featured high kicks and landing splits as signature moves. When women lined up in short skirts and stockings, kicking high, cheers and thrown coins often followed.

Of course, it was a technically demanding dance. A skilled dancer needed to kick their leg as high as their nose or close to their ears. Lumian absorbed the surrounding sounds, occasionally glancing at the stairs where the cheap cologne scent vanished. Soon, two thick meatloaves and a dreamy, transparent alcoholic beverage with a red top and floating ice cubes arrived.

Lumian sipped the apple punch, refreshed by the sweetness, faint tartness, and smoothness of the alcohol. The ice's coldness invigorated him.

He then bit into the Rouen Meatloaf, unable to resist the blend of unfermented dough's sweetness, minced meat's flavor, oil's aroma, and spices' kick.

After devouring a whole meatloaf, he sipped the apple punch to cleanse his palate. Post-dinner, Lumian clutched his drink, listening to the girl's singing and watching the dance floor crowd.

The feverish atmosphere seemed to affect him as he occasionally swayed to the rhythm at the dimly lit bar counter.

Each time, Lumian would steal a glance at the stairs, monitoring Margot and his subordinates' movements. It was midnight when Margot-clad in a red shirt, leather vest, and sporting short, vertical, light-yellow hair-descended the stairs with three thugs and exited Salle de Gristmill.

Aware that the other party might be a Hunter pathway Beyonder, Lumian didn't follow immediately. He was prepared to lose them since the gang's leather shoes, once soaked in cheap cologne, had been changed. Relying on his sense of smell to track them from a distance was no longer an option. Still, he harbored some hope. He'd noticed that most dance hall customers were too engrossed and frenzied, occasionally spilling alcohol on the floor, creating wet spots from the stairs to the exit.

Swaying to the rhythm, Lumian observed from the corner of his eye that Margot consistently avoided the damp ground. This further solidified his belief that Margot was a Hunter pathway Beyonder.

As for Margot's three subordinates, despite their attempts to dodge the wet areas, their limited observation skills and the dim gas wall lamp lighting led to their feet or heels inevitably getting wet.

For those frequenting bars and dance halls, it was unavoidable. Margot had grown numb to it, not considering it an issue or giving it much thought.

Almost a minute after they left, Lumian rose from the bar counter and stepped out of Salle de Gristmill.

With few pedestrians on the streets, only the occasional drunkard's singing and cursing broke the silence. Ruined gas street lamps cast moonlight providing the main illumination.

a feeble light, with the sky's crimson The four gas wall lamps at the dance hall entrance allowed Lumian to spot numerous Some had long since faded, wet footprints. while others were fresh.

Three sets of footprints appeared in close proximity and consistently at the same time. Upon closer inspection, Lumian discovered a faint, difficult-to-notice set of footprints without any wet stains leading the way. Lumian chuckled, whispering to himself, "Constantly hanging out with fools and vermin will only bring you harm."