

Inevitability 211

Chapter 211 Spirit Channeling

While Lumian sneezed, Franca swiftly took two steps forward and crouched beside the fake Ive's lifeless body.

With a delicate grip, she extinguished the flickering black flames that still clung to it.

“Thank goodness it hasn't burned too far, or the soul would have dissipated,” Franca breathed a sigh of relief, straightening up. She reached into her pocket and retrieved a handful of powder that resembled the pitch-blackness of night.

Lumian stowed away the canister of stimulating gas and glanced at Franca, curiosity etched on his face.

“Are you planning to channel his spirit?”

In the recent battle, the fake Ive had displayed the strength of a Mid-Sequence Beyonder and wielded peculiar abilities. Lumian couldn't hold back, or the situation would have taken a perilous turn.

Franca nodded subtly, responding, “Indeed. Channeling a spirit now will yield significant results.”

“And which entity do you intend to invoke?” Lumian asked casually.

Franca chuckled before answering, “None. I've merged the principles of Magic Mirror Divination and devised a spirit-summoning spell. While it may not rival the most professional methods, it suffices. Moreover, it won't attract the attention of deities from the corresponding domain.”

“You're quite clever,” Lumian praised, his words laced with a hint of mockery.

Exasperated yet amused, Franca retorted, “It's called having an academic spirit. We—uh, your sister—have conducted similar research and experiments. Usually, I can't be bothered to overthink things. Not because I lack intelligence, but because the burden of endless calculations is tiresome. The key to life is to remain relaxed and not get entangled in every intricate detail.”

Her gaze swept over Charlie, still sprawled amidst the rubble in the tunnel. Franca refrained from mentioning Gandalf, the president of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

Is this why you've adapted so well after becoming a woman? Lumian observed Franca building a wall of spirituality in the vicinity as he approached Charlie.

Witnessing Ciel's approach, Charlie snapped out of his daze and crawled out of the debris on all fours.

Lumian gazed at him, his expression devoid of emotion.

What he was thinking was: Charlie has just witnessed the battle between Franca, me, and the imposter Ive. If he seeks refuge at the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, there's a high probability that he won't be able to conceal it when questioned by official Beyonders utilizing their powers. This situation differs from the previous one, where the official Beyonders believed everything was under their control. They were prone to carelessness and had blind spots in their minds...

Charlie's initial elation waned as Lumian continued to scrutinize him in silence. His heart began pounding like a jazz band's drumbeat.

Fear and confusion evident in his voice, Charlie finally mustered the courage to ask, "What's the matter?"

Lumian observed that Charlie's luck remained a blend of red and black, although it had slightly improved since before.

This indicated that Susanna Mattise's threat had not been completely resolved.

He fell silent for a few seconds before speaking up, "Remember to head to Église Saint-Robert later."

Having already contacted Madame Pualis, Lumian no longer needed to stay at Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman or manage Salle de Bal Brise. As long as he remained with the Savoie Mob, he still had a chance to fulfill Mr. K's mission.

Furthermore, Franca was now involved. With her vouching for him while in the Boss's good graces, Lumian could be assigned other profitable ventures even without Salle de Bal Brise. However, the earnings might not be as substantial.

"Alright, alright!" Charlie heaved a sigh of relief.

Having experienced many things, Charlie possessed an open-minded personality. He belonged to the kind of people who grew more excited as the number of individuals increased. Soon enough, his curiosity got the better of him. Pointing at the lifeless imposter Ive lying on the ground, he asked,

"Who's that? Why does he look exactly like you..."

Before Charlie could finish his question, he paused. As the fake Ive met his demise, the facial muscles relaxed, no longer resembling Ciel. The corpse appeared unfamiliar.

"That's someone who believed in an evil god and gained strange powers," Lumian explained simply, tailoring his response to Charlie's comprehension. "He has a certain connection to Susanna Mattise."

Charlie felt a lingering fear.

"No wonder he kept leading me underground..."

Unable to hold back, Lumian cursed, "You imbecile! You've been with him for so long, and yet you didn't sense anything was off about him? Does having my face mean he's me?"

Charlie replied sheepishly, "When I entered Underground Trier, I sensed something was wrong.

"He was very quiet. He only mentioned taking me underground to completely resolve the Susanna Mattise problem. He's not like you, always cracking jokes and teasing.

"I thought it was because the situation was urgent and you weren't in the mood..."

Lumian sighed and shifted his gaze to Franca, realizing that Charlie, being an ordinary person, couldn't see through the Beyonder disguise that could fool even official Beyonders, no matter how astute he was.

The Witch had finished preparing for her own spirit-channeling spell. Standing before the fake Ive's lifeless body, she held two white candles and chanted a series of incantations in Hermes.

Due to the wall of spirituality, Lumian could only catch fragments of the chant. Franca described herself and the imposter Ive, with the former being the source of spirituality and the foundation for maintaining the ritual, and the latter being the object of prayer—the Magic Mirror that provided answers to questions.

As for Charlie, he heard even less and couldn't make sense of it all.

A faint light emerged on the makeup mirror in Franca's hand, and its interior turned into an abyss of deep darkness, as if it had sunk to the river's depths.

A hazy, pale-white face swiftly appeared in the mirror, bearing a resemblance of 50 to 60% to the deceased fake Ive.

Switching to Intis, Franca inquired, "Who are you and which organization do you belong to?"

The imposter Ive, replied in a dazed manner, "Rentas, a member of the Bliss Society."

Rentas... Lumian suddenly recalled the name.

The word "Rentas" often appeared on the posters outside Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. He was a prominent male supporting actor.

Franca pressed on with her questioning, "What kind of organization is the Bliss Society? And how is it connected to Susanna Mattise?"

The imposter Ive, Rentas, spoke with an otherworldly voice, "The Bliss Society was originally a secret society for women who love women. Susanna was one of them.

"She grew weary of being involved with members of parliament, high-ranking officials, bankers, newspaper moguls, and other men. She sought solace among fellow ladies and madams who shared her love for women. Eventually, she received divine enlightenment and a boon, becoming a priestess of my lord. She transformed the small Bliss Society into a secret organization that worships my lord.

"In today's society, it's inconvenient for women to be openly involved in many affairs. Therefore, the Bliss Society has admitted some male members who can also receive boons, but they lack the privilege to partake in core matters or possess knowledge of the most confidential aspects."

"Remarkable!" Franca applauded.

She knew that Rentas was referring to the evil god known as the Mother Tree of Desire. Delving into such matters made her apprehensive, fearing that she might stumble upon mystical knowledge she shouldn't acquire.

A secret society for women who love women... Male members excluded from core matters... Lumian suddenly grasped something.

He stood by the wall of spirituality and gazed at the makeup mirror in Franca's hand.

“So, Hedsey frequently seeks out street girls and hunts for prey because his desires cannot be fulfilled within the Bliss Society?”

“Yes,” Rentas replied. “Women love women exclusively. When I was a Sex Addict, I had to satisfy my desires on my own. Fortunately, I was more attractive than him and had female audience members who admired me. There were plenty of street girls in the market district, so I didn't need to take the risk of pursuing excitement.”

“That's lit!” Franca expressed her feelings with peculiar words. She clicked her tongue and sighed. “Isn't there a regular secret group for women who love women?”

“Yes,” Rentas firmly responded. “To my knowledge, there's the Moment Society and the Narcissus Society. They often organize women orgies at Trocadéro's Red House Café. We have been attempting to establish contact with them and convert them into believers of my lord[1].”

Trocadéro was situated in Quartier 16 on the north bank of the Srenzo River, in the square district. Known as the Triumph Square established by Emperor Roselle, it was a small town surrounded by a vast suburban forest. It was renowned for its exceptional wine production. Trocadéro Wine stood second only to Aurnir red wine in the world.

Fascinated, Franca listened and repeated the terms, “Trocadéro... Red House Café... Women orgies...”

Lumian couldn't help but feel more concerned about the term “Sex Addict.” It seemed to perfectly suit the twisted state of Hedsey. It likely corresponded to Sequence 8 of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway. However, he feared that time was running out for the spirit channeling, so he didn't rush to delve into the matter. Instead, he redirected his focus to Susanna Mattise.

“How did Susanna Mattise transform into an evil spirit? And why did you bring Charlie underground?”

Rentas's pale-white face contorted in distortion.

“She died while receiving a boon and transformed into an evil spirit.

“She told us that because her name was still on the lips of many Trieriens and her portrait was used by numerous men to satisfy themselves, she didn't completely dissipate. She retained a certain level of rationality, albeit warped. She became more consumed by her own affairs, neglecting all else.

“She was gravely injured by official Beyonders during her last encounter and spent time recuperating at the altar. We were worried that once she fully recovered, she would seek out Charlie and attract the attention of the authorities. So, we took advantage of the election and brought Charlie to the altar in advance, handing him over to her for handling.”

Charlie had already moved to Lumian's side. His face turned ashen as he listened, feeling as if he had stepped into the depths of hell.

Franca nodded subtly and spoke, "Where is this altar? How much time until Susanna Mattise fully recovers?"

"The altar..." The surface of the makeup mirror revealed a fading blurry face, unveiling an underground tunnel.

The tunnel stretched endlessly, branching off in multiple directions before leading to a small quarry cave engulfed by vines and branches.

There, a colossal brownish-green tree stump emerged abruptly from the ground. Its form consisted of thick branches, with roots originating from an unknown place.

As the image of the tree stump grew clearer, Franca hastily interrupted the manifestation, fearing any potential disturbances.

Rentas continued, "Susanna will regain her full strength in two days and depart from the altar."

Chapter 212 Actor

Franca carefully calculated the time and inquired with meticulous detail, "What perils lie at the altar? How much progress has Susanna Mattise made in her recovery today?"

Upon hearing Franca's question, Lumian made a rough conjecture about her thoughts.

If it was possible, they could seize the opportunity to destroy the altar and eliminate Susanna Mattise, who was now weakened, once and for all!

Before departing from Salle de Bal Brise to track down the imposter Ive, Lumian had contemplated a similar issue. Since Rentas had taken Charlie underground, he believed their destination was Susanna Mattise's hiding place. Consequently, when he retrieved the carbide lamp, he also retrieved a few bundles of detonators from the safe, hoping to utilize the unique environment to blast those intruders to their demise.

Rentas's hazy, pale face took on a hint of sanctity.

"The altar is the altar. Only the light of my lord exists. There is no danger."

Lumian muttered to himself, standing by the wall of spirituality, By stating it that way, it only heightens the danger.

Rentas continued, "I do not know the exact condition of Susanna. All I know is that two weeks ago, we could not see her, but she would occasionally make sounds. Last week, she could communicate with us normally, and we could perceive her when we activated our Spirit Visions. Today, she remains the same as before, but she appears extremely feeble."

Based on Rentas's account, Lumian made a preliminary estimation. Susanna, who was originally a Fallen Tree Spirit equivalent to Sequence 5, is now nearing Sequence 6?

If Susanna had not been hiding at the Mother Tree of Desire's altar, Lumian would have considered it worth the risk.

Franca pondered for a moment and spoke, "Do you typically offer prayers at the altar and receive boons?"

"Yes," Rentas replied with a nostalgic tone. "Susanna is our priestess. She enables us to experience the Lord's love for the world and unveils everyone's true desires, allowing us to truly understand ourselves."

Upon hearing this, Franca decided to forego further inquiries and seek the truth in the details.

"Is the altar usually protected?"

"Susanna is always there," Rentas's blurred, pale face swayed gently in the mirror.

Franca gazed at the makeup mirror in her hand and queried, "Was the altar under anyone's protection during the two weeks that Susanna was severely injured?"

Rentas's spirit responded truthfully, "No."

Franca couldn't help but turn her head and glance at Lumian. She realized that he too appeared disappointed and regretful.

From Rentas's answer, they both discerned a crucial fact: the altar possessed a concealed and formidable protective mechanism!

Otherwise, regardless of its underground concealment and the difficulties in locating it, they would need to consider guarding against bounty hunters or cave adventurers fond of searching for treasure in Underground Trier. Simultaneously, they would have to be cautious of smugglers who might have temporarily altered their routes or wandering university students.

Franca let out a sigh, deciding that it would be best to leave the altar and Susanna Mattise in the hands of the authorities.

Franca shifted her focus and inquired about something else.

"How many members are there in the Bliss Society at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons?"

"Not many," Rentas's blurry face with flickering dark green eyes responded. "But I only know a few. Ive, Hedsey, and I report to Maipú Meyer. He is the theater manager and represents Susanna in the core affairs of the Bliss Society since she became an evil spirit."

"Why choose a man? Isn't it believed that women only love women? It would be easier to communicate with the other core members of the Bliss Society if it were a woman," Franca objected.

Are you certain there's no hidden significance in this conversation? Lumian sensed Madame Hidden Blade's curiosity piqued.

Rentas's voice drifted as he replied, "Maipú Meyer used to be Susanna's lover."

Franca clicked her tongue and sighed.

“So, we have the high priestess going against the principles of the organization, loving both men and women.”

As she spoke, she cast a glance at Charlie, who appeared bewildered and terrified.

Rentas didn't shy away from revealing the truth about Maipú Meyer.

“Before Susanna joined the Bliss Society, they were lovers. Furthermore, he was the only one who could make Susanna feel at ease and relaxed. After her divine awakening and embracing her faith in my lord, she transformed the Bliss Society and recruited Maipú Meyer. However, their intimate relationship ceased. When she became an evil spirit, she no longer limited her affections to women and resumed her connection with Maipú Meyer. Meanwhile, she sought out other targets, infiltrating their dreams and draining their energy. She would fall in love with them before killing them.”

Charlie's face grew paler with each passing word, as if he had fallen into an inescapable nightmare that would only end in death.

Franca, who had seriously contemplated having her lover Gardner bear her child, commented, “This is all rather twisted.”

She then smiled and remarked, “Does Maipú Meyer enjoy wearing green hats?”

“No, he now exclusively wears a black top hat. He even meticulously grooms the tips of his beard,” Rentas dismissed Franca's speculation.

Lumian recalled the mention of a woman's death in Aunett Town during Mr. K's Gathering.

If Maipú Meyer receives a boon and becomes a male Fallen Tree Spirit, could he enter women's dreams and induce erotic fantasies to drain their energy, gradually weakening them until they perish?

The Bliss Society consists of women as its core members, emphasizing that they only love women. It is unlikely for male members to attain such high levels of power. Those incidents are not a result of the Bliss Society, but they too believe in the Mother Tree of Desire? Or could it be due to women loving women?

Franca pressed on with her questioning.

“Why don't you even know the number of members in the Bliss Society at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? So, other than Susanna, there are no female members among the Bliss Society members you're familiar with?”

Rentas's pale, blurry face seemed to contort.

“Only Maipú Meyer interacts with the female members.”

“While I'm uncertain about the current status of female members at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, I can speculate on who they were in the past.”

“How?” Franca inquired curiously.

Rentas replied, “Those who joined our theater started as supporting actresses. Through honing their acting skills, they eventually became the leading ladies before they left. They were the core members of the Bliss Society.

“The theater was established as a safe and dependable venue for them to fulfill their inner desires until they could gain initial control.”

“Why must they act?” Lumian recalled Rentas's various performances.

Rentas struggled for a moment before explaining, “We were blessed with a boon equivalent to a Sequence 7 called Actor.

“This gift enables us to evoke a deep yearning for attention and a desire to perform in our targets. It also awakens our own hidden desire to showcase ourselves and perform. Before we fully master the power of this boon, we cannot restrain this impulse. Therefore, we require a proper stage to satiate our desires without arousing suspicion.

“Every applause from the audience is a validation for us.”

A peculiar Sequence... Instead of immediately attacking Rentas, I confronted him. I failed to utilize the ritual silver dagger in time to suppress my explosive desires because unknowingly, my own desire to perform was awakened... Lumian came to a realization.

Franca clapped her hands, exclaiming, “That explains it. No wonder I was so immersed in acting today!”

She smiled and inquired, “Does your ability to disguise as Ive and Ciel also come from Actor?”

Rentas's face nodded slightly.

“We can manipulate our muscles, skin, and bones to a certain extent. We possess all the necessary skills for disguise, including makeup techniques and prop production. Moreover, Actors have the talent for ‘imitation.’ They can convincingly portray anything. If they act as an ordinary person, their Astral Projection will appear ordinary as well. If they portray a soldier, they'll display remarkable combat and marksmanship.”

“What if they act as a woman?”

“What about acting as a Beyonder?”

Franca and Lumian raised their questions.

Finally, the two of them understood how the fake Ive could deceive official Beyonders and why the theater performers at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons excelled in their craft.

Working with real Actors every day, it was no wonder their acting skills were top-notch.

Rentas's spirit spoke in a dazed manner, "To portray a woman, you need to prepare props in advance, such as fake breasts and long hair.

"When acting as other Beyonders, if I have observed them beforehand, I can replicate their corresponding abilities, but they won't have tangible effects. They are more like illusions. However, if I were given the opportunity to closely observe and learn from a Beyonder over several months, I could perform similar but significantly weakened abilities."

Impressive indeed... Lumian sighed, then asked in a deep voice, "Who were you impersonating when you emanated that powerful aura?"

"None other than Susanna, as she connects with the altar's aura while conducting the boon ritual." Rentas revealed a trace of piety and reverence.

Franca and Lumian exchanged glances, grateful that they had abandoned the idea of heading to the altar to eliminate future troubles.

Based on Rentas's response, it appeared that when Susanna merged with the altar, she could exhibit power at a demigod level!

"Do Actors possess any other abilities?" Franca inquired.

Rentas shook his head. "No. However, Maipú Meyer once cautioned me against becoming too engrossed in my roles while acting."

Lumian seized the opportunity to ask, "What are the names of the other Sequences corresponding to Actor?"

Rentas's voice took on a sinister tone. "Sequence 9 Scrooge, Sequence 8 Sex Addict, Sequence 6 Recipient, and Sequence 5 Baby Cupid. Beyond that, I am unaware."

Quite fitting... Lumian, who was acquainted with the abilities of Scrooge and Sex Addict, questioned further, "What does 'Recipient' entail?"

"It involves craving success and recognition from high society or the public," Rentas explained.

Curiosity piqued, Franca asked, "It seems that you Actors aren't able to fully control your corresponding desires at every Sequence. At Sequence 5, won't your desires explode upon encountering anything?"

"In truth, as they progress through the Sequences, individuals can gradually gain control over their corresponding desires," Rentas clarified. "For Actors, their primary desire is acting. Their desires for wealth and the opposite sex are only slightly stronger than usual. They won't appear pathological or completely uncontrollable as a result."

Lumian found himself perplexed.

"Then why were you so miserly when you portrayed Monsieur Ive?"

He chose to pick up a gold coin of unknown origin.

Rentas responded naturally, "Because the real Ive is like that. I must stay true to the role."

Chapter 213 Correct Interpretation

Upon hearing Rentas's response, Lumian found himself torn between laughter and rejoicing, grateful that he had achieved a satisfactory outcome through a mistaken train of thought.

Originally, Lumian believed that Beyonders, like the imposter Ive, who worshiped the Mother Tree of Desire, would struggle to control their insatiable hunger and carnal desires. That's why he decided to use a gold coin to carry the vagrant's bad luck. To his surprise, the followers of the evil god were primarily influenced by their specific desires at different stages. Once they mastered the power or received a new boon, they could break free and progress to the next state. While their desires remained potent, they were no longer uncontrollable.

In simpler terms, if Rentas hadn't been portraying Monsieur Ive and didn't feel the need to exhibit stinginess, there was a high probability that he wouldn't have picked up the ill-fated gold coin and would have approached the situation with greater caution.

Of course, if Rentas hadn't been attuned to changes in fate and failed to detect the issue with the gold coin, he would likely have claimed it for himself once he realized its owner was long gone and wouldn't return. After all, he possessed a touch more greed than the average person, and as the saying goes, "finders keepers" in the hearts of a certain percentage of ordinary individuals.

Lumian now grasped the full meaning behind Rentas's words.

Indeed, one mustn't become lost in the role when acting.

However, Rentas was in the midst of acting, so scrutinizing the details was not a concern for him. Otherwise, it would have been easy for others to discover his true identity as the imposter Ive...

Franca sensed that the spirit channeling was coming to an end and hurriedly asked, "Who are the suspected core members of the Bliss Society?"

Rentas's pale, indistinct face twitched.

"Even if I were to tell you, you wouldn't find them.

"They joined Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons after receiving boons and becoming actresses. They adopted false names and concealed their true faces. Once their acting skills reached maturity and they gained control over their corresponding desires, they would reclaim their real identities upon leaving the theater.

"If you wish to uncover their assumed identities, gather a list of all the female leads in Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons' plays from the past two years. Look for those who performed most frequently."

At the mention of the female lead at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Lumian's mind recalled a name.

"Could Charlotte Calvino be one of the core members of the Bliss Society?"

She played the lead in the play Forest Fairy. The costumes in the promotional stills evoked memories of Susanna Mattise.

Rentas's face grew increasingly elusive, and his voice became more ethereal.

“I don't know. She rose through the ranks as an apprentice actress and only recently started taking the lead roles in the past few months. She's not an outsider, but Maipú Meyer might promote her to a member of the Bliss Society.”

Franca was about to inquire about Maipú Meyer's corresponding stages and abilities when Rentas's spirit, consumed by black flames, could no longer hold on and dissipated upon the surface of the makeup mirror.

With a tinge of regret, Franca concluded the ritual and dismissed the wall of spirituality.

As she squatted beside Rentas's lifeless body, rummaging through his pockets, she let out a sigh and remarked, “I didn't manage to get to Maipú Meyer. Forget it, I'll leave it to the authorities to handle it.”

Lumian paused, pondering her question.

“I've heard from a playwright that Maipú Meyer is highly ambitious. He aims to make Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons the most renowned theater in Trier and receive the prestigious Intis Legion of Honor medal.”

“Desire for success and recognition?” Franca recalled Rentas's depiction of a Sequence 6 recipient. “I suppose that's the limit for male members of the Bliss Society?”

Franca had already collected a stack of items.

Two metal canisters, a leather wallet, a peculiar dough that conformed to facial contours, thin skin-like pieces, eyebrow pencils, and various makeup tools...

“Give it a sniff.” Franca tossed the two metal canisters to Lumian.

Lumian distinguished them for a moment before responding, “One canister contains the scent you just experienced, and the other should hold a matching sedative.”

They appeared to be essential items for followers of the Mother Tree of Desire when venturing outside.

“Mysticism-branded smelling salts?” Franca mused, then added, “You can keep what's left of the canister you have. This is mine. I'll give you the sedative. Choose from these disguises and take the money from the wallet. Anything you don't want, I'll keep. Bloody hell, this pauper doesn't even possess materials, talismans, or weapons, let alone Beyonder characteristics or mystical items!”

“The sedative and mysticism smelling salts will prove useful,” Lumian, who had only obtained Beyonder abilities from “Hammer” Ait, didn't show much concern.

Franca didn't overlook any part of Rentas's body—including his crotch and soles—yet she found nothing more.

She withdrew a folded cloth bag and opened it, carefully stashing away the collection from the ground. Then, she addressed Lumian, “We'll divide this once we return.”

With that, she rose to her feet and glanced at the frightened Charlie. She muttered to herself thoughtfully, “He witnessed our clash with Rentas. What should we do?”

Charlie's legs trembled, and as he leaned toward Lumian, he gritted his teeth and proclaimed, “I-I won't betray you!”

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Franca let out a sigh and declared, “Forget it. We'll leave it to the official Beyonders.”

She deliberately introduced the topic before promptly reaching a conclusion. Lumian, finally freed from the grip of his acting impulses, regained his composure and rationality. After careful consideration, he suggested,

“I have alternative solutions.

“Charlie doesn't need to seek refuge at Église Saint-Robert, nor does he need to worry about Susanna Mattise finding him.”

He thought of his Luck Transference Spell!

Before, he refrained from using it as Susanna Mattise had yet to bother Charlie. There was no corresponding fate to alter. But now, Susanna Mattise was on the path to recovery, and Charlie was her primary target. His luck had taken a turn, and a life-threatening calamity loomed. His luck had indeed changed!

When the moment arrived, Lumian would “gift” the gold coin carrying the weight of the impending disaster to the real Ive, allowing them to face it on their own.

Naturally, this differed from the Substitution Spell and Fallen Mercury's Fate Exchange. It only diverted bloodshed temporarily. In other words, Charlie wouldn't be in Susanna Mattise's crosshairs for the next few days. However, in a few days' time, unless Susanna Mattise was wholly purified or had lost her memories, this external threat would still remain.

Nevertheless, the authorities would take action tomorrow, armed with sufficient intel!

When Lumian realized that Charlie's luck was in jeopardy, he refrained from intervening because he could only change Charlie's luck, not his own. Susanna would undoubtedly target him as well, the adversary who had provoked Charlie's betrayal. Therefore, he opted for the simplest approach—to disguise himself and urge Charlie to seek refuge at the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral, thus buying more time to guard against Susanna Mattise. They were now certain that Susanna had two days left to recuperate.

“Really?” Charlie's eyes brightened.

Lumian smiled and inquired, “Do you trust me or not?”

Charlie stammered, “I-I believe you! I believe you!”

“You just like to tease people about trivial matters.”

Curiosity piqued, Franca asked, “What way?”

A method you shouldn't be aware of... Lumian silently muttered, contemplating the specifics.

If I wish to alter Charlie's current luck, mere prayers won't suffice. I must harness the power sealed within me...

Poor Charlie; I'll have to render him unconscious. I can't expose the corruption within me or the suspicion of seeking aid from an evil god...

Just as Lumian was about to instruct Charlie to accompany him and prepare for his temporary incapacitation, a thought flashed across his mind.

Does utilizing the power within the seal constitute exploiting Termiboros?

Should I write to Madam Magician and seek her opinion?

Previously, the tramp's ill fortune bore no relation to mysticism or Beyonder abilities. The ritual required minimal power. However, the support needed to resist a Sequence 5 evil spirit atop an evil god's altar would likely be several times greater than before...

What would occur then?

Since Charlie's luck changed, everything had become urgent. The timing was impeccable. It seemed as though an opportunity had emerged without allowing me a chance to weigh my options...

If I hadn't just corresponded with Madam Magician and received her reminder, I might have already altered Charlie's luck...

Noticing Lumian's motionless state, Franca inquired, “What's the matter?”

Shaking off his stupor, Lumian contemplated for a moment.

“I just realized that the method I had prepared seems to have significant flaws.”

“Ah,” Charlie uttered, a mixture of disappointment and concern.

Franca ruminated for a few seconds before suggesting, “I have an idea as well.”

“Charlie won't head to Église Saint-Robert. He'll follow us to Rue des Blouses Blanches.

“As long as we survive the night, we'll be fine by tomorrow.

“Think about it. Our original plan was to confront Susanna Mattise, and she still has two days remaining at the altar. Even if we face an attack tonight, it will likely come from Maipú Meyer and his lackeys. Even if he recruits other core members of the Bliss Society, as long as they are inferior to Susanna Mattise at the altar, we stand a good chance of holding out until dawn. If things don't go as planned, we can create a commotion and attract the attention of official Beyonders. We can escape from the market district amidst the chaos.

“This is the worst-case scenario. However, if Charlie goes to Église Saint-Robert, we must consider moving immediately. We could also become targets.”

Lumian pondered for a few moments and found the idea quite feasible.

He nodded and stated, “I have no objections.”

His gaze then fell upon Charlie, who eagerly replied, “I don't have any issues either.”

Charlie held considerable confidence in Ciel and Franca.

Lumian refocused his attention and observed Charlie's luck.

To his surprise, Charlie's impending disaster had noticeably weakened and showed signs of improvement!

What... Charlie's true misfortune lies in participating in the luck transference ritual? Did his fate change when I abandoned that notion? Although a bloody calamity still awaits, it appears less severe... Bloody Termiboros! Lumian comprehended the situation in an instant and couldn't help but inwardly curse.

Chapter 214 Encounter

After cursing Termiboros, Lumian caught sight of Franca securing the cloth bag with war spoils and fastening it to her person.

A thought struck him, triggering a recollection of one of Scrooge's abilities, and he reminded her, “Aren't you worried those Scrooges will track us down using lost possessions?”

He had previously informed Franca about the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, mentioning that the sinister cult possessed a peculiar knack for detecting the whereabouts of their lost belongings.

In contrast to the perverted Hedsey, Rentas carried out his orders dutifully. If anything happened to him, he might possess something from Maipú Meyer to determine his location and the saboteur's whereabouts.

Franca scoffed dismissively. “That ability surely has its limitations in terms of time and range. By the time the folks at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons realize Rentas is missing, it will prove exceedingly arduous for them to track us down.

“Besides, with Charlie here, they could find us if they truly desired. Whether we take these items or not, Charlie is akin to Susanna Mattise's lost possession—no, her lost lover.”

Charlie stood dazed, bewildered by the conversation between Ciel and “Red Boots.” It wasn't until Franca mentioned his name that he grasped his “situation” somewhat. Sporting a bitter expression, he retorted, “We're not lovers...”

Franca consoled Charlie, though her sincerity remained questionable. “Can't be helped. She's convinced of it on her own accord, and she's strong enough.”

Persuaded by Franca's argument, Lumian ceased dwelling on Scrooge's abilities. He pulled out the ritual silver dagger and promptly tended to his wound.

Bending down, he scooped up Rentas's lifeless body and carried it to the debris-blocked hole, shoving it into the passage the Actor had previously dug.

Charlie watched in horror, marveling at Ciel's skills as a ruthless mob leader who had struck fear into the Poison Spur Mob. His attention then shifted to Rentas's attire—shirt, vest, pants, and boots. They seem relatively new. If they are stripped and pawned, I reckon they can fetch at least two verl d'or... Charlie's mouth gapped, but he refrained from voicing his thoughts.

Franca nodded approvingly. "Good job. Cleaning up the scene and stalling the enemy's detection."

"I worry that Maipú Meyer will exercise caution. Once Rentas fails to return by midnight, he'll lead his men here and stumble upon the corpse. Then, he might choose to abandon Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and relocate with the remaining members of the Bliss Society. Maybe we don't even have to wait until midnight. Susanna Mattise will undoubtedly prod him if she can find a way to contact him."

Such a turn of events would thwart the forthcoming official Beyonders' raid and leave behind latent dangers.

Franca added, "Fortunately, Susanna won't be able to leave the altar in the next two days, and the altar itself can't sprout legs and flee. At the very least, the official Beyonders can address Charlie's predicament."

"Not necessarily," Lumian countered, "we shouldn't make assumptions about the evil god altar using conventional logic. It's akin to me never fathoming that a man could give birth."

"Huh?" Charlie's confusion escalated as he listened to Ciel and "Red Boots," comprehending each word independently but failing to grasp their interconnected meaning.

Franca fell silent for two seconds before solemnly nodding.

"You're right. The true form of the altar is like a massive tree stump. It might possess life. When the time comes, it can uproot itself and transform into a treant, making its escape with Susanna."

With a clap of her hands, Franca exclaimed, "Exactly! How can it be called a tree spirit without a tree?"

Lumian sensed that Franca's conjecture could be close to the truth.

He recollected wearing the Mystery Prying Glasses at Auberge du Coq Doré, where he had witnessed an extensive underground network of brownish-green roots stretching in all directions.

Emerging from the hole, he retrieved the carbide lamp and the enemy's lantern. He scrutinized the structure of the tunnel's ceiling and the surrounding rock walls. Every now and then, he extended his palm, gently patted and knocked against them.

Confused by Lumian's actions, Franca, eager to leave Underground Trier as soon as possible, asked, "What are you doing?"

Calmly, Lumian replied, "I'm searching for a suitable spot to place a bundle of explosives and bury the corpse completely. We mustn't make too much noise to avoid alerting Susanna, who's deep underground, and Maipú Meyer, who's in Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons on the surface."

Simultaneously, he had to ensure that the ground wouldn't collapse, as it could endanger the buildings above.

Clearly, the municipal workers had diligently reinforced these areas when connecting the underground quarries, sewers, and various tunnels. Regular repairs were carried out, and minor cave-ins posed no threat to the surface's safety or its own integrity.

Using his Hunter powers, Lumian soon identified a depression on the side of the hole and placed a bundle of detonators there.

"Unfortunately, we lack the proper tools and materials. Otherwise, we could set up a trigger for the explosives under the corpse. When Maipú Meyer arrives and tries to lift the body in his agitation, it would go boom," Lumian said with regret, squatting down.

Since consuming the first potion, he hadn't had the opportunity to execute a Hunter's bomb trap and showcase his explosive finesse.

Charlie's heart raced as he listened, confirming Ciel's reputation as the most renowned mob leader of recent times.

"Indeed, a true Hunter," Franca exclaimed, filled with admiration.

Lumian then took out a match, igniting the fuse.

He stood up and began walking toward Franca and Charlie at a steady pace. Passing by the pile of gravel, he tossed the lantern into the tunnel.

"Hey, hey, hey!" Charlie hurriedly warned Lumian as he noticed the fuse nearing its end.

His calf muscles tensed, preparing to leap behind the rock wall to avoid the impending explosion.

Dressed in a simple formal top and cargo pants, Lumian had only covered a distance of seven to eight meters when the detonator erupted behind him.

The tunnel trembled slightly, and the stone wall beside the hole collapsed, burying most of the already unstable opening.

Flames ignited, and gravel scattered, but they didn't reach Lumian's back. They only affected the area two to three meters away from him and in a different direction within the tunnel.

Lumian didn't turn around or evade. He approached Franca, who wore a smile, and Charlie, who stood there dumbfounded.

Franca gave him a thumbs-up and clicked her tongue. "Let's go."

With that, she swiftly turned and headed towards the exit of Underground Trier, the same path they had used to enter.

Black flames silently flickered behind her, igniting the blood on the ground, filling the air with its scent, and engulfing the remnants of red and white.

Charlie's eyes widened, as if he had stepped into a surreal dream.

Only when Lumian patted him on the shoulder did he turn and follow, as if his spirit had abandoned him.

As they ascended towards the surface, Franca grinned and said, "Tomorrow and the day after, we'll discover whether Susanna Mattise and the altar have been completely eradicated, by observing Charlie's situation."

"Whether Susanna Mattise comes searching for him?" Lumian, carrying the carbide lamp, startled Charlie intentionally.

If that were the case, Franca would have said "two days later" instead of "tomorrow or the day after."

Charlie trembled and stammered, "H-h-how?"

Franca chuckled before replying, "If the official Beyonders don't come looking for you, it means you have truly escaped the nightmare called Susanna.

"If they do come and offer you a good position, congratulations. You will have hope entwined with danger."

"W-what do you mean?" Charlie didn't fully grasp the meaning.

Franca didn't explain further and instead inquired, "If you become a quarry policeman with a monthly salary of 300 verl d'or, you'll face conflicts with smugglers, cave explorers, and bounty hunters every day. There's a certain chance of sacrifice. Are you willing?"

"Of course!" Charlie blurted out.

Though being a quarry policeman was perilous, most of them managed to survive!

If Susanna Mattise isn't completely purged, the official Beyonders would offer Charlie a job that would make it easier to protect him. And those positions often come with good pay. Lumian roughly understood Franca's meaning.

The three of them exited Underground Trier, maneuvered through an alley, and crossed a barricade. Taking a secluded route on Rue des Blouses Blanches, they arrived at Franca's sixth-floor apartment.

Franca removed her hood and casually tossed the bag containing their spoils of war beside the coffee table. She half-reclined on the armchair and gestured with a nod towards the sofa and another armchair.

"Now, we must endure until dawn."

After Lumian and Charlie took their seats, the living room fell into an eerie silence.

This made Charlie uneasy. He glanced at Ciel and spoke up, "You actually possess those mystical abilities."

"If not, how could I have slain Margot and Ait, becoming the guardian of Salle de Bal Brise and Auberge du Coq Doré?" Lumian chuckled.

“That's true.” Charlie pondered for a moment and found this explanation more acceptable.

As the trio engaged in conversation, the needle of the cuckoo wall clock gradually approached midnight.

Outside the window, the darkness remained undisturbed.

At that moment, faint footsteps resonated from outside the door, approaching swiftly from below.

“Jenna... I forgot she was coming over tonight!” Franca exclaimed, sitting upright.

She glanced at Lumian, then at Charlie. After a brief moment of hesitation, she closed her eyes and waited for Jenna to open the door herself.

With a click, Jenna, dressed in a white blouse and a fluffy beige skirt, used the spare key to enter the apartment.

In an instant, she noticed Lumian and Charlie.

“What's going on?” Jenna couldn't hide her confusion, her gaze shifting between Lumian, Charlie, and Franca.

Franca mustered a forced smile and said, “We were getting bored. We thought of playing Fighting Evil. Want to join us? We have two decks of cards.”

Jenna peered suspiciously for a few seconds, sensing that Franca didn't want to disclose the real reason in front of Ciel. She gestured towards the guest room and stated,

“Dammit, it's already late. Why are you still playing cards? I have a packed day tomorrow. I need to get some sleep!”

She waved at Lumian and Charlie before heading towards the guest room.

Lumian gazed at Franca calmly and inquired, “Why didn't you just tell her what we're doing?”

Jenna, too, had fallen victim to the predicament at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. She had nearly been raped by the pervert named Hedsey.

Franca was caught off guard.

“You're right. Why didn't I just say it straightforwardly...”

There was no need to conceal it!

She glanced at the closed door of the guest room, intending to reveal the truth to Jenna later.

Casually, Lumian asked, “What does Jenna usually keep busy with?”

“Don't you know?” Franca's face gradually lit up with satisfaction. “She's an apprentice in acting, studying drama. Sigh, it's not like the old days. I heard in the previous era, apprentices could learn for free as long as they signed a long-term contract. They even received food and accommodation. Nowadays, not only do they have to pay tuition fees, but they also have to cover all expenses themselves.”

As Franca spoke, she noticed Lumian's expression turning grave.

Lumian furrowed his brow and inquired, "At which theater is she doing her apprenticeship?"

"I never asked..." Franca murmured, making the connection.

In that instant, Jenna emerged from the guest room, carrying a stack of items as she made her way towards the restroom.

"What theater are you apprenticing at?" Franca stood up and inquired.

Jenna responded with confusion, "Why do you ask? You've never been curious before."

Observing Lumian and Charlie's focused gaze, she couldn't help but curse, "Why the f*ck are you staring at me? Dogsh*t, what does my theater have to do with you?"

Realizing Franca and Lumian's seriousness, she hesitated for a moment before muttering, "Dammit, there's no need for me to hide anything! It's the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons."

Chapter 215 Jenna's Worry

As soon as Jenna revealed where she studied acting, a hush fell over the living room. Franca and Lumian exchanged inexplicable glances, causing Jenna to feel a pang of uncertainty. Charlie, the waiter, couldn't conceal his startled expression and the fear that gripped him was evident in his shrinking demeanor and fearful eyes.

"What's wrong? Is there a problem?" Jenna asked, her confidence wavering.

Lumian seized the moment and tossed a Louis d'or at Jenna's feet, his eyes intently following her every move, even the slightest flicker in her gaze.

"Dammit! What's the meaning of this?" Jenna looked down at the Louis d'or, her confusion turning into anger as she confronted Lumian.

Lumian's expression returned to normal, and he turned his head, grinning at Franca. "Not a Scrooge."

"Of course!" Franca responded, a mix of exasperation and amusement. "We meet often. She may be a bit frugal, but she's definitely not a Scrooge. Plus, she doesn't exhibit any signs of being a Sex Addict, and her acting skills leave much to be desired."

Franca couldn't help but feel a twinge of regret.

"What are you two talking about?" Jenna was utterly bewildered, forgetting her own penchant for profanity.

"You explain," Lumian instructed Franca.

Franca rose and tried to allow Jenna to squeeze into the recliner with her, but realizing it was too cramped, Jenna opted for an armchair instead, resting a pile of ordinary clothes on her lap.

“Do you remember that creep Hedsey?” Franca slumped back disappointedly in the recliner.

Jenna responded without hesitation, “I remember. Damn it, he died too easily!”

It wasn't exactly an easy demise... Lumian silently muttered, recalling the gruesome state of Hedsey's lower body.

Using this as a starting point, Franca delved into the secrets of the Bliss Society, the dark Sequences tied to the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire, the connection between the Bliss Society and the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, and various details involving the true Ive, Rentas, Maipú Meyer, and Susanna Mattise.

Jenna, having absorbed Franca's mystical knowledge, grew increasingly astonished with each revelation. It was as if a door had swung open, revealing a new world—a scene that was entirely different from what she had known before. It festered, exuded sinister vibes, terrified her, and made her stomach churn with disgust.

After Franca finished her account, she blurted out, “Did that creep target me at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons?”

Considering that Hedsey was a subordinate of theater manager Maipú Meyer and associated with the Bliss Society, he likely frequented and surreptitiously entered the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Jenna suspected that the pervert often lurked in the shadows, observing the apprentice actresses during their classes.

“It's possible,” Franca agreed, contemplating why the pervert Hedsey didn't choose another underground singer but instead risked attacking Jenna.

Jenna was undeniably attractive. After her time at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, where she honed her acting and makeup skills, her allure had gradually emerged. However, she wasn't a fully-fledged Witch yet, nor was she overwhelmingly captivating. In the bustling marketplace, there was no shortage of underground singers who were more alluring and could ignite the desires of men of lower standing. Besides, they lacked the distinction of being Red Boots's mistress.

Jenna glared at Lumian, her teeth grinding together in frustration.

Lumian chuckled softly. “I suddenly realized that since we met, you've never praised any orthodox god. I still don't know if you're a follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery. It's rather suspicious.”

Jenna scoffed and replied, “Most of the time when I meet you, I'm dressed like this. I wear smoky makeup that symbolizes debauchery and sing, ‘My dear, he's really good with his fingers.’ If I were to praise the Sun in this state, I believe God would incinerate me.”

As she spoke, she pointed to her chest, revealing a generous amount of alluring cleavage.

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she turned her finger towards Franca.

“And Franca never praises any deity either. Why aren't you suspecting her?”

“Who says I don't?” Franca declared solemnly, drawing a triangular Sacred Emblem on her chest. “By Steam!”

Your acting skills are mediocre... Aurore is the same. She rarely mentions her faith and doesn't attend Mass. She only praises the Sun when questioned... Lumian drew the triangular Sacred Emblem.

“By Steam!”

Caught up in their actions, Charlie instinctively spread his arms wide.

“Praise the Sun!”

An indescribable silence descended, as if no one knew how to proceed with the conversation.

After a few seconds, Lumian addressed Jenna, saying, “So, your true identity is an apprentice actress.”

Jenna couldn't help but feel a twinge of satisfaction. She lifted her chin slightly and replied, “Well then, am I qualified to critique your acting skills? And let me clarify, I'm not some low-class hooligan with a vulgar mouth. I'm merely playing the role of an underground songstress. How did I do? Was it convincingly authentic? Can you find any faults?”

“No wonder I occasionally find you rather refined,” Lumian mocked, concurring with Jenna's statement.

“What do you mean, ‘rather’?” Jenna expressed her dissatisfaction.

Charlie's gaze darted between their faces, eventually landing on Franca, who sat in the recliner.

Franca pursed her lips and observed Lumian and Jenna as they bickered.

Lumian dismissed Jenna's bragging and said, “Let's discuss the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.”

After a few moments of contemplation, Jenna blurted out in frustration, “Dammit! My tuition fees!”

As soon as the words left her mouth, she noticed everyone giving her strange looks.

Jenna hurriedly clarified, “Didn't you mention that Maipú Meyer might escape with the members of the Bliss Society? Won't Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons shut down? Damn it, I've already paid a year's worth of tuition fees to these damn heretics! I need to get that money back!”

Once Jenna regained her composure, Lumian's lips twitched.

“Weren't you claiming that your foul mouth and low morals were all part of an act?”

“...” At first, Jenna was left speechless, but then she defended herself forcefully. “I am currently Jenna, the underground songstress! I am still in character and haven't broken free from it...”

Observing Lumian's skeptical expression, Jenna became enraged with embarrassment.

“Dammit, don't you understand? This is called method acting!”

“Yes, yes, yes,” Franca chimed in, trying her best to change the subject. “Théâtre de l’Ancienne Cage à Pigeons has a dedicated audience and talented actors. Even if the theater manager and a few leads leave, it won’t shut down. At most, they might embezzle funds. It’ll be a bit challenging for them. I believe there will be plenty of people willing to take over such valuable assets. Oh, by the way, who owns Théâtre de l’Ancienne Cage à Pigeons?”

Jenna recollected and replied, “Maipú Meyer himself.”

“Ah, I see...” Lumian glanced at Franca. “If Maipú Meyer truly intends to escape, we could acquire Théâtre de l’Ancienne Cage à Pigeons at a low price. There are numerous dancers and singers under Brignais’s control who don’t want to sell themselves. We can give them an opportunity to earn a living at the theater.”

“They will face fierce competition.” Franca contemplated. “If we succeed, it could indeed be a viable path. The challenge lies in convincing Brignais... Haha, we can spin him a tale and sell him a promise. Let him know that no matter how much he squeezes a singer who moonlights as a street girl, he can only make a pittance. On the other hand, a renowned theater actress under the influence of our Savoie Mob will bring far greater returns.”

Charlie’s gaze shifted between Lumian and Franca before settling on Jenna, who sat in an armchair. After discussing with Lumian, Franca assured Jenna, “Don’t worry, your tuition fees won’t be in vain.”

Jenna, who had been listening intently to their conversation, let out a sigh of relief and muttered, “The tuition fees for Théâtre de l’Ancienne Cage à Pigeons aren’t cheap at all.”

Franca redirected the conversation back to its original course.

“What’s your impression of the people from Théâtre de l’Ancienne Cage à Pigeons? Who do you find suspicious?”

Jenna contemplated for a moment before responding, “Maipú Meyer enjoys watching our acting classes. His gaze can be a bit lecherous, but he has never harassed anyone. That’s something many men do, isn’t it? Yes, some apprentices might have a private relationship with him. After all, he’s the theater’s owner and manager.

“Rentas possesses remarkable acting skills. He is the most professional and exceptional among all the acting instructors. The characters he portrays in plays seem to come alive, each one distinct from the others...”

At this point, Jenna’s tone revealed a touch of envy, as if she desired to possess the abilities of an Actor. However, thoughts of Hedsey’s perversity and Susanna Mattise’s current predicament filled her with fear, preventing her from indulging in such fantasies.

“I haven't really interacted with the Ives you mentioned. Perhaps he only appears in certain genres...

“I'm not well-acquainted with Charlotte. By the time I joined Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, she had already taken on lead roles, but she was my role model. Her acting skills are slightly inferior to Rentas's. I'm uncertain if she's an Actor. Dammit, it's hard to say...”

Jenna struggled to restrain herself for a long while before finally cursing.

“The other acting instructors are probably not Actors. Their acting abilities pale in comparison to Rentas's. They often praise me for my talent in acting. While I may not match Rentas or the previous female leads of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, I can hold my own against Charlotte when she was still an apprentice...” Jenna suddenly fell silent.

“What's the matter?” Franca inquired, concerned.

Charlie's gaze shifted from Franca and Jenna to Ciel, who sat beside him.

Jenna furrowed her brow and said, “Tomorrow, the official Beyonders will conduct a thorough investigation of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. What... what should I do?”

She was a wild Beyonder, an Assassin.

“Abandon Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons and find another theater?” Lumian suggested.

Money was the least of her concerns.

Jenna pressed her lips together, her expression filled with dejection.

“B-but I used my true identity at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. What about my mother and brother...”

Chapter 216 Acting Guidance

Lumian wasn't sure if Jenna's bounty would have consequences for her family, so he turned to Franca, hoping she could use her connections to persuade the official Beyonders to overlook a mere apprentice actress.

Franca didn't hide her dilemma.

Helping to hide something was not an issue for someone like 007, but if they expected him to meticulously cover for someone during the operation, two conditions had to be met. First, he had to be involved in the operation and responsible for investigating the apprentice actresses. Second, he needed some information about Jenna to determine whom he should assist.

Franca didn't believe that 007 happened to be in the market district by chance. At best, he could pass on information. The chances of him being directly in charge of the operations were highly unlikely.

“I can try, but I can't make any promises,” Franca replied, looking at Jenna with concern, trying to offer some comfort without making any definite commitments.

Jenna acknowledged her words briefly, feeling a bit relieved, but she still struggled to come up with another solution.

Lumian pondered for a moment and said teasingly, “You're just an apprentice actress. Why are you so anxious?”

“Even if the official Beyonders investigate everyone in Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, they won't waste much effort on you. Think about it. You've only been in the market district for a short time, and you haven't even become an apprentice actress yet. You don't even have a chance to play a minor supporting role. How could you be a female member of the Bliss Society?”

“That's right,” Franca interjected. “You spend most of your time singing in bars and dance halls rather than interacting with the cult of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. You're in the least suspicious group. If you tell the investigators the truth, you might not have to undergo any further tests of your Beyonder powers.”

Lumian added with a smile, “And even if they do test you, it will mainly be to determine if you believe in the Mother Tree of Desire, or if you're a Scrooge or a Sex Addict. And you definitely don't fall into any of those categories.”

“This is a blind spot for the official Beyonders during their investigations, and you can take advantage of it.”

“Didn't you mention your excellent acting skills? Now is the time to showcase them!”

“Yes... When the Sun rises, go to Église Saint-Robert and pray. Get an accessory that reveals your identity as a believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun, and wear it. When you enter Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, whether or not the official Beyonders arrive, praise the Sun frequently.”

“Evil god believers rarely engage in such actions. It will effectively set you apart from them. If the official Beyonders notice these details, there's a good chance they'll consider you trustworthy.”

Jenna's eyes sparkled as she listened.

“That's right.”

“A devout apprentice actress who believes in the Eternal Blazing Sun and has only recently joined Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons won't switch to an evil god so easily. They only need to conduct a simple investigation...”

“As long as I lead them to search for Beyonder powers in connection with the believers of the evil god, they probably won't suspect that I became a Beyonder due to other encounters...”

The more Jenna spoke, the more her excitement grew. She placed the stack of clothes on her lap and stood up.

She paced back and forth, making gestures as if she were embodying a devoted apprentice actress who believed in the Eternal Blazing Sun.

Madame, it appears you're not a true follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun. Otherwise, you wouldn't have needed to rehearse beforehand, Lumian clicked his tongue and criticized.

Charlie, who had been listening, was taken aback.

Is “Little Minx” Jenna also someone with magical powers?

Jenna's performance, even in the presence of imaginary official Beyonders, gradually bolstered her confidence.

Franca observed quietly, her eyes flickering, her mind filled with trivial thoughts.

If Jenna and I possessed the powers of an Actor, we would make perfect cosplayers, capable of becoming anything we desired. Tsk tsk... she thought to herself.

After some time, Jenna regained her composure and looked at Charlie warily.

“I've heard that you enjoy giving speeches in bars and twisting other people's secrets into stories.

“If you dare to f*cking reveal my Beyonder powers, I'll hand you over to a homosexual Sex Addict. Heh heh, just imagine the suffering you'll endure.”

Charlie couldn't help but pause for a moment. He shuddered and raised his right hand.

“Praise the Sun. I swear in God's name that I won't divulge your secret!

“I just mentioned that you and Ciel became lovers...”

Charlie suddenly stopped, sensing the strange atmosphere in the living room once again.

Lumian shrugged at Franca, signaling that it was merely a rumor.

Jenna scoffed.

“Will you also spread the rumor that Franca joined Ciel and me to form a stable love triangle?”

“No,” Charlie quickly shook his head.

At the same time, he found the idea rather intriguing. It hadn't occurred to him before.

Jenna settled back into the armchair and continued to recount her knowledge of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

Lumian and Franca listened attentively, occasionally posing questions to guard against potential threats.

In Underground Trier.

A figure with a lantern in hand moved cautiously along a familiar path, searching for something.

This person, of average height, wore a black tailcoat, a matching bow tie, and a half top hat. His face had a square shape, with short and thick eyebrows. The lines on his face were etched deep, and he sported a well-groomed brownish-yellow beard, carefully waxed at the tips.

The lantern's flickering light cast eerie shadows on his countenance, lending him an air of profound melancholy.

After walking for some time, the man halted, his gaze directed towards a section of the tunnel that had suffered a slight cave-in.

His dark brown eyes narrowed, focusing intently for a moment, before he suddenly dropped to all fours, his nose twitching.

The scent of gunpowder... and blood... The man rose solemnly to his feet and approached the collapsed area.

Through the layers of debris, he seemed to discern the glimpse of an incomplete corpse.

The atmosphere on Rue des Blouses Blanches was much quieter at night compared to Rue Anarchie. Except for the occasional clamor caused by passing carriages and the inebriated stumbling their way home, the night seemed to have fallen into a stillness.

From time to time, a distant gunshot would break the silence, its echo piercing through the night only to be swallowed by the darkness and moonlight.

Lumian and his companions engaged in intermittent conversation, their nerves on edge, apprehensive that shadows might suddenly emerge from the darkness beyond the window.

Time dragged on slowly. For Charlie, it felt like awaiting a verdict. He was restless, anxious, yet filled with a glimmer of hope.

Finally, the distant skyline began to be tinged with a golden-red hue. Before long, the entire night was bathed in the crimson light.

“We should be safe now,” Franca declared, sitting upright in her recliner.

Lumian glanced at Charlie and noticed that his luck was no longer drenched in blood-red. It had returned to its normal state, and there were even hints of prosperity.

The immediate crisis has been averted, but if Susanna Mattise manages to escape, will Charlie obtain a position with the authorities? Lumian pondered over it and nodded.

“For the time being, all I can say is that we should be fine.”

Through this encounter, he confirmed one thing: even without the Luck Transference Spell, human luck could change.

He felt that the future was shaped by multiple factors. Different choices could lead to diverse outcomes.

If Lumian had followed Osta Trul and provided protection instead of forewarning him of impending disaster, perhaps he wouldn't have suffered injuries. However, that didn't guarantee a turn for the better. Lumian's protection might have implicated Osta Trul, leading him to be dragged to the river's depths by another water ghost, losing his life.

Does inevitability imply that regardless of the choices one makes, a predetermined fate will inevitably manifest? Lumian turned his gaze towards Jenna, the underground songstress and apprentice actress.

Jenna possessed average luck—neither filled with fortuitous encounters nor beset by grave dangers.

In high spirits, Jenna furrowed her brow and asked, “Why are you staring at me?”

After a night of acclimatizing, she refrained from uttering vulgarities and put more thought into her words.

Lumian pointed to his eye sockets.

“Are you planning to go to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons looking like that?”

“Oh, right! I haven't taken off my makeup!” Jenna exclaimed, getting up and rushing into the washroom with a stack of clothes.

Franca stood up and stretched, paying no mind to her appearance.

She glanced at the washroom and whispered to Lumian, “Will the act be convincing?”

“Yes,” Lumian replied with confidence.

Previously, he hadn't been entirely sure, but after observing Jenna's current state of luck, he was more certain.

Franca chose to place her trust in Lumian.

“I'll keep a close watch on her as well.”

She clicked her tongue and let out a sigh.

“You seem rather skilled at deceiving the official Beyonders. Just as I expected from a...”

She mouthed the final words silently—“wanted criminal.”

Not just deceiving the official Beyonders... Lumian whispered to himself, pointing at Charlie.

“I'll take him back to Auberge du Coq Doré to rest, just in case the official Beyonders can't locate him. I'll leave Jenna in your care.”

“You make it sound like she's truly your lover. Asking me to look after her,” Franca retorted with a sour tone.

By the time Jenna finished removing her makeup and changing her clothes, Lumian and Charlie had already departed. Franca had also informed 007 about the altar, the Actors, and the other information she had gathered.

At that moment, Jenna's face was no longer adorned with smoky eyes, pronounced blush, and fiery lips. She appeared clean-faced, albeit a bit fatigued.

As Jenna braided her brownish-yellow hair, she glanced at the door and grinned at Franca.

“When did you become involved with Ciel? Aren't you afraid the Boss will find out?”

Franca chuckled.

“Him? It'll be far too sinful; I can't bring myself to do it.”

“Why?” Jenna couldn't comprehend.

To her understanding, Franca's moral boundaries weren't that strict. Ciel was only a few months away from adulthood.

Franca pondered her words and responded, “After getting to know him better, I discovered that he's the younger brother of one of my relatives.”

“So you're related by blood.” Jenna nodded in understanding.

However, her attention quickly shifted. After securing her braids, she pointed towards the door.

“I'm going to Église Saint-Robert to offer my prayers.”

“I'll follow you discreetly to ensure nothing untoward happens.” Franca retrieved some fluorescent powder and, with an incantation, blended it in to conceal herself.

When will I become a Witch... Jenna averted her gaze enviously, opened the door, and stepped outside.

Chapter 217 Notarization

Église Saint-Robert stood proudly near the Suhit steam locomotive station, serving as the bishop cathedral of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Its distinctive onion-shaped dome was painted in shimmering gold, representing the radiant sun. Below it stood a white building with gilded edges and a monumental Sun Sacred Emblem.

Adjacent to the cathedral was a bell tower, crowned by a roof fashioned from a gleaming golden sphere.

Observing Jenna entering the cathedral amidst the morning prayer congregation, Franca opted to wait in close proximity.

Uncertain whether the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral possessed any peculiar enchantments that could render her invisibility ineffective, she remained cautious, unwilling to take any unnecessary risks.

Église Saint-Robert, much like other cathedrals belonging to the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, boasted a resplendent golden base and was adorned with gilded accents throughout. The ornate structure, adorned with vibrant stained glass windows and a vast mural depicting a saint in vivid hues of blue, green, and red, exuded an atmosphere of profound sanctity and grandeur. Every

worshiper who entered its hallowed halls couldn't help but bow their heads in reverence, enveloped by the sacred ambiance.

Jenna made her way to the front of the altar and settled into the second row of seats.

Closing her eyes, she inclined her head forward and crossed her arms, placing them reverently upon her chest.

Having been baptized and frequented the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral since her youth, Jenna was intimately familiar with this customary ritual, even though she could hardly be considered devout. She swiftly cleared her mind of any distracting thoughts, focusing her entire being on the act of prayer.

Time seemed to stand still as the bishop delivered his sermon.

After nearly fifteen minutes, Jenna opened her eyes and quietly rose to her feet. She proceeded towards a long table positioned along the side of the main hall.

This table spanned an impressive length of 20 to 30 meters, adorned with slender white candles flickering within golden lamps.

Devotees seeking to express their gratitude or admiration for a saint or angel could purchase a candle from the clergyman stationed beside the table, lighting it and placing it within an unoccupied lamp.

Jenna fixed her gaze upon the softly swaying flames for a few fleeting moments before redirecting her attention towards the clergyman dressed in a white robe interwoven with threads of gold.

Her eyes caught sight of a man engaging in the purchase of candles.

He appeared to be in his late twenties, his blond hair immaculately styled and subtly enhanced with cosmetics. His eyes resembled the vivid azure of a tranquil lake, albeit relatively small in size.

Adorned in a white shirt, a yellow vest, and a slim blue tweed coat adorned with two golden buttons, he bore a resemblance to the slightly distinguished gentlemen of Trier, with discernible traces of makeup enhancing his features.

As the man approached an unoccupied lamp with his acquired candle, Jenna moved closer to the clergyman in the resplendent white robe interwoven with golden threads, extending her arms in a welcoming gesture.

“Praise the Sun!”

“Praise the Sun!” the clergyman warmly replied, his smile radiating genuine warmth.

Jenna hesitated briefly for a couple of seconds before uttering, “I seek a blessed necklace.”

Comparing it to the purchase of candles, this act was more devout.

But, naturally, it came with a higher price tag.

“Sister, how about this one?”

He produced a necklace adorned with a gold Sunbird pendant from among the unsold white candles.

Two rose-red rubies were nestled within the eyes of the Sunbird.

In the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, just as “Brother” was used to address men of the faith, female believers were affectionately called “Sisters.” Some nuns even formed an alliance known as the Nine Sisters Association, working hand in hand with the Brotherhood Minor.

Jenna couldn't help but sense that this particular necklace must be quite expensive—she could almost hear her wallet crying in protest.

After careful consideration, she ultimately settled on a relatively simple amulet featuring a small Sun Sacred Emblem.

It set her back 30 verl d'or, causing her to wince at the cost.

As an underground singer in the market district, Jenna earned a decent income, especially since her recent rise in popularity. However, it had only been a month since she began gaining recognition. Previously, her earnings were barely sufficient to cover rent, food, performance attire, makeup supplies, and the like, without having to rely on her family for financial support.

Despite now earning nearly 300 verl d'or a month through part-time work, her financial situation still left her feeling uneasy. She had to save for next year's tuition, ensure her mother wouldn't worry, and even contribute to the family's debts.

With the newly acquired amulet adorning her neck, Jenna took a deep breath and departed from Église Saint-Robert, making her way to Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons before 9 a.m. The classroom for apprentice actresses was located on the second floor, and Jenna passed by the manager's office on her way.

The door remained tightly shut, indicating that Maipú Meyer hadn't arrived at the theater yet.

Could he have really fled? Jenna averted her gaze and continued forward.

Shortly thereafter, she walked past the locked door of the exclusive break room belonging to the popular leading actress, Charlotte Calvino.

The door was locked as well.

Jenna exhaled quietly, straightened her posture, and turned into the classroom.

She was late. Gaspar, the instructor for today's first acting class, had already arrived and was busy addressing a private question from one of the apprentices.

Gaspar, despite being a middle-aged man of dignified demeanor, had the ability to portray a charming playboy on stage.

Deep within Underground Trier, nestled within a hollow strewn with remnants of tree branches and vines...

The very center had collapsed, leaving the soil in a state of disarray. Faint marks, as if from hurried footsteps, led towards an unknown destination.

Angoulême de François followed the path indicated by the cardinals and found himself standing at the precipice, his eyes fixed on the bewildering sight before him.

Those filthy rodents had relocated once more!

In response to the signal from the cardinals, Angoulême unsheathed a golden longsword that appeared to be forged from condensed light from a grayish-white mechanical doll.

With a swift motion, the sword plunged into the ground, causing the bluish-green and withered branches and vines to erupt into flames. Yet, no trace of black smoke ascended.

As the fiery shroud dissipated, the true nature of the ground, walls, and ceiling came into view for Angoulême and his companions.

A multitude of serpents, slimy and cold, writhed and entwined, engaging in frenzied mating rituals. Countless gray rats tore at each other relentlessly, refusing to retreat until death claimed them. Diverse insects devoured leaves and soil with such voracity that they burst open from overindulgence...

As the realization dawned upon Franca that the plainclothes police had covertly sealed off Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, she swiftly withdrew from the brick-red three-story edifice and sought refuge in a nearby side alley. From her concealed vantage point, she observed the situation unfolding on the second floor.

As the first acting lesson neared its end, Jenna couldn't help but notice the conspicuous absence of Maipú Meyer, who typically lingered by the classroom door.

Just then, a group of black-uniformed police officers entered, clutching lists in their hands.

The leader called for a momentary pause in the lecture and addressed the assembled individuals.

“Maipú Meyer has been confirmed as a heinous heretic. We must ascertain your faith.”

Gasps and exclamations erupted, momentarily plunging the scene into disarray.

“Silence!” bellowed the leading officer. “I shall read out your names, and you will sign this pledge as a witness before God. No one shall deceive.”

Ascertaining of faith... Jenna's racing heart found a measure of solace.

One by one, the teachers and apprentice actresses stepped forward, receiving a pledge form from one of the police officers. They diligently completed their declarations of faith, appending their signatures to solidify their commitment.

Before long, Jenna heard her own name being called.

“Celia Bello.”

She approached with composure, collecting a pledge form and a scarlet fountain pen.

The contents of the pledge were as follows:

“I solemnly swear that my faith in the ____ remains unyielding to this day.

“Affirmer: ____

“Notary: ____

Jenna filled in the first two blanks with “Eternal Blazing Sun” and “Celia Bello” respectively before returning the completed pledge and the fountain pen to the police.

Once all the actors and apprentices had signed the pledge, they were instructed to remain confined within the classroom, rehearsal room, and other designated areas until further notice, unable to venture beyond those confines.

Within the manager's office that had previously been occupied by Maipú Meyer, a gathering took place to collect the signed pledges.

Several devout members of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, known as Beyonders, took turns wielding a fountain pen crafted from pure gold. With deliberate strokes, they inscribed the initials "D.E." in the designated Notary space.

The ink they used appeared to be a vivid shade of crimson, reminiscent of fresh blood.

Upon the completion of each pledge, a shimmering golden aura would briefly envelop the document before dissipating back to its original state.

Every so often, a pledge would emit an ominous, blood-red glow, accompanied by piercing screams emanating from the same floor.

Even those actors and apprentices who employed aliases, long-established pseudonyms recognized by those in their midst, possessed mystical connections that were intricately intertwined.

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 504.

Charlie lay restless in bed, his weariness unable to lull him into sleep.

All of a sudden, a knock echoed through the room.

"Who's there?" Charlie called out, startled, as he sat up in bed, resembling a startled bird.

"Angoulême de François." The voice from beyond the door was deep, yet carried a compelling warmth.

Charlie's mind immediately conjured the image of the Monsieur who had interrogated him about Madame Alice's demise. Hastily, he rose from his bed and swung the door open.

Standing before him were Angoulême, with his blond hair, golden brows, and beard, and Imre, whose brown skin and full lips bore the traces of Southern Continent heritage.

"What brings you here, Monsieur François?" Charlie inquired cautiously.

Simultaneously, a thought flashed across his mind.

Could these be the official Beyonders whom Ciel and Red Boots mentioned?

Angoulême did not immediately respond. He stepped into Charlie's room, gesturing for Imre to shut the wooden door behind them.

Casting a sweeping glance around, he finally spoke.

"I bring bad news. Susanna Mattise is not entirely deceased. She may appear before you at any time in the future."

Charlie couldn't conceal his disappointment, pain, confusion, and fear.

“What should I do?”

Angoulême nodded gently.

“But there is good news as well. We intend to offer you a clerical position within our ranks. This will provide you with enhanced protection.

“Your monthly salary will amount to 320 verl d'or, and there will be a confidentiality agreement in place as compensation. For the initial one or two months, you will need to undergo an Intisian improvement course. Consider it an internship period, with a stipend of 200 verl d'or. Once you successfully pass the assessment, you will become a full-time employee.

“Are you willing? We do not wish to force this proposal upon you.”

320 verl d'or per month? And improved protection? These words echoed within Charlie's mind. He believed that no ordinary person could turn down such a remarkable opportunity.

He was satisfied even with his current job as an attendant, which earned him 80 verl d'or monthly!

Recalling the hints dropped by Lumian and Franca, Charlie responded with surprise and delight, “Absolutely no problem!”

By the window of Room 207, Lumian positioned himself in front of a wooden table, observing Charlie as he followed the two strangers towards Avenue du Marché.

He focused his attention, seeking any changes in Charlie's luck, but found none.

This meant that the two individuals were not Actors manipulating the situation!

Lumian's gaze then shifted to the blond man, intrigued to discover what kind of fortune the official Beyonder possessed.

Suddenly, an intense wave of danger washed over him. He instinctively crouched down, reducing his profile.

Angoulême turned his head, his eyes filled with confusion, as he looked at the Auberge du Coq Doré's windows.

He sensed that someone was observing him.

Chapter 218 Promise

After Charlie and the two official Beyonders departed Rue Anarchie, Lumian settled back down at the wooden table, berating himself internally.

How could I forget? I mustn't gaze upon what I ought not to!

The same applied to observing luck!

Previously, he believed that scrutinizing one's luck was a subtle affair, unlikely to be detected. Neither Sequence 7 Franca nor the equivalent of a Sequence 7, “Black Scorpion” Roger, had noticed anything awry. However, the previous official Beyonder had displayed an unmistakable reaction.

Does his Sequence far exceed mine, or does he possess special abilities, or perhaps he wields a corresponding mystical item? Lumian struggled to determine.

He had never observed Beyonders beyond Sequence 7, lacking a point of comparison. Whether it was Gardner Martin or Mr. K, he exercised caution and refrained from examining their luck in their presence.

Having taken note of the lesson, Lumian, who didn't require sleep, perused the copied grimoire of Aurore.

The sunlight grew more intense, transforming the window into a radiant source. Even the bustling Rue Anarchie appeared like a golden oil painting.

In comparison to Backlund, the capital of the Loen Kingdom, Trier remained bathed in sunlight. Despite its pollution, the city's industrial layout was relatively sensible, confining the impact to specific areas. Most of it lay to the south, where factories were abundant.

Knock, knock, knock!

Someone rapped on Room 207 once again, yet this time, Lumian failed to discern any footsteps.

Arching his right eyebrow, he stowed away the papers on the table and turned toward the door.

“Come in. It's unlocked, Madame Red Boots.”

With a creak, the door swung open, and Franca stepped inside, donning a blouse, beige trousers, and red boots.

In surprise, she inquired, “How did you know it was me?”

Why ask the same question as Jenna? Should I praise her for being a worthy student of an Assassin like you? Lumian replied, amused, “Because I possess a brain.”

“Don't make it sound like I lack one,” Franca responded calmly, settling herself on Lumian's bed.

Lumian chortled.

“I can't think of anyone else capable of approaching my room without my notice and knocking on the door politely.”

Naturally, he had to exclude Madam Magician first. She lacked such diligence. It was impressive enough that she managed to reply in time!

After a brief moment of contemplation, Lumian inquired, “Has Jenna's predicament been resolved?”

Franca clicked her tongue. “You have an uncanny foresight, brat.”

She assumed the role of an elder sister.

If Jenna is still in danger, how could you, Hidden Blade, find the composure to seek me out?

Franca laughed dryly.

“I was referring to your astute guess that the authorized Beyonders would primarily investigate whether Jenna and the others are followers of evil gods.”

After all, I'm closer to an evil god than any evil god believer here... Lumian raised his right hand and gently patted his left chest.

With a smile, he responded, “Such insights stem from the ample experiences of a wanted criminal.”

“You seem quite proud,” Franca teased.

Curious, Lumian inquired, “How did the authorized Beyonders conduct their investigations?”

The more he learned, the more confident he would become in evading similar inquiries in the future.

Franca responded with an air of indifference, “Based on Jenna's account, I reckon they utilized the powers of a Notary.”

“Each person had to sign a pledge of their faith, a pledge witnessed by a Notary. Heh heh, those who lied were engulfed in burning golden flames. They bled profusely and were dragged away.”

Aware that Lumian was still delving into the realm of mysticism, Franca proceeded to provide a detailed explanation,

“Notary-related abilities are quite common in Trier. They can be found in various places, disguised under different guises.

“Notaries have the ability to create contracts with mystical effects. Once the parties affix their signatures to a similar contract in the presence of a Notary, they are bound by it unless they are demigods. Even at the demigod level, breaking the contract requires a substantial price. For transactions involving millions, or even tens of millions, of verl d'or, both parties are willing to pay a hefty sum and receive notarization in front of the God of Deeds' Sacred Emblem at a cathedral.

“The pledge is a special contract.”

“The Eternal Blazing Sun is also known as the God of Deeds and the Guardian of Businesses.”

It aligns with Aurore's grimoires... Lumian inquired, “Has Jenna returned home?”

Franca nodded subtly. “She needed to catch up on sleep.”

Franca scrutinized Lumian. “You seem lively. I can't tell that you haven't slept all night.”

“I'm accustomed to it.” Lumian couldn't reveal that his condition would automatically restore itself at six in the morning. “You also appear quite energetic.”

Franca smirked and replied, “I'm accustomed to it as well. For people like us, the night is the beginning of revelry.”

If Aurore had made that statement, words like “inspiration,” “drafts,” and “tranquility of the night” would have crossed Lumian's mind. However, when Franca said it, he could only associate it with “orgies,” “large beds,” and “romping.”

Unaware of his critical thoughts, Franca continued, “Apprentice training at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons will be suspended for three days. The theater will be temporarily occupied by the police headquarters. The daily performances will carry on as usual to avoid impacting the National Convention elections. However, the repertoire will be adjusted. Some plays have lost their female leads.”

“Charlotte and Maipú Meyer are gone?” Lumian asked.

Though he had suspected that Susanna Mattise hadn't been completely purified when Charlie left with the official Beyonders, he still felt a tinge of disappointment upon hearing Franca's account. Franca nodded.

“Apart from them, two others are missing: the real Ive and Lolth.”

“Among the remaining actors and apprentices, a total of seven have converted to the Mother Tree of Desire. They were exposed, but it seems none of them received any boons.”

So, those who received boons have fled, while the mere believers have been abandoned? Lumian scoffed inwardly as he relayed Charlie's departure with the suspected official Beyonders to Franca.

Franca let out a soft sigh.

“This is the best outcome for him. We can't protect him every single day.

“Though the official Beyonders can't either, they can arrange for Charlie to stay in a relatively safe place until Susanna Mattise's matter is truly resolved.

“In comparison, you're in more danger. Didn't you mention that Susanna Mattise holds a grudge against you? Evil spirits can be quite fixated.”

That will give me a good chance to test Mr. K's finger... Lumian silently muttered, indicating that he would be cautious.

Something crossed his mind, and he inquired, “Do you know why our Savoie Mob supports Hugues Artois?”

Franca smiled. “If I had that figured out, I wouldn't be part of the Savoie Mob anymore.”

Hmm... Is that her primary reason for joining the Savoie Mob? Lumian pondered.

Franca stretched, stood up, and addressed him, “We truly have a chance to acquire Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons at a low price, but we might have to face the enmity of those Scrooges. However, you have nothing to fear. Yes, I'll go to Rue des Fontaines to discuss with Gardner and resolve my problem while there.”

“What problem?” Lumian was puzzled.

Franca responded with a smile, “Even though the desires Rentas evoked were suppressed by the mysticism smelling salts, my body still feels a bit restless. When I recall that sensation, I feel somewhat empty, longing for fulfillment and release. Since you can't help me, I have no choice but to find my true lover. Why aren't you affected at all?”

There were indeed residual effects, but I was fine after six in the morning... Lumian pursed his lips and replied, “My willpower is stronger than yours.”

Franca sneered, walked towards the door, and exited Room 207.

Lumian watched her leave, deep in thought.

Has Franca become the Boss's mistress, or has the Boss become Franca's lover?

Is Franca responsible for satisfying the Boss, or is the Boss responsible for satisfying Franca?

Just before noon, Charlie returned to Auberge du Coq Doré. He packed his meager belongings into his suitcase and descended the stairs with it.

Spotting Lumian on the second floor, he glanced around and lowered his voice.

“I have a new job and need to move elsewhere. After some time, I should be able to return to the basement bar for a drink.”

Lumian smirked once again. “Sounds good.”

If Susanna Mattise's issue could truly be resolved, Charlie's fate would change.

Charlie also seemed pleased. He pondered for a moment and stated, “There are many things I can't tell you, but when the time comes, I'll try to drop hints for you.”

In the Inquisition beneath Église Saint-Robert, he had come across Ciel's wanted poster and recognized his friend, yet he didn't inform Deacon François.

What does that mean? Why does Charlie suddenly feel he can be useful? Does his new job have a close connection to the official Beyonders, allowing him to gather valuable information? Lumian swiftly formed a hypothesis.

With a mischievous grin, he remarked, “First, focus on staying alive before contemplating anything else! I might leave the market district in a few weeks.”

The implication of his words was, “Do your job well and don't even think about leaking information. Don't attempt it unless your life is truly at stake.”

Whether Charlie understood or not, Lumian wasn't entirely certain. After all, this guy wasn't very smart.

After spending the afternoon at Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian changed into a grayish-blue worker's uniform and donned a dark-blue cap. He hailed a public carriage to take him to Rue des Pavés in Quartier du Jardin Botanique.

As per his arrangement with Louis Lund, Lumian anticipated a response from Madame Pualis regarding their meeting before the night fell.

Upon reaching the lobby of Apartment 9, Lumian opened the letterbox in Room 302, only to find a collection of fliers inside.

The letter hasn't arrived? Lumian suppressed his anxiety and decided to wait across from Apartment 9.

Just as he exited the lobby and descended the stairs to the roadside, he noticed a brown four-wheeled carriage approaching from a distance. It came to a halt right in front of him.

The carriage driver had jet-black hair and piercing blue eyes. He sported dark red attire, yellow trousers, a polished hat, and a white cravat. It was Louis Lund!

In the next instant, the carriage door swung open noiselessly, revealing the figure of a woman seated within.

Chapter 219 Probing

Lumian's eyes locked with Louis Lund, who occupied the driver's seat of the carriage, and received a confirmation nod.

Drawing a deep breath, Lumian strode toward the four-wheeled carriage, crouched down, and entered it.

He grasped the gravity of the situation.

Madame Pualis, cautious and aware, refrained from responding through letters. Instead, she concealed herself near 9 Rue des Pavés, anticipating Lumian's arrival for the reply. This strategy effectively minimized the risk of being trailed and cornered.

In the blink of an eye, Lumian's attention was seized by a familiar figure.

Adorned in a meticulously tailored black corset dress and a slightly mischievous lady's round hat, she exuded an elusive allure. Her untamed brows, lively brown eyes, and moist lips radiated a sense of allure. A cascade of brown hair, half-up and half-down, graced her shoulders. Although informal, her elegance, immaculateness, and enchantment remained undeniable. She was none other than Pualis de Roquefort, the wife of Cordu's administrator.

"Long time no see," Madame Pualis greeted him with a smile, yet her eyes emitted a frigid glare, sending shivers down one's spine.

Simultaneously, Lumian observed a shift in his surroundings.

The carriage vanished, leaving him stranded in a desolate wilderness.

There was nothing before him, and Madame Pualis had vanished into thin air.

Just as Lumian marveled at this bewildering turn of events, a colossal, irregular shadow emerged on the ground.

Instinctively, he raised his gaze, met by a reflection of brown feathers.

Each plume rivaled the size of his head, assembling into a pair of wings that seemed to obscure the heavens.

These wings belonged to Madame Pualis herself, who grew in stature, hovering in mid-air. Her feet transformed into avian talons, glistening with a chilling gleam.

A majestic, ethereal voice resounded.

“You should have been buried with Cordu!”

Lumian's heart constricted. Gripping his revolver, he swiftly pivoted and sprinted toward the edge of the wilderness.

If the visions within this dream held even an ounce of truth, he could escape Paramita once he reached its limits!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Lumian maneuvered in a curved path, firing rounds into the air. This constituted his sole means of long-range assault.

Despite her immense size, Madame Pualis displayed remarkable dexterity. The gusts generated by her flapping wings disrupted the bullets' trajectory, enabling her to deftly reposition herself.

An ear-splitting screech emanated from her throat.

Ahead of Lumian, the earth beneath the wilderness upheaved, soil cascading away, unveiling yet another monstrous entity.

A repugnant odor filled the air as the python's entire body writhed with yellow pus and deformed worms.

Bloodshot eyes glared condescendingly at Lumian. Translucent silkworms squirmed in and out of its hollowed eye sockets.

The serpent's gaze landed condescendingly on Lumian before it lunged over, its maw open wide, its yellowed fangs aimed at the living prey.

Lumian's head spun from the putrid stench that permeated the air. With haste, he withdrew a sheet of drawing paper from his shirt and unfolded it.

A vibrant, golden-red sun adorned its surface.

Instantly, the surroundings grew warmer, and the sky, once obscured by Madame Pualis, brightened.

The long-deceased python averted its gaze from Lumian, seemingly unwilling to face the sun's brilliance.

Yet, its attacks merely slowed rather than ceased.

Seizing the opportunity, Lumian pivoted, clutching the drawing, and darted off in another direction.

Hovering mid-air, Madame Pualis parted her lips, uttering a sinister phrase unintelligible to Lumian.

An immediate weakness washed over Lumian, diminishing his running speed, as if a grave illness had befallen him, leaving him yet to convalesce.

Right on the heels of that, Madame Pualis raised her head, emitting a sharp, pained howl.

At that moment, Lumian perceived an ethereal shattering sound.

It reverberated within his soul and body, casting a veil of darkness over his vision, propelling him toward the threshold of death.

Had it not been for Hunter, Provoker, Dancer, and Alms Monk fortifying his constitution from various angles, Lumian might have succumbed to his enfeebled state.

Clutching onto his last vestiges of reason, Lumian endured the agonizing pain, mustering his dwindling strength to reach into his pocket and brush Mr. K's finger.

In an instant, he felt the refreshing touch of raindrops nourishing his body and soul.

His injuries swiftly mended at a visible pace, while the surrounding wilderness gradually dissolved into illusion until it vanished entirely.

Lumian caught sight of Madame Pualis seated opposite him in the carriage.

The chill had evaporated from her gaze, replaced by a sneering mockery.

“With your feeble strength, you aspire to seek revenge against Guillaume Bénét?”

“When I departed Cordu Village, he gained a new boon after driving away us believers in the Great Mother. He now stands on par with a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator. In the future, he may even procure the corresponding potion for consumption.”

Was her earlier attack merely a test of my capabilities? Lumian harbored no surprise at the padre's Sequence 5 status. After all, his contracted abilities far surpassed those of a Contractee, yet he clearly lacked godhood. That left only two possibilities: Sequence 6 or Sequence 5.

Considering Guillaume Bénét's performance in the dream and his clash against Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, Lumian had long suspected him to be a Sequence 5 Fate Appropriator. Now, Madame Pualis had confirmed his suspicions.

What astonished him was that Recipients could consume potions to acquire additional abilities. However, they must choose the appropriate potion or a suitable alternative.

Lumian pondered for a moment, concluding that such occurrences were to be expected.

Beyonders themselves could receive boons; it was just that the process carried various complications.

Lumian met Madame Pualis's gaze and responded calmly, “I still have time to grow, and there's a chance for me to become stronger. However, Guillaume Bénét has little hope of attaining godhood. He doesn't believe in the three entities that the Great Mother is a part of. I'll catch up to him as soon as I can.”

Unspoken by Lumian were his hopes of acquiring more formidable allies. Being an evil god's Blessed and having offended a follower of the Great Mother, Guillaume Bénét couldn't find many companions. They were likely wild Beyonders and Recipients who also believed in Inevitability.

Madame Pualis chuckled.

“Confidence is a good trait. I admire young people like you who are full of confidence. Would you like to join me and worship the Great Mother? By doing so, you can gain additional assistance. Apart from the power of the potion, you can also receive boons.”

“I'd rather not become pregnant and have children,” Lumian declined Madame Pualis's kind offer in a tactful manner.

Madame Pualis smiled and replied, "It seems you haven't yet experienced the holiness, preciousness, and joy of life and the wonders of new beginnings. It's something I only came to fully comprehend after giving birth.

"But there's no need for you to refuse now. When you come to understand the greatness of the Mother, you can approach me anytime."

Lumian didn't wish to dwell on matters concerning the Great Mother, so he changed the subject.

"I thought you got others to have children. I didn't expect you to have one yourself."

Madame Pualis's face glowed with a maternal radiance.

"After becoming a Banshee, I had to bear a child myself in order to draw closer to the Great Mother."

It's hard to believe that you were once a man... Lumian almost hesitated to meet Madame Pualis's gaze. He swiftly redirected the conversation with a casual question.

"Did your child perish in the castle?"

"Yes," Madame Pualis sighed. "His father killed him with his own hands. Regrettably, he was unaware that the child was his."

"Who?" Lumian blurted out.

Madame Pualis smiled.

"Guillaume Bénét. Didn't you witness our affair? He didn't notice, but I knew you were hiding behind the altar. I even considered inviting you to join us."

I assumed your affair was merely symbolic... Some of it was real? Lumian was taken aback as several images flickered in his mind:

Madame Pualis and the padre entangled in their nakedness.

Madame Pualis praising the padre's audacity, forthrightness, and masculinity.

The padre having Saint Sith put up with the transgression...

Noticing Lumian's change in expression, Madame Pualis smiled and continued, "After arriving in Cordu and familiarizing myself with the surroundings, the first thing I did was seduce Guillaume Bénét.

"He held true authority as a clergyman and was the only means for Cordu to connect with the Eternal Blazing Sun Church. If I could bring him down and make him a believer of the Great Mother, combined with Béost's identity, I could have truly established Cordu as my territory without arousing suspicion from the outside world.

"Coincidentally, I also needed a child. So, I decided to put him to the test. Within a week, I secured his bloodline as a contingency plan. However, around July or August of last year, his attitude suddenly changed, and he lost interest in the Great Mother.

Unfortunately, I didn't even have the opportunity to let him bear a child for me to experience the wonders of life."

"Last July or August?" Lumian repeated.

Every year, shepherds returned to the mountains during May and June.

"Yes, I remember it vividly," Madame Pualis chuckled. "Later, that fool Louis Lund even attempted to seek his assistance."

Lumian furrowed his brow and asked, "Why did the padre's attitude change all of a sudden?"

"I'm not entirely sure. All I know is that during that time, some villagers were spreading distorted ideas about horoscopes, and they were reported to Guillaume Bénét. After interrogating those individuals, Guillaume Bénét's demeanor gradually shifted." Madame Pualis's eyes seemed to reflect the sunlight dancing on a lake's surface.

"Who were they?" Lumian pressed.

Madame Pualis smiled in response. "Nazélie and the others—people you are familiar with."

Lumian fell silent for a few seconds before speaking again, "Where were you, and what were you doing when the padre and the others attacked the castle?"

Pualis let out a brisk laugh.

"So, you finally ask. You should have already guessed the answer, right?"

She gazed at Lumian with a pained and twisted smile.

"Aurore attacked me."

Chapter 220 Nightmare

"Aurore attacked me."

The words echoed in Lumian's ears, crashing through his mind like a burst dam. A surge of memories flooded in, washing away the hidden horrors buried beneath the surface. They were ghastly, painful, and pierced his very bones.

One by one, scenes played out before Lumian's eyes. Guillaume Bénét, the padre, encircled by a horde of undead figures in the wilderness. Madame Pualis soaring through the air with her wings spread wide. And there, in her eyes, Lumian caught a glimpse of a familiar blond figure.

It was Aurore!

Lumian's gaze shifted to the castle's third-floor walls, covered in translucent faces of bluish-white hue. He witnessed Louis Lund giving birth, Sybil Berry being reborn within the body of a lady's maid, Guillaume Bénét, Pierre Berry, Pons Bénét, and a group of believers of Inevitability engaged in a fierce battle against the midwife, Administrator Béost, and their companions.

All of this unfolded within Lumian's own visions, emanating from a small bubble floating in the air.

White Paper...

White Paper!

Lumian's face contorted in agony as he staggered backward.

Bluish-purple veins, densely packed, protruded from his body, each representing a blood vessel.

Meanwhile, the words of Psychiatrist Susie flashed through his mind: "Always remind yourself not to overreact. Whenever you feel a similar surge of emotions, take deep breaths and find your calm..."

Lumian gasped heavily, feeling as though the world around him had turned into a vacuum.

In an act of sympathy, Madame Pualis spoke, "You have indeed forgotten many things. No, you've buried them deep in your heart, afraid to confront them.

"I, too, suffered. It was not pleasant for me. After becoming a Banshee, it was the first time I encountered a woman who truly touched my heart. She possessed charm, kindness, gentleness, and a vibrant spirit. I never imagined that she, as a follower of the evil god, would turn against me.

"Even then, she was already a Fate Appropriator, favored by Inevitability more than Guillaume Bénét."

Lumian couldn't help but bring his hands to his head, as if it might explode from the intense pressure within.

Taking deep breaths, he recalled Aurore, who brushed off his concerns about the village's peculiarities. He remembered her cautioning him against laying eyes on forbidden things. He thought of Aurore, who would often sit on the roof at night, gazing at the vastness of the cosmos. The dream of the diaphanous "lizard" crawling out of Aurore's mouth resurfaced in his mind. He remembered how Nazélie and the others, the initiators of the horoscope heresy, had close ties to Aurore.

Amidst these recollections, Lumian also recalled his failure to avenge Reimund and Ava's deaths, discovering himself captured by Pons Bénét instead. He endured torment before finally being set free. He recalled Aurore, who had cut the livre bleu and assembled a plea for help together with him. He remembered Aurore explaining the mystical knowledge she possessed. And above all, he remembered Aurore pushing him off the altar during the ritual, her eyes flickering with a newfound liveliness...

Huff... Huff... Lumian gasped heavily, as if still trapped in the clutches of a never-ending nightmare.

A soft sigh escaped Madame Pualis's lips.

"I should have noticed her strangeness sooner. Although we didn't often cross paths, I always sensed something peculiar about her. The way she would gaze up at the night sky, speaking cryptic words about her hometown.

“Later on, I wished for her to embrace the Great Mother's teachings, but alas, it was too late...”

Lumian's trembling lips struggled to form the question. “When... did she... start behaving strangely?”

He had a vivid recollection of Aurore's habit of stargazing and reminiscing about her homeland, but there had been no signs of trouble in the early years.

Granted, Lumian acknowledged that Aurore had been fixated on the cosmos more frequently over the past year, but he couldn't pinpoint the exact moment when it all began.

Madame Pualis shook her head, suppressing her emotions, and spoke with a hint of amusement.

“That's a question you must answer for yourself. You spend every day with her, whereas I do not. Sometimes, I envy you deeply. Yet, at other times, I believe you have your own merits. Why should we be bound by the rules of a conventional society, denying ourselves the freedom and joys of life?”

Lumian seemed lost in his own thoughts, barely registering Madame Pualis's words. He continued to hunch over, pressing his head against the carriage floor. Muttering to himself, he questioned, “Who... who led her to embrace Inevitability?”

“Perhaps only she knows the answer. Unfortunately...” Madame Pualis sighed once more.

Lumian fell into silence, taking deep breaths to steady himself.

Once... twice... thrice... Time seemed to blur as he wrestled with his thoughts. Finally, he straightened his posture, lowered his hands, and turned his gaze towards Madame Pualis.

“Have you ever encountered an elf-like creature resembling a lizard in the village?”

“No.” Madame Pualis shook her head.

The diaphanous “lizard” from my dream was merely a symbol. Did it represent the influence of Inevitability? Or did it actually exist, concealed deep within reality? Lumian pondered incessantly, as if this were the only way to prevent the razor-sharp blades from piercing his shattered heart.

He posed a new question.

“Have you ever come across the legend of the Warlock? The one about nine bulls being the only ones capable of pulling the coffin.”

“No,” Madame Pualis replied once more, shaking her head.

Lumian continued to inquire, one question after another. Eventually, he lost track of what he was asking and whether Madame Pualis had even responded. In his mind, her face became hazy, as though she were standing dozens or hundreds of meters away.

At some undetermined point, the four-wheeled carriage came to a halt. Lumian found himself back on the roadside, moving forward without purpose or destination.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The cathedral bell tolled, signaling midnight.

Suddenly, Lumian snapped out of his daze, realizing he had returned to the Auberge du Coq Doré.

Almost instinctively, he ascended the steps and prepared to push open the door. But after a few seconds of shock, he retreated back onto the street, wandering towards the end of Rue Anarchie like a lost soul.

He walked until he reached Avenue du Marché. The sky, perpetually gloomy throughout the night, now became shrouded in thick, dark clouds. There was no crimson moon or stars to be seen.

Finally, Lumian arrived at the entrance of Salle de Bal Brise, where a cacophony of voices and the rhythmic beat of drums emanated, creating an unusually vibrant atmosphere.

Feeling overwhelmed by the environment, he abruptly spun around, staggering to the side of the road. Finding a spot in the shadow, far away from the nearest gas street lamp, he sat on the ground.

Pitter. Patter. As time ticked by, raindrops began to fall, landing on the ground, his head, and before him.

The raindrops grew stronger, creating a steady patter.

Lumian remained motionless, as if he had transformed into a statue, allowing the rain to soak his hair, face, and clothes.

Suddenly, a shadow appeared above him, and the raindrops vanished.

Confused, Lumian looked up and saw a dark-blue umbrella, its metal frame supporting the fabric, held by Jenna.

He averted his gaze, staring blankly at the middle of the road where mist had started to rise. He made no effort to stop Jenna nor acknowledged her presence.

Jenna, wearing heavy smokey makeup and a sequined, low-cut red dress, draped a lightly-colored shawl with sizable holes over her shoulders to conceal some of her skin.

She observed Lumian for a few seconds, refraining from asking any questions. Standing beside him, she held the umbrella aloft.

The heavy rain persisted for an entire hour before gradually subsiding. Only scattered droplets now dripped from the buildings on either side and the street lamps.

Lumian rose slowly, as if he had lost something.

Jenna folded her umbrella and muttered, her voice barely audible.

“The rain will cease eventually, just as darkness always gives way. The sun is destined to rise, and its light will surely illuminate the earth.”

Lumian remained silent for a moment, his gaze fixed on the darkened road ahead.

“How would you feel when you discover that someone you trust isn't who you thought they were?”

Jenna didn't respond directly. Instead, she countered with a question of her own, "Do you still trust him?"

Lumian pursed his lips, his answer unwavering, "Yes."

"If you still trust him, then find out why he did it," Jenna advised, her tone calm.

Lumian's hands trembled slightly as he took a series of deep breaths.

Eventually, his body returned to normal, and he turned to face Jenna. "Why are you here?"

Jenna's reply carried both frustration and amusement, "Dammit! This is just outside Salle de Bal Brise! I didn't need to go to the theater tonight, so I came here to sing and make some cash. When I stepped out, I spotted you sitting by the roadside, completely drenched."

Lumian averted his gaze and began walking forward, his expression devoid of emotion.

He splashed through puddles, striding toward Rue des Blouses Blanches.

"Where are you going?" Jenna asked, a hint of concern in her voice.

Lumian responded without looking back, "To find out the reason!"

He recalled Aurore's words when she pushed him away from the altar: "My grimoires..."

Considering the current circumstances, Lumian suspected that his sister was trying to convey that he could uncover clues about the source of the abnormality within her grimoires!

Jenna followed Lumian, holding the umbrella, and probed, "Do you think you can find the reason in just one night?"

"Perhaps it will take a long time," Lumian impatiently replied.

Jenna muttered under her breath, "Then why are you in such a hurry? Rest and clear your mind. It might help you uncover the reason more quickly."

Lumian contemplated his limited understanding of the grimoires' contents and his lack of mystical knowledge. He fell into silence.

Once again, he turned to Jenna. "Is Franca at home?"

"Why do you ask?" Jenna appeared perplexed. "She probably won't return to Rue des Blouses Blanches today. She mentioned wanting to spend a pleasant evening with Gardner Martin."

Phew... Lumian exhaled and redirected his steps toward Rue Anarchie.