

Inevitability 141

Chapter 141 “Hostage”

In the dimly lit corridor, bathed in the eerie glow of the crimson moon, Charlie's voice echoed, sending shivers down one's spine.

Dreaming of Susanna Mattise again? Lumian's alarm gave way to surging anger.

Are you out of your damn mind? If you had that dream again, go to the nearest Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and find a clergyman! I'm not your father to have you report your wet dreams to me!

Casting a glance at Charlie, whose face was a mask of terror, Lumian reined in his emotions and spoke in a low voice, “Relax. This was bound to happen. For now, get some sleep and seek help from the nearest cathedral at dawn.”

Charlie appeared on the verge of tears.

“B-but, in my dream, she said if I dared to seek help from the Church, she'd kill me on my way to the cathedral!”

“You communicated in the dream?” Lumian was taken aback.

Charlie nodded frantically.

“Yes. Before, she never spoke in my dreams. She only satisfied me, warm and gentle. This time, she warned me. She warned me!”

Could it be that Susanna Mattise hasn't fully transformed into a monstrous creature and still possesses some level of intelligence? Lumian's thoughts raced, and he felt a pang of sympathy for Charlie.

If Charlie couldn't get help from official Beyonders, he'd likely end up like the three female victims in Aunett Town, lost in dreams until drained of life.

Hold on, are the official Beyonders handling Charlie's situation so carelessly? Didn't they consider the possibility of Charlie being killed by Susanna Mattise? Lumian instantly thought of Ryan, Leah, and Valentine.

None of them would dismiss the case so casually, merely instructing the victim to rush to a cathedral if he faced any issues.

Remembering how the clergyman from the Church stayed with the lunatic upstairs and protected him after encountering the Montsouris ghost, Lumian grew suspicious.

The official Beyonders overseeing Charlie's case intentionally downplayed the threat posed by Susanna Mattise, allowing him to return to the motel. They claimed the situation was mostly resolved and instructed him to seek help from the cathedral if any issues arose—all to lure Susanna Mattise into revealing herself again!

Realizing this, Lumian looked at Charlie and said coolly, “If you trust me, return to your room, lie down, close your eyes, and sleep until dawn. Don't worry, it'll all be sorted out.”

Lumian appeared unruffled, but inwardly, he was cursing.

Get your ass back to the fifth floor! By now, the official Beyonders monitoring the area should've detected the anomaly and be preparing to act. Why are you standing in front of my door? Are you trying to get me caught?

"I, I..." Charlie hesitated, his eyes filled with terror.

Will everything truly be resolved if I do nothing?

Lumian exhaled and forced a smile.

Lumian resorted to coaxing and deception, desperate for Charlie to leave the second floor.

Charlie's face brightened, and he exclaimed excitedly, "Thank you, thank you!"

The moment he spoke, Lumian caught the scent of vegetation, tainted with an unsettling aroma.

In an instant, greenish-brown vines and branches unfurled from the walls, ceiling, and floor. They sealed the windows and doors of the other rooms.

At the staircase, a woman's voice, both beguiling and unnerving, rang out.

"Charlie, are you really going to betray me?"

Charlie's eyes widened in shock as he turned toward the sound.

He saw the woman from his dreams, her turquoise hair cascading from her head to the floor, reaching out to the surrounding walls and ceiling above, melding with vines and branches.

Without her turquoise hair shrouding her body, Susanna Mattise stood entirely exposed, her beautiful curves on display. Scattered among her flesh were flower buds and tree warts—some red, some white, some green, and some brown.

As she spoke, the vivid flower buds and bluish tree warts opened and closed, oozing a foul-smelling, viscous liquid.

The repulsive scene left Charlie feeling as if he'd plunged into a nightmare. He stood there, trembling, his mind a haze.

Susanna Mattise looked at Charlie, her eyes brimming with affection.

"Have you forgotten our blissful moments in the dream? Charlie, I'm your wife."

Snapping out of his stupor, Charlie nearly crumbled.

"No! No!"

You idiot! Just say something to placate Susanna! Lumian cursed himself for not reacting quickly enough to silence Charlie.

Susanna's expression frosted over.

"Then stay with me forever."

At her words, the terror in Charlie's eyes vanished, replaced by infatuation as he eagerly moved toward the monstrous being.

A moist flower bud on Susanna's lower abdomen opened unnaturally wide, unlike the other flower buds and tree warts that closed slowly.

It seemed to await Charlie.

Simultaneously, Susanna glared at Lumian, her voice seething with hatred, "It's all your fault. You incited Charlie to betray me!"

"Why don't you take a look in the mirror and see how horrifying and repulsive you've become? If I were Charlie, I would've kicked you out of my dream from the start!"

Lumian's instincts told him pleading for mercy was futile. Instead, he chose to retaliate and provoke Susanna, hoping to uncover her weakness.

Merely standing near the bizarre creature, Lumian felt a mix of exhilaration and dread. He longed for her, yet resisted, as if caught in a whirlpool of desire, consumed by an overpowering sense of helplessness.

This proved she was far stronger than him!

Lumian cursed inwardly as his thoughts raced, searching for a way to buy time.

He was sure the official Beyonders would arrive soon!

What in the world is this monster?

Why does she believe she's Charlie's wife?

Wife...

In that instant, as Susanna Mattise screeched, incensed by his words, an idea struck Lumian.

As her scream filled the air, vines and branches surged toward Lumian, amplifying the fear lurking in his heart to the point of near-collapse.

His legs weakened, and his body trembled uncontrollably.

Summoning his ruthlessness, Lumian managed to extend his right hand, grabbing Charlie, who was about to rush toward the creature.

With Fallen Mercury in his left hand, he pressed the sinister dirk to Charlie's throat.

Susanna Mattise looked bewildered, her anger palpable.

"What are you doing?"

Lumian smirked menacingly.

"I forgot to mention, my Beyonder weapon is called Cursed Blade.

"A single cut drawing blood will curse his entire family to death, including his wife.

"And you're Charlie's wife!"

Recalling the lunatic upstairs, Lumian suspected that the Montsouris ghost would target not only one's immediate family but also their spouse.

Although he didn't understand how a spouse was determined in mysticism, since Susanna Mattise claimed to be Charlie's wife, he treated her as such!

Of course, Lumian knew allowing Fallen Mercury to curse Charlie with the fate of the Montsouris ghost wouldn't immediately impact Susanna Mattise. It wouldn't affect the present situation at all.

He gambled that Susanna Mattise didn't know this, and that she could sense the danger in Fallen Mercury.

It was a bluff!

Susanna Mattise's expression froze, and the attacking vines and branches halted midair.

Her jade-green eyes radiated menace.

Lumian's vision shifted. He saw Guillaume Bénét, the hawk-nosed padre clad in a white robe adorned with golden threads.

Suppressed hatred erupted like a volcano.

Lumian released Charlie and advanced toward the "Guillaume Bénét" he had locked onto.

But before him stood only Susanna Mattise.

In that instant, Charlie, his face awash with infatuation, saw Lumian approaching his "wife" with a dirk. He lunged at the assailant, shouting, "Don't hurt her!"

Lumian snapped to his senses, realizing Guillaume Bénét had morphed into Susanna Mattise, her flower buds and tree warts blossoming one by one!

She controlled my emotions? In his shock, Lumian twisted violently, seizing Charlie again and pressing Fallen Mercury to his throat.

Susanna Mattise didn't conceal her disappointment. After a moment's silence, she parted her red lips.

Suddenly, the creature halted, staring solemnly at the wall near Rue Anarchie in Auberge du Coq Doré.

In the next second, her turquoise hair retracted, and the vines and branches disintegrated, vanishing.

Wh— The official Beyonders are here? Lumian watched Susanna Mattise's figure burrow through the wall and disappear from the corridor.

He released Charlie and shook him, urging him to wake up. He quickly instructed,

"Lie down on the second-floor stairs and keep your eyes closed until someone wakes you!"

With that, Lumian pushed Charlie and retreated to his room, closing the wooden door and feigning sleep, like the other tenants.

As Susanna departed, the obsession faded from Charlie's eyes. When Lumian jolted him back to reality, he had no choice but to follow Lumian's directions. He jogged to the staircase leading to the ground floor, lay down, and closed his eyes, feigning unconsciousness.

Almost simultaneously, a red hue filled Charlie and Lumian's vision, as though the sun had risen prematurely, heralding the day.

Minutes later, a golden sword formed from light stabbed into the ground of Rue Anarchie, skewering a writhing turquoise vine.

“Is it resolved?” A young man with the Sun Sacred Emblem pinned to his chest asked the one brandishing the sword.

He was a rugged man with blond hair, golden eyebrows, and a golden beard, wearing a brown coat adorned with two rows of golden buttons.

He exhaled and declared, “We've resolved it for now, but unless we find the origin of this evil spirit, it's only a matter of time before she regenerates there.”

Chapter 142 Mother Tree

“Evil spirits can reform again?” The young man bearing the Sun Sacred Emblem on his chest inquired, astonished.

From his mysticism knowledge and experience gained through case files, he knew that unless an evil spirit possessed unique abilities, purification equated to total annihilation.

Such soul-type entities were either the offspring of powerful Beyonders' deaths or vengeful spirits that managed to break through various constraints. The mightiest could even wield a degree of godhood, but resurrection and rebirth were not among their traits.

The blond man, clad in a double-breasted brown coat, straightened up and eyed the dissipating, writhing vines. After some thought, he said, “Evil spirits can have unique distinctions. Under specific conditions, they rely on an object to be born. This object often lies at the heart of their territory.

“As long as this object remains intact, the evil spirit, even if not entirely purified, will gradually reform within the corresponding area.”

Evil spirits would assimilate their birthplaces, merging with the spirit world and the Underworld to obtain the power necessary to maintain their existence. Otherwise, they would slowly weaken until they vanished completely.

In essence, evil spirits had a fixed range of activity and couldn't wander far from their birthplaces. This was their “territory.”

The young man donned in the Sun Sacred Emblem and a white robe adorned with golden threads roughly grasped the reasoning. He furrowed his brow and said, “We've been searching for days, yet we haven't found the birthplace of the evil spirit, Susanna Matisse.”

Logically, Susanna Matisse couldn't stray far from her territory. If official Beyonders carefully searched Rue Anarchie and its vicinity, they would surely locate the evil spirit's birthplace and destroy the object it depended on.

However, this was Trier, a city with not only an above-ground area but also an underground section. Another Rue Anarchie and Le March du Quartier du Gentleman mirrored the area above, with numerous obscure paths and empty spaces.

More crucially, deeper underground, lay Trier from the Fourth Epoch. Even for official Beyonders, it was a perilous place they scarcely comprehended.

As a deacon of Le March du Quartier du Gentleman's Inquisition, Angoulme de Franois had never understood why Trier had been rebuilt atop the original site, right above the sunken Trier of the Fourth Epoch, in the late era.

Although geographically ideal, this decision had spawned countless troubles over the ensuing thousand years.

The Purifiers weren't incapable of resolving the Beyonder incidents; they just couldn't get to the root of the problem, hidden within the underground ruins of the Fourth Epoch's Trier.

Rumor had it that not even Demigods dared or were willing to venture into those depths.

Angoulme sheathed his golden longsword, which seemed to be condensed light, into a grayish-white, steam-powered humanoid head contraption, allowing it to sink into the corresponding "vertebrae."

Dark liquid seemed to fill the device.

A man in a white suit, yellow vest, and light-colored shirt, adorned with the Sun Sacred Emblem, emerged from Auberge du Coq Dor.

His light-yellow hair was neatly combed, skin-colored tape covered the bridge of his nose, and his lips were thick. A hint of a Southern Continent ancestry showed through his slightly brown skin.

"Deacon, I've spoken to Charlie Collent," he reported to Angoulme de Franois.

Angoulme touched the golden button on his brown coat, asking, "Is he alright?"

The brown-skinned man shook his head, replying, "We arrived just in time. He wasn't physically harmed.

"According to him, after he dreamed of Susanna Matisse again, although she warned him, he still chose to seek help. He was intercepted by Susanna Matisse on the second floor of the motel and almost became one with her forever. At least, that's what she said.

"After that, Charlie collapsed at the staircase and almost fainted. At that moment, he saw a light like the sun rising."

This development seemed normal and reasonable, aligning with the details provided by the Purifier elite team led by Angoulme. Neither Angoulme nor the other two Purifiers had any doubts.

In their understanding, Charlie's request for help was in accordance with their instructions to head to the nearest Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral.

Angoulme surveyed the unusually quiet Rue Anarchie and nodded slightly.

"For now, let's put Charlie Collent aside. But if we don't find Susanna Matisse's birthplace in two weeks, consider arranging a civilian job for him and telling him the truth."

This was the standard procedure used by official Beyonders to protect ordinary people who had yet to fully escape the influence of Beyonder events.

Of course, it often appeared they had resolved the problem and informed the victim to live peacefully, only for the person to die mysteriously weeks, months, or years later.

Angoulme continued, "We have two priorities. First, investigate this area, including the underground, to find Susanna Matisse's birthplace. Second, locate the person who warned us with the letter. He seems to have deep knowledge of Susanna Matisse."

Before releasing Charlie, Angoulme and his team had secretly investigated Auberge du Coq Dor but found no suspicious areas that could be the birthplace of the evil spirit.

Additionally, they had used Beyonder methods to verify Charlie's encounter and confession. They confirmed that the victim had interacted with ordinary people from the moment he prayed to Susanna Matisse until he was arrested by the police.

That was why Angoulme suggested not to worry about Charlie's situation for the time being.

As for the sender, he had impressive methods and extensive anti-divination and anti-tracking experience. He had chosen to use a spirit world creature to write and send the letter.

It was worth noting that even when using the same descriptive incantation to summon a spirit world creature, a different one would likely appear each time.

The challenge with using just a three-line description was that it could potentially match hundreds of thousands of spirit world creatures, if not more. What they could summon each time relied solely on chance.

Without a corresponding medium and a description that highlighted the subject's unique traits, it was nearly impossible to zero in on the target spirit using the incantation alone. Most spirit world creatures simply weren't distinctive enough.

Angoulme had previously sought the help of colleagues adept in such matters. Employing the letter as a medium, he tried summoning the associated spirit world creature, hoping to glean any clues from it. Alas, whether it was the letter's transcriber, author, or sender, they came up empty-handed.

The issue could have been a flaw in the descriptive statement, or perhaps the corresponding spirit world creature sensed their ill intentions and refused the summoning.

Even with a flawless summoning ritual, it could still fail if the spirit world creatures fitting the description declined to respond. Only those Sequences skilled in summoning could significantly boost the odds or even force the issue. Naturally, Beyonders rarely faced such obstacles. Their three-line descriptions cast a wide net, ensnaring numerous spirit world creatures, with a handful always eager to enter the real world and absorb some spirituality.

Lumian feigned sleep, poised to flee at a moment's notice.

It wasn't until the nearby cathedral clock struck six that he allowed himself a sigh of relief.

Seems like the battle between the official Beyonders and Susanna Matisse has ended. They didn't even realize I briefly confronted her Lumian rolled out of bed and rubbed his face.

He couldn't be certain if the official Beyonders had completely neutralized Susanna Matisse or if this ordeal was truly over.

Recalling Susanna's intense hatred for him, Lumian knew he couldn't rely on hope alone.

He decided to write a letter to Madam Magician, reporting his encounter with Mr. K and inquiring about Susanna Mattise's nature and weaknesses.

For good measure, he also planned to ask Hela, the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society's vice president after all, Madam Magician wasn't all-knowing.

By the time he finished washing up and returned to Room 207, there were already two replies waiting silently on the wooden table.

Wow, Madam Magician is quick too. Did the messengers run into each other? If so, what would they talk about? Lumian muttered, picking up one of the replies.

The letter was from Hela.

“Similar cases have occurred in the Northern and Southern Continents. Men and women often dreamed of the opposite sex and engaged in intimate acts, ultimately dying from exhaustion.

“If the victims have partners or lovers, these innocents are killed one by one by creatures like Susanna Mattise. These creatures seem to believe they're the dreamer's spouse.

“Such creatures are said to possess powerful abilities on par with Mid-Sequence Beyonders.

“Some details suggest Susanna may have already died, becoming a vengeful or evil spirit”

It is indeed quite powerful Lumian recalled his encounter the previous night, realizing that without Fallen Mercury's deterrence, Charlie as a “hostage,” and Susanna's conviction that she was Charlie's wife, he might have been defeated within a minute.

After burning Hela's reply with a flame conjured from his spirituality, Lumian unfolded Madam Magician's letter.

“I'm unsure whether to congratulate or commiserate with you. Your chances of encountering an evil god's Blessed seem higher than those of ordinary Beyonders. This may be due to the corruption sealed within you.

“It's difficult to explain this phenomenon using the law of convergence of Beyonder characteristics. It's more like repulsive forces rejected by this world, attracting each other.

“That's my theory. I can't guarantee its accuracy. If I'm wrong, don't forget to inform me and provide the correct answer.

“Based on your account, I suspect Susanna was once a believer of an evil god, who bestowed her with strength equivalent to a Sequence 5.

“That evil god goes by the pseudonym Mother Tree of Desire in this world. Don't attempt to understand Her, let alone guess Her true and complete title.

“Susanna is likely a Fallen Tree Spirit or Spirit of Lust, also known as Baby Cupid in some regions. They can appear as men or women, engaging in intimate acts within dreams and absorbing the victim's energy. Over time, their possessiveness leads them to believe they're the victim's spouse, driving them to kill the victim's partner or lover in a fit of jealousy.

“However, Susanna also exhibited traits of a soul-type entity. It's highly plausible she met her demise in an accident or failed to endure the boon, morphing into an evil spirit. She grew increasingly paranoid, clinging to her instincts.”

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Having briefly outlined the nature and territorial tendencies of malevolent spirits, the woman known as Magician continued,

“Though Susanna Mattise's power is on par with a Sequence 5, it's not impossible for you to handle her. You could use the dirk on Charlie and swap your fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost with his. After the Montsouris ghost kills Susanna Mattise, you can transfer the fate of encountering it back into the knife.

“Alright, that was a joke. This plan has far too many uncertainties. It's virtually impossible to pull off.

“Firstly, the Montsouris ghost might only kill those who come across it.

“Secondly, even if the Montsouris ghost does kill Susanna Mattise, you won't know. You wouldn't be able to change fate in time without affecting Charlie.

“Thirdly, Charlie shouldn't be an orphan. His parents and siblings might still be alive. No one knows if the Montsouris ghost will leave Trier to kill.

“Fourthly, the Montsouris ghost might not be able to kill Susanna Mattise.

“Fifthly, Charlie himself admitted that he and Susanna are mystically bound as husband and wife.

“I'm saying all of this mainly to discourage you from going down that path. Using Charlie as a 'hostage' suggests that you're inclined to take such risks.

“Actually, this situation presents both a crisis and an opportunity.

“For you, the best solution is to ask Mr. K for help in dealing with the threat posed by Susanna Mattise.

“Remember, asking for help is an effective way to build relationships and earn someone's trust. Of course, the other party must be willing and capable.

“You can showcase your potential and make Mr. K see that you're valuable.

“I wish you the best of luck. I hope you can quickly gain Mr. K's initial trust and join that organization.”

Lumian's initial reaction to the letter was that Madam Magician tended to ramble and digress. She seemed to enjoy finding lofty excuses and often entertained far-fetched notions bordering on absurdity. This contrasted sharply with Madam Hela's succinct and polished reply.

This writing style must be Madam Magician's trademark... Lumian pursed his lips, summoned his spiritual energy, and ignited a flame, burning the paper in his hand.

After reading the two letters, he discarded the idea of using Fallen Mercury to resolve his issue with Susanna Mattise. Their fates had been entwined for more than just a brief moment. It couldn't be as simple as erasing the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost.

In comparison, seeking Mr. K's assistance was indeed an effective solution Lumian hadn't considered.

This could quickly bridge the gap between him and Mr. K, fulfilling Madam Magician's mission.

After contemplating for a moment and determining how to approach Mr. K and demonstrate his worth, Lumian changed into a grayish-blue worker's uniform, put on a dark-blue cap, and left Room 207.

Upon reaching the ground floor, Lumian saw Charlie lingering near the entrance, wearing a linen shirt and black pants.

“What are you up to?” he asked with a grin.

Charlie forced a smile.

The establishment's official name was Pawnbroker Shop or Pawnshop Company.

“To the pawnshop?” Lumian sidled up to Charlie and lowered his voice. “Are you alright?”

Charlie glanced around and gave a bitter smile.

“They said there's no problem this time. Susanna, that evil spirit, has been purified.

“Whether there's an issue or not, life has to go on. Haha, I heard that from a hotel guest. Sounds pretty sophisticated, right?”

“Anyway, for people like us, a day without work puts us on the brink of financial ruin. We'd soon be hungry again. I have to pawn the diamond necklace for cash. You know, only cash gives people a sense of security. Clothes and jewelry can't do that. Even food is lacking!”

At this point, Charlie's excitement grew.

“Madame Alice said the necklace is worth 1,500 verl d'or. If I pawn it, I should get around 1,000.

“My god. I've never seen 1,000 verl d'or before. Even if I become an attendant foreman, it'd take me years, maybe more than a decade, to save that much!

“When it's time, we'll have lunch at a café on Rue des Blouses Blanches. I want DuVar broth, coarse salt beef in red wine sauce, and apple tenderloin!”

Did you learn nothing else at Hôtel du Cygne Blanc, just the names of dishes? Lumian grumbled and asked thoughtfully, “You want me to protect you?”

Charlie laughed.

“I'd be scared carrying that much money alone. Ciel, you might not have had that experience yet—thinking everyone's a thief who'll rob you on the streets.

“I felt that way when I got the necklace. I was so nervous, I nearly passed out. Can you imagine?”

“Yes.” Lumian smiled. “I probably won't have that experience. Not now, not ever, because I'm the one who makes others think I want to rob them.”

Take Margot, for example, who had just forked over more than 1,000 verl d'or, nearly enough to buy the diamond necklace!

Charlie's smile froze.

After a few seconds, he forced a smile and said, “That's why I want you to come with me to the pawnshop.”

He had seriously doubted Ciel's means of making money. His neighbor was clearly capable and smart, but he wasn't rushing to find a job. He roamed around daily, seemingly without money troubles, but lived at Auberge du Coq Doré, not Hôtel du Cygne Blanc.

Remembering how Ciel had posed as a lawyer to infiltrate the police station, provided vital information, and helped him survive Susanna Mattise's threat, Charlie felt it was a small concern.

Even if Ciel's a thief, robber, or con artist, he's one who risked his life to help me!

Pleased with Charlie's apprehensive expression, Lumian asked, grinning, “Which pawnshop are you going to?”

“I heard the pawnshops in Quartier de l'Observatoire offer better prices.” Charlie had already decided.

Lumian nodded.

“I'm actually headed to Quartier de l'Observatoire.”

He planned to ask Osta Trul for Mr. K's contact information.

Charlie was thrilled. He spent a whopping 1 verl d'or to treat Lumian to a barbecue pie, cream bun, and plum wine. Naturally, this included his own portion.

Lumian graciously accepted.

Exiting Rue Anarchie, Charlie winced when he saw Lumian heading straight for the public carriage sign.

He glanced around, making sure no one was nearby, and whispered,

“Last night, you said your blade was called the Cursed Blade. Will anyone cut by it really have their entire family die?”

Before meeting Susanna Mattise, Charlie never believed in such things. Even if he had heard about them, they were just fodder for boasting and tall tales. But now, he couldn't help but wonder if Ciel truly wielded a mystical weapon.

Lumian turned to Charlie and grinned.

“Want to give it a try?”

Charlie shuddered and smiled sheepishly. “I believe you.”

“Do you? Well, I was just bluffing Susanna Mattise last night. I'm just an ordinary guy. If I hadn't, I'd be dead!” Lumian said, still smiling. “Doesn't the Cursed Blade story I made up ring a bell? You've heard of the Montsouris ghost legend when that maniac was having his bout of clarity, right?”

Charlie's eyes widened in realization.

That's it! It's a spin on the Montsouris ghost legend!

Ciel is a master of deception. An ordinary person managed to fool that malevolent spirit, Susanna Mattise, and saved our lives!

I only spin tall tales in bars and occasionally lie. I can't even begin to compare to him.

He's got guts and smarts. A person like that is destined to make it big!

Seeing that Charlie genuinely believed the lie he'd just spun, Lumian did his best to keep a straight face.

He asked earnestly, “Are your parents still alive? Do you have siblings?”

“...” Charlie was taken aback and leaped to the side like a spooked rabbit. “Why do you ask?”

Could it be that the Cursed Blade is real? Is he trying to figure out which family members I have?

Lumian couldn't contain his laughter anymore.

“You're not actually scared, are you? Aren't you too easily pranked?”

Charlie slapped his forehead, exasperated with the thought of the Idiot Instrument.

He couldn't distinguish which of Ciel's words were false and which were true.

However, after being pranked, he felt even more certain that the Cursed Blade was fake and based on the Montsouris ghost legend.

Ciel loves using such fabrications to fool others, just like the Idiot Instrument.

Hmm... The Cursed Blade story is a good one. Now that it's mine, I'll use it at the bar tonight to spook people!

The two of them arrived at Quartier de l'Observatoire in a public carriage. Charlie asked for directions several times before finally finding Phil's Pawnbroker Shop.

Housed in a seven-story off-white building, it featured pillars, arches, relief sculptures, and large windows.

Etched above the grand entrance were the words: "Freedom, equality, fraternity"

Freedom to pawn any item; equality to discriminate against anyone who comes to pawn something? Fraternity to seize every opportunity to lowball prices? Lumian couldn't help but criticize.

How ridiculous for a pawnshop to carve the Republic's political slogan on their door?

Inside the hall, there were several counters, with rows of benches in front of them.

At the moment, dozens of people sat there, waiting for the clerk to appraise their items and call their number.

Charlie easily found an empty counter and handed over the diamond necklace. He received a slip with the item's name and corresponding number for appraisal.

Soon, Charlie's number was called from the counter.

He walked over with anticipation, only to return looking as if his spirit had been crushed.

Lumian, who was browsing newspapers in the hall, asked in confusion, "What's wrong?"

Charlie spoke in a daze, his voice tinged with disappointment, "That necklace, that necklace is a fake. It's only worth 12 verl d'or..."

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Fake? Lumian's right eyebrow twitched, as if fate was mercilessly mocking Charlie.

Charlie had forsaken his fragile principles and bedded Madame Alice for days, only to get embroiled in a life-threatening lawsuit and lose his job as an apprentice attendant—all for a counterfeit diamond necklace?

For some reason, Lumian felt a sudden urge to defy fate.

This wasn't his problem, but he couldn't shake the feeling.

To hell with this inevitable destiny!

You mock me, so I'll mock and provoke you in return!

In that moment, Lumian began to grasp another aspect of the Provoker's acting principles, albeit crudely and imprecisely.

He eyed Charlie and asked thoughtfully, “Do you think Madam Alice lied to you, or did the pawnshop see your desperate situation, knowing you couldn't determine the necklace's authenticity, and use it as an excuse to offer the lowest possible price?”

“I-I don't know.” Charlie was at a loss and in pain.

After a pause, he added with difficulty, “I suspect it's Madame Alice. Look, there are so many people here pawning their items. Appraisers handle dozens or hundreds of items every day, most of them valuable. They can't just lie to me, right?”

“H-how could she...”

Charlie couldn't go on.

Can't pawnshops deceive everyone equally? Lowballing the offer as much as possible, especially for the pricey items? Lumian scoffed.

“Why not?”

“Many wealthy people don't amass fortunes through kindness and hard work. If they can trick you with a fake, why give you the real deal?”

“Maybe Madame Alice is one of those people. She might not even be that rich. She relied on staying at the Hôtel du Cygne Blanc to dupe a gullible lad like you.”

Lumian didn't distrust every rich person. Many had made their fortunes through talent, hard work, and opportunity—like Aurore.

Stung by Lumian's words, Charlie's face twisted with anger.

He muttered to himself bitterly, “That's right. During this time, Madame Alice hasn't even treated me to a big meal. She only calls me to her room at seven or eight at night for... service.”

You're so naive. Are you really from Reem? Lumian couldn't help but facepalm.

He stood up and said, “Get that necklace back. Let's try another pawnshop. What if it's real?”

Charlie was taken aback.

“Alright, alright!”

Lumian urged him, “Be vigilant. We can't let them switch the necklace.”

“Yes.” Charlie tried his best to rally. “I've been studying that necklace daily recently and memorized every detail!”

After retrieving the diamond necklace, Lumian accompanied Charlie to two other pawnshops in Quartier de l'Observatoire.

The appraisal results were the same as before. The necklace was fake and worth only 11 to 15 verl d'or.

Charlie's frustration mounted, and he crumbled.

Lumian glanced at him and consoled, “At least you can get a dozen verl d'or. It'll last you more than a week. With the money, you can buy drinks for waiters at cafés on Rue des Blouses Blanches and ask them to help you find a new job.”

Including rent, Charlie spent about 1 verl d'or a day. If he skipped the underground bar, his expenses would be even less.

“Yeah...” Charlie sighed.

He was utterly disappointed. But after accepting reality, he found a glimmer of hope.

Lumian hesitated before suggesting, “We can't dismiss other possibilities. For instance, the pawnshops around here might have secret ways of communicating. They could specifically target people like you—those who don't dress well and pawn valuable items without proper documentation. How about taking the necklace to a specialized jewelry shop for appraisal?”

“We'd have to pay a fee.” Charlie's face clouded with worry.

If the appraisal confirmed its authenticity, that would be great. But if it turned out to be fake, his already meager assets would be reduced by a third or even half.

Lumian sighed and offered, “Hand me the diamond necklace, and I'll find a friend to appraise it for you—one who won't charge.

“You've still got some cash to get you through the day, right?”

“I have 2.6 verl d'or left.” With hope in his eyes, Charlie handed the diamond necklace to Lumian.

As Lumian pocketed the necklace, he grinned and asked, “Are you not worried that the appraisal might prove it genuine, but I'll return a fake one to you and claim there's no issue with the pawnshops' assessment?”

“...” Charlie's face tensed once more.

After a moment, he exhaled and admitted, “I trust you. Besides, I've already written it off as a fake.”

Lumian waved goodbye to Charlie and strode toward Place du Purgatoire.

Near the catacombs, Osta Trul occupied his customary seat facing the bonfire, clad in a hooded black robe.

Lumian approached and asked with a hint of amusement, “Don't you ever change areas?”

Osta chuckled and replied, “My divination and interpretation skills are fairly accurate. Many people have introduced their friends. If I switch locations, wouldn't I lose my clientele? They're all verl d'or!”

“What do you mean by clientele? They're clearly a bunch of fools,” Lumian half-jokingly and mockingly remarked.

Osta didn't dare to argue.

Lumian inquired, “I need to discuss something with Mr. K. How can I reach him?”

So he's not here for me... Osta sighed in relief and quickly answered, "Anyone who has attended the gathering can go straight to Psychic's headquarters, located in the building where our gathering took place. At 19 Rue Scheer, knock on Room 103 with three long, two short, and one long beats. Someone will take you to see Mr. K."

"If you don't want to go in person, you can send a letter. Address it to Room 103, 19 Rue Scheer, Avenue du Boulevard. The recipient is Guillaume Pierre."

What a fake name... The knocking rhythm differs from the gathering's... Mr. K never told me this. Did he think Osta would inform me? Lumian nodded, bid Osta farewell, and returned above ground.

At the catacombs' entrance, he spotted a group of visitors carrying lit white candles, following the administrator through the naturally formed arch and into the Death Empire.

Withdrawing his gaze, Lumian took a public carriage to 19 Rue Scheer on Avenue du Boulevard.

He lowered his cap and knocked on Room 103.

The dark-red wooden door creaked open, revealing a handsome young man with shoulder-length brown hair, resembling an artist.

The lad scrutinized Lumian with his dark brown eyes for a couple of seconds.

"Who are you looking for?"

"I'm Ciel. I need to speak with Mr. K," Lumian replied bluntly.

The young man cocked his head slightly, as if listening for a faint sound.

Soon, he instructed Lumian, "Follow me."

The lad led him to a vintage-styled room and unveiled a secret door hidden within the dressing area.

A staircase descended underground, its walls on either side adorned with gas lamps encased in black grids.

Lumian entered the basement and traversed a short corridor before reaching a rather barren chamber.

He suspected other exits were present, some possibly connecting to areas in Underground Trier.

At that moment, Mr. K lounged in a red armchair, his face concealed by the shadow of his large hood.

The gathering's organizer studied Lumian wordlessly, exuding an unnerving air of intimidation.

Lumian pressed down on his cap and smiled.

"Good morning, Mr. K. I require your assistance.

"The price I'll have to pay is your call."

Mr. K remained silent for a few seconds before inquiring in a deep, raspy tone, "Does the Poison Spur Mob know you killed Margot?"

As expected... Lumian wasn't surprised that Mr. K had information on him.

When he attended the gathering, he deliberately wrapped his face in bandages to recreate his appearance when he killed Margot. He wanted Mr. K to be aware of it and display his worth and impulsive nature.

This could also help “earn” Mr. K's trust.

Lumian shook his head.

“It's another problem...”

Lumian recounted his encounter with Charlie and how he had helped him escape his predicament, only to be despised by Susanna Mattise and nearly killed by that peculiar creature. Fortunately, the official Beyonders had arrived in time. He didn't lie, but he didn't share too many details either.

This aligned with the information he sought at the gathering.

Mr. K listened intently and asked in a low voice, “You want divine protection?”

Divine protection? Aren't you overestimating yourself? Just protection! Lumian thought silently and nodded solemnly.

“Yes.”

Mr. K rasped, “That creature is likely a soul-type being, akin to an evil spirit. Normally, it wouldn't affect you as long as you leave the market district. However, the official Beyonders have clearly taken an interest in this matter. If you move now, you might arouse suspicion. Moreover, if Susanna Mattise remembers or even marks you, you could be attacked anywhere. Many abilities can surpass distance limitations. There's no need for the creature to truly leave its territory.”

No wonder the two ladies didn't suggest I leave... Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

“What should I do then?”

Mr. K spoke deliberately, “I can offer some protection, but you need to do something for me.”

“What is it?” Lumian inquired “eagerly.”

Mr. K clasped his hands together and said, “Join any gang in the market district and become a leader.”

So the organization behind Mr. K wants to control the market district indirectly? Lumian agreed without hesitation, “No problem!”

Mr. K nodded slowly and held his left index finger with his right hand.

Then, he yanked the finger off, exposing a bloody wound and ghostly white bones.

Lumian winced at the sight.

Surprisingly, no blood flowed from Mr. K's wound or finger. Instead, it hovered at the edge, twisting and contracting as it gradually “healed.”

“Take this with you. It can help you in critical moments.” Mr. K tossed the severed finger to Lumian.

The flesh on his fingerless left hand writhed violently, as though a new digit was about to sprout.

Chapter 145 Service Fee

Lumian deftly extended his right hand, snatching the severed finger from the air.

Feeling its weight and the warmth that hadn't yet dissipated, he was both surprised and disturbed.

He had anticipated Mr. K would offer some form of protection, but he hadn't expected the man to rip off his own finger and toss it to him, claiming it could prove helpful in a tight spot!

Was this some kind of sick joke?

Setting aside the dubious utility of a severed digit, didn't Mr. K worry about the potential consequences of handing over a piece of his own flesh?

In the world of mysticism, one's flesh and blood held significant power. In the wrong hands, they could lead to disastrous consequences.

No one wanted to become the target of a horrifying curse without reason!

Given Mr. K's formidable abilities and his knowledge of mysticism, to the point of being able to act as a Notary, Lumian suspected the man had a way to nullify the various dangers associated with parting with his flesh. That was why he had dared to sever his own finger and hand it over.

Moreover, the detached finger was clearly imbued with magic.

I wonder if I can trade the prospect of meeting the Montsouris ghost with Mr. K by using Fallen Mercury, drawing blood when cutting this finger... As Cordu's Prankster King, Lumian was never short of unconventional ideas.

Suppressing the urge, he shifted his gaze from the finger back to Mr. K.

By now, Mr. K had regenerated a new finger, slightly damp and covered in delicate, fair skin.

"Thank you," Lumian murmured, stowing the severed finger in the pocket of his slate-blue workman's uniform.

Mr. K gave a curt nod and said, "You may leave. Don't forget our agreement."

"One more thing." Lumian produced the diamond necklace. "Could you help me determine if it's real or fake? I need to exchange it for some cash."

He already owed Mr. K a favor; he didn't mind owing a little more.

And if he couldn't repay the debt? At worst, he'd sell himself to the organization behind Mr. K!

That was Lumian's endgame.

Mr. K directed the attendant who had led Lumian underground to pass the diamond necklace to him and examined it.

From the corner of his eye, Lumian could see a golden glow emanating from the shadows beneath Mr. K's hood.

After a few seconds, Mr. K handed the necklace back to the attendant.

"It's a fake. The craftsmanship is quite impressive, though. It's worth 50 verl d'or."

“Alright.” Lumian didn't bother hiding his disappointment, adding, “I also need a set of identification papers.”

After receiving Mr. K's affirmation, Lumian left 19 Rue Scheer and caught a public carriage back to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. His thoughts bounced between joining a gang without raising suspicion, pondering the purpose of the severed finger, and devising ways to get pawnshops to pay more for the counterfeit diamond necklace—at least 30 verl d'or...

Amid these thoughts, an idea began to crystallize.

Simultaneously, he planned to find a couple of safe houses in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique before noon—the kind that didn't require identification.

I still have 850 verl d'or and 24 coppet on me. After setting aside the remaining 400 for the information broker Anthony Reid, I'll have 450 verl d'or left. I can rent two or three safe houses... Lumian carefully calculated his remaining assets.

He pursed his lips, feeling an urgency to leave Mr. K's severed finger at Auberge du Coq Doré before securing a room.

By 3 p.m., Lumian had found rooms in both Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman on Rue des Blouses Blanches, and Quartier du Jardin Botanique on Rue des Pavés—neither of which required identification.

Naturally, there was a surcharge for such discretion. The former was hardly better than Room 207 at Auberge du Coq Doré, costing 6 verl d'or per week. The latter, more akin to Osta Trul's rented apartment, neighbored factory workers from the south and cost 10 verl d'or per week.

Lumian paid four weeks' rent upfront but received no discounts.

Returning to Auberge du Coq Doré, he skimmed through Men's Aesthetics for a while, using cosmetics to soften his sharp features, add shadows, and trim his eyebrows.

Soon, Lumian had completed his initial disguise, transforming into an ordinary-looking man in his mid-twenties with a dangerous air.

After combing his golden-black hair, he donned a dark blue cap, took Mr. K's severed finger, and made his way to Salle de Bal Brise on Avenue du Marché.

Unlike other guests, he didn't enter directly. Instead, he stopped between the khaki building and the white spherical statue made of countless skulls, addressing the two gangsters guarding the entrance, “I need to see Baron Brignais.”

Without waiting for their response, he added, “Tell the baron it's Ciel, from our last meeting. He'll be pleased to see me again.”

The two gangsters exchanged glances, not daring to delay the baron's business. One of them entered the ballroom.

In under five minutes, the gang member reemerged, telling Lumian, “The baron wants you to meet him where you last saw him.”

The café on the second floor? Lumian smirked. With hands in his pockets, he sauntered up the stairs and entered Salle de Bal Brise, spotting Baron Brignais with a mahogany-colored pipe.

The gentleman sported a black, thin tweed suit, a half top hat nearby, and a gleaming ring on his left hand. Four thugs flanked him.

“Sit.” Baron Brignais's brown eyes scanned the room, his smile indicating the seat across the table.

Lumian approached and sat, studying Baron Brignais's sharp features and naturally curly brown hair, and said, “Good afternoon. We meet again.”

Baron Brignais tapped the pipe's base, smiling as he asked, “What brings you here?”

Lumian produced Charlie's counterfeit diamond necklace, calmly stating,

“I've been strapped for cash and want to pawn this necklace to you. It's worth 1,500 verl d'or. I'll take 1,000.”

Baron Brignais turned to a subordinate, commanding, “Get someone to appraise it.”

“Yes, Baron.” A thug with conspicuous bruises on his forehead left the café.

Brignais appraised Lumian again, nodding in approval.

“Not bad. Your makeup skills have come a long way. Although still flawed, you're no longer as easy to recognize.”

“Thanks for the tip,” Lumian grinned. “Men's Aesthetics is quite the resource.”

They exchanged small talk until the thug who had left the café returned with a man in his forties, dressed in a formal suit and bow tie, carrying a toolbox.

After assessing the necklace, the man approached Baron Brignais, set the necklace on the table, and whispered, “It's fake.”

Instantly, all the thugs present drew their revolvers.

Baron Brignais observed Lumian, who appeared unfazed by the appraiser's declaration or the thugs' actions.

His grin never wavered as he nodded to the appraiser, “You may leave.”

“Yes, Baron.” The appraiser hurriedly exited the café.

Baron Brignais set down his mahogany pipe, playing with the diamond ring on his left hand. He asked Lumian, still smiling, “Were you aware this necklace was counterfeit?”

Lumian smiled as well.

“Indeed.”

Before he could finish, the thugs aimed their revolvers at him.

Intrigued by Lumian's composure, Baron Brignais inquired, “Did you anticipate I'd have someone verify the necklace's authenticity?”

Lumian's grin remained steady.

“Indeed.”

Baron Brignais's eyes narrowed.

“Knowing all this, why would you still attempt to borrow 1,000 verl d'or with a fake necklace?”

“What makes you think I'd grant your request?”

Lumian slowly rose, disregarding the revolvers aimed at him. He placed his hands on the table's edge, leaned down to meet Baron Brignais's gaze, and smirked.

“Because I killed Margot of the Poison Spur Mob.”

Baron Brignais's smile froze.

His pupils involuntarily dilated as if to scrutinize the man before him.

The four thugs, their revolvers aimed at Lumian, also reacted with shock.

As enemies of the Poison Spur Mob, they knew Margot's capabilities all too well.

Lumian's emotionless gaze scanned the thugs' faces, causing them to avert their eyes and, unconsciously, their weapons.

Baron Brignais recovered quickly, addressing the four thugs, “Holster your revolvers! Have I not taught you how to treat guests?”

Reprimanding his subordinates, he turned to Lumian, curiosity piqued, “How did you manage to kill Margot?”

“I stabbed him with something poisonous, but I don't know where he fled before succumbing,” Lumian replied nonchalantly.

This aligned with the preliminary intel Baron Brignais had received. Eyes narrowing, he asked with a grin, “Do you understand the implications of taking my 1,000 verl d'or?”

Lumian smirked, unfazed.

“Indeed.”

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 504.

Upon seeing Lumian outside the door, Charlie eagerly inquired, “So, is it the real deal?”

“It's a fake. Worth no more than 50 verl d'or,” Lumian casually replied as he entered the room.

He noticed that Charlie had already ripped off Susanna Mattise's portrait, leaving behind a sticky residue.

Charlie, having mentally braced himself for the outcome, was disappointed but not crushed. He chuckled self-deprecatingly, “Well, it's still worth 50 verl d'or at least. A generous pawnshop might give me 20 for it.”

Lumian shot him a glance and grinned.

“But I managed to sell the fake necklace for 1,000 verl d'or.”

“What?” Charlie was dumbstruck.

Lumian pulled out a thick wad of bills, still smiling.

“The fake necklace is yours and worth 50 verl d'or. That's all I can offer you. The rest is my fee for services rendered. Is that acceptable?”

Chapter 146 Turf

Charlie was dumbstruck and answered subconsciously, “No problem.”

Only when Lumian laid out the 50 verl d'or notes did he snap back to reality. He cautiously peeked out the door.

The evening light was fading, and unlike the second floor, the fifth floor had large balconies on both sides, casting deep shadows. It was as if night had already descended.

Seeing the corridor empty, Charlie breathed a sigh of relief. He lowered his voice and asked Lumian, “You conned someone into buying the fake necklace for 1,000 verl d'or?”

“You've got two things wrong.” Lumian grinned and handed the stack of 50 verl d'or notes to Charlie. “First, I didn't con just any person.”

“Then who?” Charlie questioned, puzzled as he instinctively took the mix of 1 and 5 verl d'or notes.

Lumian's grin broadened.

“The Savoie Mob.”

Hearing this, Charlie nearly dropped the banknotes in his hand.

He stared at Lumian in terror and blurted, “Are you insane?”

“They kill people. Folks go missing all the time on Rue Anarchie!”

Lumian smirked and replied, “Second, it wasn't a con.”

“What?” Charlie couldn't follow Lumian's logic.

Lumian clarified, still smiling, “They knew the necklace was a fake, yet they still forked over 1,000 verl d'or.”

Impossible, Charlie thought, certain it was a joke.

The Savoie Mob might be ruthless, but they weren't idiots. Why would they pay 1,000 verl d'or for a fake necklace worth only 50 verl d'or?

Then, a wild thought crossed Charlie's mind.

“You didn't steal the leadership from the Savoie Mob, did you?”

That would be even more insane!

Lumian smirked again.

“Relax. Baron Brignais and I reached an agreement through a friendly conversation.

“Don't worry. There won't be any trouble in the future.

“So, do you want the 50 verl d'or or not?”

Considering his own financial situation, he took the 50 verl d'or and muttered,

“Thank you.”

Lumian nodded with a smile and turned to go.

In that instant, Charlie grasped the whole picture and blurted out, “Did you join the Savoie Mob?”

Lumian didn't turn around. He waved his hand and replied, “That's right.”

Charlie opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. He watched Lumian's silhouette vanish into the darkness outside and disappear down the shadowy staircase.

Upon returning to Room 207, Lumian, fresh out of his disguise and ready to hunt for a tasty meal, caught a familiar curse coming from the fourth floor.

“If you think this money is easy, you can lie down and earn it yourself!”

“Useless coward. A dickless wretch; all you dare to do is bully women!”

“Send your mother to me if you dare!”

“...”

Lumian listened for a few seconds and quickly deduced that Wilson from the Poison Spur Mob had come to Ethans with his crew to collect “protection money.”

A grin spread across his face.

In the next instant, Lumian donned a dark-blue cap, left Room 207, and made his way to the fourth floor.

Before he could reach Room 408, he heard the sharp crack of a slap followed by Ethans's even more vehement cursing and struggle.

The tenants on this floor shut their wooden doors tight, not daring to step out.

With one hand in his pocket, Lumian arrived outside Room 408. The first thing he noticed was the presence of two goons.

They were clad in dark jackets, blocking the doorway.

At this moment, Ethans's curses blended with sobs and screams.

“You sons of bitches!

“I curse you!

“I'll rip off your dicks!”

Lumian raised an eyebrow and approached the two thugs at the door.

“What do you want?” one of them barked.

Lumian didn't reply. Instead, he took a sudden step forward, reaching out to grab them.

His movements were so swift that he had the two thugs by the back of their heads before they could react.

Lumian applied force, slamming their skulls together.

With a sickening thud, their foreheads bulged, eyes rolled back, and they crumpled to the ground.

As they “cleared the way,” Lumian glimpsed the scene inside the room.

Ethans, her flaxen hair and delicate features in disarray, lay on the bed. Her dress was torn, her face visibly bruised and swollen. Wilson, his curly brown hair and deeply creased face sneering, was pocketing a stack of banknotes. His belt unbuckled, another thug was holding Ethans down.

Sensing the disturbance at the door, the Poison Spur Mob leader swiftly reached for his belt and glanced outside.

There he saw Lumian, casually wiping his hands and stepping over his two fallen comrades.

Not giving Wilson a chance to speak, Lumian grinned and said, “Didn't anyone tell you that Auberge du Coq Doré is now under the Savoie Mob's protection...”

Mid-sentence, he lunged forward, throwing a punch before Wilson could fasten his belt.

Wilson hastily dodged and buckled his belt.

Simultaneously, his eyes narrowed as they locked onto Lumian.

Lumian suddenly felt a wave of fear.

It was the unbridled fear of an ordinary person facing a villain or a thug. Wilson had manifested such emotions!

Yet, even as an ordinary person, Lumian wasn't cowed by villains who wouldn't dare to fight back. As a vagrant, he had always believed in fleeing and surrendering if possible. If not, he'd drag the other party down with him. Now, as a Sequence 8 Beyonder, he was even more fearless.

Another Beyonder? Lumian harnessed the intensity of his fear to grapple with Wilson and unleash his close-quarters combat skills.

His hands, elbows, knees, and feet transformed into weapons, overpowering Wilson, who had barely buckled his belt.

As the sounds of their struggle filled the air, another thug sprang into action. He grabbed a chair in the room, poised to smash it into Lumian's back.

But Lumian twisted his upper body like a serpent, circling behind Wilson.

Bang! The chair struck Wilson's head, sending him reeling.

With a crash, the already unstable chair splintered.

Lumian coiled his body like a spring and lifted his right leg.

His heel struck the thug's lower abdomen with pinpoint accuracy, eliciting a muffled groan.

The thug's eyes bulged as he clutched his crotch and crumpled to the floor. He writhed in pain but couldn't make a sound, like a rooster with its neck throttled.

As Lumian's right foot swung back, his arm lashed forward, whipping Wilson's chest.

Unable to dodge, Wilson heard the crack of his ribs breaking.

Before he could recover from the pain, Lumian seized his arms and yanked him closer.

Pfft!

A knee to the chest greeted him.

Wilson's face paled, and his body doubled over.

Lumian clenched his fists and hammered Wilson's back.

Plop! Wilson collapsed to the ground.

Lumian capitalized on the opportunity, pouncing on him. He pinned Wilson's arms behind his back and pressed his knees into his spine.

"I thought you were quite the tough guy," Lumian taunted. "Turns out, you couldn't even last ten seconds."

Based on his assessment, Wilson was only at Sequence 9, a Sequence that focused more on combat and physical enhancement. However, he wasn't sure which pathway he belonged to.

Wilson, provoked and enraged, struggled with all his might but couldn't break free from Lumian's grip.

Lumian glanced up at the dumbstruck Ethans and chuckled at Wilson and the incapacitated thugs.

"Go back and tell your bosses that this is Ciel's turf. If you've got any business, feel free to look for our Savoie Mob!"

"You're a dead man!" Wilson snarled.

Lumian smirked, retorting, "I'm not sure if I'll die, but you're the one dying now."

"You dare to kill me in front of so many witnesses?" Wilson mocked.

Lumian said nothing. He tightened his grip, and a sickening crack echoed in the room.

Wilson let out a spine-chilling scream, beads of cold sweat the size of beans breaking out on his forehead.

His arm was broken!

Lumian hoisted him up and leaped onto Ethans's wooden table. He pushed open the window and dangled Wilson over the outer wall.

Glancing down at the deserted alley, Lumian smiled at Wilson and taunted, "Try guessing. Do you think I dare to throw you down?"

Wilson stared at the cobblestones more than ten meters below and recalled how resolute the other party had been when he said he'd break his arm. For a moment, he didn't dare answer.

Just then, Lumian released his grip.

I haven't answered yet! Wilson's body plunged downward in sheer terror.

With no other option, he desperately tried to adjust his posture to protect his vitals.

Crash!

He hit the ground with a sickening thud, his flesh instantly mangled in multiple places.

Lumian observed for a couple of seconds before chuckling.

“Quite a tough one. You're still alive. Is your nickname Rue Anarchie Cockroach?”

Ignoring Wilson, he jumped off the wooden table and addressed the three thugs struggling to their feet, “Did you hear what I just said?”

The three thugs nodded fearfully and turned to flee.

“Wait,” Lumian called out to them.

The three thugs froze on the spot, their bodies trembling slightly.

Lumian gestured at the shattered chair and grinned.

“Aren't you going to compensate for the damage?”

The three thugs hastily pulled out all the banknotes they had and tossed them on the floor.

With Lumian's nod of approval, they stumbled out of Room 408.

Ethans stared blankly the entire time, only recalling the words that this place had been taken over by the Savoie Mob.

Then, she realized that Ciel from the Savoie Mob hadn't informed her about how much she should pay or how often she should pay in the future. He didn't even glance at her as he walked straight to the door.

Ethans instinctively opened her mouth, wanting to ask something, but she hesitated, fearing the Poison Spur Mob might retaliate. She watched Lumian's figure vanish into the darkness beyond the door.

Chapter 147 Reaction

Lumian had just returned to the second floor when he spotted Charlie lingering outside his door.

“Hey, don't tell me you had another dream? You make me nervous, just popping up at my door like that,” Lumian teased with a hint of mockery.

He couldn't shake the fact that Charlie had sought him out rather than heading directly to the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral.

Charlie glanced at the stairs and lowered his voice.

“Something happened on the fourth floor?”

“You've got good ears,” Lumian commended. “There was an incident. I tossed Wilson down the block.”

“Huh?” Charlie appeared bewildered once more.

It took him a moment to process.

“Which Wilson? The one from the Poison Spur Mob who collects money from Miss Ethans?”

“Yes.” Lumian nodded candidly.

At first, Charlie's expression read, “I see.” Then, he blurted out in shock, “You threw him down the block? From which floor?”

“Fourth floor,” Lumian replied, grinning.

Charlie's mouth fell open, forgetting to close it.

“You're not joking, are you?” he asked nervously after a few seconds.

Lumian gestured toward the room across the hall.

“If you don't believe me, take a look at the alley behind. That guy's like a cockroach; he didn't die from the fall.”

“...” Charlie assessed Lumian anew, as though seeing him for the first time. He realized that his mischievous, audacious, and clever friend possessed a side he didn't grasp at all.

In Lumian's eyes, there seemed to be no law, and a chilling coldness ran deep within him. Fear was absent from his mind, and he had genuinely thrown a living person from the fourth floor. Moreover, he was a leader of the Poison Spur Mob!

Wasn't he afraid of dying?

Wasn't he afraid of the Poison Spur Mob's retaliation?

This brought to mind how Ciel had held a dirk to his throat when Susanna Mattise threatened him.

Of course, his weapon wouldn't have been some Cursed Blade.

The next second, Charlie glanced around and lowered his voice again.

“are you out of your mind? The Poison Spur Mob isn't to be trifled with!

“Why don't you move away? You should be safe once you leave the market district.”

He felt that no matter how reckless Ciel was or how little he respected the law, he was someone who had genuinely helped him. He had to warn him of the danger so he could escape swiftly.

Lumian smirked and shot back, “Our Savoie Mob isn't to be trifled with either.”

“Uh...” Charlie suddenly sensed that the situation might not be as he'd imagined.

Lumian opened the door to Room 207 and declared as he entered,

“From now on, Auberge du Coq Doré is our Savoie Mob's turf. I'll throw out anyone from the Poison Spur Mob who shows up.”

Had the Savoie Mob enlisted Ciel to handle Wilson? Charlie came to a realization and felt a mixture of relief.

Since the Savoie Mob had instigated the confrontation, they surely had a plan to counter the Poison Spur Mob's retaliation. A broke, jobless guy like him needn't worry.

Lumian snapped the suitcase shut, concealing a few sets of clothes and Aurore's grimoire within. He slid it under the bed and draped a blanket over it. Straightening up, he instructed Charlie,

“If anyone comes looking for me, tell them I went to the Salle de Bal Brise.”

“alright.” Charlie watched as Lumian vanished down the stairs, a sudden realization hitting him.

What would become of Miss Ethans after this?

Would she be claimed by the Savoie Mob, or was there still a chance for her to redeem herself?

Avenue du Marché, Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian perched at the bar counter, tapping his fingers on the surface.

“One glass of Lover, a serving of mashed potatoes, veal slices in lard, a pork sausage, and a croissant.”

Lover referred to a sugar alcohol brewed from sugarcane syrup, served with ice and water. It was common slang in Intis bars.

Soon enough, Lumian sipped the amber-hued, sweet alcohol and savored the aromatic veal slices.

As he relished the delicacies and listened to the music from the dance floor, his body swayed rhythmically.

Just then, one of Baron Brignais' gang members sidled up beside him.

Lumian turned to the man, noticing the blood clots on his forehead. He smiled and said, “This is our third encounter, right? What should I call you?”

The thug replied cautiously, “Just call me Louis.”

Another Louis... Lumian mused.

In the Intis Republic, Louis was as common a name as Pierre and Guillaume. The last Louis Lumian had met had given birth to a child, despite being a man.

Louis watched Lumian take a bite of the croissant and offered casually, as if trying to build rapport, “This one's on me. It's your first time at our Salle de Bal Brise.”

“Alright.” Lumian didn't bother with pretenses.

Louis ordered a syrupy lemon soda alcohol dubbed Demon and took a sip.

“You live at Auberge du Coq Doré, right?”

“Yeah.” Lumian grabbed a piece of sausage and popped it into his mouth.

Louis pondered for a moment before asking, “That's Poison Spur Mob territory. Want to move to Rue des Blouses Blanches?”

“No need.” Lumian sipped his ice-cold Lover, its caramel scent wafting through the air, and grinned. “It's now our Savoie Mob's turf.”

“What?” Louis nearly choked on his drink.

Lumian swiveled his head and smirked.

“I tossed Wilson from the Poison Spur Mob off the fourth floor. Auberge du Coq Doré is now Savoie Mob turf.”

Hearing Lumian's account, Louis's face gradually stiffened.

After a few seconds, he forced a smile and stood up.

“I need to report this to the baron.”

Why is this guy even more brutal and unhinged than the baron?

“Alright.” Lumian didn't care.

Louis took a few brisk steps before turning back, leaning in to whisper, “Is Wilson dead?”

“No.” Lumian feigned regret.

What are you regretting? Louis studied Lumian's face, suddenly wondering: Did we gain a weapon or a massive problem?

Avenue du Marché, Unit 126, inside Roger's three-story building with a modest garden.

As the injured Wilson was carried past him, Roger's icy blue eyes scanned the three trembling thugs and he demanded, “Who did this?”

“Someone from the Savoie Mob!” A thug answered hastily, slightly hunched. “He calls himself Ciel and says that the Auberge du Coq Doré now belongs to the Savoie Mob!”

Ciel... Black Scorpion Roger's somewhat plump face registered a mix of confusion and wariness.

He murmured to himself, “There's no Ciel among the top brass of the Savoie Mob... How did he manage to thrash Wilson like this?”

It was worth noting that Wilson was a Villain, equivalent to a Sequence 9 Beyond—a master of combat!

At that moment, another thug spoke up speculatively, “Boss, I remember something. We went to Auberge du Coq Doré the night Margot was killed.”

Roger's expression darkened, a fierce hatred seeping in.

“Was that also Ciel's doing? How did he pull it off?”

“Did the Savoie Mob secretly recruit such a formidable figure to drive us out of the market district?”

A man standing beside Black Scorpion Roger spat hatefully, “First, an assassination; now, an open taunt. If we don't retaliate, who knows what'll come next!”

The man had a shaved head but boasted striking features. His lake-blue eyes, high nose bridge, thick brown eyebrows, and curved lips rendered him handsome despite his baldness.

Dressed in a black shirt, dark breeches, and strapless leather boots, he forewent a coat and stood nearly 1.8 meters tall.

Roger pondered for a few seconds before instructing the man beside him,

“Haman, go to Baron Brignais and find out what's going on. Ask if the Savoie Mob intends to wage an all-out war against our Poison Spur Mob.”

“If they're open to reconciliation, we can make appropriate concessions.

“Remember, learn to endure—the time isn't right yet.”

On the balcony of a third-floor room in Salle de Bal Brise.

Baron Brignais leisurely puffed on his peach-colored pipe, observing the guests entering and exiting the dance hall.

Suddenly, he turned his gaze towards the door.

Two seconds later, Louis pushed open the door, entering the balcony and stepping past the other thugs.

“Your footsteps are a bit heavy and hurried. Something happen?” Baron Brignais inquired with a smile.

Louis replied anxiously, “Baron, Ciel threw Wilson off the fourth floor of the Auberge du Coq Doré!”

“Wilson from the Poison Spur Mob?” Baron Brignais recalled, seeking confirmation.

“Yes, he's severely injured but not dead,” Louis quickly added.

Baron Brignais held his pipe, pondering for a moment before asking, “Did Ciel mention why he did that?”

“He said that the Auberge du Coq Doré is now our Savoie Mob's turf,” Louis repeated Lumian's words.

Baron Brignais couldn't help but chuckle.

Taking a drag from his pipe, he spoke with a hint of meaning, “If you don't handle a sharp weapon properly, it's easy to hurt yourself. I'll have to find an opportunity to give him some ‘guidance.’”

“What should we do about the Poison Spur Mob? Should we inform the Boss?” Louis asked, concerned.

Baron Brignais considered for a moment and responded, “Not for now.

“Ciel actually performed well this time. I'm curious to see how the Poison Spur Mob reacts.”

Noticing his subordinate's puzzled expression, Baron Brignais—always fond of ‘educating’ them to showcase his intelligence—smiled and explained, “Since the Poison Spur Mob's inception, their number of Beyonders has swelled, nearly matching ours in just under two years. They've seized a significant amount of territory. Don't you see a major issue here?

“Give them another two years, and we might be completely driven out of the market district.

“If they want to escalate this matter, I'm more than willing. It's a prime opportunity for the authorities to take notice and uncover who's backing them.”

Chapter 148 “Lord of the Motel”

At 10 p.m., while returning to Auberge du Coq Doré from Avenue du Marché, Louis, who was with Baron Brignais earlier, guided Lumian from the main road bathed in yellow light to a side street swallowed by darkness.

Surveying the neglected, broken street lamps, he remarked nonchalantly, “The baron has cut a deal with the Poison Spur Mob. From now on, Auberge du Coq Doré is officially under our Savoie Mob's control.”

Lumian snorted. “Is the Poison Spur Mob that easy to negotiate with?”

What do you mean? Are you hoping for the two parties to fight? Louis increasingly sensed that Ciel was a dangerous man who thrived on conflict.

He was convinced that Ciel's nature and approach would bring trouble to the Savoie Mob time and time again in the future.

The market district, already strained by the Poison Spur Mob's rapid ascent, would certainly become more chaotic.

As a seasoned gang member, Louis believed in bullying ordinary people rather than resorting to violence and bloodshed. Life was precious; he'd witnessed several comrades die in gang wars and police raids. Initially, their families were taken care of, but as time passed, their circumstances deteriorated.

But if cornered, Louis wouldn't shy away from brutality. Every thug under Baron Brignais had climbed the ranks through street brawls and alley fights. They may not be brainy, but their skills and courage were nothing to sneer at.

Louis slowly exhaled.

“You showed enough force to protect Auberge du Coq Doré, and the Poison Spur Mob didn't want to escalate matters and draw police attention. So, after the baron covered Wilson's medical expenses, the matter was settled.

“Keep a low profile for now. If you catch the police's eye, you won't withstand a thorough investigation.”

It doesn't matter to me. I'll just find a hideout before the official Beyonders corner me. The Poison Spur Mob can run, but they can't hide... Lumian murmured, borrowing a line from Aurore's book.

Louis continued, “The baron wants me to tell you that since you're staying at Auberge du Coq Doré, it's your turf now.

“And for members who control their own turf, we don't usually provide daily allowances.”

What he implied was that the Savoie Mob likely wouldn't give Lumian any more money beyond the initial 1,000 verl d'or. He'd have to find a way to generate income from his turf.

Lumian was momentarily stunned before replying with a chuckle, “Alright.”

As they spoke, they stopped outside Auberge du Coq Doré.

Lumian gazed at the old, cream-colored building and was struck by a bizarre, ludicrous thought.

This is my turf?

The residents of this ramshackle place are all destitute. How can they afford to pay protection fees?

Forget it. It's already a blessing that they don't create trouble for me like Charlie. I can't squeeze money out of them!

Having already consumed two drinks, he skipped the basement bar and retreated to Room 207.

No one had visited.

After perusing Aurore's grimoire for a while, Lumian recognized a familiar footfall, followed by a knock on the door.

He opened it, unsurprised to find Charlie standing there.

Charlie's face was flushed from drinking. He grinned and exclaimed, “Can you believe it? I'm about to land a new job! I went to Rue des Blouses Blanches tonight and bought the waiters drinks. They introduced me to a hotel manager who said they needed a few full-time attendants!”

“If that manager learns you hooked up with a female guest at your previous hotel and were recently implicated in a murder case, will he still consider you?” Lumian retorted.

Charlie's smile froze. He massaged his face and replied, “He might still give me a chance. But Ciel, that's not why I'm here. I wanted to ask what you plan to do with Miss Ethans?”

“What do you mean?” Lumian inquired, smirking.

Charlie forced a smile and asked, “Will you stop her from leaving Rue Anarchie? If you make her keep working the streets, how much should she pay you each time? And how often?”

Lumian chortled.

“She's free to do whatever she wants. It's none of my business. I have plenty of ways to make money.”

“I knew it! Praise the Sun and Saint Viève!” Charlie cheered. “I could tell from the moment I saw you at the bar that you were a clever and capable gentleman!”

“Trusting the judgment of the Idiot Instrument?” Lumian jested.

Charlie sheepishly smiled.

“That's one factor.”

He waved his hand.

“I'll share this news with Miss Ethans!” After taking a few steps, Charlie halted and spun around, asking unusually cautiously, “Will the Poison Spur Mob come back?”

“Baron Brignais has brokered a deal with them. Auberge du Coq Doré is now Savoie Mob's turf,” Lumian answered nonchalantly. “And I'm the one in charge here.”

Charlie was ecstatic. He spread his arms wide and exclaimed, “Praise the Sun, praise Saint Viève, and praise you, Ciel!”

With that, he dashed into the stairwell.

Comparing me to the Eternal Blazing Sun and Saint Viève... Are you trying to get me killed faster? Lumian snorted and shook his head. He then retreated to his room and resumed studying Aurore's grimoire.

Outside Room 408, Charlie knocked on the wooden door.

Ethans, her cheek red and swollen, opened the door and stated flatly, “I'm not feeling well today. Find someone else.”

Charlie couldn't contain the exciting news.

“Guess what? The motel's no longer under Poison Spur Mob's control. It belongs to the Savoie Mob!”

Ethans suddenly remembered the evening's events and hesitated before asking, “Are you sure?”

“Absolutely!” Charlie replied, his signature enthusiasm returning. “You won't believe it. I found out from the leader of the Savoie Mob. Ciel, who lives in 207. He's already become a leader of the Savoie Mob. Auberge du Coq Doré is his turf now! He personally told me that the Poison Spur Mob bastards have scrambled and won't be back! He also said that the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob reached an agreement!”

Ciel... The man who threw Wilson down? Ethans's eyes darted, seemingly awakening from her puppet-like state.

“The Poison Spur Mob was really driven away?”

“It's true!” Charlie nodded emphatically.

Ethans stood stunned for a moment, then clenched her teeth and spat out, “Those sons of bitches, rotten scum, they're finally gone!”

Charlie continued, “I've asked Ciel. He said you can do whatever you want. It's not his concern. He's incredibly resourceful. So much so that he can change my opinion of pranksters like him. Can you believe it? He comes up with lucrative schemes every minute!”

Ethans was dumbstruck.

As far as she knew, none of the gangsters were good people. They were all despicable scoundrels who deserved hell!

Charlie kept talking, but Ethans tuned him out. The words “do whatever you want” resonated in her mind.

After Charlie left, she retreated to her room and quickly changed into a lady's blouse and light-colored pants.

Next, she lifted the mattress and retrieved a stack of 200 verl d'or notes.

She crammed all the bills into her pocket, then hesitated for a moment before removing more than half and hiding it back in its original spot.

With the remaining 40 verl d'or, she shut the door and headed downstairs.

Before long, she stepped out of Auberge du Coq Doré and onto Rue Anarchie.

A solitary gas lamp illuminated the street from a distance. Bathed in crimson moonlight, numerous inebriated people stumbled along the road, shouting, singing, or sporadically clashing with one another.

Ethans sidestepped the drunks and nervously followed the shadows along the street, aiming for Rue Anarchie's exit.

Throughout her journey, memories of escaping and being apprehended by the Poison Spur Mob on the street haunted her.

The memory of the beating made her shudder involuntarily.

Ethans slowed down, as though the Poison Spur Mob lurked around the corner.

Finally, she reached the exit of Rue Anarchie and saw the broad main road beyond.

Ethans stared at the once-unreachable scene, feeling as if she were in a dream.

Subconsciously, she quickened her pace, striding faster through the dark night under the crimson moonlight.

In no time, she arrived at the nearest public carriage stop.

She still remembered disembarking from the public carriage here on her first day in Trier.

Now, she had finally returned.

With no public carriages running late at night, Ethans didn't mind. She gazed at the street ahead, the postbox shrouded in darkness, and the sign displaying the carriage route. Her eyes welled up with tears.

Suddenly, Ethans spun around and bolted.

She had to get back to Auberge du Coq Doré, pack her belongings, and leave at daybreak!

Ethans sprinted faster, feeling the wind slap her face, cold and damp.

Her vision blurred, and she seemed to see a ghost of her past self.

The former Ethans, who arrived in Trier filled with dreams and enthusiasm, stood beneath the streetlamp, gently beckoning.

Hurry up and catch up!

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 207.

Ethans dabbed the corners of her eyes and rapped on the door.

Lumian swung the wooden door open and cast a cursory glance at her.

“What can I do for you?”

In a raspy voice, Ethans inquired, “Why are you helping me?”

Lumian sneered. “Why should I help you? What do you possess that's worthy of my assistance? You're not beautiful, and you don't have much money.”

Ethans's words of gratitude were immediately choked off.

She couldn't even recall how she left the second floor. As she packed her belongings, the whole experience felt surreal.

Watching her vanish down the stairs, Lumian snickered.

I'm not helping you. I just can't stand fate's cruel taunts.

We are all victims of fate's ridicule, but I want to defy and resist it, even if I'm not capable enough, until death puts an end to it all!

In that moment, Lumian sensed his Provoker potion digesting a bit further.

Although he was far from fully digesting it and needed time to work through it, this indicated that he had adapted to the Provoker potion, and his condition had stabilized. He could contemplate extracting the sealed power within him and obtaining the Alms Monk's boon.

Judging by the name, it should compensate for his lack of mystical techniques.

Chapter 149 Five Ritualistic Spells

Lumian wasn't eager to perform the ritual just yet. For one, he had been swamped all day and was far from his peak condition. He needed rest, or at least to wait until he reset at six in the morning. Secondly, the ritual involved two hidden entities and a corruption that had trapped a village in a time loop. If something went awry, it wasn't just the Auberge du Coq Doré that could be in jeopardy—the entire Rue Anarchie might face destruction. Who knew how many lives would be lost?

Thus, Lumian planned to head underground after daybreak, seeking a secluded quarry cave to serve as the ritual site.

As for the materials, he had already brought them from Cordu.

Rue Anarchie's nights were seldom peaceful, but Lumian managed to sleep well, practically dreamless. He awoke early to the sound of cathedral bells.

Rising slowly, he washed up and headed to a café on Rue des Blouses Blanches. His breakfast consisted of plum pie, savarin, and a café au lait with plenty of milk.

Delicacies always lifted one's spirits, and the Auberge du Coq Doré was no longer under the Poison Spur Mob's thumb. Lumian gradually adjusted to his optimal state.

With renewed purpose, he returned to Room 207, intending to gather the necessary materials and carbide lamp for his venture into Underground Trier.

Just as Lumian finished preparing and was about to leave, he heard a soft knock on the door.

Confused, he opened it to find Anthony Reid standing outside, clad in military-green attire and strapless leather boots.

The forty-something information broker stroked his short blond hair and said to Lumian, "I got something."

The padre or Madame Pualis and her underlings? Lumian stepped aside, allowing Anthony Reid to enter the room.

Anthony scanned the surroundings, Lumian's reflection caught in his dark brown eyes.

Simultaneously, Lumian felt an all-too-familiar unease.

Suppressing his thoughts, he inquired, "What are they?"

Anthony Reid gave a slight nod before replying, "Someone spotted a man suspected to be Louis Lund on Avenue du Marché, the one you believe to be Madame Pualis' butler."

On Avenue du Marché? Lumian's excitement surged.

Louis Lund, Madame Pualis, and I are so close?

"Are you sure?" he asked urgently.

Anthony Reid shook his head.

"I'm not sure. I'm just here to let you know that I haven't forgotten your task. When I'm certain it's really Louis Lund, I'll collect the balance from you."

"My money can't wait to part with me." Lumian made no effort to conceal his eagerness.

After seeing Anthony Reid off, his resolve to obtain the Alms Monk's boon only intensified.

A chilly wind whispered through the tunnels, leaving faint traces of moisture on the stone walls above.

Navigating the subterranean streets and alleys, Lumian discovered a passage that led even deeper.

Utilizing a Hunter's innate ability to memorize environments, he descended until he finally reached a quarry hollow, roughly the size of two or three Auberge du Coq Dorés.

Sparse white mushrooms grew in the rock crevices.

Charlie had mentioned that many people in Rue Anarchie and the surrounding areas scoured these underground quarries for mushrooms to bolster their income and meals. Trier mushrooms had become synonymous with these fungi, but the specimens here were clearly natural.

Lumian circled the cave twice, inspecting it thoroughly.

Satisfied that there were no issues, he found a half-meter-tall stone and placed the blood-infused musk candle on it. The other candle was positioned closer to him.

Having tidied the area, Lumian lit the two grayish-white candles in the order of top to bottom—divine before mortal—by channeling his spirituality.

Next, he drew the ritual silver dagger and swiftly sanctified it, erecting a barrier of spirituality.

Unlike the last time he had prayed for the Dancer's power, Lumian's spirituality remained plentiful after completing these tasks. He effortlessly entered a somewhat ethereal state, enabling him to perform rituals without the aid of incense.

He exhaled slowly, picked up the gray amber perfume on the altar, and dripped it into the deity-representing candle.

As the scent sizzled, a sweet, elegant fragrance filled the air, calming his nerves.

After the gray amber perfume came tulip powder. As a strange aroma permeated the spiritual barrier, Lumian took two steps back, gazed at the flickering candle flame, and bellowed in ancient Hermes,

“Power of Inevitability!”

A howling gust swept through the chamber, causing the deity-representing candle's orange flame to quiver. It hung by a thread, threatening to go out at any moment.

In the dimming light, Lumian's left chest seared with pain, accompanied by a wave of dizziness.

Once again, he heard the enigmatic sound that seemed to originate from an infinite distance, yet felt close at hand. However, it wasn't loud enough to engulf him in agony.

Lumian continued chanting the subsequent incantations in ancient Hermes.

“You are the past, the present, and the future;

“You are the cause, the effect, and the process.”

Within the spiritual barrier, an invisible wind turned pitch black as a faint gray fog filled the space.

Rocks and bottles warped and twisted, appearing as malleable objects.

Silently, the deity-representing candle's flame swelled to the size of a fist, shimmering silver-white with a hint of black.

Granules emerged on Lumian's skin and on the rocks, writhing and stretching, poised to burst forth at any moment.

The terrifying sound filled his ears, drowning out all else. His head spun, threatening to make him vomit.

His thoughts wavered between disarray and chaos as he barely finished reciting the incantation.

As Lumian spoke the final words, the silver-black candle flame contracted into a beam of light that struck his left chest.

Silver-black phantasmal liquid flowed out, enveloping Lumian's body as though it possessed its own life and will.

Lumian had already steeled himself for the onslaught. In his uncontrollable frustration, he felt a prickling pain erupting all over his body. As the piercing ravings seemed to saw through his skull, a burning sensation flared within him.

He collapsed, curling up and enduring the agony with gritted teeth.

All he could do was struggle to maintain the “boat” of rationality amidst the tempestuous waves of pain.

Throughout the ordeal, he was tempted several times to surrender to the malevolent thoughts gnawing at his heart. He longed to merge with the pain, to escape the torture. However, the lingering elegant and sweet fragrance in his nostrils caused his ruthlessness and frustration to ebb and flow repeatedly.

Ultimately, Lumian felt as if his body and mind ceased to exist, leaving only a sense of rational spirituality.

As the pain and ravings began to subside, he realized he had endured.

Lumian lay motionless on the cold ground, not willing to move for an extended period.

After what felt like an eternity, he mustered enough strength to hastily end the ritual and clean up the altar, warding off any potential mishaps.

Having dealt with these matters, Lumian sat on the stone that had served as the altar and scrutinized the changes within himself.

Soon, he muttered, My tolerance for extreme environments has increased a bit... Heh, guess I won't need to buy winter and summer clothes anymore?

Beyond this, Lumian discovered another newfound intuition.

An intuition for luck!

He could roughly sense the recent fortunes of others—good luck, bad luck, potential for disaster, romantic opportunities, and so on—but he couldn't discern the precise details.

In other words, Lumian could detect that someone was experiencing bad luck, but had no way of knowing how unlucky they would be or how long their misfortune would last.

“Truly worthy of a monk with the power of inevitability,” Lumian couldn't help but sigh, feeling he could entirely replace Osta Trul as a diviner for others.

Although ignorant about divination, wouldn't he be able to fabricate the corresponding words when he could glimpse the rough strokes of someone's fortune?

Moreover, Lumian acquired an abundance of sacrificial knowledge and five ritualistic spells in his mind.

The former compensated for his many shortcomings in the realm of mysticism, while the latter augmented his repertoire of mystical techniques.

The five ritualistic spells were Animal Creation Spell, Prophecy Spell, Luck Enhancement Spell, Substitution Spell, and Exorcism Spell.

Through ritualistic magic, the Animal Creation Spell utilized sheepskin, cowhide, and other animal hides to morph the target on the altar into the corresponding creature. This could also be applied to Lumian himself. As long as he mastered the incantation to break the curse or waited for the ritual to end, he could revert to human form. While transformed into an animal, he would be unable to speak or wield most of his Beyonder powers.

The Prophecy Spell was entirely different from what Lumian had envisioned. The process involved gathering ingredients such as a snake's venom sac and a rock from an eagle's nest. Using ritualistic magic, one could concoct an unusual concoction. Next, one had to find a corpse dead for less than seven days and not yet cremated or purified. Pouring the concoction into the corpse's mouth would momentarily revive it, allowing the caster to ask three questions about the future.

The Luck Enhancement Spell employed ritualistic magic to create an object linked to one's misfortune. By sending the object away and having others open, consume, step on, or wear it, the caster could transfer their bad luck onto them, thus enhancing their own luck.

The Substitution Spell was even more intricate, and Lumian suspected it was a lower-tier reflection of a Fate Appropriator's abilities. For example, if he wished to evade Susanna Mattise, he would need to find a vagrant and make them live as Ciel for a while. During this period, the vagrant would have to stay in Room 207, use all of Lumian's money, and gain recognition from Charlie and other acquaintances to establish sufficient mystical connections before performing the ritual to complete the substitution.

Upon the ritual's completion, Susanna Mattise would seek vengeance on the vagrant rather than Lumian.

Of course, Lumian wasn't certain he could deceive Susanna Mattise, who was on the verge of becoming a demigod, with a Sequence 8 Substitution Spell. He even doubted whether the ritualistic magic would succeed at all.

Chapter 150 Voice

When Lumian first gained the mysticism knowledge, he had placed high hopes on the Exorcism Spell. It appeared to be the perfect solution to deal with Susanna Mattise—provided she hadn't been entirely wiped out by the official Bypassers.

But it was only upon truly grasping the Exorcism Spell did Lumian come to the sobering realization that his jubilation had been premature.

The ritualistic spell was capable of banishing wraiths and even evil spirits, preventing them from tormenting a soul. But it came with two caveats. First, he needed to know the specter's real name and possess a personal item she'd held dear in life. Second, he needed ample time to conduct the ritual.

That second condition meant the Exorcism Spell was a no-go in the heat of battle. It was better suited for situations like Charlie's, haunted by constant dreams of Susanna Mattise, plagued by wraiths or evil spirits, but not on the brink of death.

Lumian, however, hadn't been physically hurt by Susanna Mattise, just targeted. The Exorcism Spell needed a victim, and without one, he couldn't banish her.

When Susanna Mattise made her next move, Lumian knew she wouldn't be playing nice. She'd leech his energy through erotic dreams, leading him slowly but surely towards his demise. Given her prior displays of venom and paranoia, she was sure to strike directly, unleashing her supernatural arsenal to kill on contact.

In such a scenario, Lumian wouldn't have a chance to wield the Exorcism Spell unless someone could buy him a few minutes.

Should I turn to the official Beyonders for help? But that would expose me to the authorities, causing a world of trouble down the line...

Or perhaps Charlie could play the martyr, soothing Susanna Mattise with heartfelt words of love, buying time in the flesh? The longer he held out, the better Lumian's odds of completing the Exorcism Spell... Heh heh, a bizarre thought that's like underground literature, Lumian mused quietly.

Though the current mantra of the Intis Republic was 'freedom,' it was a far cry from true liberty.

On the one hand, they wanted to quash the nostalgia of Roselle's followers and the Carbonari's revolutionary impulses. Opposition threatened the ruling party's authority. On the other hand, they faced the traditionalist Church of the God of Steam and Machinery and the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun. The Intis Republic's censorship of publications was heavy-handed.

They'd even plant spies or groom authors as double agents to keep an eye on influential content creators, ensuring they didn't tarnish the ruling party's image or produce content deemed too explicit or blasphemous for the wider readership.

But with every prohibition came violations. Trier spawned a thriving underground literary scene that reached beyond its borders.

Aurore once, driven by curiosity, bought a few such books. She forbade her brother from reading them and tucked them away in the bookcase's darkest corner. But prohibition bred violation. Lumian had snuck a peek at one and was taken aback.

The book was a critique of the clergy's indulgence and corruption, peppered with erotic content. It was titled 'Monks Chasing Dogs.'

Lumian's plan to use Charlie as bait for Susanna Mattise had a certain subversive literature charm to it.

Then again, I don't have any of Susanna Mattise's personal items to use as a conduit. I could try to hunt down something in the coming days. Regardless of whether it ends up being useful, it's better to be prepared than caught unawares... Lumian shook off his reverie, considering the potential of the other four ritualistic spells and their relevance to him.

To Lumian, the Animal Creation Spell seemed mystical, malevolent, uncanny, and downright horrifying.

If utilized right, it could work wonders. Imagine turning captives into sheep, cows, horses, and just walking away with them. Or infiltrating places no human could, in the form of a critter. But in the thick of a fight, this ritualistic spell was pretty much a dud.

According to the mysticism wisdom bestowed upon Lumian, the invocation for the Animal Creation Spell could be made to the hidden existence known as Inevitability, a host of honorific names unknown to him, or even himself.

Naturally, the prerequisite was ample spirituality and the corresponding rank. Also, the ritual's success rate and the spell's longevity were significantly lower than the previous methods.

The minimum requirement for the Animal Creation Spell was a Sequence 7 Contractee. The higher the rank, the better the chances of the spell working, and the more potent the effect.

With the corruption sealed within him, Lumian wasn't concerned about his rank. He was unsure, though, if his spirituality reserves could endure the consumption of the Animal Creation Spell. If they could, how many times could he bear it?

This led Lumian to speculate that these five ritualistic spells could be simplified at higher ranks and deployed in real combat. For instance, he could simply drape an enemy in sheepskin, chant the preordained incantation, and transform them into sheep.

That doesn't seem plausible for a Contractee, equivalent to a Sequence 7. A Sequence 4 Circle Inhabitant is too lofty for such a rudimentary spell... Could a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator accommodate such a simplification, or is it a Sequence 6, the name of which escapes me? Lumian mused subconsciously.

As for the Luck Enhancement Spell, he felt it could only "assist" others at present, not himself. His destiny was deeply entwined with the corruption sealed within him and the great existence behind the seal. Unless he prayed directly to the power of Inevitability, altering his luck was a non-starter. Only when he ascended to the Fate Appropriator rank could he choose a fate unbound by those lofty beings.

The Substitution Spell was just too convoluted, and it would severely disrupt Lumian's routine and other tasks. He wouldn't consider it unless he was out of options.

Compared to that, the Prophecy Spell seemed like a piece of cake and rather handy as ritualistic magic went.

Lumian had already decided to gather the necessary intel and find a suitable corpse. By inquiring about Charlie's future, he could estimate when Susanna Mattise would strike next and locate Madame Pualis and the others by delving into Louis Lund's destiny.

Dog's drool, lynx innards, hyena tongue, stag bone marrow, sea or aquatic monster flesh, lizard eye, rock from an eagle's nest, snake venom gland, and deadly herbs. These ingredients aren't all that hard to come by. The only pain is the sea or aquatic monster flesh, but the ritual doesn't specify a rank. Technically, the feeblest aquatic monster still counts as an aquatic monster; it just impacts the effect, right? Lumian ruminated for a bit, noticing that his energy levels had considerably

rebounded. He readied himself to leave the subterranean quarry cave and head back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

Just as he rose to his feet, a sudden furrow creased his brow.

A faint sound reached his ears.

The voice echoed inside his ears!

Lumian fought to steady his nerves, straining to discern the sound.

With each passing moment, the voice grew clearer, more potent, more imposing.

“Lumian Lee!

“Lumian Lee!

“...”

It knows my name? Instinctively, Lumian swept the area with his carbide lamp, yet found no figure, nothing out of the ordinary.

“Lumian Lee!

“Lumian Lee!

The voice reverberated as if it were emanating from the very core of his being, muffled by his flesh, organs, and bones, creating overlapping echoes.

Inside my body... The thought struck Lumian the moment he made this realization.

In a hushed whisper, he asked, “Who are you?”

The deep, majestic, and spectral voice ceased its chant and solemnly declared, “I’m the Angel of the Lord, Termiboros.”

“Lord? Which lord?” Lumian's eyes narrowed, the corners of his mouth twitching into a smirk.

He suspected the entity communicating was the corruption entombed within him. After receiving the Alms Monk's blessing and nearing the entity of Inevitability, it had managed to transmit a voice devoid of corruption via their intertwined powers.

The spectral voice echoing in Lumian's ears intoned reverently, “The Lord is the ruler of the Great Old Ones, the Essence Above the Sequences, the mighty Circle of Inevitability...”

Merely contemplating these words sent an inexplicable shiver down Lumian's spine. It felt as if a gaze had pierced the cosmos, the clouds, the surface-level Trier, layers of earth, and was fixed upon him.

Suddenly, Lumian found himself glancing over his shoulder, as if unseen entities were scrutinizing him from the enveloping darkness.

The sensation sent chills down his spine, sowing unease in his mind, threatening to unhinge him.

Out of nowhere, a faint gray fog materialized and shrouded the surroundings, significantly pacifying Lumian's agitated mind.

He sneered at the self-proclaimed Angel, Termiboros.

“So, you're the one sealed within me?”

I wonder if it's a bona fide Angel with Beyonder characteristics or just an Angel-tier servant boasting only a boon...

This insolence seemed to digest Lumian's potion further along its course.

Undeterred by Lumian's provocation, Termiboros continued solemnly, “Follow my instructions, break my seal, and I will aid you in resurrecting Aurore Lee.

“You should be well aware that my Lord's power spans the past, the present, and the future. It can weave a cycle of destiny.

“In due time, I will restore Aurore Lee's soul fragment to its state prior to the descent ritual. All you need to do is prepare a body with the essence of life for her.”

Lumian fell silent. After a moment, he asked in a low voice, “Descent ritual... Is that the ritual to forge a body for your descent?”