

Inevitability 251

Chapter 251 Giant Tree

Jenna's brother gone mad? Lumian's rage surged.

Not because he was angry with the other party and thought his mental strength too weak to crumble so easily into madness, but because he heard fate's mocking laughter once again.

He noticed yesterday that Julien blamed himself for Elodie's death and showed signs of withdrawing into himself, but that was far from madness. Even if he faced psychological issues in the future, they would be prolonged, not an instant breakdown.

Unless... unless something happened last night that dealt Julien another heavy blow!

Damn fate!

Franca shared the surprise.

Yesterday, she had warned Jenna to keep an eye on her brother's mental state, but she hadn't expected Julien to lose his mind so swiftly.

As far as she knew, he was a resilient young man. He was in good health, and his emotions wouldn't easily be affected or trigger dangerous tendencies. It would be normal for him to isolate himself or indulge for a while, but a complete breakdown in one night seemed unlikely.

Jenna had mentioned Julien's inclination towards extremism, but that was for the sake of their family. With his sister still alive, burdened with debts, and the need to become an underground singer, it was evident that Julien would persist and work hard to share the load until the debts were repaid. If his psychological issues persisted until then, he might collapse or quietly take his own life.

This led Franca to suspect that Julien had been agitated once again the previous night.

She had similar concerns about Jenna's mother's decision to commit suicide, but she refrained from mentioning it to avoid upsetting Jenna.

Franca understood Elodie's feelings and choices, but suicide felt too hasty and impulsive, as if something had influenced her emotions.

Before transmigrating into this world, Franca had read many reports of such nature. She knew that the torment of poverty, self-blame for burdening the family with debts, fear of being incapable of labor, and pure selfless love could drive an optimistic person into a desperate situation, leading them to sacrifice themselves.

However, such matters typically involved a period of internal struggle before they were carried out. After all, everyone had a will to survive and would consider their loved ones' feelings. While it wasn't impossible to commit suicide upon understanding the circumstances, the chances were quite low.

Franca speculated two possibilities. First, Jenna's mother might have been psychologically affected by her physical condition. Second, the explosion at the chemical plant might have been part of the

motives of the Member of Parliament secretary, Rhône, and others. The subsequent abnormal and widespread emotional fluctuations could be connected to those events.

Is Julien in a similar situation? Franca shifted her gaze to Jenna, who approached Room 207, sobbing.

“What happened?”

“Julien got fired,” Jenna said, her expression filled with resentment. “Just because he didn't go to the factory yesterday afternoon. But who thinks of work when their mother has just passed away? After leaving the hospital, he immediately went to his master to request time off, but they handed him a dismissal notice instead. He had been an apprentice there for a whole year!”

“Dammit!” Franca cursed. “Can't they just deduct some money? Are they heartless? Do none of their own family members die?”

“They said it needed to be requested in advance. It can't be done afterward.” Jenna wiped her tears. “Julien broke down this morning. He cried like a child, blaming himself and expressing his fear of losing his job. I waited until he was exhausted from crying and fell asleep before rushing over to find you. I went to Rue des Blouses Blanches first but found no one there, so I came here.”

As she spoke, her words meandered, as though a flood of emotions had surged within her and needed release.

Franca let out a relieved sigh.

“It doesn't seem too grave. Sounds more like an overwhelming breakdown. Trust me, a genuine Psychiatrist can heal your brother completely. I'll arrange an appointment for you right away!”

As Franca spoke, she turned and headed towards the staircase.

The anger in Lumian's heart intensified.

Forgetting to request time off, getting fired on the very day he made the request, succumbing to new disturbances, and spiraling into madness—it all seemed too coincidental.

Motherf*cker Termiboros!

Motherf*cker Inevitability!

Lumian spun towards Jenna and said sharply, “Let's pay a visit to the factory owner and your brother's master!”

Jenna pursed her lips and replied simply, “Okay.”

Lumian walked past her and followed Franca up the stairs, his fiery blue eyes burning with determination.

At that moment, the words of Psychiatrist Madam Susie echoed in his mind: Always remind yourself not to overreact. Whenever you feel a similar surge of emotions, take deep breaths and find your calm...

Lumian took a deep breath, feeling a sense of alarm.

In the face of Jenna's brother's madness and fate's cruel taunts, he should be angered and protest, but he shouldn't have allowed his rage to consume him completely!

Almost simultaneously, behind Lumian, Jenna's resentful expression transformed into a calm one. From somewhere, she drew a brownish-green dagger,

resembling a blade fashioned from tree branches instead of metal. Its surface was adorned with bark, arranged in intricate patterns.

With a swift motion, Jenna thrust the dagger towards Lumian's back.

Reacting swiftly, Lumian twisted his body, narrowly avoiding a fatal blow. The dagger found purchase between his shoulder and back, drawing blood.

Jenna leaped back with agility, while the crimson blood from Lumian's wound flowed profusely, like crimson fire.

The bark on Jenna's brownish-green dagger seemed to come alive, greedily absorbing Lumian's blood.

In that moment, the muscles on Jenna's face contorted, rendering her unrecognizable to Lumian and Franca.

In an instant, she transformed into an enchanting and ethereal girl, her features captivating.

Lumian's pupils dilated as he recognized the imposter.

Charlotte Calvino!

Charlotte Calvino, the leading actress of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons!

Charlotte blended seamlessly with her surroundings, evading Lumian's fiery crimson fireball with ease.

Amidst the thunderous explosion, the door to Room 207 crumbled. The actress chuckled and uttered,

“You regained your senses swiftly. I couldn't eliminate you directly.

“But it matters not. We only require a small portion of your blood.”

On Avenue du Marché, outside the khaki-colored four-story building that housed the member of parliament's office,

Jenna stepped into the banquet hall with bewilderment. Before her eyes lay an array of exquisite desserts, savory dishes, and glasses of vibrant-colored drinks, spread across long tables.

In one corner of the hall, a small symphony band played a soothing melody, accompanied by the sparkling brilliance of a crystal chandelier and the gentle rays of sunlight pouring in through the windows.

Amongst the crowd were individuals clad in brown jackets, linen shirts, and nondescript attire from the market district, appearing rather out of place amidst the opulence of the banquet.

Some stood in a corner, their expressions vacant, while others regarded the luxurious items with resentment. Some consumed food in a state of confusion, while others savored champagne with excitement, relishing the taste of an affair reserved for the upper class.

Instinctively, Jenna retreated to a dimly lit corner, her expression impassive as she silently observed everything around her.

Meanwhile, on the fourth floor of the member of parliament's office.

Hugues Artois, dressed in a black tailcoat and a dark-blue bow tie, his sideburns mottled and his nose prominent, stood behind a window, surveying the market district.

This chaotic and antiquated place belonged to his kingdom.

“Monsieur Member of Parliament, why host a condolence banquet and invite these plebeians?” Rhône, wearing gold-rimmed glasses and sporting neatly combed hair, asked in confusion.

Hugues Artois smiled.

“It is the duty of a member of parliament. Before assuming another identity, I must fulfill my obligations.

“Furthermore, by offering condolences and assistance to the grieving people at this time, I will leave a lasting impression in their minds. They may become my loyal followers in the future. When the time comes, their conversion will be easier.”

The red-haired Cassandra chuckled.

“And they shall remain oblivious to the fact that it is you, a member of parliament, who has brought calamity, pain, and despair upon them.

“They will only perceive the care and concern from a high-ranking figure, satisfied by your promises.”

Secretary Rhône nodded, a smile playing on his lips.

“In their eyes, Monsieur Member of Parliament is an esteemed figure they can only admire from afar. They dare not approach or question him, let alone harbor suspicions, vent their anger, or harbor hatred.

“As long as there is no organization among them, they will never dare to resist.”

Hugues Artois laughed and declared, “That is precisely why we must sow division among them, fueling their animosity towards each other.”

With those words spoken, Hugues Artois turned his gaze towards the sunlit window and muttered to himself, “Those under the Mother Tree of Desire must have already commenced their actions, I presume...”

On Rue Anarchie, just outside Auberge du Coq Doré.

Without warning, the ground split open and the center caved in, catching several vendors off guard. They tumbled into the abyss, their screams abruptly silenced.

A colossal brownish-green tree sprang forth from the depths, its branches spreading in every direction.

Stretching across multiple blocks, it ensnared Auberge du Coq Doré within its leafy embrace.

The eloping couple, amidst their verbal sparring, found themselves once again engaged in their favored pastime. Anthony Reid, the information broker, sought refuge beneath a rickety wooden table, trembling uncontrollably. Meanwhile, Pavard Neeson, the proprietor of the underground bar, reached for his sketchpad, downing a gulp of liquor as he sketched with an expression of deep concern...

The immense brownish-green tree continued to grow, unabated.

Chapter 252 Ancient Times

Lumian's fireball missed its target, Charlotte, and in response, countless branches and vines slithered into Auberge du Coq Doré from every direction, entwining the walls, floor, windows, and ceiling. They twisted together in a tangle of brown and green, creating an impenetrable barrier.

In an instant, the entire scene transformed into a surreal illusion before solidifying once more.

Before him stood an immense tree, its shades of brown and green blending together harmoniously. Its roots delved deep into the earth, while its majestic crown reached ever higher towards the heavens.

Lumian's eyes widened as he realized he had been unknowingly transported. It was reminiscent of his previous journeys into Paramita, where he would find himself in a new place without any awareness of the transition.

Gone was Auberge du Coq Doré. Now, his feet trod upon the tangled knots of tree roots that carpeted the ground. His gaze ascended to the colossal tree, reminiscent of ancient legends, as the vast expanse of the sky with its painted-like blue hue and fluffy white clouds loomed above.

The tree's surface was marred by repulsive, damp growths, and each branch appeared to bear the weight of a structure—a building, a road, and other peculiarities.

Auberge du Coq Doré was among them, perched upon a brownish-green tree trunk, intertwined with countless branches and vines, revealing a mere dozen windows to the world.

Through one of the glass windows, Lumian caught sight of the eloping couple engaged in passionate love-making, while the information broker, Anthony Reid, cowered under a wooden table, trembling in fear...

The other tree trunks held objects enshrouded by branches, leaves, and vines, appearing ethereal and hazy, as if they were scenes recorded by a magnetic field through foggy air.

Within this realm, ancient buildings with pediments, herringbone roofs, and lead-framed windows emerged. Women clutching gas street lamps were embraced from behind, priests stood before nude men, and individuals leaped out of glass windows while covering their behinds. Exquisite bodies were carried on trays to dining tables, orgies unfolded with clothing strewn about, and an evil beauty turned her head to reveal two black goat horns. A bishop naked from the bottom half heard confessions from believers in front of a Sacred Emblem.

The scenes varied in architectural styles, clothing, and hairstyles, some evoking ancient times while others seemed to have occurred just yesterday.

Behind Lumian, crimson Fire Ravens materialized, half-illusory. He swiftly scanned the area, yet Franca was nowhere to be found.

Franca hadn't been transported to this place caught between reality and illusion!

On Rue Anarchie, amidst the tree roots, branches, and vines, street vendors and pedestrians devoured the food they sold. Even after vomiting, they continued to eat with unwavering determination. Some forcefully pinned down members of the opposite sex on the street, others drawing daggers to attack peers who had provoked them or dared steal their spots. In scenes of utter chaos, certain individuals approached glass windows, attempting to entice their reflections into a dance with a gentlemanly bow.

Pedestrians and carriages traversed the streets, seemingly oblivious to the extraordinary circumstances. Vendors continued their lively hawking, and shops remained open. Passersby appeared captivated by the bustling atmosphere, unwilling to depart.

What they failed to notice was the absence of anyone who had entered this area—they had simply vanished, never to return.

On the fourth floor of the khaki-colored building that housed the member of parliament's office at Avenue du Marché.

Hugues Artois, lost in thought, gazed out at the nearby streets.

Cassandra, with her fiery red hair, turned back to him and asked with curiosity, “What is Susanna from the Bliss Society planning?”

A smile formed on Hugues Artois' lips as he replied, “They spoke a great deal, but my understanding was limited. I recall them mentioning a plan to submerge the underground divine tree into the depths of Fourth Epoch Trier and extend it into a place called the astral world.”

Cassandra, Rhône, Margaret, and Boduva exchanged puzzled and concerned glances, unable to hide their confusion.

“But won't that cause a tremendous uproar? Our current strength is far from that of official Beyonders. It's best to avoid a direct clash with them. You might not be aware, but I come from the Sauron family, and I understand the authorities quite well. I know how powerful and formidable they can be.

“Everything we've done so far has been in secret, evading investigations as best we could. If we were to be exposed, it's highly likely that we would face a Saint or a

Grade 1 Sealed Artifact. And beyond them, there are angels and Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts.”

Hugues Artois pressed his right hand down and reassured them with a smile.

“Fear not, they won't implicate us.

“I didn't incite them to undertake this endeavor. I didn't even offer a hint or assistance. I can only be considered aware of their plan in advance, silently consenting to their actions.

“The only thing that could potentially link us to this affair is the explosion at the chemical plant that received an excessive amount of decay blessings. However, that occurred because Bono Goodville misunderstood Rhône's intentions and committed an unforgivable crime. The various emotions and desires stemming from the accident were exploited, amplified, and used as nourishment. What does that have to do with us?”

As the team members' expressions eased, Hugues Artois stepped away from the window, emitting a deep chuckle.

“If they succeed, it will mark another solid step forward in our pursuits. We will be even closer to welcoming the descent of great existences. If they, unfortunately, fail, we will exercise restraint for the time being and strive to ensure that our activities remain hidden from the Beyonders of the two Churches. We will continue to be the rulers of the market district.

“Success or failure, it's our opportunity.

“During the National Convention's discussions, I will expose the corruption and mediocre abilities of the Beyonders from the two Churches. They have allowed heretics to repeatedly ravage the market district, each time worse than the last!

“I will request Bureau 8 to establish a branch in the market district to assist the inept Church Beyonders and share their burden.

“Bureau 8, always eager to expand its authority, will surely support my proposal.

“With three different official forces simultaneously present in the market district, conflicts among them will work to our advantage.

“Compared to the orthodox Beyonders of the two Churches, Bureau 8 can be influenced, corrupted, and gradually swayed to our side.

“This is my plan. In the long run, victory will be ours!”

Rhône, the secretary with gold-rimmed glasses and neatly combed hair, chuckled.

“That's my specialty.”

Influencing, corrupting, and gradually decaying an organization, leading to its decline and moral degradation.

Hugues Artois adjusted his tailcoat and bow tie, preparing to leave for the banquet hall.

Before departing, he surveyed his surroundings, his gaze shifting between Cassandra, Rhône, Boduva, and Margaret. An unusual sense of confidence and certainty washed over him.

These four subordinates possessed impressive Beyonder powers, with the red-haired Cassandra being particularly formidable, instilling him with a sense of security.

Outside the office door, near the stairs, stood an official Beyonder team tasked with protecting him.

Not every member of parliament received the privilege of a three-man protective team. Some were already powerful Beyonders, while others hailed from noble backgrounds and had their own Beyonder bodyguards. For some, a certain level of personal strength warranted the presence of a Beyonder companion to ensure their safety. It was only someone like Hugues Artois, lacking Beyonder abilities and familial support, who required such protection.

According to the rules, the responsibility of safeguarding Hugues Artois rotated among the Eternal Blazing Sun Church, the God of Steam and Machinery Church, and Bureau 8. Today, it was the turn of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

In addition to the Beyonders, the entire building housed ten well-trained professional security guards armed with firearms. They were members of Bureau 7, a branch of the Intis Intelligence and Homeland Security Committee—the Special Services Bureau—responsible for providing basic protection to members of parliament and high-ranking government officials.

Standing by the door, Hugues Artois awaited Rhône, his secretary, to open it. With a smile on his face, he lifted his head slightly, puffed out his chest, and confidently walked out, descending the stairs.

On the ground covered with tangled tree roots,

Lumian surrounded himself with semi-illusory Fire Ravens, once again spotting Charlotte Calvino, the leading lady of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons.

With a remarkable talent for acting, Charlotte gracefully wandered through the illusory scenes formed by the various tree trunks. Sometimes, she adorned a corset dress and styled her hair in an elegant bun. Other times, she embraced contemporary fashion, donning a fitted dress, a small coat, and long boots. On certain occasions, she even transported herself to the era of the Sauron royal family, embodying their love for masculine attire and blending seamlessly with the corresponding backdrop.

In this ethereal process, whenever she left one misty illusory scene, she promptly emerged in another, as if leisurely strolling through different eras of Trier.

Beneath the dim glow of the gas street lamps, Charlotte wore a smile as she addressed Lumian, “You should consider yourself honored. You are the first dissident to enter the divine tree and merge with it.”

The crimson Fire Ravens encircling Lumian condensed but refrained from attacking. This was because Charlotte constantly flickered between illusory scenes, altering her appearance with each transition.

Her voice echoed from all directions, forming sentences.

Lumian had already donned black gloves. His right hand was in his pocket, gripping Mr. K's finger tightly.

Charlotte continued her discourse, introducing the situation as if through an aria, as if it were insufficient to satisfy her inner desires.

This ancient Tree of Shadow predates the construction of present-day Trier. Its roots were buried deep underground.

“It brings delight and sustenance to the people of Trier. With the aid of the devil lineage and devoted followers, the ambiance here gradually transformed according to the deity's desired path. The people of Trier have never failed it. Both debauchery and pleasure are inherent to human nature. Year after year, they showered it with various excessive desires, providing it with nourishment.

“Over a millennium has elapsed. Although Trier hasn't reached the expected pinnacle of unbridled joy and indulgence until death, it has taken form. The divine tree's growth has now reached a crucial crossroads.

“In such a situation, pure desires and emotions can no longer play their primary role. They can only serve as firewood for the fire. We require a sacrifice of considerable magnitude. And you, who possess corruption at the angelic level but lack commensurate strength, are the perfect choice!”

Lumian's heart skipped a beat upon hearing this. His pupils dilated, as if he wished to see Charlotte's face clearly.

Does she know that I carry the sealed power of Inevitability within me?

Charlotte grinned.

“The first time you summoned High Priestess Susanna, she sensed the terrifying angelic power sealed within you. She didn't dare possess you. Her subsequent attempts to kill you were not solely motivated by Charlie!”

Chapter 253 Root of the Problem

Upon hearing Charlotte's words, Lumian grasped the problem in an instant.

As soon as he reached the market district and attempted his first Summoning Dance, he unintentionally summoned Susanna Mattise, who had been drawn to Charlie, into his room.

At the time, Susanna seemed eager to possess him, but she instinctively sensed the danger lurking within the seal and refrained from acting. This mirrored the behavior of the peculiar creatures

Lumian had summoned before. It appeared that only by compelling them would they dare to take hold of him.

Hence, Lumian didn't see anything amiss then. Even when he later encountered Susanna Mattise again and gained deeper insight into the Bliss Society, he failed to connect the dots.

But now, he realized his oversight.

Susanna Mattise was fundamentally different from the strange creatures he had previously summoned!

The dissimilarity didn't lie in her status as a Sequence 5 evil spirit who had failed to attain godhood, but rather in her possession of reason and the ability to think. Besides being extremely fanatical and persistent, she could also lead and develop a secret organization!

When such an evil spirit sensed the tremendously dangerous power sealed within Lumian's body, even if she didn't immediately recognize it as angelic-level corruption, she would have left in confusion and sought revelation from the evil god she believed in!

By the time she grasped the situation, Lumian, possessing the strength of a Low-Sequence Beyonder equivalent to an angel, would be irresistibly appealing to heretics skilled in sacrificial rituals. He would be no less enticing than a hundred million verl d'or abandoned on the street before a Scrooge.

Had it not been for Lumian's quick thinking, temporarily stunning her with Fallen Mercury and deceiving Susanna Mattise during their second encounter, the situation might have reached its conclusion before the official Beyonders arrived.

For Charlie, an ordinary person, to successfully descend from the fifth floor to Lumian's door and seek help despite Susanna Mattise's threats and lingering presence, it seemed more than just mere luck.

One couldn't trust the words and emotions of an Actor, especially those who were particularly good-looking!

In Charlotte Calvino's performance, Lumian had been scanning the surroundings, hoping to utilize a Hunter's instincts to find an exit from this peculiar space.

Yet, aside from the entangled tree roots blanketing the ground, the colossal slowly-growing brownish-green tree, and the oil painting-like blue sky with white clouds, there was nothing else.

In such an environment, Lumian's Pyromaniac instincts made him stop hesitating. He released his grip on Mr. K's finger and flung it into the air.

Almost simultaneously, the semi-illusory crimson Fire Ravens condensed around him took flight, each tracing an elegant arc as they soared toward the illusionary scene where Charlotte Calvino stood and the fog of the past lingering on the surrounding branches.

Charlotte stepped out of the grand palace, suspected to be a scene depicting Emperor Roselle's affair, and entered the White Maple Palace during the Sauron royal era. There, a Beyonder who had transformed into a man due to a potion but hadn't changed his sexual orientation was scrutinizing the noble ladies' spouses.

The rumbling sounds persisted, yet Charlotte effortlessly evaded the onslaught of Fire Ravens. The fog-shrouded scenes of the past remained unyielding, as if they were truly nonexistent. However, the brownish-green branches that bore them showed signs of scorching and charring.

The Tree of Shadow was, after all, a tree, and thus susceptible to combustion!

The only issue was that Lumian's Fire Ravens inflicted minimal harm upon it.

In an explosive moment, Mr. K's finger detonated like a bomb, transforming into a gruesome rain of flesh and blood that draped Lumian in a hooded robe of crimson.

To Lumian's dismay, Mr. K didn't appear immediately. It was uncertain whether it would take time to sense his presence or if the Tree of Shadow had isolated this space from the real world.

Charlotte ventured into the illusory scene of a torrential downpour, where a few naked figures sprinted about. Her white silk dress seemed drenched, adhering to her body and accentuating her unusually exquisite form.

She bestowed Lumian with a smile, her eyes akin to serene lakes tinged with timidity, innocence, and purity.

A searing flame coursed through Lumian's being, igniting from his head down to his very core.

Lumian's heart surged with longing. He darted between the entangled roots, heading toward the brownish-green tree and the captivating figure of Charlotte Calvino.

Charlotte didn't traverse the various illusory scenes. Instead, she stepped onto a tree branch below and leaned against the brownish-green trunk. Her body trembled slightly, as if yearning to hide but finding no escape.

Lumian's eyes blazed with a reddened fury as his gaze fixated upon Charlotte's sparkling eyes, moist lips, graceful neck, and alluring curves. His thoughts became a chaotic haze.

Thus, he failed to notice Charlotte's abdomen and legs sinking into the brownish-green trunk. He failed to observe the crack forming, unveiling a colossal moist flower.

The vivid red flower bloomed gradually, akin to an enormous mouth anticipating its prey.

Lumian lunged toward Charlotte, propelled by his fervor.

Charlotte couldn't help but smile.

At that very moment, a muffled explosion erupted from Lumian's right pocket.

Boom!

Underneath his blood-colored robe, a ball of flames burst forth, ripping through his pocket and igniting his shirt, causing an agonizing pain to course through Lumian's waist.

Lumian's eyes regained some semblance of clarity. Swiftly, he reached out and grasped Charlotte's wrist, keeping a minimal distance between himself and the moist flower.

Having long been aware of the Mother Tree of Desire's ability to awaken various desires, how could Lumian not have been on guard against Charlotte's seduction?

However, in order to prevent the other party from detecting his defenses prematurely and setting a trap, he chose not to directly soak the Mysticism Smelling Salts in cloth and place it near his nose.

Nor did he turn the dagger around, preparing for the collision that would bring him back to his senses. In their current predicament, such methods held little reliability, for Charlotte might not allow him to truly pounce on her.

Hence, Lumian opted to create a small fireball with a delayed explosion in his pocket, all the while gripping Mr. K's finger!

If he remained unaffected and the fireball neared detonation, he could choose to dispel it and create another.

The small fireball inflicted negligible harm upon him. Its primary purpose was to awaken him through pain.

As for the resultant burn injuries, Lumian paid them no heed.

Pyromaniacs held no fear of such trivialities!

In an instant, Lumian seized Charlotte's wrist, and he caught a flicker of fear on her face.

Without delay, two serpent-like crimson flames burst forth from Lumian's palm, searing their way along Charlotte's arm toward her body and head.

Instinctively, Charlotte tilted her neck back, emitting a pained groan as her skin swiftly turned black from the scorching flames.

Just as Lumian was on the verge of engulfing her entirely, a wave of intense danger washed over him.

He attempted to pull Charlotte to the side, but she appeared to meld with the brownish-green tree. No matter how hard Lumian tugged, he couldn't extricate her.

Reluctantly, Lumian abandoned his futile efforts and lunged to his right.

With a muffled thud, a tree trunk as thick as a wine glass descended from the sky, impaling the ground teeming with tangled roots like a javelin, its tip quivering violently.

Lumian glanced upward and beheld Susanna Mattise, her turquoise hair cascading around her, her emerald eyes and scarlet lips.

She possessed a translucent quality, standing amidst the dense and ethereal canopy of the tree, blending seamlessly with it.

Both the brownish-green trunk and the outstretched branches bore colossal wet flowers in pale hues, flourishing and blooming.

On Avenue du Marché, inside the khaki-colored four-story building that housed the parliament member's office.

In a corner, Jenna observed Hugues Artois, garbed in elegance, leading his secretary Rhône and others through the gathering. With a glass of champagne in hand, he offered consolation, made promises, and delivered impromptu speeches with mere words. In response, he received sincere gratitude, unveiled dependence, and instinctive flattery.

Jenna couldn't help but recall a question Lumian had once posed to her: "Do you wish to sit here and watch as the murderers responsible for your mother's death and the destruction of your

happiness revel in champagne, indulge in dance parties, and inflict more heartbreak on innocent families?”

Unconsciously, Jenna's fists clenched, her knowledge of the truth fueling an uncontrollable anguish. However, she understood the need to restrain herself. Acting impulsively wouldn't yield results. She had to endure.

This was because following the proper procedures, she couldn't take action against a parliament member without substantial evidence. And if she desired to seek justice independently, her adversaries boasted several Beyonders who had been bestowed with an evil god's boon and were protected by official Beyonders and armed personnel.

All she could do was endure and await the future!

Within the confines of Auberge du Coq Doré, ensnared by branches and vines, Franca stood near the staircase, her face flushed and her eyes glistening as she battled to suppress the overwhelming desire coursing through her veins.

Her right hand trembled as she retrieved the canister of Mysticism Smelling Salts obtained from Rentas. With a twist of the lid, she raised it to her nose.

Achoo! Achoo! Achoo!

A series of sneezes erupted, marking Franca's triumph over her desires and the gradual return of her rationality.

Swiftly scanning her surroundings, she realized that Lumian, who had been mere steps away, had vanished.

Taking note of the unnatural transformations plaguing the motel and the adjacent streets engulfed by colossal trees, Franca clenched her teeth and arrived at a resolution. The tree crowns above seemed to grow increasingly ethereal as they reached skyward, extending into an otherworldly realm.

She retrieved two objects from her possession.

They were a pair of tarot cards.

One depicted a man and a woman raising their cups in a greeting—the Two of Cups. In the center, a wooden staff coiled by twin serpents stood prominently.

The other card portrayed an angel sounding a trumpet, calling forth the resurrection of the departed—the Judgment card!

Chapter 254 The Weight of History

Franca clutched the Judgment card tightly and chanted in Hermes, “Rain judgment!”

The ordinary-looking tarot card remained unchanged, but within a few seconds, Auberge du Coq Doré trembled visibly.

The brownish-green branches and turquoise vines that covered the building's facade receded, as if filled with fear.

Franca's view through the window expanded. She witnessed the sky merging with the ethereal canopy of a colossal tree. The clouds appeared to be caught in a hurricane, swirling in unison.

As the wind shifted, numerous white clouds gathered, forming a massive vortex that descended to the ground, elongating into a sword-like gust that bridged heaven and earth.

The sword descended, and a figure stood unwavering in the middle of Rue Anarchie.

It was a woman with shoulder-length blond hair, donned in a traditional grayish-white knight's training attire.

Standing over 1.5 meters tall, her features were exquisite, and her eyes exuded a commanding aura of dignity, demanding submission and obedience.

Rue Anarchie, where she stood, was no longer recognizable. The surrounding buildings, the narrow roads, and the vendors and pedestrians, consumed by their own desires, were divided and scattered across the strange wilderness, blending with the other streets.

Interwoven roots sprouted from the ground, connecting the scattered sections. Radiating from the brownish-green tree at the center, they spread out layer by layer, growing denser as they neared the core.

The streets occupied by the colossal tree remained hidden from the outside world, thanks to this strange wilderness!

Franca let out a sigh of relief at the sight of the short yet dignified lady with blond hair.

Grasping the Judgment and Two of Cups cards, she blurted out, "Praise The Fool! Praise Madam Judgement!"

As soon as the woman known as Madam Judgment landed, her gaze fell upon the side of the brownish-green tree. Unbeknownst to Franca, a cradle-like dark-red open carriage had appeared there at some point. Two towering creatures with goat horns, pitch-black bodies, and burning dark flames pulled the carriage. They seemed to be Demons.

Seated within the carriage was a woman wearing a light-colored veil. She adorned a loose white robe, her slightly swollen belly emanating a tangible maternal glow.

Lady Moon!

The strange wilderness was her Paramita world!

Lady Moon... You have emerged from the rat's hole... The eyes of Judgment, the blond-haired lady, instantly took on an ethereal quality, as if touched by a golden hue.

Through her eyes, she perceived the intertwining Beyonder powers that existed within the woman on the carriage, manifesting in different colors and states.

"Deprivation!" Madam Judgment's solemn voice resounded.

It was an ancient Hermes word.

With a simple gesture of her right hand, Madam Judgment temporarily stripped the ability to copulate between creatures of different genders.

Immediately after, Madam Judgment leaned forward, pushed out her palm, and declared in ancient Hermes, "Exile!"

With a whirring sound, an invisible and majestic force coalesced into a terrifying hurricane, howling before Lady Moon.

Unfazed by distance, it materialized directly where the carriage was.

Beneath Lady Moon's veil, her faintly discernible red lips parted as she took deep breaths.

The exaggerated hurricane, capable of toppling an entire building, seemed to find an outlet in a confined vessel. It surged into Lady Moon's mouth and permeated her body.

In just a second, the hurricane dissipated into nothingness, completely absorbed by Lady Moon.

With a radiant maternal glow, she extended her right hand, caressing her swollen stomach with tenderness.

The cerulean sky and billowing clouds resembled exquisite paintings, while the earth beneath was a realm entwined with tree roots.

Lumian's gaze met Susanna Mattise perched atop the crown of the tree, and they exchanged a knowing look. In an instant, semi-ethereal crimson Fire Ravens materialized around him.

The Fire Ravens circled and soared towards the heavens, but they couldn't breach the ethereal canopy of the tree. They could only approach, their presence without touch.

They alighted upon the brownish-green trunk, scorching it with blackened marks.

Observing this, Lumian swiftly shifted his focus.

He had discovered earlier that flames possessed the ability to inflict certain damage upon the enigmatic entity known as the Tree of Shadow!

Crimson fireballs condensed one after another, hurtling towards the branches of the tree. Yet, they merely singed them without evident impact.

Lumian paused momentarily. Susanna Mattise was preoccupied with something, and Charlotte Calvino had yet to recover from her burns. It was suspected that she had taken refuge within an illusory scene, allowing the crimson flames in his palm to accumulate layer by layer until they transformed into a fist-sized sphere of searing incandescence.

Boom!

The explosion caused by the incandescent fireball was several times more powerful than before, but not a single fragment of the Tree of Shadow's bark fell. Only a larger area of charred flesh and the faint whiff of a colossal light-colored blossom attested to the reality of the incandescent white flame stream.

Lumian's expression turned grave. After a moment of contemplation, a spear formed from blazing white flames materialized in his hand.

He hurled the spear towards the brownish-green tree, witnessing it puncture needle-sized holes in the charred bark before disintegrating into a cascade of flames that spread across various sections of the tree.

Witnessing this, Lumian's heart clenched as he recalled his sister Aurore's favored phrase for describing those who overestimate their abilities to the point of impracticality: “It's akin to an ant attempting to shake a towering oak.”

Lumian's anxiety, impatience, and fear compelled him to unleash his fists.

His clenched fists were engulfed in crimson flames.

As he struck the brownish-green tree, a wisp of fire infiltrated its surface.

Fire Infusion!

Lumian sought to bypass the Tree of Shadow's resilient outer bark and directly harm its core.

Bam! Bam! Bam!

His flaming fists pummeled the trunk of the brownish-green tree, as if he aimed to inject every accumulated flame within his being into it.

Bam! Bam! Bam! After a flurry of frenzied attacks, he retracted his fists and took a step back.
Rumble!

A muffled explosion reverberated from within the tree trunk, causing the charred bark to finally crumble away, consumed by flames.

In an instant, an ethereal mist enveloped the scene, as if a long-forgotten beautiful dream had been set ablaze by a match.

Lumian found himself momentarily lost in a haze, as if he had transformed into the protagonist of that dream—a man engaged in a passionate encounter with an enchanting woman wearing an exquisite dress, her hem teasingly lifted.

The unfamiliar sensation felt so vivid that Lumian believed himself to be living it firsthand.

Abruptly, a sharp pain shot through his ankle, snapping him out of the reverie. He discovered numerous branches and vines emerging from his surroundings, stealthily coiling around his feet, their thorns piercing through his blood-colored robe, sinking into his flesh, and greedily drinking his blood.

Lumian grunted, crimson wisps emanating from his body, manifesting into a vibrant cloak of fiery flames that swathed his robe of flesh and blood.

Amidst crackling sounds, the branches and vines ignited, quickly withering into brittle twigs and ashen remnants.

Seizing the opportunity, Lumian swiftly retreated, his gaze fixed upon the wound he had inflicted.

His eyes met the same brownish-green bark, albeit slightly recessed compared to its surroundings.

Beneath the bark... more bark!

Lumian's pupils dilated as he gleaned the gravity of the situation.

The Tree of Shadow had been nurtured by the abnormal desires of Trier's denizens for one to two millennia. Each piece of bark likely represented specific human activities from a particular era, layered upon one another, carrying the weight of history and the subtleties of humanity.

In simple terms, Lumian realized that if he wished to destroy the Tree of Shadow, he would have to confront countless desires accumulated over the span of two thousand years. And he had exhausted his strength to vanquish merely one desire, perhaps one in a billion, or even billions upon billions.

How could he possibly prevail?

Only then did Lumian comprehend the abnormality of his actions.

He had been focused on assaulting the Tree of Shadow instead of seeking an escape route.

An exchange of glances with Susanna Mattise brought forth fear, anxiety, and a deluge of emotions.

No wonder Susanna Mattise allowed me to act freely. No wonder the injured Charlotte Calvino didn't intervene... Lumian had been cautious of the Fallen Tree Spirits and Actors that could evoke desires and emotions, yet he had unknowingly fallen under their sway.

Once more, he raised his gaze and beheld Susanna Mattise, her hair a cascade of turquoise, nimbly shifting positions within the ethereal canopy, uttering an arcane incantation. Charlotte Calvino resumed her enigmatic actions, traversing illusory scenes, her attire, hairstyle, and makeup transforming to mirror various eras. It was no mere performance.

As Lumian's thoughts raced, dizziness assailed him, and his strength rapidly waned.

Such a sensation was foreign to him, but he had subjected others to its effects.

The sedative concocted by the Bliss Society!

Ever the keen observer of his surroundings, Lumian swiftly took out the Mysticism Smelling Salts, his attention drawn to the multitude of pallid flowers adorning the brownish-green tree.

He suspected they were responsible for releasing the sedative gas!

Achoo!

In the midst of his sneeze, Lumian pivoted, intending to distance himself from the Tree of Shadow.

Yet, Mr. K remained absent.

In the blink of an eye, roots emerged from the earth, intertwining to erect a formidable wooden barricade, surpassing ten meters in height, encircling the brownish-green tree and obstructing Lumian's path to freedom.

Lumian halted and pivoted on his heel. Countless fractures marred the trunk, branches, and roots of the Tree of Shadow. Some crevices harbored moist, light-colored flowers, while others resembled cavernous mouths oozing with viscous slime, swiftly elongating toward him.

Trapped with no means of escape, Lumian's lips curled into a smirk.

Without warning, he extended his right hand, pressing it firmly against his left chest. He spoke with a derisive tone, "Termiboros, they truly underestimate your worth. They actually intend to employ you as a sacrifice."

Chapter 255 Bridge of Communication

Upon learning of the Bliss Society's plan, Lumian's immediate assumption was that Susanna had made a crucial mistake.

What lay sealed within him wasn't just corruption at an angelic level, but an actual angel!

The former lacked self-awareness and reacted on instinct alone. Without undoing the seal and reconnecting it with its true form, it was like a cache of explosives temporarily without a detonator. While there was still a possibility of explosion, Susanna and the other heretics believed they could manage the situation.

By employing the right method, utilizing the isolated environment within the Tree of Shadow, arranging the necessary rituals, and harnessing the evil god's gaze during the sacrificial ceremony, they could break the seal and offer it as a sacrifice to the Mother Tree of Desire, ensuring the angelic corruption wouldn't pose a threat.

However, the true angel possessed intelligence and a strong will. He wouldn't idly stand by while being sacrificed.

Once the seal was completely lifted, could Susanna, Charlotte, and the others truly handle a genuine angel?

One of them was a Sequence 5 evil spirit that required the Tree of Shadow to possess some godhood, while the other was undoubtedly an Actor with an irrepressible desire to perform. As for a true angel, He had to be at least a Sequence 2 for Lumian to address Him as such. In ancient times, They were nearly on par with deities and were considered subsidiary gods. The difference between them was as vast as that between a saint and an ordinary individual.

Initially, Lumian hesitated to use Termiboros as an escape plan, fearing that the sinister and detestable angel would exploit the opportunity to make him do something seemingly innocent on the surface but secretly aid Him in infiltrating more of His powers beyond the seal.

In that scenario, Lumian, Susanna, and Charlotte would meet their doom. The Tree of Shadow would be destroyed or vanish underground, allowing Termiboros to truly descend upon the world.

Left with no other choice, Lumian cautiously stepped onto the steel rope suspended above a metaphorical abyss, hoping to maintain his balance.

One misstep, and he would fall into irreparable oblivion.

As soon as Lumian finished speaking, Termiboros's deep and commanding voice resounded in his ears.

It had been a while since Lumian had heard and resisted the angel's temptation. He could only sense His connection to his own fate through the abnormal occurrences around him or the predetermined events. Yet, the angel hadn't given up and continued to make attempts.

Now, after many days, Lumian once again heard Termiboros's voice, experiencing the full presence of the angel sealed within him.

Termiboros's voice carried a tinge of relaxation and satisfaction as it echoed in Lumian's ears.

“If they underestimate me, it will only aid my escape from this seal.

“This environment is perfect, precisely what I've been waiting for. Even if you perish later and the seal loses its support, the outside world won't detect the corresponding changes and won't be able to prevent me from breaking free of my restraints.

“They may not outright kill you, but once they attempt to shatter the seal and perform their sacrificial act, I will unleash their predetermined fate. I will abandon your body and disrupt their ritual.”

Termiboros's words insinuated:

This is the opportunity I've long awaited!

Why should I assist you? Just wait patiently for the inevitable outcome!

Lumian fell into silence and leaped away from his original position.

The tree roots split apart, and a massive, damp, pale flower blossomed, one after another, as if the abyss itself had yawned open.

Achoo!

Lumian inhaled the Mysticism Smelling Salts once more, dispelling his drowsiness.

He gazed up at Susanna Mattise in the sky and erupted into wild laughter.

“Haha, you're the most dim-witted bunch I've ever encountered!

“You've set up this ritual without a clue. Did your brains empty out because of your faith in the Mother Tree of Desire, or have they been filled with various liquids?

“Let me enlighten you. What's sealed inside me isn't corruption at the angelic level, but a bona fide angel. His name is Termiboros!

“As soon as that seal is undone, He shall descend upon us and slaughter you all. He'll shatter this foul, wretched fallen tree and cast it into a cesspool!

“If I were you, I'd cease this ritual now and let me go!”

Susanna Mattise, continually shifting positions within the illusory tree canopy, looked down at Lumian and smiled.

“Are you bluffing again? Bluffing seems to be your favorite pastime. I fell for it once; I won't be fooled again.”

Not far from her on a branch, one of the few windows on the surface of Auberge du Coq Doré, entwined with vines and branches, reflected the figure of the playwright Gabriel.

He frantically penned his name on a piece of paper with a fountain pen, as though a renowned author signing autographs for avid readers.

He had succumbed to the allure of his script, *Lightseeker*, gaining fame and becoming a household name.

Susanna Mattise continued, “Furthermore, we've contemplated the possibility that it's not corruption but an actual angel.

“Therefore, with the divine revelation, we've altered a crucial segment of the ritual. We will employ you as the primary sacrifice, together with the seal and the angel, to offer them to the mighty Mother Tree of Desire. It won't hinder the final outcome.

“Sacrificial rituals are not like cooking, where ingredients are transformed into dishes. Our task is to present the offerings to the deity. As for what befalls you, along with the seal and the angel within, it is for the great Mother Tree of Desire to decide.

“Why do you think I refrained from truly attacking you? Such an action might have prematurely shattered the seal!

“Don't even entertain the notion of threatening me with suicide. I shall imbue you with an ardent desire to live.”

It seemed as though Termiboros was akin to a valuable gift that would break free of its own accord. The seal was like a locked box, and Lumian himself was the exquisite wrapping. Susanna and Charlotte had no intention of unwrapping the box and presenting the gift to the Mother Tree of Desire. Instead, their plan was to offer the box and its packaging to the deity, avoiding any significant risks.

Upon hearing Susanna Mattise's words, Lumian remained unfazed—neither surprised, nor fearful, nor disappointed.

He tilted his head slightly and directed his gaze towards his left chest, a smirk forming at the corners of his mouth.

“Termiboros, did you hear that? You're going to be packaged up and offered to the deity known as the Mother Tree of Desire. You won't get a chance to escape that seal.

“I'm not sure how the Mother Tree of Desire will deal with you, but I can assure you it won't be anything pleasant. Are you really content to wait for the final outcome as a mere bystander?”

This time, Termiboros didn't immediately respond to Lumian. After a few seconds, His resonant voice reverberated, “Draw your Fallen Mercury and plunge it into the trunk of the Tree of Shadow. Pierce through its second layer of bark.”

Lumian was taken aback.

“The fate of the Tree of Shadow can also be exchanged?”

Termiboros's voice regained its grandeur.

“It wasn't possible before, but now it is. That tree possesses a certain living characteristic. It's akin to a mythical treant that hasn't fully developed its intelligence.”

Without hesitation, Lumian extended his left hand, passing through the crimson-flaming cloak and robe made of flesh and blood. He grasped the pewter-black dirk adorned with sinister patterns.

Bending his body slightly, engulfed in flowing crimson flames, he sprinted toward the trunk of the Tree of Shadow, swift as a cheetah. Along the way, he leaped agilely, evading the cracks and blooming gigantic flowers.

Observing Lumian's new course of action, Susanna Mattise didn't pay too much heed. She didn't believe he could truly harm the Tree of Shadow or her. Nevertheless, she remained cautious. She intended to kindle his desires and fabricate corresponding illusions, luring him to "unite" with a certain flower or crevice in the tree.

Susanna Mattise's emerald eyes reflected Lumian's figure, draped in a robe of flesh and blood and adorned with a flaming cloak. Moisture welled up in her eyes instantly.

She had hoped to witness Lumian abruptly changing his direction and pouncing upon the colossal light-colored flower. Yet, Lumian appeared unaffected as he charged toward the brownish-green trunk.

Beneath the flaming cloak, Lumian clutched the Mysticism Smelling Salts in his right hand, holding it close to his nose.

Tears welled in his eyes, obstructing his sneeze. However, with the aid of the Alms Monk's endurance, he managed to endure it.

Susanna Mattise was puzzled. With her level and Sequence, even if the other party repeatedly sniffed the Mysticism Smelling Salts, he shouldn't remain completely unaffected.

Under normal circumstances, given the disparity in their strength, she could easily induce Lumian to sneeze while he searched for light-colored giant flowers or brownish-green crevices and continued inhaling the Mysticism Smelling Salts.

Of course, there was a possibility of failure in such situations, but it was unquestionably lower than the probability of success.

But now, Susanna Mattise's initial attempt had proven futile. It was as if a skilled dice thrower had surprisingly rolled the lowest number.

Achoo!

Lumian let out a loud sneeze.

Seizing the moment while his mind remained clear and Susanna hadn't exerted her influence a second time, he shielded the metal canister with his right finger and thrust the Fallen Mercury at the brownish-green trunk of the Tree of Shadow, aiming for the needle-sized hole he had created with the burning-white spear.

A resounding clang echoed as Fallen Mercury failed to penetrate any deeper, as if it had struck an impenetrable iron plate.

Achoo!

Lumian, having inhaled a substantial amount of the Mysticism Smelling Salts, sneezed once more, shaking off yet another desire incited by Susanna. Her attempts faltered once again.

Lumian's right hand, gripping the metal canister, surged with crimson flames.

It absorbed the engulfing cloak of fire that adorned his body, swiftly condensing into a blazing white boxing glove.

In the next instant, Lumian raised his right fist and hammered it against the hilt of Fallen Mercury, resembling a blacksmith forging a weapon.

A thunderous boom erupted as the incandescent white boxing glove detached from Lumian's hand and detonated at the rear end of Fallen Mercury.

Boom!

Lumian's left palm, holding the dirk, was charred and mangled in several places. As for Fallen Mercury, propelled by the force of the explosive impact, it managed to break through the first layer of bark and penetrate into the core trunk of the Tree of Shadow.

Chapter 256 Crack

The searing pain in Lumian's left palm from the explosion nearly caused him to instinctively draw his pewter-black dirk, which had already been plunged into the core trunk of the Tree of Shadow.

Drawing upon his resilience and experience with similar injuries, he fought to control his body's reflexive reactions.

As his mind cleared from the stimulation, he managed to shake off the two desires imposed by Susanna Mattise.

Pain and rationality entwined, engulfing his mind, followed by a terrifying torrent of scenes.

These were the accumulated experiences of the Tree of Shadow over the past millennium, countless fragments of desire that had nourished and formed its trunk. They represented the potential futures of this malevolent tree.

They converged in a mercury-colored illusory river, flooding Lumian's thoughts like a deluge.

Not only were there an overwhelming number of scenes that could overpower any Low-Sequence Beyonder, but some scenes compelled Lumian to instinctively ignore or overlook them, unable to muster the courage to look or discern.

Just when he thought his intellect would be crushed by the immense torrent and reduced to a blank canvas, he realized that he had endured it. It was as if there existed an additional space capable of accommodating countless scenes beyond the limit.

Lumian wasted no time in choosing the fate he wished to exchange. Guided by his intuition for danger and spiritual instincts, he selected a scene:

A brownish-green root extended towards the depths of an ancient structure, devoured by an unseen flame that silently burned in the darkness, casting an eerie glow over the area.

With a crack, the tree root snapped and descended into the shadows. Purple flames surfaced, swiftly transforming into a color indistinguishable to the naked eye. In an instant, it dissipated, leaving no trace behind.

Lumian withdrew Fallen Mercury and exerted all his strength to pry open this fate, but it remained unresponsive.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Brownish-green tree trunks, not excessively thick, hurtled towards Lumian like javelins precisely thrown by a platoon of soldiers.

Each one possessed the potential to impale and skewer a target upon the gnarled tree roots.

In the ethereal canopy of the tree, Susanna Mattise's emerald eyes widened as she attempted to employ various abilities related to desires—be it for sex, food, greed, or acting—but all in vain. Opting for the tree spirit's powers, she aimed to deliver a physical blow.

Bound to the Tree of Shadow, the methods available to her were far more potent than those of her counterparts who relied on ordinary trees as companions.

Though she still doubted that the so-called Cursed Blade could harm the Tree of Shadow, Lumian's confidence and performance left her somewhat uneasy. Subconsciously, she believed it wiser to disrupt whatever he was doing.

She would rather err on the side of believing it to be seriously harmful and take excessive precautions in advance than be careless and witness unforeseen changes and the possibility of failure.

The former would at most waste a certain amount of strength and energy, delaying the completion of the ritual a little. The latter might bring about changes she didn't want to see and an outcome of failure.

Even if the probability was low, she had to take preventative measures. She couldn't wait until it happened before attempting to rectify it.

The flesh robe enveloping Lumian's body abruptly contracted, diminishing his size and evading the majority of the javelin-like tree trunks.

Two of them landed on Lumian's left and right shoulders, leaving him unable to dodge or evade.

The flesh and blood constituting the robe acted as disciplined soldiers receiving an order. They surged towards the impending strike, constructing layers of blood-colored cushions.

With a resounding impact, the layers of flesh were pierced by the two brownish-green tree spears. More flesh surged forth, hurriedly filling the void.

Although Mr. K's finger had transformed into a robe of flesh and blood to mitigate the damage, Lumian's legs buckled under the force akin to that of a sledgehammer, causing him to tumble backward.

In that moment, he felt the fate of the brownish-green tree root, which had been burned by the invisible flames, loosen its grip.

The illusory power prying it loose didn't solely belong to Lumian, but also to his left chest, emanating from an unknown source.

Gritting his teeth, Lumian utilized the momentum of his fall to laboriously stir up that fate. With great difficulty, he transformed it into a droplet of mercury and exchanged it with the fate of encountering the Montsouris ghost, stored within the pewter-black dirk.

With a crisp crack, fractures spread across Fallen Mercury, as if it struggled to bear the burden of fate. Some fractures were unnaturally long, others were delicate, and some ran straight through the blade.

With a thud, Lumian collapsed onto the coiled tree roots entrenched in the ground, freeing himself from the lingering forces of the brownish-green tree javelins.

His shoulder throbbed with pain, but he remained physically unharmed. The robe woven of flesh and blood began to disintegrate, trickling down, obstructing the pale-colored flower and the brownish-green crack as they unfurled their “mouths” in an attempt to devour Lumian. When he collapsed, he crushed them.

With a resounding boom, crimson flames erupted, consuming the malevolent entities. Seizing the opportunity, Lumian swiftly rolled over and maneuvered to a relatively safe position.

Only then did Lumian recall a crucial issue. Amidst dodging attacks from trees, branches, leaves, vines, roots, and flowers, and taking whiffs of the Mysticism Smelling Salts, he whispered amidst sneezes,

“Encountering the Montsouris ghost... Achoo! ...doesn't necessarily mean that the Montsouris ghost will attack immediately!”

If it took a while, what was the point of his previous efforts?

Disregarding the fact that the Montsouris ghost would assault the Tree of Shadow every month or two, even if it attacked every four to five minutes, Lumian found it despairing. When the time came, the preparations for the ritual would surely be complete. The sacrificial ceremony would have already commenced. Under the watchful eyes of the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire, there was a high likelihood that the Montsouris ghost would choose to wait a while before returning, based on its previous patterns.

Termiboros's majestic voice resonated within Lumian's body and ears once again.

“It approaches. It is a destined fate.”

In the ethereal canopy of the tree, Susanna ceased her attacks on Lumian. Utilizing the Tree of Shadow, she remotely guided Charlotte in controlling the sacrifice while delving her consciousness into the brownish-green tree, searching for any potential issues resulting from the pewter-black dirk's assault.

The sooner she discovered it, the sooner she could resolve it and propel the sacrificial ritual forward!

Upon hearing Termiboros's words, Lumian couldn't help but inquire, “Can the Montsouris ghost truly destroy the Tree of Shadow?”

Although both entities were malevolent, the giant tree that had been rooted in Trier's soil for over a thousand years, nourished by countless desires, and linked to a hidden evil god, appeared loftier, more menacing, and more wicked.

Termiboros's deep voice resounded, “No. However, it possesses the ability to influence the Tree of Shadow to some extent, creating an opportunity for you to escape.”

Just as Termiboros finished speaking, Lumian caught sight of a sudden black shadow beside him.

The figure stood slightly hunched, resembling an elderly man burdened by the weight of life.

The Montsouris ghost!

It had bypassed numerous restrictions and obstacles to arrive in the alternate space occupied by the Tree of Shadow.

With a single stride, the stooped figure reached the edge of the brownish-green trunk. Susanna and Charlotte noticed its presence.

They instinctively sensed a threat, yet they didn't connect the black shadow to Trier's legend of the Montsouris ghost.

Frantically, they stirred up the various desires of the Montsouris ghost, but their efforts were like stones cast into an unfathomable abyss. There was no response whatsoever.

For the first time, Lumian beheld the true appearance of the Montsouris ghost.

It was neither an elderly man nor even human. It more closely resembled a viscous black shadow taking on a human form, hunching its back.

The Montsouris ghost fixed its gaze upon the Tree of Shadow for two seconds before pressing itself against the brownish-green trunk.

In an instant, it transformed into a malevolent, pitch-black liquid that corroded the layers of tree bark.

A sizable pool of moist darkness spread across the surface of the massive tree trunk, steadily contaminating its surroundings and expanding its reach.

Within moments, the entire lower portion of the Tree of Shadow was overtaken by the black shadow, rendering Susanna Mattise and Charlotte Calvino's attacks futile.

The next second, the oil-painting-like blue sky and white clouds, along with the ground intertwined with tree roots, trembled visibly as if experiencing a violent earthquake.

Faint illusory cracks appeared on the surface of the tree trunk, the ground, and even in the sky. Some of them slowly widened, revealing glimpses of the street beyond—a distorted microcosm of chaos influenced by branches, vines, and desire.

“Be prepared,” Termiboros's grand voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

Realizing that she couldn't halt the Montsouris ghost and that the situation was rapidly deteriorating, Susanna Mattise wore a resentful expression and recited an incantation in ancient Hermes, “Son of the God who should never have been born, you are a cage for the imprisoning curse, an evil that erodes history. I implore your assistance.”

The instant Susanna Mattise finished speaking, the branches beneath the ethereal tree crown began to “secrete” a viscous, pitch-black liquid.

It bore a striking resemblance to the black liquid assumed by the Montsouris ghost, but there was a significant distinction. It possessed a greater degree of chaos, frenzy, and wickedness.

Almost simultaneously, pale-white, malformed skulls, yellowish eyeballs entwined with thick veins, scarlet tongues dripping with repulsive pus, and indescribably grotesque objects that induced madness by mere sight sprouted from the liquid secreted by the tree trunk.

In the untamed wilderness, where Madam Judgment and Lady Moon engaged in their fierce battle, Rue Anarchie and other locations lay scattered. The brownish-green tree swayed ominously, while tiny cracks that appeared to pierce the very fabric of reality spread across its surface and surroundings.

Suddenly, an illusory door materialized in the sky, layer upon layer.

From the midst of these doors emerged a lady clad in an orange dress, her appearance exuding a languid aura. Worms emitting resplendent starlight wriggled in and out of her visage, obscuring her true features from discernment.

With purposeful strides, the woman approached the brownish-green tree, extending her hands to grasp the sides of an invisible crack, as if intent on tearing it open!

Chapter 257 The Unfortunate

Transparent maggots, shimmering under the starlight's embrace, wriggled out from the lady's relaxed palm, their movements concealed within an elusive crack. The crack, once invisible, now bore the hue of starlight.

With a vigorous pull, the transparent veil veiling this world let out a terrifying groan, unable to bear the weight. It parted forcefully, yielding to the unstoppable momentum.

Amidst an indescribable shattering, the crevice ripped apart, transforming into a colossal cavity adorned with glimmering starry specks.

It resembled the entrance to a tunnel leading to an unknown realm.

In a mere instant, the woman in the orange dress vanished from the wilderness.

Seated within the cradle carriage, Lady Moon's expression flickered. She commanded the Demon-like creatures pulling the carriage to follow her into the tunnel.

Madam Judgment trailed closely behind.

In a world where tree roots intertwined and ethereal clouds resembled oil paintings.

As the branches of the otherworldly tree secreted viscous black liquid and peculiar entities sprouted, Lumian felt his mind teetering on the edge of madness, despite Termiboros's warning not to gaze skyward.

His skin prickled, and the flesh beneath twitched unnaturally, as if masses or tumors were about to form.

At that moment, pure starlight bathed the world, casting its radiance upon Lumian's eyes.

Not far from him, a minuscule crack instantaneously expanded into a mystical and enigmatic door of starlight.

“Shut your eyes and rush through the doorway,” Termiboros's resonant voice echoed in Lumian's ears.

Without a moment's hesitation, Lumian clutched Fallen Mercury tightly with his bloodied left hand and sprinted toward the starlit door.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Lumian relied on a Hunter's instinctual understanding of spatial location and precise distance, reaching his destination within a few strides. Unperturbed by the changes around him or the lurking dangers, he leaped into the unknown.

After a brief bout of dizziness, Lumian sensed as though he had ascended from the depths of a profound lake, his entire being easing.

He opened his eyes and beheld the brownish-green silhouette of the Shadow Tree not far away, Auberge du Coq Doré, and other buildings cloaked in branches and vines. He witnessed streets divided by peculiar forces in various sections of the wilderness, merchants and passersby indulging in their individual desires, and Franca gracefully leaping from a second-story window of Auberge du Coq Doré.

He had departed from the alternate realm within the Tree of Shadows, yet he had not returned to the tangible world.

Franca also caught sight of Lumian nearby. She exclaimed with excitement, “Hurry, find the exit!”

Although she had “summoned” Madam Judgment and felt a measure of confidence, she desired no lingering stay in this place.

How could a mere Sequence 7 like herself partake in a battle involving demigods? Even observing from a distance posed significant risks.

Lumian nodded and sprinted toward Franca, scanning his surroundings for any signs of an exit.

The more he surveyed, the more he sensed the resemblance to Paramita, a boon from the Great Mother. However, there were no hordes of undead or Demons casting sinners into the abyss.

Could it be that the Bliss Society's operation involved the followers of the Great Mother? Lumian swiftly formed a hypothesis and shouted to Franca, who was mere inches away, “To the edge of the wilderness!”

Drawing from his experience, if this place was indeed Paramita, they should be able to escape from the wilderness's periphery.

Franca nodded slightly and followed, without questioning his instruction.

Suddenly, the wilderness convulsed with a violent quake, and a low rumble echoed from within the brownish-green tree.

The sky darkened, and the world itself teetered on the brink of collapse.

The branches and vines that had ensnared the buildings and streets swiftly withdrew. Vendors, pedestrians, and residents, caught in the grip of their desires, snapped out of their dazed states.

They ceased their ravenous feasting, released their grip on their partners, and rose in fear. Bloodied and bewildered, they halted their savage violence and looked around in a state of confusion...

In Auberge du Coq Doré, the bickering eloping couple ceased their romp. Oblivious to the wrongness of their actions, they were perplexed as to why the sky had darkened so drastically, as if evening had descended upon them.

Anthony Reid, trembling beneath a wooden table, regained his composure. He emerged and peered out the window, his expression darkening.

Gabriel, who had been frantically signing his name, suddenly regained his senses. He wondered if the stress had taken its toll on his sanity while he polished the Lightseeker script, incorporating the theater manager's feedback.

Pavard Neeson, owner of the underground bar, set aside his paintbrush but couldn't tear his gaze away from the drawing board. Though he had only sketched it hastily, he felt it was the most remarkable work he had ever produced. It surpassed even his loftiest standards. Unconsciously, he yearned to return to that state, but he couldn't.

In the blink of an eye, all the branches and vines retracted into the Tree of Shadows. Most of the vendors, pedestrians, and residents, who had regained their senses, beheld the ominously terrifying brownish-green tree.

They didn't understand what had transpired, but fear propelled them to swiftly flee from the Tree of Shadows, heeding their instinctual warnings.

In that moment, Susanna Mattise, her turquoise hair flowing, materialized atop the ethereal tree crown. Below her stood Charlotte Calvino, wearing an expression of disappointment, frustration, and hatred.

The escape of the sacrificial offering signaled a temporary failure in their sacrifice. They promptly departed the alternate realm to evade the repercussions of the demigod-level clash.

Susanna Mattise, beset by the backlash and the influence of godhood, appeared increasingly ethereal, as if she could dissipate at any moment.

Lumian and Franca, racing toward the wilderness's edge, flickered in her weakened gaze, yet she lacked the power to influence them.

Under normal circumstances, her fusion with the Tree of Shadows granted her the ability to exert her powers from a distance. However, the backlash from the interrupted ritual and the uncontrolled corruption following the Son of God's descent had nearly claimed her life. She was now in an extremely feeble state.

The tenacious and evil spirit that she was, Susanna Mattise refused to surrender so easily. She yearned to capture Lumian and drag him back into the Tree of Shadows to resume the unfinished ritual.

Once again, the branches and vines of the Tree of Shadows swiftly extended, ensnaring a hapless vendor and hoisting him aloft. Their thorns pierced his flesh, absorbing the vital essence that could rejuvenate Susanna.

It was akin to utilizing the Tree of Shadows to enter a dream-like state, draining energy to gradually lead the target to their demise through a sinister encounter. However, the process had become crude and expedited—an accelerated ordeal!

Vendors, pedestrians, and residents trapped within the wilderness erupted in terrified screams as they frantically fled upon witnessing the surge of brownish-green branch and vine monstrosities and their companions being hoisted into the air.

The eloping couple, wrapped tightly in a blanket, darted out of Auberge du Coq Doré, following in Anthony Reid's wake toward the wilderness's edge. Behind them trailed Gabriel, Pavard Neeson, and the tenants who hadn't yet departed for work. Before them swarmed vendors and pedestrians in a chaotic scramble.

One by one, fleeing escapees were snatched up by tree branches and vines, their cries for help piercing the air.

The peddler, who had once served Lumian extra Whiskey Sour, stumbled over a rock on the ground. In utter despair, he witnessed turquoise vines creeping up his body, layer upon layer, engulfing him entirely.

Sensing the commotion, Lumian turned his head and fixated on the scene for several seconds before gradually slowing his pace.

Upon witnessing this, Franca cursed, "Do you plan to go back and save them? Dammit! Know your place. You're just a wanted criminal, a mob leader!"

Lumian didn't come to a halt, but he didn't hasten his steps either.

He and Franca drew ever nearer to the edge of the wilderness.

In that very moment, Lumian's ears resonated with the majestic voice of Termiboros.

This time, the angel of Inevitability did not deliver sentences one by one. Instead, He injected a lengthy paragraph into Lumian's consciousness at intervals.

"Have you not come to terms with your destiny?"

"After enduring the might of Inevitability, there shall naturally be a corresponding corruption.

"From the moment Cordu was obliterated, you became the unfortunate one.

"It was not I who exerted influence over you in many past matters; rather, it was your hapless fate playing its part.

"As an unfortunate soul, not only shall you suffer ill fortune, but so too shall those around you and those close to you.

"If it were not for your lack of knowledge in mysticism, which allowed Susanna Mattise to uncover the issue within your body and begin contacting Hugues Artois about employing the chemical plant explosion for the sacrificial arrangement, Jenna's mother would not have taken her own life, and Jenna's brother would not have descended into madness.

“If you had been cautious enough, when Flameng regained consciousness and drank with you, you would have remembered to seek an opportunity to engage a genuine psychiatrist. He may not have chosen the path of suicide.

“If you had not merely forewarned Ruhr, but also restricted his movements, he would not have succumbed to the illness once more and met a swift demise. Michel would not have lost her will to live.

“All this misfortune has been brought upon them by you.

“My existence is not solely a trump card that grants you boons and the power to deter others, but also an inescapable curse.

“Only by bowing to Inevitability and releasing me from my seal can your misfortune come to an end.

“If you continue on this path, you shall be unable to save those whom you wish to save. You shall be unable to protect those whom you wish to protect. You shall only amplify their misfortunes.

“When the time comes, those pleading for help here shall perish.

“Gabriel shall perish.

“Charlie shall perish.

“Jenna shall perish.

“Franca, too, shall meet her demise.”

Lumian came to a sudden halt, his countenance twisted in anguish. He could no longer conceal the pain that consumed him.

Franca called out once more, “Get a grip! It's all well and good to do good deeds when everything is fine. But now, we need to escape and seek help from official Beyonders! Who knows what will come of those demigod battles? Susanna is now like an empowered Sequence 5 with some godlike abilities. She's not someone we can handle!

“Those people don't expect assistance from a villain who enjoys playing pranks on them!”

In the vicinity of the brownish-green tree, numerous individuals already dangled from its branches.

With a swoosh, Gabriel was hoisted up by a few green vines, and the scattered pages of the Lightseeker script fluttered to the ground.

Pavard Neeson, the owner of the underground bar, stood beside him, his body impaled by a protruding spike.

Among the eloping couple, the woman stumbled and ran slower, eventually tripping over a branch and becoming ensnared by the vines.

The young man wrapped in a blanket grew alarmed and continued onward. However, after a few steps, he abruptly halted, cursing himself.

“Dogsh*t!”

Before he could finish his sentence, he had already spun around and dashed back toward his partner. Clenching his teeth, he sought to tear at the vines and help her free.

Desperate cries and terrified screams reverberated through the wilderness.

Lumian's fists clenched involuntarily.

Suddenly, he let out a chuckle and spoke.

“Then, are you considered close to me? After all, you reside within my body. Will you also encounter misfortune?”

“I know I will face countless failures, yet I will persist again and again in pursuit of that elusive and seemingly insignificant hope!”

“If I had chosen to surrender, I would have been defeated long ago!”

“And now, there is still a chance for success.”

With that, Lumian took another step and continued his sprint toward the edge of the wilderness.

Although Franca couldn't comprehend his mutterings, she was glad to see that he had made a wise decision.

Two to three seconds later, the two of them reached the wilderness's edge. Lumian deliberately maintained a distance from Franca, then suddenly extended his arms and pushed her out.

Caught off guard, Franca watched in shock as her body gradually left the wilderness. She turned to gaze at Lumian.

Lumian smiled and spoke gently, “Once, I shared their despair, pain, and longing for aid. And during that time, someone extended a helping hand to me.”

With those words, he pivoted and sprinted toward the brownish-green tree.

In the dim expanse of the wilderness, crimson flames ignited upon his body. This time, the fiery cloak no longer isolated him from his garments, scorching his skin and flesh.

He intended to use the constant pain to resist the diverse desires he would encounter next!

As he ran, his gaze locked onto Susanna, her turquoise hair entwined. Yet, he “saw” not only the Fallen Tree Spirit, but also the figure etched in his memory.

The one who had illuminated his path.

Chapter 258 Assassin

Susanna's eyes fixed on Lumian as he dashed towards her, his body engulfed in crimson flames. She absorbed energy from the surrounding crowd, including peddlers, pedestrians, and tenants hanging from the trees. Her goal was to restore her combat abilities as quickly as possible.

She wasn't worried about Lumian causing her harm. Positioned at the top of the tree crown, she knew he couldn't reach her. Moreover, she was one with the Tree of Shadow, making her nearly invulnerable. Without godhood, any attack would only cause minor injuries, incapable of killing or severely harming her.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Lumian sprinted into an area where tree branches and vines entangled, with a hundred to two hundred humans dangling from above.

The brownish-green foliage tried to ensnare and pierce him, but his fiery aura forced them to retreat in panic.

Suddenly, a rumbling sound shook the ground. The brownish-green tree descended rapidly, shrinking its height to seven to eight meters.

The violent tremors across the wilderness made it difficult for Lumian to advance.

Rumble. A tremor like an earthquake shook the crystal chandelier in the banquet hall. Terrified expressions appeared on the faces of most people present. Quick-thinking individuals sought shelter under the long table draped in a white tablecloth.

The team assigned to protect Hugues Artois consisted of Imre, a mixed-blood individual, Valentine, and a Warrior pathway Beyonder named Antoine.

Sensing the anomaly simultaneously, they tacitly sent Imre to investigate. He rushed to the window and peered out, trying to locate the source of the disturbance.

Imre observed that several houses in Rue Anarchie, Rue du Rossignol, and Rue des Blouses Blanches had tilted to a certain degree, but they had not collapsed. Their surfaces were covered with brownish-green branches and vines.

In comparison, the prominent feature was the brownish-green tree, situated roughly on Rue Anarchie. It descended, adorned with numerous tree tumors and flowers.

The scene lasted only a few seconds before returning to normal, as if an unsuccessful painting had been replaced by another work.

“What's happening?” Hugues Artois calmly approached the window and inquired.

Imre didn't hold back any information. He lowered his voice and replied sincerely, “Anomalies have occurred on Rue Anarchie, Rue du Rossignol, and Rue des Blouses Blanches.”

Rue Anarchie, Rue du Rossignol, Rue des Blouses Blanches... As Jenna, who had approached a nearby window but missed witnessing the scene, heard the street names, her feet froze in place.

Two names immediately surfaced in her mind: Ciel, Franca...

Had they encountered the anomaly? Jenna's heart sank, and she instinctively looked at Hugues Artois.

She noticed a curl forming on the member of parliament's lips, as if he couldn't hide his delight.

It's him... It's him and his group of heretics! Jenna's mind instantly reached a conclusion. Darkness enveloped her, and despair surged through her uncontrollably.

Could Franca and Ciel withstand the planned attack by the heretics and survive this anomaly?

Should I rush to their aid with my current strength? Or will I only bring harm to them?

At that moment, Jenna felt as if the pillars supporting her—her two friends who had always stood by her side—were about to crumble, just as she had lost her mother.

And it was all the fault of the heretics, of Hugues Artois!

Her thoughts drifted to Franca's words when she consumed the potion and transformed into an Assassin, warning Jenna to avoid contact with evil gods.

“Contact with evil gods will bring nothing but disaster.

“Not only will it drive a person to madness and strip away their true self, but it will also drag everyone around them into darkness, whether they know them or not.

“If we don't eliminate those individuals, the influence of the evil gods will persist. The pain will return again and again, unending.”

And now, Hugues Artois stood at the center of all the market district's disasters.

Jenna lowered her head, unable to meet Hugues Artois's gaze, afraid that her eyes would betray the pain and hatred within.

Hatred consumed her!

Yet, she could only remind herself that her brother Julien was still alive, albeit with a certain mental ailment that could be cured. If he lost his sister next, he might truly spiral into irredeemable madness.

After the banquet concludes, after the factory owners provide their “compensation,” and after I settle all our debts, I'll take Julien and leave the market district and Quartier du Jardin Botanique. We'll find another place to live, far from the ensuing pain... Jenna repeated these words to herself, desperately trying to contain her emotions.

“Why is there another anomaly?” Hugues Artois questioned Imre, Valentine, and Antoine.

Imre offered a bitter smile and replied, “I witnessed that tree. It has appeared multiple times in Trier's history, but it has never been fully resolved.”

Ever since joining the Purifier team in Trier, he had learned about the hidden dangers lurking beneath the ground that couldn't be entirely purified. The brownish-green tree was one of them.

He, his superiors, and his teammates couldn't fathom why Trier had been established atop such things in the first place.

Without giving Hugues Artois time to question their capabilities any further, Imre added,

“Now that the anomaly has been discovered, it won't be long before it's suppressed.”

As a member of the elite Purifier team, he knew that Trier differed from other countries' capitals. Due to the perpetual underground dangers, both the former royal family and the current parliamentary government had agreed to the two Churches' secret dispatching of an angel each or placed Grade 0 Sealed Artifacts in Trier to prevent any mishaps.

Of course, during periods when the royal family and government held immense power, the Church's angels refrained from interfering. For example, during Emperor Roselle's reign.

Once the anomaly caused by the peculiar tree was exposed, it would swiftly face a devastating blow. Although it couldn't be completely eradicated, it would be kept under control for a considerable time.

...

After the swift and violent descent of the Tree of Shadow, the wilderness stabilized. Gabriel, Pavard Neeson, and the others remained suspended from the branches, their faces growing pale and blackened, as if drained of energy.

Lumian regained his balance and continued sprinting towards the nearby brownish-green tree, still engulfed in crimson flames.

At that moment, Susanna Mattise had regained a significant portion of her strength. Lumian's figure appeared in her eyes, awaiting his approach within the range of her current abilities.

Behind Lumian, a shadow detached itself from its owner and stealthily lunged at his back.

It was Charlotte Calvino, "acting" as a shadow!

Having not been the host of the ritual and being far from the treetop, she had not suffered the backlash or intense corruption, thus her strength had not waned. Seeing Lumian turn around, she quickly hid herself, and put to show her acting abilities, ready to execute a surprise attack

Suddenly, a gunshot pierced through the air in the distance.

The iron-black bullet was too distant and lacked precision. It grazed Charlotte's body, but it disrupted her plans.

Wearing a blouse, light-colored breeches, and red boots, Franca emerged at the edge of the wilderness, clutching a brass revolver. She cursed at Lumian's retreating form and shouted, "F*ck, don't you think I'm on your team?"

Noticing that the street had returned to its "normal" state, Hugues Artois made his way back to the center of the banquet hall, holding a glass of light-gold champagne. Standing before the gathering, he began his speech as usual.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to have you join us for this condolence banquet. Please join me in a moment of silence to honor those who have tragically departed..."

"As you can see, yet another accident has occurred in the market district. We cannot continue like this. We must establish a more efficient and adaptable system to handle such situations.

"I understand that many of you harbor anger and fear in light of the recent accident. Your loved ones may have lost their lives, sustained severe injuries, or perhaps experienced agitation, mental breakdowns, and madness as a result of this..."

Jenna's head shot up upon hearing these words, her gaze fixed on Hugues Artois once more. He had just mentioned “agitation, mental breakdowns, and madness” in such specific detail. Under normal circumstances, such elaboration would not be necessary. A simple reference to insanity would suffice.

Did Hugues Artois know that someone would suffer a mental breakdown due to the chemical plant explosion and go mad? And was he deliberately mentioning it in his speech, as if a criminal returning to the crime scene, reveling in his sinister handiwork? An absurd mix of hatred and fear consumed Jenna's heart.

If her suspicions were correct, Julien's mental breakdown might have been influenced by the heretics!

Could he be cured? Could he be saved?

If I don't sever the source, even if I leave the market district with Julien, there might still be hidden dangers and lingering problems in the future! The feeling of desperation overwhelmed Jenna, as if she were trapped in an inescapable darkness.

Her pupils dilated, reflecting Hugues Artois's figure with a chilling clarity.

Imre, Valentine, and Antoine's expressions darkened, their gazes falling, as they heard Hugues Artois's implicit accusations against the two Churches.

The alternate space that accompanied the Tree of Shadow lay in ruins. Some areas were coated with pitch-black mucus, while others bore gaping holes, as if swallowed by an endless void.

Suddenly, a glimmer of light emerged from the shrunken door of starlight.

It grew brighter and brighter, akin to a transformed sun, illuminating every nook and cranny with an eerie clarity, banishing all shadows.

A female figure draped in a white robe adorned with golden threads emerged from the radiant source. She appeared to be crafted from pure light, translucent and ethereal. With emerald green eyes and flowing blond hair, she exuded beauty and a divine aura.

The guardian angel of Trier, Saint Viève.

Amidst the applause, Hugues Artois, having concluded his speech, mingled with the families of the victims, champagne glass in hand. He displayed enthusiasm, friendliness, and a trustworthy demeanor.

Jenna closed her eyes and wandered towards the long table dressed in a white tablecloth. She picked up a plate and placed some food on it, then grabbed a long silver fork and began to eat.

As she ate, she slowly approached Hugues Artois in a daze.

Drawing near, just two meters away, she assumed a stance that suggested a conversation with Monsieur Member of Parliament.

Surrounded by his team and guarded by official Beyonders, Hugues Artois noticed Jenna. He smiled warmly, anticipating her approach.

Jenna passed by Secretary Rhône and positioned herself a step away from Hugues Artois.

Before their conversation could commence, the ground trembled once more, accompanied by a resounding rumble. Rue Anarchie and Rue des Blouses Blanches seemed to brighten significantly.

Cassandra, Hugues Artois, and the others turned their bodies instinctively, gazing out of the window, their concern evident.

Witnessing this, Jenna closed her eyes once more. Then, she took a step forward, raising the silver fork in her hand towards Hugues Artois!

All the emotions suppressed within her heart erupted.

You wretched politician, the bringer of disaster and darkness to the market district!

You heretic, your conscience devoured by a dog!

You are the bastard responsible for my mother's death and my brother's descent into madness!

Perish now!

Without your demise, the suffering in the market district shall never cease. Darkness shall engulf this place, preventing the dawn from breaking.

Indeed, with heretics surrounding you and the protection of official Beyonders, anyone attempting to confront you would meet their demise here, dissuaded by the risk.

But what if an assassin has no intention of leaving alive?

Jenna channeled all her hatred, outrage, and pain into the long-handled silver fork in her grasp. She unleashed an Assassin's Mighty Blow, aiming for Hugues Artois's exposed right eye as he turned his body.

In that moment, she glimpsed the surprise, confusion, and fear etched upon his face. She witnessed Hugues Artois frantically glancing towards Cassandra, pleading for assistance.

Cassandra's line of sight was obstructed by Purifier Imre, who had subtly stepped diagonally, leaving her unaware of the imminent danger.

With a squelching sound, the long-handled silver fork in Jenna's right hand plunged deep into Hugues Artois's eye socket, piercing into his brain.

Hugues Artois's expression froze. The fear, confusion, and terror remained etched on his visage. Time did not permit much change, only revealing a profound sense of despair.

Jenna watched as crimson blood gushed forth, and Hugues Artois's countenance gradually crumbled under the lights. Surrounding her, red sparks erupted, whether from firearms or supernatural abilities. She closed her eyes with a serene smile, surrendering to her fate.

Mother, I see the light.

Chapter 259 Awe

Hugues Artois's initial reaction was one of surprise and confusion as he beheld the glimmering silver light emanating from the long-handled fork, thrusting menacingly towards him.

He found it hard to fathom that someone would attempt to assassinate him, a well-protected member of parliament, under these circumstances.

The assassin didn't appear particularly formidable.

Despite being a retired veteran, he had left military service five years ago to pursue a career in politics. His combat skills were no longer honed. With the adversary a mere step apart, evading the attack effectively seemed impossible.

Disregarding him, even a Sequence 9 or even a Sequence 8 Beyonder would likely struggle to dodge a Mighty Blow from an Assassin, especially one who had stealthily approached them. It all depended on whether their abilities could help them avoid vital areas or reduce the damage, thus preventing instant death.

Naturally, some Sequence 8 or 9 Beyonders possessed the ability to sense danger or hostility ahead of time, thwarting the approach and attack of Assassins.

In an instant, Hugues Artois cast his gaze upon the red-haired Cassandra, the three official Beyonders, and his subordinates Rhône, Margaret, and Boduva, feeling intense fear grip him.

However, what met his eyes was Cassandra's red hair—her body and line of sight obscured by the mixed-blood Imre—as well as the calm and indifferent gazes of the official Beyonders, Imre and Antoine. Valentine had reacted immediately but restrained himself, and Rhône, Margaret, and Boduva, though eager to use their Beyonder powers to save him, dared not expose their boons obtained from the evil gods.

At that moment, Hugues Artois was overwhelmed by a profound sense of despair.

You all, save me!

Save me!

With a squelching sound, the long-handled silver fork plunged mercilessly into Hugues Artois's right eye, propelled with all the force Jenna could muster. It pierced through the eye socket, penetrating the brain, with only a small portion of the handle protruding outside.

Hugues Artois's thoughts became hazy.

He yearned to reach out and grasp something, but his arm wouldn't even rise.

I haven't become president... I haven't witnessed the arrival of great existences... I haven't received the boon of godhood... I cannot die like this... Slain by a feeble Assassin... I-I don't wish to perish... A barrage of thoughts flashed through Hugues Artois's mind as gunshots resounded in his ears.

His body slumped to the ground, and darkness enveloped his vision once more.

Thud. Hugues Artois, member of parliament for Le Marché du Quartier du Gentleman, collapsed onto the ground, his heart ceasing to beat.

Jenna, her eyes shut and a smile adorning her face, was struck by bullets fired by nearby Bureau 7 agents.

One bullet struck her shoulder, and another pierced her ribs from the opposite side.

The pain contorted her expression instinctively. Her body involuntarily recoiled, as if she wished to curl up into a protective ball.

She opened her eyes and beheld Rhône and the other devotees of the evil gods glaring at her with hatred and an unnatural panic, yet refraining from attacking.

In the next instant, a golden revolver, its chamber loaded, pressed against Jenna's head. Imre surveyed the room and declared, "I have already subdued the assassin. Verify if Monsieur Member of Parliament can be saved and maintain order. No one should leave for the time being."

He made it clear that he intended to escort Jenna back to Église Saint-Robert or inquire on the spot about the motive behind the assassination and the mastermind, preventing Cassandra and the others from venting their rage.

As the Tree of Shadow descended, the various streets reverted to their original state, yet they remained engulfed in wilderness.

Lumian perceived that Susanna Mattise could no longer stir his desires from a distance as she did before. So, he turned around, intending to confront Charlotte first.

The crimson flames enveloping his body burned with intensity, scorching his garments and searing his skin and flesh to varying degrees, inflicting constant pain.

This torment stimulated his mind, allowing him to maintain a certain level of clarity. He could also rely on the endurance bestowed by the Alms Monk boon to sustain his thoughts and actions, instead of merely focusing on enduring the agony.

Even for Pyromaniacs, such incineration posed a threat. Moreover, as time passed, the damage would worsen, eventually endangering their lives.

Of course, long before that point, Lumian's spirituality would likely crumble. He could only allow the flames to extinguish on their own.

Were it not for the Alms Monk boon and the internal struggle within the Tree of Shadow, his spirituality would have been strained by the self-immolation.

Upon seeing Lumian turn and observe "Red Boots" Franca dashing toward her with a brass classic revolver, sliding across a layer of frost formed beneath her feet, Charlotte abandoned her plans for a surprise attack. Instead, she readied herself to return to the Tree of Shadow, where she could exploit the environment and enhance her abilities to confront the enemy.

Her body instantaneously grew pliable, as though secreting a slimy substance.

She "acted" as a serpent-like creature, utilizing the intertwining vines and branches to swiftly retreat toward the brownish-green tree.

At that moment, Charlotte's body froze.

It was akin to facing a dragon head-on, confronting a predator at the apex of the biological hierarchy. She couldn't help but tremble with fear and overwhelming panic.

She circled her immediate vicinity and ran haphazardly, as if fleeing from an unseen adversary.

Not far from her, Anthony Reid, the information broker, emerged from behind an iron-black gas street lamp post, suspended by the vines and branches of the Auberge du Coq Doré.

At some point, his dark brown eyes had transformed into a pale golden hue, adopting a vertical orientation.

He was a Psychiatrist, a Sequence 7 Psychiatrist of the Spectator pathway.

He had just employed Awe!

In ancient times, it was referred to as Dragon Might!

The brownish-green vines and branches surrounding Anthony Reid, manipulated by Susanna rather than the Tree of Shadow, cowered and retreated from him.

Observing Charlotte's descent into madness and confusion, rendering her unable to evade Lumian's attacks, Susanna, who desperately absorbed vitality, narrowed her eyes and cursed, unable to conceal her deep-seated hatred.

“You shall all perish. Today, you shall all meet your demise!”

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! On the Tree of Shadow, new tree trunks distinct from the main body shot forth like javelins, aimed at impaling Lumian in the midst of the wilderness.

Apart from utilizing the abilities of the Fallen Tree Spirit, Susanna Mattise had not yet regained sufficient strength to affect targets dozens or even nearly a hundred meters away.

Lumian had foreseen this. With a roll, he positioned himself within the area where Charlotte aimlessly fled.

Thud! Thud! Thud! The tree trunk javelins impaled the ground nearby, pounding the wilderness like hammers.

Lumian rose to his feet, engulfed in crimson flames. He extended his arms slightly and let out a boisterous laugh.

“Bring it on, kill me!”

If Susanna were to blanket the area with relentless assaults once again, he could still find a way to evade them. However, Charlotte, lost in her state of confusion, would undoubtedly meet her demise!

As he bellowed, half-illusory crimson Fire Ravens materialized behind Lumian. They circled and traced multiple trajectories, fixating their sights on Charlotte Calvino.

The branches and vines on the ground surged wildly, swiftly ensnaring Charlotte, shielding her from harm.

A series of thunderous sounds resounded as the crimson Fire Ravens descended upon Charlotte, shattering tree branches and igniting vines, systematically stripping away layer after layer of the Actor's outer shell.

Bang!

Franca, who had closed the distance, stepped in and extended her right hand, firmly squeezing the trigger.

An iron-black bullet flew from the classic brass revolver and struck Charlotte's head with precision, piercing through the gap created by the Fire Ravens.

The enchanting, pure, and delicate visage instantly shattered, with red and white fluids splattering forth from her eyes, nose, and mouth.

With only its severed head remaining, the lifeless body stumbled a few steps in confusion before finally collapsing to the ground.

“Go to hell!” Susanna roared.

With that cry, brown branches, green vines, thick limbs, and pale-colored blossoms surged forth in a multitude of forms, converging upon Lumian, Franca, and Anthony.

Despite the nightmarish scene unfolding before them, Lumian sensed no immediate peril.

Until Susanna Mattise regained a certain level of strength, an attack that consumed a significant amount of spirituality posed no true threat.

Lumian charged forward once more, carrying the crimson flames that devoured his flesh, venturing deeper into the primordial forest-like setting.

Vines ignited, flowers turned to ash, branches charred, yet none impeded the enemy's advance toward the Tree of Shadow.

Suddenly, the objects recoiled, drawing the suspended human captives back into the embrace of the Tree of Shadow.

Susanna had thought it through. There was no need to squander energy merely to vent her rage. It was wiser to await the approach of the three prey, luring them into the range where desire could take hold, before employing her most formidable abilities to deal with them.

She could not accept her current weakness. That was one of the reasons why she refrained from invoking the incantation to seek assistance initially.

Before dragging the offering into the Tree of Shadow, the Son of God dared not reveal Himself in Trier. In the future, Susanna possessed a measure of confidence and needed to push the offering to a certain extent, securing the protection of the ritual. Only then could she utilize her fusion with the Tree of Shadow to confront the Son of God.

The Son of God was astonishingly deranged. He would never restrain the corruption He might inflict upon His subordinates.

As for Lady Moon, she had merely pledged to intercept potential saboteurs temporarily. Susanna dared not permit devotees of other deities to enter the Tree of Shadow.

Thud, thud, thud. Lumian raced through the abruptly vacated wilderness and dilapidated streets, sprinting toward the brownish-green tree. Franca and Anthony each selected their respective angles of attack and followed suit from different directions.

The fortunate vendors, pedestrians, and tenants who had yet to be ensnared by the branches and vines seized the opportunity to flee the wilderness, making their way towards the outskirts.

Chapter 260 Cracking

It didn't take long for Lumian, Franca, and Anthony to approach the Tree of Shadow, stepping within the effective range of Susanna's powers.

One of them had run out of Mysticism Smelling Salts and was consumed by crimson flames. His skin grew numb, but his flesh still burned with pain. Another moved gracefully, constantly shifting positions. Every now and then, she would inhale the scent of the metal canister in her hand and let out a sneeze. The third employed the Psychiatrist's Placate ability to pacify his emotions and desires.

In the ethereal crown of the tree, Susanna Mattise, positioned only four to five meters above the ground, grunted. Franca, dressed in a blouse and light-colored trousers, saw her reflection in Susanna's eyes.

Suddenly, intense fear gripped Franca.

Yet, this fear didn't arise from the outside world or grow abnormally intense. Rather, it originated from her understanding of the current situation and her desire to survive.

Susanna Mattise, fused with the peculiar tree, couldn't be treated as a mere Sequence 5. She ought to be regarded as a weakened Sequence 4, one lacking an incomplete Mythical Creature form!

Franca believed that Susanna Mattise would swiftly dispatch her, Lumian, and the information broker.

Before saving anyone, she had to save herself!

Franca halted, her yearning for life impossible to suppress.

She struggled, torn between the urge to flee and the nagging feeling that she shouldn't abandon her teammates.

Susanna Mattise's emerald eyes shifted toward Anthony Reid.

The information broker, his emotions and desires now stabilized, shuddered suddenly, an all-too-familiar fear surging from the depths of his heart.

A Spectator afflicted by severe mental deficiencies is all too easy to deal with... Anthony Reid fully comprehended his predicament, yet he lacked the power to resist.

A helpless sigh escaped his lips. When his Placate failed, he trembled and retreated to a corner, succumbing to overwhelming fear.

Swiftly, Susanna Mattise incapacitated Lumian's two companions, leaving them unable to offer aid for the moment.

Then, she directed her gaze at Lumian, who stood less than ten meters away from the Tree of Shadow.

As an evil spirit, Susanna possessed boundless extremism and persistence. She still sought to capture this sacrifice.

Despite the ritual causing a great uproar, prompting numerous saints and even angels to rush and intervene, making its success unlikely, the Tree of Shadow could not be destroyed. It wouldn't even suffer significant harm. Unless the Eternal Blazing Sun or the God of Steam and Machinery were willing to bury the millions of people residing in Trier and expose even graver underlying problems underground, there would always be another opportunity, even if the present one failed.

As long as Lumian remained within her grasp, the sacrificial offering that perfectly sealed an angel, it wouldn't take long for Susanna to attempt the ritual once more!

Hence, the malevolent spirit, Susanna Mattise, desired to capture Lumian alive.

In an instant, Lumian's pace slowed, his mind consumed by the same thoughts.

I mustn't die. I mustn't die. If I perish, Aurore will have no hope of revival...

I must survive and uncover the truth behind the Cordu disaster. I must understand why Aurore believes in Inevitability...

These people have no connection to me. What does it matter if they die? Don't countless lives perish every day in this world? Can I even prevent that?

“...”

Lumian's pace grew sluggish, his expression contorting in agony.

The fiery crimson flames that engulfed him continued to burn, inflicting pain while also sharpening his senses.

But the more aware he became, the stronger his desire to survive.

This time, Susanna's influence over his desires had not faltered.

The Fallen Tree Spirit summoned an array of vines, branches, and tree trunks from the Tree of Shadow, ensnaring Lumian within a small circular perimeter of less than ten meters. The once open space transformed into a dense, ancient forest teeming with vegetation.

Damp, pale-hued flowers sprouted from the roots, vines, and branches, releasing odorless anesthetic gases that threatened to lull the surroundings into a deep slumber.

In that moment, Lumian's yearning for life aligned with his other thoughts.

To escape this dire predicament and survive, he had to press forward and defeat Susanna Mattise!

Lumian surged forward once more, gathering semi-illusory crimson flames behind him, spiraling them toward Susanna Mattise, who hovered merely four meters above the ground.

He didn't expect this assault to harm the Fallen Tree Spirit. After all, Susanna Mattise had merged with the Tree of Shadow, granting her formidable defenses and vitality. Moreover, she wasn't a mindless foe who couldn't dodge attacks or employ superpowers to safeguard herself.

Lumian's objective was to momentarily disrupt Susanna Mattise's focus and impede her from inciting another desire immediately.

This time, the crimson Fire Ravens managed to breach the ethereal barrier. They passed through the weakened defenses and hurtled toward Susanna Mattise.

Layers of brownish-green vines and branches encased Susanna Mattise, enveloping her in a wooden sphere, her pair of green eyes the only feature visible.

Amidst the rumbling, the plant-like encasement exploded, replaced swiftly by fresh growth.

Meanwhile, less than ten meters slipped away in the blink of an eye for Lumian.

Vast amounts of slumberous gas corroded his body, but they were swiftly consumed and evaporated by the searing crimson flames. The charred scent of his flesh neutralized the remaining fumes, leaving only a small portion to infiltrate Lumian's nostrils.

His thoughts slowed, his head spun, yet his movements remained unaffected for the time being.

Harnessing his momentum, Lumian alternated between his left and right feet, launching a forceful kick against the brownish-green trunk. He propelled himself forward by a couple of meters before leaping high into the air, his gaze fixed upon Susanna Mattise.

Behind him, a colossal fireball gradually took shape. His eyes reflected the wooden sphere and Susanna Mattise's emerald-green gaze.

It seemed as though he intended to hurtle himself at the treetop, obliterating the encasing of plants with the mighty fireball.

This particular stance bore an evident element of showmanship. Lumian's desire to perform had been subtly provoked by Susanna Mattise, even if his ceaseless pain could only be slightly suppressed.

Susanna Mattise grinned, allowing sharp brownish-green tree trunks to emerge from the surface of the encasement like a porcupine baring its spikes, ready to impale any unsuspecting prey.

Once Lumian sustained grave injuries, the vines and branches forming the sphere would unfurl, taking complete control of their captive.

As the massive fireball solidified, Lumian began his descent.

Yet, instead of lunging at Susanna Mattise, he regarded her with an air of superiority, eye to eye.

Still, he refrained from attacking. He continued his descent. Susanna Mattise wore a puzzled expression, perplexed by his failure to walk into her trap.

Only when Lumian touched down below the treetop did he make his next move.

The massive, incomplete fireball detonated, propelling him toward the trunk of the Tree of Shadow like a cannonball.

In his left hand, he wielded Fallen Mercury, now adorned with cracks.

Right from the start, Lumian hadn't set his sights on Susanna Mattise, who possessed freedom of movement and the advantages of being a Sequence 5. It would be highly risky, with little chance of success and much danger involved.

His sole objective was to strike the Tree of Shadow with Fallen Mercury, a single strike!

Without the enhancement of Termiboros, Fallen Mercury alone wouldn't be enough to alter the fate of the brownish-green tree. However, Lumian was confident that Susanna Mattise had fused to some extent with the Tree of Shadow. As the name "Fallen Tree Spirit" implied, a tree was necessary to embody a tree spirit.

This understanding derived not only from Lumian's observations but also from Franca's speculations and Susanna Mattise's own admissions and actions.

In essence, when Fallen Mercury pierced the Tree of Shadow, there was a strong possibility that it would alter the fate of Susanna Mattise, who had merged with it, rather than the fate of the Tree of Shadow itself!

Lumian's actions were intended to deceive Susanna Mattise into overconfidence, ensuring she wouldn't impede his approach to the Tree of Shadow or hinder him from gathering a fireball for propulsion.

And Susanna Mattise's manipulation of his desire to perform only fueled Lumian's confidence further.

Though acting was a waste of time and could potentially lead to missed opportunities, it also served as a cover for one's true intentions!

With a loud crash, Lumian and Fallen Mercury collided with the brownish-green trunk. Ribs cracked, wrist snapped, his entire body battered by the explosion and impact. But he managed to drive the pewter-black dirk through the outer bark and into the second layer.

As expected, Lumian didn't "see" the torrent of historical scenes. Instead, he sensed the illusionary river, shimmering with a mercury hue, that belonged to Susanna Mattise.

In the next instant, his desire was manipulated once again, and a barrage of javelins rained down from the ethereal tree crown.

Releasing his hold on the pewter-black dirk, Lumian entrusted the rest to Fallen Mercury.

He plummeted to the ground, using the pain to reclaim consciousness. With a swift roll, he evaded the tree javelins that impaled the earth.

When Susanna Mattise realized Lumian's true intent, she felt vexed, angry, and somewhat fearful.

The previous use of the pewter-black dirk had left a deep impression on her.

However, she wasn't overly concerned for her safety. With her connection to the Tree of Shadow, it would be arduous for her to be slain, even if she encountered a saint. Her worry lay in the possibility of severe injury, which would thwart her chance of capturing her prey once more.

At that moment, Fallen Mercury shattered into pewter-black fragments, silently descending to the ground.

Long worn and weakened, it could no longer endure.

However, its destruction also brought an end to the fate exchange, which should have taken several minutes to complete. It didn't stir any fate within Susanna Mattise. It merely bestowed upon her the fate stored within the blade.

Normally, this would be impossible as Fallen Mercury had to adhere to corresponding rules. But now, shattered and fragmented, it couldn't care less.

Susanna Mattise froze, purple flames erupting from her body.

Fallen Mercury had bestowed upon her the fate of the Tree of Shadow's root being consumed by an unseen underground fire. As a tree trunk akin to the Tree of Shadow, she couldn't escape this fate!

In a mere second, the purple flames vanished, leaving Susanna Mattise reduced to ashes, her eyes filled with disbelief and astonishment.

A tree trunk erupted in flames, cracking and collapsing.

