

Inevitability 191

Chapter 191 Suspicions

Right hand... Franca's body jolted with a sudden shudder.

As a Witch, she was well-acquainted with the intricacies of mirrors, attuned to their peculiarities. And one thing she knew for certain was this: when a person gazed into a mirror, their reflection would be inverted from left to right.

The situation at hand was baffling. After Erkin, who habitually favored his right hand, had ventured into the enigmatic mirror world and returned, he had inexplicably switched to using his left hand. Franca and Lumian, however, had not experienced such a change.

What could this mean? Franca trembled with unease.

Just then, Christo reappeared at the warehouse's bottom floor, bellowing instructions to Erkin on the upper level. He demanded that Erkin retrieve his prized White Elixir wine. Seizing the opportunity, Lumian leaned in close to Franca and whispered into her ear,

“Have you noticed any connections?”

“You've thought of it too?” Franca replied, taken aback.

It was a challenge to detect Erkin's abnormality and grasp the underlying possibilities without extensive knowledge of mysticism and encounters with the Beyond world.

Lumian continued in a hushed tone, “Judging by the amount of blood present in that space, I find it hard to believe that a regular person could have survived. From the start, I suspected something was amiss with Erkin and the other members of the caravan.

“Furthermore, you mentioned that the peculiar mirror world contains your past self—the reflection of who you once were.

“A mirrored image is left-right reversed in reality.

“Do you think the Erkin in the mirror has replaced the original Erkin?”

Franca fell into silence, pondering the implications.

“I dread to consider such a horrifying possibility, but the circumstances align more and more with your theory.

“I need to be certain.”

As they conversed, Erkin descended from the warehouse's upper level, clutching a sack filled with various spices and two bottles of White Elixir wine. He made his way towards a nearby grayish-white, two-story building.

The structure served as a dining room and kitchen for “Rat” Christo's subordinates.

On the surface, Christo presented himself as a merchant. He owned multiple companies specializing in trade and providing storage facilities.

Franca approached Christo with a solemn expression and asked, "Are you absolutely sure that is truly Erkin?"

Christo blurted out in surprise, "Why are you asking such a peculiar question? Of course, it's Erkin. By Steam, how could I not recognize my own brother?"

"My kids are also quite fond of him. They find nothing unfamiliar about him."

Franca pondered for a moment before smiling faintly.

"I can't help but feel that something might go awry after venturing into that bizarre realm."

Franca chuckled.

"You're not a Beyonder yet. Before you took over this smuggling business, didn't you anticipate that those above you would follow certain customs and pay extra for particular matters?"

Christo fell silent, uncertain of how to respond.

Franca then said, "I'll help you confirm whether anything is amiss with those individuals."

Franca retrieved her makeup box and Erkin's handkerchief, preparing to perform a divination in front of "Rat" Christo.

"Erkin's whereabouts. Erkin's whereabouts..."

As Franca chanted in Hermes, her eyes darkened, and she gently caressed the surface of the makeup mirror.

Lumian observed as the mirror shimmered with watery ripples of light.

Soon, a scene materialized within its depths: Erkin, dressed in a blue shirt, stood near the kitchen, engaged in conversation with the chef.

"I knew everything would go smoothly." "Rat" Christo chuckled.

He then gestured towards the warehouse.

"I have some matters to attend to. You can explore the area on your own or wait for me in the dining room."

Once the short-statured leader of the smugglers had entered the warehouse, Lumian turned to Franca.

"It appears that the real Erkin might be dead."

Thus, the divination results indicated the person who originally belonged to the mirror world.

"Do you still think something is amiss with Erkin and the others?" Franca furrowed her brow.

"And if not?" Lumian laughed. "Should we cover our eyes and ears and pretend we didn't see, hear, or discover anything?"

Franca pondered for a moment before responding, "Perhaps, because I'm using mirror divination, it will be easier to pinpoint the individual within the mirror. I shall attempt another method."

Surveying the warehouse area, she picked up a short wooden stick and held it before her, pressing down from the top.

After uttering a similar divination statement, the wooden stick snapped, pointing directly at the grayish-white, two-story building that housed the kitchen and dining room.

Erkin was there.

Franca fell silent momentarily before declaring, "Let me see if that mirror can be of any assistance."

She referred to the classic-styled silver mirror that served as a gateway to the peculiar realm, hoping to employ it in banishing all the monsters that had emerged from within.

Lumian eagerly trailed behind Franca as they entered the dining room.

Their eyes were immediately drawn to a woman wearing a grayish-green dress. She appeared to be in her late twenties, holding the hands of a boy and a girl. Tears of joy streamed down her face as she embraced Erkin, who had just emerged from the kitchen.

"You're finally back!"

"Pépé!"

"Pépé, play with me!"

Amidst the clamor of excited voices, Erkin's face radiated sheer happiness. His brows and eyes reflected pure joy.

"..." Franca paused in her steps, silently observing the heartwarming family reunion for a long while.

Eventually, she let out a sigh and remarked, "Let's give it a little more time."

Lumian maintained his smile.

"Are you finding it hard to bear?"

Franca sighed.

"The real Erkin might already be dead. After all, this is his reflection.

"If I were to expose his true nature now, kill him, or force him back into the mirror, not only would his wife and children fail to show gratitude, but they would also despise me."

"You're right." Lumian chuckled. "In any case, if anything untoward happens in the future, whether someone lives or dies is not our concern. We simply need to exercise caution. Why should we appear as the 'villains'? No one will thank you for it. Yes, let's avoid 'Rat' Christo and the others for the time being. If we don't encounter them, it's as if nothing has occurred."

Franca's inner conflict grew.

She didn't know what the mirror's reflection would do after replacing the person in reality.

What if his kindness morphed into cruelty, and his affection transformed into hatred?

Franca, unable to reach a decision, could only gaze at Lumian and sigh. "Your words are rather cold-hearted..."

She began to think that Jenna's assessment of Ciel held some truth.

"Madame, am I not merely following your inclinations to help you convince yourself?" Lumian responded, a mix of annoyance and amusement evident in his tone.

Franca offered a sheepish smile.

"How do you propose we handle this situation?"

Lumian glanced at Erkin, who was recounting his strange encounter to his wife and children as if it were someone else's story.

"We should have someone write a letter and report this matter to the police headquarters or a cathedral.

"The letter should merely state that 'Rat' Christo's brother, Erkin, ventured into an underground realm with a group of individuals and remained absent for the majority of the day. Upon resurfacing, their dominant hand had changed.

"Official Beyonders have encountered numerous anomalies, so they should be familiar with the underground. They will likely deduce what has befallen Erkin and his companions.

"As for how they handle it, that's their responsibility. We need not worry. If they refrain from harming Erkin and the others, the mirror person poses no threat. They can serve as replacements for the deceased originals. And if those monsters are eliminated, we won't have to confront pain and animosity, let alone compensate anyone.

"In short, we must trust the officials and the Church.

"Emperor Roselle once mentioned that a gentleman wouldn't feel inclined to dine on an animal they were familiar with after it had been slaughtered. However, if they remained unaware, it wouldn't be an issue. They could enjoy their meal blissfully. The same principle applies in this case."

Lumian couldn't recall the exact words, so he did his best to convey the sentiment in his own words.

Franca pondered deeply for a few moments before being convinced.

"You're right..."

She glanced at Lumian.

“You don't sound like a mob leader at all.”

“A true mob leader knows how to manipulate the authorities.” Lumian grinned.

Franca chuckled and remarked, “Do I have to address you as ‘Godfather’ from now on?”

Without giving Lumian a chance to inquire further, she swiftly added, “A mob's godfather. Yes, for now, you don't have the means. I'll take responsibility for leaking the information to the officials.”

Mob's godfather... Lumian had heard his sister mention this as the subject of her next book. He grasped the general idea, but couldn't help feeling a tad disheartened.

In the ensuing hours, he and Franca joyously attended a banquet hosted by “Rat” Christo, engaging in lively conversations with Erkin and the other smugglers.

Lumian couldn't stop raving about the delectable Savoie roasted chicken. It was seasoned with an array of spices, its surface glistening with a similar concoction. The golden skin boasted juiciness, tenderness, and an aromatic essence.

He sliced a piece of the crispy skin-covered meat and let it soak in the succulent juices for a moment before savoring it. The experience was pure bliss, rendering it impossible for him to cease indulging.

As the banquet drew to a close, Franca noticed only a handful of people remained at the dining table. She turned to “Rat” Christo, a smile playing on her lips.

“Come closer. I have something to ask you.”

Christo, momentarily taken aback, shifted his chair nearer to Franca and responded with a smile, “And what's the matter?”

Franca smiled and whispered, “In truth, Ciel and I also ventured into that peculiar world. Fortunately, we managed to escape...”

With that, she swiftly produced the roast chicken's knife and drove it into the table in front of “Rat” Christo. Her voice turned icy as she interrogated him, “What's concealed within that shipment? You nearly got us killed!”

“I-I don't know!” Christo glanced around, beads of cold sweat forming on his forehead.

Realizing that only he, Franca, and Ciel remained at the table, he hastily explained, “I genuinely don't know. The boss instructed me to bring it to Trier!”

Chapter 192 Verification

Boss? Lumian was alarmed. He hadn't anticipated the connection to Gardner Martin, but now things were starting to make sense.

Why did the smuggling caravan vanish on a known route that had been used before?

And why was “Rat” Christo so eager to seek their help? If he had only lost a shipment, he would have made more confirmations. It would have taken time for him to reveal his vulnerabilities and mistakes to his peers, who might be eyeing his position.

Lumian's mind raced with thoughts.

Gardner Martin might be a Sequence 6 or 5 on the Hunter pathway.

Both Franca and I entered the special mirror world, and we're a Hunter and a Demoness, respectively, on similar and neighboring paths.

Mr. K instructed me to approach Gardner Martin and gain his trust.

Franca, as a member of the secret organization Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, has quite a high Sequence. It's surprising that she's willing to be the mistress of a mob boss like Gardner Martin.

The boss of the Savoie Mob must be hiding a major secret or involved in something significant...

Why does he want Christo to smuggle an item related to the Hunter or Demoness pathway into Trier? And why go through the risks of underground smuggling? Is he afraid of the tax collectors? Instead, why doesn't the boss retrieve the item himself outside the city and have Christo get a smuggler lead the way? It would be safer and more discreet. Could it be that he knows the item might cause trouble and wants to avoid the risk? Lumian shifted his gaze from "Rat" Christo to Franca's face.

To Lumian's surprise, the Witch seemed unprepared for such an answer. Her initial shock was swiftly followed by a hint of excitement and joy.

She stared intently at "Rat" Christo and sneered, "Are you trying to f*cking deceive me? How come I haven't heard about Gardner asking you to bring something into Trier? Where is that thing?"

Excitement... Joy... Lumian grew increasingly certain that Franca had ulterior motives for joining the Savoie Mob and approaching Gardner Martin.

Christo forced a smile and responded, "It's in an iron box. I've already sent it to Rue des Fontaines. Perhaps the boss hasn't informed you yet."

As a seasoned member of the Savoie Mob, he knew the power Franca possessed. She could easily dispatch him, especially since he wasn't prepared and hadn't brought any assistance. Moreover, she excelled in divination and could detect falsehoods.

"You better not be lying to me!" Franca recoiled, produced her makeup mirror, and began performing a divination in front of "Rat" Christo.

Lumian cooperatively stood up and walked to Christo's side. He reached out and firmly grasped Christo's shoulder.

Once Franca confirmed the truth through her divination, Lumian patted the "Rat" on the back with a smile.

"If anything similar happens in the future, make sure to remind me of any potential issues with the merchandise. I must be prepared for any unexpected incidents.

"Otherwise, I might just chop you into pieces and feed you to your beloved kids."

He had heard from Louis that "Rat" Christo had numerous pets and had a special fondness for dogs.

Fueled by the threat, Christo grew angry.

Franca may be the boss's mistress, and she's stronger than me. I can tolerate her treatment, but what right does a newbie like you have?

“The boss asked me to keep it a secret this time.”

Franca stowed away her makeup box and cursed, “You son of a bitch! You could have at least given us a clue!”

Christo sheepishly smiled and replied, “Alright, alright.”

Surprisingly, he wasn't at all offended by the insults. To him, dogs were cherished family members, so how could their mention be taken as an offense?

He often warned his lecherous subordinates that laying a hand on his wife was akin to touching his dog!

Observing Franca and Ciel's softened attitudes, Christo curiously asked, “Is that strange world really as Erkin described?”

Before Franca could respond, Lumian patted Christo's shoulder with a smile.

“Haven't you figured it out yet? Has a dog eaten your brain? We were just bluffing you!

“We didn't enter any strange world at all. We simply suspected something was amiss with your goods, considering the previous smooth smuggling operations and the sudden involvement of a Beyonder incident. So, we decided to deceive you!”

“...” “Rat” Christo couldn't help but feel vexed.

Indeed, if Franca and Ciel had truly entered a strange world, they wouldn't have returned so swiftly! Erkin and the others had been missing for hours!

How could he have been so foolish?

Why did he fall for their ruse?

Suppressing his emotions, Christo looked at Franca with a fawning smile.

“Please don't tell the boss that I revealed the existence of that item. He will not be pleased with me.”

Franca cast a strange glance at Lumian and said to “Rat” Christo, “Fine. From now on, you owe me a favor.”

“Alright!” Christo hastily agreed.

After bidding farewell to the leader of the smuggling operation, Lumian and Franca exited the warehouse and turned onto the narrow street of Avenue du Marché.

“I realized today that Christo is a complete fool. He's incredibly gullible,” Franca remarked, breaking the silence as she glanced at Lumian beside her. There was a hint

of a smile on her face, but it didn't quite reach her eyes. "You're quite skilled at deceiving others."

Lumian assumed a composed demeanor.

"In Cordu, you must have heard about Cordu, right? They call me the Prankster King."

Franca, familiar with Cordu due to the wanted poster, smiled at Lumian and responded,

"Did you lie to me earlier then? Heh heh, Jenna's assessment of you wasn't entirely off. You possess cunning and trickery."

"You're my sister's companion. I've been telling you the truth," Lumian said sincerely, maintaining an honest expression.

However, he didn't divulge the complete truth. Even if Franca were to confirm it through divination, she wouldn't detect any signs of deception.

Franca observed his expression and nodded in satisfaction.

"I am willing to trust Muggle's brother. Hmm... Let's pretend you don't know about Gardner's item. There are certain things that can be harmful if you were to uncover the truth. I won't inquire about it either."

"Alright," Lumian acquiesced, obediently playing the role he had assumed in front of Aurore.

The two then went their separate ways on Avenue du Marché. One headed towards Salle de Bal Brise, while the other turned onto Rue des Blouses Blanches.

It was already past 8 p.m., and the sky had darkened. Gas wall lamps embedded in the walls illuminated the dance hall, casting a yellowish glow on the entire first floor. As they approached the dance floor, the ambiance grew dimmer.

Amidst greetings, Lumian took a seat at the bar counter and ordered a glass of fennel and mint absinthe, known as Parrot.

The drink was rather invigorating, and with just one sip, it cleared his mind as if he had been slapped awake.

Lumian sat for a while, enjoying Jenna's risqué songs. Eventually, he noticed Charlie approaching the bar counter with a tray in hand.

"Ciel... Boss!" Charlie swiftly altered the way he addressed Lumian upon realizing it was the bartender looking at him.

Lumian took a sip of the psychedelic green liquid and asked with a smile,

"Do you prefer the dance hall or the underground bar in the motel?"

Charlie glanced at the bartender and the other waiters before lowering his voice.

"I still prefer the motel bar. Over there, I'm the center of attention!"

I can tell... Lumian chuckled and nodded towards the young female singer who had taken over from Jenna.

“Is she your friend's daughter?”

Charlie had previously mentioned a friend who had fallen victim to a loan shark. Pressured by Baron Brignais, the friend tragically committed suicide by jumping off a building, and now his daughter was forced to sing at Salle de Bal Brise.

“Yes,” Charlie replied with a sorrowful expression.

The female singer, dressed glamorously in a revealing blouse and skirt, was around Jenna's age but lacked the same allure.

Upon closer observation, Lumian noticed the key distinction between the two:

Jenna's eyes radiated a certain spark, whereas despite her fake smile, the light in the other singer's eyes was absent.

Charlie opened his mouth, seemingly hesitant to ask for something, but in the end, he decided against it and remained silent.

Lumian took another sip of the Parrot and immersed himself in deep thought, the song playing in the background.

Approaching 10:30 p.m., he stood up and made his way back upstairs. He changed into a worn linen shirt, an old jacket, brown pants, and topped it off with a dark blue cap.

With this appearance, he resembled a vagabond.

Without hesitation, Lumian pushed open the window and leaped into the alley behind the dance hall.

His intention was to pay a visit to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

His Prophecy Spell had revealed that Monsieur Ive, the landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré, would be present at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons between 11 p.m. and 12 p.m. this Friday, i.e., tonight.

Lumian wasn't expecting to confront the matter involving the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire, single-handedly. He had no intention of facing them head-on. Instead, he aimed to gather valuable information and uncover more problems through observation.

To him, the most crucial objective was to utilize Monsieur Ive and the others to locate the place where Susanna Mattise had resided during her lifetime and obtain an item she had carried for a significant period. This would lay the groundwork for the Exorcism Spell when she eventually launched an attack.

Although completing the ritualistic magic in time might prove challenging, being prepared was preferable to being caught off guard.

After taking a few detours, Lumian arrived outside Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Since it was not yet 11 p.m., he saw no need to rush inside. Instead, he found a corner and settled down, observing Monsieur Ive's beige six-story apartment with the demeanor of a genuine tramp.

Before long, Lumian spotted the landlord.

Monsieur Ive returned from Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, holding a black cane. He wore a faded dark suit, chestnut pants, and an aged half top hat.

A few minutes later, a dim light emanated from one of the windows of his apartment.

Lumian patiently waited.

As he waited, his brow gradually furrowed.

Why hasn't Monsieur Ive made his way to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? It's already past 11 p.m.

The window continued to emit a yellowish glow, and occasional figures passed by.

Fifteen minutes elapsed, yet Monsieur Ive had not left his apartment, crossed Avenue du Marché, and entered Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Lumian couldn't help but mutter to himself, Could there be an error in my Prophecy Spell?

Chapter 193 Luck Enhancement

Lumian waited patiently until midnight drew near. As the clock struck 11:30 p.m., the light in Ive's room went out, yet no one emerged from the apartment. It seemed the miser had decided to save on gas bills and retired for the night. The final act of the play at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons concluded as midnight approached. The audience trickled out one by one, but no one entered the theater.

Lumian muttered to himself, his thoughts racing: Could it be that the Prophecy Spell's answer isn't precise enough? After all, the ritualistic magic was cast by me. It's understandable that its effect isn't perfect. Yes, that's a possibility. But what if the Prophecy Spell is accurate?

Alarmed amidst his thoughts, Lumian's head snapped in the direction of the door adorned with theater posters.

If the Prophecy Spell was correct, it meant that Monsieur Ive had indeed been at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons between 11 p.m. and midnight.

And if Monsieur Ive truly had been there, who was the identical figure who had entered the apartment and never left?

There was a strong chance it was a decoy!

A decoy!

No way... Lumian couldn't fathom his own suspicion.

How could he be deceived by such a trick, especially after meeting and conversing with Monsieur Ive before?

He was more inclined to believe that the Prophecy Spell was flawed.

Perhaps there's a tunnel beneath the apartment leading to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? Lumian pondered, searching for a plausible explanation.

Trier was a city where establishing a tunnel was easier than in other places. It only required a short excavation to connect to underground passageways and sewers. However, such tunnels were also prone to discovery. The Underground Trier teemed with people—quarry police patrolled the area, smugglers traveled through, and planters passed by. Unless the tunnel went deeper or had a cleverly hidden entrance, it wouldn't take long for it to be found.

If Monsieur Ive's apartment did have a similar tunnel, he wouldn't have needed to venture out to the nearby Underground Trier entrance at night.

In the midst of these thoughts, Lumian recalled two important details.

Firstly, he had “witnessed” a change in Monsieur Ive's luck when they first met. The next day, he realized that luck had inexplicably altered.

Secondly, Monsieur Ive possessed Beyonder powers and had a high likelihood of being a believer in the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire. Despite having a low Sequence, when the official Beyonders brought him in for questioning, they found nothing amiss.

Combining these perplexing facts with the disparity between the Prophecy Spell and reality, Lumian's pupils contracted as he muttered to himself:

A decoy, could it be real?

Was the person residing in the opposite apartment all this time after the robbery a mere decoy?

Is that why his luck changed and the official Beyonders failed to detect anything wrong?

How is it possible for him to resemble Monsieur Ive so perfectly? Did he employ a mystical item akin to the Mystery Prying Glasses or some other method? And where is the real Monsieur Ive hiding in Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? The more Lumian pondered, the more unnerved he became.

No one had discovered the substitution that took place.

At the very least, Christo's men showed signs of mirror-like reversal.

From the assortment of the pervert's abilities, Lumian had already deduced that Monsieur Ive had sensed something awry after being “robbed.” After all, even a single *verl d'or* held value as money. No robber would willingly discard it. And if it had truly been discarded, it meant that the robbery was not the true objective. It was understandable, then, that Monsieur Ive had prepared himself to conceal his secrets from the official Beyonders. Lumian simply hadn't anticipated such a bizarre method.

He had actually fashioned a *doppelgänger* identical to Monsieur Ive!

For a moment, Lumian couldn't ascertain whether the decoy in the apartment was an ordinary person adorned with Beyonder cosmetics or a devotee of the evil god with extraordinary powers.

If it was the former, Lumian desired to seize the opportunity in the dead of night, apprehend the decoy, administer a thorough thrashing, and extract the truth. Then, he would deliver the decoy to the police headquarters or a cathedral, leaving the official Beyonders to conclude matters.

If it was the latter, he dared not act impulsively. No one knew the decoy's Sequence level or the breadth of its abilities.

Lumian turned his head once more, casting a glance at the brick-red, three-story building housing Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. He noted that no more patrons emerged from its entrance, dispelling his idea of venturing inside for another look.

The final performance of the day had concluded!

After contemplating for a while, Lumian resolved to make some preparations.

He rose slowly to his feet and proceeded toward Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, skulking in the shadows untouched by the glow of the gas street lamps.

Along the way, he scrutinized the vagabonds slumbering in the corners of the roadside, his gaze deep and earnest.

Finally, he found a suitable target.

Huddled beneath a makeshift barricade in the alley, the vagabond's clothing was tattered and stained with mud. His legs bore the marks of dog bites, festering wounds oozing yellow pus.

In Lumian's eyes, this individual was plagued by misfortune. He would face a series of calamities in the next two or three days, with his very life potentially at stake.

This made him the ideal “material” for the Luck Enhancement Spell!

Yes, Lumian intended to employ the ritualistic magic of the Alms Monk—the Luck Enhancement Spell—to fashion an item capable of transmitting ill fortune.

If the fake Monsieur Ive were to be plagued by misfortune, continually beset by various predicaments, there was a high likelihood that he would reveal his predicament to the official Beyonders!

With this in mind, Lumian had been on the lookout for the most hapless vagabonds. This particular group belonged to the realm of ill-fated individuals.

With his cap pulled low, Lumian approached the vagabond, positioning himself so the gas lamps on the street cast his face in shadows.

He crouched down, black-gloved hands ready, and gently prodded the tramp.

“You...” The tramp stirred, his voice filled with pain and confusion.

“I need your assistance with something. Willing to lend a hand?” Lumian produced a silver coin, worth one verl d'or, adorned with cherubs and intricate lines.

The tramp's eyes were immediately drawn to the gleaming coin. Without hesitation, he nodded and replied, “No problem!”

As he spoke, he extended his hand, already imagining the aroma of Apple Whiskey Sour and hearty meatloaf.

Once the silver coin was in his palm, the tramp's eyes widened suddenly, fixated on something behind Lumian. He blurted out in shock, “That's...”

Seizing the moment Lumian turned his head, the tramp swiftly pushed himself up, attempting to vault over the barricade and sprint down the alley.

It was evident that giving money to a vagabond and enlisting his cooperation in something posed a clear danger!

For an ordinary tramp, the logical choice was to accept the money and make a run for it!

Whack!

Lumian swiftly withdrew his right hand, calmly observing as the tramp slumped against the barricade, unconscious.

From the start, Lumian had no intention of allowing the tramp to witness everything while awake. Even if he were blindfolded and his ears blocked, there was still a risk of danger. Moreover, there was the potential for revealing Lumian's identity and the sinister ritualistic magic known as the Luck Enhancement Spell.

Hence, his plan had been to seek the tramp's consent and then render him unconscious.

Lumian assisted the tramp to his feet, as if supporting a drunken companion, and guided him to the nearest entrance to Underground Trier. Finding a concealed spot nearby, he secured the tramp, binding his hands and feet, blindfolding him, and muffling his ears.

Once everything was in place, he stealthily returned to Salle de Bal Brise, retrieving a carbide lamp and the necessary tools.

Without delay, he went back to the entrance, carefully lifting the unconscious tramp and making his way to the quarry cave where he had previously performed the Prophecy Spell.

This time, however, the ritual had undergone a change. While it remained a dualistic ceremony, the orange candle representing a deity and other supplicants had been replaced with one of a grayish-white hue.

It still contained Lumian's blood.

To enhance his chances of success, Lumian intended to utilize the ritualistic magic to “pray” to the corruption sealed within his chest, mobilizing a fragment of its power.

After constructing the altar and erecting a wall of spirituality, he plunged Hedsey's tainted dagger into the tramp, allowing his blood to flow into a metal vial.

The tramp stirred, only to be swiftly rendered unconscious once again.

Lumian disinfected and bandaged the wound, blending the blood with ash from his own hair to create an ink-like substance. Using the thinnest paintbrush at his disposal, he meticulously outlined a series of intricate and enigmatic symbols on faux goatskin parchment.

The design consisted of interwoven black thorns forming a ring, snakes with entwined heads and tails, a river composed of these serpentine figures, distorted lines, a peculiar eye, and more.

By the time he completed a fraction of the intricate work, Lumian's forehead was drenched in a sheen of cold sweat.

He positioned the tramp and the faux goatskin adorned with symbols upon the boulder that served as the altar. Dripping perfume into the flames and sprinkling powder, Lumian took two steps back, fixing his gaze upon the gently flickering yellow candle flame, and uttered ancient Hermes words:

“Power of Inevitability!

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

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

As before, the flame of the deity's candle compressed to its utmost limits before expanding, swelling to the size of a clenched fist. Its hue transformed to a silvery-black shade, distorting everything in its vicinity. Gray mist filled the air, and a tempest of darkness whirled about.

Lumian, his ears assailed by frenzied murmurs, endured the vertigo and switched to the Hermes tongue.

“I implore you,

“I implore you to alter this destitute man's fate.

“I pray that you will take away his misfortune.”

At this juncture, Lumian took a step forward and ignited the faux goatskin adorned with mysterious symbols using the silver-black candle flame. Placing it within a natural crevice on the altar's surface, he observed as the parchment began to smolder.

In the next instant, he produced a gold coin worth five verl d'or, engraved with the Sunbird, and positioned it near the tramp's outstretched hand.

To those gripped by greed, money was an irresistible lure. It served as the optimal conduit!

Lumian, burdened by a sensation akin to carrying a weight of over five hundred kilograms, retreated a step, awaiting the consumption of the smoldering faux goatskin before commencing the final incantation.

“Gray amber, a herb that belongs to inevitability, please pass your powers to my incantation...”

The entire altar abruptly ignited, assuming an ethereal semblance. Before Lumian, an illusory, intricate, and chilling river of mercury silently coursed its way.

It enshrouded the tramp and the gold coin, amplifying the murmurs in Lumian's ears and causing the cyan veins upon his face to bulge.

Instinctively, Lumian recoiled from the agony of supplicating for a boon. Suddenly, the illusory image shrank, descending upon the surface of the gold coin resting upon the altar.

Everything returned to its former state, except for the gold coin, which now appeared dimmer under the silver-black illumination.

Chapter 194 Triggered

At the sight of this, Lumian hastily concluded the ritual and extinguished the candles in the proper sequence.

The frenzied ravings that had filled his ears vanished, and the searing pain abruptly ceased before it could overwhelm him.

Once he tidied up the altar in a rough manner, Lumian shifted his gaze to the 5 verl d'or coin.

It no longer appeared peculiar. Bathed in the glow of the carbide lamp, it shimmered with a captivating golden sheen, indistinguishable from any other coin.

Lumian's eyes darkened suddenly, as if he were observing a living being, examining its fortune.

Normally, he couldn't "see" an object's fate, but this time was different. After focusing, he realized that the gold coin was enveloped in black vapor tinged with a hint of blood-red glow.

The former symbolized ill fortune, while the latter indicated a degree of impending catastrophe.

Phew... Lumian let out a sigh of relief.

This meant that the Luck Enhancement Spell had succeeded. The tramp's streak of misfortune for the next few days had been transferred to the gold coin!

However, if Lumian didn't find another person to bear this fate within three days, it would revert to the tramp, permanently untransferable.

Lumian continued to gaze at the tramp for a few more seconds, confirming that his luck had temporarily returned to normal, neither good nor bad.

Satisfied, Lumian, already positioned at the edge of the altar, reached out and picked up the 5 verl d'or, which served as the medium for luck transference.

He wasn't concerned that this act would transfer the misfortune attached to the item onto himself. That's because activating the Luck Enhancement Spell required specific conditions:

Firstly, the recipient had to willingly accept the gold coin and subjectively desire to possess it.

Secondly, throughout the entire process, the recipient had to exploit a situation they shouldn't have.

In other words, if Lumian used the gold coin to make a purchase, the shopkeeper wouldn't suffer any ill luck merely because they accepted the item—unless they sold Lumian something counterfeit or dishonestly manipulated the transaction for illicit gain.

Likewise, if Lumian discreetly slipped the gold coin into Charlie's pocket without his immediate awareness, Charlie wouldn't encounter misfortune when he eventually used it.

As the original owner of the coin, Lumian naturally remained unaffected by the Luck Enhancement Spell when he retrieved it.

The two straightforward methods to trigger the Luck Enhancement Spell were to keep the coin in his pocket and allow the target to steal it. He could also feign leaving it behind so the target could pick it up.

Lumian believed that unless individuals like Monsieur Ive, who had acquired a miserly habit, underwent a significant transformation, they would still harbor an enduring fondness for money. Falling into such a trap would be easy for them.

After erasing various traces on the altar, he hoisted the tramp onto his back and ascended to the surface. He dumped him back into the alley where he had been found, removing the ropes binding his hands and feet, along with the cloth covering his eyes and ears.

The tramp stirred slowly, uttering pleas of desperate fear, "Please, let me go!"

He blinked his eyes open, instinctively scanning his surroundings. To his realization, there was no one in sight, and he found himself still slumbering in his usual spot.

“...” The tramp fell silent.

As his senses gradually returned, his initial reaction was to delve into his pocket.

A chill seeped into his mind, and with a gleeful expression, he retrieved a silver coin worth 1 verl d'or.

It's still here!

It's really still there!

It wasn't a dream!

Under the faint crimson moonlight casting its glow from above and the street lamps illuminating the vicinity, the tramp fiddled with the silver coin repeatedly, assuring himself that it wasn't a counterfeit.

Only then did he recall to examine his body.

Soon, he noticed that his arm was bandaged, and a sharp ache assaulted his mind.

Apart from that, there was nothing out of the ordinary.

The tramp stumbled to his feet, rubbing his backside as he muttered to himself, “It's not that kind of pervert...”

Having witnessed the world prior to his bankruptcy, he was aware that Trier housed its fair share of peculiar individuals. Consequently, various private organizations had sprung up. Some advocated that men and women existed solely for reproduction, while others believed that true love only blossomed between men. Gatherings even catered to those who believed that women alone held the secret to loving their own kind.

The tramp had initially suspected he had fallen victim to men with a peculiar fixation on foul, unwashed men. However, it seemed that wasn't the case.

After pondering for a moment, he conjectured that someone had taken an interest in his blood and extracted some. The 1 verl d'or was his reward.

He had heard tales before of influential figures relying on continual blood transfusions to sustain their lives.

“At least there's 1 verl d'or.” The tramp instantly rejoiced, no longer dwelling on the loss of blood.

He even entertained the hope that the other party would seek him out once more. When the time came, he would willingly inquire about their desired price.

Lumian relied on a copper coin toss to decide that he would spend the night at Auberge du Coq Doré. Consequently, he returned to Room 207 and slept until 6 a.m.

After having breakfast and engaging in some outdoor exercises, then returning to the motel, changing his attire, and disguising himself, Lumian prepared to set off for Avenue du Marché to find the two cleaning ladies already hard at work.

Lumian caught sight of a cleaning lady in her fifties, sporting a vibrant golden wig and makeup, as she diligently cleared the trash in the lobby. Lumian halted his steps and asked contemplatively, "You're Elodie, aren't you?"

He recalled Charlie mentioning her name.

"Yes, Monsieur Ciel." Elodie straightened her posture.

She wore an old yet clean grayish-white dress and stood at an average height of 1.65 meters. From her facial features, it was evident that she had been quite attractive in her youth.

"You know me?" Lumian inquired nonchalantly.

Elodie answered truthfully, "Monsieur Charlie Collent spoke of you before. He mentioned that you're the hotel's guardian."

Heh heh, just as expected of Charlie... That's the right attitude. No trace of inferiority or fear... Lumian started to feel that Elodie, the cleaning lady, wasn't a former street girl as Charlie had speculated.

He casually asked, "I heard from Charlie that you used to be a theater actress?"

"Yes." A smile graced Elodie's face. "I performed in two theaters, taking on supporting roles. However, one of them went bankrupt, and the other stopped hiring me for some reason. I was already quite old by then."

As she reminisced about the past, a hint of melancholy appeared in her demeanor.

Lumian nodded and glanced towards the motel door.

"Have you heard of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons?"

This was the question he was truly interested in.

This cleaning lady named Elodie was originally a theater actress, but she had been hired by Monsieur Ive, the motel landlord who had a close relationship with Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. It was a little suspicious.

Elodie's expression became animated.

"I know that their plays are splendid. The actors possess remarkable acting skills. It's worth saving up for a month just to purchase tickets to their shows.

"When I attended a performance at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, I discovered that they were in need of a cleaning lady for half a day. That's why I ended up here."

I see... It seems unrelated to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons or Monsieur Ive... Lumian refrained from further probing to avoid raising any suspicions. He smiled and remarked, "Seems like you have other jobs?"

Elodie believed that Monsieur Ciel sought to ascertain the cleaning lady's background to protect the motel's interests, so she responded honestly, "Every day from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., I work at a factory

south of the market district. It's called the Goodville Chemical Factory, situated on Rue Saint-Hilaire.”

Rue Saint-Hilaire ran alongside Trier's city walls and neighbored the factories in Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

Trier's factories had preserved a practice from the era of Roselle. If production continued around the clock, the workers were divided into three shifts: one for the morning to noon, another for the afternoon to evening, and the final one for the night.

“That sounds demanding.” Lumian sighed.

Elodie smiled and spoke gently, “I have two children who are nearly grown. Once they secure their own jobs, I won't have to toil so relentlessly.”

“What about your husband?” Lumian casually inquired.

Elodie's expression darkened.

“He died in a factory accident a few years ago.”

Lumian didn't pry further. Instead, he engaged in conversation with another cleaning lady, faithfully fulfilling his duties as the protector of Auberge du Coq Doré.

Exiting Rue Anarchie, Lumian stepped onto Avenue du Marché, making his way towards Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

He wasn't intentionally waiting for Monsieur Ive, who was suspected of being a decoy. His intention was simply to observe. His primary objective was to keep a close watch on the individuals heading to 126 Avenue du Marché.

The Prophecy Spell had revealed to him that he would cross paths with Louis Lund on Avenue du Marché. “Hammer” Ait had mentioned that Louis Lund would once again seek out the boss of the Poison Spur Mob, “Black Scorpion” Roger, this Saturday or Sunday, and “Black Scorpion” Roger resided at 126 Avenue du Marché.

With this combination of information, Lumian had decided to become a “permanent resident” on Avenue du Marché on Monday and wander about in hopes of encountering his target.

As Lumian neared Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and Monsieur Ive's apartment, he slowed his pace. Sometimes, he sat among the tramps, while other times, he visited a nearby café for a drink.

Since he was already there, it was only natural for him to keep an eye out for Monsieur Ive. After all, this was Avenue du Marché as well.

After nearly 45 minutes, Lumian finally spotted the landlord of the motel.

Clad in a faded formal suit, a worn-out top hat, and a black cane that was on the verge of losing its paint, Monsieur Ive emerged from the apartment and made his way towards the Suhit steam locomotive station.

Lumian gradually stood up and glanced behind him. He feigned terror and jogged, as if he were being pursued by an enemy.

In his attempt to overtake Monsieur Ive from behind, he accidentally collided with him.

A clatter ensued as a golden coin fell to the ground, yet Lumian seemed oblivious to it. He lowered his head and fled in a panic.

Monsieur Ive grumbled, his gaze suddenly drawn to the golden coin on the pavement.

Subconsciously, he wanted to call out to the impolite individual, but as he extended his hand, no words escaped his lips.

Swiftly scanning his surroundings, he swiftly squatted down and retrieved the 5-verl d'or coin. Nonchalantly, he slipped it into his pocket, as if nothing out of the ordinary had transpired.

Chapter 195 Candidate

Hidden behind the shadow of an ebony street lamp, a mere twenty meters away from Monsieur Ive, Lumian leaned discreetly, tugging his cap lower amidst the bustling crowd. He watched intently as his mark retrieved the glistening gold coin, secretively stashing it away.

Only then did Lumian release a sigh of relief. With one hand nonchalantly tucked inside his pocket, he strolled towards 126 Avenue du Marché, paying no further heed to the dubious decoy, for the Luck Enhancement Spell had been officially set in motion, impervious to interruption.

However, the spell required time to manifest its effects. Within half a day or, at most, a full day, misfortune would incessantly plague the false Monsieur Ive. Lumian need only orchestrate a small incident when the opportune moment arrived, and the chances were high that Monsieur Ive would inadvertently unveil his peculiar nature to the legitimate Beyonders.

As Lumian ventured forth, he soon realized that 126 Avenue du Marché was none other than the abode of “Black Scorpion” Roger, the very nerve center of the Poison Spur Mob. Consequently, he dared not approach too closely, wary of exposing himself. Settling himself near a café window, diagonally positioned at a distance of over ten meters, he ordered a Fermo coffee and a dariole.

While awaiting his refreshments, Lumian attentively scanned the passersby on Avenue du Marché, his gaze lingering upon the promotional posters adorning the café's walls.

A prevalent theme among them was the impending National Convention elections scheduled to commence on Sunday.

There were three contenders vying for the position: Matthew Boulanger, representing the National Party; Hugues Artois, championing the Enlightenment Party; and Jacques Sanson, hailing from the Revolutionary Party.

As Lumian observed the fervor surrounding the approach to 126 Avenue du Marché, he found himself engrossed in the manifestos of the candidates.

Matthew Boulanger, the incumbent parliament member for the Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman district, advocated for the restoration of Intis's former glory. His rallying cry was “Make Intis Glorious Again.” Boulanger attributed the nation's current predicaments to its defeat in the recent war against the Loen Kingdom. His proposed solution entailed reorganizing the Intis army with a renewed focus on prioritizing Intis's interests. He sought to regain the advantages relinquished in the Southern Continent, bolster the economy, and transform the marketplace district.

Boulanger believed that the process of “Making Intis Glorious Again” would bestow upon the denizens of the marketplace district an abundance of employment opportunities, enabling them to amass wealth, whether through venturing into the Southern Continent, enlisting in the army, or capitalizing on foreign trade.

Hugues Artois, a candidate gaining considerable popularity of late, advocated for “More Jobs, For A Fairer Society.” His pledge was to invigorate the economy, constructing additional factories in the southern region of the marketplace district, while simultaneously dismantling the shackles that bound factory owners, bankers, financiers, and merchants. However, his intentions also encompassed challenging the privileges enjoyed by the Church and the affluent, imposing heavier taxes upon them.

Jacques Sanson, a member of the Revolutionary Party, shared Hugues Artois's conviction that societal privileges had no place in the modern world. Regardless of one's affiliation with the Church or financial benefits, Sanson believed that everyone should pay equal taxes.

He boldly asserted that the current tariff policies hindered Intis's progress, particularly the city walls and the 54 checkpoints surrounding Trier. Sanson advocated for the free circulation of goods and the establishment of a liberated market, which would lead to the proliferation of factories and a significant increase in tax revenue. By taxing the privileged class alongside these reforms, the national treasury would swiftly recover from any initial setbacks.

When the time came, Sanson planned to explore the implementation of Emperor Roselle's envisioned annuity guarantee system, providing essential protection to the workers in the marketplace district.

His slogan resounded, “Take Down Those Damned Walls!”

Having finished reading the candidates' platforms, Lumian couldn't help but feel inclined to vote for Jacques Sanson.

While it remained uncertain whether Sanson possessed the capability to realize his ideas, cheaper alcohol and goods would bring tangible benefits and security to the people in the marketplace district.

As for taxing the privileged, they weren't overly concerned, as long as the burden didn't exceed a coppet.

Yet, it was evident that Jacques Sanson faced discrimination. His campaign posters were relegated to the farthest corners, barely visible. This treatment stemmed from the Revolutionary Party's perennial status as a minority within the National Convention.

As the Poison Spur Mob rallied behind Hugues Artois of the Enlightenment Party, Lumian directed his utmost attention towards this candidate. He not only perused Artois's election platform but also scrutinized his color photographs.

Artois, a man in his thirties, possessed a luxuriant head of black, fluffy hair with hints of gray at his temples. His nose stood tall and proud, complemented by deep blue eyes. His height commanded attention, and he exuded an air of refinement when dressed formally.

I can't allow this man to be elected... Unless I dismantle the Poison Spur Mob before that happens. However, the Mob still enjoys the mysterious support of Madame Moon. Even if one Black

Scorpion falls, another Red Scorpion will emerge... Yes, the elections are set to commence this Sunday. The police headquarters, military police, and official Beyonders will be mobilized to vigilantly monitor each constituency. Causing trouble won't be easy... Should I involve the laborers, porters, and waiters of the Savoie Mob? Lumian contemplated how to secure the National Convention seat for both Matthew Boulanger and Jacques Sanson.

Lost in thought, he maintained a watchful eye on the window, hoping to catch sight of Louis Lund.

After a considerable time had passed, the golden sun ascended into the sky. Lumian realized that waiting was not a viable option.

Firstly, his identity posed a problem. He remained under the intense scrutiny of the Poison Spur Mob, preventing him from waiting in a building opposite "Black Scorpion" Roger's residence. Such a vantage point would limit his view and increase the risk of overlooking crucial details.

Secondly, as the leader of the Savoie Mob, he had numerous responsibilities to fulfill and required moments of respite. Waiting 24 hours a day for two straight days was simply unfeasible.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian was struck by an idea.

Why should I do it myself when I have so many subordinates and even hired Anthony Reid with my own money?

With that thought, Lumian rose from his seat and left the café, making his way towards Salle de Bal Brise.

As he reached the middle of Avenue du Marché, Lumian's attention was drawn to a gathering by the roadside. At the outskirts of the crowd stood a circle of black-uniformed police officers, while two rows of mounted officers observed the passersby.

Amidst the 200 to 300 people, there stood a makeshift wooden platform. A man in a black suit, sans bow tie, commanded the stage.

A massive poster displaying his photo adorned the outer wall of the house behind him. His resounding voice resonated through the streets.

"We need jobs. We need better income..."

"I will construct more factories on Rue Saint-Hilaire..."

"I pledge tax concessions for these factories..."

Ah, isn't that Monsieur Hugues Artois? Lumian, utilizing his above-average Intis height, could clearly see the speaker on the wooden stage.

It was the elegant, black-haired, blue-eyed Hugues Artois, a candidate supported by the Poison Spur Mob!

Lumian listened for several seconds, his gaze instinctively scanning the upper levels of the building opposite Hugues Artois, examining the windows and roof.

As expected, he detected signs of police officers or individuals who clearly did not belong to the household.

He's well-protected indeed... I cannot shoot Hugues Artois in the head or chest from those positions using a rifle... Lumian averted his gaze, a tinge of regret washing over him.

There was another way to ensure Hugues Artois's defeat in the election, and that was to prevent him from participating altogether.

Those who perished would automatically forfeit their right to run!

Lumian had seriously contemplated the feasibility of this plan while at the café, but he concluded that it would stir up too much chaos. The market district mobs would likely be mobilized and used as scapegoats. He himself would fall into that category. If that happened, his true identity would likely be exposed, compelling him to flee the market district, if not Trier altogether. He would lose the opportunity to track down Madame Pualis and the padre.

Assassinating the candidate appeared to be quite a challenge. Even if he were fortunate enough to succeed, escape might not be guaranteed.

Lumian shifted his gaze to the people standing behind the wooden platform. They were most likely members of Hugues Artois's campaign—a trio of men and two women.

Among them, there was a woman with fiery red hair, rumored to possess noble lineage. Her features were striking, with chiseled lines on her face, yet there was an overall air of neutrality to her beauty.

Tall and attired in a white and brown hunting suit, she was accompanied by four other individuals.

Fearful of missing Louis Lund, Lumian paid no heed to Hugues Artois's oration. He withdrew from the throng and made his way back to Salle de Bal Brise.

Noontime brought few patrons to the establishment. Some waiters and bartenders took a break, while others busied themselves with tidying up.

Addressing Louis and Sarkota, Lumian spoke up. "Dispatch four men to keep watch at 126 Avenue du Marché."

"126..." Louis repeated, his voice filled with astonishment. "Isn't that 'Black Scorpion' Roger's residence?"

Is the boss planning to stir up trouble for the Poison Spur Mob once again?

Lumian nodded, his expression candid.

"You've got it. Don't get too close and ensure you remain undetected. Stand guard from different vantage points and observe whether he appears among the passersby."

Lumian gestured toward the wanted posters adorning the wall, as well as Louis Lund, who stood nearby.

Since joining the Savoie Mob, Louis's own wanted poster had been discreetly moved to an even more inconspicuous spot.

Louis and Sarkota turned their attention to the wanted poster, carefully examining its contents. Words like "Cordu Village" caught their eye.

They grasped the general idea and readily agreed.

“Yes, Boss.”

Once the four mobsters departed Salle de Bal Brise with the wanted poster in tow, Lumian turned to Louis and Sarkota.

“For the next few days, your task will be to maintain order on the first-floor dance hall.”

Having issued his instructions, Lumian added nonchalantly, “I just caught snippets of Hugues Artois's speech. Not bad. Hmm... Whom does our Savoie Mob support as the market district's member of parliament?”

Louis cast a quick glance around and lowered his voice.

“The baron mentioned that he intends to vote for Monsieur Artois.”

Chapter 196 Elimination

Hugues Artois? Lumian never anticipated such a response.

Did the competing Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob really endorse the same candidate?

If Hugues Artois succeeded, would he assist the Poison Spur Mob in dealing with the Savoie Mob? Or would he aid the Savoie Mob in completely overthrowing the Poison Spur Mob? Or would he demand peace between the two factions?

The more Lumian pondered it, the more he sensed that something was amiss.

If the influential figure behind both the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob was none other than Hugues Artois, then the two sides wouldn't have become bitter enemies to this extent!

Though Lumian played his part, wasn't he acting under the blessings of the Boss and Baron Brignais?

Furthermore, Hugues Artois wasn't an elected member of parliament. What authority did he have to protect both the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob?

The only plausible explanation was the machinations of the Enlightenment Party, but it made no sense for them to incite two rival mobs to fight each other to the death.

Lumian, lacking experience in this area, failed to find an answer even after considerable thought. All he could do was sigh with regret.

I can't employ the Savoie Mob's men to secretly intimidate voters into not supporting Hugues Artois!

He glanced at Louis, his confusion evident as he asked, “Why was I unaware that our Savoie Mob is backing Hugues Artois?”

Louis immediately grew tense.

“I assumed the baron had apprised you, Boss.”

Wasn't that the purpose of the handover?

Baron Brignais was in a foul mood after losing the Salle de Bal Brise, so he couldn't be bothered to inform me about many things. In any case, I'll find out when I need to know? Lumian mumbled inwardly as he departed from Salle de Bal Brise and returned to Auberge du Coq Doré. He proceeded directly to the third floor and made his way to Room 5, the dwelling of Anthony Reid, the information broker. Extending his hand, Lumian knocked on the wooden door.

Knocks reverberated, yet no response came.

He must not be present... That makes sense. How can an information broker stay holed up at home all the time... Lumian retrieved a note and fountain pen he carried with him and wrote on the note, using Anthony Reid's door as a surface:

"I've received intel that Louis Lund will be seen on Avenue du Marché from Saturday to Sunday. Keep a close watch on him. As soon as you spot him, notify me without delay. You can find me either in Room 207 at the motel or at Salle de Bal Brise. The agreed payment will be made promptly when the time comes.

"Ciel."

After sliding the note through the crevice of Room 305's door, Lumian returned to Salle de Bal Brise and settled in the café, patiently awaiting feedback.

Has Louis Lund been discovered? Lumian rose from his seat, eyeing his subordinate.

The mobster appeared inexplicably anxious, as if a famished lion had set its sights on him.

Without waiting for Lumian to inquire, he stammered in haste, "Boss, th-this is bad! I saw, I saw a group of police officers heading toward the depot!"

The depot? Isn't that under the boss's ownership? Ah, near the depot lies the warehouse belonging to "Rat" Christo... Could Franca's "report" have taken effect? Lumian swiftly contemplated a possibility.

This left him disheartened.

In his eyes, the mirror people and any potential harm they might bring couldn't hold a candle to a single strand of Louis Lund's hair!

Suppressing his emotions and residual excitement, Lumian spoke to his subordinate, "Understood. I'll handle it. Return to your original post and remain vigilant for the person depicted in the wanted poster. In half an hour, I'll send four others to relieve you."

"Yes, Boss." The gangster heaved a sigh of relief and made his way downstairs.

As Lumian watched him disappear, he gazed down at his trembling hands.

They still quivered slightly.

It was a result of the sudden surge of exhilaration he experienced when he thought his subordinate had brought news of Louis Lund.

At times, my emotional stability wavers... Fortunately, I have another psychiatric session scheduled for this Sunday... Lumian sighed inwardly, taking a seat and savoring his coffee.

In order to welcome Louis Lund in his finest state, he had refrained from ordering alcohol.

Outside the warehouses belonging to “Rat” Christo.

He, along with his subordinates and the porters, had gathered together, encircled by 20 to 30 armed police officers donning black uniforms.

Christo forced a fawning smile and addressed Superintendent Travis Everett, saying, “Monsieur Superintendent, why have you suddenly surrounded the warehouses? I'm a legitimate businessman!”

Everett, a man in his thirties with black-framed glasses and a broad chin, regarded Christo and spoke in a deep voice, “Do not assume that we are unaware of your usual dealings. We are not dealing with you because you abide by the rules and know what is permissible. Your only choice now is to cooperate with us and aid us in unraveling this as swiftly as possible.”

Christo detected a glimmer of hope in Superintendent Everett's words and nodded.

“Alright, alright, no problem!”

He had already distributed the batch of goods from yesterday. As long as the genuine account books were not discovered, there was no concrete evidence to accuse him.

With his short black hair, Everett turned to the man standing beside him and said, “Monsieur Deputy Assistant Commissioner, you may proceed.”

The man had a rugged appearance, sporting fluffy blond hair, golden eyebrows, and a beard. He wore a slightly smaller black police uniform, but his buttons were crafted from gold.

Adorning his epaulet was a silver-white seven-petal scented iris, accompanied by an off-white diamond square.

This emblem indicated the rank of Deputy Assistant Commissioner.

The police department in Trier had four ranks, in ascending order: Chief Superintendent, Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner, and Deputy Commissioner.

Of these, there was only one Deputy Commissioner—the head of Trier's police department. Across the entire Intis Republic, the minister of the National Police Department, a Commissioner, held a higher rank.

The Assistant Commissioner and Deputy Assistant Commissioner served as Trier's Police Department's Deputy Minister and Police Committee members. Their epaulets displayed off-white diamond squares beside the seven-petaled irises. There were four Commissioners, three Deputy Commissioners, two Assistant Commissioners, and one Deputy Assistant Commissioner, with no Chief Superintendents.

In other words, this uncouth man with blond hair and a golden beard held an equal rank to Aymerck, the Police Committee member in charge of the entire Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman. However, Christo was entirely unfamiliar with him.

“Just call me Angoulême,” the rugged Deputy Assistant Commissioner replied succinctly.

His gaze swept across Christo, Erkin, and the others, inexplicably making them feel as if they were staring at the blinding sun, forcing them to lower their heads.

Angoulême averted his gaze and instructed the plain-clothes team behind him, “You may bring that object forward now.”

Two team members approached the nearby four-wheeled carriage and unveiled a wide, flat, and sizable object covered in a black velvet curtain.

They positioned the object beside Angoulême.

Angoulême locked eyes with “Rat” Christo and the others, subtly raising his chin, and uttered, “Line up in front of me, one by one.”

Christo sensed the kid in his pocket trembling visibly. He surmised that Angoulême was an official Beyond, someone of considerable power.

After a few moments of contemplation, he approached Angoulême fearfully, not daring to resist.

Suddenly, Angoulême pulled open the black velvet curtain, revealing the complete appearance of the object beside him.

It was a full-body mirror, simple and unadorned, mounted on a stand of rusted iron-black.

Christo's reflection appeared instantly in the mirror, capturing every detail.

Christo remained unaware of anything amiss, but Erkin's expression underwent a drastic change behind him.

Erkin abruptly turned to the left, attempting to escape.

Almost 20 others followed suit, including laborers and porters.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Angoulême's team had already prepared, raising their arms and squeezing the triggers.

Bullets struck those fleeing, but it was as if they struck an illusion, passing through them and landing in the distance.

Angoulême calmly extended his left hand and adjusted the position of the full-body mirror beside him.

The mirror reflected Erkin's figure against a dark background.

Erkin froze in place, maintaining his running posture.

In an instant, he was drawn towards the full-body mirror, a look of horror etched on his face.

As soon as the two collided, Erkin's body vanished.

In the blink of an eye, he reappeared in the mirror, his face stained with blood. His expression turned sinister, consumed by hatred and resentment.

He opened his mouth as if to scream, but an invisible force pulled him into the unnaturally dark backdrop of the mirror, and he vanished.

Witnessing this, Christo stood dumbfounded, forgetting to aid his brother.

One thought echoed in his mind: There's something terribly wrong with them...

Meanwhile, Angoulême's subordinates worked to control the fleeing individuals. The ordinary people caught in the midst of the chaos cowered on the ground, heads lowered, trembling with fear.

In Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian sat at the bar counter, listening to Jenna's captivating singing. Two hours ago, he had received news that "Rat" Christo was unharmed, but a group of his subordinates had perished.

Quite efficient... Lumian inwardly commended the official Beyonders in the market district.

As the risqué song came to an end, a woman who had been waiting on the sidelines took the stage and hurriedly approached a young band member. She sobbed and cried out twice.

It seemed she was delivering news of someone's death.

The band member stood frozen, shocked by the news, unable to react for a moment.

After a few seconds, he flung aside the six-string zither strapped to him and dashed off the stage.

However, he only managed a few steps before he stumbled and fell heavily to the ground. He struggled to rise but failed.

In the next moment, tears streamed down his face.

Jenna, adorned in a shimmering red dress, observed him for a few seconds before pressing her lips together. Eventually, she didn't offer consolation, allowing the band member and the grieving woman to weep.

She quietly stepped down from the stage and crossed paths with Lumian, who had left the bar counter.

"What happened?" Lumian inquired.

Jenna let out a soft sigh and replied, "His father passed away in an accident a few hours ago. I know him. Learning to play a musical instrument hasn't been easy for him. His father works as a porter, and his mother is a dishwasher. Without their unwavering support, he would be limited to manual labor..."

An accident a few hours ago... A porter... Lumian roughly pieced together the cause.

He gazed silently at the stage.

Chapter 197 Helper

After the band member and his mother got time off from René, Salle de Bal Brise's manager, the drumbeats reverberated through the air, signaling the start of a new round of dancing.

Lumian turned his gaze to Jenna, who stood by his side, and spoke in a casual tone.

"I thought you would offer him some comfort. After all, you know him well and often collaborate with their band."

Jenna, dressed in a stunning red sequined dress that revealed a generous amount of her chest, pressed her lips together and responded calmly.

“In that moment just now, what he needed wasn't comforting words but a release. Offering condolences would only worsen his pain.”

Lumian scrutinized Jenna for a few moments.

“You seem to understand it quite well. Why do I have a feeling that you've experienced something similar yourself?”

Jenna lowered her gaze to her toes and smiled softly.

“A few years ago, I went through the same thing when my father passed away.

“One day, before dawn, my mother took me to the rooftop of our apartment and stayed with me until the sunrise. I witnessed the gradual brightening of the sky, from pitch black to a deep blue. It grew lighter and lighter, and I saw the clouds adorned with shades of bright gold and other colors.

“In that moment, she told me that darkness would eventually pass, and the sun would rise. Light would always find its way to illuminate the land.

“When he returns to the band, I'll find an opportunity to share something similar with him.”

Lumian listened in silence, letting out a sigh. “You have a wonderful mother.”

“Yes.” Jenna accepted the compliment with pride.

Lumian chuckled and remarked, “You managed to say so much without resorting to curses. That's unlike you.”

Moreover, she appeared rather refined.

“Damn it! Do you think I'm the type of person who curses incessantly?” Jenna cursed indignantly and made her way to the break room to prepare for the next song.

Lumian settled back at the bar counter, his mind preoccupied with another matter.

He had therapy scheduled for tomorrow afternoon, and there was a possibility of Louis Lund showing up on Sunday.

What if he missed it?

Lumian's initial impulse was to write a letter to Madam Magician and request her to check with his psychiatrist, Madam Susie, about the possibility of rescheduling the treatment by a day. However, he couldn't shake off the feeling of his condition being unstable for the past two days. If he didn't act promptly, he might face severe consequences when tracking down Louis Lund.

Even though Madame Pualis wasn't exactly Madame Night, Lumian couldn't confront her directly. His primary objective was to locate the survivor from Cordu and engage in a friendly conversation with her.

Lumian didn't hold much animosity towards Madame Pualis. While she believed in an evil god and had involvement in Cordu, it appeared that she wasn't responsible for the disaster. She had departed before the ritual took place under some compulsion.

Hence, if he allowed himself to become unstable and reacted impulsively, escalating the conflict with Madame Pualis and making her his enemy, matters would become exceedingly troublesome, and he might even lose his life.

As for the dispute with the Poison Spur Mob, a problem with Madame Moon didn't equate to matters involving Madame Night.

After careful consideration, Lumian devised a plan to find someone who could track Louis Lund on his behalf and follow him to his residence in Trier.

There's no need to consider individuals without Beyonder powers. They simply wouldn't be able to keep up with him.

There are two viable options. The first is Anthony Reid, an information broker suspected of being a Beyonder from the Psychiatrist pathway. He possesses excellent tracking abilities and has already accepted my commission, receiving a deposit. Since the task involves locating Louis Lund, it naturally falls within the scope of the mission. If Anthony proves difficult, I'm prepared to offer more money.

The second option is Franca. She, along with Aurore, belongs to the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Franca knows my true identity and displays a certain level of concern for me. She is trustworthy to some extent, not to mention that she still owes me a favor. Franca possesses enough power to tail Louis Lund and even intercept him if necessary. As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, he rose from his seat, making his way to the bedroom on the second floor and leaving Salle de Bal Brise through the window.

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 305.

Lumian knocked on the wooden door.

"Please come in," Anthony Reid responded in a West Midlands accent.

The door slowly swung open.

The information broker stood before Lumian once more.

His plump face, once slick with oiliness, appeared freshly scrubbed, enhancing his air of honesty.

Wearing a grayish-blue worker's uniform, he seemed to have spent the entire day in the southern part of the market district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

"I've read your note," Anthony Reid said, running a hand through his receding light-yellow hairline. "I've been keeping an eye on Avenue du Marché."

Lumian felt a slight unease, but he surveyed the room and spoke directly.

"I have other matters to attend to between 2:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. tomorrow. If you happen to spot the target during that time, don't inform me. Simply follow him and ascertain his place of residence."

Anthony Reid locked his dark brown eyes onto Lumian's for a few seconds.

“Very well.”

He made no mention of an additional fee, and Lumian was content not to broach the subject either.

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches housed a relatively new apartment building. Its beige facade boasted a charming curvature, featuring numerous irregular walls adorned with a variety of statues. Angels, animals, celebrities, and legendary objects found their place amidst the architecture. The building boasted an abundance of large windows, wall pillars, and scroll art, creating an atmosphere of grandeur.

Lumian stood before Room 601 and pressed the doorbell.

With a jingling sound, Franca swung open the dark-red door.

Her flaxen hair cascaded naturally and voluminously, while she wore a loose white silk nightgown that gracefully reached her knees. The wide-open collar revealed a fair expanse of skin.

Observing that the other party showed no signs of wariness and wasn't even wearing a bra, Lumian made a conscious effort to keep his gaze focused.

Before opening the door, Franca seemed to already know the identity of the visitor. She greeted him with a smile.

“Coming to seek knowledge in mysticism?”

“After all our discussions, you've finally arrived.”

“No, it's something else,” Lumian responded, gesturing towards the room, indicating that they should speak inside.

Franca turned and walked towards the sofa, Lumian following closely behind. As he entered, he instinctively scanned his surroundings.

This apartment consisted of two bedrooms, a bathroom, a living room, and a kitchen. The furnishings in the living room, such as the sofa, coffee table, dining table, chairs, and cupboards, were predominantly beige, iron-black, silver-white, or light gray. The colors were muted and lacked vibrancy. The overall aesthetic was one of simplicity and cleanliness, but it also exuded a touch of coldness. It stood in stark contrast to the living room styles found in most households.

Lumian took a seat on the edge of the divan while Franca curled her legs and reclined on the adjacent armchair, revealing her alluring curves.

“What brings you here?” Franca inquired.

Lumian pointed towards her.

“Aren't you considering changing your clothes?”

Franca glanced down at her nightgown and came to a realization.

“Perhaps it's because you know my original gender. When I'm around you, I always have this illusion that I'm still a man and forget to pay attention to such details.”

A smile played on her lips. Rather than changing her attire, she shifted her sitting posture, accentuating her allure even further.

After a few moments, she even left her recliner and settled beside Lumian.

Sensing Lumian's perplexed gaze, she chuckled and remarked, "Since you won't peek, why should I bother changing?"

She made a playful gesture, unreservedly teasing him.

"Madame, you have a wicked sense of humor." Lumian sighed.

Franca grinned and replied, "Life is already tough. I need to seek some amusement for myself.

"But I'm considered fine. There's a group of individuals in the Research Society who harbor little hope for the future and have made it their life goal to pursue enjoyment. They've formed a group called April Fools' Day. Your sister must have mentioned it, right?"

"She did," Lumian confirmed, recalling reading about it in Aurore's grimoires.

Franca refrained from elaborating and fixed her gaze upon Lumian, her eyes resembling calm lakes, awaiting an explanation for his visit.

Lumian spoke directly, his words carrying a certain bluntness.

"I require a favor."

"Oh?" Franca responded cooperatively, her tone laced with curiosity.

Lumian took a moment to contemplate before continuing.

"Considering you've seen my wanted poster, you must possess some knowledge regarding it.

"I've received information that one of the individuals depicted, a man by the name of Louis Lund, will make an appearance on Avenue du Marché tomorrow. He maintains close ties with the masterminds behind the Poison Spur Mob.

"My intention is to apprehend him and unveil the truth behind the catastrophe in Cordu. However, I'll be preoccupied with crucial matters tomorrow afternoon, so I can't personally await his arrival. I hope you could lend me your assistance. Should he show, tail him and ascertain his whereabouts. If you feel confident, aid me in capturing him. He once possessed Beyonder powers equivalent to a Sequence 8 and is likely a Gardener, though I cannot say for certain at present.

"After acquiring the mirror, you did promise to compensate me. This would be it."

Franca retorted angrily, "This concerns Muggle's death. I will most certainly help. Compensation is not an appropriate term in this context."

“Tailing him doesn't count. But attacking him counts?” Lumian proposed. Discerning the underlying polite and detached nature of his request, Franca did not insist and simply nodded.

“That works too.”

Curiosity danced across her countenance as she posed another query.

“What could be more pressing than apprehending this individual named Louis Lund?”

“I expected you to be more concerned about uncovering the truth behind Cordu.”

Lumian pondered briefly before speaking candidly, “The Cordu disaster has left me grappling with certain psychological issues. I am presently undergoing regular treatment. I fear that without timely follow-up, I will lose control of my emotions, thus jeopardizing my quest for the truth.”

Franca nodded sympathetically, displaying her understanding.

Taking the initiative, she offered a suggestion.

“Would you like me to find a genuine psychiatrist—one with Beyonder powers—for you?”

“My psychiatrist already possesses them,” Lumian revealed, withholding nothing.

Franca refrained from prying further, recalling that Muggle's brother participated in other mystical gatherings.

Lumian mentioned the attributes of a Villain and a Gardener, as well as the existence of Anthony Reid. He provided a detailed description of Reid's appearance to ensure Franca wouldn't mistake him for a companion of Louis Lund, potentially leading to unnecessary conflict.

With that, Lumian rose from his seat, signaling his intention to depart.

Franca stood up, amused. “You've come all this way. Aren't you interested in delving into the mysteries of mysticism?”

“Louise Lund may make an appearance tonight as well,” Lumian remarked, eager to return to Salle de Bal Brise as swiftly as possible.

At that precise moment, both he and Franca directed their attention toward the door.

Light footfalls resonated from the stairs before halting nearby.

Franca glanced at the peephole from a distance, her expression suddenly morphing into one of peculiarity.

In hushed tones, she addressed Lumian, “Jenna!”

Chapter 198 Conciliation

Beneath the open window of Room 601, Lumian scaled the wall with his bare hands, aided by the protrusions, statues, and pipes. His descent was swift and steady, story after story, until he made a

final leap and landed gracefully on the edge of Rue des Blouses Blanches. He grumbled under his breath, "Why am I forced to climb down from the sixth floor? I haven't done anything!"

Lumian slipped into the shadows and made his way towards Avenue du Marché.

In Room 601.

Franca cast a fleeting glance at the swaying window, adjusting her silk nightgown before approaching the slowly opening door, wearing a smile.

Dressed in a sequined red dress, Jenna stored away the spare key Franca had entrusted to her and entered the apartment.

"Why are you here so early today?" Franca inquired, blocking Jenna's path to the window, her brow furrowed in confusion.

Jenna let out a sigh and replied, "Something happened to the band's six-stringed zither player. While it didn't affect my singing, it put everyone in a foul mood. The dance hall manager, René, asked me to end the performance early and switch tonight's theme to cheek-to-cheek dancing."

The cheek-to-cheek dance in the market district differed from the usual version. It involved intimate embraces and provocative movements between men and women on the dance floor. It was an exhilarating experience, but dance halls needed enough female dancers to organize it.

Attempting to find a topic of conversation, Franca asked, "What happened exactly?" She discreetly calculated the time it would take for Lumian to descend to the first floor, all the while grumbling internally, Why is Muggle's brother a Hunter instead of an Assassin? Assassins can effortlessly leap from the sixth floor and land as light as a feather!

Jenna recounted the band member's unfortunate incident and concluded, "Dammit, why do unlucky people always attract more misfortune?"

"Yes, even though the performance ended earlier than usual, it's still late. Going home would be quite troublesome. I'll sleep at your place."

Given that Jenna lived far away from Avenue du Marché, she often sought refuge at Franca's whenever she performed late into the night at the dance hall. She even had a spare key.

Warehouse... porter... Recalling the information provided by her subordinate, Franca surmised that it must be related to the matter involving "Rat" Christo.

As she let out a sigh, contemplating how the innocent had lost their kin, Franca inwardly expressed her sorrow.

Brother 007 is incredibly efficient. I only informed him about the mirror people late last night, and the official Beyonders have already dealt with the anomaly before this evening.

Brother 007 was the code name of a man from the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, a member of an official organization in Trier. His rank seemed quite high, and Franca had secret connections with many fellow researchers in Trier, often organizing private gatherings with them.

However, Franca knew that the matters involving the mirror people wouldn't end there. The special mirror world still existed, the mystery artifact that Gardner Martin smuggled into Trier remained, and the classic silver mirror in her possession persisted. If these elements weren't eliminated

entirely, it would only solve the problem temporarily. Franca couldn't predict when similar anomalies would arise in the future.

Franca approached the classic-styled silver mirror, which allowed entry into the special mirror world, with caution and seriousness. She believed it held a secret related to the Demoness pathway.

“Why are you so quiet?” Jenna asked, extending her right hand and waving it in front of Franca.

Franca snapped back to reality and let out a sigh.

“I feel a bit sad upon hearing about their misfortune.”

It was precisely because she didn't want to face the pain of countless innocents that she followed Lumian's suggestion and “handed over” the matter to the officials.

Jenna bypassed Franca and made her way to the guest room, intending to change into more comfortable attire.

“It was a bit stuffy,” Franca quickly explained.

Jenna regarded her with suspicion.

“Why did you feel the need to explain?”

Ahem... Franca nearly choked on her own saliva.

Thankfully, Jenna didn't dwell on it too much. She entered the guest room and headed towards the washroom, carrying her nightgown and pajamas.

Once Lumian returned to Avenue du Marché, he began his rounds, starting with Unit 126, where “Black Scorpion” Roger resided. He approached the four mobsters disguised as beggars stationed at different entrances, far from their intended target. Lumian made a promise to each of them, guaranteeing 100 verl d'or by Monday.

That night, he struggled to find rest in Salle de Bal Brise. Occasionally, he would wake up, straining his ears for any signs of movement outside the window, hoping to catch the sound of hurried footsteps.

At dawn, while enjoying breakfast at the café and skimming through a newspaper, Louis ascended from the first floor and whispered in Lumian's ear, “Boss, Superintendent Everett requests your presence at the Valiant café, opposite the police headquarters, for a cup of coffee precisely at 10 a.m.”

Superintendent Everett wants to meet me, the newly appointed leader of the Savoie Mob? Lumian remained relatively composed with the Mystery Prying Glasses in his possession.

He asked Louis, “Who else will be there?”

“Many,” Louis responded in a hushed tone. “They say all the mob leaders from the market district will gather. The official voting begins today.”

The voting would extend over three days.

Is that so... So they won't let us disrupt the National Convention election, it seems. I wonder if the Poison Spur Mob will attend? Lumian nodded and left Salle de Bal Brise at 9:15 a.m., making his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

In Room 207, he put on the Mystery Prying Glasses, experiencing the disorienting sensation of descending from great heights and burrowing into the ground.

Suppressing the urge to retch, Lumian retrieved a mirror and all his cosmetics, busying himself with preparations.

He opted for subtle alterations, focusing on thickening his eyebrows, accentuating his cheekbones, and enhancing shadowy areas. The adjustments created an impression that it was indeed Ciel and not someone else.

As soon as he finished his makeup, Lumian hastily set the mirror aside, unwilling to catch a glimpse of his reflection.

Shortly before 10 a.m., he arrived at the Valiant café and was promptly escorted to a private room by a waiter.

Upon entering, he immediately recognized several familiar faces—Baron Brignais, adorned in formal attire with a top hat and pipe; Franca, sporting trousers, red boots, and a blouse; the towering “Giant” Simon; and the merchant-like figure of “Blood Palm” Black.

Seated in an armchair at the head of the table, Travis Everett, donning a black uniform, rose with a smile upon seeing Lumian enter.

“You must be Ciel, am I right?”

“Yes, Superintendent Everett,” Lumian responded respectfully.

Franca, Baron Brignais, and the others, who had risen alongside Travis Everett, exchanged puzzled glances as they observed Lumian.

Franca's gaze averted in enlightenment as she recognized the golden-black hair. Baron Brignais, Giant Simon, and the rest gradually “realized” that it was Ciel.

Adjusting his black-framed glasses, Superintendent Everett's blue eyes gleamed as he half-praised Lumian and patted the recliner beside him.

“You've only been in the market district for less than three weeks, but you've already taken over Salle de Bal Brise. And you're so young. You're really outstanding.

“Sigh, the market district hasn't been peaceful for the past month.”

He half-praised Lumian and patted a recliner beside him.

“Come, have a seat here.

“Let me introduce you to the others.”

When Lumian stood by Everett's side, the superintendent gestured toward a middle-aged man seated across the coffee table and spoke, “Roger, you're acquainted with him, aren't you?”

“Black Scorpion” Roger? Lumian directed his gaze at the middle-aged man.

Roger, dressed in formal attire with neatly combed black hair, had a slightly chubby face, and his deep-blue eyes resembled the vast sea.

“We're meeting for the first time,” Lumian replied with a smile. He noticed a chilling gaze emanating from Black Scorpion.

Everett proceeded to introduce the individuals sitting beside Roger.

“Harman, Castina.”

Upon entering the private room, Lumian had noticed only Harman among the few members of the Savoie Mob. The bald man's shining head was so eye-drawing that Lumian almost looked away, fearing that it might reflect his disguised appearance.

Upon closer inspection, Lumian recognized Harman's unique features—a prominent brow, a high nose bridge, and deep-set lips. He possessed the allure of a ruggedly handsome individual. Even in a seated position, his imposing height was evident, complementing his dark breeches shirt splendidly.

Castina, petite and likely under 1.55 meters tall, appeared to be around 30 years old. She possessed curly auburn hair, brown eyes, a curvaceous figure that turned heads, and full lips.

“You should be familiar with Ciel from the Savoie Mob, right?” Everett introduced Ciel to Roger and the others.

Roger flashed a cold smile.

“Indeed, Superintendent. The impression he made on me will never fade.”

“Baldy” Harman's eyes brimmed with hatred and cruelty.

Everett sighed and said, “We all reside in the market district. Only by coexisting peacefully can we secure a better future and greater wealth.

“If any conflicts arise, come to me. I'll mediate and arbitrate.

“Ciel, take this cup of coffee to Roger and hand over Salle de Bal Brise's profits for the next six months. The issue between Margot and Ait ends here. If anyone troubles you regarding these matters again, feel free to inform me directly.”

Lumian observed Roger, Harman, and Castina with a sense of amusement, realizing that their eyes held no mercy, only restrained coldness and malevolence.

Baron Brignais and the others remained silent, watching the scene unfold as though it were a spectacle. Franca shook her head at Lumian, signaling him not to act recklessly.

Lumian bent down and picked up the cup of coffee from the table.

Suddenly, he raised his hands and flung the contents of the cup at “Black Scorpion” Roger.

Reacting swiftly, Roger evaded the liquid, colliding with the coffee table. Harman and Castina sprang to their feet.

Simultaneously, Lumian pointed at “Black Scorpion” Roger and cursed, “F*ck you! Are you disregarding the Superintendent's words? Playing dumb, are we? If you don't desire peace, speak up. I, Ciel, shall await you at Salle de Bal Brise!

“The look in your eyes tells me vengeance is on your mind!”

How brazen... Franca had not anticipated Lumian's audacity.

Chapter 199 “Unruly”

Travis Everett concealed his emotions behind the black-framed glasses, rendering them inscrutable.

Nevertheless, he made no attempt to halt Lumian's actions. It was as though he had transformed into a mere observer.

Baron Brignais, “Blood Palm” Black, and the rest were taken aback by Lumian's reaction. They couldn't fathom his audacity to splash coffee at “Black Scorpion” Roger in front of the superintendent and sabotage the mediation.

In particular, Baron Brignais felt as though he was encountering his former subordinate, now colleague, for the very first time.

Is he far more unruly and reckless than I had anticipated?

Does he refuse to accept any grievances and is unwilling to pay any price?

Although he attempted to shift the blame onto “Black Scorpion” Roger and the others, it was evident to anyone with a modicum of sense and perception that Lumian was the instigator of the conflict, driven by a strong will of his own.

Clearly, he had no intention of reconciliation. He sought only an excuse to undermine Superintendent Everett's proposal.

Is this not a blatant slap in Superintendent Everett's face?

The superintendent wielded considerable influence in the market district. A slight embellishment in reporting to higher authorities, or rather, stating the unvarnished truth, would draw the attention of official Beyonders and dismantle all our enterprises, including the leaders of the Savoie Mob!

Incensed, “Baldy” Harman denied Lumian the opportunity to shatter the coffee cup on his boss. He lunged forward, stooped down, grasped the coffee table's edge, hoisted it, and flung it at the detestable individual.

Cups clattered to the ground, splintering into shards. Lumian deftly evaded the projectiles, swiftly drawing his black revolver from beneath his arm. He trained it on Harman amid the cacophonous crash of objects and the ensuing chaos.

“Baldy” Harman chuckled, a product of his extreme rage.

“You country hog, do you spurn Superintendent Everett's gracious offer of mediation?”

“Very well then, our Poison Spur Mob shall entertain you until one of us is vanquished from this game!”

“Go ahead, fire away. Your audacity and lack of respect towards Superintendent Everett know no bounds. If you possess such ability, then pull the trigger!”

Were it not for the impending election and the stringent surveillance imposed by officials, the Poison Spur Mob would have long seized an opportunity to assassinate Ciel!

In that instant, “Black Scorpion” Roger rose once more. Black flames materialized within his clenched fists, only to dissipate swiftly.

He was reluctant to unveil his Beyonder powers in the presence of Superintendent Everett.

“Short-legged Candlestick” Castina also fixed her gaze on Lumian, poised to strike if he refused to relent.

Upon hearing “Baldy” Harman's retort and provocation, Lumian chuckled.

Bang!

Lumian squeezed the trigger, unleashing a yellow bullet hurtling directly towards “Baldy” Harman's skull.

His reflexes barely saved him. Harman crouched down just in time, his eyes widening in alarm.

The bullet grazed his glistening scalp and careened off, ricocheting into the adjacent washroom with a metallic clang.

In an instant, all the mob leaders sprang to their feet. “Black Scorpion” Roger and “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina fixated on Lumian, preparing to retaliate.

Undeterred, Lumian remained resolute. He lowered his gun and aimed it once more at “Baldy” Harman, his gaze devoid of any emotion.

“Enough!”

At that very moment, Superintendent Everett, who had been calmly seated, spoke up.

The indescribable authority emanating from him, combined with his esteemed position, compelled Lumian to instinctively halt his finger from pulling the trigger.

Seizing the opportunity, “Baldy” Harman shifted his position and rose to his feet.

Though the others maintained their combative stance, the palpable tension that had lingered dissipated.

Lamenting his missed chance, Lumian reluctantly holstered his revolver and turned to face Everett.

“Superintendent, I am willing to comply with your request, but they don't seem inclined to do so.”

Everett's eyes flickered behind his black-framed spectacles. Standing up, he surveyed the room.

“We will address your conflict after the election.

“For the next three days, I expect all of you to conduct yourselves properly. Fail to do so, and you shall make an enemy out of me. Trust me, that's a predicament you won't be able to handle.”

Although Everett's voice carried depth, his tone remained calm, devoid of anger or arrogance. Instead, a hint of sincerity permeated his words.

Yet, those who had resided in the market district for more than two years recalled a term: the “Valiant Mob.”

Two years prior, the Valiant Mob held a similar status to the Savoie Mob in the market district. However, due to their repeated defiance and disrespect towards Superintendent Everett, they were ruthlessly eradicated in a joint operation conducted by the authorities. The subsequent rise of the Poison Spur Mob was partly due to the power vacuum left behind in the district's underworld.

Now, only the Valiant café stood as a testament to the existence of such a mob.

The leaders of the Savoie Mob, the Poison Spur Mob, and the other two medium-sized gangs fell into silence for a few seconds before responding to Superintendent Everett's words. They expressed their commitment to restrain their subordinates and ensure that the election proceeded without disruption.

Superintendent Everett's gaze swept across their faces. Without uttering another word, he strode towards the exit of the private room.

As he disappeared beyond the door, “Black Scorpion” Roger, “Baldy” Harman, and “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina cast Lumian cold glances before departing from the café.

The remaining gang leaders didn't linger, leaving only the Savoie Mob in the confines of the private room.

Baron Brignais took a leisurely puff from his pipe and addressed Lumian, “You acted too impulsively back there.”

Lumian offered a faint smile in response and replied, “I have been awaiting an opportunity like that. Unfortunately, I couldn't seize it to incite the conflict.”

Observing the puzzled expressions on the faces of “Giant” Simon, “Blood Palm” Black, and the others, Lumian calmly elaborated, “We have already made two attempts, and the Poison Spur Mob chose to endure. Baron, as you have rightly pointed out, they harbor a significant problem, and they await their chance. I believe that opportunity will present itself soon.

“If we fail to incapacitate the Poison Spur Mob before then, we shall face their unhinged retaliation. And when that moment arrives, none of you will be able to escape.

“Just a moment ago, there were only three members of the Poison Spur Mob present, while we numbered five. Red Boots, your strength is comparable to that of Black Scorpion. With my assistance, you can surely overpower him. Baron, Simon, Black, is it conceivable that you cannot handle Baldy and Short-legged Candlestick? One of you might even be able to impede Superintendent Everett.

“As long as the Poison Spur Mob dares to strike back, we shall eliminate them all right here!”

“Rat” Christo had received instructions from Superintendent Everett the previous night that he was not to be invited today.

Baron Brignais, “Blood Palm” Black, and their comrades found Ciel's words reasonable, yet a deep-seated fear for this individual arose within their hearts.

He wasn't bluffing. He genuinely desired to eliminate “Baldy” Harman and the others!

He was too crazy and extreme!

He possessed the audacity to commit any act without hesitation!

“But this is tantamount to slapping Superintendent Everett in the face. The repercussions will be exceedingly troublesome.” “Blood Palm” Black shook his head.

Franca shared the same concern. She wished to caution Lumian that such a course of action would render him unwelcome in the market district. He might even end up with another wanted poster.

However, recognizing that the other leaders were present and unable to reveal her true friendship with Lumian, Franca sealed her lips.

A quizzical smile played on Lumian's lips as he inquired, “Wasn't Superintendent Everett killed by the Poison Spur Mob?”

Lunatic... This notion raced through everyone's minds.

Baron Brignais, gently stroking his mahogany-colored pipe, chimed in, “It's nearly impossible to conceal that from official Beyonders. It's merely an excuse.”

“In that case, let it go. Blame everything on a lunatic like me. At worst, I'll depart from the market district. I trust the Boss will arrange another task for me once this storm blows over,” Lumian calmly remarked, a serene smile gracing his face.

This was indeed a fragment of his genuine thoughts.

Mr. K's mission revolved around earning Gardner Martin's trust, not running Salle de Bal Brise or establishing a foothold in the market district!

If his provocation had genuinely enraged “Black Scorpion” Roger and his accomplices, Lumian believed that Franca would surely come to his aid. With one of the Savoie Mob's leaders on his side, the others wouldn't hesitate to act. When the time came, united in strength, they stood a high chance of eliminating the remaining three leaders of the Poison Spur Mob.

Once he unraveled the Poison Spur Mob's scheme, Gardner Martin would undoubtedly appreciate Lumian's daring and unorthodox approach in eradicating hidden threats. Even if he lost Salle de Bal Brise and was compelled to “escape” once more, he would merely find sanctuary elsewhere in Trier and continue serving Gardner Martin until he gained his complete approval.

Furthermore, it was advantageous for Lumian. If the Poison Spur Mob finalized their preparations, he would be their primary target for revenge. Failing to address the issue beforehand would only

heighten the danger he faced. In the future, even if Madame Moon birthed another group, Lumian wouldn't fret. Today, Louis Lund would likely be present in the market district. By temporarily suppressing the deaths of "Black Scorpion" Roger and his cronies, creating a façade of tranquility, Lumian could patiently await his target at 126 Avenue du Marché.

These individuals weren't parliamentary candidates whose demise would incite an uproar.

After a few moments of silence, Baron Brignais approached the door and issued a reminder, "Superintendent Everett has probably marked you. There will be considerable trouble after the election."

Lumian responded with a smile, "Perhaps he will mysteriously vanish one day."

Having said that, Lumian calmly endured the mildly apprehensive gazes of "Giant" Simon and his comrades.

You see, having laid the groundwork, anything I utter now will convince them all.

At 3:15 p.m., Lumian arrived at Quartier du Jardin Botanique in a public carriage. Once again, he beheld Mason Café, housed in a beige four-story building adorned with lush green plants entwined on its outer walls.

Passing through a sheltered walkway upheld by pillars, he entered the interior, enveloped by dark-green walls and expansive windows. Settling into the familiar Booth D, he removed his wide-brimmed round hat.

"A cup of Intis coffee," he instructed the waitress and patiently waited.

Chapter 200 Spectator

The titular coffee was rich and aromatic, a perfect match for the creamy cupcake. Though Lumian's focus was elsewhere, he still appreciated their beauty.

The moment the clock struck 3:30 p.m., a familiar soft female voice reached him from the booth behind.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lumian Lee."

"Good afternoon, Madame Susie," Lumian responded, concealing his surprise.

While Lumian didn't intentionally observe the customers entering Mason Café, his Hunter instincts allowed him to maintain awareness of his surroundings.

When he had arrived at the café at 3:18 p.m., Cabin D had been deserted. No one entered from 3:15 to 3:30 p.m.

And yet, here was Madame Susie, appearing silently behind him, in the very spot behind Booth D!

How mystical and bizarre was this!

Susie's voice gently inquired once more, "How did you feel after your last treatment?"

Lumian didn't hold back and responded simply, "I felt much better than before. At least I could release my emotions."

“That's a good thing. Suppressing your feelings and bottling up your emotions will only exacerbate your mental problems and lead you down a self-destructive path until your innate will to live is completely overwhelmed,” Susie commented in a calm and soothing tone, confirming Lumian's transformation.

A hint of a smile laced her words.

“Let's have a conversation first. We'll discuss all the things you've encountered in the past two weeks. Feel free to choose what you believe you can and are willing to share.”

Lumian knew he needed to calm himself and undergo further psychiatric treatment as a foundation for unlocking more memories later. Hence, he offered no resistance. He chuckled wryly and said, “There's nothing I can't tell you. I've even shared that dream with you. Everything else can only be classified as minor secrets.”

He paused for a moment and began with Charlie.

“There's an unlucky and dim-witted fellow at the motel I'm staying at...”

Lumian casually recounted the events of the past two weeks.

Gradually, his mind relaxed, as if he had returned to a time before Cordu's destruction.

Aurore, who rarely ventured outside, would hear about everything that transpired in Cordu from him. He delighted in sharing it with his sister, even boasting about the successful pranks he had orchestrated.

As time trickled away, Lumian's rigid posture softened as he sank into the plush sofa.

He refrained from delving into further details. Time was limited, and he couldn't afford to waste it. He didn't touch upon the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, Franca's true gender, or his suspicions regarding her motives for joining the Savoie Mob. He merely mentioned his encounter with a pen pal of Aurore's—a Sequence 7 Witch of the Demoness pathway, who happened to be in the same mob.

Likewise, he provided only a brief mention of performing a ritual and receiving an additional boon, without going into the specifics.

After recounting his experiences from the past two weeks, Lumian spoke in a self-deprecating tone, “I can't help but wonder if it's my own fault for stumbling upon so many Beyonder events in such a short span of time. Sometimes, I question why every human and dog in Trier seems to possess Beyonder powers.”

For once, Susie didn't respond immediately. After a few moments, she smiled and replied, “I can perceive that your mental state has indeed improved compared to before.”

“How can you tell?” Lumian didn't mention the details of his tearful carriage ride upon seeing Aurore's obituary. He didn't believe that describing all of that was an accurate reflection of his mental state.

Susie spoke in a gentle tone, "I can sense that you're reconstructing your social connections and beginning to form friendships."

"Friends?" Lumian asked, slightly amused. "Charlie, Jenna, Franca? Can they truly be called friends?"

They are mere acquaintances!

Susie responded with a smile, "Friendship comes in various forms. Not all require deep connections. You simply need to ask yourself—when they face challenges that lie within your capabilities to solve, would you be willing to offer assistance? That will reveal if they can be considered your friends."

"It depends on the specific circumstances and the price I must pay. I'm not the type to go out of my way to help just anyone," Lumian muttered.

Susie didn't press further and explained, "For someone prone to self-destruction, a sign of their emergence from the quagmire is their willingness to forge new social bonds."

"Emperor Roselle—assuming he truly said it—once remarked that humans are the sum of their social relationships. When you no longer resist forming new connections, it signifies that you're no longer opposed to your own future."

"Of course, this is just one aspect. It's not everything."

Lumian fell silent for a moment before speaking again, "Madame Susie, there's something I'd like to ask you. I mentioned a series of coincidences that have befallen me. Are they truly as Madam Magician suggested? Could they be partially influenced by Mid-Sequence Beyonders of the Spectator pathway?"

In contrast to the previous session, Susie appeared more at ease. She chuckled and remarked, "Are you attempting to divert the topic? Are you still resistant to such matters?"

"Actually, one can discern it from certain details. You took the initiative to request the 'Red Boots' lady to enlighten you on mystical matters whenever she was available, but you never followed through. The sole visit you made was on the pretext of her repaying a favor. It suggests that you remain unwilling to establish a closer bond with her."

"That's natural. How can a patient recover after just one treatment? You need not burden yourself..."

Susie tirelessly voiced her observations, gently pinpointing some of Lumian's current psychological issues.

"If it were the last time, I wouldn't have been so forthright. It would have only bred resistance, causing you to close yourself off further. However, now you exhibit certain inclinations toward forging new social connections. This will allow you to gain clearer insights into your true self and facilitate your progress."

Having his underlying thoughts laid bare by Susie, Lumian's initial reaction was wariness, vigilance, and denial. Yet, Susie's composed demeanor, non-aggressive analysis, and accurate understanding of the situation gradually eased his tension, enabling him to confront his deep-seated problems.

His body and mind gradually settled.

Susie refrained from prying further and addressed Lumian's inquiry.

“Madam Magician's explanation is not entirely incorrect, but it lacks specificity.

“For a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Spectator pathway to engineer a coincidence, they must employ face-to-face psychological cues or hypnosis. In other words, they need to be present around you, Baron Brignais, and his associates.

“The reason you didn't notice it and Baron Brignais remained oblivious is that Mid-Sequence Beyonders of the Spectator pathway possess an additional Beyonder power—Psychological Invisibility.”

“Psychological Invisibility? How does it differ from regular invisibility?” Lumian inquired, perplexed.

Susie calmly elucidated, “Psychological Invisibility is not true invisibility. It merely prevents you from perceiving me, even when I am standing right before you and numerous others have already witnessed my presence.”

“Sounds very magical...” Lumian sighed with a sense of wonder. For some inexplicable reason, he felt as though Psychiatrists were all around him, yet he remained oblivious to their presence.

“This won't change even if you employ Spirit Vision. Your intuition for danger will not react until I am prepared to strike,” Susie continued. “By comparison, a Shadow Ascetic's concealment within shadows occasionally evokes the sensation of being watched by the darkness.”

Lumian pressed, “Which pathway does Shadow Ascetic belong to?”

“Secrets Suppliant,” Susie replied simply.

Secrets Suppliant pathway? Above Listener and below Shepherd, there's a Sequence known as Shadow Ascetic? This belongs to Mr. K's pathway... Occasionally, I sense someone observing me in the surrounding darkness because of him or his subordinates. Combining this with Aurore's grimoires and Madam Magician's clues, Lumian felt a wave of enlightenment.

For the Secrets Suppliant pathway, Aurore had only noted down Sequence 9 Secrets Suppliant and Sequence 8 Listener.

Madam Magician appears to write a substantial amount, but it's actually just an outline without much detail. It's not as comprehensive as Madame Susie's explanation... Lumian mumbled

curiously and asked, "Aren't you concerned that revealing your pathway's Beyonder powers to me might harm you?"

Susie brushed off the question and continued, "If you're a High-Sequence Beyonder of the Spectator pathway, there's no need for such elaborate measures. Even if they're far away from you, they can subtly influence you, causing you to unknowingly follow their arrangements and create various coincidences.

"Though I too am a Spectator, I must still caution you, 'Beware of the Spectator!'"

High-Sequence Beyonder... Lumian was alarmed.

"So, you 'arranged' for the paperboy to deliver an outdated newspaper to me?"

Madame Susie is a High-Sequence Beyonder, a true demigod?

"It wasn't me," Susie said, feeling a tad embarrassed. "It was my companion."

Companion? Lumian recalled Madam Magician's initial suggestion and guessed, "The other Psychiatrist? He was here last time too?"

"Yes," Susie candidly admitted. "Your condition is more serious, and I wasn't too confident, so I invited her along to assist me. Yes, as a precautionary measure.

"In fact, she's here today as well. She's sitting across from you."

Across from me? Lumian glanced in surprise at the empty seat across the coffee table. Not only was there no one present, but there wasn't even an indentation from someone sitting there!

In the next instant, he heard a gentle female voice with a hint of a smile and a slightly brisk tone.

"Hello."