

Inevitability 231

Chapter 231 Mr. K's Purpose

Jenna's eyes darted around, her arm raised in the air.

“This is a requirement for my theater acting class!”

Her words seemed to ease her tension, and her smile took on a more natural quality.

“Didn't I mention that I work part-time as a waitress at a bar to make ends meet? This is my boss. I'm here to discuss a salary increase with him!”

Jenna pointed confidently at Lumian, stationed by the door of Room 207.

Elodie glanced at Lumian, then fixed her gaze on Jenna for a few moments before nodding. “Don't forget to come home tonight.”

Jenna's smile faltered momentarily before she replied, “Okay.”

Seeing Elodie return to her tasks, cleaning the other side of the second floor, Jenna tiptoed down the stairs and made her way out of Auberge du Coq Doré.

It didn't take long for her to spot Lumian catching up to her, prompting her to grumble, “Dammit! Why is my mother at Auberge du Coq Doré?”

Lumian contemplated for a moment before responding. “Blame it on Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons. Monsieur Ive, the owner of Auberge du Coq Doré, found a part-time cleaning lady who works only half a day there. And your mother is a regular visitor at Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons for plays.”

Jenna clenched her teeth and exclaimed, “Those cursed heretics!”

She then threw up her arm.

“Tonight, I'll tell her the truth. I'll say I'm working part-time as an underground singer to save up for next year's tuition, and I earn quite a bit!”

Lumian glanced at Jenna's side profile, curious. “You don't seem too nervous or afraid?”

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Jenna spat.

“That's my mother, not some man-eating monster.

“She's kind-hearted and understanding. I didn't tell her what I was up to before because I didn't want her to worry.”

“She'll worry now, though,” Lumian reminded her.

Being an underground singer in dance halls and bars often involved dealing with shady characters. Being taken advantage of was an unfortunate reality from time to time.

Jenna's smile was mischievous as she playfully remarked, “I'm the mistress of Ciel Dubois, leader of the Savoie Mob and guardian of Salle de Bal Brise. Who dares to mess with me?”

Lumian chuckled. “That's even more dangerous.”

Jenna averted her gaze and observed the street vendors on Rue Anarchie.

“If my mother can't accept it, I plan to demonstrate my current abilities and convince her that I can protect myself.”

Oh, really? Lumian didn't raise the example of the perverted Hedsey.

Jenna composed herself and said in a heavy voice, “She's been through so much. She has worked tirelessly for years. I want to help her shoulder some of the burden so she won't break herself.”

Lumian contemplated for a moment before responding. “Since your father's passing?”

Jenna's gaze shifted to the ground, and she tersely confirmed, “There was an accident at the factory. My father was severely injured and spent over ten days in the hospital. In the end, he couldn't be saved.”

“We used up all our savings and still owe a significant amount of money. A few years ago, I could have pursued a career in theater and studied acting. But it wasn't until the beginning of this year that we managed to repay almost half of our debt and save up some money for my education. My mother insisted that we couldn't delay any longer. If we kept delaying, I would become too old.”

Lumian listened attentively, his brow furrowing in puzzlement. “No compensation for the factory accident?”

“Yes, but that scoundrel hasn't compensated us yet!” Jenna clenched her teeth. “He keeps appealing, and the courts always take their time. F*cking dammit, is he trying to drag it out until we're all dead?”

Lumian fell silent briefly before changing the subject. “Was your mother truly a theater actress?”

“That's correct.” Jenna's expression softened gradually. “She had great acting skills and was beautiful, but most theater managers, sponsors, and owners were men. They would prey on actresses in

the theater like lions patrolling their territory. Those who refused to submit to them wouldn't get good roles. It's infuriating, everyone thinks it's normal, even the police and the courts!

“My mother has a gentle nature, but she's fiercely stubborn. She could only land supporting roles and was even fired once. When the theater she worked at went bankrupt, she lost the chance to return to the stage temporarily. She had to take on odd jobs as a motel maid and laundry worker.

“That's when she met my father. They got together and became husband and wife in the presence of God. Praise the Sun. At that time, my father was working hard to become a skilled laborer. My mother took on various jobs and saved money while searching for an opportunity to return to the theater. Those were the days she cherished the most.

“Later, my brother and I were born. Mom and Dad became busier, struggling to make ends meet and give us a chance to pursue an education.

“When we became self-sufficient, my mother was already old and couldn't return to the stage. She placed her hopes on me. She wanted to see me become an exceptional actress, even if it meant playing supporting roles. My father wished for my brother to become a skilled laborer.”

These words had been bottled up inside Jenna's heart for a long time, and only now did she find the opportunity to express them.

Lumian patiently waited for Jenna to finish before posing a question. “Do you aspire to be a theater actress yourself?”

Jenna beamed with pride and contentment. “It's hard not to love theater when your mother is such a dedicated fan and talented actress.”

Her smile inexplicably evoked a twinge of jealousy in Lumian.

Sighing with a touch of emotion, he remarked, “I can tell that your mother has a genuine passion for theater. Even as a cleaning lady, she adorns herself with makeup and wears exquisite wigs.”

Jenna lightly nodded and shared, “She says it makes her feel youthful, as if she's back on the stage. In her eyes, she remains a true theater actress, and her other jobs are merely part-time endeavors.

“She's always been like this. She takes me to witness the sunrise, reminding me that darkness will always give way to light. And she tells me that even in the darkest times, I must find a way to kindle my own inner light. Only then can I patiently await the sunrise.”

Jenna's yearning for the future grew palpable.

“If I continue as an underground singer for another year, I'll save enough for next year's tuition and make significant progress in repaying our debts. With the combined earnings of my mother and brother, we won't be burdened anymore. Soon, she won't have to juggle multiple jobs, and my brother will have the opportunity to learn skills from others!”

As Jenna spoke, her excitement grew, and she couldn't help but raise her arm, as if reaching out to grasp the beauty of the future

Lumian observed Jenna silently, and a wave of pent-up emotions within him seemed to dissipate.

Hope. Such a profound and moving word.

After a few moments of relief, Jenna suddenly felt an inexplicable sense of embarrassment. She turned her head and gave Lumian an accusing glare.

“Why are you staring at me? Haven't you seen someone getting excited before?”

Lumian scoffed but chose not to respond.

Jenna studied him intently and muttered to herself, “Why do I feel like you're in better spirits?”

“No,” Lumian replied succinctly.

At that moment, the two of them had already entered Avenue du Marché. Posters celebrating Hugues Artois's successful election as a member of parliament adorned the surroundings.

Hugues Artois, the joint support of the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob, has indeed become a member of parliament... I wonder what changes he will bring to the market district... Lumian averted his gaze from the poster, his mind echoing Franca's words: Lady Moon, a follower of the Great Mother, believed that Hugues Artois was an open-minded individual.

In the afternoon, prior to embarking on his journey to Avenue du Boulevard in search of Mr. K, Lumian arranged an altar in the second-floor bedroom of Salle de Bal Brise.

With the wall of spirituality in place, Lumian proceeded to light three candles in the order from deity to mankind, left to right. After carefully dripping essential oils and extracts, he took a couple of steps back, enveloped in a misty atmosphere, and intoned in a deep voice, "The Fool that doesn't belong to this era, the mysterious ruler above the gray fog; the King of Yellow and Black who wields good luck."

A faint gray fog arose, accompanied by an unsettling aura.

Suppressing the sluggishness of his thoughts and the tingling sensation beneath his skin, Lumian fixed his gaze upon the bluish-black flame of the candle. Following the instructions of Madam Magician, he recited the subsequent incantation in the ancient language of Hermes.

"I implore you, I implore your protection..."

After a series of gestures, Lumian caught sight of the divine angel, seemingly materialized from pure light.

Simultaneously, he faintly heard a dreamy sigh.

A sigh originating from an infinite height.

Descending from above in resplendent and ethereal form, the angel extended its arms to embrace Lumian.

Wings of radiant light enveloped him.

When Lumian regained consciousness, everything had returned to its usual state.

As evening descended upon 19 Rue Scheer, Avenue du Boulevard, Lumian once again found himself in the basement, face-to-face with Mr. K.

Clad in his customary voluminous hood and black robe, Mr. K sat silently upon a chair with a crimson backrest.

Meeting Lumian's gaze, Mr. K nodded gently and spoke in a low, raspy voice, "I am highly pleased with your adeptness in action. What's more, unknowingly, your actions align with the teachings of my lord, countering those Blessed of evil beings!"

Pausing momentarily, Mr. K inquired, "Have you given it sufficient thought?"

"Yes, I have," Lumian replied, lowering his head. "You have revealed to me the magnificence of the Lord."

"Haha!" Mr. K burst into a maniacal laughter, as if his sanity had slipped away.

After a few seconds, he regained composure and disregarded the attendants, ensuring they stayed put. He continued, "My lord's honorific name is the Lord that created everything, the omnipotent and omniscient God, the Lord who reigns behind the curtain of shadows, the ruler of the mind world, and the degenerated nature of all living things. Choose any three and entreat Him in Hermes."

The mere description by Mr. K caused Lumian's garments, skin, flesh, and bones to dissolve completely, leaving behind an unnerving sensation of pure consciousness and self-awareness.

Involuntarily trembling, Lumian instinctively recited, "The Lord that created everything, the omnipotent and omniscient God, the Lord who reigns behind the curtain of shadows..."

Lumian's mind was too overwhelmed to deliberate, and he unconsciously selected the first three phrases.

Almost instantly, his surroundings darkened, as if enshrouded by a heavy curtain.

Beyond the illusory and profound shadowed veil, a pair of eyes fixated upon Lumian, penetrating his consciousness and nearly rendering him unconscious.

After an indeterminate period, Lumian regained his faculties, his body drenched in cold sweat.

Rising from his seat, Mr. K's deep voice seemed laced with a smile.

"Henceforth, you are our brother, truly one of us.

"We're a secret organization that believes in the True Creator. We go by the name of the Aurora Order."

"Aurora Order?" Lumian was taken aback.

Isn't this the terrorist organization that took the blame for me?

It seems that the official Beyonders did not misidentify their target...

I have truly become a member of the Aurora Order...

Dismissing the attendants from the basement, Mr. K addressed Lumian, "Gardner Martin is a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. This secret organization once revered our lord, but in recent years, they have distanced themselves from us and ceased their frequent prayers. They appear to be plotting something of great significance.

"I have assigned you to infiltrate their ranks, for I hope you can discover the cause behind their actions and unravel their intentions."

Chapter 232 Financing of Activities

The Iron and Blood Cross Order... appears to have some significant plans in the works... Lumian finally grasped Mr. K's true intentions for persuading him to join a mob.

The Iron and Blood Cross Order—an equally secretive organization—seemed to be related to a competition of faith and Trier's situation.

Curiosity stirring within him, Lumian inquired, "What exactly is the Iron and Blood Cross Order?"

The more Lumian understood, the more he inclined towards actions that would gain Gardner Martin's approval.

Mr. K let out a chuckle. “Allow Gardner Martin to personally enlighten you. If you possess knowledge about their circumstances before they disclose it to you, they are likely to notice some problem.”

So, you found a wanted, simple country boy like me to be a spy? You wanted someone with a clean slate and humble background? Lumian pondered, nodding thoughtfully.

His thoughts wandered to the mysterious item Gardner Martin had smuggled into Trier through Rat Christo, as well as the support the Savoie Mob extended to Hugues Artois. After two seconds of contemplation, Lumian voiced his suspicion, “Could the Iron and Blood Cross Order's plan be connected to Hugues Artois?”

In a raspy voice, Mr. K responded, “According to the information we've gathered, that is merely one component, not the primary one.”

I see... Lumian then broached the topic of “mirror people” before continuing, “Gardner Martin seemed aware that the item he had the smuggling caravan transport could trigger a corresponding incident.”

Mr. K fell silent momentarily before speaking, “I suspect that item holds immense importance. It's a matter you'll need to unravel. Don't worry. Our Aurora Order is generous with rewards. When the time comes, you can make any request.”

Just as Lumian was about to internally utter the words, “Help me revive my sister,” Mr. K added, “As long as it lies within my power.”

Very straightforward... If I genuinely become an official member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and gain access to pertinent information, they will undoubtedly grant me certain privileges. And in turn, I can seek rewards from the Aurora Order. Yes... This is akin to further fulfilling Madam Magician's mission. She won't reject me, the bearer of a Minor Arcana card... Such “treatment” is rare—to receive three rewards for a single task... As Lumian silently sighed, he assumed it wouldn't matter if he faced rejection.

“I now require some financing for my future endeavors.”

The purpose of these funds was to enhance Lumian's personal strength and establish a “solid foundation” for completing the mission.

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Mr. K nodded. “No problem. I will provide you with 10,000 verl d'or later. This is one of the perks of officially joining our Aurora Order and participating in a high-risk mission.”

In Intis, “perk” was a commonly used term coined by Emperor Roselle.

Very generous... At that moment, he found himself wondering if he should seek out more secret organizations like this one, just to enjoy additional membership perks.

Rising from his seat, Mr. K extended his hands and began to circle Lumian slowly.

As he walked, he spoke in a solemn tone, “My Lord is the great being who created this world, the father of all living creatures.”

“We all originate from Him, carrying the divine essence He bestowed upon us.”

“Divinity exists within every living being, and no one is inherently more noble than another. We distinguish our status based on our proximity to our Lord and our ability to embrace His teachings.”

“It is through our shared divinity that we can consume potions, face trials, and accumulate more divine power. Ultimately, we can become angels in service to my Lord...”

Is he preaching? Lumian couldn't help but feel that there were similarities between Mr. K's words and Madam Magician's story of the original Creator—the Oldest One—fragmenting and manifesting different Beyonder characteristics. They seemed to share a common essence.

This led him to suspect that the True Creator of the Aurora Order corresponded to the Oldest One.

After nearly fifteen minutes, Mr. K concluded his preaching and traced a cross on his chest, starting from the top and moving to the bottom, left, and right.

“Praise be to you, the creator of all things. Praise be to you, who carries the burdens of the world's sins.”

Lumian followed suit, offering his own words of praise.

Mr. K then proceeded to introduce the Aurora Order.

“We currently have a total of seven Saints and twenty-two Oracles, each designated by alphabetical code names, scattered across various locations...”

There are still 21 individuals as powerful as Mr. K? The Saints are Sequence 4 and Sequence 3 demigods with godhood. And there are a total of seven in the Aurora Order? Lumian was taken aback by this revelation.

The Aurora Order was far more formidable than he had anticipated!

As for whether there were any figures on the level of angels, Mr. K did not mention it, leaving Lumian to wonder.

Concluding the introduction, Mr. K took hold of his right index finger with his left hand and tore it off. He then tossed it to Lumian, the finger dripping with blood.

“Use it in times of dire need.”

Lumian caught the finger, its blood already congealing, and imagined the phantom pain he had experienced before.

Although he was unafraid of pain or injuries in battle and could stab himself without hesitation when necessary, he couldn't simply pluck out a finger without reason, as Mr. K had done.

In a matter of moments, a new finger sprouted from Mr. K's hand, its skin fair and unblemished.

With the gathering scheduled for 9 p.m., Lumian secured the 10,000 verl d'or and made his way to Psychic's old journal library, a lavish off-white six-story building located at 19 Rue Scheer. He stayed there until 6 p.m.

Then, he leisurely found a nearby restaurant and spent 2 verl d'or on an inexpensive set meal.

The meal included an ordinary bottle of red wine, a bowl of soup, three dishes, a dessert, and an unlimited supply of bread.

Lumian made his selections from the provided menu, opting for a beef chowder, braised rabbit meat, and a serving of roasted cauliflower.

As the gathering commenced, Lumian, already in possession of the Scorpion Poison, sold the aquatic monster's blood, poisonous scales, and other items he had no use for, fetching him 100 verl d'or.

Thus far, he had amassed a total of 14,710 verl d'or and 24 coppet in cash, mostly courtesy of Mr. K.

This filled him with confidence that he could gather the remaining 30,000 verl d'or within a short span of time.

If he borrowed a bit here and pocketed a bit there, combined with the spoils of war, wouldn't he have enough?

Shortly before 11 p.m., Lumian returned to Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Ruhr and Michel, residents of the third floor who made a living selling photos of street maîtresse d'atelier near the Suhit steam locomotive station, were hauling a bulging flaxen-colored cloth bag up the stairs.

Lumian cast a curious glance at the white-haired duo and asked, slightly puzzled, "So late?"

He knew that Ruhr and Michel also worked as part-time scavengers, having encountered them on a few occasions before. However, he recalled that their work typically ended by nine.

Ruhr, clad in tattered clothing with a slight hunch to his back, mustered a smile and replied with a touch of joy, "Tonight, the member of parliament's office hosted a celebratory feast and discarded a lot of valuable rubbish. We waited until the bags could no longer hold before returning."

The market district's member of parliament's office was celebrating Hugues Artois's election? Lumian nodded subtly and walked past the elderly couple, making his way to Room 207.

Before igniting the carbide lamp, he noticed a square-folded white paper on the table, illuminated by the faint crimson moonlight streaming through the window.

Observing the neatly folded paper, Lumian suspected it to be a letter from Madam Magician.

The Pyromaniac potion formula? Did she have the messenger leave the Pyromaniac potion formula here before my arrival? Is she so confident in my ability to become an official member of the Aurora Order? Or does she have something else to inform me about? These thoughts raced through Lumian's mind as he ignited the carbide lamp, picked up the white paper, and carefully unfolded it.

“Your next mission is to complete the task assigned by Mr. K. Do you understand what I mean?”

“Pyromaniac potion formula:

“Main ingredient: Fire Salamander gland, Magma Elf core;

“Supplementary ingredients: 50 milliliters of Fire Salamander blood, 10 grams of Magma Pyroxene powder, 10 grams of Redcrown Balsam powder, 10 drops of Sun Star extract.

“Usage: What do you think?”

She actually wrote down the main ingredient... Does this mean I'll need the accompanying parts for the potion? Is Madam Magician also interested in uncovering the Iron and Blood Cross Order's current situation? How did she know that today would be the day Mr. K would assign me this task? Or does she simply disregard Mr. K's intentions? Does she only hope that I can gain more of Mr. K's trust and gradually become a core member of the Aurora Order? Lumian leaned towards the first possibility, but he couldn't dismiss the latter.

For now, he had no choice but to follow her instructions.

Having attended two mysticism gatherings, Lumian had developed a certain understanding of the potion formula's value. He knew that the Pyromaniac potion formula in his possession was worth at least 30,000 verl d'or.

If he were to sell it, he could exchange it for the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic.

Of course, this idea was fleeting. Without Madam Magician's explicit agreement, he didn't dare entertain it.

Wouldn't it be equivalent to trading Madam Magician's potion formula for her Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic?

Instead, Lumian found a more feasible plan, inspired by a popular trade scheme in Intis which was also known as Commercial Paradise or Financial Empire.

The plan required a down payment of 10,000 verl d'or, with the remaining 20,000 to be paid in installments over a year, along with a 10 to 15% interest.

After careful consideration, Lumian, sensing a high likelihood of Madam Magician possessing godhood, dismissed the idea.

He had already gathered almost half of the required funds. There was no need to risk offending a demigod by negotiating installments.

Even if Harvest Sacrifice didn't yield a satisfactory price or Franca had little savings due to her extravagant lifestyle, Salle de Bal Brise still had a substantial amount of cash in its safe. As the protector of the dance hall, what harm would there be in embezzling a small sum?

Chapter 233 Advance Payment

Realizing the lateness of the hour, Lumian planned on delving into Aurore's grimoire until midnight. He resolved to seek out Franca the next morning and inquire about the sale of Harvest Sacrifice. Additionally, he intended to ask her to keep a watchful eye on the supplementary ingredients like Fire Salamander blood and Magma Pyroxene powder.

Hmm, Franca is known for her late sleeping habits. If I go searching for her now, she'll surely still be awake. Most likely, she'll be asleep before 11 a.m. tomorrow... Taking this into consideration, Lumian had a change of heart. He tidied the wooden table, rose from his seat, and departed from Auberge du Coq Doré.

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, in front of Apartment 601.

After knocking a few times, Lumian caught sight of Franca. Her flaxen locks were disheveled, and she wore a lake-blue silk nightgown as she opened the door.

“What's the matter this time?” the Witch inquired, a smile gracing her lips as she stepped aside to make way.

Lumian didn't respond immediately. He glanced around and inquired, “Is Jenna not here?”

Unconsciously, Franca's smile faded away.

“Are you here for her? She doesn't have to perform tonight. She left early today.”

Lumian nodded.

“That's good. I won't have to climb the outer wall and leave later then.”

“...” Franca's lips twitched, and she clicked her tongue with a chuckle. “So, you've come to mock me?”

After playing a simple prank, Lumian settled himself on the gray divan.

Just as he was about to speak, Franca, who had curled up in the recliner, causing her nightgown's hem to slip, let out a soft chuckle.

“You missed quite a show in the market district this afternoon.

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“The police took care of all the places tied to the mob. Brignais, Simon, Christo, and Black were all apprehended and brought to the police headquarters. They nearly fell into the clutches of the official Beyonders and received their customary treatment. Luckily, Gardner managed to contact the newly elected Hugues Artois and convinced him to exert pressure on the two Churches and the police headquarters. By throwing a few scapegoats under the bus, the matter was resolved.”

Hugues Artois is indeed in cahoots with the Boss... Lumian chuckled.

“You didn't get caught?”

“I didn't go to any of those locations today. I spent the whole afternoon playing Fighting Evil with Jenna and my star dancer. Why would I get caught? You see, there's nothing wrong with being lazy. My favorite saying is that lazy people are blessed by being lazy,” Franca replied, amused.

“I've never heard that before,” Lumian asked casually. “Where does this proverb come from?”

“I made it up,” Franca replied nonchalantly.

Pondering Franca's explanation, Lumian's suspicions were confirmed.

“Did Jenna suggest staying indoors in the afternoon and playing cards?”

“How did you know?” Franca exclaimed in surprise.

She scrutinized Lumian, her gaze turning suspicious.

Could it be that Jenna told him herself? Had they shared so much in private?

Lumian had nothing to hide and spoke frankly, “Charlie paid me a visit today, and Jenna happened to be there. From him, I learned that the official Beyonders and the police headquarters planned a joint operation to clean up the mobsters in the market district this afternoon.

“I advised Jenna to keep it a secret so as not to trouble Charlie. And it seems she's proven to be trustworthy. She simply kept you occupied in the apartment,” Lumian explained.

Franca's face brightened with understanding. “No wonder you weren't around in the afternoon.”

A smug expression crossed her features. “Jenna is still on my side!”

She let out a satisfied sigh before curiosity tinged her voice as Franca asked warily, “Why did Jenna come to you?”

Lumian smiled knowingly. “After the demise of ‘Black Scorpion’ Roger, she finds me suspicious due to my ongoing conflict with the Poison Spur Mob.”

Franca's response was a mix of relief and amusement.

“The Aurora Order ended up being the scapegoat in this case.”

“Since I arrived in Trier, I've noticed in the newspapers that whenever something happened, the terrorist group known as the Aurora Order would claim responsibility. But I never imagined that we would finally get a taste of that treatment. The subsequent investigations were misled, and no one suspected us.”

The Aurora Order is indeed responsible for this... After Lumian mocked Franca, he steered the conversation back on track.

“Taking advantage of the situation, I attended a mysticism gathering in the afternoon and managed to obtain the formula for the Pyromaniac potion, as well as some clues about its main ingredient.”

“You're quite fortunate,” Franca exclaimed, her eyes widening slightly. “If we weren't in Intis, I'd doubt your story. It's only in Intis that the Pyromaniac potion formula is so readily available.”

Lumian then made a request.

“Please help me keep an eye on the supplementary ingredients: Fire Salamander's blood, Magma Pyroxene powder, and Redcrown Balsam.”

He omitted mentioning Sun Star, as it was relatively common and could be found in larger flower shops.

“No problem,” Franca assured him. She inquired about the quantities of each ingredient in detail before raising another concern. “Do you have enough money? I mean, enough to purchase the main ingredient for the potion.”

From her perspective, Lumian had likely spent all his savings on the Pyromaniac potion formula.

Lumian seized the opportunity to respond, “Actually, I was just about to ask if Harvest Sacrifice had been sold.”

“How can it be sold so soon? It's only been a day! I haven't even had the chance to attend any mysticism gatherings,” Franca replied, pausing before offering a solution. “If you urgently need money, I can lend you some. After all, I don't have any immediate need for the next potion.”

“There's no rush,” Lumian replied after considering the matter.

He still needed to gather all the supplementary ingredients.

Franca estimated, “Based on my experience, Harvest Sacrifice won't fetch a high price due to its inevitable side effects. You can expect it to sell for around 10,000 to 12,000 verl d'or.”

“When you need the money, I can directly provide you with 6,000 verl d'or, considering it a buyout of Harvest Sacrifice. Additionally, I can lend you 20,000 to 30,000 verl d'or, but you must return it within three months.”

“Alright,” Lumian agreed without hesitation.

He then produced Fallen Mercury and said to Franca, “I need to find someone who can repair Beyonder weapons.”

Franca examined the dirk with its ominous patterns and asked in confusion, “What's the point of repairing a Beyonder weapon? Its energy will deplete eventually.”

“It's tremendously useful. I want to utilize it for as long as possible,” Lumian admitted, though he naturally refrained from mentioning that he had a means to replenish Fallen Mercury's energy.

Of course, he had to wait until he reached Sequence 6 and could withstand the corruption. Otherwise, Termiboros would undoubtedly seize the opportunity to cause trouble.

“That's true,” Franca recalled Fallen Mercury's impressive performance in the battle against “Black Scorpion” Roger. “I'll help you inquire, but no Artisan would likely accept the task of repairing a suspected corrupted Beyonder weapon. They fear the potential adverse effects it could have on them.”

Artisan... a Beyonder skilled in repairing mystical items and Beyonder weapons? After exchanging a few more words with Franca, Lumian left Room 601 and returned to Avenue du Marché, entering Salle de Bal Brise.

Despite it almost being midnight, the place was still bustling. Lumian made his way to the finance office on the second floor corridor. As he unlocked the safe, he asked about the accountant and the cashier on the night shift.

“How much cash do we have at the moment?”

The accountant, a refined bespectacled woman in her thirties, replied with a hint of apprehension, “Approximately 28,000 verl d'or and some change.”

Lumian had already opened the safe's door by then, revealing stacks of banknotes and shimmering golden coins.

After a quick calculation, he calmly requested, “Give me 12,000 verl d'or.”

“Huh?” Both the accountant and the cashier exclaimed fearfully.

While Monsieur Ciel was the protector of Salle de Bal Brise, taking away such a substantial amount of cash in one go was unthinkable!

The accountant exchanged a glance with the young cashier, silently indicating her to find the dance hall manager, René, in the adjacent office.

Dressed in formal attire, Gardner Martin's designated representative glanced at the open safe and inquired, “Monsieur Ciel, why do you need to withdraw 12,000 verl d'or?”

“Personal expenses,” Lumian replied calmly.

René pondered for a few seconds before responding, “No problem.

“In the first two years, Baron Brignais would take between 40,000 and 50,000 verl d'or from the dance hall annually. During the transition, he even withdrew 15,000 verl d'or, which would have counted as part of the first half of the year. And it's not even the second half yet. Monsieur Ciel, consider this 12,000 verl d'or an advance.”

“Sure.” Lumian didn't concern himself with the details; he simply wanted the 12,000 verl d'or!

After securing the cash in a cloth bag, Lumian let out a silent sigh of relief.

He had nearly gathered the required 30,000 verl d'or to purchase the Pyromaniac Beyond character. Now, all he had to do was await news of the supplementary ingredients!

Currently, he possessed a total of 26,710 verl d'or. With an additional 6,000 from the Harvest Sacrifice, he would have enough.

As Lumian, laden with a significant amount of cash, left Salle de Bal Brise, a sense of unease suddenly washed over him.

He wasn't afraid of being robbed; rather, he worried that a conflict might damage the money bag or tear the banknotes.

I must find a safe place for it. I can't keep carrying it like this... Lumian strolled along Avenue du Marché, contemplating transferring the funds to the safe house.

Before long, his eyes caught sight of the brightly illuminated office belonging to the market district's member of parliament.

It stood as a classic four-story building, boasting a khaki-colored façade with statues adorning the top two floors—a Sunbird and Giant Gears.

The celebration banquet is still underway... Lumian shook his head disapprovingly.

Pausing for a moment, he settled in the shadows across the street, observing the departing guests from the banquet hall.

Hugues Artois, who enjoyed the combined support of the Savoie Mob and the Poison Spur Mob, not to mention Lady Moon's praise, was undoubtedly a man of influence. Some of the guests he had invited could very well be problematic individuals connected to the schemes of the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

As time went by, an increasing number of guests emerged from the member of parliament's office. Lumian found no one who aroused suspicion. He could only confirm that most of them belonged to the upper echelons of society. They were elegantly attired, and their faces had graced the pages of various newspapers.

Suddenly, a familiar figure caught his eye.

It was Gardner Martin, an amiable man with chubby cheeks, a few silver strands of hair at his temples, and brownish-red eyes!

Gardner Martin, the boss of the Savoie Mob!

Dressed in a tailcoat and a dark bow tie, Gardner seemed to sense something. He abruptly turned his head, fixing his gaze on the shadowy spot where Lumian sat.

Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

His thoughts raced, and he swiftly made up his mind. Rising to his feet, he approached Gardner Martin.

Gardner Martin regarded him with a penetrating stare, revealing no trace of emotion.

“Good evening, Boss,” Lumian greeted as he drew nearer.

Gardner Martin asked nonchalantly, "What brings you here?"

Lumian replied candidly, "I left Salle de Bal Brise and noticed that the member of parliament's office banquet was still ongoing. I thought I'd check which guests Monsieur Hugues Artois had invited, so as to avoid offending the wrong people in the future."

Gardner Martin nodded subtly and spoke calmly, "That's a commendable habit."

With a gesture signaling Lumian to depart, he proceeded towards a private carriage, accompanied by Butler Faustino.

Lumian's heart stirred as he followed suit, taking the initiative to speak, "Boss, I took an advance of 12,000 verl d'or from the dance hall today."

Chapter 234 Sincerity

Gardner Martin's brows lifted in surprise as he cast a curious glance at Lumian, taking a moment to ponder the situation.

"Let's converse inside the carriage."

Upon hearing this, Butler Faustino took the initiative to settle himself in the front of the carriage, right beside the driver.

Silently, Lumian trailed behind Gardner Martin and entered the carriage, taking a seat opposite him.

As the carriage slowly set in motion, Gardner Martin fixed his gaze upon Lumian and spoke up.

"Why did you advance such a hefty sum of cash?"

Lumian responded with candor.

"Given the opportunity to enhance my strength, I aspire to become a Sequence 7 Pyromaniac."

Gardner Martin hadn't anticipated Lumian's straightforwardness. After a brief pause, he smiled and inquired, "Is 12,000 verl d'or sufficient?"

Lumian didn't bat an eye as he replied, "In addition to the 18,000 verl d'or you provided last time and my previous savings."

Gardner Martin nodded slowly.

"Did you come across anyone selling the main ingredient for the Pyromaniac potion elsewhere? And do you possess the formula for the potion?"

"Yes," Lumian confessed without reservation.

Gardner Martin chuckled.

.....

"You've divulged all of this to me. Shouldn't these matters be kept secret?"

Lumian displayed an unusual sincerity as he responded, "I feel prepared to consume the Pyromaniac potion. It won't be long before I advance to Sequence 7.

"When that happens, if a conflict arises, concealing the change in my strength would be impossible. Boss, you'll soon discover it anyway. So why not tell you now?"

Furthermore, René, the manager of the dance hall, worked under Gardner Martin. He would undoubtedly report the 12,000 verl d'or advancement.

Lumian paused momentarily before continuing, "That's one reason.

"Another reason is that I've lived on the streets, endured rural life, and faced persecution. Now, I adhere to a single principle: I treat those who treat me well."

He wasn't attempting to flaunt his loyalty. According to Jenna, such exaggerated loyalty would seem untrustworthy, especially when he had only met Gardner Martin once. His main goal was to convey his allegiance.

Similarly, Gardner Martin would definitely comprehend the underlying purpose behind Lumian's frankness. It was a display of his astuteness.

Gardner Martin lifted his head and burst into laughter.

"Very good.

"Brignais, Christo, and the others have their own secrets. They assume I'm oblivious.

"The fact that you can accurately grasp your situation, your future progress, and my stance indicates that you're more astute than them. Most times, sincerity proves to be the most effective approach."

Sincerity? Lumian seized the opportunity to express himself with an extraordinary sincerity.

"Boss, I have leads on the main ingredient, but I'm unsure where to acquire the supplementary ingredients.

"Could you keep an eye out for Fire Salamander's blood, Magma Pyroxene powder, and Redcrown Balsam?"

From Lumian's perspective, Gardner Martin, suspected to be a Sequence 6 or perhaps even a Sequence 5 Beyond of the Hunter pathway, would have an easier time finding the supplementary ingredients for the Pyromaniac potion compared to Franca.

Perhaps he still possessed leftover supplementary ingredients from advancing to Pyromaniac?

According to Aurore's grimoire, spiritual supplementary ingredients could be preserved for an extended period if the method was correct.

Gardner Martin was taken aback. He hadn't anticipated Ciel making such a direct request.

Initially, he had intended to inquire about a few matters of concern and understand Lumian's needs before offering assistance to win him over.

After a brief pause, Gardner Martin nodded and responded, "No problem."

Observing that Gardner Martin didn't inquire about the quantities of the three supplementary ingredients, Lumian grew increasingly convinced that the Savoie Mob boss was a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway.

Gardner Martin peered out of the window and spoke inquisitively.

“While you were observing the parliament member's office, did you notice anything suspicious?”

“No,” Lumian shook his head. “They're just individuals whose pictures occasionally appear in the newspapers.”

Gardner Martin smiled nonchalantly.

“Indeed, there's the president and vice-president of our Savoie Chamber of Commerce; Bono Goodville, the owner of Goodville Chemical Factory; Clement, the manager of Nova Mechanical Prosthetics; and Etienne from Saint-Ger Phlogiston Factory... I was invited as a shareholder of Rist Docks and the head of Rist Shipping Company and Savoie Construction Company, not as the boss of the Savoie Mob.”

Gardner Martin let out a soft sigh.

“However, we can barely squeeze into Trier's high society. In the business world, the true heavyweights are the chairmen and proprietors of Trier Bank, Suchit Bank, and Asset Credit Bank. They are the shareholders of behemoths like Suhit Textile Group, Tilisi Coal and Steel Consortium, Anubi Steel Company, Southern Liquor Merchants Federation, Falgar Weapons Group, and Balam-Paz Import and Export Corporation.”

Lumian had come across these names in newspapers and magazines. The company that had left the deepest impression was Balam-Paz Import and Export Corporation.

To protect their interests in the West Balam and Paz Valley of the Southern Continent, they had even been allowed to finance a substantial private army and a fleet as mercenaries.

Noticing that the carriage was about to depart from Avenue du Marché, Gardner Martin signaled the driver to halt and nodded at Lumian.

“Before consuming the potion, ensure your condition is favorable. It's better to delay than to take unnecessary risks.”

After acknowledging Gardner Martin's advice, Lumian left the carriage and headed towards Rue des Blouses Blanches.

He intended to conceal all his cash within the confines of the safe house.

After walking a certain distance, Lumian hesitated.

Safe houses didn't guarantee absolute safety, especially in lower-class areas like the market district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique, where the population was denser. Thieves ran rampant in such places.

If a burglar were to stumble upon Aurore's grimoires, they would be of little value to them. At most, they would search through them in the hopes of finding hidden banknotes, but the sum of over 26,000 cash would undoubtedly be taken.

Should I set up a few traps in the safe house to deter thieves? Lumian's thoughts raced, and suddenly, a better idea struck him.

That idea was to provide Madam Magician with an advance payment of 26,000 verl d'or!

This way, there would be no risk of losing such a large sum of cash.

Furthermore, a lofty individual like Madam Magician would not deny accepting the advance payment.

Phew... With his mind made up, Lumian arrived at the safe house on Rue des Blouses Blanches and retrieved pen and paper to write a letter.

"Esteemed Madam Magician,

"I have already procured 26,000 verl d'or. I will offer this as an advance payment. Once I gather the remaining 4,000, you may send me the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic.

"Looking forward to your reply."

Lumian refrained from requesting Madam Magician to grant him the Pyromaniac Beyonder characteristic immediately, as he had yet to acquire the corresponding supplementary ingredients. Preserving Beyonder characteristics proved to be quite troublesome, and there was a risk of losing them.

After summoning the puppet messenger and entrusting it with the cloth bag containing cash and coins, along with the letter, Lumian felt a significant sense of relief. However, he couldn't help but worry that the messenger might fall victim to robbery in the spirit world.

Before long, the puppet messenger adorned in a golden dress returned with a reply from Madam Magician.

"26,000 verl d'or has been received.

"Magician."

It's akin to receiving a receipt... Lumian murmured to himself, expressing gratitude to the puppet messenger.

He then departed Rue des Blouses Blanches and made his way back to Auberge du Coq Doré.

As was his routine, Lumian used a short wire to open the door, quietly traversed the dimly lit lobby with only the basement bar's glow, and ascended the stairs.

Reaching the second floor, he pursed his lips and continued upwards to the third floor, arriving at Room 310, where Flameng had once resided.

The wooden door to the room stood ajar, and the curtains remained undrawn, allowing the crimson moonlight to filter through the glass.

It was an unwritten folklore often believed by the lower-class citizens of Trier:

In a room where someone had met their demise, the door had to be left open and the curtains undrawn for three days.

This was done out of concern that the ghost of the deceased might be reluctant to depart.

Lumian stood at the doorway, gazing into the empty room, as if he could see the madman clutching his head and whispering, "I'm dying."

After a while, he silently averted his gaze and proceeded towards the stairs.

As he approached the staircase, he overheard a conversation emanating from Room 302, despite their attempts to suppress their voices.

The room belonged to Ruhr and Michel, the sellers of counterfeit photographs who worked as part-time scavengers.

There was no sign of a kerosene or carbide lamp being lit within the room. No light seeped through the crack in the door.

Lumian's acute hearing allowed him to instinctively tune in to the discussion between the elderly couple.

"Old Woman, look at these. They're worth a fortune! Those gentlemen and ladies simply discarded them!"

"I reckon this bag alone could fetch 5 verl d'or..."

"5 verl d'or? It's worth at least 15!"

"Old Man, if only we could stumble upon such valuable rubbish every day."

"Then we'd have to vote for a member of parliament every day."

"Praise the Sun. Let that member of parliament host a banquet every day. In that case, we could return to Aurmir and purchase 10 acres of fields to cultivate grapes within a year."

"You're quite the dreamer, Old Woman."

"What's wrong with dreaming? Don't you dream? Even without the banquet, we've managed to save up a significant sum. Another four or five years should suffice."

"True. When the time comes, we won't have to toil as hard as we do now, and we won't need to worry about being unable to work..."

Lumian ceased eavesdropping and silently chuckled. Descending the stairs, he returned to Room 207, briefly freshened up, and climbed into bed.

In the midst of the night, half-asleep, he was suddenly startled by hurried footsteps.

As he sat up and glanced towards the corridor, there came a knock on his door.

Lumian, feeling a mix of wariness and confusion, approached the wooden door and opened it.

Standing outside was Madame Michel, the short, gray-haired woman adorned in a yellow cloth dress.

She spoke with fear and panic, "Ruhr has taken ill suddenly! Ciel—Monsieur Ciel, can you assist me in carrying him to the clinic on Rue des Blouses Blanches?"

"I-I have the money for his treatment!"

Monsieur Ruhr is unwell? He was perfectly fine when I fell asleep... Lumian was taken aback.

Chapter 235 "Disease"

Observing Lumian's silence, Michel spoke with anxiety creeping into her voice.

"If you're not willing, I can find someone else."

"Who should I look for... They don't really like us. They can't stand our foul odor..."

That was precisely why she sought out Lumian, a leader of the mob. Lumian and Charlie were the only ones at Auberge du Coq Doré who could calmly communicate with the couple, but Charlie had already left.

Glancing at the short and hunched figure of Madame Michel, Lumian let out a sigh and responded.

"I'll go and check it out."

Still perplexed, he walked past Madame Michel, hastened up to the second floor, and entered Room 302.

The place was filled with various kinds of rubbish, emitting an indescribable stench. Lumian raised his hand, pinching his nose, and maneuvered his way through the cramped space, barely fitting a single person, until he reached the yellowish and greasy bedsheet.

Ruhr, with his wrinkled eyes tightly shut, lay on the bed, his face flushed and his breath ragged. He had fainted.

He's seriously ill... Lumian furrowed his brow, holding his breath. He turned around and carried Ruhr out of the room.

Meanwhile, Michel swiftly rummaged through the piles of trash, uncovering hidden spots with single banknotes and coins, which she promptly concealed on her person.

Soon, they left Room 302. As Michel locked the door, she spoke to Lumian.

"Monsieur Ciel, pay me no mind. Send Ruhr to the clinic without me. I'll catch up."

Lumian nodded, quickened his pace, and sprinted out of Auberge du Coq Doré.

He was familiar with Rue des Blouses Blanches' clinics, often frequenting the area. After a short sprint, he spotted the Roblin Clinic, a small hospital in all but name.

Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman and Quartier de Noël had been neighboring districts for some time now. The Holy Palace Hospital, funded by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, was located across the bridge. As a result, only a few clinics were situated on this side of the bridge.

Roblin Clinic had two doctors on duty during the night. Temporary beds were set up in the spacious hall, with a few patients lying on them, receiving infusion treatments.

Lumian carried Ruhr to one of the doctors and gently placed him on a treatment bed.

The doctor, donning gold-rimmed glasses and in his early thirties, glanced at Lumian. Without directly mentioning any consultation fees, he disdainfully examined Ruhr's condition.

After a few minutes, he adjusted his glasses and spoke.

“He's running a high fever, but there don't appear to be any other symptoms. I suggest we try to bring down the fever first. If it persists, we should immediately transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital.”

“Alright.” Lumian possessed limited medical knowledge, so he could only heed the doctor's advice.

The doctor swiftly wrote a prescription for Lumian and instructed him to make the necessary payment. Lumian complied, receiving the fever medicine and infusion drip from the pharmacy.

The Fool Pharmaceutical Company's Type 1357 Fever Medicine... Lumian glanced at the prescription's contents and then proceeded to the payment window.

Madame Michel finally arrived, panting and exhausted.

She accepted the prescription from Lumian and glanced at the price. In a burst of frustration, she exclaimed, “It's 5 verl d'or...”

Without waiting for Lumian's response, she clenched her teeth and retrieved copper and silver coins. She gathered 5 verl d'or and paid the consultation fee.

Before long, Ruhr was carried to a temporary bed for the infusion.

This treatment had gained popularity only in recent years.

Madame Michel finally regained her composure and spoke to Lumian.

“Thank you, Monsieur Ciel. You can go back and rest. I'll stay with Ruhr.”

Lumian didn't insist. After all, he wasn't a doctor.

He nodded slightly and directed his gaze towards Ruhr. Concentrating, he intended to check on his luck.

Lumian couldn't help but furrow his brow.

Monsieur Ruhr was on the brink of death!

However, it wasn't severe or evident. Unlike the previous vagrant, there seemed to be a chance of salvation.

Just as Lumian was about to suggest transferring him to the Holy Palace Hospital, Ruhr's condition took a turn.

Translucent blisters resembling burns emerged on his skin. They swiftly filled with light yellow pus, exhibiting signs of festering.

Such symptoms, such progression, and such rapid evolution caused Lumian's pupils to contract. His intuition informed him that this was no ordinary illness.

Perhaps it was connected to mysticism and supernatural forces!

Monsieur Ruhr is merely a scavenger. Why is he affected by supernatural powers? Lumian raised his head and pointed at the unconscious Ruhr. He addressed Madame Michel, "You're believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun, correct? Take him to the Église Saint-Robert and give it a try."

He sensed that the Holy Palace Hospital might not be equipped to treat an illness involving supernatural powers. It would be better to visit the Eternal Blazing Sun cathedral and determine if purification could eliminate the effects.

Madame Michel noticed her husband's peculiar transformation and pleaded with a sobbing tone, "No, transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital! Transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital!"

To Madame Michel's understanding, seeking blessings at the cathedral was akin to giving up on treatment and preparing for the solace of a deathbed.

Lumian refrained from persuading her, realizing that it was the dead of night and Église Saint-Robert had long closed its doors. Moreover, Ruhr and Michel were nothing more than a couple of scavengers, so the chances of the cathedral opening for them were slim.

Additionally, Église Saint-Robert was quite far away. Ruhr's condition was rapidly deteriorating, and he might not survive the journey, let alone live long enough to rouse the cathedral's caretakers to unlock the door.

Lumian observed Ruhr, whose blisters had burst and were now oozing pus. After a brief moment of silence, he spoke to Madame Michel, "Find a doctor and transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital immediately."

"Alright, alright!" Michel snapped out of her daze and hurriedly approached the doctor who had attended to Ruhr.

Once she vacated the temporary bed, Lumian positioned himself to block the view of the other patients. From his pocket, he retrieved an iron-colored metal canister adorned with a spring fountain pattern.

This was the Healing Agent he had obtained from "Baldy" Harman!

Lumian believed that ailments as a result of mysticism could only be countered by mysticism remedies. Although uncertain whether this agent, primarily meant for external injuries, would work on Ruhr, he was determined to give it a shot.

Unscrewing the cap, he pinched Ruhr's mouth open and forced down half of the agent.

Ruhr, seemingly parched, instinctively swallowed the clear liquid resembling a refreshing spring.

After two gulps, he began to calm down.

In less than a minute, Madame Michel returned with the doctor. The blisters on Ruhr's face shriveled, scabbed over, and silently fell away.

It actually worked... Lumian breathed a sigh of relief and focused on observing the shifts in Ruhr's fate.

This time, there were no signs of impending death. Ruhr's destiny for the next few days appeared somewhat chaotic, making it difficult for Lumian to decipher or speculate upon.

Perplexed, the doctor glanced at Ruhr and asked Madame Michel, "Isn't he in pretty good shape?"

Madame Michel also noticed that the dreadful blisters that had marred her husband's face were now gone, leaving behind only scars and wrinkles. His breathing had steadied and was no longer labored.

"I apologize for my anxiety," she quickly apologized.

The doctor, irritated by the stench emanating from her and Ruhr, waved his hand dismissively.

"The Fool Pharmaceutical Company's medications are far more effective than others. Since the situation has improved, keep a close eye on him. Don't rush to transfer him to the Holy Palace Hospital."

With that, he hastily departed from the temporary bed.

Madame Michel slumped down next to Ruhr, occasionally checking his forehead to gauge his body temperature.

Lumian remained by their side. He pulled up a stool and sat, attentively observing Ruhr's condition.

Ten minutes later, Ruhr opened his eyes and gazed blankly at the unfamiliar white ceiling.

"Where am I?"

Michel let out a sigh of relief and swiftly recounted his sudden illness.

"Why did I fall ill out of the blue?" Ruhr was bewildered. "I felt perfectly fine before going to bed."

Interrupting their conversation, Lumian casually inquired, "What did you do before bed that was different from your usual routine?"

"Nothing," Ruhr pondered for a moment before replying, "Just the usual routine. I sorted through the trash I collected, went to the washroom, had a chat, and then went to sleep... Maybe I came back late last night. It was nearly one o'clock by the time I finished sorting. I guess I ended up sleeping too late..."

Could there be something amiss with the garbage? Or did something occur during the day that only manifested in the dead of night? Lumian delved deeper, hoping for valuable clues from Ruhr and Michel, but alas, his efforts proved fruitless.

Ruhr recuperated swiftly. Once the IV had been administered, he insisted on leaving the Roblin Clinic immediately, unwilling to spend any more money and determined to return to the motel before dawn.

Observing that Ruhr's luck remained unchanged, Lumian didn't try to dissuade him.

Auberge du Coq Doré, Room 302.

Lumian furrowed his brow, surveying the piles of garbage emitting various odors, hoping to pinpoint the problematic one. Ruhr and Michel stood beside him, expressing their gratitude incessantly.

Given the peculiar environment, his sense of smell proved useless. Lumian activated his Spirit Vision and observed for a while, yet found no clues.

He could only say to Ruhr and Michel, “We can't rule out the possibility that there might be something contaminated in this trash that caused your illness. Sleep in a different room tonight and wait until morning.”

Lumian intended to seek the assistance of Franca, a skilled Witch in divination, once she awoke, in order to identify the source of the problem.

Before Ruhr could respond, Michel, terrified by her husband's sudden illness and brush with death, spoke up.

Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you very much!

“Alright! Thank you, Monsieur Ciel.”

Two vacant rooms were available on the third floor. Lumian arranged for Ruhr and Michel to rest in Room 307.

It was already past four in the morning. Lumian returned to Room 207 and lay on the bed, contemplating the reason behind the strange occurrence. Gradually, he drifted off into a dazed slumber.

Suddenly, he jolted awake, barely catching a glimpse of a woman's anguished cry.

Lumian's heart tightened as he grabbed Fallen Mercury and left the room. Following the sound of the wailing, he ascended to the third floor.

In the darkness, his heart sank as he slowed his pace, filled with trepidation.

Finally, he halted outside Room 307. In the crimson moonlight that filtered through the curtains, he spotted Madame Michel kneeling before the bed, weeping uncontrollably.

Sensing his approach, Michel, clad in a yellow gown, turned her tear-streaked face in the dimness and directed her gaze towards the door.

Her voice hollow, she uttered, “Ciel—Monsieur Ciel, Ruhr is dead...”

Chapter 236 Morning Light

He's dead... Lumian thought, his heart heavy with the news he had anticipated but couldn't fully accept.

Leaving the clinic, Ruhr had appeared to have recovered, escaping the clutches of death. How could he have died so suddenly?

With a heavy heart, Lumian stepped into Room 307, fixing his gaze upon the bed.

There lay Ruhr, his body plagued by festering wounds that oozed a faint yellow pus. His complexion was pale and sickly, and he lay completely still.

Ruhr's eyes were wide open, and there was evidence of vomit around his mouth.

After a few moments of silently studying Ruhr's dazed, pained eyes, Lumian spoke in a deep voice, "When did he pass away?"

Michel, her white hair now devoid of its usual luster, slowly shook her head and replied, "I was exhausted and fell asleep. When I awoke, he was already gone..."

"Did he return to Room 302 before bedtime?" Lumian inquired, pressing for details.

"No, he only went to the washroom near Room 302. I followed him..." Michel's voice carried a deep timbre, but it gave Lumian an otherworldly sensation, as though a part of her soul had left her body.

They had all visited the washroom. One fell victim to the strange ailment, while the other remained unscathed... Lumian furrowed his brow, determined to investigate the washroom.

If nothing seems amiss there, the likelihood of Madame Michel being abnormal becomes increasingly probable!

As Lumian departed from Room 307, heading toward the designated washroom, Michel remained kneeling by the bed, quietly weeping, unaware of the other's movements.

The third-floor restroom was no longer as filthy as before, thanks to the regular cleaning ladies. Although some stains and trash were unavoidable after a day's use, it was still passable for civilized individuals.

Lumian glanced around, taking in the sight of the toilet bowl and sink illuminated by the moon's crimson glow streaming through the window. He noticed the rusty tap and mirror, reflecting his own image.

After careful observation, he noticed a white silk handkerchief draped over a pipe in a hidden corner.

Even with a casual glance, Lumian could tell that it didn't belong to any of the current residents of Auberge du Coq Doré. The fabric was of superior quality, adorned with elegant embroidery—a clear sign of its expense.

An outsider, perhaps? Lumian's initial instinct was to pick up the silk handkerchief and examine it more closely. However, he quickly reminded himself of the sight of Monsieur Ruhr's festering body when he had fallen ill and forced himself to restrain his impulses.

Lumian's mind raced as he left the washroom and returned to Room 307. He approached Madame Michel, who was still sobbing, and inquired, "Do you know who the handkerchief in the washroom belongs to?"

Confused and filled with sorrow, Michel instinctively replied, "It's Ruhr's."

Monsieur Ruhr's? Lumian was both surprised and convinced.

He pressed further, "Where did it come from?"

Madame Michel gazed at Ruhr's grotesque, lifeless form and spoke dreamily, "It was among the trash we collected tonight. I wonder which gentleman or lady discarded it..."

“It had phlegm on it but was undamaged. Ruhr cleaned it and intended to sell it second-hand instead of throwing it away...”

“After you mentioned the possibility of something unclean in the trash, Ruhr took it out and hid it in the washroom. He didn't dare to return to Room 302...”

Phlegm... Lumian felt he had discovered the root of the problem.

He let out a slow exhale and said, “Did Monsieur Ruhr touch the handkerchief again? Did you?”

“I don't know...” Madame Michel shook her head slowly. “He went to the washroom by himself. I didn't touch it...”

As expected... Lumian retrieved his gloves and put them on. He returned to the washroom and used Fallen Mercury to lift the white silk handkerchief. He carefully placed it in the white paper he had with him, folding it neatly.

Throughout the process, he made sure not to touch the handkerchief directly.

Afterward, Lumian wiped Fallen Mercury's blade with another piece of white paper and tossed the crumpled ball into the toilet bowl. He waited for it to soften and then flushed it away.

Stepping out of the washroom, he noticed Madame Michel standing silently by the door of Room 307, like a ghost wandering in the darkness.

As Lumian approached her, the old lady with white hair wore a pleading expression.

“It's almost dawn, Monsieur Ciel. Could you help me move Ruhr back to Room 302?”

Her voice still held a dreamy quality.

Lumian was taken aback. After a brief pause of five or six seconds, he replied, “Okay.”

He entered Room 307 and carefully wrapped Monsieur Ruhr's body in the bedsheets, hoisting him onto his back.

With just a few steps, Lumian carried the lifeless form and placed it on the bed in Room 302.

Madame Michel, having squeezed through the trash, expressed her profuse gratitude before striding towards the wooden table and drawing back the curtains.

It was almost 6 a.m. As the first rays of dawn broke through the sky, dimming the crimson moonlight, Michel listened to the vendors outside the motel and fixated her gaze on Ruhr.

Lumian retreated from Room 302 and returned to the corridor, stepping out of the reach of the light. He leaned silently against the wall, not disturbing the serene scene.

After a few minutes, Madame Michel suddenly sprang into action.

She rummaged through the room, finding more banknotes and coins. Then, she hastened out of the room and descended downstairs.

Lumian didn't follow. He raised his right foot to the wall and leaned against the sleeping darkness of the wall.

As time passed, Madame Michel returned with an abundance of items.

There was a bottle of red wine, grilled cod, cured meat, meatloaf, soybean paste, hot sauce, and apples.

Without sparing a glance for Lumian, Madame Michel entered Room 302. She collapsed onto the bed and placed the food beside the decaying corpse.

After a moment's contemplation, she rose again and ignited the carbide lamp on the wooden table, filling the room with its glow.

Madame Michel once again lowered herself to the floor, picked up the meatloaf, and brought it to Ruhr's mouth. Smiling, she uttered, "Haven't you been craving meatloaf lately? I bought it for you today."

After allowing some of the oil to moisten the corpse's lips, Madame Michel took a bite of the meatloaf and savored it with closed eyes.

"It's delicious. How long has it been since we last ate? Two weeks, right?"

Having taken a few more bites of the meatloaf, Madame Michel seized the bottle of red wine and took a swig.

Mumbling, she continued, "Old Man, our vines have produced red wine. We needn't worry about what the future holds!"

Engaging in one-sided conversation with Ruhr's lifeless body, she continued to indulge in wine and various delicacies.

Outside the door, Lumian remained in the darkness, leaning against the wall as he silently observed the unfolding scene. He neither entered nor departed.

Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you very much!

Soon enough, Madame Michel began to feel the effects of her intoxication. As a former barmaid, she began to sing loudly:

"Trier, a city dressed in gold,

"A ball that endures 'til dawn unfolds;

"Chicken roasted, dripping with oil's grace,

"A castle cake to fill each eager embrace.

"A bow-tied attendant glides 'mongst the guests,

"Merrily dancing with joy and delight.

"My beloved, hidden 'midst the crowd,

"Among them, a beacon shining bright.

"Among them, my love resides,

"In the Capital of Joy, forever Trier!"

Madame Michel rose unsteadily and stumbled towards the wooden table, gathering the banknotes in front of the carbide lamp.

In an instant, the cash caught fire and flames erupted on the table, emitting a bright yellow glow.

With her arms outstretched, Madame Michel shouted, "In the Capital of Joy, forever Trier!"

She retrieved the rope that had once bound the sack and climbed onto the wooden table, tying the rope firmly to the window frame with a tight knot.

In the flickering light of the fire, Madame Michel turned to face Ruhr, lying motionless on the bed. She positioned the knot around her neck and bent her legs.

The knot tightened, and Madame Michel's eyes bulged in her struggle for breath.

Outside the window, the sky grew brighter, casting a faint light that bathed a portion of the corridor. Lumian leaned against the wall, concealed in the shadows. With his hands in his pockets and his right foot propped up, he gazed impassively at Madame Michel, suspended from the window frame. He witnessed her mouth gradually open, her expression contort in pain, and her bent legs letting up upon her demise.

In the morning light, the corpse swayed gently.

At 6:35 a.m., 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, Apartment 601.

Startled by the knocks on the door, Franca, her flaxen hair disheveled, wore a bitter expression as she rose from her slumber.

"I've only had three hours of sleep. Three hours!"

"Help me inspect the contents for any anomalies." Lumian ignored Franca's complaints and presented the handkerchief wrapped in white paper. "Be cautious. It might be infectious."

"Infectious?" Franca snapped out of her daze and retreated to her room, donning translucent, pale-yellow rubber gloves.

She carefully unwrapped the outer layer of paper, extracted the silk handkerchief within, and placed it on the glass coffee table.

Tapping her teeth while observing intently, Franca spoke with a solemn expression,

"There is indeed an issue. There are numerous small but active spirits lingering on it. They belong to the same category.

"I suspect it's a pathogen. It spreads through direct contact with the skin or even blood exchange. Based on your description, it's not highly contagious."

Although Lumian didn't comprehend the concept of a pathogen fully, he grasped the essence of Franca's explanation.

He fell into silence momentarily before saying, "Can you determine the owner of this handkerchief?"

“No problem. With a powerful medium present, as long as they don't possess strong anti-divination abilities, I can locate them.” As Franca spoke, black flames flickered on her rubber gloves.

After “cleansing” the area, she removed her gloves and retrieved a makeup mirror. Hovering her left palm over the handkerchief, she stroked the mirror with her right hand.

Reciting a series of incantations in a hushed tone, her eyes darkened.

She repeated the divination statement.

“The owner of this handkerchief.

“The owner of this handkerchief...”

After several repetitions, the mirror emitted an aqueous glow, reflecting a figure in the darkness.

It was a slender young man with a pale complexion and an unhealthy appearance.

His curly dark-yellow hair framed his face, and his brown eyes conveyed an unmasked indifference. Clad in a black tailcoat, he clutched a white silk handkerchief. He coughed twice and expectorated into the fabric.

Lumian strained to capture the person's features, feeling a sense of familiarity wash over him. It was as if he had encountered this individual somewhere before.

After a brief recollection, it dawned on him.

This was a member of Hugues Artois's campaign team, the one who stood behind the red-haired woman!

Chapter 237 Concealment

“So? Do you know him?” Franca glanced at Lumian, seeking his insight.

Lumian shifted his gaze away from the mirror, its reflection gradually fading, and spoke with a deep voice, “He's one of Hugues Artois's men. I spotted him during the campaign.”

Franca furrowed her brow, closing her makeup mirror and inquiring, “What happened?”

Lumian recounted the encounter between Ruhr and Michel, concluding, “There's something suspicious about this man.”

Franca sighed, remarking, “They're already in such dire straits as scavengers, and yet they still have to face such a situation...”

She scoffed, adding, “Considering Lady Moon's endorsement of Hugues Artois as an open-minded individual, it wouldn't surprise me if he surrounds himself with peculiar characters.”

Pausing to look at Lumian, Franca continued, “Hugues Artois is now a member of parliament. He'll have both visible and covert protection. If we make a move against him or his associates, we'll easily be tracked down. The consequences would be severe.”

“Let's entrust this matter to the official Beyonders for further investigation. I can't guarantee much else. At the very least, the Inquisition's Purifiers and members of the Machinery Hivemind won't turn a blind eye to such affairs. They will find a way to uncover the truth and assess the situation,” Franca suggested.

Lumian nodded slowly and inquired, “Then which Sequence or pathway could it be? Can phlegm transmit such a deadly disease?”

As he made his way from Auberge du Coq Doré to Rue des Blouses Blanches, Lumian diligently recalled the twenty-two paths of the divine detailed in Aurore's grimoires but found no match for the current circumstances.

Franca pondered deeply and said, “My understanding of the twenty-two paths of the divine is similar to your sister's, but I have a more comprehensive knowledge of certain aspects. I can only think of one pathway that fits the criteria, but it's of a higher level and exclusive to women. It doesn't align with the target's situation.”

“Hmm... Considering we've encountered the Great Mother and the Blessed of the Mother Tree of Desire, could our target be someone blessed by another evil deity?”

“Heh heh, if it truly involves the faith of an evil god, the Beyonders from both Churches will undoubtedly intensify their efforts.”

“Yes, Ruhr's death is peculiar indeed. As long as the investigating police aren't blind, they'll swiftly report it to their superiors, who will assign someone capable to handle the case.”

Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you very much!

Lumian acknowledged her words briefly, his expression softening.

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

As he walked past the reception desk, Madame Fels rose to her feet, a mix of fear and flattery evident in her voice as she greeted, “Good morning, Monsieur Ciel.”

A few days ago, the police had informed her that Monsieur Ive was believed to be involved in a cult and had become a wanted criminal. They had requested her to use the rental income to cover expenses and ensure the motel's smooth operation during this period. Additionally, they wanted her to keep a record of the accounts. Once the elections were over, they would settle the matter of Auberge du Coq Doré's ownership promptly.

Madame Fels felt uneasy, fearing that the new boss would dismiss her. Subconsciously, she tried to win Ciel's favor, hoping that a leader of the Savoie Mob would stand up for her when the time came. Whoever took control of Auberge du Coq Doré would not want to offend the corresponding mob, unless they had influential connections.

“Good morning,” Lumian replied simply. He walked along the wall, covered in newspapers and pink paper to conceal stains, cracks, and bedbugs, making his way up to the third floor.

He had locked the door to Room 302 before the other tenants on the third floor had awakened, so as of yet, no one had discovered the lifeless bodies of Ruhr and Michel.

Madame Michel's singing before she took her own life had failed to disturb the neighbors. To those residing on Rue Anarchie, various noises during the night were commonplace. Singing, gunshots, brawls, shouting, and sporting activities were nothing worth paying attention to.

Lumian returned the silk handkerchief to its hidden spot in the washroom before pausing in front of Room 302. Extending his left hand clad in a black glove, he turned the handle and opened the creaking wooden door.

Madame Michel's lifeless form hung silently in the room. The aroma of food mingled with the surrounding stench of garbage, filling the space as the light grew brighter.

Lumian gazed at the scene for over ten seconds before slowly turning away, preparing to leave.

It was nearly eight o'clock when the two police officers arrived at Auberge du Coq Doré. They spotted Lumian, who had disguised himself using the Mystery Prying Glasses.

“Why is there another death?” grumbled the officer who had previously interrogated Lumian.

His face was rugged, lacking in handsome features, and bore the marks of age.

Lumian responded calmly, “One died of illness. I'm no doctor, unable to save him.”

“And the other one?” the officer pressed for more information.

Lumian replied honestly, “She took her own life after the blow.”

The older-looking policeman furrowed his brow and entered Room 302, accompanied by his partner.

The first sight that greeted them was Madame Michel's lifeless body hanging from the window frame. The officer instinctively covered his nose.

The place was far too filthy and foul-smelling!

Next, his gaze fell upon Ruhr's decaying corpse, observing the putrefying flesh and spilled blood.

“Son of a bitch, you call this an illness?” he couldn't help but turn to Lumian, his eyes filled with shock and fear.

Lumian briefly recounted the events of the previous night, omitting the fact that Ruhr's condition had worsened while he was at Roblin Clinic and had been revived by half a bottle of Healing Agent. Lumian attributed the credit to The Fool Pharmaceuticals' fever-reducing medicine.

He also mentioned his suspicion that the Ruhrs had encountered an infectious source within the pile of garbage they had collected the previous night, causing them to sleep in Room 307. Lumian brought up Madame Michel's mention of a silk handkerchief in the washroom as well.

The more the two officers listened, the quieter they became, their expressions slightly off.

After Lumian finished speaking, they hurried to the washroom to confirm the presence of the silk handkerchief.

The older-looking officer glanced at Ciel outside and whispered to his partner, "Another mysticism incident. Stay here and guard the scene. I'll report the situation."

The other officer nodded.

"No problem."

Lumian observed as they divided the tasks, patiently awaiting the arrival of the official Beyonders.

In less than half an hour, the older-looking policeman returned to Auberge du Coq Doré, alone.

Where are the official Beyonders? Lumian's eyes widened in surprise.

The older-looking policeman avoided Lumian's gaze and pulled his partner to the end of the corridor, engaging in a hushed conversation.

Lumian stood at a distance, straining his ears to catch their words, but they remained unintelligible.

After a while, the older-looking officer approached Lumian, his expression grave.

"We've preliminarily determined it as death due to illness and suicide."

No further investigation? Lumian's eyebrows twitched in disbelief.

The officer repeated what he had said when they had taken Flameng's body away. He donned gloves, carefully placed the silk handkerchief into a cloth bag, and secured it tightly.

Lumian silently observed as they removed the corpses, wrapped Ruhr's body, and placed him in a body bag. Numerous thoughts raced through his mind.

Even though he died in such a manner, the official Beyonders don't find it suspicious? No need for further investigation?

Or perhaps the police officer didn't report the matter, and the official Beyonders remain unaware?

Could someone have intervened and persuaded them to treat this as an ordinary death case, not involving any criminal offense?

"..."

With these thoughts swirling in his mind, Lumian quietly followed the officer carrying the two bodies to the carriage.

From a distance, he trailed them, detecting the lingering odor emanating from Ruhr's and Michel's bodies. He tracked them all the way to the entrance of the police headquarters in the market district.

Lumian furrowed his brow as he observed uniformed police officers entering and exiting the building.

His initial suspicion was that an officer from the police headquarters had halted the investigation, but he couldn't confirm the identity.

Even if he were to enter the police headquarters, given the circumstances and his own status, it would be impossible for him to trace their steps all the way to the relevant office. If he observed from outside, he wouldn't be able to discern who might be involved from the people coming out.

Lumian pondered the direction of his investigation once more.

Get Franca to use divination?

But there's no medium available...

Alternatively... Why did the officer stop the investigation? Was he aware that someone would be implicated, or had someone already alerted him to such matters beforehand?

If it's the latter, there's a high chance that he holds considerable influence within the parliamentarian's office...

Lumian's heart stirred as he left the entrance of the police headquarters and swiftly arrived outside the four-story khaki-colored building that housed the parliamentarian's office in the market district.

Taking cover in an alley across the street, he found himself in the company of a group of vagrants.

Before long, his eyes landed on an officer.

The officer was plump, in his early forties, with brown hair and blue eyes. Three-petaled silver-white sweet irises adorned his black epaulets.

This indicated that he was a chief inspector, one rank lower than a superintendent.

As Lumian watched the chief inspector enter the parliamentarian's office, a smile curled upon his lips.

In the khaki-colored four-story building, on the second floor...

Tybalt, his face pale and his hair curly and yellow, entered the office of the member of parliament's secretary.

The secretary, a man in his thirties with neatly combed back black hair and blue eyes hidden behind gold-rimmed glasses, possessed refined features and an air of sophistication.

He glanced at Tybalt, who was coughing, and tossed a cloth bag on the table. With a cold expression, he spoke, "We've recovered your handkerchief."

Tybalt, his dark-yellow hair curly, was attired in a black suit. He smiled and replied, "That was quick."

"You bastard!" the member of parliament's secretary cursed. "Do you not realize that your phlegm can spread diseases to others? Aren't you afraid of attracting the attention of the two Churches?"

Tybalt's brown eyes remained indifferent as he nonchalantly remarked, "At most, two or three commoners might die. No one would care about them. I've been sick for far too long without receiving a new boon. It frustrates me, and it makes me want to kill someone."

The member of parliament's secretary stared at him for a few seconds before admonishing in a deep voice, "If I hadn't taken precautions in advance, the Purifiers would have come looking for you. Your life is inconsequential. Don't jeopardize us! Tybalt, there will be no next time."

Tybalt shrugged, accepting the reprimand.

Chapter 238 Endure

Lumian sat in the alleyway across from the member of parliament's office, blending in with a group of tramps.

Having followed and observed carefully, he had pieced together the entire situation.

Within the office, someone had managed to find a reliable officer beforehand and instructed him to monitor cases of mysterious illnesses in their jurisdiction. This officer would keep things quiet, refraining from reporting to the corresponding official Beyonders. Furthermore, any evidence he discovered would be sent to the member of parliament's office.

This revelation implied that the sickly lad who had spat into the handkerchief and discarded it knew the consequences of his actions. As long as he kept his mouth shut, the member of parliament would never seek assistance from the police headquarters!

Lumian's gaze fixated on the khaki-colored four-story building. His hands unconsciously balled into fists, yet he restrained himself from taking any drastic measures.

After a while, he let out a slow exhale.

Just then, a familiar figure emerged from the door of the building that housed the member of parliament's office.

This man donned a silk top hat and wielded a dark cane. Clad in a sharp black suit, a thick brown beard adorned his mouth and chin. Deep wrinkles framed his dark-blue, almost black eyes.

It was Bono Goodville, the owner of Goodville Chemical Factory. He had left the celebratory banquet earlier than Gardner Martin—the boss of the Savoie Mob—the previous night. Occasionally, his photos would appear in certain newspaper reports.

Lumian averted his gaze and waited. Only when the chief inspector left the member of parliament's office unaccompanied and returned to the police headquarters did he rise from the alleyway teeming with tramps. He casually found a café and enjoyed a simple late breakfast.

Shortly before 11 a.m., he knocked on Franca's door once again.

“How did it go? Have the official Beyonders taken over?” Franca had already risen from bed and changed into her favorite white blouse and light-colored breeches.

Lumian shook his head. “No.”

As he stepped into the apartment, he elaborated, “It was brushed under the carpet by a chief inspector from the police headquarters.”

Franca comprehended the situation and couldn't help but scoff. “Even the folks at the member of parliament's office recognize the problems of spitting anywhere!”

Lumian found a spot on the sofa and sat down. He recounted everything, from the moment the police arrived to investigate the scene until the chief inspector entered the member of parliament's office.

Franca peered into his eyes, contemplating for a few seconds before speaking up,

“I understand that you find it hard to accept and that a fire might be raging in your heart. I truly empathize with you. Though that couple had no relation to you, you tried your utmost to save them, only to meet with failure. Many people can sympathize with such tragic encounters.

“But I must insist, be patient, endure, restrain yourself from rash actions or seeking revenge. These individuals are connected to the member of parliament. If anything were to happen, the situation would explode. It's beyond our capacity to bear.”

Observing Lumian's silence and absence of emotional outburst, Franca let out a sigh of relief and continued, “I'll say it once more. It's best to leave this matter to the official Beyonders for investigation. Later, through my contacts, I'll inform them of this case and provide the suspect's identity and description.

“Although crucial physical evidence might have been lost by now and the body likely cremated hastily, as long as the official Beyonders discover the existence of abnormal pathway Beyonder powers in their jurisdiction, targeting the person I identified through divination, they will discover his problem sooner or later.”

Upon hearing Franca's advice, Lumian nodded, his thoughts aligning with her suggestion.

“Let's go with that plan.”

Franca relaxed, taking a moment to contemplate before speaking again.

“I won't divulge the precise details. I'll merely mention a peculiar ailment causing festering in the market district. There's suspicion that someone from the member of parliament's office might have wrapped a handkerchief around thick phlegm, and similar incidents may have been concealed by the police headquarters.

“If I don't do this, the official Beyonders might suspect you as the source of the information and thoroughly investigate you.”

Lumian acknowledged her concerns with a curt response, signifying his agreement.

After bidding farewell to Franca and departing Rue des Blouses Blanches, he encountered Jenna on his way to Salle de Bal Brise.

“Well, if it isn't Celia?” Lumian greeted.

Showy Diva, dressed in a simple grayish-blue gown, had her brownish-yellow hair tied up in a natural bun. Her face lacked makeup, giving her an elegant appearance without her usual air of decadence.

Upon hearing Lumian call her by her real name, Jenna clenched her teeth and retorted,

Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you very much!

“Just call me Jenna!”

Lumian sized her up.

“Did your mother hit you with a broomstick? Are you considering leaving the underground singer circle?”

“Dammit! You can't seem to wish anything good upon me, can you?” Jenna exclaimed. “My mother is a gentle and reasonable person. Why would she hit me with a broomstick?”

She smirked confidently.

“Initially, she opposed my singing in the dance halls, thinking it was dangerous and prone to debauchery. But after I explained how much I could earn each week without having to sleep with any man, she relented. She even said she'd come to Salle de Bal Brise after work today to watch me perform. Dammit, what am I going to do?”

Lumian deliberately asked, “If your mother saw you wearing a revealing dress and deliberately raising your leg while singing ‘his touch is skilled indeed,’ how would she react?”

Jenna tousled her brownish-yellow hair. “She'd storm the stage and beat me to a pulp!”

She mumbled to herself before suggesting, “I don't have to wear overly revealing dresses. Remember when I tried singing in a cocktail dress last time? The response was pretty good. It's been a while, but I can give it another shot. The key is the song selection. I'll discuss it with Franca. She has excellent taste. She even knows how to compose her own songs and write lyrics, though they're all rather peculiar...”

Lumian smiled and spoke up, “If that doesn't work out, I can have René organize a themed night event at Salle de Bal Brise. Tonight's theme will be love.”

This would pair well with less suggestive love songs.

Jenna's eyes lit up. “That's a brilliant idea!”

She looked at Lumian awkwardly, offering her thanks.

“You're quite quick-witted. Uh, dammit, thank you!”

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Jenna instinctively glanced around and lowered her voice.

“I also told my mother that I'm good friends with Red Boots from the Savoie Mob and that she's protecting me. That's how I can sing at Salle de Bal Brise and stay safe. Remember, I came to you that day to negotiate a higher singing fee. And thanks to Franca, you agreed.

“If my mother asks you, just give this answer.”

Lumian nodded and teased, “It's called collusion.”

“It's called a harmless fib,” Jenna replied gleefully. “Just hold onto that story until I've been singing for another year. I'll save up enough money for my tuition and pay off my debts.”

Lumian glanced at the apprentice actress and pondered, "Haven't you thought about seeking proper compensation for that accident?"

"How?" Jenna's eyes widened in confusion. "The court hasn't reached a final verdict yet."

Lumian chuckled.

"Why wait for the court? Settling debts is protected by the Guardian of Businesses. We can handle it ourselves."

"That factory owner never said he wouldn't pay us. His constant appeals are just about the division of responsibilities and the amount of compensation..." Jenna eyed Lumian suspiciously. "Are you suggesting we force him to compensate us? That's illegal!"

"Illegal?" Lumian looked amused. "As a mob leader, I break the law every day. Didn't you want to assassinate Margot and avenge your friend? Did legality matter to you back then?"

Jenna's words faltered as she muttered,

"Margot is a mob leader who has committed countless crimes. Each one of them is deserving of the gallows."

"So you want to be his judge and jury?" Lumian smiled. "That factory owner may have done many wrongs. Let's mask our faces, infiltrate his house, tie him up, and make him compensate everyone. Alternatively, we can convince him to hand over the money quietly and split it among ourselves to avoid arousing suspicion during subsequent investigations."

Jenna wore a troubled expression.

"I'll think about it. I'll consider it."

Ciel lived up to his reputation as a mob leader. Discussing breaking the law came as naturally to him as eating and drinking.

Lumian didn't press the matter further. Since Jenna wasn't in a hurry, he saw no need to worry about her.

As evening approached, Lumian sat in the café on the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise, awaiting another night.

For now, he had nothing to occupy his time. All he could do was wait for Franca or the Boss to procure the additional ingredients for the Pyromaniac potion, the final step before his breakthrough to Sequence 7.

"Boss, what would you like to have for dinner tonight?" Louis asked Lumian as the sky grew darker.

Just as Lumian was about to respond, Jenna approached.

Showy Diva had transformed herself, donning a dress the color of roses. The hem of her gown appeared to defy gravity, resembling an inverted flower.

Her long, brownish-yellow hair was fashioned into a simple bun, with most of it cascading smoothly over her shoulders. Her makeup was subtle, accentuating her complexion and striking features. A mole adorned the right side of her face, and she held a beautifully patterned fan in her hand.

This left Louis and Sarkota dumbfounded. They could hardly believe that this was the same “Little Minx” Jenna.

Jenna nervously asked Lumian, “Is this suitable?”

“Quite impressive.” Lumian didn't discourage Jenna.

Suddenly, a deafening explosion echoed in the distance. The ground trembled visibly, and the café's glass windows rattled.

“Dammit, what's happening?” Jenna exclaimed, peering out of the window in shock.

Lumian stood up and made his way to the window. As he looked outside, he noticed the perplexed and flustered pedestrians.

In the distance, a plume of black smoke billowed from the south.

“Find out what's going on,” Lumian instructed Louis.

Once Louis departed, Jenna approached Lumian, her gaze fixed on the dark smoke rising from the southern part of the market district. Anxiousness and concern filled her.

After some time, Louis returned to the café and reported to Lumian, “Boss, there was an explosion at the Goodville Chemical Factory.”

A thud interrupted the conversation as Lumian turned to see Jenna's fan fall to the ground.

Jenna appeared to lose her spirit as she murmured, sounding disoriented, “My mother, my mother is there...”

Chapter 239 Fighting Fire

Before she could finish, Jenna snapped out of her daze. Adorned in a rose-colored dress that hugged her slender frame, she hurried towards the staircase and descended.

Witnessing this, Lumian motioned for Louis and Sarkota to maintain order in Salle de Bal Brise before giving chase.

Anxiety and fear filled Jenna's face, her expression teetering on the edge of collapse.

She made no attempt to conceal her Beyonder identity. She exerted every ounce of her strength, as if she intended to soar through Avenue du Marché and into the streets leading south of the market district.

Only the darkness of the sky and the unlit gas street lamps, combined with the chaos caused by the panicked pedestrians after the explosion, prevented anyone from noticing the extraordinary speed at which the woman ran.

Lumian swiftly caught up to her, his pace surpassing hers. He urgently tapped her shoulder and said, "Take to the shadows!"

Determined to reach Goodville Chemical Factory as swiftly as possible, Jenna ran a distance before comprehending Lumian's meaning. She altered her course slightly and darted towards the dimly lit area cast by the unilluminated street lamps, blending in seamlessly.

Assassins possessed the ability to conceal themselves within shadows.

Jenna's emotions surged, making it difficult for her to maintain control. Additionally, sprinting at full speed weakened the effectiveness of this ability. At times, she would become visible, and at others, she would vanish. Nevertheless, compared to before, she managed to avoid drawing much attention from passersby.

Lumian ran alongside the shadows, paying no heed to the perplexed gazes directed his way, his nostrils filled with the lingering scent of Jenna's perfume.

Pushing his Hunter's speed to its limits, he left observers dumbfounded.

Certainly, such behavior would arouse suspicion, but he paid it no mind.

As the two Beyonders endowed with enhanced physiques raced at full tilt, they arrived at Rue Saint-Gerre near Trier's city walls within a mere ten minutes.

The area was teeming with factories, and the sky was shrouded in dusky smoke tinged with a yellowish hue, obscuring the fading glow of the sunset.

Emerging from the shadows, Jenna caught sight of the blazing metal container—Goodville Chemical Factory was engulfed in flames, with firefighters battling desperately to extinguish the inferno and rescue those trapped inside.

Some of the rescuers wore peculiar masks adorned with elongated, pointed beaks, while others sported mechanical octopuses on their faces. Several donned black helmets that appeared to consist of multiple layers. The commonality among them was the presence of apparatuses resembling steam backpacks, albeit with significant differences. Thick rubber hoses extended from the contraptions, connecting to the "masks."

Without a moment's hesitation, Jenna rushed for Goodville Chemical Factory, where sporadic explosions continued to erupt.

The pungent odor in the air threatened to overwhelm Lumian's sense of smell. He seized Jenna's shoulder and spoke in a deep voice, "Do you know which factory your mother is in?"

Jenna was taken aback. "I don't know."

"Have you come equipped to shield yourself from chemical contamination?" Lumian switched questions.

"No," Jenna replied, her confusion evident.

“Then are you attempting to commit suicide?” Lumian scolded. “Perhaps your mother has already been rescued. Let us first search the area where the injured are being attended to. Are you venturing inside to create further chaos for the rescue team?”

Jenna's heart churned with conflicting emotions. She yearned to rush to the chemical plant to find her mother, yet she couldn't deny the logic in Lumian's words.

After Lumian pulled her back, she followed him with a vacant mind for a few paces. Then, her senses returned, and she sprinted toward Église du Sifflet, not far from Rue Saint-Hilaire.

It stood as the grand cathedral of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery in Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman.

Jenna had witnessed the rescued victims being carried there.

In a matter of seconds, she and Lumian arrived at the square outside the cathedral.

It was teeming with workers from Goodville Chemical Factory, groaning in agony. However, a significant number of them lay unconscious, and some no longer drew breath.

Doctors and nurses, clad in white coats, maneuvered through the crowd, feverishly providing first aid. They guided those deemed salvageable to a two-story carriage stationed at the square's periphery, adorned with various coats of arms or Sacred Emblems. From there, they transported them to several major hospitals in Quartier de Noël.

Jenna's body involuntarily quivered as her gaze swept over the lifeless bodies and injured individuals, fearing what she might witness.

Lumian seized her arm and guided her across the square, in search of Elodie.

The gas lamps lining the square cast a rudimentary glow, granting them a modicum of illumination.

After a few minutes, Lumian's keen Hunter eyesight detected a wounded figure whom he suspected to be Elodie.

Upon receiving the news, Jenna dashed over, crouched down, and studied the unconscious person's face.

The injured individual's golden wig had mostly been singed away, exposing her flaxen hair, now blackened by the flames.

Her eyes, adorned with smudged eye shadow, remained tightly shut, her countenance marred by soot. Burns covered her body, and her lips bore an unnatural blue tinge. It was none other than Elodie, the cleaner at Auberge du Coq Doré—Jenna's mother.

“Mom! Mom!” Jenna's strength evaporated, and she crumpled beside Elodie.

Realizing her mother's unconscious state, occasionally punctuated by twitches, Jenna abruptly rose to her feet and muttered to herself, “We need a doctor. We must get her to a hospital without delay!”

Having confirmed the victim's identity, Lumian focused on assessing Elodie's luck and deduced that it was dire. Even if she were swiftly transported to the hospital, her chances of survival seemed slim.

Swiftly, he seized Jenna and spoke in a solemn tone, “Help me shield her from prying eyes.”

Jenna regarded him with astonishment. Infused with his composed demeanor, she turned her body to block the area on Elodie's left side.

“I possess a healing agent from mysticism. Let us first test its efficacy,” Lumian explained in a hushed tone as he circled around to Elodie's right side, his back serving as a barrier for her other flank.

A healing agent from mysticism... Jenna's eyes sparkled, a glimmer of hope illuminating her face.

Intently, Jenna watched as Lumian produced an iron-colored metal canister, unscrewed the cap, and poured its contents into her mother's mouth.

After more than ten seconds, Elodie appeared to regain some consciousness and swallowed the curative liquid.

Observing this, Jenna felt a slight wave of relief wash over her. She instinctively sensed that her mother's condition had improved marginally.

Time seemed to stretch unbearably, suffocating her. A minute felt like an eternity.

Finally, she witnessed the burns on Elodie's body start to heal at an astonishing pace, and the bluish tint on her lips gradually faded.

Jenna looked up at Lumian, her astonishment palpable.

Countless words clamored to escape her lips, but they remained lodged there, unable to form coherent utterances.

Lumian met her gaze and nodded. He whispered, “This agent works wonders in treating external injuries and alleviating ailments caused by chemical fumes. It can transform near-fatal wounds into severe injuries, severe injuries into minor ones, and minor injuries into complete recovery.

“Your mother suffered severe injuries earlier. For now, her life is no longer in immediate danger. However, she will require extensive treatment in the days to come. Otherwise, her condition may deteriorate.”

Upon hearing the words “no longer in immediate danger,” Jenna's vision blurred.

She had suppressed her tears, determined not to let them hinder her search and her mother's treatment.

But now, tears streamed down her face. She raised her hands, clumsily wiping them away, and muttered incoherently, “Thank you... Thank you...”

Amidst her words, distant cries reached their ears.

Relatives of the deceased had arrived.

Just as Lumian was about to offer a jest to lighten the mood, a muffled thunder resounded in the air.

Rumble!

Instinctively, Lumian looked up and beheld a thick dark cloud looming over Rue Saint-Hilaire, where flames still flickered and explosions echoed.

The cloud wasn't expansive, enshrouding only a few streets.

Silver-white lightning streaked across the sky, accompanied by muted thunderclaps that reverberated through everyone's hearts.

Torrential rain poured down, concentrated over Rue Saint-Hilaire and Goodville Chemical Factory.

The grayish-black smoke tinged with yellow swiftly dissipated, settling to the ground. The flames were swiftly extinguished, and no further explosions occurred.

As swiftly as it had arrived, the storm dissipated. The dark clouds dispersed, and the setting sun on the horizon cast a fiery glow.

Within the golden-red light, a behemoth soared above Rue Saint-Hilaire.

It was a dark gray airship, its elongated and circular balloon emitting a loud buzzing sound.

At the rear of the hull, paddlewheels spun frenziedly, while numerous cannon muzzles and bomb ports adorned its surface. At that moment, a translucent turquoise liquid rained down upon Goodville Chemical Factory below.

The acrid stench in the air began to subside.

Are the authorities resolving the catastrophe? The dark clouds, the lightning, and the rain didn't seem natural. Could they be the work of a Beyonder or Sealed Artifact? It almost resembled the handiwork of a deity... Lumian withdrew his gaze, a tinge of astonishment in his eyes.

Jenna had also witnessed what had just happened, but her focus remained fixed on her mother's injuries, not dwelling too deeply on what had transpired.

Elodie's burns had mostly healed, leaving behind only a few charred remnants. Her breathing had stabilized, and although her lips remained pale, it didn't seem to cause much concern to those around.

The curative agent had taken full effect, bringing stability to her condition.

Jenna closed her eyes and absentmindedly wiped her face.

At that moment, a voice nearby called out, "Celia!"

Jenna glanced to the side and waved her hand. "Julien, over here!"

A young man, standing nearly 1.75 meters tall, swiftly made his way to Elodie's side. Clad in a grayish-blue worker's uniform, he had flaxen-colored hair and eyes that mirrored Jenna's blue hues. His features were rather pleasing to the eye.

He looked at Elodie with concern and asked hurriedly, "How's Mom?"

Jenna pursed her lips and replied, "She sustained serious injuries, but she'll pull through."

Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you very much!

Relief washed over Julien, who then cast a curious glance at Jenna.

"Why are you dressed like that... And who is he?"

Only then did Jenna realize she was wearing a rose-colored gown. Hastily, she explained, "I came straight from the theater. This is my friend, Ciel. He has been a great help."

"Thank you," Julien sincerely expressed his gratitude to Lumian.

Lumian nodded and advised, "Fetch a doctor and arrange for a carriage to take her to the hospital immediately. Otherwise, her condition may worsen."

"Alright." Julien dashed off to find the nearest doctor and nurse.

Lumian turned to Jenna and said, "If you can't secure a carriage promptly, hire one yourself."

Jenna nodded, her gaze filled with gentle concern as she looked at her unconscious mother. She whispered, "I owe you my gratitude this time..."

Chapter 240 Bewitchment

Lumian cast a contemplative gaze at Jenna, his lips forming a tight line.

"You lack the awareness of an Assassin and the understanding that you've stepped into the realm of mysticism. Had you possessed such insight, you might have joined mystical gatherings through Franca and procured valuable resources in the past month or two. Though they may not rival the potency of my healing agent, it would have been a proactive step instead of watching your mother's condition deteriorate."

Jenna, instead of erupting in a fit of humiliation and resorting to vulgar retorts, remained silent for a few moments before curtly acknowledging his words.

This response left Lumian at a loss. He clicked his tongue and spoke again.

"Of course, considering your financial constraints and the weight of debts and tuition fees, even if you were to participate in these mysticism gatherings, you wouldn't be able to afford much. It would be more of an opportunity to earn money or valuable items by accepting commissions."

Just then, Jenna's brother, Julien, arrived with a doctor and two nurses.

The doctor glanced at Elodie with a puzzled expression and inquired, "I recall that there was no need to resuscitate her..."

"You remembered incorrectly," Lumian calmly interjected.

The doctor, overwhelmed by the influx of injured patients, had his memories tangled and disorganized. Upon hearing Lumian's remark, he assumed he must have mistaken the person. Consequently, he swiftly tended to Elodie's remaining external injuries and arranged for her to be carried into the carriage, awaiting transportation to the hospital.

Connected to Quartier de Noël and the bustling market district, stood Passy Bridge, one of the five bridges that stretched over the mighty Srenzo River in the city of Trier.

Nestled beside Passy Bridge was the Holy Palace Hospital, generously funded by the Eternal Blazing Sun Church. Elodie, a devout follower of the Eternal Blazing Sun, had been admitted to this renowned establishment. Placed on the top floor of the white six-story building, she shared a ward with five other patients.

Jenna watched as doctors and nurses meticulously drew blood, conducted examinations, and administered intravenous drips. A soft sigh escaped her lips.

“The hospital has undergone quite a transformation in the past few years...”

“Oh?” Lumian was puzzled.

Jenna's expression darkened as she replied, “A few years ago, when my father and the others were brought to the hospital, the more severe cases were immediately taken to the operating room. Those with lesser injuries were simply bandaged and given medication to gauge its effectiveness. There was no blood being drawn, and the examinations were rudimentary. It's completely different now. The entire process seems to have changed.”

“That's a good thing.” Lumian nodded.

It looked more professional.

As the two spoke in hushed tones, Jenna's brother, Julien, diligently assisted the doctors and nurses. He answered inquiries about the patients' normal physical conditions, aided in moving IV stands, and was dispatched to the pharmacy as needed.

Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you very much!

However, even after the medical professionals in their white coats had concluded their tasks, he had yet to return.

The doctor overseeing Elodie's care approached Jenna, holding a writing board, and observed her rose-colored gown. His expression softened.

“Is Elodie your mother?” he inquired.

“Yes,” Jenna confirmed with a nod.

The male doctor pondered for a moment before speaking, “Your mother's condition is better than I anticipated. It seems surgery may not be necessary at this time. Of course, this assessment is preliminary and contingent upon the results of the tests we conducted.

“That's some good news. On the other hand, your mother has suffered severe burns. She may need to remain hospitalized for months, half a year, or even longer. Even if she recovers, she will likely be in a weakened state.

“The Church's philanthropic foundation will cover the initial two days of treatment. The remaining expenses will be deducted once the accident insurance from the factory is settled. However, you must be prepared to bear the subsequent costs yourself. It won't be a small sum. I must caution you not to have excessive expectations of the accident insurance. From my experience, it typically takes an average of three to five years to obtain compensation. You must understand that our Intis laws tend to favor factory owners and bankers in order to protect their interests.”

Jenna didn't hesitate for a moment.

“I will ensure my mother's full recovery.”

Jenna had already contemplated the possibility of borrowing money from both Franca and Lumian if she found herself in need of a substantial sum. She was willing to repay them in installments at a later date. Whether it meant making monthly or weekly payments for the treatment, she was prepared to cut back and save, reducing her previous debt payments, while also relying on her income as a part-time underground singer.

However, this meant that her plan to remain an underground singer for just one year, as she had initially intended, would need to be extended. It seemed she might have to continue as an underground singer for two, or even three, years.

The doctor briefly assessed Jenna's appearance and attire before giving her the necessary instructions.

“Take this form and make a payment of 200 verl d'or at the payment counter on the first floor.”

200... Jenna breathed a sigh of relief. She signed the form under her real name, Celia Bello, and took it with her as she descended the stairs.

On her way down, she glanced at Lumian, who was by her side, and hesitated before speaking.

“I-if I ever find myself in need of a large sum for medical fees in the future, I think I would like to borrow from you.”

Jenna had always been a stubborn individual with her own principles. In the past, when she worked tirelessly to earn money in various dance halls within the market district, the thought of borrowing from Franca or asking for her help in securing an easy and lucrative part-time job had never crossed her mind. But now, for the sake of her mother, Elodie, she was willing to let go of her stubbornness in this regard.

Although Lumian had already “squandered” more than 700 verl d'or on himself and received an advance from the proceeds he could obtain from Salle de Bal Brise, he showed no signs of concern. He replied nonchalantly, “Okay.”

Jenna regarded him suspiciously.

“I thought you might hesitate for a moment. Franca mentioned that you needed a significant sum of money for something important.”

Lumian chuckled.

“That's for advancing and purchasing the main ingredient for Pyromaniac. However, it doesn't prevent me from lending you money. As a Beyonder and the leader of the Savoie Mob, even if I don't have a coppet at the moment, I can assist you in acquiring the necessary funds.

“The simplest solution would be to have René sign a long-term contract with you, advancing you 10,000 verl d'or. Then, 50% of your income from the dance hall will be

deducted each day to repay the loan in installments. Once it's fully repaid, the contract will naturally be terminated.”

Jenna fell silent for a moment, realizing that something that had deeply troubled her was easily resolved in Ciel's presence.

Lumian glanced at her and smirked.

“As an Assassin, you shouldn't fret about medical expenses like these. If you aim to advance in the future, you'll need tens of thousands in funds.

“You need to change your mindset now. Don't hold the law in such high regard. As you heard earlier, Intis's laws don't protect the poor. We can only protect ourselves.

“Once you've come to terms with this, we'll kidnap the former factory owner and extract enough cash from him. After the verdict is announced and he pays the compensation for your father's accident, you can donate the money to someone in need.

“As long as we execute it cleanly, combined with Franca's anti-divination measures, the likelihood of success is exceedingly high. It won't leave a trace behind. It's improbable for a factory owner like him to have Beyonder bodyguards.”

Jenna's heart raced at his words. She hesitated for a moment before speaking.

“It just doesn't sit right with me...”

“Dammit, are you the Instigator, or will I become the Instigator? How are you so adept at bewitching people?”

“Eventually, you'll have to face the consequences of breaking the law, won't you?”

Lumian smirked once again.

“I didn't finish. We only do what's necessary. We can't act recklessly. Not only would it bring danger, but it could also increase the risk of losing control. Kidnapping the factory owner is to reclaim the compensation your family deserves.”

Jenna fell silent once more.

Realizing they were about to reach the first floor, she hurriedly said, “I need to use the washroom.”

By the time she emerged from the washroom, she had a stack of 200 verl d'or notes in her hand.

Seeing Jenna pay the initial treatment fee, Lumian glanced at her rose-colored gown and commented,

“You can't tend to a patient dressed like this. I'll return to the dance hall and fetch your clothes. I'll also help you secure some time off.

“If your mother's condition worsens, come to me or Franca immediately.”

Having just examined Elodie's luck and confirmed that her condition was no longer critical, though still uncertain of improvement, Lumian found it somewhat chaotic. It might have been dependent on the hospital's treatment effectiveness.

“Okay.” Jenna pursed her lips and nodded.

On the second floor of Salle de Bal Brise.

Just as Lumian was about to inform Manager René about Jenna and ask him to reschedule tonight's performance, Louis approached him.

Louis cast a quick glance around and lowered his voice.

“Boss, about half an hour ago, Boss sent someone to deliver a bag of items to the financial safe. He said it was for you.”

Something from Boss... Supplementary ingredients for the Pyromaniac potion? As expected of a Mid-Sequence Beyonder of the Hunter pathway... Lumian nodded slightly, pleased, and passed through the café, entering the second-floor corridor.

Upon opening the safe, he felt a burning sensation.

Inside the grayish-white cloth bag were three glass bottles. One contained bubbling crimson blood, from which flames burst with each bubble. Another held blood-colored powder at the bottom, while the third contained a finger-sized stone emitting a red fluorescent light.

Fire Salamander blood, Redcrown Balsam powder, Magma Pyroxene... Indeed, supplementary Pyromaniac ingredients... Lumian picked up the items, satisfied.

3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, outside Apartment 601.

Lumian, having left Salle de Bal Brise, headed straight to Franca's place. He intended to borrow 4,000 verl d'or, using his share of the Harvest Sacrifice as collateral.

Upon opening the door and seeing Lumian, Franca clicked her tongue and remarked, “Did you hear? There was an explosion at a factory in the southern part of the market district. Numerous incidents have been occurring in the market district lately, giving me the sense that a storm is brewing.”

Upon hearing this, Lumian instantly recalled something.

He spoke in a deep voice, “There was an accident at the Goodville Chemical Factory. This morning, the owner of the factory paid a visit to the member of parliament's office.”