

## Inevitability 361

### Chapter 361 Farewell

Recently, those who frequented the basement bar had grown indifferent to Charlie's lectures on respectability and civility. Now, with a chance to tease him, they became exceptionally excited and engaged in a shouting match.

Dressed in a white shirt and an unbuttoned black vest, Charlie hesitated between buying drinks for nearly 30 people or performing a striptease.

Swiftly, he set down his beer and leaped onto a small round table.

...

In the past, when he was drunk here, he had done all sorts of foolish things. Why should he be afraid of a striptease?

Lumian smiled and applauded, taking out a 20 verl d'or banknote and placing it on the bar counter. He said to Boss Pavard Neeson, "A drink for everyone. Let them have whatever they want."

With that, he picked up his glass of Lanti Proof and watched as Charlie clumsily gyrated his hips and carefully unbuttoned his shirt amidst the cheers.

"More passion! More energy!" Lumian shouted, as if he were watching a show.

The other patrons chimed in.

Sweat beaded on Charlie's forehead, fearing that excessive energy from removing his clothes might damage his shirt.

This wasn't a cheap old linen shirt!

After some thought, he decided to take it off as one would a sweater since the top buttons on his shirt were already undone.

Lumian took another sip of the Lanti Proof and leaned back at the bar counter. He glanced at Gabriel, who was wearing black-framed glasses and dark suspenders, and asked with amusement, "You're early today?"

Hadn't this playwright, accustomed to staying up late, only come here for a drink after midnight?

Gabriel held the green absinthe and smiled calmly.

"I'm moving out tomorrow."

"Lightseeker has begun airing?" Lumian immediately had a guess.

Gabriel ruffled his disheveled brown hair and smiled.

"Not yet, but after rehearsing for a while, both Monsieur Lopp and the directors and actors at Théâtre de la Renaissance think highly of me. They're very confident. I won't have to worry about my living expenses even after moving to a more expensive place

and spending the 1,000 verl d'or advance. As you know, I don't write trite stories for tabloids anymore.”

“Where are you planning to move to?” Lumian asked casually.

Gabriel said with a yearning expression, “Rue Saint-Michel in Quartier 2, where many authors and painters find their haven. Not far away is the National Museum, the Trier Art Center, various galleries, and sculptures of various forms.”

Quartier 2, also known as the arts district or financial district, was a blend of ancient charm and modern opulence, housing not only the artistic community but also the financial heart of the city. It was home to major banks like the Intis Central Bank and the Trier Bank, along with financial institutions, the Trier Stock Exchange, and the Intis Futures Market.

Rue Saint-Michel, on the outskirts of this vibrant district, offered affordable rent, making it an attractive choice for artists and writers.

Lumian couldn't resist recalling Aurore's teasing about Rue Saint-Michel, and he playfully paraphrased it, poking fun at the struggling poets. “What a fantastic place! You might toss a brick and hit three authors and two painters, and let's not forget those poets who die without anyone noticing.”

Gabriel, slightly embarrassed, took a sip of his absinthe.

“However, that's indeed the most suitable place for artistic exchange and creativity. It's not like here, where it's relatively quiet only at night, but it's only relative. And the repulsive bedbugs...”

Gabriel suddenly remembered that the violent and elegant mob leader beside him was the current boss of Auberge du Coq Doré. He quickly shut his mouth.

At that moment, Charlie completed his striptease act and donned his shirt once more. He skillfully navigated his way out of the crowd of patrons, who had “maliciously” remarked on his physique, and settled beside Lumian. He casually remarked, “I've been swamped lately. Haven't been around for a few days. As soon as I get home, I feel like collapsing into bed. You see, this is the drawback of being a decent bloke. Sigh, why in the world are they suddenly launching such a massive investigation into those wanted criminals from Cordu?”

Oh, you've become much smarter. Lumian, who was keen on improving his rhetoric, replied with a smile, “What concern is Cordu's business to me, Ciel Dubois?”

Having contracted the Niese Face from the Human-Faced Mantis, he wasn't particularly concerned about being recognized by the authorities.

Seeing Lumian's self-assured demeanor, Charlie dropped the subject. He eagerly mentioned that a colleague had introduced him to a female teacher. Although she wasn't interested in him romantically, it marked another stride towards his quest for true dignity.

They continued to enjoy their drinks until nearly midnight. Lumian and Gabriel, who was set to move the following day, bid Charlie farewell and ascended the stairs to the second floor.

Gabriel's gaze fixated on the corridor wall, illuminated solely by a gas wall lamp and adorned with newspapers and faded pink paper. Suddenly, he let out a heartfelt sigh.

"It's only when I'm on the verge of leaving that I realize there's something worth reminiscing about here.

"When I first moved in, I thought it wouldn't be long before I'd escape this dump—well, this wretched motel—with my talents. Who would've guessed I'd end up staying here for ten whole months? Even if I move to Rue Saint-Michel, I'll often think of that cozy little bar downstairs. I'll reminisce about the absinthe that could both sober me up and make me intoxicated, the pungent smell of sulfur, those pesky bedbugs, and the people who brought light to my darkness. Miss Séraphine, Charlie, and... you."

As Gabriel spoke, he paused, extending his hand to touch the crack in the wall where a fallen newspaper had revealed it.

Lumian couldn't resist a playful jab, "Do you authors enjoy launching into spontaneous soliloquies and lengthy speeches?"

Gabriel chuckled sheepishly and replied, "I don't know about other authors, but I do find myself doing it occasionally.

"I've called this place home for nearly a year, and I've witnessed numerous tenants abruptly vanish, leave in haste, or succumb to the pain of life. Yet, the very next day, or maybe just an hour later, new tenants move into the very rooms left behind by those chasing prosperity and dreams in Trier. Most of them fail and fade away like dust, but waves of people keep coming. Perhaps one or two among them will actually succeed.

"This is the wellspring of inspiration for the 'Lightseeker' script."

"You're the one who succeeded." Lumian couldn't help but recall Madame Michel, who had tragically ended her life while singing "In the Capital of Joy, forever Trier," a memory that left him with no capacity for mocking Gabriel.

"Hope." Gabriel's face lit up with anticipation.

He took another step toward the second floor, as if driven to continue ascending.

"Where are you going?" Lumian could guess the answer, yet he asked politely.

Gabriel motioned upstairs.

"To bid farewell to Miss Séraphine and express my gratitude for her unwavering support."

Lumian couldn't resist a sly smile, pursing his lips and letting out a playful whistle. "Have a romantic night!"

"I am not!" Gabriel instinctively protested.

Lumian turned and headed towards Room 207, waving his hand dismissively.

“Can't a person have a romantic night all to themselves?”

Gabriel was speechless.

After witnessing Ciel's entrance into the room, Gabriel cleared his throat and continued his ascent to the third floor.

As he climbed, memories flooded his mind—the initial encounter with the human model, Séraphine, their first conversation about his creation, and the first words of encouragement...

He understood that human modeling was a meagerly compensated profession. Even the most popular male models barely received 80 to 90 verl d'or a month. Ordinary models scraped by on 60 to 70, equivalent to the earnings of an apprentice motel attendant. Female models fared even worse, with a meager 40 verl d'or, forcing them to take on part-time work. No one chose to expose their bodies as artists' models out of laziness or greed for pleasure.

Séraphine was no exception. She endured the criticism to earn more money and improve her circumstances.

Gabriel halted outside Room 309 and rapped gently on the door.

“Please come in.” Séraphine's somewhat hollow voice responded.

Gabriel pushed the door open and found Séraphine standing by the wooden table near the window. Her lake-blue dress had slipped from her form and lay in a heap on the floor.

In the crimson moonlight, Séraphine's brown eyes flickered, and her brown hair cascaded down her back. Her fair body bore the imprint of human faces.

Some were stunning, some sinister, some handsome, and some wicked. They all fixed their gaze on Gabriel simultaneously.

Gabriel nearly let out a startled cry.

“What's the matter?” Séraphine's voice, tinged with detachment, rang out once more.

Gabriel shook off his stupor and realized that the faces were nothing more than lifelike oil paintings. The canvas was Séraphine's body.

Remembering that she was a human model, Gabriel refrained from probing further. He exhaled and expressed, “I'm moving out tomorrow. Thank you for your encouragement these past few months.”

As soon as he finished speaking, Séraphine extended her right hand, her eyes distant.

Gabriel couldn't resist complying.

Half an hour later, Gabriel lay on the bed, holding Séraphine close, and spoke with sincerity, “Come with me to Rue Saint-Michel.”

Séraphine shook her head resolutely. “I'm moving as well. Somewhere else.”

Gabriel persisted, “Where to?”

“To a place called the Hostel. My friends are there.” Séraphine's voice turned hollow once more.

Gabriel made several attempts to convince her, but the human model remained steadfast.

He had no choice but to leave disheartened. Séraphine rose from the bed, entirely unclothed, and watched him as he walked towards the door.

In that instant, the crimson moon was veiled, plunging the room into an unnatural darkness. The oil-painted faces on Séraphine's body suddenly appeared to come alive, their mouths opening as Gabriel retreated.

Eventually, tranquility returned, and Gabriel respectfully closed the door.

The following morning, Lumian stuck to his routine—going for a run, practicing his boxing, and hunting for breakfast in his customary fashion.

Upon his return to the Auberge du Coq Doré, he noticed that Gabriel's neighboring room was already open. There was no sign of Gabriel, nor any trace of luggage.

Intrigued, Lumian made his way to the third floor and discovered that Room 309 was in the same state.

He clicked his tongue and returned to Room 207 with a wry smile.

Before long, the “doll” messenger made an appearance, tossing a neatly folded letter and a silver mask onto the wooden table.

Madam Justice's reward has arrived? Lumian's delight was palpable.

## Chapter 362 Lie

Lumian hesitated briefly before touching the silver mask. He carefully opened the letter and began to read the elegant handwriting, which was quite different from Madam Magician's.

“This is the promised reward.

“Lie:

...

“It allows you to truly transform your appearance, adjusting your form within a certain range, and altering your height.

“At the same time, it grants you the ability to use Flame Controlling and Damage Transfer like a Magician. You'll also have an enhanced sense of danger, as well as improved balance and agility.

“It can change its appearance at will. It can become anything you desire.

“But, when you wear it, your emotions will be amplified. You must learn to control yourself, or there will be significant problems.

“Also, remember:

“Don't lose yourself in Lie.”

It's actually portable without any negative effects? Lumian's initial reaction after reading the letter wasn't one of delight that Lie's effects suited his needs but rather one of surprise that the mystical item's negative effects were far weaker than he had imagined.

It only amplified one's emotions when worn!

In other words, Lumian could store it in a bag, wallet, or any other container and carry it with him at all times without facing any side effects.

Compared to Lie, Decency had to be ensconced in liquor, making it rather troublesome to retrieve and safeguard. Flog also exerted an influence while being carried.

With a sigh, Lumian couldn't help but make a self-deprecating remark.

Why does it always have to be something that messes with my emotions?

With this combination, even Alms Monk would explode on the spot...

This combination of dark corruption from the contracted creatures, the fluctuations in desire stemming from Flog, and the “gift” bestowed by the Blood Emperor Alista Tudor was sure to wreak havoc on his emotions. When you added Lie to the mix, the equation became something like  $1+1+1+1>4$ .

Having just finished psychiatric treatment for his past wounds and painful memories and returning to his normal state, Lumian realized that if he wanted to avoid descending into madness and losing control, he shouldn't let Flog's boxing gloves and Lie take effect simultaneously.

Lie is meant for the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society gatherings. It's for socializing; I don't need Flog for that. And when I'm not using Lie, I have the Niese Face to replace it, Lumian thought, pondering for a moment before tossing the satchel containing the Flog boxing gloves onto the bed.

After this decision, he reached for the silver Lie mask and covered his face.

The mask began to melt, its silvery substance seeping into Lumian's skin like mercury, completely enveloping his head.

In an instant, everything began to shift and transform. Lumian's contours and facial features swiftly adjusted.

Before long, the silvery liquid seemed to be absorbed or evaporated, and Lumian's skin returned to normal, now even fairer than before.

Then, his body underwent a sudden change, and his white shirt strained against his bulging chest.

Lumian lowered his head and scrutinized his appearance for a few seconds before muttering to himself, There's a limit of 10 centimeters for becoming shorter or taller...

I used to be 1.76 meters tall, just 8 centimeters taller than Aurore, but now I'm 1.81 meters tall. Yes, three centimeters of difference shouldn't be noticeable to ordinary people. Besides, it is quite normal for both men and women to use special shoes to appear taller...

I can even imitate voices. That's all part of the true transformation of one's appearance...

With his loose pants and a snug shirt, Lumian left Room 207 and entered the washroom, casting his gaze at the mirror.

A beautiful woman stared back at him in the mirror. She had long, thick blond hair, light-blue eyes, a tall, delicate nose, and red lips as bright as the morning sun.

The details of her facial features and the contours of her face continued to subtly change for dozens of seconds before settling into their final form.

Lumian gazed at the woman in the mirror, his eyes gradually softening as the corners of his mouth curled up.

After a few seconds, he chuckled and said, “Long time no see, Aurore.”

Franca, returning from Rue des Fontaines, gracefully opened the door to Apartment 601.

What she saw when she entered left her stunned—a face identical to her own.

This person had a flaxen ponytail, bright, smiling lake-colored eyes, brown eyebrows that reached her temples, and thin red lips...

Franca's tension was palpable as she blurted out, “Who are you? Why are you impersonating me?”

The doppelganger also pointed at her and said, “Who are you? Why are you impersonating me?”

In exasperation, Franca laughed and secretly wrapped the spider silk she released around the imposter.

In an instant, crimson flames erupted, igniting the invisible threads around them.

Franca immediately understood the truth. She pointed at the fake Franca and said, “You Six-Eared Macaque, how dare you impersonate me!”

The fake Franca's face squirmed as she transformed back into Lumian.

His body grew taller.

After removing the Lie earring, Lumian asked curiously, “What's a six-eared macaque?”

Franca hesitated for a moment, debating whether to keep it a secret, but then she realized that Lumian already knew everything he needed to know. There was no need to hide such trivial details.

She replied, “Back home, there are many myths and legends for your sister and me. The Six-Eared Macaque is one of them. It can hear all your secrets and become identical to you.”

Without waiting for Lumian's response, Franca asked excitedly, “Did you acquire a mystical item that can alter your appearance and figure?”

Lumian raised his left hand, wrapped in a few white bandages, and replied, “Can't you see I'm injured? I accepted Madam Justice's commission and helped her retrieve an object from the fourth level of the catacombs. This is the reward: Lie.”

As he spoke, Lumian flicked the earring-shaped mystical item with his right hand.

“Is that so?” Franca had suspected that Lumian's visit to the catacombs was likely arranged by the Tarot Club, so she hadn't inquired further in front of Jenna.

Curious, she asked, “What was the object?”

Lumian pondered for a moment and realized that neither Madam Magician, Madam Justice, nor Madame Hela had asked him to keep it a secret. Hence, he replied, "The spring water of the Samaritan Women's Spring."

"Is there really a Samaritan Women's Spring?" Franca was astonished.

She had read Trier's mysticism magazines and heard rumors about the Samaritan Women's Spring. She even went to the catacombs to find the one named by the administrators but found nothing magical.

"Yes," Lumian confirmed after some thought. "It's deep in the catacombs and has something to do with Fourth Epoch Trier."

Franca's eyes sparkled as she inquired, "Is it magical?"

Lumian glanced at her.

"It's magical, but it's only for Beyonders of the Corpse Collector, Warrior, and Sleepless pathways. If you want to give it a try, there's only one outcome. You'll forget who you were and the home you keep talking about. From then on, you'll become a true Trier Demoness."

Franca shuddered and subconsciously shook her head.

"What's the difference between that and being dead?"

She stopped asking about the Samaritan Women's Spring and said excitedly, "Can you transform into Muggle? Let me take a look."

Lumian gazed at Franca for a few seconds before finally donning the silver-white earring again.

Soon, Aurore, clad in a white shirt, black vest, and simple pants, appeared before Franca.

"Wow!" Franca exclaimed. "She's even more beautiful than I imagined!"

"Is that the point?" Lumian asked in Aurore's voice.

Franca smiled sheepishly.

"I'm not sure how close this is to the real Muggle, but we disguise ourselves at gatherings. This is enough."

Lumian reverted to his original form. As he removed the Lie earring, he said,

"I've already written a letter to Madam Hela. She said she'll inform me about the next gathering and bring me there."

Franca averted her gaze in disappointment.

"Then there's no need for me to worry. Yes, let me tell you about the different methods of the gathering and the characteristics of the members of the Research Society..."

Franca's supplementary class continued until noon.



Seeing Lumian preparing to leave, she hesitated for a moment and said, "Um, can you... can you transform into me again?"

Lumian, puzzled but not refusing, frowned.

Before long, with a reference, he accurately transformed into another Franca.

Franca gazed at her face, seemingly intoxicated.

Suddenly, she extended her right hand and touched Lumian's cheek.

"Hey!" Lumian took a step back.

Franca snapped out of her daze and smiled sheepishly.

"The feeling of a real person and a mirror is indeed different. However, I feel that you're still lacking something, but I can't tell what."

Lumian pondered for a moment and asked with a smile, "Lacking a feminine charm?"

"Maybe." Franca exhaled and watched Lumian walk towards the door.

Just as Lumian opened the door, he heard the Demoness of Pleasure shout from behind, "Dammit, were you secretly cursing me? What feminine charm!"

In Salle de Bal Brise, as Lumian sat down, Sarkota approached him with a wanted poster and said, "Those black dogs have been asking around with it for the past two days."

Lumian glanced at it and realized it was his wanted poster.

He smiled nonchalantly. "It's fine. Let them search."

Sarkota didn't say anything else and informed Lumian, "The Boss wants you to make a trip to Rue des Fontaines today."

What's the matter now? Lumian pondered and nodded.

It was almost evening when he arrived at 11 Rue des Fontaines in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

The lawn seemed to have been ravaged, and the hall filled with weapons and armor was severely damaged.

Upon seeing Gardner Martin, Lumian didn't hide his confusion.

"Did something happen?"

Gardner Martin, his face glowing, smiled and said, "After the Werewolf incident, they launched a sneak attack and were forced back. They suffered a loss."

The Rose School of Thought ultimately fell into the Boss's trap? Seeing that Gardner Martin didn't want to elaborate, Lumian asked, "Boss, why did you summon me?"

Gardner Martin produced an exquisite invitation.

"Count Poufer invites you to his Red Swan Castle for a salon this weekend."

Red Swan Castle? Lumian frowned slightly.

## Chapter 363 Studying Leads to Improvement

Lumian still vividly recalled the night he played King's Pie. Nightmares haunted him repeatedly, and every time, he found himself in an ancient beige castle, its surface tainted with the marks of ages-old blood, its interior a horrifying canvas of madness.

Seeing his silence, Gardner Martin flashed a reassuring smile.

“Just remember to let Poufer choose first in situations like the King's Pie game, and you'll be fine.”

...

But I'm no longer the same person I used to be. Can I really depend on being the last to choose to avoid the problem when there's the Blood Emperor's aura corrupting my right hand? Lumian silently pondered for a moment before responding, “Yes, Commanding Officer.”

He then inquired, “Where is Red Swan Castle?”

He intended to scout the area when the opportunity arose. At the very least, he needed to pinpoint the location of the nearest cathedral.

“Quartier Éraste, near Emperor Roselle's Summer Palace and the West Lognes Forest,” Gardner Martin replied succinctly.

Quartier Éraste was designated as 17. In Roselle's time, it served as a suburban retreat for nobles and royalty, but now it was enclosed within the city walls, becoming one of Trier's largest districts. Known as the barracks district due to its multiple army encampments, it was situated in the northwest, boasting a national park, West Lognes Forest, a conference center, and numerous arsenals. Additionally, it was home to the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun's largest cloister in Trier, the Sacred Heart Cloister.

Lumian recalled a map of Trier he had seen and nodded in acknowledgment.

“It's near the square district.”

Emperor Roselle's summer palace wasn't situated in Quartier Éraste; it resided in the square district, nestled between West and East Lognes Forest.

Gardner Martin cast a glance at Lumian's left hand.

“Why are you injured?”

Lumian smiled candidly and said, “I recently delved into the catacombs with a friend I met at a mysticism gathering and got injured.”

He couldn't shake the feeling that the Iron and Blood Cross Order had an interest in the underground world, possibly with spies lurking around the tombs. It was safer to focus the lie on something else. The Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society also doubled as a mysticism gathering, after all.

Gardner Martin nodded with approval.

“Avoid unnecessary explorations and risks in the future. They won't bring you the mystical knowledge you seek, nor will they yield valuable items. Only danger, danger, and more danger awaits.”

Is that so? Does the Samaritan Women's Spring count as a high-value item? Lumian inwardly criticized. Nevertheless, he earnestly agreed, “Yes, Commanding Officer.”

Had it not been for Madam Justice's request, he would have had no inclination to venture into the catacombs' fourth level.

Now, the odds drew closer to zero. He couldn't help but wonder if he might stumble upon another of Amon's tombs!

After bidding farewell to Gardner Martin, Lumian hopped onto a public carriage headed back to Avenue du Marché.

As the carriage rumbled along, he leaned against the wall, letting various thoughts swirl through his mind. He used this time to relax and ponder any potential issues he might have overlooked.

Amidst the rhythmic sounds of horses' hooves and the carriage's wheels, a sudden thought struck Lumian.

Could the Rose School of Thought, after suffering another setback at the hands of Gardner Martin, decide to seek out others who were involved in the Tree of Shadow incident?

The Bliss Society only lost Charlotte Calvino and Susanna Mattise, the high priestess. There are still other members to contend with, such as Maipú Meyer, the former manager of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, or the actresses who had once played lead roles there before departing.

I wonder if Susanna Mattise had divulged the details of the Tree of Shadow to these members. If she had, they would likely know that the high priestess's true target was either me, Ciel Dubois, or rather, Lumian Lee...

If that were the case, the Rose School of Thought and the Bliss Society might redirect their focus towards me. That could spell trouble...

How annoying. I really wish I could eliminate every member of the Rose School of Thought and the Bliss Society...

Towards the end, upon realizing the various negative effects on him, Lumian cursed inwardly before controlling himself.

If it weren't for the Actors' remarkable skill in disguise and concealing themselves, he might have seriously contemplated eliminating all members of the Bliss Society to eliminate any hidden threats.

He suspected that the Flog boxing gloves might have a miraculous effect on individuals with twisted desires, like those in the Bliss Society.

How should I find them? Lumian fell into deep thought.

Just then, as the public carriage pulled into a halfway stop, a passenger boarded.

It was a boy, around seven or eight years old, dressed in a white shirt and a miniature black formal suit with matching shorts. He wore white socks and black shoes, had short blond hair, and his brown eyes held determination. His chubby cheeks suggested he still had traces of baby fat.

Oh, isn't this Baron Brignais's godson, Ludwig? Lumian's mood brightened as he smiled.

Almost simultaneously, Ludwig noticed him

and his expression turned to panic. He swiftly attempted to disembark from the carriage.

He was still carrying the heavy dark-red hard school bag.

Running away from home again? Lumian thought as he stood up, alighting from the carriage ahead of schedule.

The boy had already disappeared from the vicinity of the stop sign.

He's quite fast... Lumian identified the nearby footprints and calmly chose a direction.

Escaping a Hunter's pursuit without addressing tracks promptly was nearly impossible.

After trailing the footprints for a couple of streets, Lumian turned into a secluded alley and approached a half-broken barricade that barely reached waist height. He couldn't help but chuckle as he said, "Come out."

Ludwig cautiously peeked his young face out from behind the barricade, a mixture of nervousness and resentment evident in his voice as he said, "You swindler, stay away! If you come any closer, I'll devour you!"

Lumian raised his right hand and stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Why did you run away from home again?"

Ludwig responded angrily, "It's all because of all that damn homework!"

Lumian couldn't help but tease, "Yo, you've learned to curse. You've improved since last time."

He noted that Ludwig, even if his unusual appetite and eating habits were disregarded, seemed more like a real child now compared to their previous encounter.

With this in mind, Lumian concluded, "This proves that studying is still useful."

Ludwig was momentarily taken aback and seemed to forget to retort.

Lumian sized him up and said sincerely, "You weren't born with a high IQ; in a way, you're relatively less intelligent. But if you don't study, do your homework regularly, and occasionally take exams to gradually improve your thinking abilities, I can guarantee that someone like me could easily deceive you the moment you step outside, and you wouldn't even realize how you fell for it."

Ludwig muttered to himself in a daze, "Did I really improve? Is studying, doing homework, and taking exams really useful..."

You're not born stupid, are you? Is your brain damaged? You believed me just like that? I can't even imagine what would happen to you if you were thrown at the Salle de Bal Unique's entrance... As Lumian muttered inwardly, his smile remained unwavering.

"That's right. If you find it too burdensome, talk to Brignais about reducing the amount of homework. There's no need to run away from home. Giving up on studying will only make you more foolish."

At that moment, Lumian had a single prevailing thought:

It is better to keep such abnormal and brainless humans or humanoid creatures under the supervision of the orthodox Church.

However, wouldn't the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom be too arrogant to think that Baron Brignais could control a fellow who ate everything he saw?

He has already escaped twice!

If he hadn't encountered me every time, he would have caused trouble long ago!

Ludwig fell silent for a few seconds before he spoke up, "Will you negotiate for me?"

Lumian didn't hesitate in his response, "No problem."

Negotiating was something he was quite experienced in, especially when dealing with his sister.

"Then I'll trust you again." Ludwig hesitated for a moment before making up his mind.

He then flipped over the dilapidated barricade.

Don't say that. It'll only make me feel like scamming you again... Lumian muttered and led Ludwig to the nearest public carriage stop.

On the way, he glanced at the boy's filthy clothes and said, "Did you bring a change of clothes?"

"No." Ludwig shook his head.

Running away from home without any spare clothes? Lumian asked in amusement, "So, what's in your bag? Food?"

Again, Ludwig shook his head, displaying a rather obedient attitude.

It's not food or clothes... Lumian cast a puzzled glance at the dark-red hard school bag.

"It can't be filled with books and papers, can it?"

"No either..." Ludwig suddenly shut his mouth.

What could it be? Lumian narrowed his eyes.

At that moment, Ludwig asked innocently, "Is there anything to eat?"

"No, we'll eat when we return to Avenue du Marché," Lumian replied mercilessly.

What a joke. With your appetite, why would I use my own money to treat you?

Disappointed, Ludwig let out a sigh and began sucking his finger, as if he wanted to take a bite out of it.

Fortunately, their destination, Avenue du Marché, wasn't too far away. After another stop, they arrived, and Lumian spotted Baron Brignais waiting at the entrance of the usury company. The gentleman visibly relaxed upon seeing Ludwig.

"This can't go on," Lumian interjected before the other party could speak. "Do you think I'll keep running into him every time? Reduce his homework by half."

Baron Brignais weighed the options for a moment. "Okay."

Ludwig interjected in a hushed tone, “And add another dessert meal.”

With the godfather and godchild relationship seemingly back to normal, Lumian bid them farewell and couldn't help but wonder, Why did the Church of the God of Knowledge and Wisdom send such an abnormal child to Trier?

In the hill district, in Deep Valley Town, in front of an old grayish-white house with only two floors, Valentine and Imre, now in possession of the brass key obtained from Celia Bello, stood behind the Deacon Angoulême with serious expressions.

According to the feedback from a Sealed Artifact, the brass key left behind by the mysterious entrustee of the gatekeeper's disappearance pointed to this very building.

### Chapter 364 Red House

The door to the grayish-white old house creaked open, needing no key to grant access.

Inside, chaos reigned, with assorted items strewn about, as if someone had burglarized the place.

Valentine surveyed the disarray and remarked, “Someone's made off with valuable items from here.”

...

His gaze fell upon the open and empty doors to the first-floor rooms, evidence of heavy boxes that once occupied the space.

“We're too late. The entrustee's companion must have sensed trouble and moved out,” Imre lamented.

The Purifiers fanned out, scouring the cramped area for clues.

Before long, Angoulême discovered a handful of white papers scattered near the stairwell's edge. He carefully examined them in the sunlight.

Taking a pencil from his pocket, he began to gently shade one of the papers.

Gradually, faint marks emerged, forming a few legible words: “Albert Goncourt... Underground... Riot... Time...”

“Albert Goncourt...” Imre glanced at the paper in the deacon's hand and couldn't help but frown.

Albert Goncourt had been the mastermind behind the Trier uprising six years ago, a leader of the Carbonari—a prominent anti-government militant faction.

Angoulême remained silent, urging his team to press on with their investigation.

After thoroughly searching both the first and second floors, they descended into the cellar.

At the far end stood a black iron door, its brass lock gleaming in the dim light.

Angoulême patted the grayish-white humanoid machine by his side and inserted the brass key he had obtained from Celia Bello into its palm.

Immediately after, Angoulême adjusted a few knobs on the mechanical contraption.

From the high-energy pyrokinetic backpack on the robot's back, a billowing white mist erupted. Steadily, it pushed the rigid machine forward, guiding the brass key into the lock at the correct height.

Watching this spectacle, Imre couldn't help but sigh, “Deacon, among the Inquisition—no, the entire Church—you're truly the most fond of mechanical creations.”

Angoulême glanced at his usually laid-back subordinate and replied, “I don't discriminate, whether it's a product of the Church of the God of Steam and Machinery or not. I only care about its utility.

“When a robot malfunctions, we can fix or replace it. If a person breaks down, I'll be dealing with compensation claims and grieving friends and families.”

The Purifiers recognized the deacon's protective tone and turned their attention to the grayish-white humanoid machine with a smile.

Currently, it could only be used to move things and hammer nails. It could barely walk and run. It couldn't do any intricate or brain-intensive operations, and it didn't last long enough. Otherwise, it would have saved them a lot of trouble.

With a mechanical click, the robot turned the brass key, and the heavy iron door swung open.

A thin fog billowed from within, distorting the door and revealing ethereal faces, etched in the mist, contorted with hatred and pain.

The faces were formed by white fog, filled with hatred and pain.

They clawed and cursed at the mechanical creation opening the door, but it remained impassive.

Rays of brilliant sunlight descended one after another, swiftly clearing the fog behind the black iron door.

As the fog dissipated, Valentine and the others saw what was there.

It was a small altar, made of grayish-black stones, rising only halfway up.

Angoulême, after repeated confirmations that the area was safe, guided the robot inside.

He observed a shallow, narrow groove on top of the grayish-black altar, suggesting that something had once been embedded there but was now gone.

“A ring?” Angoulême mused in a hushed tone.

In the market district, at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, at the entrance of Apartment 601.

Franca sported an exquisite shirt adorned with lace flowers at the collar and cuffs, paired with her beloved beige breeches under the sunlight. Her slippers completed the ensemble as she gazed at Lumian. Franca questioned, “Why are you here again?”

Not wasting any time for his response, she raised her hand and quipped, “If you transform into Muggle, you're more than welcome!”

Lumian pushed his way into the room and scanned his surroundings.

“I need to discuss something with you.”

“What's the matter now?” Franca, visibly apprehensive, inquired, “Can't you wait patiently for the gathering next week?”

Lumian chuckled.

“How about a trip to Trocadéro, specifically the Red House Café?”

“The Red House Café known for hosting women's orgies?” Franca asked in surprise.

Oh, you remembered it immediately. You must have been thinking about it a lot, right? Lumian replied with a smile, “Yes.”

Franca shook her head.

“Forget it, forget it. Fantasizing about it is enough. No need to actually go. It would be too indulgent. I must maintain control, resist desires, and avoid complete indulgence.”

Then, she scrutinized Lumian and remarked critically, “Don't tell me you intend to use Lie and Transfiguration to disguise yourself as a woman and infiltrate the orgy for firsthand experience?”

Lumian mocked, “Did you truly think that through, leading you to believe I'd consider such a plan? This is a serious matter!”

He recounted the Rose School of Thought's failure and his concerns.

“Someone from the Bliss Society mentioned that they're in contact with members of the Moment Society and the Narcissus Society, who also participate in the Red House female orgies. They want to convert them into believers of the Mother Tree of Desire.

“If we follow this trail, we might uncover the core members of the Bliss Society, or at least eliminate Maipú Meyer and those who were aware of Susanna Mattise's rough plan.”

Franca nodded slightly and said, “Moreover, we can't entrust this to official Beyonders. If they extract any information, your cover could be blown.”

With a resolute expression, she declared, “Since it's a serious matter, we have to be there.”

Then, with enthusiasm, she asked, “When are you planning to go? Do you know the party's time and the conditions for an invitation?”

“That's today's objective. Visit the Red House Café, enjoy coffee for an hour or two while subtly displaying your feminine charm. See if you attract the attention of potential contacts among the homosexuals or identify any women who might be orgy participants. Initiate conversations and establish connections to gather further intelligence.” Lumian understood the importance of a methodical approach, especially in delicate situations like this one.

Franca nodded heavily.



“No problem.”

Lumian produced Lie, in the shape of a silver necklace, and handed it to Franca.

“Use this to alter your hair, eyes, and facial features. You can't appear in your true form. What if Maipú Meyer is lurking? He'd recognize you as the current boss of Théâtre de l'Ancienne Cage à Pigeons in an instant!”

As soon as Franca finished donning Lie, she said eagerly, “Let's go now!”

Lumian's lips curled up.

“I forgot to mention that this mystical item amplifies the wearer's emotions.”

“Uh...” Franca was taken aback. “No wonder I've been feeling so anxious!”

Lumian added with a smile, “Emotions that weren't there before won't be amplified.”

“...”Franca, clenching her teeth, retorted, “Well, my desire to punch you has definitely been amplified.”

Lumian ceased his mockery and began to earnestly explain the functions and precautions of Lie.

Franca walked to the full-body mirror and observed her hair rapidly turning black, her pupils turning dark brown, her skin becoming more delicate, and her lines softer.

Compared to her flamboyant beauty, she now appeared more composed and mature. Her facial features leaned towards elegance, giving her an indescribable charm.

Gazing at her altered reflection in the mirror, Franca remained silent for a prolonged moment.

“It doesn't resemble your true appearance, but it's still beautiful and charming,” Lumian complimented objectively.

He wanted to say that she had the charm of a Demoness, but he chose not to agitate Franca.

Franca snapped out of her daze and silently changed into non-red boots before walking towards the door.

Upon entering the corridor, she snapped out of her daze and glanced at Lumian beside her.

“If you're giving me Lie, how do you plan to disguise yourself as a woman? Are you relying on the transformation illusion?”

Lumian replied with a hint of amusement, “Who says I'm masquerading as a woman?”

He led Franca to a new safe house on Rue du Rossignol, retrieved a brownish-yellow ritualistic dog skin, and wrapped it around himself.

Then, he recited an incantation in Hermes.

“Dog!”

A dark light suddenly surged from the ritualistic dog skin, enveloping Lumian completely.

In an instant, a large dog with brownish-yellow fur appeared in the room.

Franca, with her black hair and brown eyes, was taken aback.

She finally understood Lumian's plan for monitoring the situation at the Red House Café.

After a moment of curiosity, Franca asked, "What does it feel like to become a big dog? Are you sure you don't feel burdened?"

The brownish-yellow-furred dog rolled its eyes at Franca and opened its mouth. "Woof!"

Are you stupid? Do you think dogs can speak and answer your questions?

Franca clicked her tongue and, with Lumian in brownish-yellow dog form, hired a rental carriage to head to Trocadéro Town, west of Lavigny Docks.

Along the way, Lumian had the urge to bite her several times. From time to time, she would curiously stroked his dog fur, stomach, and head, hoping to find something distinct from a real dog.

After more than an hour, the carriage arrived outside Trocadéro.

Franca paid the fare of 2 verl d'or, and Lumian, in his dog guise, hopped out, behaving as if he had no connection to her. He began to scout the streets for the Red House Café, which emitted a distinctive aroma of fermented grapes.

Soon, he located the establishment near East Lognes Forest.

While the entire building wasn't red, it sported a magnificent mushroom-shaped red roof. The main structure was beige, adorned with bold graffiti on the walls.

Lumian settled near the café's entrance, lying down quietly, and watched as Franca, transformed into a black-haired beauty, entered the establishment.

## Chapter 365 Observation

The ambiance at the Red House Café radiated a small-town charm. Enamelware utensils, wooden-framed decorative paintings, checkered tablecloths, and exposed ceiling beams gave it a simple yet elegant vibe, a striking contrast to its vibrant and trendy exterior.

Franca, seated by the window, ordered a cup of fragrant Intis coffee and basked in the sunlight.

With a casual glance around, she observed the clientele and waitstaff.

...

Most of them were women, particularly the waitresses, and their attire and graceful movements indicated specialized training.

Only two men, seemingly foreign wine merchants, sat across from each other, discussing the impact of this year's abundant rain and sunlight on grape quality. Among the three female patrons, one was a local elderly woman with gray hair, dressed modestly, occasionally greeting passersby. Another was in her thirties, wearing a veiled black hat and a blue corset dress, her features fairly ordinary. The third, a striking beauty with delicate eyebrows, had naturally cascading brown hair in wavy curls, dressed simply, and exuded a calm demeanor.

Apart from the local elderly lady, the other two might be participants in the orgies. Franca turned her attention away, thinking that the first floor, with a dozen or so tables, didn't seem like the place for such private affairs.

Her guess was that it might be happening in the basement or on an upper floor closer to the distinctive red mushroom roof.

From Franca's vantage point, she had a clear view of the café's entrance. Lumian, in his brownish-yellow dog form, lay there quietly, soaking up the sun and keeping a close eye on everyone entering and exiting the Red House Café, as well as the patrons and waitresses inside.

No one paid much attention to the wild dog by the roadside, except for a few stray dogs that passed by.

One of them bared its teeth at Lumian, who occupied his usual spot, and growled menacingly.

Lumian felt somewhat helpless. Could he really engage in a dogfight in his current form?

This wasn't a significant concern for him, but what mattered was that the Animal Creation Spell had sealed most of his Beyonder powers, reducing his strength to that of a dog.

Of course, given his size as a large dog, intimidating smaller canines was a breeze. However, the dog growling at him was also quite substantial, albeit on the thin side.

Fight! Fight! Franca couldn't contain her excitement as she watched the scene unfold through the window.

She had no intention of intervening; it was a rare opportunity to witness Lumian in such an awkward situation. How could she resist the spectacle?

Lumian, sprawled by the door, raised his right palm—no, his right foreleg. Drawing from past experiences, he focused a portion of his consciousness on his paw.

A faint sense of madness and a scent of blood, perceptible only to Lumian, hung in the air.

The brown-furred dog, its skeletal frame visible, was taken aback and hastily retreated with its tail between its legs.

Oh... Come on! Be more daring! Why run away? Franca, inside the Red House Café, was left disappointed.

She couldn't fathom why the dog had suddenly become afraid of Lumian.

The Hunter couldn't unleash his full powers—he could exude an aura of provocation at best!

Simultaneously, Lumian chuckled self-deprecatingly.

If The Blood Emperor ever found out that I used His aura to scare off dogs, He might just skin me alive, wouldn't He?

After the brief interlude, Franca refocused her attention on the café.

Drawing from her experience and observations in fashion magazines, she gracefully sipped her coffee and occasionally performed everyday actions that highlighted her feminine charm, all learned over the past year.

It didn't escape her notice that nearly everyone in the café had their eyes on her. Some glanced discreetly, while others openly admired her, some even offering warm smiles.

The elderly local lady, who had been seated nearby, smiled at Franca, picked up honey-roasted chicken wings from her plate, and made her way out of the Red House Café.

Stopping in front of Lumian, she mumbled to herself in amazement, "It's another one..."

Lumian had an uneasy feeling as he watched the old lady squat down and offer the brownish-yellow roasted chicken wing to him.

After a moment's hesitation, he bit into the chicken wing like a real dog, allowing the old lady to stroke his furry head.

Truth be told, he wasn't accustomed to eating like a dog, but fortunately, the old lady stood up and departed after a couple of affectionate strokes.

Inside the Red House Café, Franca couldn't help but burst into laughter as she watched Lumian awkwardly nibble at the chicken wings. Unable to resist her amplified emotions, her body trembled with laughter.

If she didn't need to maintain her image, she might have doubled over in laughter.

She also wanted to take something to feed Lumian!

In her natural state, Franca's true charisma shone through. Her black hair, brown eyes, and effortless elegance captivated those around her, giving her a unique and magnetic presence in the café.

The mysterious charm of her black hair and brown eyes, along with her elegant and casual demeanor, made her uniquely attractive.

At that moment, a woman wearing a light-colored hunting suit rode up on a brown horse from the nearby racetrack near East Lognes Forest.

She skillfully dismounted and removed her hat.

Her long, orange-red hair flowed like a waterfall, adding a touch of wildness to her otherwise clean, pure, and exquisite face.

Carrying a whip, the woman in the hunting attire secured her horse and made her way into the Red House Café. She approached the quiet and beautiful young woman.

Franca had ceased her laughter at Lumian's antics and couldn't help but feel that this new arrival seemed more like a participant in the orgies than anyone else present.

Despite being the most beautiful with exquisitely delicate features that gave her an innocent appearance, there was an aura about her that could easily pass for that of a man.

There was likely to be someone like her at a female orgy.

Franca elegantly raised her right hand and brushed back the black hair that had fallen across her lips, subtly displaying her own feminine charm.

The woman with long orange-red hair, who had been unconsciously surveying the café's occupants, appeared visibly taken aback, as if she had been momentarily stunned.

However, Lumian, who had been lying quietly by the entrance, noticed a slight furrow in the woman's brow after her initial surprise.

She averted her gaze and continued her approach toward the quietly elegant woman with wavy hair. They engaged in light banter before they ascended the wooden stairs to the second floor amidst some chatter.

Franca observed them from the corner of her eye and began to form a rough idea.

There is a strong likelihood that these two are indeed participants in the female orgies, though whether they belonged to the Moment Society or the Narcissus Society remains uncertain.

Franca continued to sip her coffee leisurely, deliberately making no move.

After more than half an hour had passed, and with no sign of the women descending, she decided to leave her seat and walked out of Red House Café.

She planned to call it a day, so as to not risk arousing suspicion by approaching them too hastily.

Her plan was to maintain her cover as a resident of the nearby Lavigny Docks and return to Trocadéro every two or three days, or even more frequently. After all, this area was renowned for its wine production and scenic beauty, attracting numerous tourists daily. It would be entirely plausible for a lady who had recently moved nearby to explore the area.

Lumian, stationed at the entrance of the Red House Café, appeared disinterested, as though he had no connection to Franca's actions.

Almost simultaneously, his sharp senses detected the beautiful woman with long orange-red hair standing behind a glass window on the second floor.

The woman observed Franca's departing figure with a solemn, vigilant, and contemplative expression, devoid of any apparent homosexual romantic interest.

Why is there such a reaction? Did she discover something amiss with Franca? How did she discover it? Lumian felt puzzled as he stood up, as if he had soaked up enough sun, and moved to the alley between the Red House Café and the neighboring building, which was closer to Franca's departure direction.

Before long, the woman with long orange-red hair reappeared behind the second-floor window.

She carefully scanned her surroundings, confirming that no one was paying attention. There was only a brownish-yellow dog dozing off in a corner. Gently, she pushed open the window and gracefully descended to the alley below, as light as a feather.

Immediately after her descent, the woman with the clean and pure appearance blended into the shadows.

Lumian, pretending to be in a state of drowsiness, silently observed this unfolding scene, his mind racing.

Featherfall... Shadow Concealment... Beauty... Remarkable charisma... Could she be a Demoness?

Was it precisely because she is also a Demoness that she sensed something unusual about Franca's appearance and demeanor, prompting her to follow and observe?

Lumian discreetly stood up and began to follow Franca from a distance, giving the appearance of a leisurely stroll.

The orange-red-haired woman remained hidden in the shadows, elusive and difficult to pinpoint. Lumian couldn't ascertain her exact location, but he was certain that she was not far from Franca.

Franca, playing her part convincingly, didn't seem in a hurry to leave Trocadéro. She embraced the role of a tourist, visiting the nearest vineyard, sampling the free red wine at a shop, and purchasing some regional specialties.

Just before noon, Franca entered the town's upscale department store and began trying on various styles of women's clothing.

As Lumian watched, nearly fifteen minutes later, he lost sight of Franca. It was then that he observed the clean-looking woman in hunting attire emerging from the shadows in a corner of the department store, her eyes scanning the surroundings.

Franca had successfully shaken her pursuer.

Lumian's guileless dog face lit up with a gratified smile.

The final stage of today's operation, getting rid of the would-be stalker, had been executed flawlessly. Franca, with Lie's assistance and her ability to counter divination, had done a commendable job!

She must have utilized the shoppers in the department store, changing into a different set of clothing as a ruse, transformed herself, and exited openly to evade detection.

After the woman in the hunting attire returned to the Red House Café, Lumian left Trocadéro and made his way toward Quartier Éraste.

While still in his canine form, he intended to explore the vicinity of Red Swan Castle.

Guillaume Bénet's Animal Creation Spell had a duration of seven days, after which it would naturally dissipate, requiring a new ritual.

As Lumian had anticipated, Red Swan Castle stood atop the hill, its beige exterior tainted with the marks of age-old blood. It stood in eerie silence, surrounded by a small river.

Lumian conducted a few circles around the area before arriving at the closest church building—the Sacred Heart Cloister of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church.

Beneath the shade of the green trees, he squatted quietly and gazed at the magnificent golden building adorned with steeples.

During his observation, Lumian couldn't help but notice a golden retriever squatting more than ten meters away, its attention also fixed on the Sacred Heart Cloister.

Chapter 366 Demoness Sect

Are all the dogs around the cloister so devout? He retracted his gaze while criticizing.

He quickly left the forest behind.

His primary concern was to chart a route from Red Swan Castle to the Sacred Heart Cloister, taking note of any advantageous terrain and hiding spots along the way. What the Sacred Heart Cloister actually looked like or if it held any special significance was of little concern to him.

...

By mid-afternoon, Lumian had thoroughly scouted the area surrounding Red Swan Castle. He discovered several potential escape routes, some following the main road, some along the freight railways, others winding through forests, past lakes, or over hills. Not only were they well-concealed, but they also featured natural traps.

Initially, Lumian had contemplated infiltrating Red Swan Castle in his canine form, but he soon realized that security was exceedingly tight. Stray dogs were not tolerated, and intruders faced certain death.

Unfortunately, the Animal Creation Spell only permits transformation into larger animals. The implicit requirement is that the hide must be able to envelop a curled-up human. Otherwise, I could transform into a rat. I don't believe they could guard against that! He sighed and retreated to a nearby secluded spot.

With his spirituality, Lumian manipulated the air within the dog hide and murmured two words of Hermes.

“His Grace!”

Creating a sound in this manner was not challenging for Lumian. What proved difficult was that his spirituality was constrained by the Animal Creation Spell. It could not extend beyond his body or the dog hide, and it was in limited supply. Thus, any sound produced remained confined to the dog hide, hidden from others' ears. Furthermore, he could dispel the incantation after uttering a few words.

In a swift, shadowy motion, the brownish-yellow dog skin split open, revealing Lumian's human form.

He crawled out, carefully folded the hide, and cradled it against his chest.

Though it had lost its mystical properties, Lumian had no intention of discarding it. Finding such a complete and large dog hide was a rarity.

I only have one ritualistic dog hide left. I must conserve it. Lumian muttered these thoughts as he resumed his journey along the familiar road toward the nearest town.

In a bustling metropolis like Trier, ritualistic dog hides proved more practical than ritual sheepskin or cowhide. Donning the latter two and transforming into the corresponding animals would undoubtedly draw attention. After all, who wouldn't be tempted to guide a lone sheep wandering the streets home to prepare it into various delicacies? Moreover, in Trier, there were those with perverted inclinations, ones who fancied sheep buttocks.

As Lumian returned to Apartment 601 at 3 Rue des Blouses Blanches, the night had already fallen, casting a dark veil over the city.

Franca swiftly changed back into her usual attire and settled into the recliner, her gaze fixed warily on the Lie necklace resting in a corner of the coffee table, as though it might spring to life and ensnare her at any moment.

“What's wrong?” Lumian closed the ajar door behind him and casually stowed away the Lie necklace.

Franca's expression shifted, and she sighed, confessing, “After I returned, I found myself with idle time, so I attempted to adjust my appearance, but...”

At this point, she let out another sigh, her emotions a mixture of fear and nostalgia.

“I became entranced by my own reflection in the mirror!

“I've never seen such a flawless woman. Just by gazing at her face, I could do so for an entire day—no, for eternity!”

Lumian contemplated her words for a moment before responding, “You can use Lie to deceive others, but never deceive yourself.”

“I understand, but the allure of the Demoness of Pleasure and the effects of Lie are genuinely potent,” Franca admitted earnestly. “It wasn't easy for me to regain control. I forcibly removed the necklace and tossed it onto the coffee table. While my fixation may be partially due to its amplification properties, I can't help but reminisce. I can't help but yearn to give it a try. Heh heh, my mind has passed the test.”

With the Lie necklace out of her sight, Franca visibly relaxed. She chuckled and remarked, “Were you meme—uh, using your sister's way of speaking to caution me?”

“Yes, in preparation for your upcoming gathering,” Lumian confirmed, making no effort to conceal the fact that he had been practicing Aurore's manner of speech recently.

Franca nodded thoughtfully and commented, “It felt quite natural. If it remains at this level, deceiving them shouldn't pose a problem.”

Without awaiting Lumian's response, the Demoness of Pleasure playfully inquired, “So, how did the honey-roasted chicken wings taste?”

Lumian provided an objective assessment, “They were decent.”

Franca's curiosity and teasing spirit persisted as she asked, “Could it be that your taste buds were improved due to your canine senses? Had your sense of smell become more acute?”

Lumian replied with an experimental tone, “It does have some influence on me, but I haven't transformed entirely into a dog. I still retain a significant portion of my human senses.”

Franca continued, “And what about other aspects?”

After a moment of contemplation, Lumian explained, “Other aspects? It's more like my soul is confined within a real dog's body. Everything I do is restricted and influenced by my physical form, including...”



Seated on the divan, he raised his leg, mimicking the posture of a canine taking a leak.

Franca exclaimed, "You really don't care about your image at all, do you? It doesn't bother you?"

Lumian shrugged, responding, "What's there to be concerned about?"

Franca thought for a moment before posing her final question, "One last thing, will you be affected by dog hormones and react strangely to other dogs?"

"The body is mine, and the dog is just a disguise. It's merely an external constraint."

Lumian's expression suggested he wasn't a fool.

He then adopted a mimicry of Madam Magician and asked, "Are there any more questions?"

"I'm done." Franca was satisfied.

Lumian chuckled.

"Then it's my turn to ask. What are your thoughts on the ladies you observed today?"

Franca absently twirled a few flaxen-colored strands of hair that had come loose from her ponytail as she replied, "There are two potential suspects..."

She proceeded to recount her speculation and added, "That woman with the orange-red hair still gives me an odd sensation, as if she's drawing me in."

Lumian smiled approvingly. "You're onto something. She's at least a Demoness of Pleasure or a Beyonder with a corresponding mystical item."

After identifying that the Beyonder belonged to the Demoness pathway, Lumian sensed a magnetic allure in every gesture she made, similar to Franca's. It was a bit challenging for him, with most of his abilities sealed, to resist such temptation. Fortunately, Alms Monk's endurance held firm.

"Demoness?" Franca pondered the possibility and mused to herself, "That makes sense. How could a gathering of females dedicated to pleasure not attract one or two Demonesses..."

Lumian had a moment of realization and posed a question, "Is it to bring pleasure to others and oneself?"

He sensed that this might be a fundamental requirement for their acting.

"That's one aspect of it. Even if it weren't for the potion, I'd still want to attend. However, I can control myself, but the same can't be said for other Demonesses," Franca said with disdain and a sigh.

Lumian, not fully grasping the implication behind her words, remarked, "She followed you but you managed to shake her off."

"Ah..." Franca was momentarily surprised. "She should be from the Demoness family."

"The Demoness family you mentioned?" Lumian had previously heard Franca briefly mention this secret organization.

He had always been curious about how Demonesses could form families.

Matriarchal society?

Franca sighed and said, "Yes, it's also known as the Demoness Sect. Its origins trace back to the descendants of the Primordial Demoness during the Fourth Epoch. The Primordial Demoness is a Sequence 0 of the Assassin pathway, essentially a true deity. She's widely regarded as an evil god, also known as the Chaos Demoness."

Primordial Demoness... Lumian committed the name to memory.

Franca continued, "The core of the Demoness family always includes a descendant of the Primordial Demoness, but they also recruit or cultivate Assassins with different surnames. It's essentially a sect that controls all the potion formulas and most of the resources related to this pathway.

"Only a Demoness from the Demoness Sect would tail a wild Demoness upon their first encounter."

"To retrieve the Beyonder characteristic?" Lumian inquired.

Be it recruitment or elimination, it was a way of reclaiming Beyonder characteristics.

Franca pursed her lips and responded, "Exactly. They don't want the Beyonder characteristics of the Demoness pathway to be lost outside their sect. Moreover, they hold a deep disdain for female Assassins and eliminate any they come across."

"Why?" Lumian couldn't comprehend.

Franca shot him a resentful glance, as if blaming him for asking such a question.

She sighed and said, "It's because the Primordial Demoness was originally male. During the process of attaining godhood through the Assassin pathway, She transformed entirely into a woman. This transformation left Her mind twisted and filled with agony. The Demoness Sect claims they want to emulate the Primordial's experience.

"So, every Demoness in the sect was once male. After enduring immense pain and suffering, they became profoundly distorted. They yearn to see other men undergo similar ordeals. Perhaps you don't know, but these Demonesses seek out men to father their children. Baby girls are sent away, while baby boys are kept behind to relive their mothers' lives."

As Cordu's Prankster King, Lumian couldn't help but shake his head in disbelief.

"Isn't this incredibly twisted?"

"What's even more twisted is that these children's fathers eventually become Demonesses themselves." Franca recounted the information she had obtained from Madam Judgment and exhaled in fear. "I've been avoiding them, not wanting them to discover me."

“But you're originally a man. Why should you be afraid?” Lumian asked, puzzled. “Are you worried that being around them might corrupt you and warp your senses after joining the Demoness Sect?”

Franca nodded solemnly.

“Yes.

Besides, I'm already a Minor Arcana card holder of the Tarot Club. How could I possibly join the Demoness Sect?”

Lumian fell silent for a few moments before speaking again.

“Didn't you want to join the Iron and Blood Cross Order too?”

“That's different. It's a mission for the Tarot Club,” Franca defended reflexively.

Lumian didn't press the issue and instead nodded thoughtfully.

“No wonder you mentioned that female orgies easily attract Demonesses.”

Franca scoffed.

“It's just that most Demonesses are members of the Demoness Sect and have connections either vertically or horizontally. Otherwise, half of the female orgies might consist of Demonesses.

“What's even more extreme is that when you receive an invitation to a strip ball and attend with enthusiasm, it's always packed with men.”

After muttering a few words, Franca looked at Lumian and asked awkwardly, “So, what should we do next?”

Chapter 367 Salon

Lumian understood Franca's concerns and smiled.

“Two directions:

“First, consult with your Major Arcana card holder about the possibility of establishing contact with the Demoness Sect. Remember, you originally were a man, so there's no need to fret about being eliminated. As long as you can pass their background checks, you can tap into their resources to enhance yourself. And when pretending isn't an option anymore, have your Major Arcana card holder assign you a mission to steer clear of Trier and make a swift getaway.

...

“Think about it. You're already at Sequence 6. Most of the top-tier resources are within the Demoness Sect's grasp. Infiltrating their ranks and acquiring these resources from within is a much simpler and safer route compared to making

enemies and taking risks to hunt them. Of course, this hinges on your Major Arcana card holder providing a way to elude the watchful eye of the Primordial Demoness.”

Franca was taken aback and mumbled, “How do you sound so experienced...”

Lumian scoffed. “Are you amnesiac? I'm doing something similar right now. I'm infiltrating the Iron and Blood Cross Order on behalf of the Tarot Club.

“What's the major perk? Once I complete the Iron and Blood Cross Order's mission, I can claim rewards from Gardner Martin and report back to my Major Arcana card holder. I can use the pretext of my spying progress to secure rewards from her—two rewards with one mission. Otherwise, why do you think the number of mystical items on me have increased so rapidly?”

Of course, he didn't need to mention Mr. K's contributions to Franca.

“Two rewards with one mission...” Franca repeated it a few times before a realization dawned on her. “I've been cooperating with you on missions related to the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Will this clash with contact with the Demoness Sect?”

Lumian's expression said: “As expected, you're still inexperienced.”

“There's no clash; why would there be? Simply convey to the Demoness Sect your desire to transition to the Hunter pathway at Sequence 4 and revert to your original gender. That's your motivation for pursuing leads on the Iron and Blood Cross Order. You've already left enough clues and made substantial progress.

“From what you've described, those Demonesses went from being men to women. I refuse to believe they haven't considered leveraging the pathway switch to regain what they've lost. That reason should be enough to convince them.

“Moreover, Demonesses and Hunters belong to neighboring pathways. They surely have ulterior motives concerning the Iron and Blood Cross Order. Given your opportunity to infiltrate them, they're more likely to embrace you than hinder you. In fact, they might even value your presence.

“Most importantly, if things go as planned, you could become the Demoness Sect's liaison responsible for matters related to the market district and the Iron and Blood Cross Order. If you want the higher-ups among the Demonesses to be aware of what's transpiring here, they'll be informed. If you prefer keeping it under wraps, they'll remain oblivious. For instance, Jenna being a female Assassin.”

At this point, Lumian smiled.

“You can also exploit the Demoness Sect to nurture Jenna. When the high-ranking Demonesses discover that a powerful pure female Demoness is paid for by their own sect, won't they lose control on the spot?”

It was an intriguing thought. It could be described as extreme provocation and mockery.

Franca nodded indiscernibly.

“Kid, if you had taken the Instigator potion, you might have fully digested it within a week.”

“I'm just kindling a specific fire within you.” Lumian leaned back on the sofa.

Franca couldn't help but scoff in a half-mocking, half-teasing tone.

“If I were to genuinely join the Demoness Sect, and you reach the Sequence 5 qualitative transformation without obtaining a Sequence 4 potion formula and the corresponding main ingredient from the Iron and Blood Cross Order, would you consider becoming a Demoness?”

Lumian considered the question seriously before answering, “It depends. If I urgently require the strength and capabilities of a Sequence 4 to complete specific tasks, it's not out of the question. I'll choose the path that's simpler and more attainable.”

“...” Franca was taken aback. “Are you sure you won't find it mentally burdensome?”

He made it sound as if he was drinking absinthe or Lanti Proof tonight.

Lumian borrowed a phrase from his sister's vocabulary.

“I'll do whatever it takes.” He then added, “I'll stop at nothing to achieve my goal.

“Besides, can't we just switch back when we reach Sequence 3?”

“You can't just switch at will. Most Beyonders never advance beyond Sequence 4 in their lifetime, let alone Sequence 3. As they ascend, it becomes increasingly difficult. Whether it's the risk of losing control or obtaining the necessary resources, the challenges remain the same,” she cautioned.

Lumian let out a chuckle.

“Anyway, it's all just a fantasy at this point, isn't it? To confirm if it's feasible at all.”

Franca was left momentarily speechless and then inquired, “You mentioned two directions. What's the other one?”

“The other option is to track down the Demoness of the Demoness Sect and extract detailed information about the female orgies from her. Subsequently, focus on identifying potential members of the Bliss Society among the participants. As soon as you can, pinpoint the core members with close ties to Susanna Mattise and eliminate any hidden threats,” Lumian explained the alternative plan concisely.

“While it's a viable plan, if the Bliss Society members aren't directly involved in the female orgies and are merely associating with certain individuals, targeting the Demoness alone might not provide the information we need. Additionally, it's bound

to draw the attention of high-ranking members of the Demoness Sect, leaving little room for further investigation. I'll start by reaching out to my Major Arcana card holder and inquire if she has any reservations about my contact with the Demoness Sect." Franca analyzed after some thought.

She was clearly tempted by Lumian's suggestion.

Lumian acknowledged her analysis without rushing her. After all, she wouldn't return to Trocadéro's Red House café for another two or three days, with an invitation to Count Poufer's salon preceding that event.

Three days after scouting the surroundings of Red Swan Castle and informing Madam Magician and Mr. K of the invitation, Lumian arrived at the beige castle in a four-wheeled four-seater provided by Gardner Martin.

He chose not to dress too formally for the occasion. No tailcoat, top hat, or cane that stereotypically marked a gentleman.

Instead, he wore a light-brown hunting suit, off-white breeches, and brown boots. In his hand, he held a Loen-style deerstalker hat, allowing his golden-black hair to catch the wind.

Lumian was aware, through Aurore's gossip, that appearing overly grandiose in a literary and artistic salon like this would make him appear out of place among the other participants, possibly even a laughingstock.

Of course, this outfit had been funded by Gardner Martin's recent contribution of 10,000 verl d'or, costing Lumian a total of 1,000 verl d'or.

Holding the invitation letter, Lumian underwent the guard's scrutiny and passed through the imposing several-meter-tall door.

In this area, there was a hall, but it was relatively modest. It served as a waiting area for the butlers, valets, maids, and guards accompanying the guests during a grand banquet.

Lumian scanned his surroundings and confirmed that this wasn't the hall from his unsettling nightmare.

Beyond the hall was the atrium, and on the opposite side stood Red Swan Castle's main edifice.

It rose six to seven stories high and was encircled by a ring of towers.

Lumian couldn't help but glance up at a narrow window on the third floor.

In his nightmare, a man with dark-red hair had gouged out his own brownish-red eyes from behind that very window.

Now, however, there was nothing behind the clear glass window but a slightly mottled light-colored wall.

Mottled... Shouldn't the rooms' walls have been repainted? Aurore had mentioned that the annual maintenance cost for such an ancient castle is astronomical... Lumian shifted his gaze away and proceeded to enter the main building.

The moment he crossed the threshold, his eyes narrowed, and his heart sank.

This hall was an exact replica of the one in his nightmare!

From the crystal chandelier hanging high above to the spiral golden staircase leading to the second floor, everything mirrored his dream with eerie precision.

Though Lumian had expected this, encountering it in reality stirred up complex emotions within him.

The male servants in the hall, adorned in their vibrant red uniforms with golden trimmings, stood in two neat rows to welcome Lumian's arrival.

Lumian's eyelids twitched, finding the vividness of the red to resemble flowing blood.

The salon was situated in a spacious living room on the first floor, elegantly decorated with a thick, dark red carpet adorned with intricate patterns. A set of plush sofas graced one side of the room, and bar stools and armchairs were scattered around them.

On the opposite end of the living room, a tall young woman sat at a brown piano. She wore a simple yet pristine sky-blue-patterned white corset dress, and her auburn hair cascaded gracefully down her back.

As Lumian entered the living room, the girl's fingers danced gracefully across the piano keys, conjuring a sprightly melody.

Count Poufer occupied an armchair, engaged in conversation with an elegant lady with black hair, blue eyes, and an air of refinement as she leaned against the armrest in a crouched position, chuckling merrily.

Novelist Anori, Painter Mullen, critic Ernst Young, and Poet Iraeta, each accompanied by their female companions, were either gathered on the sofa, engaged in conversation, or lingering near the table adorned with desserts and roasted meats.

In addition to these well-known figures, other guests filled the room. Lumian scanned the crowd and spotted a familiar face.

It was Laurent, the inhabitant of Auberge du Coq Doré, rumored to have used Madame Lakazan's hard-earned money to frequent upscale cafés and mingle with high society.

Laurent still donned the same pristine black tailcoat, and his neatly combed brownish-yellow hair followed a precise 30-70 cut. He stood out amidst the casually attired authors, painters, poets, and critics surrounding him.

He displayed no restraint in his interactions, his dark-brown eyes sparkling as he exchanged pleasantries with the gathered guests.

Within moments, Laurent locked eyes with Lumian, and his pupils dilated, as if he had encountered an evil spirit.

I-Is this not Ciel Dubois, the current owner of Auberge du Coq Doré and the infamous mob leader?

In an instant, fear coursed through Laurent's veins.

He worried that Lumian might expose his true identity, jeopardizing the connections he had painstakingly cultivated.

He was on the verge of success!

Oh, you're doing quite well. You've even received an invitation to such a salon... Lumian remarked with a smile, pointing to himself as if to suggest that they both belonged to a certain type and could feign ignorance of each other.

A sigh of relief escaped Laurent as Lumian approached Count Poufer.

With a hint of annoyance, he grumbled, "You didn't inform me about bringing a female companion. You're making me look like a fool!"

"Haha." Count Poufer and the others chuckled, delighted that their prank had succeeded.

After the laughter subsided, Count Poufer gestured toward the girl at the piano.

"If you don't mind, you can invite my cousin, Miss Elros."

### Chapter 368 Speculator

Lumian settled into an armchair with a polite smile aimed at Count Poufer. He responded, "That would be my honor."

With a graceful gesture, he extended an invitation to Miss Elros.

Count Poufer, dressed in a crimson shirt, waved his hand.

...

"After she finishes playing this piece."

Lumian shifted his gaze towards the piano, finally getting a clear view of Miss Elros.

Her chestnut eyebrows framed her expressive brown eyes, which sparkled with a youthful vibrance. The delicate curve of her cheeks and gentle facial contours suggested her age to be under 20, and there was no apparent trace of Sauron lineage.

Lumian surmised that Elros likely inherited her Sauron lineage from her maternal side.

He turned away briefly, his fingers wrapping around a glass of red, white, and blue liqueur resting on the coffee table. Engaging in lively conversation with Count Poufer, Novelist Anori, and others, Lumian discussed the latest trends and scandals circulating in their circle.

He had been diligently reading newspapers like *Novel Weekly*, *Journal des débats*, *Youth of Trier*, and *Ghost Face* to keep himself well-informed for occasions like these.

The black-haired lady who had been kneeling beside Count Poufer had already moved away to observe the newspaper editors engaged in a game of billiards.

Lumian was aware that she couldn't be Count Poufer's wife. Aurore had once enlightened him about the peculiar customs of Trier: in intimate gatherings and small-scale balls, the male and female hosts refrained from appearing together. It was considered improper and might invite unnecessary gossip. Therefore, when one of them hosted a salon, their spouse would attend someone else's event.



Back when Lumian first learned of this, he was barely fifteen, and it struck him as a bizarre set of rules. Now, reflecting upon it, he couldn't help but think:

You Trieriens have devised such absurd and comical unwritten rules to facilitate discreet affairs, and everyone willingly adheres to them!

As the musical piece concluded, Elros gracefully left the piano and made her way to the sofas. Her cousin introduced her to Lumian, pulling over a barstool for her. She sat with her legs neatly together, a silent observer of the ongoing conversation.

As time flowed by, others gradually converged in their direction. Laurent followed a casually-dressed, middle-aged man who sported an impressive beard.

Count Poufer took it upon himself to make introductions, saying, "This is Cornell, the editor-in-chief of Le Petit Trierien."

Lumian had perused the newspaper before, and he vividly recalled the advertisement for the "interstellar bridge to the crimson moon" featured in its pages.

Now, with that memory in mind, he couldn't help but suspect that it might be a cleverly disguised scam or perhaps a piece of Trierien performance art. He also harbored suspicions that it might be connected to devotees of some evil god.

"This is Ciel Dubois, the general manager of Coastal Import and Export Corporation," Poufer introduced the identity Gardner Martin had fabricated to Cornell.

Cornell extended his right hand with a look of surprise as he greeted Lumian. "You're quite the young lad."

Lumian accepted the handshake, offering a charming smile.

"This is the result of my unwavering diligence and hard work."

Just as Poet Iraeta was on the verge of commenting on the diligence of most individuals present without becoming the general manager of a large company at such a young age, Lumian added a touch of self-deprecation to his tone.

"It's precisely because I excelled in both areas that my father appointed me as the general manager of the import and export company."

The room erupted in laughter as everyone grasped Lumian's meaning.

Their perception of Ciel Dubois underwent a positive transformation.

In their social circle, there was no shortage of individuals who had landed important positions at a tender age due to familial connections. These people typically either avoided mentioning their parents and elders, striving to demonstrate their self-proclaimed abilities, or they struggled with confidence and maturity, endlessly fixating on their fathers or uncles. There were very few who exuded the kind of openness, honesty, and humor that Lumian effortlessly radiated. Back then, Count Poufer could scarcely be counted among them.

Lumian, with a touch of mischievous humor borrowed from his sister, turned his gaze toward Laurent and inquired, "Who might this be?"

Thud! Thud! Laurent's heart raced in response.

While they had an unspoken agreement not to reveal each other's true identities, Laurent lacked a thorough understanding of Ciel Dubois, the mob leader, and worried that Lumian might suddenly change his mind.

Cornell, the editor-in-chief of *Le Petit Trierien*, gestured to the young man by his side.

“This is Laurent. He's remarkably talented, well-informed, and unfailingly polite. I've been observing him for nearly three months, and I'm considering offering him a position as my assistant and deputy editor-in-chief. Laurent, how do you feel about this unexpected proposition?”

Laurent initially found himself taken aback, but soon, he was overwhelmed by joy and felt a slight sense of vertigo.

All the pains and anxieties he had endured, from his mother's tears to his neighbors' disdain, had led to this moment.

He had always believed that with his talents, he shouldn't be stuck at the bottom, and he had been actively seeking an opportunity, even if it meant squeezing his mother dry to maintain a facade of dignity.

Laurent refrained from displaying excessive excitement and responded to Cornell with a gracious smile, saying, “It would be an honor.”

Not bad at all, Lumian thought as he assessed the situation. Speculation could be a risky endeavor, but the rewards could be substantial. However, there's the importance of changing one's mindset and genuinely starting from their current position. Speculating to improve social status might lead to losing everything in the long run. Lumian recalled his sister's comments after losing in the stock market as he considered Laurent's actions.

He was unlike Charlie and others; Lumian held a disdain for those who exploited their mothers in the speculative process. As long as Laurent's mother could accept it and didn't resort to violence against her son or show strong resistance, Lumian didn't pass harsh judgment.

With Cornell and the others now seated, Lumian's curiosity led him to ask, “Where did you first encounter Laurent?”

Cornell responded with a smile, “At the Vichy Café. He often visits to engage in discussions about various Trier-related matters and to share his opinions.”

Vichy Café—the place where 5 verl d'or could buy half a bottle of mineral water and two boiled eggs? Laurent's mother, Madame Lakazan, doesn't even earn 3 verl d'or after a long day's work. Yet, the investment has clearly paid off. Even a rookie deputy editor-in-chief at a newspaper like *Le Petit Trierien* earns nearly 5,000 verl d'or annually, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. Lumian observed the differences and realized that Laurent's fixation on speculative networking had a certain logic.

Still, success in such endeavors was a rare occurrence—one in a hundred at best.

Lumian cast a glance at Laurent, who eyed him with caution, and smoothly changed the subject with a smile.

“Cornell, I happened to come across an advertisement for the Interstellar Bridge in Le Petit Trierien last month, or perhaps even earlier. It piqued my interest. Any comments about it?”

Cornell indulged in a puff from his pipe before bursting into laughter.

“I believe it's a bunch of delusional folks, but since they paid, there's no reason why I shouldn't run their advertisement. Maybe it can fool some fanatical enthusiasts of mechanics and science.”

“How are they now?” Lumian chuckled. “I'm even thinking of investing in them, just to see if they're swindlers or if they can actually produce something.”

Poet Iraeta picked up his pipe and muttered, “You might as well sponsor me instead of investing in them. At least then, you can berate me for writing like a piece of dogsh\*t, and I won't have any comeback.”

Lumian played along, acting as if money was of no concern to him. “No problem. How about 5,000 verl d'or?”

His intention was to give Iraeta only 3,000 verl d'or later, using the excuse of not having enough cash on hand at the moment.

Iraeta lowered his pipe and spread his arms theatrically.

“Praise the Sun and let Ciel's malice strike harder!”

“Haha, let's head back to the old city together after the salon.” Lumian subtly hinted at his intention to sponsor Iraeta later but refrained from handing over the money directly to avoid the stink of money.

Following this brief diversion, Cornell seemed to warm up to Lumian's presence.

“I'm not sure how those people are faring. They only paid for a one-month ad.”

As the conversation flowed, Count Poufer glanced at the setting sun and proposed a game with a warm smile. “Shall we play King's Pie? Consider it a warm-up before dinner.”

Is this the only game you know? Do you have a childhood... Lumian couldn't help but inwardly critique Count Poufer's choice of games, but he refrained from objecting.

The others readily agreed, and Count Poufer promptly instructed his valet to bring out the sizable King's Pie that had been prepared in the kitchen.

It resembled the lid of a grand saucepan, emitting a tantalizing aroma and color.

“Who shall be in charge of the cutting?” Count Poufer surveyed the participants, his gaze sweeping over each of them.

After a moment's thought, he decided, “Elros, you do the honors. You're the youngest and most beautiful lady here.”

Elros, seated on a barstool beside Lumian, gracefully rose and took up the table knife to start dividing the King's Pie.

Rather obedient of your cousin. Living off the Sauron family, off Count Poufer? Lumian realized that Elros's techniques were deft, perhaps from frequent practice.

In no time, the colossal King's Pie was divided into roughly 29 portions.

As was customary, Count Poufer proposed offering the extra slice to his ancestor, Vermonda Sauron, and no one voiced any objections.

After completing this part of the ritual, the living room seemed to descend into an eerie silence, as if the very atmosphere outside the castle had solidified.

Count Poufer then turned his attention to Lumian and Laurent. "Laurent, this is your first time attending my Saturday salon with Ciel. You'll be the first to choose."

Lumian laughed and said, "Of course, the host should be the first to choose. Don't you all think so?"

Instigated by him, the other participants readily agreed that the male host should have the honor of making the initial selection.

Count Poufer didn't insist and took up a slice of King's Pie, addressing the group, "Whoever bites into the gold coin shall be king."

Seeing that the Sauron family member had made the first choice, Lumian felt more at ease and leaned forward to survey the slices.

This was double insurance. First, he would let Count Poufer make his selection. Then, while there were still plenty of slices left, he would exploit Termiboros's aversion to the matter to choose a slice without the gold coin.

This time, Termiboros remained silent, not offering any warnings. Lumian naturally picked up the King's Pie slice he had personally selected.

But as he settled back into his seat, his mind spun unexpectedly. It was as if he saw the narrow glass window once again, and the image of the dark-red-haired man who had gouged out his own eyes intruded upon his thoughts.

Chapter 369 King? No, Emperor!

Compared to his previous nightmare, Lumian could now "see" him more clearly. The dark-red-haired man behind the narrow glass window bore a striking resemblance to Count Poufer.

As he raised his right hand to dig at his eyes, his facial muscles twitched, and his facial contours transformed, instantly becoming identical to Lumian's.

It was identical to Lumian Lee from Cordu Village, not the current Ciel Dubois!

...

When the dark-red-haired man with Lumian's face gouged out the bloody eyeball, Lumian's eyes ached, and his vision darkened.

Simultaneously, wild laughter echoed in his ears, infecting him to the point where he wanted to release his frustration, unleash violence, and satisfy his bloodlust.

Suddenly, his right palm heated up, and pure madness surged into his mind.

Out of nowhere, frustration, violence, and bloodthirst surged out of him as the maniacal laughter instantly ended.

Lumian's vision returned to normal, and he saw Novelist Anori sitting across from him, with Count Poufer beside him.

They grinned as they observed the other participants selecting slices of King's Pie, completely unaware of the unusual changes happening to Lumian.

Lumian counted the King's Pie slices that had vanished and glanced at Laurent, who was engrossed in his choice. He realized that only a few seconds had elapsed, but it felt like an eternity.

Drawing upon his Alms Monk abilities, he resisted the emotional turmoil stirred by the Blood Emperor's presence. He faintly perceived a peculiar, insane, bloody, and ruthless mental impression lingering in the void above him.

The desire to infiltrate Lumian's body, sending shivers down his spine, remained suppressed by Alista Tudor's hidden aura; it dared not descend. Instead, it circled above the living room, akin to vultures eager to feast on carcasses but cautious of nearby predators.

None of the participants in the King's Pie game detected the existence of such a manic spirit glaring fiercely at them from above. They giggled and selected their slices of King's Pie.

Come, dance with the Blood Emperor! Let's see who's crazier, you or Alista Tudor! Lumian scoffed inwardly, his emotions in turmoil.

Of course, he understood that his Blood Emperor aura was a mere facade. If the spirit were to forcefully enter his body, he wouldn't have the power to resist it. All he could do was hope that Mr. Fool's seal would activate and yield some effect.

However, judging by appearances, the frenzied and cruel spirit lacked any rationality. It operated solely on instinct and harbored an innate fear.

Lumian took a moment to collect himself. While observing Elros and the others choose their King's Pie slices and sensing the frenzied spirit's erratic movements, he contemplated the corresponding dilemma.

This appears to be the core of the Sauron family's King's Pie game...

Poufer employs his bloodline and a simplified ritual to summon the lingering spirit of his ancestor, allowing it to inhabit the person who consumes the symbol and becomes the king...

If a frenzied and bloodthirsty spirit were to truly take control of my body and corrode my mind, I might lose my sanity instantly. It's nearly impossible for ordinary individuals to resist such a force. What does Count Poufer rely on to maintain his composure? At the very least, he seems normal and has become king countless times...

No wonder Termiboros insisted I switch slices last time. If I were to lose control, He wouldn't fare any better...

Son of a sow! Why didn't you warn me today? Did you choose to remain silent because you knew I possessed the Blood Emperor's aura and wouldn't succumb to this insane mental invasion?

Where does this frenzied spirit originate from? It's been two to three hundred years; how can it still exist?

Could it be that the Sauron family has a special method for preserving the spirit of a high-ranking individual across generations? Or could Vermonda Sauron actually still be alive? Or perhaps the Beyond trait he left behind has become too corrupted? Is the Sauron family attempting to gradually eradicate it using this method? But it's been two to three hundred years!

Gardner Martin's objective is to ascertain Vermonda's condition...

Hmm, this crazy spirit continues to hover above my head without descending... Will it eventually retreat, change its target, or trigger other alterations?

Lumian remained on high alert, keeping a constant watch on the frenzied spirit lingering in the air.

If it displayed any signs of forcefully invading through the Blood Emperor's aura or causing other unfavorable developments, Lumian would opt to "teleport" away.

Anori, Mullen, Iraeta, and the others each selected their King's Pie slices, leaving only the one reserved for Vermonda Sauron on the plate.

Count Poufer surveyed the surroundings with a grin and declared, "Everyone, let's dig in. The one who finds that gold coin will be the king for today."

With that, he elegantly sampled a portion of the King's Pie in his hand, then took a few more bites. His countenance gradually shifted from one of confidence to one of blank panic.

There was no gold coin!

Count Poufer stared at the other participants in disbelief, his assurance of control crumbling.

In that moment, a single thought consumed his mind:

No, this can't be! I'm the one who most closely resembles my ancestor!

His eyes fixed on Elros, the sole guest possessing the Sauron family's bloodline.

Though Elros was perplexed by her cousin's frantic and intense gaze, she still took a few bites of her King's Pie slice.

Yet, still, there was no gold coin to be found.

Count Poufer's confusion deepened. His gaze darted around, his mind racing with conjectures.

Could there be an illegitimate son of a family member here?

No, even if there were, I bear the closest resemblance to the ancestor!

Could a high-ranking member of the Hunter pathway be present?

Impossible!

Or perhaps someone here has been tainted in the underground world?

Lumian noticed Count Poufer's distressed head-scratching, and most of the game participants had sampled their King's Pie slices. He gradually lifted his right hand and took a bite.

As anticipated, his teeth encountered a solid metallic object.

He spat out the item onto his left palm. It was, without a doubt, a 10-verl d'or gold coin.

Count Poufer's pupils widened as he fixated on Lumian's visage, a burning desire to dissect every inch of his flesh evident in his gaze.

Novelist Anori let out a chuckle.

“Ah, a new king at last. It being always Poufer tires me out. He was getting rather dull with his pranks.”

Lumian picked up the gold coin and cast a cold glance at Anori.

“Who gave you permission to speak?”

Anori's body quivered, and he instinctively clamped his mouth shut.

Lumian struggled to maintain control over the influence of the Blood Emperor's aura. He sensed the frenzied spirit above him spiraling faster and faster, as if growing more impatient and savage.

He surveyed the surroundings leisurely and offered a smile.

“From this moment forward, I am your King. Or would you prefer to address me as Emperor?”

For some inexplicable reason, all the participants, including Count Poufer and Miss Elros, experienced a stirring in their hearts, as if they were compelled to heed Lumian's commands.

Of course, it was merely a pulsing sensation, induced by the combined impact of his words and aura.

Among them, Poet Iraeta, who had recently entered into a sponsorship agreement with Ciel Dubois, rose nonchalantly, pressed his hand to his chest, and bowed.

“Indeed, Your Majesty!”

The others followed suit, either embracing the spirit of the game or yielding to the pulsing sensations in their hearts. They stood and offered their bows in their own unique ways.

“Indeed, Your Majesty.”

Lumian's lips curled into a satisfied smile as he signaled for everyone to retake their seats.

Then, he turned his gaze towards Count Poufer and raised his chin slightly.

“I command you to present 30,000 verl d'or worth of gold.”

Count Poufer was taken aback, a whirlwind of complex emotions surging within him.

This was the first time he had been subjected to the King's Pie commands.

He had an urge to respond with a jest, but he remembered the gravity of the consequences if he disobeyed the king's orders during this mystical game. He would meet a dreadful fate.

Count Poufer clenched his teeth and rose from his seat.

“Indeed, Your Majesty.”

Exiting the living room, he ascended to a floor of the castle's main building and retrieved five hefty gold bars from a secure vault.

For him, parting with 30,000 verl d'or wasn't a significant loss.

Seeing Count Poufer offering him gold bars totaling 30,000 verl d'or, Lumian couldn't help but feel a pang of regret.

Had he known that his orders would be followed to the letter, he might have demanded even more!

The dilemma now lies in how to discreetly make off with the gold later. In normal circumstances, even if I accepted 30,000 verl d'or in person, I would have to privately return it. Failing to do so could offend Count Poufer... Moreover, I need to figure out how to explain to Gardner Martin that I had become king while remaining unaffected. Lumian pondered as he tucked away the five gold bars.

Then, he turned to Novelist Anori.

“Your mission is to bestow a kiss upon someone here. Your target is...”

As Anori eagerly eyed the beautiful women present, Lumian pointed towards Poet Iraeta, who had just taken a puff from his pipe.

“Our poet.”

A momentary silence hung in the air, followed by a whistle from one of the guests, and then the others joined in.

Reluctantly, Anori stood up and muttered, “I really don't want to kiss that guy with bad breath. I could accept it if it were Mullen...”

Despite his reservations, he complied, giving Iraeta a gentle kiss on the lips.

Iraeta took it in stride, chuckling, and remarked, “I can sense your discomfort, Anori. Pull yourself together. Don't act like a naive country bumpkin.”

Lumian observed with an impassive expression, his attention primarily drawn to the swirling madness.

Though it refrained from attempting to invade anyone's body, the influence of the madness made everyone slightly restless, their emotions displaying signs of instability.

Upon hearing Iraeta's teasing, Anori's countenance turned icy, as if he contemplated picking up a table knife and stabbing him.

However, he ultimately restrained himself.

Lumian suspected that as the game unfolded, the participants would grow increasingly agitated, irritable, and prone to bloodlust while the madness continued to linger.

At that very moment, a piercing, terrified scream echoed from somewhere within the castle.



## Chapter 370 Sending Off

A chilling scream, filled with terror, reverberated through the living room, causing the hearts of every guest to race with fear.

Painter Mullen was very sensitive to this. His pale-white complexion exchanged a concerned look with Count Poufer.

“What happened?”

...

Count Poufer furrowed his brow, puzzled by the sudden disturbance.

Upon hearing Mullen's question, he snapped back to attention and casually reassured everyone,

“It seems there may have been an accident. I'll have a servant find out the details. Don't worry, it won't disrupt our gathering. What could possibly go wrong?”

With that, Count Poufer signaled to his valet, positioned discreetly in a corner of the living room, to investigate the source of the scream.

Then, he addressed the assembled guests, saying, “Please, let's continue.”

As he spoke, the Sauron family member directed his gaze towards Lumian.

Ever since presenting the gold bars, he had been closely watching Emperor Lumian, analyzing every subtle movement and expression. He was determined to unravel the mystery of how Lumian had chosen the King's Pie slice with the gold coin and not him.

Lumian fought to keep his composure in the face of the madness that seemed to consume him and turned his gaze towards Painter Mullen.

“Create a piece of art using your buttocks.”

In his role as Cordu's Prankster King, Lumian had an array of tasks in his arsenal to assign to each participant in the game, ensuring that none of them would forget their missions.

Yet, Lumian's main concern wasn't the playful antics but the malevolent presence that loomed over the sofas.

This sinister entity refused to dissipate, even after failing to infiltrate Lumian. It hovered in the air, exuding an impatient, bloodthirsty, and irritable aura.

Lumian suspected a connection between the earlier scream and this ominous mental vortex.

The handsome yet pallid and weary painter, Mullen, stood in bewildered silence, grappling with this bizarre request. Painting with one's buttocks was entirely uncharted territory.

Novelist Anori and the others, having readily accepted their own missions, not only cheered with enthusiasm but also summoned the servants to bring paint and drawing paper. They even “assisted” Mullen by loosening his belt.

With no escape, Mullen reluctantly covered his posterior with paint and made a few awkward imprints on the drawing paper. The result resembled a child's crude doodle.

Observing this spectacle, Novelist Anori was struck by an idea.

“Why don't we frame it and send it to art critics? Let's see their reaction to such a unique creation.”

“The painting's signature is the word ‘The Emperor.’ For the title... Right, Mullen, any suggestions?”

Mullen, avoiding the crowd, cleaned himself up and contemplated for a moment before responding, “Let's call it ‘Café.’”

Curious, Cornell, the editor-in-chief of Le Petit Trierien, asked, “What does it signify?”

Mullen shook his head as he discarded the paint-stained handkerchief and soft paper, pulling up his pants. “It doesn't signify anything. This painting was meaningless from the start.”

As they discussed, Count Poufer's valet returned to the living room and whispered something into the host's ear.

Influenced by the unsettling aura of the Blood Emperor's madness, Lumian struggled to make out the words despite his best efforts, catching only fragments.

“Lost... harm... danger...”

Count Poufer's expression darkened, a hint of seriousness creeping in.

He nodded subtly, signaling for his valet to return to his previous position, maintaining an air of nonchalance.

Observing Count Poufer's reaction, Lumian racked his brain, searching for a way to dispel the malevolent spirit.

I can't wait for everyone to complete their missions, can I? No, there's one crucial step missing. At the end of the previous King's Pie game, Count Poufer had consumed the King's Pie slice meant for Vermonda Sauron...

With this thought in mind, Lumian fixed his gaze on the untouched offering that remained on the plate. Leaning forward, he extended his right hand and claimed it.

Count Poufer had no doubts about this.

From his perspective, it would be suspicious if Lumian didn't retrieve the offering!

Almost simultaneously, the frenzied entity, radiating negativity, reacted vehemently, positioning itself directly above Lumian's head.

It emitted waves of negative emotions, as though cursing the audacious human who dared to partake in its offering.

Lumian sensed anger, hatred, and an insatiable desire to rend his soul asunder.

Yet, he remained unfazed and even smiled.

This reaction confirmed that he had made the correct choice!

Had the agitated spirit not responded so vehemently to his appropriation of the offering, Lumian would have remained clueless about how to banish it from lingering above everyone's heads.

This wasn't a guarantee of success, and it might entail danger, but it was a preferable alternative to the participants of the King's Pie game growing increasingly agitated and bloodthirsty, ultimately turning on each other.

When the moment was right, Lumian could still “teleport” away. As for the others, barring Count Poufer, their chances of survival were slim.

Naturally, he couldn't predict whether there would be unforeseen changes or new threats after consuming the offering, but in this dire situation, it was better than nothing.

For the participants in the King's Pie game, Lumian's intervention was their only hope. Without his actions, their demise was certain. With them, there was a fighting chance.

Lumian raised the sacrificial King's Pie to his lips and took a substantial bite.

The frenzied spirit grew even angrier and more violent.

It no longer hovered above the others but remained directly above Lumian's head. At times, it seemed poised to descend upon him, while at others, it attempted to tear into its target. However, it was thwarted by Alista Tudor's aura, instinctively holding back from further aggression.

Another scream resounded.

It came from somewhere in Red Swan Castle—originating from a different person than the previous one.

A moment ago, it had been a man, but now, it was a woman.

Count Poufer's eyelids twitched, and he smiled.

“It seems the servant responsible for cleaning up the earlier mishap must have stumbled upon some rather terrifying sights.”

Literary critic Ernst Young and the other guests readily accepted this explanation.

As guests, they lacked the authority to pry into the castle's internal affairs. Moreover, they had gradually become engrossed in the King's Pie game, growing a tad fanatical, impatient, and preoccupied, diverting their focus away from other occurrences within the castle.

Lumian relished the King's Pie offering, savoring the intangible anger and curse like a melodious symphony playing in his ears.

Compared to the horrifying ravings he endured whenever he received a boon, this was akin to the beautiful performance of an orchestra.

Unable to vocalize itself and hesitant to invade his body, the frenzied spirit could only indirectly influence his emotions and mental state.

During this process, Lumian turned his attention to assigning missions to various individuals, noting that the participants were fully immersed in the game, their gazes fixed on it.

Periodically, another scream would punctuate the air, sending shivers down the spine.

Finally, Lumian finished the offering, and the frenzied spirit hovering above him abruptly halted.

In the next instant, it vanished mysteriously, dissipating into thin air.

While the participants of the King's Pie game still appeared fanatical, their irritability and agitation had considerably waned.

Lumian let out a quiet sigh of relief and turned to Elros, seated beside him.

“Let's see you do the Twist. If you're not sure how, ask someone to show you.”

In contrast to the risqué Can-can dance, which was already laden with suggestive undertones, the Twist seemed relatively innocent as long as it wasn't a male-female dance. However, it had a comical appearance.

Elros complied, rising from her seat and attempting the Twist with a hint of awkwardness.

Amidst the laughter of those present, Lumian continued to assign missions to the remaining participants.

After all the participants had completed their assigned missions, Lumian straightened up and assumed an air of superiority as he delivered his final instruction.

“Last mission:

“Keep everything that happened today a secret. You must not divulge anything about today's game to anyone.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!” Elros and Laurent, still caught up in the game's ambiance, responded in unison, their expressions displaying utmost respect.

This compliance was partly due to the lingering presence of the Blood Emperor's aura that still clung to Lumian.

Observing the instinctive obedience of each participant, Lumian let out a contented sigh and offered a warm smile.

“That concludes today's game.”

Count Poufer rose from his seat and gestured with a smile.

“Let's proceed to the dining room.”

As they moved from the living room to the dining room, they had to pass through the castle's main hall. Lumian, who had returned to his usual self, noticed out of the corner of his eye that a few valets and maids were diligently at work near the corridor.

They were using mops to clean up a reddish puddle.

Red... Lumian's eyelids twitched as he swiftly averted his gaze.

Following dinner, the guests bid their farewells one by one. Lumian sought out Count Poufer and retrieved the five heavy gold bars with a smile.

Count Poufer shook his head.

“Since I proposed the game, I must adhere to its rules. Do you think so little of me, believing I can't do without the 30,000 verl d'or?”

“It's simply a gesture of courtesy,” Lumian responded with a smile. He didn't insist and smoothly returned the gold bars to his pocket.

According to their arrangement, Lumian arranged for the poet, Iraeta, to join him in his four-wheeled, four-seater carriage. Using the pretext of having limited funds on hand, he handed Iraeta only 3,000 verl d'or.

Iraeta didn't seem to mind at all. He stashed away the banknotes and engaged in a conversation about his artistic preferences.

As the carriage began its journey, Lumian inquired, “Which district are you heading to?”

“Just take me to the Sacred Heart Cloister,” Iraeta replied with a grin. “I'm meeting a friend there. Sponsored poets always find friends to share a drink with.”

Sacred Heart Cloister... Lumian nodded slightly and instructed the carriage driver accordingly.

Before long, the carriage arrived at the picturesque cloister. Even in the darkness of night, the golden façade of the building reflected the crimson moonlight, creating a surreal and dreamlike atmosphere.

After watching Iraeta enter the cloister, Lumian directed the carriage driver to head back to Rue des Fontaines in Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative.

As the carriage rattled along, leaving behind the woods and fertile fields,

Lumian suddenly heard the resonant voice of Termiboros.

“A dangerous creature is tailing you; it has been since Red Swan Castle. It brims with hostility and is preparing to strike.”

Dangerous creature... Lumian narrowed his eyes, calmly opened the carriage door, and effortlessly leaped out.

Facing the carriage driver, he spoke with the remaining authority of an Emperor, “Wait for me in the nearby town.”

The carriage driver hesitated for a moment before complying with the order.

As Lumian watched the carriage and its driver disappear into the distance, he calmly retrieved the Flog boxing gloves from his briefcase and methodically donned the iron-black gloves.

The nearby forest seemed to darken, and the river that flowed through it took on an eerie blood-red hue.