

Inevitability 201

Chapter 201 Recalling

Lumian was taken aback, his eyes widening in surprise as he glanced at the vacant seat across from him. With a polite tone, he mustered, "Hello."

In that instant, a memory from his sister Aurore flashed through his mind. She had once mentioned an intriguing phrase: Expert consultation!

Although I'm not entirely surrounded by invisible Psychiatrists, there are two of them, and I can't detect them either... Lumian muttered inwardly.

The woman sitting opposite him fell silent, while Susie's voice assumed a more relaxed and lighthearted tone.

"It seems the newspaper has left a lasting impression on you. Does that mean it had a positive impact?"

"Yes," Lumian replied candidly.

He had reached a point where he could confront the emotional turmoil within him instead of burying it deep down. Otherwise, he would have tried to avoid any encounters with "Red Boots" Franca, as she invariably brought up Aurore.

Naturally, this evoked intense waves of emotion.

Susie skillfully redirected the conversation back to its original path.

"If you wish to further investigate any unusual coincidences that have occurred during this period and identify their underlying sources, I can assist you."

"I won't delve directly into your memories, but I can awaken them all and present them chronologically before your eyes. Of course, this excludes those hidden deep within the recesses of your subconscious. They pose too great a risk," Susie explained.

"Are you willing to give it a try?"

Lumian didn't hesitate for a moment.

"Yes."

Whenever he noticed any coincidences around him, he would occasionally recall his recent experiences and meticulously scrutinize the corresponding details. Now, he was merely shifting to a more effective approach.

"Lean back fully against the sofa, relax, and close your eyes..." Susie's gentle voice reached Lumian's ears unhurriedly.

Just as he adjusted his sitting position and prepared to calm his mind and close his eyes, a sudden "volcanic eruption" erupted within his thoughts.

This unexpected “attack” caught him off guard, leaving his subconscious unable to effectively shield him.

Magma and smoke burst forth like luminous specks, each containing a distinct scene.

The multitude of glowing dots arranged themselves chronologically, giving Lumian the sensation of watching a play with himself as the central character.

It unfolded in a blur, yet every detail remained vivid and complete.

As the temperature soared, Lumian's mind raced, threatening to release wisps of white smoke.

He witnessed each scene and recalled every detail, skillfully connecting them and searching for any abnormalities.

Lumian's eyes widened, and his facial features contorted in visible distress.

The memory that should have been present was now a void!

In that moment, a gentle female voice resonated within his mind.

“Has it truly vanished, or have you forgotten or overlooked it?” spoke the lady seated across from him, her tone devoid of its previous cheerfulness.

Like a lightning bolt, it illuminated Lumian's mind, casting light into the darkest recesses beyond his subconscious.

Lumian's expression grew increasingly pained, and he couldn't help but bow his head as he struggled to say, “I-I see it, I see it...”

“I was in conversation with the angel sealed within me!

“H—His name is Termiboros!”

At last, Lumian recollected something that had slipped his memory.

The corruption contained within his left chest was, in essence, an angel who believed in Inevitability—Termiboros!

Initially, he had intended to seek guidance from Madam Magician on how to harness the angel's powers and avert any potential negative consequences, but he had completely forgotten about it.

“Is this the corruption sealed within your body?” Susie's reaction appeared unsurprised, her voice maintaining a calm demeanor.

Lumian instinctively exhaled, his fingertips reaching his forehead, already dampened with cold sweat.

He truthfully replied, “Yes, He attempted to entice me into aiding His escape from the seal, but I refused. And then, I simply forgot.

“This is truly... truly bizarre...”

Termiboros is undeniably sealed within my body and can't break free, yet I was unwittingly affected by Him!

“That's to be expected. One mustn't underestimate any angel, even when sealed,” Susie offered an explanation to allay Lumian's immediate apprehension.

The unknown was always the most terrifying.

She continued, “In ancient times, angels were also referred to as subsidiary gods. This implies that They possess the essence of a deity. Even when sealed, They can exert a certain influence upon the external world through various means.

“Did you, perhaps, believe that with the seal of the great entity, the corruption upon your chest was more akin to a boon? As long as you follow the correct procedures at the appropriate stages, you shouldn't encounter any issues apart from enduring greater pain and assuming a certain risk of losing control.”

Lumian fell into silence, recognizing that he had entertained similar thoughts of late.

“You must remember that in such matters, the potency of a curse is no less than that of a boon, if not stronger,” warned Susie. “I don't know how Termiboros has influenced you, but given His belief in Inevitability, I suspect His primary aim is to induce a deviation in your destiny.

“However, you needn't worry excessively. He is, after all, sealed, and His capacity for influence is considerably limited. Moving forward, as long as you continuously assess your condition and consistently seek guidance on your actions, you can largely circumvent this predicament.”

“Alright.” Lumian retrieved a pen and paper and hastily jotted down a memo.

The note pertained to consulting Madam Magician regarding Termiboros.

He feared succumbing to the angel's influence from the realm of Inevitability and forgetting these pertinent matters once the treatment concluded.

Lumian carefully stored away his pen and paper, releasing a slow exhale.

“Now that I've recollected the events involving Termiboros, I feel considerably more at ease. It appears that my spirituality had detected something.”

“I can perceive an improvement in your mental state,” affirmed Susie, echoing Lumian's sentiments.

Taking advantage of the moment, Lumian posed a question, “Ladies, do you believe that Susanna Matisse has been fully eradicated by the official Beyonders? Or should I continue searching for clues at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons to prevent her from launching another attack?”

Taking note of the time, Monsieur Ive, the landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré, should soon find himself in dire straits.

Susie offered a gentle smile as she replied, “The Spectator path isn't well-versed in divination.”

Seated across from Lumian, the “invisible” lady smiled and added, “Madam Magician is a divination expert. Did she not provide you with an answer? Or perhaps her hidden message eluded your understanding?”

She didn't say anything... Lumian pondered for a moment, recalling Madam Magician's response regarding Susanna Mattise.

Suddenly, he froze.

Madam Magician had continuously guided him on how to resolve the issue with Susanna Mattise, subtly hinting that he should seek assistance from Mr. K.

From a different perspective, she had never once considered the possibility that Susanna Mattise had been entirely eliminated!

In her view, this predicament would undoubtedly resurface!

Isn't it too ambiguous? Or does she assume it's self-evident and fails to emphasize it? Lumian mumbled to himself, nodding in realization.

“I know the answer.”

As Lumian spoke, he made a connection based on the manner and demeanor exhibited by the Psychiatrist seated opposite him when addressing Madam Magician.

Could they also be members of the secretive organization that employs tarot cards as their code names?

To which cards do they correspond?

After making some adjustments, Lumian sought clarification about his mental state.

“The mere thought of meeting Louis Lund fills me with anxiety, excitement, and adrenaline. I can't seem to control my emotions. Is this a severe psychological issue?”

Susie responded in a soothing voice, “That's actually quite normal. People often exhibit similar behavior when it comes to matters they deeply care about. You're just a bit more intense than usual.

“If you didn't react this way, I would have been concerned that you were facing a more severe psychological problem and had repressed all your emotions.

“What you need to focus on now is not being fearful or overwhelmed, but rather learning to manage those emotions.”

Normal... Lumian felt reassured by Susie's explanation, and his concern regarding the matter at hand subsided, allowing his mental state to stabilize.

He pondered and asked, “Manage them?”

How do I do that?

Susie replied, “The simplest method is to always remind yourself not to overreact. Whenever you feel a similar surge of emotions, take deep breaths and find your calm.

“It may sound easy, but in reality, it's quite challenging. When emotions flare up, it's difficult for humans to maintain rationality. They rarely think about controlling themselves. By the time they regain their composure, they often find that they've already made a mistake.

“I can set up a trigger for you. Once your emotional reactions exceed a certain threshold, it will remind you of my words and assist you in regaining your rationality, allowing you to attempt to regain control.

“This is a temporary solution. In the long run, it will depend on your own efforts. However, once you become accustomed to self-reflection during times of heightened emotion, the issue will become more manageable.

“Are you willing to give it a try?”

“Alright.” Lumian had no qualms about accepting external assistance.

At some point, Susie's voice took on an otherworldly and elusive quality. It felt as though she had said a great deal, yet Lumian couldn't recall a single word. The only thing he could remember was her concluding statement: “The trigger has been set. If all goes well, it will last for two weeks, perfectly timed for your next session. At that point, we can decide whether to make any adjustments.”

Lumian briefly acknowledged her words and assessed his mental state.

After more than ten seconds, filled with both fear and anticipation, he inquired, “Is it possible for me to attempt to awaken more buried memories from my subconscious?”

Chapter 202 Analysis

“Of course,” came Susie's gentle voice, reaching Lumian's ears.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian felt a weight pulling at his consciousness, dragging him down swiftly into deeper depths.

Within a matter of seconds, his eyelids grew heavy, and he could not resist the urge to close them. His thoughts became muddled and indistinct.

In his dazed state, Lumian appeared to transform into a spectral figure, floating through the familiar village of Cordu in the cloak of night.

After an unknown duration, he caught sight of the onion-shaped cathedral, though his perception remained hazy. A concentrated beam of light emerged near its main entrance, while the rest of the darkness loomed like an ominous shadow.

Lumian meandered aimlessly toward the adjacent cemetery.

In the darkness, tombstones stood in silent formation, and trees assumed an eerie presence.

A group of men were hauling a lifeless body toward a deep pit, preparing to cast it down.

Beneath the faint glow of the crimson moon, one of the men lifted his head and surveyed his surroundings.

His face, with black hair and piercing blue eyes, bore deep creases, as if shrouded in shadows.

Pons Bénet!

Lumian snapped out of his reverie.

The distance between them diminished instantly. Lumian lowered his gaze and beheld the corpse.

The face of the lifeless body appeared swollen from water, drained of color. The brown hair clung damply to the head, while the brown eyes remained wide open, reflecting agony, indignation, and resentment.

Reimund!

A surge of intense hatred filled Lumian's heart as he hurled accusations at Pons Bénet and his companions, giving vent to his emotions.

It felt as if he had unleashed a torrent of curses, as if he had pounced on Pons Bénet, the villain. It felt as if he was digging a profound pit with his bare hands.

Dirt pierced his nails, uncovering another corpse at the pit's bottom.

The girl's eyes, a shade of lake-blue, bulged fiercely. Her face bore a bluish-purple hue, her mouth agape, and her neck showed evident signs of strangulation. She wore an expression of excruciating pain.

Ava!

Lumian shot up from his seat, propelled by intense emotions, and his eyes flew open.

Huff. Puff. Lumian stared at the vacant sofa opposite him in the booth, gasping heavily.

The intense anger and hatred from his dream lingered, causing him to tremble uncontrollably.

Lumian's face twisted slightly as he replied, his voice filled with pain.

“I saw them. I saw Reimund and Ava's bodies. One of them drowned, and the other appeared to have been strangled to death... Pons Bénet and his gang were burying their bodies in the cemetery next to the cathedral... I shouted at them, wanted to do something... and then I woke up.”

Susie listened attentively and spoke calmly.

“This time, I didn't allow you to have a lucid dream. Instead, I let you experience certain subconscious scenes in the form of a dream.

“While it may not present the complete truth, it combines fragments of what actually happened. There might be overlaps in time or space, but the essential details remain intact. It provides us with a basis for interpretation.”

Lumian asked, his voice filled with anguish, “So you're saying that I really witnessed Pons Bénet and the others burying Reimund and Ava's bodies in the cemetery?”

“I'm not entirely certain,” Susie analyzed. “What we can conclude so far is that Reimund was drowned by Pons Bénet and his companions, and Ava was strangled to death by them. Their bodies were eventually buried somewhere in the cemetery, and you may or may not have been present at the scene. It's possible that you discovered it later and attempted to unearth their corpses as well as seek revenge on Pons Bénet and his gang, but the outcome wasn't favorable. Otherwise, your recent dream would have reflected some of that content.”

Lumian fell silent for a moment before speaking again.

“So that's what happened... I was wondering why Pons Bénet and the others didn't kill me and toss me into the deep pit if I was truly there...”

Part of his anguish stemmed from a fear deep within him—a suspicion that he might have been in league with Pons and his gang.

“We cannot dismiss the possibility that you were present at the scene and witnessed the entire incident, but there are numerous explanations. It may not be as you imagine it to be. They spared your life because they needed a vessel with exceptional physical attributes.” Susie understood Lumian's doubts and resistance. Her words aimed to soothe him gently. “What I can affirm is that the anger, hatred, and desire for revenge you experienced in your dream were genuine. Those were your true emotions at that time. In other words, regardless of the circumstances, the deaths of Ava and Reimund have nothing to do with you.”

Upon hearing Susie's words, Lumian felt as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He slumped against the sofa, his strength draining away.

His mind was now much calmer than before, and he no longer needed to maintain a facade of bravery.

In the blink of an eye, an invisible warm breeze swept through his body and mind, soothing him completely.

Susie's encouraging voice filled the air, her smile evident.

“Compared to our last session, you're in a much better state now. You showed courage sooner than I anticipated, facing the doubts and questions you were reluctant to confront.

“In the realm of psychology, this is a crucial indication that you're breaking free from the puzzle. Only by directly confronting the problem can you find a resolution.

“Alright, that concludes today's treatment. You're ready to face Louis Lund, Madame Pualis, and the others.”

In that very instant, the composed Lumian pondered the words of Madam Magician, recalling her earnest advice.

“There is yet another matter.

“I may be compelled to believe in another entity at some point, but ordinarily, I am forbidden to recollect His honorific name. Do you—either of you—possess a means to prevent such recollection?”

The cheerful female voice responded, her words carrying a gentle smile, “That is quite simple. I shall provide you with a psychological trigger. When your spiritual intuition feels devoid of protection, your subconscious will replace the honorific name with 'That Being' to safeguard against its impact.

“While under protection, you may freely remember and speak His name in its entirety...”

Lumian's mind turned adrift briefly upon hearing the other person declare, “The psychological cue has been planted.”

“Thank you, Madam. And thank you too, Madam Susie,” Lumian nodded toward the empty space across from the booth.

“You're welcome. See you in two weeks,” the gentle female voice replied, and Susie added, “See you in two weeks.”

Lumian wasn't sure when they departed, but the area around Booth D grew still. Only the chirping of birds in the botanical garden, the clapping of hooves on the road, and the distant hum of machinery resonated.

He lifted his cup, finishing the remainder of his Intis coffee in one gulp, adjusting his mental state.

Seizing the moment, he replayed the entire treatment process in his mind, and an inexplicable feeling settled upon him. Madam Susie's last statement seemed somewhat peculiar.

She said I can face Louis Lund, Madame Pualis, and the others now... Does that imply that the answers I might receive from Madame Pualis could shatter me?

It's understandable, but what if my condition doesn't improve as expected? Will she advise me to give up the opportunity to meet Louis Lund? But what if Louis Lund emerged yesterday? Wouldn't it be a major problem if I hadn't had my follow up?

If that's the case, shouldn't Madam Susie have warned me against approaching Madame Pualis or confronting the padre before the follow-up session?

How can she be so certain that I won't encounter Louis Lund in the past two weeks, or that he'll elude capture if I do?

Spectator...

Lumian's senses snapped back to full alertness. He exited Booth D and hailed a public carriage back to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Lumian didn't rush to send a messenger to Auberge du Coq Doré or the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches to inform Madam Magician about Termiboros. Instead, he made his way straight

to 126 Avenue du Marché to check if his subordinates, Anthony Reid, or Franca had discovered anything.

With a dark brown wide-brimmed hat atop his head, Lumian strolled to a spot diagonally across from “Black Scorpion” Roger’s house, roughly 20 meters away. He settled into a gap between two buildings, leaning against the wall.

Several vagrants occupied the area.

One of them shuffled closer to Lumian and whispered, “Nothing yet.”

Lumian nodded and directed his gaze toward the three-story building with a garden, keeping an eye on passersby.

As time ticked by, the sun descended on the horizon, casting a dwindling light. The lamplighters commenced their task, igniting the gas lamps one by one.

At that moment, Lumian spotted a man clad in a grayish-blue worker’s uniform.

Underneath his cap, light-yellow hair peeked out, and his slightly chubby face exuded an air of simplicity and honesty.

Anthony Reid? Why is he out and about? Lumian recognized the information broker, perplexed by his actions.

Resembling a worker finishing his shift, Anthony Reid hurried toward the end of Avenue du Marché.

Lumian’s pupils contracted when he realized that Anthony Reid wasn’t merely passing by; he was approaching someone.

The man sported a blue gown adorned with yellow buttons, a waxed hat, a white tie, and a red vest. He sat inside a rental carriage bearing a yellow plate, clearly a driver affiliated with the Empire Carriage Company. Carriage drivers from different companies donned distinct uniforms.

The carriage driver tipped his hat, keeping his head lowered as if waiting for a customer.

Lumian’s heart stirred. He rose to his feet, taking a few steps in that direction.

As Anthony Reid brushed past the carriage, he stumbled and collided with the horse pulling it.

Startled, the horse attempted to raise its forelegs, but the carriage driver swiftly tugged on the reins, firmly restraining the animal.

Yet, as the carriage driver lifted his head, his face was revealed.

In his forties, with black hair, Lumian couldn’t discern his features clearly due to the distance. Nonetheless, a faint sense of familiarity washed over him.

Lumian narrowed his eyes as he profusely apologized to Anthony Reid and left the carriage behind. A valet emerged from 126 Avenue du Marché.

Approaching the carriage, the valet addressed the driver,

“My master wishes to hire your carriage. Proceed inside and assist with moving some items.”

The carriage driver nodded, replying in a deep voice, "Okay."

Following the valet, he entered the residence belonging to "Black Scorpion" Roger Lumian, who had witnessed the entire sequence of events without catching their conversation, smirked.

He was now utterly certain that the carriage driver was Louis Lund!

At long last, you've arrived!

Chapter 203 Cooperation

Lumian retreated to the cluster of tramps, patiently awaiting the emergence of Louis Lund.

Soon enough, Anthony Reid, the information broker, returned after changing his attire, seemingly determined to fulfill his promise and seize an opportunity to tail Louis Lund.

At that moment, he sported a yellowish-white shirt and a brown formal coat. There was no bow tie around his neck, but he wore a round hat, resembling a clerk fresh out of the office.

Had Lumian not possessed a certain knowledge of Reid's build, temperament, and gait, he might have failed to recognize him.

After considering his options, Lumian stepped out from the crevice between the two buildings and confronted Anthony Reid.

Having discarded his disguise upon departing the Valiant Café, he now donned a simple ensemble consisting of black-framed glasses and a broad brown hat. Those familiar with him could effortlessly discern his identity.

Noticing the shift in Anthony Reid's gaze, Lumian whispered as they brushed past each other, "I'm back. Await me at the rear entrance."

Although the Prophecy Spell indicated a reunion with Louis Lund on Avenue du Marché, Lumian aimed to avert any potential mishaps.

On one hand, the Prophetic Concoction derived from his body's response, rendering it somewhat unreliable. There might be omissions within the prophecy. On the other hand, the manifestation of a prophecy could assume various forms, deviating entirely from his anticipated sequence of events.

Anthony Reid withdrew his gaze and nodded, signifying his comprehension.

He advanced onward, passing by the residence of "Black Scorpion" Roger, and disappearing into the distance down an alley.

Lumian did not immediately turn around. Beneath the glow of street lamps, he pressed onward.

Just as he reached a dimly lit section, a figure emerged from the shadows beneath a dilapidated, iron-black street lamp in the alley ahead.

The towering individual, garbed in a form-fitting black robe with a hood that nearly concealed the face, beckoned to Lumian.

Franca? Lumian instantly formed a conjecture and hastened towards her.

The conspicuously dressed character was indeed "Red Boots" Franca.

This time, she had forgone her trademark red boots in favor of black ones.

“Aren't you concerned about being discovered?” Lumian couldn't help but inquire.

While Trieriens had a high tolerance for eccentric attire and even actively pursued fashion trends, loitering in secrecy while dressed in such a manner would undoubtedly draw the attention of “Black Scorpion” Roger and the Poison Spur Mob—even the passing laborers!

Franca grinned nonchalantly and retorted, “You don't understand. This is all part of the procedure! Didn't your sister teach you?”

Indeed, she did teach me, but she never mentioned employing it in such a place or situation... Before Lumian could utter another word, Franca waved her hand dismissively.

“Fret not, I won't be discovered.”

As her words faded, she took a step backward, merging seamlessly with the shadow and vanishing from Lumian's sight.

If it weren't for the inevitable gender change at Sequence 7, he would have considered this path more to his liking than that of the Hunter.

Emerging from the shadows once more, Franca pointed toward 126 Avenue du Marché in the distance.

“That carriage driver should be the Louis Lund you seek. Shall I assist you in tailing him later?”

“I understand that Hunters possess a hound's nose and eagle's eyes, making them adept at tracking, but you struggle with concealment. Staying too far away risks losing the target, while staying too close risks discovery. It's safer if I handle it.

“Don't forget, Louis Lund is also a Beyonder, and he worships an evil god. It's possible he possesses unique abilities.”

This time, Lumian didn't resist or reject the offer. He nodded and replied, “Very well.”

At present, he couldn't mark Louis Lund with a distinct scent, and darkness was swiftly descending. The crowded streets, filled with pedestrians and carriages, would muddle any traces. Tailing from 20 to 30 meters away could easily result in losing the target with the slightest misstep.

Franca's thin, red lips curled into a visible smile, free from the confines of the hooded shadow, as she spoke, “Your afternoon therapy session was quite effective. A man should be more open-minded, untroubled by trivial matters.”

She lightly tapped her chest as she spoke.

From her possession emerged a glass bottle.

The surface of the small bottle had been intricately etched into small squares, reflecting the nearby streetlamp's light and shimmering with psychedelic colors.

“When I lived as a man, I found these perfume bottles to be beautifully crafted, but I felt too self-conscious to buy them or carry them with me. Now, I have no such

concerns. Sometimes, changing your gender can open the door to a new world," Franca said with emotion.

The door to a new world refers to sleeping with men? If it weren't for the crucial task of tracking Louis Lund, Lumian would definitely have provided such a rejoinder.

Opening the lid, she brought the pressed glass bottle to Lumian's nose.

"Remember its scent."

The perfume was refreshing and natural, akin to strolling through a forest on a summer's day.

"Got it." Lumian nodded slightly.

Franca proceeded to spray it on herself.

"It has distinct top, middle, and base notes, but the differences are subtle. There's no need to discern them specifically. You'll know it by the scent alone.

"I'll position myself three to four meters away from Louis Lund. Without a hound's nose, he won't detect this fragrance that clearly doesn't belong to the market district."

Lumian added thoughtfully, "So, I am to track your perfume from a distance of ten to twenty meters?"

It was indeed a clever strategy.

"That's correct." Franca produced a handful of fluorescent powder, sprinkling it over herself, and recited a deep incantation.

It appeared to be a fusion of the Hermes words for "hidden" and "body."

Almost instantaneously, Lumian witnessed Franca's form gradually fading away, as if an eraser were obliterating a pencil drawing.

Apart from the lingering fragrance in his nostrils, he had completely lost track of the Witch.

Once again, Lumian marveled at the Demoness path's performance as a Low- to Mid-Sequence Beyonder.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian felt the fragrance's source receding, drawing closer to the three-story building with a garden at 126 Avenue du Marché.

Lumian made his way in that direction, slipping into the shadows and pressing himself against the wall.

After nearly half an hour, a man named Louis Lund emerged, dressed in a red vest, blue uniform, white tie, and waxed hat. Accompanying him was "Black Scorpion" Roger, impeccably attired in a formal suit with neatly combed black hair.

One of them took the reins of the carriage, while the other entered inside.

Why is "Black Scorpion" Roger following him? Is he planning to meet Madame Pualis in person? Lumian furrowed his brow in slight confusion.

This introduced new variables to his plan.

Originally, Lumian intended to find an opportune moment during Louis Lund's return journey. With his current strength, he could easily overpower his target, even if they were both Sequence 8s. Plus, he had the assistance of Witch Franca.

However, if “Black Scorpion” Roger joined the equation, things would become considerably more troublesome.

From the midwife's performance in his dream, Lumian deduced that a Heretic Spellmaster possessed numerous mystical techniques and considerable power. They were fully capable of matching a Witch from the Assassin pathway.

While Lumian could have Franca distract “Black Scorpion” Roger while he dealt with Louis Lund, the battle between two Mid-Sequence Beyonders wouldn't be swift, thus increasing the risk of discovery.

Hmm... If “Black Scorpion” Roger truly intends to meet Madame Pualis, I'll follow him instead of attacking. My objective is to locate Madame Pualis and establish contact with her. Lumian swiftly revised his plan and devised a new strategy.

The rental carriage began its journey toward the opposite end of Avenue du Marché, and the refreshing, natural fragrance faded away.

Lumian hurried along beside the gas street lamps, maintaining a distance of nearly 20 meters.

After a while, he sensed the perfume come to a halt. Advancing another ten meters, he witnessed the rental carriage pulling over by the roadside. “Black Scorpion” Roger disembarked, carrying a wooden box.

Not far away stood Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Within a matter of seconds, Louis Lund directed the carriage toward a fork in the road, bypassing the bustling area. Meanwhile, “Black Scorpion” Roger ventured into the market alone.

Is Madame Pualis at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman? Or is “Black Scorpion” Roger merely escorting Louis Lund for a distance, concerned about potential targeting? Lumian speculated as he hastened forward.

Regardless, capturing Louis Lund took precedence!

Behind Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, there were only a few pedestrians. Under the pitch-black sky, occasionally, one could spot a lone figure.

Several street lamps here were out of order, leaving the road engulfed in darkness. It was wide enough for several carriages to pass side by side.

Lumian surveyed the surroundings, wasting no time. He removed his black-framed glasses and sprinted forward.

Before long, he caught up with the slowly moving carriage. As Louis Lund sensed the anomaly, he pushed down on the carriage with his left hand and lunged toward the driver's seat.

From this distance, Lumian could clearly see the black-haired, blue-eyed face.

Though the other party had employed some disguise, Lumian was certain it was Louis Lund!

Reacting swiftly, Louis Lund, without bothering to ascertain the assailant's identity or motives, seized the reins with his left hand and balled his right hand into a fist. Like a speeding cannonball, he launched an attack at Lumian, who was suspended in midair with no leverage to defend himself.

In that very moment, Louis Lund caught sight of Lumian's unmasked face, his eyes widening in sheer shock.

Undeterred, Lumian didn't evade the blow. Instead, he extended his right arm and caught hold of Louis Lund's fist.

Just as the impending collision seemed inevitable, Lumian retracted his arm, lessening the force behind the strike. Then, with a swift motion, he intertwined Louis Lund's fists, wrists, and forearms as though he had boneless limbs. As a result, Louis Lund was sent flying backward but remained within the confines of the carriage.

In the blink of an eye, Louis Lund saw a smile on Lumian's face.

Whack!

Franca materialized on the opposite side of the carriage driver's seat, her palm poised to strike Louis Lund's ear.

Under the formidable Beyonder powers unleashed by an Assassin's full-strength blow, Louis Lund succumbed to unconsciousness without uttering a single sound.

Chapter 204 Interrogation

With a swift movement, Lumian used the force of Louis Lund's fall to gracefully land in the spot where the carriage driver had been stationed.

Franca had already taken over from Louis Lund, expertly maneuvering the horse and bringing the carriage to a halt by the darkened roadside.

Their coordination was flawless, even without prior communication. One focused on the front while the other ambushed from behind. In a matter of seconds, they managed to overpower Louis Lund, a powerful Beyonder at Sequence 8.

“Carry him into the carriage,” Franca instructed, her experience evident as she contemplated the subsequent course of action.

Lumian didn't object and lifted Louis Lund into the rented four-wheeled carriage.

Franca followed suit, closing the carriage door behind her. Then, she removed her hood and black robe, seemingly preparing to change into more comfortable attire upon returning home.

Halfway through her task, she caught Lumian's puzzled gaze and snapped out of her reverie. Awkwardly, she instructed, “Turn around.”

Lumian could deduce Franca's intentions and quickly obliged, diverting his gaze out the window to allow her the privacy she required.

A rustling sound continued for over a minute behind him.

“I'm done,” Franca's clear voice reached his ears.

The rental carriage wasn't particularly spacious. Lumian, standing at over 1.8 meters tall, hunched over slightly and turned back.

Franca now wore a red vest, a white tie, and a blue gown adorned with a row of yellow buttons. Holding a waxed hat and a horsewhip, she presented an unusual blend of mismatched elements—an absurd and peculiar beauty—with her sharp nose, slightly flamboyant brown eyebrows, thin red lips, and vivid lake-colored eyes.

“Quite swift, Miss Franca,” Lumian praised, acknowledging her as the “new” driver for the Empire Carriage Company.

“That's professionalism for you! If these buttons hadn't been so time-consuming, I could have been even faster,” Franca muttered as she tucked her flaxen-colored hair beneath the waxed hat.

With her disguise complete, she retrieved an eyebrow pencil and other items she carried and quickly applied some simple makeup. Her complexion darkened, and her eyebrows were made to appear untidy, successfully transforming her into an ordinary-looking man who wouldn't attract undue attention in the dimly lit streets illuminated by the crimson moon and streetlamps.

“I'll be the carriage driver. You interrogate him,” Franca declared, opening the door and hopping out to assume Louis Lund's former seat.

She took hold of the reins and guided the horse to turn slowly.

Satisfied that the rental carriage was moving steadily, Lumian assisted Louis Lund to the opposite seat. Extracting a bottle of truth serum he had obtained from the unscrupulous Hedsey, he compelled Louis to consume a third of it.

As the drug began to take effect, Lumian resisted the urge to wake the unconscious Louis Lund with the ritual silver dagger. Instead, he gently prodded the area between the bridge of the nose and lips, tugged at a strand of his hair, and lightly tickled his nostrils with the strand. Gradually, Louis Lund stirred from his slumber.

Throughout this process, Lumian maintained a friendly and non-threatening posture, refraining from dislocating his captive's joints or binding his hands and feet.

Achoo!

Louis Lund sneezed and abruptly awakened from his slumber.

He glanced across at Lumian, who sat at ease with a smile playing on his lips.

“Stay calm,” Lumian reassured, his smile unwavering as he pressed his right palm down. “If I intended you harm, stray dogs would have already feasted upon you.”

Louis Lund's immediate impulse was to employ his powers and make a swift escape. Yet, as he recalled being attacked from behind, he cautiously peered out of the carriage window.

The distant light merged with the surrounding shadows, amplifying the hushed whispers of wheels and hooves upon the road.

Reluctant to gamble on mounting a counterattack, Louis Lund inquired in a low, grave voice, “What is it that you want?”

From his vantage point, Lumian hadn't taken any measures to restrain him, confident in the belief that escape was futile.

The other party may have been careless or vulnerable, presenting an opportunity for Louis Lund to exploit. But such an advantage would never manifest in a direct confrontation.

And the aid accompanying Lumian could strike from the shadows undetected—a force to be reckoned with!

Lumian smiled. “I merely seek to reunite with an old friend.”

Louis Lund, dressed only in a linen shirt and shorts, replied with a dark expression, “I won't succumb to your threats again. Madame is already aware of my past transgressions and has granted me forgiveness.”

So I really possessed incriminating information about you? Lumian's mind momentarily swirled with confusion.

Recollections from his dream emerged—a revelation of Louis Lund engaging in an illicit affair with a woman from the village, clandestinely selling portions of the administrator's castle collection in a bid to blackmail him for knowledge of Madame Pualis's involvement with the padre.

In retrospect, those accounts might have been fallacious.

If the padre truly harbored desires for Madame Pualis, it made little sense for him to forsake belief in the evil god symbolizing bountiful harvests, or to forgo birthing several children with her.

Lumian suspected that his dream had crafted an R-rated adaptation of the concealed conflict between the two factions. After all, both the padre and Madame Pualis had numerous lovers, making it easy for his subconscious to forge connections.

Compared to the secrets housed within Madame Pualis's castle, Louis Lund's affair and the pilfering of collections appeared as innocuous as mundane meals thrice daily. There was no ground for him to be subjected to blackmail.

Yet here stood Louis Lund, insisting that he had indeed erred and fallen victim to Lumian's coercion.

“Is that so?” Lumian adopted his Cordu Prankster King persona. “I merely assisted you in concealing your missteps. How can that be construed as a threat?”

Louis Lund erupted in a bitter laugh, a mix of anger and disbelief.

“You are the most shameless individual I have ever encountered.

“I am aware that you uncovered certain irregularities and sought to discern their origins, but you did indeed threaten me and extract information about Madame.”

“That's correct. In those days, I entertained the thought of betraying Madame and seeking the padre's assistance. However, that was because I hadn't comprehended

the greatness of Mother. I was still a follower of the false god, the Eternal Blazing Sun. Now, my life stems from Mother, and my future belongs to Mother.”

Ah, so that's how it is... I must thank this truth serum. You've spilled all that needed to be said, both the necessary and the unnecessary. I didn't have to wrack my brain to gather information... In reality, I sensed something amiss in the village and embarked on a certain investigation? Lumian nodded, satisfied, and smiled. “When did you come to realize the greatness of Mother? Was it after you gave birth to that child?”

Louis Lund looked utterly stunned, his reaction almost causing him to jolt upright and bang his head. “How did you know about me birthing a child? How could you possibly know?”

Hmm... So I wasn't involved in the padre's raid on the administrator's castle? Otherwise, Louis Lund wouldn't be posing such a question... Lumian felt a surge of delight and jestingly responded, “When I undressed you earlier, I noticed stretch marks and a C-section scar on your stomach.”

“Impossible!” Louis Lund fiercely objected. “Madame has already erased them!”

Lumian swiftly changed the course of their conversation and inquired with curiosity,

“I'm curious to know how Madame Pualis managed to impregnate you.”

Louis Lund, though initially hesitant to answer, couldn't resist the urge to divulge the secret.

“Whether it's a man or a woman, as long as you engage in intimate relations with her and exchange bodily fluids, she can conceive a child according to her desires.”

I see... Lumian breathed a sigh of relief.

His greatest concern had been the possibility of Madame Pualis employing her Beyonder abilities to remotely impregnate him.

“So, both men and women will do, but what about animals?” Lumian pressed on.

Louis Lund was taken aback by the question. After a few moments, he responded, “That should work too...”

“And what about plants? Or rocks?” Lumian's inquiry turned scholarly.

“I... I don't know,” Louis Lund admitted, unable to provide a definitive answer.

Madame has never contemplated such possibilities. Why does this youngster possess such a vivid imagination?

Regretfully, Lumian changed the subject.

“Since you conceived through the exchange of bodily fluids, how did you end up with that bird's nest-like thing in your stomach?”

“How do you know about it? When did you see it?” Louis Lund asked, astonished.

“I'll tell you later,” Lumian swiftly lied, maintaining his composure without a flicker of hesitation.

Louis Lund wore a perplexed expression as he muttered, his face clouded with confusion, "It came along with the conception of the child. It's like a fruit. The outer layer is the epidermis, and the fetus is the pulp. They were once joined together and only split open when ripe."

"Sounds quite magical. That bird's nest seems to possess great spiritual value. Can it be utilized in the realm of mysticism?" Lumian deliberately rambled, skillfully diverting the conversation away from his true intentions.

"It serves as a key ingredient in a certain healing potion," Louis Lund continued, speaking without pause. "It has various other uses as well, like enhancing the condition of human skin and providing power to spells..."

After he finished, Lumian let out a nonchalant sigh.

"Did your first child perish in the padre's assault on the castle?"

"Yes, he was still so young," Louis Lund lamented the loss of life. "During that time, the padre had many followers with him. We kept retreating, and a few Gardeners and a Heretic Spellmaster lost their lives. If Madam hadn't returned in time, we wouldn't have escaped. Sigh, all those children were killed."

"How many people did the padre bring?" Lumian casually inquired, concealing his true concerns.

Louis Lund recollected and replied, "Some were shepherds originally, like Pierre Berry, Niort Best, and the others. Some were the padre's mistresses, such as Sybil Berry, Madonna Bénet, and Philippa Guillaume. The rest were Pons Bénet and his gang. We managed to kill a few of them, including the rather formidable Niort Best..."

In my dream, Niort Best was slain by the three sheep... So in reality, he died during the raid on the administrator's castle? And I wasn't among the individuals mentioned by Louis Lund... In other words, the battle scenes I witnessed were derived from a fragment of my soul? Thus, they are incomplete and unable to reveal the full picture and all the participants... Lumian felt a sense of relief and smiled as he asked, "Where did Madame Pualis go?"

Chapter 205 Banshee

Louis Lund shook his head.

"I've got no idea, but when Madame came back, she wasn't well either."

"Then she saw the castle in ruins and the important items destroyed. She gathered the remaining ones and prepared to leave Cordu."

Based on what I witnessed, it seems that Madame Pualis had indeed been engaged in a fight with someone else. Lumian asked with curiosity, "Why didn't Madame Pualis try to bring the dead back to life?"

Louis Lund looked at Lumian, surprised.

“I never told you any of that...”

In other words, he wanted to know how Lumian had this knowledge.

Lumian smiled but offered no explanation.

Louis Lund couldn't contain his urge to spill the secret.

“Madame can resurrect the dead and restore their bodies, but it's far from perfect. The resurrected ones aren't quite human anymore. They're part corpse, part monster. They only retain fragments of their original memories and can only exist for seven days.”

Madame Pualis's resurrection ability is severely flawed at this level... Lumian was disappointed.

He diverted the topic.

“What did Madame Pualis want in Cordu?”

Louis Lund looked puzzled. “Didn't I already tell you?”

Lumian was prepared and smiled as he replied, “Given what happened afterward, I believe you might have a different perspective now.”

Louis Lund felt the need to share the information, so he sighed and said, “Back then, I couldn't comprehend it. I was even scared. That's why I dropped hints to the padre during Mass, hoping for assistance.”

“Yes... I later discovered that Madame wanted to create an entirely new world in Cordu. In this world, when humans die, their souls return to the earth and roam the wilderness. On special occasions, they can return home and experience the joy of reunion. By redeeming their sins, they can be reborn, emerging from the Mother's womb as human fetuses.”

“Paramita?” Lumian remembered the term from his dream.

“Yes!” Louis Lund replied, fear evident in his eyes.

He suspected that Lumian had asked the question to gauge his reaction.

Lumian knew the correct answer and sought to determine if Louis Lund was lying or how much of his story was false.

He could only inquire about it from Louis Lund, not Madame Pualis.

Louis Lund shook his head slowly.

“Madame briefly mentioned it, but it was very vague.

“She said she had only established a small, caricature Paramita, a part of the complete Paramita. She also mentioned that by creating her own Paramita, she could please the Mother and bear more.”

A part? What would happen if those Madames managed to create a complete Paramita? Lumian wondered if constructing a miniature Paramita was a prerequisite for their unusual path towards godhood.

He gazed at Louis Lund, attempting to inquire, "What is Madame Pualis's Sequence now?"

"Madame's condition is rather peculiar. It might be related to the destruction of her Paramita or something else she possesses," Louis Lund replied, catching himself mid-sentence.

Why can't I control my words? Why did I say what I shouldn't have?

Louis Lund realized that his behavior had likely been influenced by one of Lumian Lee's Beyond powers.

Now understanding the cause, he no longer blamed himself or felt anxious. He felt a sense of relief and relaxation.

"Madame should be somewhere between Sequence 5 and Sequence 4. At times, she exudes an imposing aura that makes people afraid to meet her gaze. Other times, she lacks such grandeur."

It's reminiscent of the state Madame Pualis displayed in my dream... Lumian recalled and stated, "Sequence 9 Villain, Sequence 8 Gardener, Sequence 7 Heretic Spellmaster, Sequence 6 Sower... What comes after Sequence 5? And what about Sequence 4? What lies beyond that?"

He knows more than I anticipated... Witnessing Lumian Lee divulge so much information about the pathway's Sequences in one go, Louis Lund didn't dare take any risks. Yielding to his desire to confide in him, he responded, "Banshee is Sequence 5, and Evil Overlord, also known as Benevolent Overlord or Madame, is Sequence 4. I don't know what lies beyond that. I'm merely a Gardener. I don't possess the right to receive any further boons and advance to become a Heretic Spellmaster."

Banshee... The name implies a change in gender... Pulitt became Pualis... Titles like Madame Moon and Madame Night symbolize godhood and demigods, but Madame Pualis doesn't precisely fit the role of Madame Night... Lumian pondered for a moment before steering the conversation back to Cordu.

"Were Madame Pualis's initial followers in the village mostly lovers and the elderly?"

"That's correct," Louis Lund affirmed, nodding. "People like Naroka, who were quite old, yearned deeply for their departed loved ones. They longed to see them again and worry about what awaits them after death. They experience both fear and longing. That's the aid Madame can provide them. Unfortunately, Naroka passed away suddenly before fully embracing Paramita. Madame suspects that she discovered the padre's scheme and was killed by her youngest son, who follows the padre."

That explains it... Lumian gained new insight into Naroka's death from his dream.

Her demise was the result of being silenced.

Ava and Reimund likely met the same fate.

Sighing, Lumian changed the subject.

“When did you realize something was amiss with the padre?”

Louis Lund contemplated for a moment and replied, “In early January, I caught sight of the children in the castle tower. You can't fathom what it was like. To put it briefly, it terrified me and nearly drove me insane. I was desperate to leave Madame.

“Initially, I believed she was just like those mystical fanatics who enjoy purchasing magazines like *Psychic* and *Lotus* and engaging in futile practices. I didn't think there was anything wrong. However, as time went on, I noticed that the other residents of the castle were becoming increasingly peculiar. The administrator locked himself and Madame in their rooms on two separate occasions, coinciding with the birth of a child each time. My valets and maids often did the same, and Madame was remarkably understanding of their behavior.

“From time to time, the distant cries of a baby reached my ears, causing deep suspicion to well up within me. Seizing the opportunity presented by Madame's absence and the others' lack of vigilance, I stealthily slipped into the tower. Oh, Mother, the sight that greeted me was utterly terrifying!”

Louis Lund, originally intending to speak of Guillaume Bénét's abnormal behavior, found himself unable to contain his thoughts on the castle tower incident, and he began to ramble.

Lumian could vividly imagine the scene, for he had witnessed it in his dream: human children with bird-like claws, sprawled against the walls, densely packed and scattered throughout.

Louis Lund gulped nervously and continued his account, “I initially dropped hints to the padre during Mass. Later, I took the opportunity to reveal Madame's abnormality to him. I suspected she might be a follower of an evil deity. He instructed me to keep it hidden and not expose myself, assuring me that he would handle the situation.

“It was around mid-January when things took a turn for the worse. The padre continued his normal routine as if nothing was amiss. Despite my repeated urging, you eventually discovered the truth and threatened me.

“After that, Sewell, the carriage driver, and I received a revelation. We repented and wholeheartedly pledged ourselves to Madame.

“Then, in March, the padre suddenly launched an attack on the castle with a group of people.”

Louis Lund has limited knowledge about the padre's situation. When Lumian inquired further about what had transpired in Cordu, Louis Lund seemed unfamiliar with the village's circumstances. This aligned with his role as the castle's butler, primarily tending to matters in Dariège and other cities.

He only mentioned that since January, the villagers of Cordu had been frequently discussing horoscopes, believing that it would bring them glory and alter their destinies. Prior to that, they merely followed certain folk traditions to ward off any changes in their fate. Specific discussions regarding these matters were rare.

With the understanding that former administrator Béost and Madame Pualis's lady's maid, Cathy, were now Heretic Spellmasters, and that Madame Pualis had left Cordu before Lent, Lumian realized he wouldn't glean any more information from Louis Lund.

Knowing when to stop, Lumian posed a direct question, "Where does Madame Pualis reside now?"

"In Quartier de Noël..." Louis Lund instinctively moved to cover his mouth but added another detail. "Rue de Scotch Broom..."

Rue de Scotch Broom in Quartier de Noël... A map of Trier from a magazine article flashed through Lumian's mind.

Quartier de Noël lay northeast of Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, divided by the Srenzo River. It was renowned for its numerous hospitals, including the Veterans' Home and Wounded Soldiers' Hospital. Additionally, being situated in the suburbs, it boasted a fair share of farmland.

Lumian refrained from pressuring Louis Lund or intensifying his desire to extract more information. Instead, he smiled and said, "I bear no ill intentions towards Madame. I merely wish to speak with her about the events in Cordu.

"I will allow you to depart. Please inform Madame Pualis that if she is willing to meet with me, she can choose the time and place. Ah, please send your response to Room 302, 9 Rue des Pavés, Quartier du Jardin Botanique, before tomorrow night."

It was a safe house Lumian had prepared in Quartier du Jardin Botanique, and now it would finally serve its purpose.

Louis Lund let out a sigh of relief before responding cautiously, "Got it."

Anxious thoughts plagued him, fearing that Lumian might allow him to depart only to trail behind him. Yet, considering Lumian's evident capability to uncover Madame's precise whereabouts without pressing the issue, Louis Lund found himself compelled to place his trust in Lumian's amicability.

He then gestured towards his shorts and remarked, "I cannot leave dressed like this."

Chapter 206 Communication

Lumian's head pounded at the mere thought of Franca coming in and undressing. He scrutinized Louis Lund, who was left in a linen shirt and white shorts, and offered a genuine suggestion.

"I can ask my companion to return the money from your coat. Leave the carriage as it is and find a clothing store. Tell them you encountered a twisted robber. I'm certain everyone in Trier will understand."

Louis Lund's expression froze for a moment as he pointed downwards from Lumian's current position. "I have spare clothes."

Lumian bent down and retrieved a black formal suit with a vest and bow tie.

It seemed to be Louis Lund's usual attire as a butler.

“Is this rental carriage truly yours?” Lumian inquired curiously as he tossed the formal suit to Louis Lund.

“I rented the clothes and the carriage.” Louis Lund hurriedly put on his pants.

Lumian sat there, patiently waiting for him to dress before calling out to Franca to stop the carriage by the roadside.

He opened the door, turned around, and waved at Louis Lund.

“Hope to see you again.”

If not, I'll find you on Rue de Scotch Broom in Quartier de Noël. And if you've already vanished, I'll continue my investigation, ensuring you'll never find peace.

Lumian would have trailed Louis Lund until he tracked down Madame Pualis if it weren't for his caution regarding her abilities and characteristics, as well as his intention to engage in a friendly conversation with her.

Franca placed the waxed hat and whip on the driver's seat of the carriage, picked up the black robe beside her, and put it on. Then, she pulled up her hood and leaped into the shadows by the road.

Once Louis Lund steered the carriage away from the street, she emerged from the shadows and approached Lumian. She gazed in his direction and spoke. “Not following him?”

“No need. For now, we're not enemies.” Lumian averted his gaze and headed towards Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Franca followed, a smile gracing her lips.

“Aren't you concerned that Madame Pualis might refuse to see you and disappear overnight?”

Lumian and Louis Lund didn't purposely lower their voices during their exchange. An assassin possessed sharp ears and eyes, so she caught most of their conversation. While she couldn't fully grasp the Cordu-related details due to her lack of prior knowledge, she gleaned plenty about other topics.

For instance, Lumian sought an audience with Madame Pualis. For instance, a certain evil god's pathway would transform into a Banshee at Sequence 5...

Lumian took two deep breaths to calm his lingering, trembling emotions.

“I simply believe it's more likely to meet Madame Pualis if I display friendliness rather than tailing Louis Lund.

“She knows full well whom I seek revenge against. Her own castle was damaged by the padre and she was driven out of Cordu. I refuse to believe she bears no grudge.

“Heh heh, I did kill two leaders of the Poison Spur Mob and tamper with 'Black Scorpion' Roger's coffee, but they don't know Lumian Lee was behind it. There's no conflict between hating Ciel and meeting Lumian Lee.”

Franca couldn't help but chuckle.

“You're right. What does their vendetta against Ciel have to do with you, Lumian?”

She murmured to herself, lost in thought, “What's Madame Pualis's connection to the Poison Spur Mob? Which evil deity does the Banshee pathway belong to? Are ‘Black Scorpion’ Roger, ‘Baldy’ Harman, and ‘Short-legged Candlestick’ Castina associated with this pathway? One Spellmaster Heretic and two Gardeners?”

She speculated based on her understanding of the Poison Spur Mob.

Lumian didn't hold back any information.

“The mastermind behind the Poison Spur Mob is Madame Moon, but it seems she has recently made further progress. She and Madame Night, whom Pualis represents, are part of a secret organization called the Nightstalkers. They worship the Great Mother. I don't know the precise name, nor do I dare to utter it.”

The concealed entity known as Inevitability could corrupt people merely by knowing about it. The Great Mother, even more sinister and fearsome than Inevitability, had her followers locked in a prolonged conflict against the Blessed of Inevitability in Cordu. So, she was certainly capable of doing the same.

Lumian suspected that if he were to learn the Great Mother's complete and honorific name, there was a high chance he would become pregnant on the spot.

Franca found herself deeply intrigued.

“Indeed, it's best not to seek knowledge beyond one's boundaries.

“There was once a member of our research society who enjoyed delving into secrets and acquiring all kinds of mystical knowledge. Eventually, he vanished and was never seen again.”

Franca pragmatically shifted the topic to “Black Scorpion” Roger and the others, along with their respective abilities. Lumian provided detailed explanations. After all, he still had to rely on Madame Hidden Blade to combat the Poison Spur Mob.

When Lumian speculated that one of the abilities of a Sower was to impregnate others, Franca felt a momentary envy and eagerly exclaimed, “If Gardner were to become pregnant, it would be quite interesting...”

“Madame, your thoughts are perilous. I truly worry that you might embrace the mantra of ‘Life is short, why not give it a try?’ and end up choosing to believe in that Great Mother, praying for Her to bestow upon you the power of a Sower,” Lumian mockingly warned.

The combination of a Demoness and a Sower was too wicked. Trier would undoubtedly witness a large number of victims.

Franca was taken aback.

“I've already consumed a potion and become a Beyonder. I can't accept any more boons, can I...?”

You don't know? That's fortunate! Lumian sincerely replied, “I don't believe so.”

“Don't worry. I possess extensive knowledge of mysticism and understand that every evil deity harbors malicious intentions.” Franca sighed softly, setting an example for herself.

She glanced over at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman nearby and casually remarked, “When I was waiting for Louis Lund earlier today, I witnessed an unlucky fellow.”

Unlucky fellow? Lumian's heart stirred as he recollected.

“Was he a slender man in his fifties with blond hair and blue eyes?”

“How did you know?” Franca was taken aback. “He was strolling along the street when a vase suddenly dropped from the balcony above and struck his head. He reacted swiftly, managing to dodge to the side of the road. However, he stumbled on the edge of the curb and lost his balance. At that very moment, a public carriage was about to collide with him. Heh heh, he's certainly no ordinary person. Despite the circumstances, he evaded it with a remarkably nimble move. And then, guess what? He collided with a gas street lamp pole, causing his nose to bleed.”

After recounting the humorous scene she had witnessed that afternoon, Franca turned her gaze to Lumian, awaiting his response to her inquiry.

Lumian paused, contemplating her question.

“That individual should be Monsieur Ive, the landlord of Auberge du Coq Doré. He is in cahoots with the pervert known as Hedsey, who attacked Jenna.

“I suspect he is a Beyonder. I had previously informed the Eternal Blazing Sun Church of the anomaly through intermediaries, but they found nothing amiss. Recently, I acquired a Bad Luck charm and seized an opportunity to use it on him. I intended for him to experience frequent misfortunes and thereby expose his abnormality.

“Unfortunately, his performance went unnoticed by official Beyonders.”

But given that tramp's luck, Monsieur Ive would likely suffer from misfortune for another two or three days.

Franca's expression darkened as she stated, “Indeed, it's clear that he is a Beyonder.

“So, it's the group that attacked Jenna... You should have informed me earlier! I could have found someone to help draw greater attention from the authorities to this fellow named Ive!”

Recalling the eradicated mirror people, Lumian focused on the depraved Hedsey, Monsieur Ive, Susanna Mattise, and Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

“The abilities of their pathway are quite intriguing...” Franca couldn't help but sigh. “When I first delved into mysticism, everyone told me that there were only twenty-two divine pathways. However, in the past two to three years, peculiar Sequences have occasionally emerged. Do evil gods fall outside the realm of divine pathways?”

After a brief pause, Franca said to Lumian, “I will report this to the authorities through my contacts, but we mustn't be careless. Remember, always remain vigilant and be prepared for any unforeseen circumstances. Indeed, when the time comes, we may have to collaborate and take action. I will inform you once we have communicated.

“Not bad. Now you know how to seek assistance from me. Don't fret; when I find myself in trouble, I will come to you.”

“Okay.” Lumian nodded gently.

After bidding Franca farewell, Lumian made his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

He still remembered the issue with Termiboros. Once inside Room 207, he retrieved the memo and read it carefully before composing a letter to Madam Magician.

In the letter, he primarily addressed two concerns. Firstly, he detailed the temptation and subsequent influence of Termiboros upon receiving the Alms Monk boon. Secondly, he informed Madam Magician that he had sought assistance from the Psychiatrist and could now avoid reciting the corresponding honorific name.

Thanks to Monsieur Ive hiring a regular cleaning lady, the motel had become less infested with bedbugs. Lumian swiftly tidied up the surroundings, arranged the altar, and summoned the doll-like blond messenger.

The messenger surveyed the room and seemed satisfied with Lumian's decision to change the summoning location.

Approximately thirty minutes later, she materialized in Room 207 and placed the reply on the wooden table. Tilting her chin slightly, she addressed Lumian, “You should be grateful. I helped remind Madam Magician and ensured she read your letter promptly.”

“Thank you,” Lumian replied reflexively, momentarily caught off guard.

It was only after the messenger had departed that Lumian snapped out of his daze. He picked up the neatly folded square letter and unfolded it.

“I am pleased to hear that your treatment is proving effective. I did not expect that entity to dispatch an angel. What a significant investment.

“In recent years, evil gods have indeed been infiltrating more frequently, but it remains challenging for higher-level powers to enter our world. The number of angels can be counted on one hand. Three of them were destroyed in transit, causing only a small area of corruption. While one succeeded, an orthodox god intervened and rectified the situation.

“In other words, you are the only unfortunate individual in the entire world.”

Chapter 207 Organization

Lumian paid no mind to Madam Magician's usual playful jabs and instead focused on her account of the evil god's infiltration.

It aligned with the information shared by the late “Hammer” Ait.

For unrecognized evil gods hailing from other realms, providing godhood boons proved to be an arduous task. Numerous obstacles hindered Their progress. They had to rely on covert followers to perform elaborate rituals on a grand scale, which often drew attention and resulted in swift annihilation before they could infiltrate.

Madam Magician painstakingly detailed various examples, showcasing the immense difficulty angelic entities faced when descending into the mortal plane. In recent years, there had been only five instances, with four failures and one partial success. While gaining a measure of godhood without reaching angelic status seemed somewhat easier, such cases were rare and generally unsuccessful.

Though Madam Magician didn't explicitly mention it, Lumian suspected that the Great Mother, the Mother Tree of Desire, and the enigmatic fog possessed extraordinary infiltration capabilities, surpassing other entities based on “Hammer” Ait. It seemed likely that these three were responsible for most successful instances involving the acquisition of godhood powers.

Does Madam Magician remain unaware or does she deem it unnecessary for me to know at this stage? Lumian pondered momentarily, inclined to believe the latter.

He continued perusing Madam Magician's response.

“This actually bodes well. Dealing with an angel who serves a hidden entity is much simpler than confronting angelic powers derived from said hidden entity. The associated risks are also significantly reduced.

“Once you ascend to the rank of an angel and extract powers of equal magnitude from that fellow with the long name, thereby rendering Him exceedingly vulnerable, you can implore my Lord to undo the seal and set Him free. Then, you can give Him a thorough thrashing and either transform Him into a Sealed Artifact or restore Him to His original Beyonder characteristics.

“Naturally, this hinges upon Him truly being an angelic entity and not a puppet blessed with a boon. Puppets are easier to handle. Once you extract a certain measure of His power, He will crumble. However, the remaining power bearing the mark of the hidden entity is what presents a greater challenge. You must maintain the seal and gradually absorb it until it reaches a level manageable by an angel.

“Doesn't it all seem to be progressing smoothly with a high likelihood of success? Ah, but the most vexing and formidable step lies in becoming an angel.

“In your present state, I lack confidence. Were it not for the uniqueness of the current era, 99% or more of the Beyonders would never come close to touching godhood.

“I believe your Psychiatrist has already enlightened you on how to evade the negative effects of Termiboros. No further elaboration is necessary.

“I simply wish to remind you that should you undertake any critical or perilous endeavors in the future, do write to me beforehand and apprise me of the situation.

“Why do I suggest you write before exploiting that lengthy-named fellow? Because you might be clandestinely influenced and neglect the corresponding dangers, forgetting to notify me. As for Termiboros, He will not let you forget my warning, for it would mean you engaging in numerous hazardous exploits and facing a high risk of losing your life. That is clearly not what He desires or strives for.

“If you were to perish, the seal would be affected, but my lord would be alerted. In that event, I shall gather a team to reinforce the seal and eliminate Him.

“With such a skilled angel of fate sealed within you, your future is destined to be quite ‘exciting.’ Praise the lord. You are akin to bait for the followers of evil gods, Hunters, and Demonesses. You shall embark on a multitude of experiences. If you find the time and inclination, do consider writing a lengthy letter to share with me.

“And now, with the assistance of the two Psychiatrists, you can express your desire to alter your faith to Mr. K during a forthcoming gathering. Remember, before you set off to attend the event, offer prayers to my lord for the angel's protection.”

Lumian read the note patiently, finding Madam Magician's words both abundant and yet empty.

The most valuable part was her guidance on evading Termiboros's influence and the reminder to seek her opinion before utilizing the angel's power. Additionally, she provided a beautifully drawn blueprint that offered a chance to address the corruption within his body at the angelic level.

Lumian burned the note by rubbing his spirituality. He then reached into his pockets, touching the hidden banknotes and coins, before leaving Room 207 and making his way to Room 305.

Anthony Reid had already returned to his lodgings and sat by the bedside, dressed as a clerk.

Lumian produced 400 verl d'or worth of banknotes and handed them over to Anthony Reid.

At the same time, he nodded slightly and stated, “The commission is over.”

“It seems you've already encountered the target,” Anthony Reid chuckled.

Taking a moment to consider, he inquired, “Can I report the target's information to the authorities?”

“Wait for a week,” Lumian replied. He had initially planned to offer Anthony Reid more money to delay claiming the reward from the wanted poster. However, since he sought his opinion, Lumian took advantage of the situation by setting a time limit.

He worried that any investigation or arrest related to Louis Lund might alert Madame Pualis, potentially jeopardizing their meeting.

Anthony Reid did not object and let out a sigh. "You're more suited for the market district than I initially thought."

He had never witnessed a wanted criminal rise to become a leader of a sizable mob so swiftly without being detected by the authorities.

"Competent individuals can thrive anywhere, just like you," Lumian advised Anthony Reid, casting a casual glance around Room 305.

His eyes fell upon a few folded papers on the wooden table near the window. They appeared thicker and smoother, larger than ordinary oil paintings.

What could they be? Lumian focused his gaze for a moment, realizing that the folded papers had a faint bluish hue and a printed texture.

Instantly, the pieces fell into place.

The posters on the wall!

Posters of parliamentary candidates had been plastered all over the place recently!

"You seem particularly invested in the National Convention election," Lumian didn't hold back his speculation as he taunted Anthony Reid. "Do you have a legitimate occupation?"

One of the fundamental eligibility criteria for the elections.

Anthony Reid calmly smiled and replied, "No."

He did not elaborate on his reasons for collecting the parliamentary candidates' posters.

Another commission? Lumian decided not to delve further. He waved his hand dismissively and left Room 305.

Amidst the lunatic's piercing cries, Lumian descended the stairs, left Auberge du Coq Doré, returned to Salle de Bal Brise, and settled at the bar counter.

"Good evening, Boss," the bartender greeted with deference, straightening his posture.

Lumian nodded.

"Give me a glass of absinthe."

Having thought about Cordu too often that day, he needed a dose of psychedelic bitterness to jolt his senses awake.

On the stage, Jenna performed with exaggerated flair, belting out flashy songs. Leaning against the bar counter, Lumian let his gaze wander as he absorbed every note.

Now and then, he would take a sip of the dreamy green liquid, allowing its bitterness to awaken his nerves.

Once he regained composure, he organized the recent matters he had to attend to.

First, there was Mr. K's mission; second, the looming threat from the Poison Spur Mob; third, Susanna Mattise's second assault; and fourth, his upcoming meeting with Madame Pualis.

Regarding the election, Lumian didn't pay it much mind after confirming from Franca that the Savoie Mob also backed Hugues Artois. This meant that even if the opposing party won, it wouldn't entirely suppress the Savoie Mob or impede his mission.

Susanna Mattise's resurgence had been a cause for concern, but thanks to the psychiatric treatment, Lumian wouldn't hesitate to seek assistance from Franca. Resolving this matter had become relatively manageable.

Once official Beyonders committed to the task, they wouldn't be inferior to Lumian, a Sequence 8, in effectiveness. They would undoubtedly uncover Monsieur Ive's issues and the troubles at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, purging Susanna Mattise's evil spirit completely.

This would be accomplished within the next few days. Lumian simply needed to remain vigilant.

Mr. K's mission was rather complex, relying on Gardner Martin. Lumian, not being a Spectator Beyer, could only attempt to gain the target's approval through repeated efforts. There were no shortcuts for the time being, so rushing was unnecessary.

Similarly, he had to await Madame Pualis's response. Lumian couldn't rush the matter even if he desired to.

Upon analyzing the situation, Lumian concluded that he needed to prioritize dealing with the Poison Spur Mob's threat.

After the election, "Black Scorpion" Roger would receive an additional boon from Madame Moon, ascending to the rank of a Sower. "Baldy" Harman and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina might even advance to the level of Heretic Spellmasters. At that point, Lumian, their primary target, would be defenseless against them. Even with the support of Franca, Baron Brignais, and his allies, the situation would be perilous.

Should I join forces with Franca before the election concludes and infiltrate 126 Avenue du Marché under the cover of darkness to eliminate the remaining leaders of the Poison Spur Mob? Even if Madame Moon sends reinforcements later, by the time they stabilize the situation, I would have earned the Boss's trust and gained a chance to partially withdraw from the market district...

The problem lies in facing a Heretic Spellmaster on their home turf. Even with Franca and me united, defeating him would be a daunting task, not to mention his potential allies...

Perhaps an opportunity will arise to strike at "Baldy" Harman and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina when they are outside? Lumian pondered as he spotted Charlie, attired as a waiter, approaching the bar counter with a tray.

Nodding in greeting, Lumian instinctively honed in on Charlie's luck.

In an instant, his grasp on the absinthe glass tightened, and his pupils dilated.

He "saw" Charlie's luck stained with blood, a swirling blend of crimson and ebony that sent a shiver down his spine.

This could only mean that Charlie was on the brink of a life-threatening catastrophe within the next two to three days, or perhaps even within the next 24 hours!

Chapter 208 Countermeasure

Could Susanna Mattise's attack be imminent? Lumian pondered this question, considering that Charlie had no known enemies and had recently worked as a waiter at Salle de Bal Brise.

Though it was possible that Charlie had simply experienced a string of unfortunate accidents, Lumian wasn't willing to take any chances.

As Charlie carefully placed the tray down and waited, he grew uneasy under Lumian's gaze.

Recalling the other's mystical prophetic ability, Charlie leaned in and whispered, "Did you see something?"

A smile spread across Lumian's face.

"I foresee a romantic encounter in your future. You'll form a relationship that goes beyond friendship with a beautiful woman."

"Is that true?" Charlie asked, surprised and delighted.

The woman's name is Susanna Mattise... Lumian chuckled, suppressing his words. "You're quite gullible, aren't you? How can you believe that?"

"I knew it..." Charlie looked disappointed.

The presence of the Idiot Instrument had already revealed to him Ciel's knack for deception.

Lumian's smile faded as he watched Charlie make his way to the edge of the dance floor, carrying a tray filled with glasses.

Thoughts raced through Lumian's mind.

Am I simply unlucky, or is my fate predetermined? The official Beyonders will soon keep a close watch on Monsieur Ive and the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. They'll arrest all the cultists who believe in the Mother Tree of Desire and locate the evil spirit, Susanna Mattise, to purge her completely. Yet, here I am, facing the possibility of Susanna Mattise launching an attack on me and Charlie today...

Dammit, Termiboros, that pig's son. He must be behind this!

Based on my observations of luck, the problem will likely arise late tonight or perhaps even at midnight the day after tomorrow...

I can't solely rely on Susanna Mattise coming to Charlie and me the day after tomorrow. I must prepare for the worst-case scenario...

Gradually regaining composure, Lumian, influenced by Franca and Jenna's vulgarities, forced himself to remain calm and assess the situation.

Simultaneously, he devised an initial plan of action.

First, he would discreetly alert Charlie, assuming a hidden identity, and instruct him to seek refuge in the nearest Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral for the next three days.

Second, Lumian would go to Rue des Blouses Blanches and enlist Franca's aid.

With Franca and Mr. K's finger acting as his protectors, Lumian believed he stood a strong chance of surviving Susanna Mattise's initial onslaught. Furthermore, she would not have another opportunity in the future. Whether it was Franca's message to the official Beyonders through her secret channels or Charlie's presence at the cathedral seeking sanctuary, it would be enough to inform the Eternal Blazing Sun Church of Susanna Mattise's reappearance!

Although Lumian could likely handle Susanna Mattise on his own with Mr. K's assistance, since he already owed Franca a favor, why not accrue a little more debt to ensure greater security?

Without hesitation, Lumian finished his absinthe and departed from Salle de Bal Brise.

Once again, the world spun, and he descended to the ground. He found himself surrounded by a vast network of brownish-green roots, insects scurrying about, and rats hiding in various corners...

Just as Lumian was about to remove his glasses and begin applying his disguise, his eyes caught sight of a clump of turquoise hair entwined with vines and branches.

Bang!

Lumian's head spun, as if he had been hit, and golden stars danced before his eyes.

In haste, he removed the Mystery Prying Glasses, bent down, and retched for a few moments.

Once the wave of nausea subsided, Lumian seized the opportunity while the urge to draw still lingered. He reached for his makeup tools and began applying various substances to his face.

Gazing into the dimly lit windowpane, Lumian found himself increasingly unrecognizable. He resembled one of the unkempt drunkards commonly found in dance halls.

When he finished, he averted his gaze, afraid of the disorienting effects that might follow.

Phew... Lumian put away his makeup tools, exhaled deeply, and filtered through the images he had witnessed while wearing the Mystery Prying Glasses.

One image stood out in particular—an image of turquoise hair entwined with branches and vines. It struck a chord of familiarity within him, and he quickly made a connection.

Susanna Mattise also possessed long, turquoise hair interwoven with branches and vines that seemed to materialize from nowhere!

Susanna Mattise's territory likely lies somewhere underground in the market district? Lumian made a preliminary judgment.

He couldn't help but grumble, Why does it have to be underground once again? Isn't the underground of Trier already bustling enough?

However, this also explained why the official Beyonders had been unable to fully cleanse Susanna Mattise during their previous encounter. Underground monsters were always challenging to eliminate, just like the Montsouris ghost.

Lumian recollected the real Monsieur Ive's clandestine visit to Underground Trier late at night. He remembered the perverted Hedsey, who had drugged Jenna and led her to an underground cavern. Hedsey seemed familiar with the area and felt at ease there.

This convinced Lumian that Susanna Mattise was indeed hiding somewhere in Underground Trier, not far from the location chosen by Hedsey.

Deeper into the depths of the underground path, all the way to the end perhaps? Lumian speculated as he changed into simple cargo pants, incongruous with his formal top, and left Room 207.

Inside Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian surveyed the surroundings until he spotted Charlie, serving drinks to guests near the periphery of the dance floor.

Leaning closer, Lumian discreetly brushed past Charlie and whispered, "Susanna Mattise."

Amidst Jenna's singing, booming music, and clamorous voices, the name resonated clearly. Charlie froze in place, as if struck by lightning.

Only then did Lumian gently remind him in a hushed tone, "I have received information that Susanna Mattise will reemerge within the next three days. If you wish to avoid a grim fate, seek refuge in the cathedral tonight and remain there for three days."

Charlie's initial reaction was one of horror. His second was to search for Ciel. And his third was to inquire anxiously whether he would be fired for taking three days off.

A lump formed in Charlie's throat as he searched in vain for Ciel. He mustered the courage to ask in a hushed voice, "Really?"

You can choose not to believe it... Lumian managed to restrain his instinctual reaction to prevent Charlie from making any connection.

With a deliberate effort to keep his voice low, he continued, "If you go to the cathedral tonight, someone will confirm the truth for you."

Charlie's fear became too overwhelming to contain. He scrutinized the unfamiliar face before him and asked with a tremor in his voice, "Who are you?"

And why did you come specifically to warn me?

"Just someone who wishes you well," Lumian responded, borrowing a phrase his sister often used in jest.

Without further explanation, he walked past Charlie, squeezing his way onto the dance floor and swiftly disappearing from view.

Charlie felt as though he had been plunged into winter, his body shivering uncontrollably.

During moments like this, memories of Susanna Mattise's beauty, tenderness, and passion would occasionally flash through his dreams. But every time, those memories would be overshadowed by grotesque images of tree-like warts, blooming flowers, and slimy substances, extinguishing any desire within him. And now, that monster was making a comeback!

I should make my way to Église Saint-Robert! Charlie took a few steps toward the exit with the tray in hand, then halted.

He recalled that it was already late at night, and Avenue du Marché would undoubtedly have very few pedestrians at this hour.

Such an environment posed greater danger than the bustling Salle de Bal Brise!

Susanna Mattise always invades my dreams, or it's in the dead of night when everyone is fast asleep. But here, in the dance hall, with so many eyes upon us, she surely won't dare to appear... Once Ciel returns, I'll ask him to escort me to Église Saint-Robert... Charlie withdrew his gaze from the door and decided to wait a little longer.

The dance hall, teeming with various sounds and aromas, offered him a sense of security.

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches.

Having wiped off his makeup, Lumian rapped on Franca's door.

Franca's ponytail had come undone, allowing her flaxen hair to cascade naturally. However, instead of a nightgown, she sported a cotton two-piece pajama set.

Donning summer slippers, she turned to admit Lumian into the room and asked in bewilderment, "Are you here for some mystical knowledge tonight?"

Considering the short time they had been apart—less than two hours—she couldn't think of any other reason.

After Franca closed the door, Lumian spoke with gravity, "Something's happening with Charlie. I suspect Susanna Mattise will make a reappearance within the next two days, possibly even tonight."

"So soon?" Franca couldn't hide her surprise.

She still hadn't relayed the issues with Susanna Mattise, Monsieur Ive, and Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons to 007!

Lumian nodded.

"Although it's hard to accept, all signs point to my guess being correct."

"What's your plan?" Franca wasted no time discussing the possibilities.

Lumian shared his two courses of action with Franca but refrained from mentioning Mr. K's finger.

Franca regarded him with a smile.

"You're remarkably composed.

"Didn't you tell me before that Susanna Mattise is suspected to be a Sequence 5 malevolent spirit? Even if we join forces, we might not be able to defeat her.

"Tsk, are you placing too much confidence in me, or perhaps too much confidence in yourself?"

Lumian smiled. "Both."

"To have survived the calamity in Cordu, you're undoubtedly extraordinary." Franca sighed and glanced at the wall clock in the house. "If we can make it through the

night, there shouldn't be any issues. I'll inform the authorities swiftly through my connections. Wait for me in the living room."

She retreated into her master bedroom and busied herself with something.

Lumian settled on the sofa and directed his gaze at the cuckoo wall clock beside him, silently ticking away the minutes.

Nearly half an hour elapsed before Franca emerged from her room. She had changed into a black robe adorned with leather armor and a hood.

"It's settled. They'll likely launch the operation tomorrow," she informed Lumian, then inquired, "Aren't you concerned that Charlie might encounter trouble on his way to Église Saint-Robert? Even ordinary people can stumble upon malevolent spirits along the roadside in the dead of night."

Église Saint-Robert served as the primary cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, near the Suhit steam locomotive station. The attached cemetery had once occupied the space now occupied by Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian had already considered this.

"I plan to discreetly follow him to the cathedral after Salle de Bal Brise closes."

"I'll accompany you." Franca furrowed her brow and scrutinized Lumian. "Won't Charlie be at risk in the dance hall? Some evil spirits pay no heed to the presence of others or their numbers."

Given that Susanna Mattise's previous appearances hadn't affected anyone else, Lumian subconsciously believed that she would avoid crowded places. The dance hall was far more crowded than the motel.

Jolted by Franca's reminder, he exclaimed in a deep voice, "Let's hurry back to the dance hall!"

Chapter 209 Bad Luck
Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian scanned the dim-lit dance hall, searching for Charlie, but to no avail. His heart sank. Hastily, he motioned for Louis and Sarkota to come closer.

"What's the matter, Boss?" Louis asked, his voice filled with anxiety.

He assumed that Lumian was dissatisfied with the current state of affairs in the dance hall.

Lumian's eyes wandered across the waiters, all dressed in vests and bow ties. He casually inquired, "Where's Charlie? I need to discuss something with him."

Louis's eyes widened in shock. "Boss, didn't Charlie follow you out just now?"

Charlie followed me? Lumian's pupils contracted, as if he had been struck by a sudden burst of light.

He asked in a deep voice, "When?"

Louis pondered for a moment, confusion evident on his face as he looked at Lumian.

"Less than five minutes ago."

Lumian's gaze shifted to Sarkota, his taciturn and reliable subordinate, who also appeared puzzled.

Five minutes ago? I've been at Rue des Blouses Blanches for over half an hour. Moreover, the last time I left the dance hall, I was disguised as a drunkard. There's no way Charlie could have left with me... Lumian swiftly dismissed the possibility of Charlie leaving the dance hall with him unnoticed.

The situation was growing increasingly bizarre!

Considering Charlie's black ill-fated luck, tinged with crimson red, the probability of him encountering danger was almost 100%!

Suppressing the myriad of thoughts racing through his mind, Lumian said to Louis and Sarkota, "Perhaps someone is impersonating me, but I'm unsure why they would be searching for Charlie."

"Impossible..." Louis blurted out.

A few minutes ago, he and Sarkota had greeted the boss. It couldn't have been a fake!

Before Louis could finish his thought, Lumian shot him a cold glare. Immediately, Louis changed his tune and stammered, "Maybe, maybe it's a fake."

Lumian didn't dwell on the question and inquired, "Did Charlie change his clothes when he left the ballroom?"

According to the rules of Salle de Bal Brise, every waiter, bartender, chef, and kitchen helper had two sets of uniforms. However, they were not allowed to take them outside of the dance hall; they could only be kept in the changing room on the first floor.

This was due to the cultural environment in the market district. Bartenders and waiters were prone to bankruptcy caused by gambling, alcoholism, illness, and other issues. If they were allowed to take their uniforms home, they would surely pawn them for cash before disappearing. They wouldn't care if Salle de Bal Brise was owned by the mob.

Similarly, in Trier's inexpensive cafés frequented by scavengers, laborers, tramps, and low-level workers, tin utensils and iron chains were used to secure them to the tables. This ensured only a limited range of movement for the customers, preventing them from secretly taking the utensils and selling them.

The more upscale cafés had their own set of troubles. In order to maintain an air of sophistication, they preferred using silver or porcelain utensils. Consequently, the boss had to painstakingly count the utensils after closing each day to check for any missing ones. The waiters were repeatedly instructed to be vigilant about such matters.

He had intended to prevent Charlie from leaving the dance hall in a waiter's attire, but since Charlie had already departed with the boss, he wisely kept his mouth shut.

Most of the dance hall's rules applied to waiters, dancers, bartenders, chefs, bouncers, cleaners, and even managers. The boss was exempt from such restrictions!

Lumian nodded slightly and calmly said, "You guys carry on with your tasks."

With that, he made his way toward the changing room near the kitchen.

He suspected that Charlie's disappearance had something to do with Susanna Mattise!

The small changing room was empty. Lumian glanced around and spotted the locker labeled with Charlie's name.

Franca, donned in a black robe and hood, materialized beside Lumian and praised, "You acted swiftly. You knew to seek out a divination medium for me."

"I'm not a fool," Lumian simply replied. He retrieved a piece of wire he always carried and manipulated it a few times before opening Charlie's locker where his clothes were kept.

Franca pondered for a couple of seconds before reaching for Charlie's linen shirt.

She then used a broom that was leaning against the wall outside the changing room to conduct the divination.

"Charlie's current whereabouts..."

"Charlie's current whereabouts..."

Franca held Charlie's clothes in her left hand and pressed her right hand against the top of the broom, murmuring to herself.

Eventually, she released her right hand, but the broom remained motionless. It stood as still as if someone were still holding it.

After a few seconds, it crashed to the ground with a thud.

"Was it interfered with?" Lumian probed.

Franca slowly shook her head.

"Doesn't appear so..."

She swiftly walked over to the full-length mirror in the changing room and stroked its surface a few times.

Holding Charlie's clothes, she commenced another round of divination.

After a few seconds, the mirror darkened, as if reflecting the darkness itself.

In the next moment, two figures materialized, moving in a hazy yellowish light.

One of them vaguely resembled Charlie, dressed as a waiter, while the other bore a resemblance to Lumian from behind.

Apart from that, they couldn't discern any further details.

Franca scrutinized the vision for a few seconds before confidently deducing, "They're underground! That's why the previous divination couldn't provide a clear answer. A broom can't jump and stand on its head, can it?"

Lumian nodded and exited the changing room. He proceeded upstairs to retrieve a carbide lamp and any other useful items he might need later. Then, he swiftly left the dance hall.

He already had a rough idea!

Witnessing the scene, Franca retrieved a glimmering powder from her pocket and combined it with an incantation to conceal herself from view.

On Avenue du Marché, bathed in the eerie glow of the crimson moonlight and gas street lamps, Lumian hastened his pace, scouring the area for any trace or clue.

His destination was the entrance to the underground located in the middle of Avenue du Marché.

Suddenly, amidst the encompassing darkness, Lumian abruptly halted.

He observed that the grills in the drainage ditch had been displaced, and there were disheveled footprints along the roadside. Near the height of an average person's head, there were signs of impact.

Franca revealed herself once more and reconstructed the sequence of events. "It seems like he slipped and stumbled while trying to maintain his balance along the gutter. Eventually, he collided with a street lamp... There should have been blood, but it was cleaned up..."

Perplexed, she muttered to herself,

"It bears a resemblance to the unlucky incident I witnessed earlier today..."

At that moment, Franca experienced a sudden realization. "Could that unlucky imposter, Ive, be the one who took Charlie?"

Lumian had long harbored suspicions, but now he was even more convinced.

"If he can masquerade as Monsieur Ive, it follows that he can also assume my identity.

"This ability is quite remarkable..."

At that instant, all the pieces of the puzzle fell into place within Lumian's mind.

Susanna Mattise was on the verge of recovering, yet she remained concerned about the official Beyonders' continued surveillance of Charlie. Thus, she enlisted the fake Monsieur Ive to pose as Ciel and discreetly escort Charlie underground, making it appear like an ordinary occurrence. Once they reached Underground Trier, it would prove challenging for the official Beyonders to locate them.

If they lingered any longer, even divination might be thwarted!

"Evading the official Beyonders during their initial investigation would require impressive skills," Franca responded. Foregoing her invisibility, she trailed Lumian to the entrance of underground Trier in the middle of Avenue du Marché.

As the yellowish-blue light from the carbide lamp illuminated the staircase below, Lumian noticed two sets of footprints.

One set was familiar—it belonged to Charlie.

Examining the footprints, it was evident that Charlie was apprehensive about descending into the underground in the dead of night. He treaded cautiously, yet ultimately chose to place his trust in Ciel.

For the time being, there were no signs of him being restrained.

“Idiot...” Lumian cursed under his breath.

It was understandable that he couldn't discern the deception. After all, one was a Beyonder, while the other was an ordinary individual. Nevertheless, they had walked together for quite a distance. Didn't he sense anything awry during their conversation?

Is it truly so effortless to impersonate me, Lumian Lee?

“Thankfully, we have these footprints,” Franca sighed with relief.

The simplified dowsing rod divination proved challenging to utilize underground. While it might point in the right direction, there might not be a viable path to follow. It often necessitated lengthy detours, increasing the risk of losing their way in the labyrinthine darkness.

The Witch had not brought any tools to illuminate their path. It was unclear whether she was confident in her ability to remain with Lumian or if she simply disregarded the hindrance of darkness on her vision.

Lumian held the carbide lamp and ascended the stairs, reaching the level where the street and square names were indicated.

He moved swiftly, sometimes choosing a direction before Franca could discern the footprints. Soon enough, they discovered Charlie and the imposter Ive's footprints once again.

Franca felt perplexed. After a brief pause, she couldn't help but inquire, “It seems you know where the imposter Ive is headed?”

“After that pervert knocked Jenna unconscious, he followed the same path,” Lumian calmly replied.

This was the route familiar to those individuals, a route that evoked a sense of security. Moreover, it was likely that the imposter Ive was leading Charlie to Susanna Mattise. Susanna might very well be waiting at the end of this path!

Franca refrained from further comment. She utilized the shroud of darkness to partially conceal herself. At times, she scouted ahead, while at others, she watched Lumian's back and flanks.

After several minutes of walking, Lumian and Franca came to a halt.

The area displayed signs of partial collapse. Debris littered the vicinity, and the trails meandered in disarray. Eventually, they led to a small cavity obstructed by rubble.

“The target encountered a minor cave-in and became trapped?” Franca whispered with a hiss. “Is this not excessively unlucky?”

Her gaze then shifted to Lumian.

“Where did you acquire that unlucky charm? Its efficacy seems way too potent.”

“I'll procure one for you the next time I come across such misfortune,” Lumian responded, uncertain if he would encounter another individual as luckless as the tramp.

As soon as he finished speaking, gravel cascaded from the heap of stones barricading the cave entrance, clattering upon the ground.

In a short while, a passageway was cleared, and a figure emerged cautiously.

With golden-black hair and brilliant light-blue eyes, he possessed a striking handsomeness—yet another Lumian.

Chapter 210 Performance

Upon glimpsing the two figures lurking in the shadows, the impostor Ive was taken aback. He raised his right hand and pointed accusingly at Lumian, his voice filled with inquiry.

“Who are you? Why are you pretending to be me?”

As he berated, he hastened his pace, pulling himself out of the tunnel and leaping onto level ground.

In the past, Lumian would have charged forward, ready for close combat or drawing his revolver to unleash a barrage of bullets at his foe. He would have granted no opportunity for words. But this time, for some inexplicable reason, he yearned to put on a show. He desired to witness the other party's abilities before seizing the perfect moment to display his own.

Without an adversary, there would be no performance!

Franca shared the same sentiment. She eagerly longed to stand in for Lumian, refraining from an immediate attack.

Behind the impostor Ive stood Charlie, disguised as a waiter. As he crawled through the debris, he caught sight of a figure beneath the dual glow of a carbide lamp and a lantern.

He froze in shock at the confrontation between the two Ciels. For a moment, it felt as though he was trapped in a dream. He couldn't discern who was genuine and who was counterfeit, who aimed to harm him, and who sought to aid him.

The only certainty he held was that danger loomed over him once more!

The impostor Ive assessed Lumian and turned to Franca, his voice laced with anxiety and anger.

“Wake up! You've been deceived by this impostor! When have I ever worn such attire?”

After Lumian warned Charlie, he wiped away his makeup but made no change to his clothing. He still sported an unusual combination of a simple formal top and cargo pants. In comparison, the impostor Ive's white shirt, black vest, brown pants, and laceless leather boots seemed more in line with his usual style.

Franca couldn't resist putting on a performance.

“Is that so? Then enlighten me, what is my code name?”

The impostor Ive asked in exasperation and amusement, “Madame Red Boots, have you forgotten your moniker?”

Franca couldn't help but chuckle.

She took a couple of steps backward, blending into the shadows at the periphery of the carbide lamp's illumination.

The underground, where darkness held sway, was an ideal setting for Demoness combat!

As the fake Ive beheld the scene, a sense of unease swelled within his heart. He knew all too well that his attempt to masquerade as the genuine article had likely been exposed, leaving him unable to maintain his charade. Instantly, he altered his approach.

Discarding the lantern, he lifted his gaze to meet Lumian's, his countenance growing frigidly cold.

The corners of his mouth curled into a chilling smirk.

“I can't decide whether to pity or congratulate you for seeing through my guise, but this definitely isn't advantageous for you.”

With lantern in hand, the fake Ive's aura surged, transforming into a fearsome volcano teetering on the brink of eruption.

Quivering, he lowered his head, unable to meet the other's gaze directly. However, his longing to perform and his unwavering resolve compelled him to raise his head, struggling to fix his gaze upon the fake Ive's face.

Simultaneously, the darkness beyond the light seemed cloaked in an eerie green glow. Vines and branches sprouted from the abyss, entwining the ceiling and rocky walls.

Franca, concealed within the shadows, succumbed to intimidation in the face of the fake Ive's aura, rendering her unable to maintain her abilities. Her form materialized less than two meters away from the impostor.

Meanwhile, Charlie, still sprawled within the passageway, trembled even more violently. He buried his face in the gravel and earth, his mind blank.

With a disdainful glance toward Lumian and Franca, the fake Ive spoke. “You dare to pursue me, utterly ignorant? The only fortunate aspect is your considerable attractiveness. I find it hard to dispose of you outright.”

His words entered Lumian and Franca's ears, instilling them with fear, compelling them to turn and flee.

This sensation prompted Lumian to realize something profound.

A demigod!

The fake Ive was a demigod, possessing godhood!

Gritting his teeth and summoning his courage, Lumian delved into his pocket, hopeful that Mr. K's finger could serve as a temporary deterrent, buying him and Franca an opportunity to escape the Underground Trier.

So what if you're a demigod? I've encountered demigods before. Fear won't break my spirit or halt my resistance!

Just as Lumian's right palm was poised to make contact with Mr. K's finger, and Franca was on the verge of fleeing, unable to contain herself, a cracking noise resounded from above.

A rock the size of a fist descended, mirroring the former descent of its brethren, hurtling toward the fake Ive, who had been arrogantly observing Lumian and Franca's reactions.

Caught off guard, the impostor Ive managed only to lower his head, barely evading the projectile. The gravel struck his left shoulder, fracturing bone and causing the flesh to sink inward.

He emitted a brief cry, nearly toppling to the ground.

This unexpected turn of events dispersed the menacing aura and godlike presence, leaving behind a scant few turquoise vines and brownish-green branches as testament to the recent occurrence.

Snapping out of his shock, Lumian, driven by his desire to perform and seizing the opportunity to provoke,

discarded the carbide lamp, clutched his stomach, and erupted in laughter.

“A fake? Is everything about you nothing but fake? Don't tell me that thing of yours is a mere piece of wood?”

The fake Ive, who had just recovered from the pain, was overcome with emotion. His gaze fixated upon Lumian, his eyes tinged with an otherworldly green hue.

Unbeknownst to him, Franca had already sprinkled herself with fluorescent powder, vanishing into thin air with a hushed whisper.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian found himself consumed by an intense yearning for the pleasures of the opposite sex.

If Franca hadn't rendered herself invisible, he would have been utterly powerless against the impulse. However, he wasn't entirely bereft of reason. It was just that his actions had become burdensome, both physically and mentally.

Struggling, Lumian extracted the revolver from its holster, endeavoring to take aim at the fake Ive.

In his current state, he inexplicably found the other's visage profoundly alluring.

Bang!

Lumian squeezed the trigger, but his shot missed the impostor Ive.

Fury ignited within the fake Ive's eyes. With agile grace, he closed in on his target, his hand rising to deliver a resounding slap across Lumian's face.

Instantly, his appearance underwent a subtle alteration, as if he possessed limited control over his image. He softened Lumian's masculine features, lending them a touch of femininity.

Lumian gasped for breath, his finger squeezing the trigger once more.

A tumultuous surge of desire threatened to consume him. He yearned to embrace the female rendition of the fake Ive and indulge in unspeakable acts.

Amidst the maelstrom of his intense emotions, he instinctively recalled the words of the psychiatrist, Madam Susie, and promptly began taking deep, steadying breaths.

Bang!

Lumian found a measure of tranquility, successfully discharging another shot from the revolver.

The fake Ive hadn't anticipated the unwavering fortitude of his adversary, who managed to retain his sanity. Narrowly evading the bullet that grazed his arm, rending his garments and scorching his flesh, he couldn't suppress a pained grunt. In that moment, Lumian, warily mindful of the opponent's abilities, ceased his pretense, seizing the opportunity to grip the ritual silver dagger and plunge it into his own ribs, refraining from extracting it.

The pain jolted his senses, quelling much of his desire.

Likewise, the fake Ive shook off the lingering effects of Provocation, regaining a measure of clarity.

He understood that the current circumstances were ill-suited for an extended confrontation. Swiftly producing a golden coin, he hurled it toward the crevice obstructed by debris.

Lumian, overcome by an uncontrollable avarice, lunged toward the gleaming coin with the ritual silver dagger, eager to claim it as his own.

Seizing the opportunity, the fake Ive sprinted deeper into the underground, displaying swiftness surpassing that of ordinary mortals.

Suddenly, his feet skidded, and a slick swoosh echoed through the air.

Unbeknownst to him, the path had been encased in a layer of frost!

Struggling to regain his footing, the fake Ive endeavored to restore his balance.

However, in that very moment, a towering figure clad in a black robe and hood materialized behind him.

With a swift motion, Franca extended her right hand, revealing a hidden blade enveloped in black flames. She aimed to plunge it into the fake Ive's back, employing the full force of an Assassin's strike.

With a pfft, despite the fake Ive's best efforts to evade and rely on some kind of performance to toughen his skin and muscles like stone, the blade managed to pierce his body.

His eyes widened, and he twisted his body forcefully, capturing a glimpse of Franca through his ghostly green gaze.

Having successfully executed her attack, Franca intended to take a step back and utilize the shadows to create distance before triggering the detonation of the black flames coursing within the target's body. However, her limbs suddenly grew weak, and she bent over.

She clenched her legs together, a watery light flickering in her eyes resembling a serene lake.

Having anticipated the deep connection between the fake Ive she was tailing and the deviant Hedsey, Franca was prepared for the current circumstances. Without hesitation, she reached into her concealed pocket, aiming to retrieve the smelling salts she had acquired earlier.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Lumian, having secured the golden coin, discharged three shots at the severely wounded fake Ive.

Desperately attempting to evade, the fake Ive's precarious footing on the icy surface undermined his ability to maintain even basic balance. Eventually, he plummeted to the ground with a resounding thud, one of the bullets piercing his abdomen.

With a chance to catch her breath, Franca inhaled the scent of the salts, the invigorating aroma jolting her senses awake. Suppressing her desires, she clenched her left hand.

Black flames erupted from the fake Ive's body, devouring his soul and eliciting a mournful cry.

Lumian aimed once more and pulled the trigger.

The final bullet erupted forth, instantaneously puncturing the fake Ive's forehead.

With a deafening bang, the fake Ive's head split open, spilling forth crimson and white.

Observing Franca bend over once again, Lumian hurriedly made his way to her side, circling around the frost-covered area.

Franca raised her gaze, her eyes moist as she softly gasped for air.

Suddenly, she embraced Lumian, but her nostrils detected the presence of a metal canister with an open lid pressed against her nose.

The indescribably potent scent compelled her to sneeze repeatedly, diminishing much of her desire.

“Dammit, this stuff is far more potent than smelling salts!” Franca blurted out as soon as she regained consciousness.

Lumian quickly took a sniff himself and let out a sneeze.