

Inevitability 221

Chapter 221: 221 Venting

221 Venting

Jenna's gaze fixated on Lumian's retreating figure as she inquired, "Where are you off to?"

"Getting some shut-eye," Lumian replied without glancing back.

Pursing her lips, Jenna pondered for a brief moment before deciding to follow him.

She wanted to ascertain his final destination and see if he truly intended to return to the Auberge du Coq Doré to sleep. Otherwise, with his current state, she couldn't fathom the trouble he might stir up.

Ignoring Jenna's presence, Lumian ambled slowly back towards the Auberge du Coq Doré.

As he reached the motel's entrance, he discovered the main door firmly locked. Rather than scaling the pipes, he retrieved a small wire from his person and deftly inserted it into the brass keyhole, skillfully manipulating it.

The door swung open, revealing the murky interior. The only source of illumination emanated from the staircase leading down to the basement bar.

Lumian cast a fleeting glance and chose to descend in that direction.

Dammit! Didn't he claim he was going to bed? Jenna cursed inwardly and let out a resigned sigh. She trailed after him into the Auberge du Coq Doré's basement bar.

The bar wasn't bustling with patrons. Two or three inebriated men occupied a small round table, sporadically bellowing, but they lacked any significant strength.

The sole customer at the bar counter happened to be Lumian's neighbor, Gabriel, the playwright residing in Room 206.

Garbed in a faded linen shirt, brown trousers, and oversized black-framed glasses, Gabriel's hair appeared unkempt and greasy.

"You're still drinking at this hour?" Lumian settled beside Gabriel, his gaze fixed upon the glass of green absinthe clasped in the playwright's hand, shimmering with a psychedelic allure.

Has he returned to normal? Jenna appraised Lumian, sensing that his condition wasn't as dire as before.

Suppressing a yawn with her hand, she pulled a barstool over and took a seat, resolute in her intent to observe for another thirty minutes.

Gabriel forced a bitter smile and responded, "I just finished a manuscript and came down for a drink."

"Are all authors the same? Do you prefer to toil at night and slumber during the day?" Lumian rapped on the bar counter, beckoning for a glass of absinthe.

Pausing for a moment, Gabriel replied, "Many authors are like that. Tranquil nights grant us greater inspiration.

"But that's not why I stay up late. I must visit various theaters during the day, persuading managers to peruse and accept my manuscript.

"Today, I went to the Théâtre de la Renaissance in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. Their manager, Nathan Lopp, is renowned as the most astute theater manager. He possesses the highest likelihood of recognizing the value of my script. Yet, he refused to see me. I failed to meet him both at his office and during my visit to his apartment."

Upon hearing words like "theater" and "manager," Jenna inwardly gasped, a vague sense of trepidation creeping over her.

The fact that many individuals around her worshiped an evil god had left a lasting scar on her psyche.

Furthermore, their abilities were repulsive and twisted, evoking deep-rooted revulsion within her.

"Do you happen to know where the theater manager lives?"

"Yes, I've visited him at his apartment before, along with other playwrights. He's still unmarried and often changes mistresses," Gabriel rambled on.

A grin crept across Lumian's face.

"I have a way to get that fellow to read your script, but I can't guarantee he will accept it."

"Really?" Gabriel was taken aback and perplexed.

There's actually a way? Jenna wondered, her mind filled with bewilderment.

Lumian swiftly finished his absinthe and rose to his feet.

"Let's go at once. Bring your script!"

"..." Gabriel had never encountered such a man of action.

It was already midnight!

With no remaining hope, he resolved to give it a try. Downing the last of his absinthe, he ascended to the second floor to retrieve the script for his three-act play.

Standing at the entrance of Auberge du Coq Doré, Jenna studied Lumian with a mix of puzzlement and curiosity. "Do you truly have a solution?"

Lumian scoffed dismissively. "You need not believe me."

"Heh!" Jenna expressed her disdain.

Uncertain if this was a consequence of his troubled state, she felt a twinge of curiosity and decided to follow Lumian to prevent him from engaging in any rash actions.

Before long, Gabriel returned to the ground floor.

He had changed into a clean and respectable formal suit, complete with a crimson bow tie.

“Address,” Lumian inquired calmly.

“Room 702, 15 Rue Defoe, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.” Gabriel gazed at the poorly lit Rue Anarchie, observing only a few inebriated individuals and wanderers.

He tentatively asked, “Shall we walk there?”

There were no public carriages available at this hour, and Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative was adjacent to the market district.

Lumian paid no attention to the query, instead strolling towards Avenue du Marché at a steady pace. He halted before a late-night-operating rental carriage, a four-wheeled two-seater, and addressed the driver, who sported the uniform of the Empire Carriage Company.

“To 15 Rue Defoe, Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.”

The carriage driver, donning a waxed hat and a blue gown adorned with yellow buttons, scrutinized Lumian and his two companions before stating, “Two verl d'or.”

In Trier, daytime travel in a rental carriage lasting less than an hour cost 1.25 verl d'or, with an additional 1.75 verl d'or per hour. After midnight until 6 a.m., short journeys were priced at 2 verl d'or, while longer trips incurred a charge of 2.5 verl d'or per hour.

Lumian remained silent, producing two silver coins worth 1 verl d'or each and tossing them to the carriage driver.

Showing no courtesy, he boarded the carriage and took a seat.

This left Gabriel in a predicament. Unsure whether he should act chivalrously and jostle with Ciel or allow the singer, Jenna, to make her own choice.

Eventually, realizing she hadn't been invited, Jenna grumbled and settled herself beside Lumian, striving to secure some personal space.

The rental carriage set off, embarking on its journey towards Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

During the ride, Lumian maintained an unsettling silence, leaving Gabriel hesitant to inquire about his solution. The atmosphere inside the carriage grew somewhat uncomfortable.

Having grown accustomed to Lumian's peculiar state that night, Jenna cleared her mind and focused on her own thoughts.

After an indeterminate period, the rental carriage came to a halt at 15 Rue Defoe.

Lumian wasted no time and headed straight for the apartment building. Upon entering the lobby, he was intercepted by a vigilant guard.

“Which floor and room are you residing in?” the dutiful guard inquired. “If you're not a resident here, you need...”

Before the guard could finish his sentence, a chilling object was pressed against his temple.

Lumian had swiftly produced a revolver from under his armpit and pressed the barrel firmly against the guard's forehead.

“W-What do you think you're doing?” the guard, who appeared to be almost fifty, stammered.

Gabriel stood frozen, his mind filled with doubt regarding Ciel's supposed solution.

Amused and eager to witness the unfolding events, Jenna observed Lumian silently guide the guard to a secluded corner of the lobby. Using the rope and various items he had with him, he proceeded to bind the guard's hands and feet, effectively rendering him immobile. A gag was placed over the guard's mouth to ensure his silence.

With the task completed, Lumian shut the apartment door behind him and secured the lock before ascending the staircase.

As if awakening from a dream, Gabriel hastened after him, his voice filled with anxiety.

“Is that really okay?”

“What do you think?” Lumian replied with a grin.

Gabriel faltered, lost for words. He hesitated, contemplating whether he should abandon his pursuit of having Nathan Lopp, the manager of Théâtre de la Renaissance, read his script.

If I were to express my doubts and return now, would Ciel become furious and resort to violence? After all, he is a mob leader... Gabriel gaped, incapable of uttering anything that might dissuade Lumian.

Soon, the trio reached the top floor and stopped outside Room 702.

Gabriel, poised to knock, witnessed Lumian deftly employ the short wire to open the vermilion wooden door.

“...” Gabriel couldn't make sense of Lumian's intentions in the slightest.

Observing this, Jenna swiftly removed her light-colored shawl and draped it over her face, exposing only her forehead and eyes.

She harbored suspicions that Ciel was about to cause trouble. To avoid being implicated by him, it was prudent to conceal her identity. At the very least, she couldn't allow anyone to remember her appearance.

Lumian stepped into the living room, awash with the glow of the crimson moonlight. Producing a bandage, he wrapped it around his face, leaving only his eyes and nostrils visible.

“...” Though Gabriel failed to comprehend why Jenna and Ciel were veiling their faces, he instinctively found a cloth and covered the lower portion of his own face.

Enveloped in a white bandage, Lumian surveyed the surroundings before proceeding towards the master bedroom. He turned the handle and gently pushed open the door.

The living room was bathed in the luminosity of the crimson moon, illuminating the figures reclining in the bed.

There lay a man and a woman. The man boasted disheveled black hair, appearing to be in his early forties. His countenance was gaunt, with a prominent nose bridge. The woman possessed curly blond hair, seemingly in her twenties. Her complexion was flawless, and her features were strikingly beautiful.

Beneath the velvet blanket, they appeared to be unclothed.

“He's the theater manager?” Lumian didn't restrain his voice at all.

Gabriel felt as though he were trapped in a surreal reverie.

“Yes, that's him.”

Lumian advanced swiftly towards the grand bed. The manager of Théâtre de la Renaissance, Nathan Lopp, stirred from his slumber upon hearing the commotion.

Before he could open his eyes, Lumian grasped his shoulder and hoisted him upright.

Nathan Lopp jolted awake, his eyes confronted with the sight of a head swathed in white bandages.

His heart seemed to skip a beat, rendering him speechless and devoid of protest.

In the next instant, a revolver was pressed against his temple.

Nathan Lopp sealed his lips shut and was propelled into the living room.

As he passed by Jenna, Lumian cast a sidelong glance towards the bed and whispered, “Keep an eye on that woman.”

Jenna found herself bewildered by the unfolding events, yet it did nothing to quell her exhilaration.

Without hesitation, she lowered herself into a crouch, drew her own revolver, and trained it upon the recently awakened blonde. With a touch of cold detachment, she issued a stern warning, “I don't want to hear a word.”

The blonde wrapped her arms tightly around the blanket, trembling on the bed.

Lumian settled Nathan Lopp into a recliner, securing his hands and feet to the sofa and floor using garments.

Perplexed, Gabriel came over. Suddenly, a thought struck him: Are we here to rob Nathan Lopp, or are we here to present him with my script?

Jenna escorted the blonde, clad in a nightgown, to the living room. Lumian, who had illuminated the crystal chandelier, took a few steps back. He retrieved his revolver and seated himself on the divan opposite the recliner.

Nathan Lopp appeared freshly awakened and uttered anxiously, “How much do you want? I'll give it to you, everything! There's a total of 1,100 verl d'or and a diamond necklace here. I'll surrender them all! Just promise not to harm me!”

Lumian, his face concealed by bandages, turned towards Gabriel and stated, “Read it.”

“Read what?” Gabriel responded, his mind blank.

Lumian let out a soft chuckle.

“Read your script. Monsieur Nathan Lopp is waiting.”

Wh... Gabriel stood dumbfounded.

Is this the solution to making Nathan Lopp read my script?

Is this how a rational person thinks?

Not only Gabriel pondered this, but Jenna couldn't help but mumble to herself.

Ciel's mind is truly unhinged!

Won't this result in Monsieur Playwright being taken to the police station?

Thank goodness I've concealed my face!

With a similar sense of relief, Gabriel approached Nathan Lopp apprehensively. He retrieved the script and began reading it aloud, as if compelled to do so.

Nathan Lopp listened in bewilderment, questioning whether he was trapped in a ludicrous dream.

Halfway through his slumber, a masked intruder invaded his abode, binding him to a chair merely to subject him to a script recital?

As he listened attentively, Nathan Lopp's professional instincts kicked in, drawing him further into the script.

After the main dialogue of the first scene concluded, Nathan Lopp interrupted Gabriel.

“Who wrote this?”

“Me,” Gabriel replied subconsciously.

Nathan Lopp's voice resonated deeply as he stated, “Bring it to my office tomorrow at 10 a.m. We'll sign the contract.”

“Alright, alright.” Gabriel's emotions swirled with surprise, happiness, and fear.

Will I find the police waiting for me at Théâtre de la Renaissance tomorrow?

Lumian chuckled, rising from his seat and making his way to the door with his revolver.

Jenna and Gabriel followed closely behind, allowing the blonde woman to free Nathan Lopp from his restraints.

As they descended the stairs, Jenna flashed a smile at Gabriel and inquired, “Monsieur Playwright, your script is exceptional. Your words are captivating. What is its title?”

“It's called 'Lightseeker,’” Gabriel responded instinctively, unable to comprehend why an underground singer held such interest in the script.

Jenna quickened her pace to catch up with Lumian. Lowering her voice, she asked, “Is this your solution? Aren't you concerned that the theater manager may also be a devotee of an evil god?”

In her current state of mind, all theaters seemed suspect.

Lumian removed the bandages, his expression unwavering, as he replied, “Then we would have fought.”

I knew it... Jenna silently muttered to herself.

After retrieving their belongings and ropes from the guard, the trio boarded a rental carriage and returned to Auberge du Coq Doré.

Once Gabriel expressed his gratitude and retreated to his room, a mix of worry and joy, Jenna observed Ciel as he freshened up and settled onto the bed. Finally, she breathed a sigh of relief.

She drew the curtains and carefully closed the wooden door before departing Auberge du Coq Doré.

In the nearly pitch-black darkness, Lumian's eyes remained closed, unmoving.

Chapter 222 Fliers

Clang! Clang! Clang!

At the stroke of six, Lumian sat upright and flung open the curtains, allowing a gentle light to stream into the room, breathing life into the once silent space. He rubbed his face, freshened up, and attended to his needs.

Once ready, he changed his clothes and departed from Auberge du Coq Doré. Making his way around Rue des Blouses Blanches, he entered the rented safe house.

With great anticipation, Lumian delved into Aurore's grimoires, hoping to uncover some hidden gems that had eluded him in his previous search.

Aurore's grimoires contained three distinct categories of knowledge.

Firstly, there were the common mystical understandings—the names of various pathways, the state of certain Sequences, the foundations of ritualistic magic, the significance of symbolic elements, and the pronunciation and meanings of several supernatural languages.

The second category focused on the practical application of mystical knowledge and personal abilities. It demanded deep contemplation, as it contained numerous recorded or purchased spells, as well as defenses against curses.

Lastly, there were fragments of peculiar and incomplete knowledge, along with intriguing anecdotes. Some were bestowed upon Aurore by the Hidden Sage, while others emerged from interactions within the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

These miscellaneous tidbits weren't organized into separate grimoires but appeared sporadically as Aurore acquired them.

For Lumian, the second category posed the greatest challenge. Warlock spells like Illumination, Weed Removal, Exorcism, Soul Summoning, Lightning, Wind Creation, and Force Field Hand proved to be perplexing. After all, he lacked the fundamental understanding of mysticism and the support of Beyonder powers required to cast spells.

On the other hand, Lumian had made significant progress in comprehending, learning, and mastering ritualistic magic since becoming an Alms Monk.

Lumian also noticed that his sister had omitted certain basic rules, such as the Law of Beyonder Characteristics Conservation, from her grimoires.

However, this was to be expected. Such laws were scarce and easily remembered. They were ingrained in the mind and required no additional recording.

After an extensive morning of reading, Lumian found no signs of suspicion. Instead, he accumulated a myriad of questions that demanded consultation with others.

He let out a slow exhale, carefully folded the pages containing his inquiries, and tucked them into his pocket before departing the safe house.

On his way to Avenue du Marché, Lumian's attention was caught by several voting booths. Uniformed police officers and heavily armed military police were working diligently to maintain order, allowing long queues of people to deposit their votes into wooden boxes.

Despite having acquired a new identification from Gardner Martin and assuming the persona of Ciel Dubois, a resident of the market district for nearly two years with the right to vote, Lumian chose not to register at all. He had no desire to partake in the parliamentary election.

After some time, a newsboy rushed by and tossed a stack of white papers into the air.

Lumian observed as many pedestrians eagerly collected the floating papers and began reading them with great seriousness. He bent down and retrieved a copy lying at his feet.

The white paper featured several lines of text in the Intis script, printed in a simple and easily comprehensible syntax.

“Hugues Artois is a traitor!

“In the war against the Loen Kingdom several years ago, he deserted his troops and fled. Countless fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons never returned!

“He is participating in the parliamentary election with clandestine support from the Loen Kingdom!”

He vividly remembered Hugo Artois's campaign posters emphasizing his military service. He had only retired from the army upon reaching the rank of major and ventured into politics, starting as an assistant secretary at the National Convention.

Could this be a desperate move from a candidate facing unsatisfactory early poll results? As Lumian pondered over the situation, a group of men, suspected to be mobsters, approached and forcibly confiscated the fliers from the pedestrians, resorting to physical violence and vulgar insults. Curiously, the nearby police officers seemed oblivious to the scene unfolding before them.

Lumian raised his gaze and recognized one of the men.

They were members of the Poison Spur Mob, the very individuals who had previously followed Margot and Wilson to Auberge du Coq Doré.

“You dare read something like that, you wretch?”

“You leper, hand me the thing in your hand!”

“Son of a bitch, do you want me to rough you up?”

The Poison Spur Mob members closed in on Lumian. Just as they were about to snatch the flier from his hand, their eyes fell upon his short blond hair with dark roots.

A mischievous grin crept across Lumian's face.

Ciel! The Poison Spur Mob members instinctively turned around, their intent to flee evident.

Lumian swiftly lifted his foot and delivered a forceful kick to one of the mobsters' rear, causing him to lose his balance and tumble to the ground.

“What's the matter? Can't recognize your pépé?” Lumian taunted, watching the disoriented Poison Spur Mob members scramble away in a disheveled state. He had no inclination to pursue them any further.

Lumian tossed aside the flier he held and strolled back to Salle de Bal Brise.

Immediately upon entering, Louis approached with Sarkota by his side.

“Boss, Charlie quit his job as a waiter last night and only asked for a week's worth of salary.”

“I'm aware,” Lumian responded calmly.

Louis recalled how the boss had taken Charlie away the previous night, returning without him. Shortly afterward, Charlie tendered his resignation and left. This sequence of events left Louis with a lingering suspicion that something secretive was at play, but he didn't dare inquire further.

Lumian cast a brief glance at Louis and casually inquired as he made his way towards the café on the second floor, “How old are you?”

“27,” Louis answered, puzzled as to why the boss seemed interested in this particular detail.

Without much hesitation, Lumian continued, “Are you married? Do you have any children?”

“Not yet,” Louis replied with an awkward smile. “I plan to get married when I'm more mature.”

Though he had managed to escape the life of a low-ranking mobster and now served as the leader's bodyguard, eliminating the constant fear of being beaten to death on the streets, Louis recognized the inherent dangers that still lurked.

He didn't wish to benefit another man shortly after entering married life and having a child.

Lumian nodded.

“It's important to consider your future. The other Louis I know already has several children.”

Louis brushed off the remark, perceiving it as an attempt by the boss to force a conversation when there was little else to discuss, as if trying to prove a point.

Franca skipped her lunch with Gardner Martin and returned to 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches before noon.

Upon reaching the house, she noticed that the door to the guest bedroom was tightly shut. Perplexed, she turned the handle and pushed it open.

Inside, Jenna lay fast asleep in her pajamas, huddled under a blanket.

Stirred by the door's movement, she rubbed her eyes and slowly sat up, her gaze fixed on Franca.

“Still snoozing?” Franca asked, her smile in place.

Just because you don't have acting lessons at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, you're letting yourself go like this?

Jenna combed through her tawny locks and grumbled, “It's all Ciel's fault; things went on late into the night.”

“...” Franca's smile froze.

Jenna continued, “I don't know what happened to him last night, but his mood and condition were off. I was worried something might happen, so I followed him. Only after he entered Auberge du Coq Doré and got into bed did I return to get some rest.”

Franca breathed a sigh of relief and inquired with concern, “Tell me everything.”

Jenna recounted the events starting from her performance at Salle de Bal Brise, seeing Lumian sitting by the road in the rain, all the way until he employed an unimaginable “method” to secure Gabriel's script deal. Finally, she said,

“Dammit, it was almost three o'clock before he finally agreed to go back to his room and sleep. I was beyond exhausted!”

Franca listened attentively and expressed her worry, “It's rare to see him in such a state...”

Franca paused, a realization dawning on her.

Lumian was still undergoing regular treatment from a psychiatrist, and perhaps this state she witnessed was his truest form.

“He must have experienced some sort of trauma last night. I'll ask him about it later.” After Franca referred to him as a relative, she no longer concealed her close relationship with Lumian in front of Jenna.

Jenna nodded.

“Choose your words carefully. Don't agitate him.”

On the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise, in Lumian's office, he noticed Franca, who had turned invisible.

“I heard from Jenna that something happened to you last night,” Franca, dressed in a white blouse and black pants, asked casually. “Did you meet Madame Pualis?”

During her lunch with Jenna, she had managed to piece together what had triggered Lumian's mental distress.

Lumian seemed to lose all his strength upon hearing Franca's question and slumped into the swiveling armchair.

After a pause of more than ten seconds, he exhaled and said, "That's right. I can't accept the truth I learned, but I have no choice."

Sensing his reluctance to share further, Franca didn't press the matter. She nodded slightly and offered, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Lumian straightened up and spoke bluntly, "Two things. First, I have numerous questions about mysticism. Second, the issue with the Poison Spur Mob.

"As I mentioned before, once the election is over, Hugues Artois will become a member of parliament. 'Black Scorpion' Roger and his cohorts will gain a new boon. In due time, we'll all be in danger. Should we launch a raid on 126 Avenue du Marché at night to eliminate any hidden threats before the election results are announced?"

Franca pondered for a moment and replied, "Based on your description, the Heretic Spellmaster holds a significant advantage on their home turf. Even if the two of us use our trump cards, our chances of successfully eliminating 'Black Scorpion' Roger and the others are uncertain, assuming there are no other surprises awaiting us.

"But if we don't act now, they will become even more formidable after receiving their new boons..."

She hesitated, unsure of the best course of action.

At 126 Avenue du Marché, within the three-story building with a garden.

"Black Scorpion" Roger gazed at his subordinate who had infiltrated the market district's parliamentary election commission and asked eagerly, "What's the situation?"

The subordinate replied with excitement, "Monsieur Hugues Artois is leading by a wide margin!"

A smile crept across "Black Scorpion" Roger's face. Once the subordinate left, he turned to "Baldy" Harman and "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina, saying,

"The election results will be announced tomorrow afternoon. Lady Moon will personally oversee the ritual and grant us a boon during the night.

"Afterward, we won't hold back anymore. That wretched Ciel must meet his demise!"

Chapter 223 Choice

On a southeastern hill overlooking Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, there stood an active quarry.

Having departed from Salle de Bal Brise, Lumian embarked on a quest to find a suitable candidate, which led him to this very place.

The night was deep, and the lamplighters diligently illuminated the gas lamps strewn across the streets. In stark contrast, the quarry, having concluded its daily operations, was enveloped in darkness, devoid of any artificial illumination.

Scattered across the quarry floor were several gypsum furnaces, surrounded by numerous tramps.

Lumian honed his focus, meticulously assessing each individual's circumstances.

At long last, he discovered a target that fit his requirements.

Resting against one of the gypsum furnaces was a male tramp. His shirt, pants, and jacket were tattered, their original hue obscured by the dark brown soil. Sunken cheeks and emaciated limbs almost distorted his figure. His unkempt hair and beard intertwined in a mess of strands.

His eyes were half-shut, and his shallow breaths suggested he might perish at any moment.

According to Lumian's observations, the tramp was indeed approaching the end of his waning life. He had but two or three days left.

Approaching the figure, Lumian squatted down and retrieved the gas canister he had obtained from the unsavory Hedsey, whom Franca had aptly named *Mysticism Smelling Salts*. Unscrewing the lid, he positioned it near the tramp's nostrils.

He and Franca had already distributed Rentas's "remains." The sedatives and coins totaling 212 verl d'or belonged to Lumian, while the remainder was Franca's share.

Achoo!

The tramp sneezed twice, and his eyes fluttered open.

Weakly gazing at Lumian, donned in a blue laborer's uniform and a dark cap, he inquired, puzzled, "W-who are you? W-what are you trying to do?"

.....

Lumian responded calmly, "I'm just a passing worker. I sensed that your demise was imminent, so I approached to verify."

The tramp found no fault in Lumian's explanation. In the Intis Republic, upon discovering a lifeless body, whether reporting to the governmental authorities or the two Churches, individuals would receive compensation for promptly ensuring purification or cremation.

Though the sum was meager, a mere 1 verl d'or, even the lower-class citizens found it a pleasant surprise, no matter how modest the additional benefits.

The tramp's beard trembled as he managed a smile.

"You guessed right. I also feel as if my time is drawing near. Drop by more frequently over the next two days, so your money doesn't get snatched away."

Perhaps it was the effect of the *Mysticism Smelling Salts*, or perhaps the topic of death momentarily stirred the tramp's spirits, for his words ceased to falter, and his reasoning became clearer.

"Have you got any family left?" Lumian inquired casually, squatting before the tramp as he stowed away the *Mysticism Smelling Salts*.

The tramp fell silent for a few moments, then slowly shook his head.

“No, not any more.

“Has your family passed on?” Lumian probed further.

The tramp's beard swayed with the motion of his muscles, and his voice carried an unmistakable tinge of anguish.

“They're gone. All gone. My parents didn't make it past 45. My brother fell in the war a few years back. My sisters succumbed to illness, and her child became a child laborer. By the age of ten, he was already hunchbacked and died from sheer exhaustion in a textile mill...”

The tramp seemed to stray from Lumian's question, more akin to a recollection before his impending demise. He rambled on, “I used to toil in the quarry, praised for my strength. Then, a Monsieur saw my diligence, believed I could endure hardship. He taught me to place detonators and loosen rocks. My pay rose, and life took a turn for the better. I had a wife, tough as nails just like me, and three precious children, but only one survived. My little angel, my daughter.

“When the food prices sparked protests, my body suddenly gave way, and I fell grievously ill.

“My wife and daughter spent everything, amassed debts. Eventually, they nursed me back to health, but I lost my job in the process. We were hounded by loan sharks day in and day out. Those men took away my little angel. My wife and I searched desperately. A few weeks later, we found her lifeless body. She couldn't endure their torment and chose to end it all.

“My wife wanted to turn to the police, but they beat her to death and dumped her somewhere. I was battered and left unconscious, but I survived. I've made it till today...”

Lumian listened in silence, his voice deep when he finally spoke, “Any wishes?”

The tramp laughed out loud.

“Wishes? My greatest wish is to pass away shortly after catching that illness.”

Lumian fell silent for a moment before continuing, “No thirst for revenge?”

The tramp's eyes glazed over as he replied, “Those loan sharks were killed by other mobs. New loan sharks have taken their place.”

He recollected Lumian's initial question and spoke in a voice that seemed to drift from another realm, “When my time comes, I think—I think I'd like to have another meatloaf. I remember those years, every weekend, my wife would buy the meat herself, add flax seeds and vinegar, turn it into a sauce, and stuff it between flatbread. My daughter adored it, and I loved it too...”

Lumian nodded, rising to his feet and making his way down the hill, toward the streets below.

After approximately 45 minutes, he returned to the gypsum furnace, carrying a Rouen meatloaf that filled the air with its enticing aroma.

The tramp seemed on the verge of fainting once more. Lumian employed the Mysticism Smelling Salts once again to rouse him from his stupor.

The tramp sneezed a few times, his gaze fixed blankly on the Rouen meatloaf. He quickly took bites, his beard becoming coated with a thin layer of oil.

Having consumed half of it, he gasped for breath and inquired with a smile, "What's your game, lad?"

"I'll be stabbing you later. It might just bring about your demise tonight," Lumian stated plainly.

The tramp chuckled weakly and queried, "Aren't you afraid of the police? I fear not death. I should've perished long ago. Did you know that every winter, I sleep inside this gypsum furnace? Even after a day's work, it retains a soothing warmth that lasts until nearly daybreak. However, the lingering fumes within are poisonous and could claim me in my sweet slumber. So far, it hasn't happened to me."

Lumian chuckled.

"I reckon the police aren't too bothered about how a tramp meets his end, so long as it's not a blatant murder."

Without further ado, the tramp devoured the remaining Rouen meatloaf and let out a belch.

After a pause of over ten seconds, he adjusted his position and spoke, "You may proceed."

Lumian drew his blade, Fallen Mercury, adorned with sinister patterns, and thrust it into the tramp's hand.

Blood trickled forth, staining the tip of the blade crimson.

Simultaneously, Lumian once again beheld the illusory river of mercury.

His purpose in seeking a near-death tramp was to exchange for a more practical fate!

This was not to say that encountering the fate of the Montsouris ghost wasn't formidable. Quite the contrary, it could lead to certain death or even the demise of an entire family for many humans. Furthermore, it clung tenaciously. However, the issue lay in the time it took to take effect. The exchange of fates could often be completed within minutes, whereas the Montsouris ghost's assault on its target occurred at random intervals. It might strike in ten to twenty minutes, or it might wait for three to four months.

In other words, the fate of "encountering the Montsouris ghost" was ill-suited for a surprise attack or a battle.

Furthermore, having learned from the experience and lessons of Margot's death, Lumian's target, "Black Scorpion" Roger, would undoubtedly be wary of such matters. If stabbed by Fallen Mercury and not instantly dispatched, there was a high likelihood that he would seek aid from Madame Moon. Lumian was uncertain if the lady possessing true godhood could fend off the Montsouris ghost. If she could, his operation would be an utter failure.

Considering these factors, he intended to preemptively alter the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost and choose a destiny more conducive to surprise attacks and assassinations. He desired “Black Scorpion” Roger to perish on the spot, without a chance to seek any assistance.

As these thoughts raced through Lumian's mind, a series of images “appeared” before him.

He saw the tramp, asleep inside the gypsum furnace, the tramp who had been viciously beaten and left unconscious, the tramp who had recently fainted, the tramp who had crumbled in front of his daughter's lifeless body, the tramp who had shared homemade meatloaf with his wife and daughter, the tramp who meticulously prepared and set up explosives...

Lumian knew he couldn't choose the tramp's destined fate of perishing in two or three days. It was an overwhelming burden, beyond what Fallen Mercury could bear. Even the Luck Transference Spell couldn't transfer such a dire fate.

The only solution Lumian could think of was to employ the Substitution Spell and find a death row inmate to take the tramp's place. He would assume the inmate's identity for a period of time, gaining the acceptance of those around him. Then, he would perform the ritual and swap the tramp's impending death with that of the inmate. However, this process would take two to three weeks, if not longer, to prepare. Time was not on his side.

Drawing on his vast experience, Lumian made a quick decision and chose the fate of the tramp who had recently collapsed due to his failing body.

It departed from the mercury river and condensed into a droplet that seeped into the blade of Fallen Mercury. Simultaneously, the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost shifted entirely to the tramp.

Lumian retracted the wicked, pewter-black dagger. It remained clean and free from bloodstains, and the wound on the tramp's hand was shallow, as though it would soon leave a scar.

“That's it?” the tramp asked in puzzlement.

He had been prepared to meet his end then and there.

“Yes.” Lumian stood up and departed from the hill.

Late that night, inside the gypsum furnace, the tramp convulsed suddenly and succumbed to suffocation.

Across from 126 Avenue du Marché.

Returning here, Lumian nestled in a shadowy corner, shielded from the glow of the gas street lamps. His eyes fixated on the target building.

Beside him, Franca emerged from the darkness, dressed in a black robe and hood.

“How did it go?” Lumian asked, entirely unsurprised.

Chapter 224 Disguise

Franca cast her gaze upon 126 Avenue du Marché and remarked, “Whether it's ‘Black Scorpion’ Roger, ‘Baldy’ Harman, or ‘Short-legged Candlestick’ Castina, none of them have shown themselves.”

“Extremely cautious,” Lumian objectively commented.

Franca let out a scoff.

“If I were in their shoes, I'd be cautious too. If I manage to make it through tonight, I can turn the tables and emerge victorious. How foolish would it be for me to reveal myself? Even if someone were to abduct Gardner and maim him at the doorstep, I wouldn't budge.”

This example isn't convincing... Lumian asked, “What if it's Jenna who's bound instead of Gardner?”

“...” Franca fell silent.

Noticing the Provoker potion taking effect, Lumian, nearing the completion of his digestion, chose not to press further. Instead, he inquired, “What else have you observed?”

Neither Lumian nor Franca had devised a specific plan for the assault on “Black Scorpion” Roger and the others. They possessed only a handful of vague ideas and were currently engaged in preliminary investigations and preparations.

Franca pondered for a few seconds before revealing, “A member of the Poison Spur Mob frequents the election commission and this vicinity. It's as if he's providing ‘Black Scorpion’ Roger with real-time updates on the polls.”

Pausing briefly, a mischievous smile curled the corners of her mouth.

“We can exploit this!”

Simultaneously, Lumian mirrored her grin.

“Isn't it like stumbling upon a soft pillow just when you're sleepy? Indeed, delving into politics is a treacherous affair.”

Franca turned her head, amusement twinkling in her eyes as she glanced at Lumian.

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“Your sister must have imparted many hometown sayings to you. How do you plan on operating this thing?”

Lumian fell silent for a moment before speaking again.

“If I were an Actor, the problem would be simple. Nonetheless, I still possess those glasses.”

Franca nodded, satisfied with his response.

“This operation requires both a surprise attack and an assassination. The importance of the assassination must outweigh that of the surprise attack to minimize a Heretic Spellmaster's advantage on their home turf.”

After some deliberation, the two of them moved away from 126 Avenue du Marché, positioning themselves in a shadowy spot near the district's parliamentary election commission.

The day's voting had concluded, and the election commission staff toiled diligently, counting the votes and providing real-time updates. Countless reporters from various newspapers gathered there, eager to acquire firsthand data.

If all went according to plan, Hugues Artois would secure more than half of the registered votes tonight, enabling him to declare his election victory.

As time ticked by, the night grew darker. Suddenly, Franca nudged Lumian and pointed towards a figure exiting the election commission.

The person appeared to be almost thirty, boasting black hair, brown eyes, and a narrow face. He sported a blue-and-white striped shirt, a light brown jacket, and a thick gold necklace.

Lumian offered a subtle nod and departed from his hiding place, adopting an air of urgency as he approached the man.

He pulled his dark cap down low, obscuring his distinct blond-and-black hair.

Upon noticing someone drawing nearer, the Poison Spur Mob member cautiously altered his path.

At that moment, Lumian took a diagonal stride forward, positioning himself in front of the individual. He smiled and greeted, "Long time no see. How have you been faring within the Poison Spur Mob?"

The man was caught off guard. Utilizing the illumination from the gas street lamps, he scrutinized Lumian's face.

Seizing the opportunity, Lumian lunged forward, gripping the other person's neck and pulling them into an embrace.

Simultaneously, Lumian pushed the metal canister closer to the target's nose with his left hand. He had already unscrewed the lid, but he kept his finger pressed against the opening, controlling the gas release.

The Poison Spur Mob member struggled desperately, but Lumian's palm covered his mouth and nose, silencing any outcry. His punches and kicks were easily deflected—either his neck was constricted or his back was pinned down by an elbow. His head remained ensconced in the other person's grasp, nestled against their chest. In his anxious state, it was difficult for him to strike his foe's vulnerable points, and Lumian endured the onslaught.

After a few seconds, the man's resistance began to wane. Passersby cast fleeting glances at him before walking away without detecting anything amiss.

Within moments, the man in Lumian's arms lost consciousness.

Supporting his "intoxicated" companion, Lumian sealed the bottle once more with his finger.

They arrived at a deserted alley barricaded from public access, where Lumian abandoned his target and screwed the metal canister shut.

“You're very reckless.” Franca emerged from the shadows beside him. “Only in Trier can you get away with this. Anywhere else, someone would have raised a loud alarm.”

“I reserve these actions solely for Trier,” Lumian replied, crouching down to strip the Poison Spur Mob member of his attire and necklace. He bound his hands and feet with a rope he had brought along.

Having completed the task, Lumian administered some truth serum to his captive before reviving him with the Mysticism Smelling Salts.

Three consecutive sneezes followed. The Poison Spur Mob member opened his eyes and exclaimed in horror, “Who are you? What do you want?”

Lumian removed his cap and crouched in front of the target, wearing a smile. He asked, “Can't you recognize me?”

Under the crimson moonlight, the Poison Spur Mob member glimpsed the golden-black hair and a vaguely familiar face.

His teeth chattered.

“C-Ciel!”

“I have something to ask you. If you refuse to answer or choose to deceive me, you know the consequences,” Lumian said with a smile.

His cold, merciless, and unhinged reputation preceded him within the Poison Spur Mob. The man was so terrified that his heart seemed ready to leap out of his throat.

“I'll talk, I'll talk!”

Unfazed, Lumian inquired, “Where were you planning to go just now?”

“To the Boss's place to report the election's polling situation. Monsieur Hugues Artois has secured nearly half the votes. He's just a little shy...” Not only did the man answer Lumian's question, but he also provided additional information.

Lumian nodded contentedly and proceeded to inquire about the specific details the Poison Spur Mob member had previously relayed to “Black Scorpion” Roger.

This encompassed his demeanor towards the staff, his manner of addressing “Black Scorpion” Roger, his positioning, and his tone.

Having meticulously memorized the details, Lumian employed the sedative once more to render the Poison Spur Mob member unconscious.

Without delay, he changed into the other person's attire, retrieved his Mystery Prying Glasses, and perched them upon his nose.

This time, underground, he beheld rats, insects, and serpents, but a charred building and a blurred face behind a glass window also materialized.

The face possessed unusually vacant eyes.

Lumian's mind momentarily spun into disarray. Frowning, he removed the Mystery Prying Glasses and retrieved a collection of cosmetics.

Assisted by the crimson moonlight and the small torch held by Franca, he meticulously applied various substances to his face, utilizing the makeup mirror his companion carried.

Around ten minutes later, his countenance grew gaunter and began to assume the likeness of the Poison Spur Mob member.

His skill in makeup fell short of fully replicating the other person's appearance, but the inherent effect of the Mystery Prying Glasses would convince anyone who glimpsed his face that he was the individual named Alsai.

Smack!

Lumian snapped the makeup mirror shut, daring not to gaze upon his reflection once more.

As Franca stowed away her belongings, she had Lumian turn his back to her.

She feared that she, too, might mistake her companion for a member of the Poison Spur Mob, thereby hindering their subsequent collaboration.

Franca examined Lumian's hair color and retrieved the disguise props she had acquired from Rentas.

“Hair and eye color are the most noticeable flaws. First, use this black hair dye, then wear these brown contact lenses.

“Damn it, anything is possible in the realm of mysticism. Who would have thought that in this day and age, Actors could create the illusion of cosmetic contacts? Although the materials are different and they don't improve vision, they can indeed alter the color of one's irises. Otherwise, Rentas wouldn't have been able to pass as Ive or you. It defies scientific explanation, but it's utterly mystical!”

Lumian paid no mind to Franca's musings and took the mysticism hair dye, which could be washed away with a special lotion. Under her guidance, he transformed his golden and black hair into a solid black hue.

Once he donned the brown contact lenses, Franca seized the opportunity to discuss the specifics of their forthcoming assault.

The two of them swiftly outlined a rough plan, but they refrained from delving into every detail. Firstly, time was limited, and secondly, they had to anticipate numerous unforeseen circumstances at the scene. It was impossible to account for every possibility, so they could only adapt and make decisions based on the main concept.

Franca produced a coin pouch.

It was a fist-sized bag made of grayish-white cloth, filled with gold, silver, and copper coins.

Franca rummaged in her bag and retrieved an iron-colored ring with a thick band and slender spikes on its surface.

“This is one of my mystical items, the Ring of Punishment,” she explained to Lumian. “It serves a single purpose. It can pierce a target's Spirit Body within a five-meter range, causing excruciating pain and rendering them temporarily unconscious. For Low- and Mid-Sequence Beyonders, there are very few Beyonder powers capable of bypassing defense and directly attacking a Spirit Body. This is one of them.”

Franca paused momentarily before continuing, “Wearing it for an extended period will make you irritable, bloodthirsty, cruel, and impulsive. If you use it more than three times in an hour, it will cause your personality to undergo mutation. If you remove it, you will suffer indiscriminate Psychic Piercing damage once you enter a five-meter radius. To seal it, you need to place it amidst a pile of valuable metal coins.”

Currently, Franca wore the ring, ensuring neither she nor Lumian fell victim to its effects.

She handed the Ring of Punishment to Lumian.

As soon as Lumian slipped the ring onto his right middle finger, he experienced overwhelming frustration.

Collecting himself, he donned black gloves, left the alley, and jogged towards 126 Avenue du Marché.

Chapter 225 Exposed

On 126 Avenue du Marché in Lumian, concealed as Alsai, a member of the Poison Spur Mob, pressed the doorbell of the three-story building with a garden out back.

Amidst the pleasant chimes, the valet, who had previously ushered Louis Lund inside, swung open the wooden door.

Seeing Alsai's face beaming with joy, he returned the smile.

“Have the voting results for today been announced?”

“You bet!” Lumian concealed his voice with feigned delight. “Monsieur Hugues Artois will be the new member of parliament by noon tomorrow!”

The valet had long been a believer in the Great Mother, and he had been promised a reward of becoming a Villain after the election. Hearing this news delighted him, and he led Lumian straight to the living room.

In the living room, “Black Scorpion” Roger, now wearing aqublue silk pajamas, lounged on a divan. He addressed “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina, nestled beside him while he playfully squeezed her buttocks, and “Baldy” Harman, who paced around the room.

“Hold on tight. It all comes to an end tomorrow night.

“No matter what happens in the next 24 hours, we can't leave this place!”

Is that so? Are you willing to stay here even if there's a fire, explosion, or earthquake? Lumian criticized silently. He shook off the valet and swiftly approached.

“Boss, I have good news!”

“Black Scorpion” Roger's excitement was palpable. He forgot to scrutinize his subordinates' movements, voices, and appearance. His eyes sparkled as he inquired, “Has Monsieur Hugues Artois won the election?”

“Baldy” Harman and “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina turned their gaze toward Lumian as well.

At that moment, Lumian had closed the gap between him and “Black Scorpion” Roger, standing just three meters away from the divan and the glass coffee table before it.

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He exclaimed with excitement, “He's only 2,000 votes away from securing a majority!”

“Black Scorpion” Roger felt a tinge of disappointment, but his happiness prevailed.

He nodded and proclaimed, “Very good...”

Before he could even complete his sentence, Lumian's hand caught his attention.

He was wearing a pair of black gloves.

Alsai didn't have such a habit!

At that moment, two blinding beams shot out from Lumian's eyes—like silent bullets and swift lightning bolts.

With a snap, “Black Scorpion” Roger felt the imaginary sound of his Spirit Body shattering, sending waves of excruciating pain through him. He cried out tragically, clutching his head in agony.

In his state of distress, he completely forgot to activate the protective enchantment that usually shrouded the master bedroom and living room.

The sudden twist of events, their origin unknown, left “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina and “Baldy” Harman bewildered, struggling to comprehend the situation. Their responses were purely instinctive.

One of them stood tall, assuming a defensive stance against the suspicious Alsai, while the other sprinted towards their boss, shielding his flank.

Lumian seized this golden opportunity. Drawing his weapon, Fallen Mercury, he lunged at “Black Scorpion” Roger, who huddled on the couch.

Witnessing the attack, “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina intercepted with her right elbow, disregarding the harm that would befall her. Her intention was to aid “Black Scorpion” Roger in fending off the strike.

In her other hand, she grabbed the nearby axe, attempting to swing it at Alsai.

Suddenly, a figure dressed in black robes, their face concealed beneath a hood, materialized behind her.

Franca!

Franca had skillfully employed Invisibility to trail Lumian all the way to this location. Her primary target was “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina, the one providing protection to “Black Scorpion” Roger.

She refrained from directly assassinating “Black Scorpion” Roger, fearing that a fatal blow jeopardizing his life would activate the “magic circle” with its substitution effect.

The hidden blade, wreathed in black flames, darted forth alongside Franca's full-force strike. It pierced through Castina's back, finding its mark in her heart.

Castina's brown eyes widened, her face contorted with disbelief, pain, and despair.

Despite the injury, she continued to block for “Black Scorpion” Roger, but her strength had already abandoned her.

Lumian's arm seemed to possess no bones. With fluid motion, he flicked his joints and swung his forearm, evading Castina's feeble attempt to obstruct him. The pewter-black dirk soared, aiming straight for the leader of the Poison Spur Mob.

Fallen Mercury's tip pierced through the aqublue pajamas, puncturing the skin over “Black Scorpion” Roger's ribs.

Crimson blood rapidly welled up, and amidst the pain of the Psychic Piercing somewhat subsiding, “Black Scorpion” Roger snapped back to reality.

He emitted an unnaturally enraged shriek, and blurry faces, some bluish-white, materialized on the living room's floor, ceiling, and walls. Most were ordinary people, a handful being children, their visages twisted with agony.

As the Undying Lands materialized, “Black Scorpion” Roger, nearly impaled by Fallen Mercury, vanished from Lumian's sight, leaving behind the pewter-black dirk stained with blood.

Crash! “Baldy” Harman toppled the coffee table and lunged towards Lumian, who had just collapsed onto the sofa.

Lumian hastily raised his hand, but his body wavered, and he slumped to the ground.

In midair, his eyes caught a glimpse of “Baldy” Harman's form, followed by lighting up with two beams of light resembling lightning.

Harman, on the verge of launching a close combat assault, experienced an anguish that penetrated the depths of his soul, forcing an involuntary scream to escape his lips.

His body froze, tilting backward. Franca, fresh from dispatching “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina, brandished a classic brass revolver in her right hand.

She aimed it at Harman's bald head and swiftly pulled the trigger.

With a resounding bang, an obsidian bullet pierced Harman's gleaming scalp, causing it to explode like a watermelon. A spray of red and white erupted in all directions.

“Black Scorpion” Roger, having just manifested from the visage of an undead on the adjacent wall, witnessed the scene and emitted an unusually resentful and outraged howl.

Alongside this outcry, his eyes darkened, as though a fervent life burned within.

The blood that drenched the living room and the two lifeless bodies churned, surging towards “Baldy” Harman and “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina as if infused with a life force. The two victims adorned a crimson shroud, rising unsteadily to their feet.

The blood upon Fallen Mercury ignited, casting forth a radiant glow akin to the warmth of spring's sun.

“Black Scorpion” Roger vividly recalled Margot's demise, prompting his initial response to rid the evil dirk of the blood it bore and retaliate against the assailant, averting an inexplicable demise in battle.

His second response was to swiftly conclude the conflict and seek aid from Lady Moon. Even the Rebirth ritual proved incapable of absolving the influence of Ciel's wicked dirk. The efficacy of solely burning the blood remained uncertain.

Indeed, he had recognized the assailant as that wretched lunatic, Ciel, through the pewter-black malevolent blade.

Cursed Ciel!

The radiant flames upon Fallen Mercury blazed along the blade, reaching towards Lumian's fingertips. Without hesitation, Lumian cast aside the malevolent pewter-black dirk, letting it fall upon the ground amidst the contorted visages.

At this point, Fallen Mercury was no longer required.

The pewter-black dirk, which facilitated the exchange of destinies, merely utilized blood as a conduit; it did not depend on it. Once the fate officially entered the exchange process, the presence of blood would no longer influence subsequent developments.

As Lumian retrieved Fallen Mercury, the exchange of fates commenced.

He made no deliberate choices, allowing Fallen Mercury to exercise its own discretion.

Lumian braced his left hand against the pallid, indistinct faces strewn upon the ground. With the resilience bestowed by the Alms Monk, he rebounded onto the divan amidst the bone-chilling cold and rigidity.

No longer did the horrifying countenances of the undead pervade this space—only “Baldy” Harman and “Short-legged Candlestick” Castina, their original appearances concealed beneath the flowing cascade of blood.

Simultaneously, the two lifeless bodies extended their arms and lunged at Lumian, seeking to ensnare him in their clutches.

Meanwhile, Franca leapt nimbly, alighting upon a chair with an air of weightlessness.

Unbeknownst to all, a thick frost had descended from the pallid-white or bluish-white ground, solidifying into a translucent sheen of ice.

This restrained the undead countenances, constraining their movements.

Almost concurrently, Franca's left hand, pressed against the hidden blade, tightened its grip, causing black flames to erupt within "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina's form, consuming her from within.

The lingering spirit of the blood-colored corpse emitted an ethereal crackling sound as its mutated body melted akin to a dripping candle, splashing upon the ground.

"Black Scorpion" Roger, relying upon the characteristic of the Undying Lands to shift locations, emitted yet another shrill cry.

A layer of black flames enkindled upon Franca's person.

In contrast to her own black flames, the black flames conjured by the Heretic Spellmaster exuded an overt malevolence, as if they consumed the life force and vitality of all who stood witness.

With a resounding crack, Franca's figure shattered, leaving behind naught but irregular shards of mirror.

Upon the icy veneer upon the ground, the Witch's form swiftly coalesced and leaped forth.

She had taken the initiative to create frost and freeze the ground not for restricting the movements of "Black Scorpion" Roger. Firstly, she sought to diminish the influence of the deceased spirits, and secondly, she aimed to gather ample materials for the Mirror Substitution.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Devoid of the pincer attack from "Short-legged Candlestick" Castina, Lumian deftly parried head-on, successfully evading the bloodied Harman. Springing onto the overturned coffee table, he withdrew his revolver and unleashed a volley of shots towards "Black Scorpion" Roger upon the wall. Concurrently, he produced the drawing depicting the peculiar sun.

He held no concern that his assault upon the target would disrupt the exchange of fates. For he was neither the wielder of Fallen Mercury, nor did he grasp its hilt.

The yellow bullets struck the wall with force, yet "Black Scorpion" Roger had already diminished into a wan, distorted, transparent countenance, vanishing from Lumian and Franca's sight.

Chapter 226 Sculpture

Lumian's left hand trembled, revealing the sun pattern that emitted a colorful glow.

The living room, once chilly, suddenly warmed up, but the frost on the ground remained stubbornly frozen. Only the pale, distorted faces turned away, unable to bear witness to what was about to unfold.

Harman, decapitated and drenched in blood, charged at Lumian, heedless of the revolver pointed his way, driven by a sinister desire to "embrace" his intended victim by force.

The drawing of the sun caused his body to tremble, and blood dripped from him onto the ground.

Instinctively, Lumian knew he couldn't engage in a direct confrontation with this "corpse." He used his light brown jacket to shield himself, pushing back against Harman's relentless assault.

The jacket quickly turned blood-red, showing signs of wear.

At that moment, “Black Scorpion” Roger had been absent for a couple of seconds, and Franca finally found an opportunity to act.

A dense black flame materialized in her palm, which she hurled at the zombified Harman.

The black flames struck the blood-stained corpse with the force of a cannonball, causing it to burst into silent flames that ignited the hidden spirituality within the blood and remains.

Harman began to melt, much like Castina, resembling a candle tossed in a blazing fire.

Just then, “Black Scorpion” Roger emerged from a corner, his face pale, cradling a sculpture of equal height in his arms.

The sculpture portrayed a woman with gentle features, her long dress intricately detailed and lifelike.

After exerting great effort to place the sculpture on the ground, Roger melded with the writhing, distorted faces around him, evading Lumian's shots and Franca's black flames with impeccable timing.

In the next instant, he reappeared beneath the ceiling chandelier, cursing rapidly.

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“You're dead meat!”

“I'll turn you into fertilizer!”

“Son of a bitch, daring to intrude upon my Undying Lands!”

“I'll take every last one of your lives!”

“I want you to have 20 children!”

“Black Scorpion” Roger constantly changed positions as he spat out these words. He swiftly moved and leaped, skillfully dodging Lumian's unfolded drawing and Franca's array of witchcraft spells, primarily comprised of black flames and frost.

Each word, seemingly stemming from Intisian, pierced Lumian and Franca's minds like an arrow. They felt dizzy and their blood resonated with the onslaught.

In the corner, the female sculpture activated, its surface blazing with brilliant flames.

Lumian's head throbbed as if struck by an ethereal hammer. Bright red blood streamed uncontrollably from his nostrils.

Franca herself endured similar injuries. She suspected that “Black Scorpion” Roger was employing a curse-like incantation. Moreover, the female sculpture's augmentation had greatly fortified his physical and spiritual presence. Franca couldn't endure more than a few uttered words.

As “Black Scorpion” Roger had left the sculpture unprotected, Franca believed that a direct attack might result in even more dreadful consequences, likely taking the form of a curse.

Suppressing her boiling blood, dizziness, and bodily pain, she raised her brass revolver and fired at “Black Scorpion” Roger, seizing the chance to leap towards the sculpture.

The iron-black bullet shattered a contorted face, leaving marks on the wall, but it failed to harm Roger.

Once Franca landed, she swiftly circled around the sculpture. She didn't squeeze the trigger of her brass revolver again, nor did she thrust with her blade. While evading the slender figures summoned by "Black Scorpion" Roger, she encased the sculpture in layers of frost.

Meanwhile, Lumian, who had been the focal point of Roger's attention, found himself in imminent peril.

A piercing cry resounded as illusory black flames kindled upon Lumian's body.

It drained his life force with alarming speed, causing his physical strength to wane.

Without hesitation, Lumian discarded the peculiar sun drawing and lunged towards the sofa, reaching into his pocket with his left hand.

Beside the overturned coffee table, "Black Scorpion" Roger emerged from the icy seal, brandishing a pitch-black, malevolent scythe that stood half the height of a man. He cleaved through the furniture before him, rending it in two.

Lumian alighted on the sofa, his left hand withdrawing from his pocket, clutching a slender and slightly pale finger.

In the face of Roger's scythe, Lumian, already weakened, barely managed to evade the strike by shifting his body.

Simultaneously, he tossed the severed finger into the air.

It was Mr. K's finger!

Amidst the sound of tearing leather and fabric, the divan was sundered by the wicked scythe. The pale-white finger expanded and detonated like a bomb.

It metamorphosed into a shower of flesh and blood droplets that cascaded onto Lumian, extinguishing the fading black flames.

The flesh absorbed the surrounding blood and dissolved corpses, swiftly coalescing and draping Lumian in a cloak of blood-red hue.

The profound weakness that had plagued Lumian dissipated. He sprang up, launching a counteroffensive against "Black Scorpion" Roger.

Witnessing this, Roger avoided a direct confrontation. He retreated into the fractured ice and merged with one of the distorted faces.

Franca, who had already encased the sculpture in frost, suddenly felt an intense chill.

The restless spirits in the living room seemed incensed. They surged from all directions, extending their arms and gaping mouths, enveloping Franca.

With a resounding crack, yet another mirror shattered.

Franca's form materialized on the other side of the ice. She raised her hand, causing black flames to surge around the sculpture, setting ablaze the indistinct souls and blood-hued shadows.

“Black Scorpion” Roger peered out from a nearby wall and unleashed another curse, “Damn bitch!”

As he weakened his targets, he swiftly shifted positions with the aid of the tormented faces. Sometimes, he targeted Lumian, and other times, he assailed Franca. He relied on the power of the Undying Lands and the sculpture to single-handedly suppress the two foes.

At intervals, vile black flames ignited over Lumian's form, sapping his life force and diminishing his strength. Yet, each time, they were counteracted by the robe forged from flesh and blood. Franca evaded the combined assaults of Evil Word, Blood Spirit, Weak Black Flame, and Life Burning time and again, employing the technique of Mirror Substitution.

Time slipped away swiftly. Noticing that Ciel's robe of flesh and blood teetered on the brink of disintegration, while the mirror and ice that Franca had brought with her neared depletion, “Black Scorpion” Roger poked his head through the ceiling, a malicious chuckle escaping his lips.

“You fools!

“Do you truly believe you can withstand the might of the Undying Lands?

“I fear no consequence, even if the entire leadership of the Savoie Mob were to enter this domain!

“Go to hell!”

His cutting words pierced Lumian and Franca's ears and minds, causing their bodies to tremble as if they could bear no more.

Observing this, “Black Scorpion” Roger, who had already shifted to the adjacent wall, revealed a sinister smile, brimming with anticipation.

Suddenly, his vision darkened, and a surge of intense emotions overwhelmed his heart.

Disbelief, shock, confusion, and panic.

In the subsequent moment, he lost consciousness.

Thud!

The boss of the Poison Spur Mob materialized from the wall, collapsed onto the floor, and slipped into unconsciousness.

The fate exchange had finally concluded, as Fallen Mercury swapped the unconscious fate of the dying tramp with “Black Scorpion” Roger's!

It happened swiftly, much faster than the exchange involving Margot.

This was because the tramp was an ordinary person, and when Fallen Mercury selected “Black Scorpion” Roger's fate, it chose the least significant one, unrelated to any Beyonder matters.

Lumian's gaze fixated on “Black Scorpion” Roger, clad in aqublue pajamas. Supported by his blood-colored robe, Lumian traversed the transparent and distorted faces, enduring the bone-chilling cold and stiffness. Finally, he reached his motionless target. Retrieving the metal canister containing the sedative, Lumian unscrewed the cap and squatted down.

He directed the sedative obtained from Rentas toward “Black Scorpion” Roger's nose, gently fanning the gas with his hand, ensuring its entry into the enemy's breath.

With that done, Lumian lifted “Black Scorpion” Roger and made his way out of the living room, guarded by Franca.

The valets and maids had long since fled.

As “Black Scorpion” Roger departed the living room, the bluish-white faces swiftly faded away, and everything returned to normal.

Witnessing this, Lumian dropped the Poison Spur Mob leader to the ground and aimed his revolver at the man's head.

After a few seconds of contemplation, Lumian pulled the trigger calmly and silently.

Two shots rang out, transforming “Black Scorpion” Roger's head into a burst watermelon, splattering blood in every direction.

He met his demise while in a coma.

Franca glanced at Lumian, still aiming at “Black Scorpion” Roger, and asked calmly,

“How is it? Have you vented all your frustrations?”

If it weren't for Franca's desire to assist Lumian, she would have considered reporting “Black Scorpion” Roger and his associates for their belief in the Great Mother.

Lumian fell silent for a moment, his lips curling into a smile.

“No.

“It merely resolved one hidden danger.”

Franca let out a soft sigh.

“In my homeland, we say that to cure a heart's ailment, the remedy must come from within. But if you don't do it right, no matter how much you try, it's futile.

“Well, I'll quickly communicate with the spirit, and let's strive to depart this place within three minutes. Hurry and seize the spoils.”

“Alright,” Lumian responded, as the remaining bloodstained garments on his body disintegrated, staining the ground red.

That's it? Lumian couldn't help but furrow his brow.

It wasn't that Mr. K's finger lacked strength. On the contrary, without it, Lumian would have been too feeble to resist and would have required Franca's aid.

However, its performance fell short if made to face the formidable evil spirit, Susanna Mattise. Lumian couldn't help but feel disappointed and perplexed.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, he headed toward the living room, scanning his surroundings for valuable items.

Suddenly, he noticed a figure cloaked in a large hood and black robe standing quietly on the staircase.

Mr. K!

Lumian's pupils dilated, but in an instant, Mr. K vanished into the shadows.

Chapter 227 Agent

Did the finger serve as a signal? How did Mr. K manage to arrive so swiftly? Or was he perhaps observing me from nearby? Lumian felt a surge of tension, his weariness from the battle fading considerably.

This revelation granted him a fresh understanding of Mr. K's power, fueling his fear.

Lumian averted his gaze and retrieved Fallen Mercury,

its blade tarnished by the scorching and decay. He couldn't help but wonder if it would endure until the year's end.

After securing Fallen Mercury, Lumian proceeded to examine the two corpses that had mostly disintegrated under the deluge of blood.

The victims displayed clear signs of petrification, rendering them motionless on the ground, and their ghastly appearance would haunt anyone who laid eyes on them for years to come.

The clothing and personal effects of the deceased suffered extensive corrosion, including Harman's poisoned dirk and Castina's cherished axe.

Among the few items that remained relatively unscathed were several specially crafted canisters with an iron hue, emitting a flickering metallic sheen. Although they bore noticeable signs of corrosion on their surfaces, the liquid contents remained unaffected.

Lumian scrutinized the canisters and discerned four distinct types, distinguished by etched patterns: a tree, a bear-like face, a spring fountain, and a scorpion.

Harman and Castina had each carried one, leaving a total of eight canisters.

Gathering them up, Lumian approached the peculiar scythe recently wielded by "Black Scorpion" Roger. It exuded an ominous aura, its pitch-black blade sharp and menacing. It wasn't as compact as a wheat-harvesting scythe, nor as colossal as a giant weapon. It lacked the capacity to shock onlookers and measured only half the height of an average person.

The moment Lumian's black-gloved hand touched the scythe, he sensed an ethereal spike extending from it, piercing into his flesh and gradually siphoning his life force. It felt chilling and merciless.

Swiftly retracting his hand, Lumian realized that his life was no longer ebbing away slowly.

Is it a mystical artifact or a Beyonder weapon akin to Fallen Mercury... How can I remove it safely? Lumian delved into deep contemplation.

.....

Just then, Franca finished her preparations and commenced spirit channeling.

Lumian returned to “Black Scorpion” Roger's corpse, carrying the eight canisters, and communicated with Franca through the wall of spirituality, saying, “Inquire about the purpose of these objects and how to transport the scythe.”

Franca nodded and directed her gaze toward Roger's face, which materialized on the mirrored surface.

“What effects do these canisters on Harman and Castina have? How can I identify them?”

Roger, his face pale and bewildered, replied, “The tree-patterned one is Bark Agent. It toughens your skin and muscles, rendering them as resilient as trees.

“The bear-faced pattern is Berserk Agent. It grants you extraordinary strength when unleashed.

“The spring fountain pattern represents Healing Agent. It mends most external wounds, alleviates severe injuries, and eliminates minor ailments.

“The scorpion pattern is ‘Scorpion Poison.’ It is primarily used on weapons and induces arrhythmia and respiratory paralysis, ultimately leading to death.”

Quite useful indeed... Franca silently praised.

Her Hidden Blade would greatly benefit from a canister of Scorpion Poison.

Franca persisted with her questioning.

“How do you usually transport that scythe?”

“In my study, there's a large wooden box. Put it inside quickly, and you can take it away,” replied Roger, his face pale and devoid of emotion.

Franca pressed further, “Is the scythe a mystical object or a Beyonder weapon? What are its abilities?”

“It's called Harvest Sacrifice. It's a weapon infused with a blessed aura and possesses the quality of sharpness. Once it inflicts a wound on the target, and that wound becomes tainted with the corresponding blood, it can continuously drain the life force of the other party,” Roger described the scythe in a dazed manner.

Seizing the opportunity, Franca redirected the conversation to more crucial matters.

“Have you encountered Madame Moon? How do you maintain contact with her?”

Roger's pale face contorted with pain.

“I met Madame Moon in the wilderness. Well, now she's Lady Moon. She sat in a peculiar carriage pulled by two demons, wearing a veil that made her appear holy and maternal to me.

“Usually, she seeks me out and commands me to venture into the wilderness abruptly.

“She gave me a green seed to place inside the statue's abdominal cavity. If I face danger, I can use it to urgently contact her.

“But there's no need for the seed now. By reciting her full honorific name, I can elicit her response.”

She can respond to an honorific name? That's quite advanced... Franca refrained from inquiring about Lady Moon's honorific name, fearing that the other party might detect her intention.

Although she could already surmise the answer, she asked out of curiosity, “Why didn't you seek Lady Moon's assistance earlier?”

Roger replied, his gaze vacant, “I can win.”

You clung to your delusion until the very end, didn't you? Franca clicked her tongue and remarked, “Why are you supporting Hugues Artois?”

“Lady Moon instructed us to aid in his election,” Roger replied with a blank expression. “She claimed that Hugues Artois is an open-minded individual.”

Open-minded... What does that mean? Franca struggled to comprehend this assessment.

As Franca channeled “Black Scorpion” Roger, Lumian didn't linger by her side. Instead, he ventured into the study, assuming Alsai's appearance, and began sifting through valuable items.

Armed with a short wire, he attempted to unlock the safe door, but his efforts proved futile.

Within the study, he discovered a suitable wooden box for housing the sinister scythe. Carrying it, he descended the stairs to the open-door basement.

The area appeared tidy, except for a stone platform suspected of holding the statue, devoid of any other objects.

Employing his keen observation skills as a Hunter, Lumian scoured the vicinity and uncovered a concealed door.

With a grating sound, he pushed open the secret passage and revealed a corridor beyond. On either side of the corridor stood prison cells enclosed by iron bars. Dozens, if not hundreds, of people were crammed inside. Most appeared destitute, but among them were well-dressed gentlemen, ladies, and seemingly lost children.

In that moment, nearly a third of the captives lay lifeless on the floor, their skin shriveled and lacking vitality. They resembled skeletons more than human beings.

They no longer drew breath, and they had lost control of their bodily functions. The stench permeated the private prison.

Lumian's gaze swept over the trembling individuals, and he noticed numerous sinister and peculiar symbols etched upon the ground, the wall behind them, and the iron fence in front.

No wonder a Heretic Spellmaster wields such formidable power on their home turf... Lumian reached a realization.

Not only did they possess the backing of a “magic circle” teeming with deceased souls, but they could also extract the life force of others at will to replenish their own!

Balancing the wooden box with one arm, Lumian retrieved his revolver, pressed it against the door of a cell, and pulled the trigger.

With a resounding bang, the iron lock shattered and clattered to the ground. After reloading, Lumian paid little attention to the captives. He progressed methodically, obliterating the iron locks of the remaining cells.

Then, with the revolver holstered under his armpit, he turned and departed, leaving behind a bewildered and numbed group of survivors.

When Lumian returned to the ground floor, Franca had just concluded the spirit channeling and dispelled the spiritual barrier.

“Did you discover anything?” Franca inquired casually.

Lumian gestured toward the wooden box nestled under his left arm.

“It should suffice for storing the scythe. I couldn't access the safe. It's possible that the servants fled to the second floor or the garden at the back. I didn't encounter them.”

“Don't concern yourself with them. As followers of an evil deity, they will meet a swift demise once their protection wanes. Furthermore, we have disguised ourselves adequately to avoid recognition,” Franca affirmed with a nod. “Pack up Harvest Sacrifice. We shall depart now. Oh, by the way, the scythe is called Harvest Sacrifice.”

Before long, Lumian returned to “Black Scorpion” Roger's lifeless body with the scythe in hand, presenting the wooden box to Franca.

Then, he squatted down, tore off a section of his pajamas, crumpled it into a ball, and stained it with blood.

Curious, Franca inquired, “What are you doing?”

Lumian remained focused, his gaze fixed on the task at hand, and succinctly replied, “Providing a hint to the official Beyonders.”

With the blood-stained cloth in hand, Lumian made his way back to the living room. Beside the serene female statue, he messily inscribed words in Intisian: “Great Mother.”

Having completed the task, Lumian discarded the cloth bundle and headed towards the door.

Why does it seem so provocative... Franca sighed and turned around.

Behind her, dark flames materialized and ascended, consuming the traces left by both of them and the lingering Spirit Bodies of the deceased.

Shortly after, Franca scattered shimmering powder and recited the incantation of invisibility. She disappeared from the foyer, clutching the wooden box.

Lumian pushed open the door and confidently stepped out onto 126 Avenue du Marché.

He left the door ajar, allowing the scene within to be exposed to passersby.

Under the yellowish glow of the gas wall lamps, a lifeless body lay in the foyer, surrounded by blood.

Lumian crossed Avenue du Marché, constantly altering his course, until he reached the alley where he had changed his clothes and assumed his disguise.

He wiped his face clean and donned his original attire, no longer emanating the aura of Alsai.

In the next moment, Franca transformed into her hooded figure, draped in black robes. She retrieved the Ring of Punishment from Lumian and returned it to her coin bag.

The Witch glanced at the unconscious Poison Spur Mob member, Alsai, and said to Lumian, who was about to depart, "Aren't you going to take care of him?"

"He knows Ciel knocked him out, and the person who killed 'Black Scorpion' Roger posed as him."

Lumian remained silent. He drew his revolver, partially turned, and fired at Alsai, clad in a blue-and-white striped shirt.

Two gunshots rang out as the Poison Spur Mob member, trusted by "Black Scorpion" Roger, was struck in the chest and met his demise.

Observing Lumian's nonchalant demeanor, Franca shook her head inwardly and proceeded to deal with the remaining Spirit Body and traces in the alley.

Then, she concealed herself once more and departed alongside Lumian. He scaled the outer wall and returned to the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

After using a special lotion from Rentas to remove the excess black dye from his hair and transforming back into Ciel Dubois, Lumian, Franca smiled and inquired, "Do you want to keep this scythe? If not, I'll sell it and we'll split the proceeds evenly."

"Your Provoker potion should be almost fully digested. You'll need to gather funds and ingredients for your advancement."

Chapter 228 Sudden Digestion

Upon Franca's mention of advancement, Lumian felt a sudden urge to make preparations.

It wasn't that he didn't aspire to become a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac and master mysticism techniques, but the Hunter and Provoker potion formulas were bestowed upon him by Madam Magician, making them easily obtainable and reducing the sense of urgency. His plan was to wait until the Provoker potion had fully digested before writing a letter to Madam Magician, inquiring about the price for obtaining everything necessary for his advancement.

More importantly, Lumian knew that Madam Magician possessed a Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic.

But now that he thought about it, he felt that he had to make additional preparations.

It occurred to him that Madam Magician might not be associated with the Hunter pathway, which meant she might not possess the Pyromaniac potion formula. Furthermore, she could have already given the Beyonder characteristic to someone else. Lumian couldn't be the only one with the Minor Arcana card, and it was unlikely that they all belonged to different pathways.

While Madam Magician's level and abilities made it relatively easy for her to acquire the Pyromaniac potion formula and its main ingredient, she might be unwilling or face unforeseen delays.

Lost in thought, Lumian glanced at the wooden box resting on Franca's lap and hesitated before suggesting, "Let's sell it."

The evil scythe possessed an uncanny sharpness and the ability to drain an enemy's life through blood, perfectly suited to Lumian's close-quarters combat style. However, it proved highly inconvenient to carry and conceal due to its usage restrictions. Most of the time, Lumian could only store it at Salle de Bal Brise or Auberge du Coq Doré, relying on it when attacked. Alternatively, he could draw it in advance and hide it in the cover of night shadows for offensive purposes.

If Lumian wished to have it with him at all times, his only solution was to acquire a cello case and carry it on his back.

Yet, for a mobster leader, this would raise suspicions.

In fact, if Franca hadn't brought up the topic of preparing for his advancement, Lumian would have deemed his current stash of 4,000 verl d'or far from sufficient. He needed to acquire more funds. Keeping the evil scythe, known as Harvest Sacrifice, wasn't a problem as it could still prove useful in certain situations. If necessary, Lumian could use the Mystery Prying Glasses to disguise himself as a musician, carrying the cello on his back to assassinate his intended target.

Franca sighed in response.

"I suppose selling it is our only option. It's actually quite good, but it doesn't suit my combat style."

She then gestured towards Lumian's waist.

.....

"How about we each get a canister?"

To be honest, Franca wasn't particularly interested in the Berserk Agent and the Bark Agent. She only desired the Scorpion Poison and the Healing Agent. However, considering that Lumian also required poison for his weapons and healing capabilities, she opted for a fair solution.

"Alright," Lumian agreed.

In the dead of the night, outside 126 Avenue du Marché:

A group of police officers, dressed in black uniforms, formed a barricade to keep pedestrians away from the building behind them.

Within the house, Angoulême de François with his blond hair, eyebrows, and beard, stood before a delicate female sculpture. His gaze fixed upon the blood-red words adorning the wall.

Donning a row of golden buttons on his chest, he remained silent, emanating an overwhelming sense of oppression that affected both the surrounding Purifiers and police officers.

After a moment, the Purifier of Southern Continent descent emerged from the basement and approached Angoulême. In hushed tones, he spoke, “Deacon, we have found clear signs of sacrificial rituals to an evil god beneath us. There are deceased individuals who were used as living sacrifices.”

“The prison cells have been unlocked, and some of the abductees managed to escape. Those who remain informed me that ‘Black Scorpion’ Roger did indeed employ sorcery.”

Angoulême listened impassively, scanning his surroundings. He then addressed the nearby police officers, saying, “Did none of you notice the significant number of people who had gone missing?”

“Who was it that claimed the market district housed only a handful of controllable Beyonders? Who suggested that arresting them would only pave the way for new criminal organizations, causing even greater chaos?”

His voice, filled with anger, reverberated through the living room of 126 Avenue du Marché, causing each police officer to lower their gaze.

At that moment, Angoulême abruptly turned his attention to the delicate female sculpture. He sensed a fleeting surge of anger emanating from it, quickly dissipating.

He had sensed a faint fluctuation of anger there, but it disappeared in a flash.

A golden light enveloped Angoulême's body as he extended his right palm, opening the abdomen of the statue.

There, a cavity large enough to cradle a curled-up human revealed itself. Within it rested a brownish-green seed, silently crumbling into dust when stirred by the wind.

On the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

Lumian furrowed his brow abruptly.

“What's wrong?” Franca asked.

Lumian found himself torn between elation and confusion.

“My Provoker potion has fully digested.

“Could it be that some important figure was provoked by our actions?”

Franca speculated, “Perhaps Lady Moon, or maybe an official Beyonder?”

“All possibilities,” Lumian conceded. If he couldn't unravel the mystery, there was no use dwelling on it. After all, it was a positive development.

This meant that he could now advance to become a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac!

This realization struck him with a newfound understanding.

He didn't need to meticulously summarize all the principles of acting to fully digest the corresponding potion.

By summarizing a portion of his acting principles and consistently receiving feedback while performing appropriately, he could rely on quantity or the accumulation of time to digest the potion.

Hence, most Beyonders can rely on time and fortunate encounters to digest the potion without being familiar with the acting method... Lumian pondered silently, feeling enlightened.

After distributing the agents and deciding to sell the remaining spoils for money, Lumian bid Franca farewell. Deliberately, he circled Salle de Bal Brise before departing Avenue du Marché and returning to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As he reached the second floor, he noticed that the door to Room 206 stood ajar, allowing the light from a carbide lamp to spill into the dim corridor.

Curiosity piqued, Lumian glanced inside as he passed by, spotting Gabriel seated by the bed in his preferred black dungarees, observing the hallway outside.

"You're finally back!" the playwright exclaimed with delight upon seeing Lumian.

Raising an eyebrow, Lumian queried, "You haven't been arrested by the police yet?"

"..." Gabriel found himself momentarily speechless.

After a few seconds, his joy overcame him, and he replied, "Monsieur Nathan Lopp didn't report me to the police. In fact, he signed a contract with me and purchased my script.

"He intended to make a down payment of 1,500 verl d'or, but considering how we frightened him, he deducted 500. Once the play commences, I'll receive 2.5% of the ticket revenue for each show."

A soft chuckle escaped Lumian's lips.

"I thought the revolver had coerced him into agreement, fully expecting him to go back on his word. I never imagined that your script would genuinely move him."

If you thought so, why did you still do it? Gabriel grumbled instinctively.

He elaborated, "Monsieur Lopp understands the idiosyncrasies of artists and doesn't mind such matters. He mentioned that his previous mistress was a female painter. She not only kept a sheep on his balcony but also attempted to flirt with men. She even prepared fake props to try and convince him, which ultimately led to their breakup."

"You Trieriens..." Lumian sighed, even as the Prankster King of Cordu.

Gabriel, hailing from a different province and not being a Trierien himself, took Ciel's teasing in stride, unfazed by the remark.

He expressed his gratitude sincerely. "Thank you very much. Although I don't agree with your approach, Monsieur Lopp would have never laid eyes on my script without your help."

Gabriel, perplexed, questioned, "Monsieur Lopp mentioned that we authors weren't cautious enough. We only covered our faces once we reached his doorstep. After conversing with the guard at the lobby, he knew what we looked like. Once he calls the police, there's no escape for any of us.

"Why didn't you mask up earlier when we tied up the guard?"

Gabriel believed that Ciel, being a mob leader, should have been more cautious.

Lumian responded calmly, "Why should I have masked myself?"

"..." Confusion filled Gabriel's face as he asked, "Then why did you eventually mask yourself?"

Lumian replied calmly, "Because Jenna masked up."

What kind of logic is this... Even as a playwright himself, he found it difficult to comprehend Ciel's thoughts.

He could sense that Ciel's state last night was abnormal, but he didn't know the exact reason. It was difficult to determine his mental state and the motives behind his actions.

Gabriel let out a sigh and remarked, "Fortunately, things turned out well. Otherwise, we would have been apprehended by the police..."

He paused for a moment, realizing that Ciel was a leader of the Savoie Mob. The crimes he had committed in the past were more serious than what happened last night. There was no need to fear. Even if the police came looking for him, he could hide for a day or two, and the matter would pass. No one would pursue him for such a trivial case.

Lumian chuckled and gave Gabriel's shoulder a friendly pat.

"Even if you get caught, you're just an accomplice. You didn't carry a weapon. You can secure your release by posting bail."

With that, Lumian walked towards his room and opened the door to Room 207.

Gabriel watched Ciel's retreating figure, feeling a mixture of confusion and relief.

In Room 207, Lumian carefully examined Fallen Mercury.

He felt that if the dirk wasn't repaired, it could last a maximum of three months.

Perhaps I should consult Franca. She might know a few individuals skilled in the mending of mystical artifacts and Beyonder weapons... Lumian half-closed his eyes and established a connection with Fallen Mercury, seeking communication.

After a while, he discerned the swapped fate that had taken place.

The destiny of "Black Scorpion" Roger gulping down alcohol.

Lumian carefully stored Fallen Mercury, stood up, and exited the room, making his way to the third floor.

Approaching the door of Room 310, he overheard the lunatic's frantic cries, still filled with fear.

"I'm dying, I'm dying!"

Lumian pulled out the short wire, unlocking the door. He then beheld the lunatic crouched on the moonlit floor, clutching his head and trembling uncontrollably.

Leaning against the door frame, Lumian couldn't help but let out a chuckle.

“You're rather fortunate. The Montsouris ghost hasn't come to claim your life just yet. I wonder if it's preoccupied or slacking off.”

Chapter 229 Equivalent Exchange

The lunatic still wore a grimy linen shirt and yellow trousers, as if changing clothes was not part of his plan.

Upon hearing Lumian's words, he looked up, revealing a face obscured by a black beard.

It seemed as though he had forgotten Lumian entirely. His blue eyes were empty, clouded over.

“I'm dying, I'm dying!” He clutched his shoulder, which was hidden beneath his unruly black hair, and let out another terrified scream.

Lumian approached, his left hand gloved in black, and drew out Fallen Mercury. With a swift motion, he plunged it into the lunatic's shoulder.

The filthy linen shirt tore open, revealing a shallow wound that still oozed blood.

The lunatic stood frozen, as if the long-awaited judgment had finally arrived.

After a few seconds, he collapsed to the ground, placing his hands on the floor as he scrambled away from Lumian.

In his terror, he cried out, “Don't kill me! Don't kill me!”

The tenants in the neighboring rooms heard the commotion, but none of them bothered to investigate. The lunatic often ranted about his impending demise and pleaded not to be killed.

The sinister pewter-black dagger had already left the lunatic's shoulder, and Lumian continued to gaze at the shimmering river of mercury, lost in thought.

He witnessed the blissful first half of the lunatic's life and the tragic deaths of his family, one by one. It was as though Lumian could relate to the sensation of a complete mental breakdown caused by an overwhelming blow.

At times, Lumian yearned to break down like the lunatic, to abandon all reason and act on primal instincts until his own demise. However, there was still a glimmer of hope—a minuscule, almost unrealistic hope—and he was not ready to relinquish it. He desired to pursue it.

Thus, he often acted impulsively and displayed self-destructive tendencies, yet he was always restrained by the rationality that stemmed from that flicker of hope. He never truly disregarded the consequences, existing in a state of profound contradiction.

.....

Knowing precisely which fate he wished to exchange and its approximate date, Lumian swiftly located the lunatic's destiny of encountering the Montsouris ghost in the underground market

district. With the tip of the blade, he pried it loose, transforming it into a droplet of liquid mercury. The drinking fate originally belonging to “Black Scorpion” Roger flowed into the lunatic's body.

Ignoring the lunatic's terrified pleas, Lumian squatted before him. He wiped the blade of Fallen Mercury clean with his clothes and assisted in staunching the bleeding.

Then, Lumian pulled up the only chair and took a seat, patiently awaiting the completion of the fate exchange.

“I'm dying, I'm dying!

“Don't kill me! Don't kill me!”

As the lunatic shrieked, time ticked by. Finally, Fallen Mercury quivered gently.

The lunatic's voice abruptly ceased. He rose to his feet, his gaze clearing as he muttered to himself, “I need a drink. I need a drink...”

Lumian smiled and stood up. “The drinks are on you. Consider it a reward for helping you escape the Montsouris ghost.”

Naturally, the true reward was the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost. With careful planning and an unguarded target, it served as an excellent tool for assassination.

The lunatic appeared startled for a moment before replying, “You got rid of it?”

“You can choose not to believe me.” Lumian turned and walked into the dimly lit corridor, devoid of wall lamps.

The lunatic, driven by an insatiable thirst for drink, unwittingly trailed after Lumian.

As they made their way to the basement bar, the lunatic glanced around and noticed a distinct change in his surroundings.

The eerie sensation of being watched from the shadows had vanished!

Perplexed, the lunatic settled himself at the bar counter and ordered two glasses of oatmeal beer—one for Lumian and the other for himself. He downed his own glass, leaving traces of foam clinging to the corners of his mouth.

Since he occasionally visited the bar in moments of sobriety, no one suspected anything amiss.

After quenching his alcohol craving, the lunatic turned to Lumian and asked once more,

“Have I truly escaped the Montsouris ghost? How did you manage it?”

“I've slain the Montsouris ghost, but I can't be certain if it will resurrect,” Lumian replied solemnly. “However, if those who previously encountered it are still among the living, they shall be free from its torment. Remember, I mentioned encountering the Montsouris ghost myself. Look at me—I'm alive and well.”

“Really?” The lunatic found it hard to believe that this handsome young man had defeated the Montsouris ghost.

Not even the Church had succeeded!

Lumian smiled.

“I lied. I merely discovered an incantation that prevents the Montsouris ghost from plaguing me, but I require the blood of someone haunted as a conduit.”

A glimmer of understanding flickered in the lunatic's eyes.

“No wonder you stabbed me.”

Blushing with embarrassment, he admitted, “I may not be able to compensate you at present. My savings are meager, and I must find new employment...”

Lumian interrupted, “What shall I call you?”

“Just Flameng will do,” the lunatic replied before inquiring, “And you?”

“Ciel.” Lumian downed his oatmeal beer.

By the time his glass contained only a thin film of liquid, Flameng had become quite tipsy. He grasped Lumian's arm and babbled on.

“Did you know? I used to be a university lecturer. Simultaneously, I was entrusted with the safety of some students.

“Many of those students were audacious and reckless, daring to engage in any endeavor and shout slogans of ‘freedom’ when challenged.

“They even held proms in the catacombs, burning the bones of nameless corpses to warm their asses. They believed in nothing and feared nothing. Of course, I was much the same in those days.”

Flameng recounted tales from the first half of his life, his tone shifting between pride, happiness, admonishment of the present ills, and wistful reminiscence.

“Might you have entered the Underground Trier to dissuade certain students from taking risks?” Lumian asked casually, taking a sip of his beer.

Flameng shook his head.

“No, my expertise lies in minerals. The subterranean rock formations of Trier are uniquely fascinating for study. Together with the medical school, we even established a Museum of Mineralogy and Pathology in the catacombs.

“I had been leaving the museum, making my way toward the underground market district with the intention of heading home when I encountered the Montsouris ghost.

“My Sandrine... My Bastian...”

Flameng clutched his head, his voice filled with an agonizing pain.

Lumian quickly changed the subject.

“So, the subterranean rock formations in Trier are quite unique?”

“Indeed,” Flameng instinctively replied, before collecting himself and continuing, “We even assigned poetic names to those formations. From top to bottom, they're referred to as ‘flowers,’ ‘sheep,’ and ‘sedges’...”

Engrossed in conversation, Lumian and Flameng chatted well into the midnight hours. The latter appeared lively, and even his bearded face seemed to regain some color.

He didn't lose his sanity again. Having confirmed that there was no longer a feeling of being watched in the darkness, he returned to normal.

After bidding a cheerful farewell to the intoxicated Flameng, Lumian smiled and withdrew his gaze. He entered Room 207 to compose a letter to Madam Magician.

In the letter, he first mentioned how Termiboros had nearly influenced him into transferring Charlie's luck and how he had slain “Black Scorpion” Roger and other Lady Moon subordinates. Lumian then revealed that the Provoker potion had been completely digested due to the latter. He inquired whether Madam Magician possessed the Pyromaniac potion formula and the associated Beyonder characteristic, as well as the price he needed to pay for them.

Not long after Lumian had tidied up the room and summoned a puppet messenger to deliver the letter, he received a reply from Madam Magician:

“Good job. You've already recognized the potential influence and threat that long-named fellow poses to you. Stay vigilant.

“Based on your description, this Lady Moon should be a Sequence 3. Being able to truly provoke such a demigod will undoubtedly hasten your digestion of the potion.

“If I recall correctly, you are attending Mr. K's gathering tomorrow night and will inform him that you can worship that being. This means you will truly become one of them, completing the initial phase of the mission I assigned you. As a reward, I will provide you with the Pyromaniac potion formula free of charge.

“I still possess the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic, but remember, the principle of equivalent exchange must be upheld.

“In Intis, the two main ingredients of the Pyromaniac potion cost more than 18,000 verl d'or, often exceeding 20,000. Correspondingly, the Beyonder characteristic usually amounts to around 35,000 verl d'or.

“What does this mean? It implies that many people in Intis have become Pyromaniacs, yet many Pyromaniacs have also perished.

“As a holder of a Minor Arcana card, I will offer you a substantial discount. The Beyonder characteristic will only cost you 30,000 verl d'or.

“Good luck.”

Phew, 30,000 verl d'or... Lumian exhaled, feeling that the sum was not unattainable.

He already had over 4,000 verl d'or in savings, and the evil scythe known as Harvest Sacrifice could fetch a decent price. Additionally, he could borrow some funds from Franca and embezzle a portion of Salle de Bal Brise's money. These combined efforts would bring him close to 30,000 verl d'or.

And just as Lumian had suspected, Lady Moon had transformed from a mere Madame to a Lady capable of birthing deities. She was undoubtedly more than a Sequence 4.

Fortunately, we had feigned impending defeat in our previous battle, preventing "Black Scorpion" Roger from seeking assistance... Lumian burned Madam Magician's letter, freshened up, climbed into bed, and drifted off to sleep.

Just after six in the morning, Lumian had finished washing up and changed into a crisp white shirt, black vest, brown pants, and sleek leather boots, when he heard footsteps descending from the third floor.

It was Ruhr and Michel, clad in tattered clothes and emanating a pungent odor.

As Lumian stood by the door of Room 207, Ruhr, his voice filled with panic, cried out, "Ciel, Monsieur Ciel! That lunatic is dead!"

Dead? Flameng is dead? Lumian was momentarily stunned before darting past Ruhr and Michel, making his way to the third floor.

The door to Room 310 was wide open. Lumian cast a quick glance inside and spotted Flameng hanging from the window.

He faced the door, having cleanly shaven his face, revealing a gentle and gaunt visage.

Now, he no longer breathed. His face had turned blue, his eyes slightly bulging. His mouth hung open wide, and the morning light streamed through the window, bathing his lifeless body. He hung silently, suspended by a belt tied to the window frame.

Beneath him, on the wooden table, lay a nearly extinguished kerosene lamp, several large books, and a white sheet of paper weighted down by a fountain pen. It appeared that something had been written on it.

Lumian fell into an eerie silence for a few seconds before cautiously approaching the white sheet of paper.

In precise Intisian handwriting, it read:

"When I was deranged, I still harbored the will to live.

"Upon awakening, I found no purpose in life.

"Please lay me to rest in the Underground Tomb of Lights within the catacombs."

Lumian raised his gaze, meeting the vacant blue eyes that seemed to peer back from beyond the grave.

He stood in solemn silence, transfixed, as if time had come to a halt.

Chapter 230 Scapegoat

At the stroke of 8 a.m., a pair of law enforcement officers ambled up to the third floor of Auberge du Coq Doré. One meticulously examined the lifeless body, the suicide note, and the surroundings, while the other commenced interrogating the neighboring tenants.

Lumian, already disguised using the Mystery Prying Glasses, had taken his position at the entrance of Room 310.

The officer, donning a uniform and clutching a pen and paper, cast a fleeting glance in his direction.

“You must be Ciel Dubois. Enlighten me on the matter.”

Lumian proceeded to recount how Flameng's sanity was gone prior to his arrival. The man incessantly raved about encountering the Montsouris ghost and the demise of his own kin. Soon, it seemed, his turn was imminent. Lumian continued, revealing how Flameng had abruptly regained consciousness the previous night and indulged in a bout of heavy drinking.

“What about the wound on his shoulder?” interjected the officer attending to the deceased in the room.

“Before he regained consciousness last night, he inflicted the injury upon himself. I was the one who bound it up,” Lumian responded with composure.

After interrogating the other tenants and the proprietor of the basement bar, the two officers cautiously deduced that the deceased had long been plagued by mental instability. He possessed a motive for suicide and displayed corresponding behavioral tendencies.

As they maneuvered Flameng's body into the mortuary bag, they addressed Lumian, saying, “We shall transport him to the catacombs, but it's a rather intricate procedure. It entails ascertaining the precise cause of death, summoning a clergyman for purification rites, finding a suitable heir for his estate, and liaising with the catacomb administrators. This will take roughly a week or two.”

Lumian fell silent momentarily before resuming, “I've shared a few drinks with him. Remember to inform me when you lay him to rest.”

Affirming their agreement, the two officers departed Auberge du Coq Doré, taking Flameng's body and the belongings from the room along with them.

Lumian removed his disguise and returned to Room 207.

Seated in a chair, his back to the window casting sunlight, he faced the dimly lit corridor, grappling with a swirl of emotions.

Flameng's suicide had presented Lumian with an alternative fate.

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Lumian had aided Flameng in evading the Montsouris ghost, not driven by a desire for personal gain or reward. It was simply because he saw a reflection of his own predicament in the man who had lost his family. One had succumbed completely, descending into lunacy, while the other persevered, clinging to a glimmer of hope and desperately struggling to maintain his grasp on reason.

But in the end, Flameng, no longer tormented by the Montsouris ghost and driven to madness by fear, had opted to terminate his own existence.

In the corridor, Elodie, her tresses concealed beneath a blonde wig and her eyes accentuated with eyeshadow, alongside the other cleaning lady, had already commenced their bustling day. They worked ceaselessly, mopping the floors and battling bedbugs without respite.

Lumian observed silently, his gaze appearing distant and unfocused.

After the passage of nearly fifteen minutes, light yet hurried footfalls reverberated along the staircase, eventually reaching Room 207.

Jenna's silhouette came into Lumian's view. Today, she donned a more understated attire compared to her usual flamboyance. Her blouse clung slightly, complementing the gentle brown shade of her top and a fluffy, beige, short skirt. She sported knee-high black boots, and her makeup exuded both decadence and allure.

She glanced at Lumian, entered Room 207, and gently shut the wooden door behind her.

Lumian snapped out of his reverie and observed her silently, refraining from questioning her intentions.

Jenna repressed her curiosity and excitement before speaking up.

“Have you heard? The boss and two leaders of the Poison Spur Gang have been murdered!”

“I'm aware,” Lumian acknowledged with a nod.

Jenna scrutinized his expression and deliberately probed further.

“You weren't involved, were you?”

“Do you think I possess the capability to eliminate ‘Black Scorpion’ Roger, ‘Baldy’ Harman, and ‘Short-legged Candlestick’ Castina all at once?” Lumian retorted.

Jenna, having already gleaned an estimation of Ciel's strength from Franca, understood that “Black Scorpion” Roger was no less formidable than Franca herself. She shook her head and uttered, “No.”

She then drawled in a leisurely tone, “But you can still seek assistance.”

For instance, Franca.

“The authorities don't even suspect me,” Lumian stated, shrugging his shoulders.

In truth, he found this matter rather perplexing.

Ordinarily, as one of the few individuals who had recently engaged in a direct confrontation with the Poison Spur Gang, he would undoubtedly be subjected to questioning following such an incident. Yet, Lumian had remained on standby since last night, prepared to don a disguise at a moment's notice, yet no investigators had arrived.

Just then, hurried footsteps echoed from the staircase.

Knock, knock, knock. Knocks resounded against the door of Room 207.

Charlie? Lumian's gaze fixated on the door as he beckoned, "Come in. It's not locked."

The visitor who stood before them was none other than Charlie. Clad in a crisp white shirt, a light-colored vest, and a formal black suit, he exuded an air of dignity. Atop his head rested a half top hat, while a dark bow tie completed his ensemble.

His attire seemed even more refined than when he served as an attendant at Hôtel du Cygne Blanc.

After sizing up Charlie, Lumian couldn't help but smile.

"Well, well, where did this civilized individual come from?"

Charlie couldn't conceal his own grin. His tone brimmed with warmth and enthusiasm as he replied, "Right? I am now a true gentleman. I'm still in the process of mastering classical grammar. Madame, Monsieur, please allow me to extend my civilized greetings."

With those words, he removed his half top hat, pressed it against his chest, and offered a slight bow.

Jenna chuckled but didn't discourage Charlie. Lumian clicked his tongue and remarked, "To be frank, you're more like a monkey playing dress-up in civilized clothing."

Charlie remained unaffected, his joy unwavering.

"I've only just begun my studies. In a month's time, you'll witness an entirely different version of me. Oh, by the way, this is Monsieur Charlie Collent. He is currently enjoying a sumptuous dinner worth 8 verl d'or!"

At this point, Charlie glanced at Jenna, who stood beside the bed. He opened his mouth as if he had something to say, yet hesitated to do so in her presence.

Nonchalantly, Lumian inquired, "What's the matter? Just speak your mind."

Charlie lowered his voice.

"Did you hear? Last night, 'Black Scorpion' Roger, 'Baldy' Harman, and 'Short-legged Candlestick' Castina were all killed."

"I'm aware. And?" Lumian believed Charlie wouldn't seek him out for something that would soon become public knowledge.

Charlie glanced at Jenna and continued, "What has been confirmed is that the murderer belongs to a terrorist organization known as the Aurora Order. They have a penchant for gruesome displays of carnage and primarily target individuals who worship evil gods. In this case, 'Black Scorpion' Roger and his cohorts followed an evil god named the Great Mother."

Aurora Order? Lumian was taken aback.

Where did this scapegoat come from?

Why were the official Beyonders suddenly pointing fingers at the Aurora Order?

Shouldn't they first investigate those who had conflicts with "Black Scorpion" Roger and the Poison Spur Gang? That's how detective novels were written!

“Are you saying that the Aurora Order truly carried out these murders?” Jenna inquired curiously.

Charlie nodded emphatically.

“That's correct. The Aurora Order appears to have claimed responsibility for these acts in some capacity. Tomorrow, there should be reports about the case in certain newspapers.”

The latter half of Charlie's statement suggested that the information he had just shared was meant to be disclosed and held no confidentiality clauses.

The Aurora Order claiming responsibility? They weren't even involved. Why would they assume responsibility? Lumian found himself momentarily perplexed yet slightly amused.

If he hadn't personally slain “Black Scorpion” Roger, he might have suspected the Aurora Order as the culprits.

Charlie glanced at Lumian and added in a hushed tone, “This afternoon, once the election concludes, a crackdown on the mobs in the entire market district shall commence in response to the public's concerns about the district's security.”

Are you reading from a document? Your words sound so official. Lumian realized why Charlie had rushed to inform him.

It was best for those with dirt on them to leave the market district this afternoon and hide for the time being!

Lumian nodded subtly and replied, “I have a mysticism gathering to attend this afternoon.”

Although Mr. K's gathering was scheduled for 9 p.m., Lumian intended to arrive early.

Charlie breathed a sigh of relief and gestured toward the door.

“I'll make a move first.”

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian responded, “In the future, there's no need to inform me about such trivial matters.”

He added mockingly, “Do you doubt my abilities?”

Charlie sheepishly smiled.

“It's my first time, so I couldn't help but feel a bit emotional. Don't worry, unless it truly concerns you, I won't drop any more hints.”

As Lumian watched Charlie depart, Jenna clicked her tongue and sighed.

“He's turned into your spy among the official Beyonders.”

“I'd prefer it if he wasn't,” Lumian mumbled, pursing his lips. “He's just an imbecile, bound to mess things up.”

Jenna scoffed and waved her hand.

“I'm going to find Franca. Are you planning to share the information Charlie gave us with the others?”

Lumian shook his head.

“If everyone flees, the official Beyonders will undoubtedly investigate any leaks. That imbecile won't be able to escape.

“Besides, some people deserve to end up in jail.”

And you don't? Jenna criticized as she left Room 207 and stepped into the corridor.

At that moment, the two cleaning ladies had already reached the staircase.

Jenna hurried over, her gaze sweeping across the cleaning lady named Elodie, who wore a blond wig.

Suddenly, Jenna's expression froze, and she swiftly turned around, heading back to Room 207. Lumian, who was about to leave, found it peculiar.

Elodie, a woman of almost 50 years with a blond wig and eye shadow, also noticed Jenna. She stared at the apprentice actress's retreating figure for a few seconds before calling out in confusion and concern, “Celia...”

Jenna's body went rigid.

She slowly turned back, forcing a smile, and greeted Elodie with a loud voice, “Mother.”

Mother? Lumian almost couldn't believe his ears.

Then he recalled Elodie mentioning that she used to be a theater actress and now enjoyed watching performances at the Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. Her husband had passed away a few years ago in a factory accident, leaving behind two nearly adult children who helped support the family.

Jenna, on the other hand, was an apprentice actress at the same theater. Her father had also passed away a few years ago, leaving only her mother and brother. Her plan was to earn enough money for her tuition fees and other expenses for the coming year.

It all adds up... Lumian nodded thoughtfully.

Elodie approached Jenna with a broom, assessing her appearance.

“Why are you here? And what kind of makeup is that?”