

Inevitability 411

Chapter 411 Review Committee

The notice had already made it clear that this was no ordinary gathering. Most members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society didn't split into groups to chat. Instead, they took their customary positions and fixed their eyes on the massive mottled stone chair.

Ten minutes past the agreed time, Gandalf, the president in his linen robe, looked around and spoke in a booming voice, "Everyone, I've brought you here for something crucial.

"We've got a bunch of traitors among us!"

A bunch of traitors... Even though Professor and the others from the Academy had received Lumian's hint, they hadn't expected the issue to be this severe.

It wasn't just one traitor; it was a whole bunch!

The ancient palace, though dilapidated, exploded with commotion. Some members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society were skeptical, while others became instantly wary, suspicious of everyone around. Some thought there might be a problem, but they didn't think it was as bad as Gandalf made it out to be.

As they whispered amongst themselves, Hela, her face shrouded in black, spoke with an icy tone, "First, let's have one of the victims share her experience."

Her voice wasn't loud, but it cut through the silence of the night, reaching every member of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

She then turned her gaze toward the area where the Academy team was positioned.

Understanding Hela's intent, Lumian confidently ascended the steps and stood next to the massive, ancient mottled stone chair.

He channeled Aurore's emotional reaction if she were to discover the truth about her death and spoke with a deep, resonant voice, "On April 1st, I acquired a spell known as the Soul Summoning Spell from Mad Lady of the April Fool's team..."

Without any need for amplification, Lumian's imitation of Aurore's voice harnessed the Concealed power that saturated the Nation of the Evernight, ensuring that everyone present could hear without any leaks.

It was evident that Hela had lent her assistance. Lumian, not being a true Warlock, couldn't employ supplementary spells himself.

Upon hearing this revelation, most members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society shifted their attention to the palace's crevice housing the April Fool's team. They noticed the conspicuous absence of Mad Lady and a significant number of her team members.

They could now infer which group the traitors were affiliated with. Those who had been pranked by the April Fool's team couldn't help but feel a sense of vindication.

Lumian continued with his account. He didn't immediately divulge Loki and I Know Someone's "confessions." Instead, he reconstructed Aurore's emotions.

The trust in I Know Someone, the yearning for home, the obsession with clues, the fascination with Mad Lady's claims, the fear and unease upon discovering a soul fragment fused with her memories after using the Soul Summoning Spell and the subsequent split into a separate personality, the desperate search for treatment from I Know Someone, the helplessness and horror from her repeated improvements before repeated deterioration...

Lumian's agitation grew as he spoke. At times, he even choked back a sob.

Part of this stemmed from his frustration. He had failed to notice Aurore's abnormal emotions and state earlier. His relaxed demeanor around those close to him had caused him to overlook subtle changes. By the time he had realized the gravity of the situation, it had already spiraled out of control.

Simultaneously, as he recounted and simulated Aurore, her fragmented soul seemed to stir and hover near the edge of the seal, exerting an influence on his own psyche.

As he neared the end of his narrative, Lumian took a deep breath.

"I came perilously close to death because of it. Fortunately, I received assistance at the eleventh hour and managed to seal my split personality. That's why I was absent from the gatherings for almost half a year.

"After my initial recovery, I reached out to Madame Hela and recounted my encounter. We began our covert investigation into Loki, I Know Someone, and Mad Lady."

Hela took charge of the conversation.

"So far, Loki has revealed a significant number of issues and has been dealt a severe blow from our actions. I Know Someone, on the other hand, was apprehended by Muggle and the rest, resulting in the extraction of a wealth of information."

As Hela noticed the growing fear and concern among the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, she recounted Loki's mockery of Muggle and I Know Someone's intricate schemes.

This revelation stoked the flames of fury within most of the Research Society's members, and they began to grasp the reasons behind Muggle and Hela's actions.

Hela surveyed the assembled crowd and continued, "Muggle wasn't the sole victim of their malevolence. Many members who had previously met untimely ends or disappeared were also targeted.

"Now, let's invite a few witnesses up."

With that, several witnesses, including Black Earth and other April Fool's team members, took the stage one by one to share what they knew. Their accounts sent shivers down the spines of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society members, leaving them with a lingering fear.

It became abundantly clear that if Muggle hadn't survived and exposed their true colors, countless more individuals could have fallen prey to their schemes!

After the witnesses had concluded their accounts, President Gandalf presented the evidence, including diaries and items. Finally, he addressed the assembly, “According to I Know Someone's confession, we've managed to eliminate Loki's accomplices who were embedded in other teams. Among them, Pettigrew took his own life, overwhelmed by guilt. He was a good person but lacked determination and courage. If he had reached out to Hela and me earlier and hinted at the situation more effectively, many unfortunate events might have been averted. He wouldn't have had to carry this heavy burden.”

As sighs rippled through the audience, Gandalf's resonant voice grew stronger.

“Everyone, we've only dealt with those accomplices known to I Know Someone. It's entirely possible that there are still spies embedded in various teams, loyal only to Loki. I propose the formation of a Review Committee consisting of Hela, myself, and three other trusted companions who have already undergone mutual reviews. Our mission will be to assess the remaining members and root out any hidden threats. We'll take decisive action against Loki and his allies.”

Members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society hesitated, concerned that this move would expose their secrets and realities to the Review Committee.

If any ambitious individuals were part of this committee, they could potentially exploit the information to manipulate and control members, posing a more significant threat than Loki's gang.

Gandalf remained observant, waiting for their deliberations before adding, “Do not be overly concerned. Our review process won't delve into your personal secrets or true identities. The primary goal is for the Review Committee to draft a stringent contract that ensures Research Society members won't harm each other. Everyone will sign it, and the contract will be notarized by Apollo. We don't care which deity you believe in, your real-world profession, or your hidden secrets. As long as you pose no threat and don't become hidden time bombs, you will be fine. This limitation will be clearly outlined in the contract.”

Apollo, one of the five vice presidents, was known by a different nickname before. However, one day, he had unexpectedly approached the massive stone chair and announced his new moniker.

He had already successfully passed Gandalf and Hela's scrutiny.

In comparison to a comprehensive body-to-soul review, signing a binding contract to ensure each other's safety seemed far more acceptable to the members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society.

After a show of hands, the Review Committee was officially established with nearly unanimous support.

The committee comprised five members: President Gandalf, Vice President Hela, Vice President Apollo, Hidden Blade from the Sanctuary team, and Headmaster from the Academy team.

Hela had initially suggested that Muggle join the Review Committee, but Lumian felt that, given that he wasn't truly Muggle, it wouldn't be appropriate for him to hold such a position. Thus, he rejected Hela's proposal.

As the vote passed, Lumian overheard Hidden Blade Franca mutter, "Humans are still the same. If you want to open a window, there will always be plenty of objections. But if you propose to tear down the roof, they'll happily agree to let you open the window."

Upon noticing Muggle's gaze, Hidden Blade Franca added, "I didn't say that."

Subsequently, the members split into groups to discuss the terms of the contract. Their aim was to ensure that it contained no extraneous content and that it could effectively expose traitors and harmful actions without any loopholes.

As Lumian descended the steps, he noticed Hidden Blade Franca engaged in conversation with a tall individual wearing a lion headgear.

As he approached, the lion-headed man turned to "her" and offered a smile.

"Muggle, you're in the market district too?"

"007, why do you say that?" Franca asked with deliberate curiosity.

That 007 who's affiliated with an official faction in Trier... Lumian nodded and smirked.

"Just because you're active in the market district doesn't necessarily mean you live there."

"That's true," 007 replied, then turned to Hidden Blade with a hint of jest in his voice, "You've already told me about that terrifying aura that night, and today you mentioned Loki and the others' betrayal. It would have been strange if I couldn't connect the dots and figure out that it was Madame Hela, you, and Muggle dealing with Loki and I Know Someone in the market district. Besides, I heard about a Marionettist going missing from Bureau 8 during that time, and it matched the abilities Loki displayed."

At this point, 007 looked at Hidden Blade and Muggle in puzzlement.

"None of you are Beyonders of the Hunter pathway."

The higher-ups suspected that the terrifying aura had been emitted by a high-level Beyonder of the Hunter pathway.

"Can we create that terrifying aura ourselves? It must be exogenous!" Franca was telling the truth, but she was deliberately misleading him into thinking about charms, Sealed Artifacts, and so on.

As 007 nodded slowly in contemplation, Lumian focused on him and inquired, "What's the official stance of Bureau 8 regarding the missing Marionettist? Why do they believe he disappeared?"

Chapter 412 Purge

Wearing a lion headgear, 007 took a moment to think before speaking.

“I've only heard rumors that the Marionettist disappeared with some classified information.”

“That's not true,” Franca replied, dropping the act. 007 had already figured out that the truth of that night involved the two of them teaming up with Hela to deal with Loki.

Loki didn't possess any such information!

007 didn't argue with her and continued discussing the rumors.

“And the classified information seems to be tied to a treasure left behind by a secret organization.”

Left-behind treasure... Lumian and Franca both remembered the Castle Dylan mentioned by I Know Someone.

The location of this mysterious castle remained unknown, and Loki's dreams featured a towering and ominous ancient castle.

007 continued, “There are also members of Bureau 8 who suspect that the terrifying aura from that night is connected to the missing Marionettist. An intelligence supervisor named Antoine has been repeatedly asking for more details.”

Antoine... He believes Loki's disappearance wasn't random, and something must have happened to him? Lumian made a mental note of the name.

After recounting the rumors, 007 glanced at Muggle and said half-jokingly, “It's best if you avoid the market district. Hidden Blade has stirred up trouble there. It's very dangerous.”

“Who said that? Security has clearly improved!” Franca responded confidently.

Ever since she and Lumian had taken down the leaders of the Poison Spur Mob, the Savoie Mob had taken control of the entire market district. The frequency of mob fights, shootings, and killings had decreased significantly, and security had improved.

007 sighed and remarked, “That's only on the surface. There are more incidents involving supernatural powers than before.”

“Sigh, I wonder when I'll get a long vacation.”

Lumian, in the role of Muggle, conversed with 007 for a while before returning to the Academy team.

Professor, wearing a black butterfly mask, approached him and let out a soft sigh.

“I was worried that something had happened to you due to the Hidden Sage's whispers, and you needed some time to recover. Who would have thought that Loki's gang was behind it?”

After cursing Loki and his gang, she turned to Muggle for confirmation.

“Have you noticed that the Hidden Sage's whispers have taken on a disturbing change in recent months?”

Aurore's grimoires didn't contain any records of this... Lumian thought for a moment and replied with a hint of bitterness, “Nothing much. As you know, I was affected by the Soul Summoning Spell in the first few months of this year. My mental state was unstable, and recently, I've sealed a part of my personality. The issues with my body haven't been fully resolved. I had already digested the Warlock potion and was planning to gather ingredients for advancement, but I haven't dared to do so now.”

The professor understood and cautioned, “You should be careful. Until your mental problems are completely resolved, and you return to your normal state, don't consider consuming the potion.”

Her voice lowered as she continued, “I've noticed that the Hidden Sage's whispers have been revealing more living knowledge lately. It's the kind of knowledge that actively seeks out individuals and insists on entering their minds. This makes it even more dangerous for Beyonders of the Mystery Pryer pathway like us.”

More knowledge actively pursuing individuals... Has the Hidden Sage's nature changed? Lumian had heard his sister Aurore mention the Knowledge Pursuer, so he didn't appear confused or bewildered.

He nodded solemnly and said, “I'll be cautious.”

Professor didn't press further and continued discussing the specifics of the contract with Associate Professor and the other Academy team members. “Muggle” Lumian also took part in the conversation.

It took more than half an hour for the teams to gather their members' opinions, document them, and submit them to the Review Committee.

After careful consolidation, adoption, and rejection by Gandalf, Hela, and others, along with collective discussions involving all members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, the terms of the contract were painstakingly finalized.

It wasn't clear if everyone tacitly agreed to enter the Nation of the Evernight, but the gathering included transmigrators. There was no requirement for members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society to be of the same kind or come from the same world. Hela was aware of this but chose not to bring it up. This allowed Lumian to fully meet the conditions and willingly comply with the contract's restrictions. He wouldn't secretly investigate the backgrounds of the Research Society members and wouldn't intentionally harm one another.

However, there were certain exceptions. The contract granted the Review Committee the right to investigate suspected members, but they couldn't pass judgment or make decisions unilaterally. They had to convene a special gathering and inform all members of the situation. Every member would then vote on guilt and suggest a rough range of punishment.

Loki and the others, who were currently being pursued, were no longer protected. Anyone had the authority to apprehend them.

After the contract was approved, Hidden Blade Franca, who stood beside Lumian, let out a sigh of relief and genuinely commented, "Once everyone signs the contract, the Research Society will truly become a secret organization."

"It was too lax before. Many matters relied on everyone's self-awareness."

Lumian, showing only the lower half of Aurore's face, smiled and replied, "After all, you all didn't come together for anything significant before. You lacked a strict hierarchy. It's only natural that you had the freedom to do as you pleased."

A loosely organized group could only mature gradually after weathering various challenges.

As Vice President Apollo drafted an extensive mystical contract, the various teams resumed their daily discussions.

This time, the primary focus of each team was on Loki and his companions' actions and potential accomplices.

Gandalf, Headmaster, Hela, Hidden Blade, and others moved from team to team, observing each member's reactions closely.

Suddenly, the Research Society member disguised as a horse, began reciting the incantation to leave the Nation of the Evernight before the Review Committee could patrol his area.

"A Beyonder from ancient times, the ruler of the Nation of the Evernight, the noble Mother of Heaven..."

The voice echoed through the ancient palace, but before the figure could finish the incantation, his eyes closed, and he fell asleep.

The surrounding members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society were momentarily shocked before realizing the situation.

They cursed, "Traitor!"

This individual had been one of Loki's hidden accomplices.

With the mole incapacitated, the Review Committee resumed their patrol.

Fifteen minutes later, the contract, as large as two dining tables, was produced, bearing the signature of a Notary.

Exhausted, Vice President Apollo drank a potion provided by Gandalf to alleviate his mental fatigue.

In the following period, members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society ascended the steps one by one. Under the watchful eyes of the Review Committee, they read the contract and signed it using the nicknames they had been using for years.

During this process, the fog outside the ancient palace grew denser, as if preventing any external interference.

Once all the members had signed, three more traitors were exposed.

One of them transformed into a torch of light after signing, while another attempted to abduct his companion next to him, only to fall into a deep slumber. Seeing this, the third traitor chose to confess.

After a vote, the one who confessed was handled by a Hypnotist to erase relevant memories. He was expelled from the Research Society, while the remaining three turned into Beyonders characteristics.

Hela concluded, "Gandalf and I will investigate the family situations of these members. If they are ordinary people and there are no issues, I suggest auctioning off the Beyonders characteristics for money and providing compensation."

This compensation wasn't a reward for their wrongdoings but rather a way to assist the relatives of the members who had taken over the bodies and could no longer provide support.

Many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society had transmigrated to this world five to six years ago. Some had wives and children. Upon hearing this proposal, they were moved and felt it wouldn't be fair to implicate their families.

Lumian had no objections. He still considered himself an outsider in this situation.

In the remaining time, Lumian visited various teams, following Hidden Blade Franca's guidance, and identified two Artisans capable of crafting mystical items.

He didn't rush to interact with the Artisans and entrust them with the Hypnotist Beyonders characteristic from I Know Someone. Instead, he planned to wait for Anthony Reid.

The assistance a Hypnotist could provide far exceeded that of a corresponding mystical item. After all, most mystical items couldn't speak or offer advice and guidance.

Due to Loki's incident and the exposure of hidden traitors, many members of the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society lost their enthusiasm and chose to depart without lingering, causing the number of people in the ancient palace to dwindle.

The Professor and Associate Professor couple, who had initially intended to organize an Academy team gathering in Trier, temporarily abandoned the idea.

At noon the following day, Lumian casually arrived at Salle de Bal Brise with a Rouen meatloaf in hand.

Upon entering the café on the second floor, he spotted "Rat" Christo.

The short smuggling leader, sporting a pair of rat-like whiskers, greeted him with a smile.

Lumian raised his eyebrows and asked with a smile, "Got into trouble?"

Simultaneously, he thought to himself, This guy is a Sequence 8 Beast Tamer. Beyond that is Sequence 7 Vampire. With his current appearance, I wonder how the potion will increase his charm and height?

Christo chuckled and said, "There's something I want to ask you. I can't make up my mind."

Lumian pulled up a chair and sat down.

"And what's the matter?"

Christo, resembling a large rat, glanced around and said, “The Trier Cave Association invited me to join them. Why do you think they're interested in recruiting me?”

The Trier Cave Association was a group of individuals passionate about exploring and studying caves. Over time, it expanded its scope to include mining and drew in mine owners as well.

In Trier, the region with the most caves was underground.

Chapter 413 Cave Association

Upon hearing the name Trier Cave Association and their invitation to “Rat” Christo, Lumian didn't feel puzzled initially. Instead, he recalled the secret map of Underground Trier he had once seen from Gardner Martin.

The upper section of the map was as detailed as if one had infiltrated the municipal department and copied the original information.

Now, Lumian suspected that it might have been leaked from the Trier Cave Association.

This seemingly civilian organization had a large number of cave researchers. Some of them were employees of the municipal department or expert consultants. They had ample opportunities to come into contact with confidential exploration and construction information. There was no lack of people who had participated in the municipal modification decades ago. They were hands-on witnesses who had bored through various tunnels and reinforced all the quarry caves.

They had a deep understanding of Underground Trier.

Lumian looked at “Rat” Christo and asked thoughtfully, “Do you really not understand why they invited you to join the association?”

“Rat” Christo smiled sheepishly and said, “I have a guess, but I'm not sure.

“Ciel, don't tell me they've discovered I'm a smuggler leader?”

As a merchant who had long exploited Underground Trier's concealed nature to smuggle alcohol, weapons, and ammunition, Christo's knowledge of different tunnels, remote mines, underground tombs, and hidden chambers rivaled that of most members of the Cave Association. He even possessed secret routes that remained unknown to others.

Moreover, his nickname was “Rat,” and he was a true Beast Tamer. With the help of his animal friends, his “tentacles” could extend to many areas that humans couldn't reach.

Christo suspected that the Cave Association had taken a liking to him because of these traits.

That was why he felt uneasy. Whether it was his status as a Beast Tamer in the Beyonder domain or his nature as a big-time smuggler, they were enough to send him to trial. His options would probably range from hanging, a firing squad, incineration, beheading, to becoming a low-level experimentalist.

Lumian chuckled.

“I don't believe that adventurers who join the Cave Association haven't been involved in smuggling and don't have Beyonders among them.”

“That's right,” “Rat” Christo exhaled and said, “The Cave Association wants some business from me?”

Lumian glanced at him and said, “That's why you should consult the Boss about this, not me.”

Christo lowered his voice and smiled ingratiatingly. “I'm just worried that the Boss will take the opportunity to assign me some dangerous mission.”

Based on Gardner Martin's previous missions and the confidential map, this “Rat” keenly sensed the Boss's extraordinary interest in Underground Trier.

He felt that if he joined the Trier Cave Association, Gardner Martin might arrange for him to contact some members of the association and attempt to steal confidential information or participate in research and risky expeditions.

And that often meant danger.

He had consulted Lumian not only because he felt that his colleague was powerful, knowledgeable, and quick-witted but also because he wanted to find someone to shirk his responsibility in advance.

He had already made up his mind to join the Trier Cave Association and keep it a secret from Gardner Martin, the boss of the Savoie Mob.

For him to progress from an ordinary mobster to a Beyonder and take control of the Savoie Mob's smuggling business, he relied on two principles: One, he had to avoid provoking anyone stronger than him, choosing only to bully the weak. If he ran out of options, he could seek help from his colleagues and join forces. Two, he had to never place all his chips on a bet or one person.

Previously, he had fawned over Lumian, displaying a certain degree of submission. His words were filled with praise for Lumian because he valued his colleague's rapid advancement in Sequence, his strength, and his intelligence. If he befriended him, he might be able to save his life from a dangerous mission given by Gardner Martin at a critical moment.

Now that he had a chance to join the Trier Cave Association and interact with more factions and powerful figures, “Rat” Christo naturally didn't want to let it go. He didn't want his connections to be limited to the Savoie Mob and the market district. If Gardner Martin lost power one day or he was given a certain death mission, he needed to switch teams, one that could protect him.

Gardner Martin definitely couldn't know about this, but if he accidentally discovered the matter, Christo could naturally blame it on Ciel:

I, ‘Rat,’ am a boorish and uncultured individual. I spend my days dealing with animals, laborers, and the dark underground. I have limited knowledge and ain't very bright. I often seek guidance from Ciel when I encounter matters, and he told me that I could join the Cave Association. He said it was a very normal and personal matter.

Lumian looked at Christo with a faint smile, his dark-blue eyes and grayish-black hair, and didn't respond to his inquiry. Instead, he asked, “You've been a Beast Tamer for a long time, right? Do you know what the next Sequence is?”

Judging by Rat's care and concern for his animal companions, even if he didn't know the acting method, the Beast Tamer potion should have mostly been digested.

“I don't know. The Boss didn't tell me,” Christo's eyes darted around.

Lumian chuckled and said, "As far as I know, the next Sequence of Beast Tamer is a qualitative change. It will bring you an all-around improvement, including a longer lifespan and a body with better recovery traits."

Without waiting for Christo to press further, Lumian changed the subject.

"Therefore, you must work hard to complete the mission given by the Boss and strive to obtain the corresponding rewards as soon as possible."

"Yes, yes, yes," Christo hastily agreed.

Only then did Lumian steer the conversation back on track. He smiled and asked, "Do you wish to join the Trier Cave Association?"

Christo stammered, "I-I'm curious about their motives. Moreover, the person who came seems polite and keeps smiling, but I keep feeling that his actions are a threat to me. Yes, a threat!

"The one following him is even more expressionless. He looks at me as if I'm a dead man, a criminal awaiting trial!"

Curious... Lumian chuckled inwardly, grasping Rat's inclination and thoughts.

"Angrily," he said, "How dare they threaten a leader of our Savoie Mob? We must inform the Boss about this!"

"No, no need!" Christo panicked. "The Cave Association is a semi-official organization. We're just mobsters. There's no need to clash with them. This won't do you, me, or Red Boots, who are members of the Savoie Mob in the market district, any good."

Lumian clicked his tongue silently, planning to add fuel to the fire and force the truth out of "Rat."

At that moment, Sarkota, who had been guarding the staircase at the bottom, walked up and said to Lumian, "Boss, two individuals calling themselves Trier Cave Association liaisons are here to pay you a visit."

Visit me? Someone from the Trier Cave Association is visiting me? Lumian glanced at "Rat" Christo, who had his hands on the table in surprise and confusion. He leaned back in his chair and said to Sarkota, "Invite them up."

The Trier Cave Association's two liaisons were young. They wore black formal attire and blue bow ties. One had brown hair, brown eyes, and a reserved smile. The other had black hair and brown eyes, expressionless and cold.

The friendly liaison glanced at "Rat" Christo and fixed his gaze on Lumian's face.

He smiled and asked, "Good afternoon. Are you Monsieur Ciel Dubois?"

"Yes." Lumian wanted to see what the Trier Cave Association was up to.

The liaison who had asked the question earlier smiled condescendingly and said, "We're members of the Trier Cave Association. My name is Joseph, and this is my colleague, Rayan. We're here to invite you to join our association. We just invited Monsieur Christo, who's standing beside you, a few hours ago."

Lumian didn't hide his emotions and asked with amusement, "What do I have that caught your Cave Association's eye?"

I'm not a smuggler who frequents Underground Trier!

Could it be that you know that I entered the fourth level of the catacombs and obtained the Samaritan Women's Spring water?

Could it be that you still know that I'm a member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order and am aware of a series of hidden catacombs like the Albert Mines?

Joseph replied with a smile, "We have our reasons. If you're willing to join our association, you'll definitely know the specific reason."

Rayan, who was taller than Joseph, added coldly, "That's a good thing for you."

Lumian gazed at them for a few seconds before chuckling.

"I'm not interested in your association."

The expressionless Rayan narrowed his eyes.

"I hope you won't regret it."

Joseph smiled meaningfully and said, "You might not know the significance of our Cave Association in Trier.

"Unfortunately, you missed this opportunity."

With that, the two of them turned around and prepared to walk towards the stairs leading to the ground floor.

As Lumian watched them leave, he raised his head slightly.

What is the Trier Cave Association up to? This matter is definitely not simple...

Perhaps this is an opportunity. If I offend the Cave Association, Gardner Martin probably won't let me stay in the market district anymore...

My current mission in the Iron and Blood Cross Order is to investigate the Sauron family's decline and explore the underground to find the entrance to Fourth Epoch Trier. It has nothing to do with staying in the market district...

Once I leave the market district, I'll be out of Loki's sight. I can slip into the shadows and wait patiently...

I wonder if I can continue enjoying Salle de Bal Brise's share of profits...

If anything goes awry, I'll teleport away immediately...

As these thoughts raced through his mind, Lumian suddenly knocked on the coffee table in front of him.

Amidst the thumping sounds, he glanced at Joseph and Rayan's figures and asked calmly, "Who gave you the permission to leave?"

Chapter 414 Reason

Joseph and Rayan came to a sudden halt, swiftly turning to face Lumian.

Lumian observed them in silence, offering no immediate explanation.

Joseph, maintaining his smug and condescending grin, inquired, "Monsieur Ciel, I'm not sure I comprehend your meaning."

Lumian spoke with composure, "I granted you permission to visit me, not the freedom to depart."

"This is my Salle de Bal Brise, not your home. You can't come and go as you please."

Though Lumian didn't intentionally use Provocation, his demeanor, tone, and message radiated unmistakable disdain, as if he held no fear of their wrath.

Rayan, his expression unchanged, narrowed his eyes, turned away, and continued his stride toward the staircase, completely disregarding Lumian's words.

Joseph, with brown hair and eyes to match, glanced at Lumian, then at Rayan. His gaze flickered, but he made no move to stop him.

Unfazed, Lumian calmly drew his revolver and discharged a round toward the staircase without hesitation.

With a bang, Rayan came to an abrupt standstill once again.

Slowly, he pivoted to face Lumian, exuding a palpable pressure from his eyes.

A subtle movement in Christo's pocket betrayed his discomfort and vigilance, sensing imminent danger.

Unperturbed, Lumian, holding the revolver, issued a sincere apology, "I'm sorry, I am carrying a concealed firearm."

As he spoke, he glanced back at Rayan and Joseph, a faint, fearless smile playing on his lips.

Joseph's feigned polite smile crumbled, replaced by a piercing gaze fixed on Lumian, as if assessing the mob leader's resolve, confidence, and strength.

Lumian contemplated uttering, "What are you staring at? If you want to fight, let's fight. If not, back down." to further infuriate the Trier Cave Association representatives, but considering the presence of "Rat" Christo, he abandoned the notion.

It would expose his true intention of provocation rather than investigating their true purpose, making it challenging to explain to Gardner Martin, the current or former Conspirer.

His unwavering gaze remained locked with Joseph and Rayan. With the revolver in his right hand, he deftly spun the cylinder.

After more than ten seconds that left "Rat" Christo visibly sweating, Joseph once again wore a polite smile and asked, "May we depart now, Monsieur Ciel?"

Oh, so you see through my true intentions of deliberately finding fault, hoping to get some action? Where's your arrogance and self-esteem? Lumian chuckled inwardly and said in an infuriating tone,

"Not just yet."

Rayan took an abrupt step forward, but Joseph restrained him.

The freckled, brown-haired, brown-eyed young man raised his chin slightly and locked eyes with Lumian.

“What must we do to gain your permission?”

Lumian's smile held a tinge of disappointment as he replied, “Answer my question, why did you invite Christo and me to join the Cave Association? I don't recall having a hobby of exploring and studying caves.”

Joseph fell into a brief silence before explaining, “Our association's cave adventurers have encountered Christo several times underground and noticed his in-depth knowledge of Underground Trier. He appears to be well-acquainted with many hidden routes, which aligns with our cave association's criteria for invitations.”

“Rat” Christo didn't voice any objections to this explanation. Although his primary activities involved smuggling underground, there were no completely hidden smuggling routes. They inevitably crossed paths with tunnels and mines known to cave adventurers and quarry police. During these encounters, it was inevitable that he would come across a few “passersby” or be covertly observed from a distance.

Lumian, all the while, idly stroked the revolver's muzzle without interrupting Joseph's narrative.

Joseph paused for a brief moment before elaborating, “There are two reasons for your invitation.”

“The first reason is an Earth Blood ore specimen.”

The Earth Blood ore specimen... Lumian hadn't anticipated this reason at all.

Without taking much time to consider, guided by his prankster instincts and recent advice from Anthony Reid, Lumian swiftly responded, “An Earth Blood ore specimen... Ah, I recall now. I acquired it from a lunatic named Flameng. Isn't it just a stone? It holds no value to me. I don't even know its whereabouts.”

Lumian then added with a touch of nostalgia, “It appears to have been stolen. I left it in a rented apartment. Heh heh, individuals like us rarely have a place solely for rest and sleep. My apartment was laden with numerous traps. Who would have imagined a thief successfully infiltrating and accessing the cabinet? What's more, they only took the Earth Blood ore and left everything else untouched. It puzzled me at the time, making me wonder if my recollection was flawed—the stone has long been lost, and no thief had broken in...”

Ciel Dubois's words were delivered with a sincere and detailed tone, and his demeanor conveyed an apparent lack of concern regarding the ore specimen. Now, it merely seemed like the loss of some insignificant item. Joseph and Rayan exchanged glances, their attitudes subtly shifting.

As Lumian finished his act, his mind raced, trying to decipher the rationale behind the Trier Cave Association's interest in the Earth Blood ore.

The Earth Blood's rock stratum has existed beneath Trier for centuries, if not millennia. The specific minerals concealed within it couldn't have surfaced recently, catching the attention of Flameng and other mineral researchers...

Official factions in Trier and certain secretive organizations probably know that a select few minerals within the Earth Blood rock stratum hold a connection to the death of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor. However, they haven't uncovered their practical significance, merely corrupting the minds of those who encountered them...

That night, I activated the brand on my right hand, causing numerous high-ranking individuals in Trier to sense it. Someone might have identified the aura of Blood Emperor Alista Tudor through various means, prompting an investigation into relevant items...

The whereabouts of the specific minerals within the Earth Blood rock stratum are a vital lead in their inquiry. Flameng's belongings were registered with the market district's police headquarters...

Given the Cave Association's connection to the authorities, they likely accepted the mission and sought me out, the one who had acquired Flameng's belongings...

But why didn't they just send someone from the police headquarters to inquire directly? The Purifier, Machinery Hivemind, and Bureau 8 members all possess corresponding police identities...

Of course, the authorities aren't unified. They are officially divided between the government and the two Churches, but in practice, each faction harbors internal divisions.

The Eternal Blazing Sun Church's Order Of Preachers clashes with the Brotherhood Minor and other ideological factions. The Church of the God of Steam and Machinery's cloister system opposes the cathedral system. Bureau 8 is even more of a mixed bag. Some members come from secret organizations recognized by the government, some are former nobles like Sauron, who retains some influence, and others had been groomed by Bureau 8 over the years...

The only thing holding them together is the fact that Bureau 8 members can't officially align with any political party, or it would become even more chaotic...

In such a fractured environment, it is possible that a group within a faction had identified the Earth Blood ore's unique trail of clues but doesn't want others to know. Hence, they bypassed the police station's public channels and conducted their investigation through the unofficial Cave Association...

Perhaps someone within the Cave Association has recognized this clue and possesses an in-depth knowledge of underground terrain and mineral specimens. They are likely among the most proficient professionals...

Is this why they hadn't directly requested my cooperation with the investigation and instead attempted to recruit me into the Cave Association?

Lumian swiftly reached this preliminary conclusion, eagerly awaiting Joseph to reveal the second reason.

Joseph said, "We believed you had an interest in underground minerals and were a kindred spirit."

"Did it really get stolen, or did you leave it somewhere else but have forgotten about it?"

"It must have been stolen," Lumian said truthfully. "I found some traces of a break-in. Because of this, I became concerned about the gold I had saved, so I went to the bank to rent a safe deposit box for it."

Joseph nodded gently and said, "The second reason is that Kendall, an administrator of the catacombs, told us that among the individuals who brought Flameng's ashes there for burial, you seemed to possess a unique sensitivity to something abnormal that others couldn't perceive."

They connected the dots from the Earth Blood ore to the catacombs... Lumian was enlightened.

"I'm not sure what you mean by 'special.'"

Joseph didn't elaborate or push for further information. He simply looked at Lumian and asked, "Monsieur Ciel, may we leave now?"

Lumian regarded them for a few seconds before nodding slowly.

"Sure."

The situation had taken an unexpected turn, causing him to abandon his plan of provoking the two liaisons and antagonizing the Trier Cave Association further.

While he had undoubtedly irked Joseph and Rayan, they had also obtained the answers they were seeking, or at least a part of them. There might be minor repercussions in the future, but a major confrontation was unlikely.

After Joseph and Rayan disappeared down the stairs, Lumian sat in contemplation for several moments. He holstered his revolver, stood up, and addressed "Rat" Christo, "This situation is more complex than I anticipated. I need to report it to the Boss."

He considered a dangerous possibility.

If it turned out that the Sauron family was behind the investigation into the special Earth Blood ore through the Cave Association, and they discovered a connection between Ciel Dubois, a mob leader, and the supposed son of a wealthy businessman who exhibited peculiar behavior in Poufer Sauron's King's Pie game, it could pose a significant problem.

Therefore, he needed to inform Gardner Martin immediately, be forthright with him, and eliminate any potential hidden threats while seeking useful advice.

With the Iron and Blood Cross Order as a secret organization backing this entire operation and his primary mission assigned by Gardner Martin, Lumian had no intention of handling the matter on his own.

"Rat" Christo hesitated for a moment before forcing a smile and responding, "Alright."

Chapter 415 The Sinner Complains First

Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative, 11 Rue des Fontaines.

Gardner Martin, dressed in a crisp white shirt and black pants, stood before the floor-to-ceiling windows in the Quartier de la Cathédrale Commémorative. Bathed in golden sunlight, he listened intently as Lumian and Christo shared the details of their encounter with the Trier Cave Association.

Lumian took the lead, briefly explaining the origins of the Earth Blood ore specimen.

“While I was staying at Auberge du Coq Doré, I crossed paths with a man named Flameng, a Lunatic who had a tragic encounter with the Montsouris ghost, leading to the bizarre deaths of his family.

“Occasionally, he regained lucidity. We drank together a few times. One day, he hanged himself. His belongings, including the Earth Blood ore specimen, ended up with the police. They said they were to hand them over to his surviving relatives, but they refused to accept them. Eventually, they asked me to retrieve them, which included the Earth Blood ore specimen.

“I knew that lunatic and had drinks with him. I didn't throw away the mineral specimen and casually placed it in an iron cabinet of my safe house...”

Lumian spoke the truth, not a single word being false. He only concealed the fact that he had helped Flameng escape the Montsouris ghost and Termiboros's reminder regarding the Earth Blood ore.

Gardner Martin, his brownish-red eyes reflecting wisdom and a touch of silver hair in his black hair, inquired, “Where is your safe house?”

Lumian replied honestly, “It's in the leftmost room on the third floor of 19 Rue des Blouses Blanches.”

This wasn't on the same side as Apartment 6, which had emitted a terrifying aura, and there was a distance between them, so Lumian's answer was straightforward.

Gardner Martin smiled.

“No wonder you frequent Rue des Blouses Blanches so often. It's not just because of Jenna.”

Boss, are you hinting at me not to visit Franca too often? Are you implying that you're aware of this situation? Lumian grumbled and continued.

He gave the same story he had told Joseph and Rayan from the Cave Association.

Finally, Lumian subtly probed, “Will this pose a problem for our Savoie Mob? There might be an official faction hidden behind the Cave Association.”

He wanted to convey to Gardner Martin that his cover in front of Poufer Sauron might be at risk, trusting the boss's intelligence to grasp the implication.

Gardner Martin gave a slight nod and turned his attention to “Rat” Christo, saying, “If you want to join the Cave Association, you can, but ensure it doesn't interfere with our smuggling operations.”

Christo nodded repeatedly.

“Understood, Boss.”

Following Gardner Martin's instructions, he departed from the study, leaving Lumian alone.

Gardner Martin smiled and consoled the official member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order.

“Don't worry about Poufer. Even if he figures out your true identity, he'll pretend he doesn't know. Ever since you became the king in the King's Pie game, he's been suspicious of you. He'll definitely probe and exploit you again and again.”

It was a subtle message, urging Lumian to remain in the market district and continue overseeing Salle de Bal Brise, Auberge du Coq Doré, Salle de Gristmill, and other businesses.

Lumian couldn't help but smile with relief. “Alright, I was just worried that it would affect the most important mission.”

Simultaneously, he sneered inwardly.

He keenly felt the irrationality of Gardner Martin's plan.

Transitioning control to another Beyonder to oversee Salle de Bal Brise and other operations, allowing Lumian to slip into the shadows, was a straightforward task for the boss of the Savoie Mob and the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order. There were no downsides to this arrangement.

Even though he couldn't afford to mistreat Lumian, a subordinate on an important mission, he could compensate him by continuing to share the profits from Salle de Bal Brise and other businesses. He couldn't risk keeping an official member, who had already attracted suspicion, in his current location.

While Lumian's retreat into the shadows might make him appear even more suspicious, potentially putting the Savoie Mob in the crosshairs, Gardner Martin had encountered such challenges numerous times before. There had to be a solution.

Sensing the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order's suspicion, Lumian aimed to use the Cave Association to keep testing him.

His account and explanations were entirely truthful. Normally, Gardner Martin would believe him, but the issue was that too many unusual events had occurred around him recently. As a former or current Conspirer, Gardner Martin would instinctively smell something fishy.

The detailed reasons were no longer enough to hide the overall abnormality.

With this thought in mind, Lumian's determination to kill surged.

He stared at Gardner Martin, positioned by the floor-to-ceiling windows, and estimated the distance between them to be about five meters.

At such a close range, if he were to suddenly employ the Spell of Harrumph, and Gardner Martin hadn't reached Sequence 4 and achieved godhood, lacking a mystical item to defend against such abilities, he could quickly subdue the Savoie Mob boss and eliminate him.

The current situation resembled that of two ordinary individuals without Beyonder powers standing within a five-meter radius. One held a high social status and excelled in combat, while the other held a low status and lacked physical strength. However, they both concealed a revolver and possessed exceptional marksmanship.

Within five meters, regardless of an ordinary person's status or combat skills, they would succumb to a single shot!

Considering the missions for the Tarot Club and the Aurora Order, Lumian composed himself and inquired, "Commanding Officer, I wish to purchase the Conspirer potion formula from the Order."

He had gained valuable insights from his advancement to Pyromaniac. He didn't want to go through the nerve-racking process of searching for each Conspirer potion ingredient after digesting the Pyromaniac potion. His goal was to gather Conspirer ingredients in advance while continuing to digest the remaining Pyromaniac potion, thereby maximizing his time efficiency.

Gardner Martin responded with surprise, "Do you have that much cash for that?"

"The Conspirer potion formula can command prices ranging from 70,000 to 80,000 verl d'or at the most mysticism gatherings, if not more. It's unlike Pyromaniacs, who are constantly perishing as others advance. Conspirers understand the importance of self-preservation, and they've become more cautious about sharing their Sequence potion formulas."

In Trier, the most common potion formulas available ranged from Sequence 9 to Sequence 7 of the Hunter pathway.

Without waiting for Lumian's reply, Gardner Martin grinned and added, "If you can unearth even a portion of the Sauron family's decline secret, I'll reward you with the Conspirer potion formula. It doesn't have to be the whole story, just a piece of the puzzle."

"If you're eager to advance and don't want to wait, as an official member of the Iron and Blood Cross Order, you have the privilege of purchasing the Conspirer potion formula at a discounted price of 60,000 verl d'or."

Lumian agreed without hesitation, "No problem. I'll bring 60,000 verl d'or tomorrow."

His initial plan had been to inquire with Mr. K and Madam Magician if Gardner Martin declined his request.

"Do you really have 60,000 verl d'or?" Gardner Martin chuckled.

Lumian's heart raced as he replied deliberately, "Just about. I previously assisted a tenant of Auberge du Coq Doré in recovering a 100,000 debt owed by Salle de Bal Unique on Rue Ancienne in Quartier de l'Observatoire. I took a bit over half of it."

In total, he had received 50,000 verl d'or in banknotes and gold, worth 30,000 verl d'or. After repaying Franca's 25,000, he had 55,000 left. Combined with the original 1,000 gold, 1,000 banknotes, and 4,000 verl d'or, he had 61,000 verl d'or in liquid assets.

"Salle de Bal Unique..." Gardner Martin repeated, his expression growing more serious. "You really managed to retrieve the debt from Salle de Bal Unique?"

Evidently, the Commanding Officer of the Iron and Blood Cross Order was familiar with Salle de Bal Unique.

Lumian nodded, his demeanor open and honest.

"Yes."

The members of the Savoie Mob at Salle de Bal Brise were more or less aware that he had helped Fitz collect his debt. Lumian couldn't keep Gardner Martin in the dark, so he decided to disclose it directly to confuse the situation and divert the Iron and Blood Cross Order's suspicions.

Furthermore, he could use this opportunity to put a little fear into Gardner Martin!

Gardner Martin scrutinized Lumian and subtly moved closer to the floor-to-ceiling windows.

After a few moments, he inquired with curiosity, "Have you never heard of the issues surrounding Salle de Bal Unique?"

"I have," Lumian replied with a smile.

If he had a monocle, he might have playfully inserted it into his right eye socket at that moment, savoring Gardner Martin's intriguing expressions and subconscious reactions.

After a pause, Lumian continued, "After accepting the commission, I conducted a thorough investigation of the dance hall and realized it wasn't as simple as it seemed. It had a mysterious background and posed a significant danger, so I initially decided to abandon it. However, one day, while trailing an adversary, I noticed something unusual. One of the guards at Salle de Bal Unique's entrance had inexplicably vanished. And upstairs, behind a window, their boss, Timmons, appeared to have lost his spirit.

"I saw this as an opportunity, so I made an attempt to enter and collect the debt. To my surprise, I succeeded!"

As Lumian spoke, he took a step forward and asked earnestly, "Commanding Officer, are there any hidden dangers I should be aware of?"

Gardner Martin discreetly took another step forward and smiled.

"Not at the moment. Keep an eye out for any future anomalies."

Lumian seized the opportunity to express his bewilderment.

"Commanding Officer, something doesn't quite add up. Why have there been so many events swirling around me lately? Some I initiated, while others just seemed to find their way to me. Am I truly a harbinger of trouble? Or has my recent fate been to rush around and handle things, leaving me constantly busy and weary?"

Gardner Martin regarded him with meaning and replied, "Perhaps, this is the destiny that every Hunter is bound to face."

After Lumian departed, Gardner Martin shifted his gaze to the side.

A hidden door creaked open, and Supervisor Olson emerged, bearing a resemblance to a hungry bear.

"How is it?" Gardner Martin inquired.

Olson smirked and responded, "It's natural for him to be discontent with your arrangements. His loyalty isn't firmly established yet. He won't be able to join your team for the time being."

Gardner Martin shifted the conversation thoughtfully.

“The calamity on him is more conspicuous than any of us. Is it possible that he's more compatible?”

Olson fell silent for a few moments before replying, “Let's observe and wait.”

Meanwhile, as Lumian returned to the market district, Franca sat at Trocadéro's Red House Café. Her gaze fell upon Browns Sauron, her long, flowing orange-red hair resembling a waterfall, as she asked, “When will you folks complete the audit?”

Browns Sauron didn't provide a direct response. She studied Franca, who had black hair and brown eyes, for a moment before saying, “We've identified a suspected member of the Bliss Society.”

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Chapter 416 Suspect

You're quite efficient. After receiving the warning, you swiftly unearthed the problem and found the clues. Instead of confirming it yourself, you're now informing me directly, intending to leverage this issue for the final audit? No wonder you didn't respond when I inquired about the audit completion date... Franca's mind raced as she grasped Browns Sauron's true intentions, representing the Demoness Sect.

Admiring the Demoness's appearance and demeanor, she smiled and asked, “Is it just a suspicion?”

She was prompting the other party to provide more details.

Browns Sauron ran her fingers through her long orange-red hair and spoke with a somber expression, “After learning from you that the Bliss Society interacts with the participants in the orgies, I observed my friends and noticed two members who were behaving unusually.

“One of them fell in love with a man once again and entered into a romantic relationship. Consequently, she started declining participation in the female orgies. The other one encountered a new woman and succumbed to her advances, leading to feelings of guilt for betraying us.”

Friends? Girlfriends! Franca couldn't help but criticize.

She smiled and inquired, “Who do you suspect are the members of the Bliss Society?”

“That woman,” Browns Sauron's aura remained dark. “She took the initiative to ask about the orgies and reassured Adaina that there was no need to feel guilty. She claimed that everyone has the right to control their bodies and freely indulge their desires without caring about others' opinions, societal judgments, moral restrictions, or religious constraints. She also stated that only deities and churches that genuinely embrace free will, physical freedom, and desire freedom are worth following.”

Physical freedom, desire freedom... It's indeed the hallmark of the Mother Tree of Desire's believers... The core members of the Bliss Society truly excel as Actors. Their acting skills are remarkable. They can artfully package indulgence and debauchery, presenting desires as a

manifestation of willpower, subtly diminishing the importance of rationality, clarity, and thoughtful reflection... Franca clicked her tongue and inwardly sighed.

For a Demoness of Pleasure, this approach proved highly effective. If the surrounding humans believed it, she could swiftly immerse them in intense and genuine pleasure, causing them to lose themselves in a sea of indulgence. Long-term consequences and effects were typically disregarded by most Demonesses, as they would have already digested the potion by then.

However, Franca could discern that Browns Sauron was possessive and didn't want her girlfriends to engage with humans outside of the orgies.

“That certainly resembles the Bliss Society,” Franca objectively remarked.

Browns added with a gloomy expression, “As for the other one, the lover is primarily concerned with money, houses, banquets, vacations, and various luxury items. It's quite evident that he's a male courtesan. They understand women very well, are eloquent, and possess considerable capabilities.”

“What do you plan to do?” Franca asked curiously.

She sensed that Browns Sauron wasn't the type to simply give up on one of her girlfriends, especially when the new lover seemed unreliable.

Browns Sauron hesitated for a few moments before saying, “I've encountered him before, and I can tell he harbors an unusual desire for me. I intend to teach him a lesson, immersing him in pleasure without granting him true gratification. Once his body and mind are completely under my control, I'll discard him.”

Wow... Did you learn this without a mentor? Do you even remember your original form? Franca raised an eyebrow, finding a rare target for mockery.

Browns glanced at her mockingly and retorted, “Based on what I've discovered and confirmed, you have two male lovers. One is mature, and the other is young. You seem to excel at enjoying yourself.”

Her implication was clear: “What right do you have to mock me? I'm merely planning to offer that man some pleasure without engaging in actual intimacy. As for you, you've long abandoned your gender, ending up in the beds of different men!”

Half of my reputation has been tarnished by Ciel! Franca didn't lose her composure over the humiliation. She maintained a smile and said, “I view this as a unique experience.

“I've already become a woman. How can I not explore something entirely different from my previous existence? If you don't experiment now, you may never have the chance in the future. Don't you desire to return to your original form. Do you not know how?”

She subtly hinted at her knowledge of mysticism, paving the way for revealing her true motives for infiltrating the Savoie Mob in the future.

Browns was left momentarily speechless, unable to refute Franca Roland's twisted logic.

Franca continued, "Life is confined to just a few decades. Why confine yourself to such a limited scope? As long as you avoid indulgence and obsession and always remain true to yourself, you're merely experiencing the present moment. Why not venture into various realms and experiences?"

At this moment, Franca had an epiphany.

Pleasure wasn't just something to offer to others; it was also meant for oneself!

Is this my first principle of acting...? No wonder my digestion speed hasn't been slowing down recently; it's even considered fast... How can being coy be considered Pleasure? Franca thought with a sense of delight.

Browns fell silent for a few seconds before speaking, "Your mindset surpasses my expectations, but with this mindset, it will be very, very challenging for you to perform a ritual, advance to Affliction, or experience pain and inflict it."

"I'm currently focused on Pleasure. I'll deal with Affliction when the time comes," Franca replied casually.

The digestion process would take months, half a year, or even longer to complete. What was the point of worrying too much?

Browns glanced at Franca for a moment, feeling a mix of repulsion and envy.

It wasn't that she desired it, but the Demonesses she had encountered, whether at higher Sequences or those who had just consumed the Witch potion, lacked this calmness and radiance. Each of them carried their own distortions, conflicts, and pain, and some even teetered on the edge of madness.

Browns decided not to delve further into personal philosophy and steered the conversation back on track.

"Adaina encountered the suspected Bliss Society member at an art exhibition. She goes by the name Theresa and comes from a former noble family. She's now an art dealer.

"I've conducted some investigation. Her identity and name are real, but they don't belong to her. In other words, there is a real art dealer named Theresa. She's impersonating her and has altered her appearance to make herself more appealing.

"This aligns with the characteristics of an Actor, as you mentioned. When Adaina had intimate contact with her, she also experienced the abilities of a Sex Addict.

"I attempted to tail her earlier, but I was too cautious and lost her trail.

"Adaina has a date with her tonight."

Franca listened attentively and then asked thoughtfully, "Can we trust Adaina now?"

Browns's expression contorted as she replied, "She can be trusted."

Franca didn't press further and reminded her deliberately, "Then, will she exhibit any unusual behavior during her date with Theresa tonight? She's dealing with an Actor."

“Perhaps. She needs a Psychiatrist or an even more powerful Beyond of the Spectator pathway to plant a cue or hypnotize her. This will help her maintain her normal state and prevent Theresa from becoming suspicious.

“If you can't find one in a hurry, I can introduce someone, but it will come at a cost.”

Browns's expression softened as she nodded in agreement.

“You're indeed more experienced than I am.”

Following her sigh, she smiled and asked, “Is that Psychiatrist also a man?”

Franca was taken aback.

“Yes.”

Hey, what kind of image do you have of me!

The two of them silently refrained from discussing which side would handle the subsequent questions after identifying the fake Theresa. It was as if they had already reached an unspoken agreement.

At 7 p.m., in Quartier de la Maison d'Opéra, just outside the Delan Music Hall, Franca and Lumian, both dressed in light-colored pants, walked toward the entrance while discreetly holding each other's arms.

They had used Lie to alter their appearances and heights, ensuring that they wouldn't be recognized by anyone they might know.

Their target for this operation was the woman entering the concert hall, about seven to eight meters away.

Among them, Adaina, a participant in the Red House female orgies, had long, light-yellow hair with thin, curly bangs. Her face was powdered, her eyes light blue, and her nose perky, making her quite attractive. As for the art dealer, Theresa, she had long, wavy brown hair and a simple style. When her flaxen-colored eyes scanned the surroundings, they sparkled with liveliness.

This woman, suspected to be a member of the Bliss Society, had somewhat stiff facial features. It lacked softness but still exuded a strange charm.

Inside the small concert hall, Lumian and Franca found their seats and then swiftly locked onto Theresa and Adaina's location, discreetly observing them from behind.

Franca watched with interest as Adaina and Theresa leaned against each other, feigning intimacy.

It was a pity that, despite her claim of loving women, Franca's limited experience mainly revolved around “teasing” Gardner Martin's other lovers. She had seldom been able to admire such scenes from a distance.

“Be careful,” Lumian warned with a sigh.

Franca responded disapprovingly, “For a Trierien, this attitude is entirely normal. Look around you. Aren't others openly watching as well?”

Lumian snorted and didn't push the matter further.

Their immediate objective was observation, not tailing. It was crucial to assess the target's situation before taking any action.

Turning an ambush and surprise attack into an open confrontation would be a failure for any Hunter.

Lumian's primary goal was to gather information about Theresa's probable Sequence. If she happened to be a Sequence 7 Actor or a Sequence 6 Recipient, Lumian was confident in executing a successful surprise attack. However, if she turned out to be a Fallen Tree Spirit of a specific tree with a changed lifeform, the effectiveness of the Spell of Harrumph might be questionable.

Although Franca had suggested using Magic Mirror Divination to gather this intel, Lumian still wanted to witness it firsthand. The desires of a corresponding Sequence of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway couldn't be easily concealed!

Chapter 417 The Importance of Intel

The concert began as scheduled, and Theresa and Aldina separated, completely immersed in the orchestra's performance.

In Trier, the citizens displayed immense enthusiasm and respect for the arts. During the Living Artists Exhibition, the daily number of visitors surpassed that of those who frequented various execution grounds to witness executions.

Franca withdrew her gaze with regret and closed her eyes, savoring a symphony that evoked the image of moonlight glistening on a tranquil lake at night.

Lumian had received no formal education in this domain, so his knowledge of music was limited to three things. Firstly, Aurore's occasional humming and the melodies of shepherds' flutes. Secondly, songs from places like Ol' Tavern, Cordu Village Square, and Salle de Bal Brise, which were often laced with suggestive lyrics and rhythms. Lastly, the psalms from the Eternal Blazing Sun's Mass. However, now, he found himself deeply moved by the band's performance. His mood gradually settled, as if he could envision Cordu Village and the highland pasture nestled in the darkness.

It was a serene night, adorned with a canopy of stars.

Lumian wasn't entirely captivated by the music. From the corner of his eye, he scrutinized the lady impersonating Theresa, carefully observing her every move.

The imposter Theresa appeared highly emotional, her demeanor shifting from sorrowful during the lyrical passages to exuberant during the ensemble. She seemed to be completely attuned to the fluctuations in the music.

Lumian pondered whether she had an exceptional affinity for music or if she harbored a strong desire to perform and convey something profound.

If it was the latter, Lumian could tentatively conclude that the imposter Theresa was likely a Sequence 7 Actor. Based on his understanding of the Mother Tree of Desire's boon pathways, Beyonders typically wouldn't be so profoundly affected by the desires associated with a Sequence after moving beyond it. However, there might still be a more pronounced influence compared to ordinary individuals.

As time passed, the orchestra played three symphonies, culminating in the conductor turning, bowing, and addressing the audience.

“The final movement is titled ‘The Girl Under the Moon.’ I'd like to invite the most beautiful lady here onto the stage, so that our entire orchestra can have the honor of taking a photograph with her as a beautiful memento.”

Franca quickly lowered her head.

She had no desire to be chosen and become the center of attention.

This would embarrass her a little.

Nonetheless, she wasn't overly concerned. Having altered her appearance and height with Lie, she could only be considered ordinary and mildly charming. After all, the greatest challenge for a Demoness of Pleasure when tailing a target lay in their inherent beauty, charisma, and attention-grabbing aura. If she didn't become invisible or remain concealed in the shadows, she ran the risk of being discovered.

Such requests were not uncommon in Trier, and several women in the audience were eager to step forward.

To them, being chosen would symbolize a significant acknowledgment of their appearance and demeanor.

Lumian's gaze swept over the attendees, eventually settling on Aldina and the imposter Theresa.

The former seemed visibly excited, her anticipation clear in her demeanor. On the other hand, the latter's body exhibited an abnormal tension, and she trembled slightly, a mix of excitement and nervousness evident in her demeanor.

Upon witnessing these reactions, Lumian couldn't help but smirk slightly, gaining a rough understanding of the fake Theresa's situation.

The desire for recognition was one of the fundamental desires of a Sequence 6 Recipient of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway!

Hence, it was likely that the fake Theresa was a Sequence 6 Recipient, not yet a Sequence 5 Fallen Tree Spirit. Otherwise, her yearning for recognition wouldn't be so overwhelming.

The invitation to bring the most beautiful lady onto the stage for a photograph wasn't a mere coincidence—Lumian had sponsored it himself.

After discovering that the first stage of the date between the imposter Theresa and Aldina involved attending a concert, Lumian had sought out the Delan Music Hall to ascertain the evening's repertoire. He had then devised a plan in line with Trier's style based on the title of the final movement, attempting to bribe the orchestra.

Ultimately, he had succeeded in convincing the conductor, not just because he had used Franca's 1,000 verl d'or, but also because Lumian had provided a compelling reason.

It was a romantic gesture intended for a certain lady, a gesture driven solely by affection, without any expectation of reciprocation or leaving a name.

Romantic gestures had a special place in the hearts of these Trier artists.

Through this event, Lumian sought to “detect” whether the fake Theresa harbored any exceptional desires.

A skilled Hunter couldn't simply wait for opportunities to arise; they had to know how to create them!

Of course, the precondition was having sufficient intel. Otherwise, planning with precision or avoiding easy detection would be impossible.

The conductor scanned the room and singled out the woman whom he believed to be the most beautiful.

He also assumed that she was the object of the young man's affection from earlier in the day.

Such extraordinary beauty was a rarity!

The woman, with her bright gray eyes and neatly tied black hair, gracefully approached the orchestra, while the fake Theresa slouched in her seat, unable to hide her disappointment, regret, and frustration.

“How should I address you?” the conductor inquired of the lady in the elegant black court dress beside him.

With a gentle and melodious voice, she replied, “Clarice.”

Franca gazed at Clarice with admiration, finding her exceptionally captivating, although she couldn't quite pinpoint the reason why.

After the concert concluded, Lumian and Franca decided not to tail Adaina and the impostor Theresa. Instead, they headed straight to Room 502 in Apartment 25 on Rue M nier in the square district.

This was a rented apartment that they had temporarily cleared out by paying. Across the way, in Room 401 of Building 23, was Adaina's chosen rendezvous point for clandestine meetings.

Tonight, she would return to that very room with the fake Theresa.

With Lumian and Franca's enhanced Beyonder vision, the distance between them and the target room wasn't enough to obscure their view of the situation inside. Their primary objective now was to remain hidden and avoid detection by the fake Theresa while observing.

Before long, the window of Room 401 in Apartment 23 across the street illuminated. Several gas wall lamps cast a bright glow throughout the living room.

Immediately after, Lumian witnessed the passionate embrace between the fake Theresa and Adaina as they approached the glass window.

Their longing was palpable, but they also wanted to shield their intimate moment from prying eyes.

“Quite focused,” Lumian teased with a smile.

Franca didn't reply, her breathing growing heavier.

“Be prepared,” Lumian whispered to Franca, making sure the fake Theresa's attention was on her companion.

Franca nodded slightly and responded in her usual tone, "Got it."

Her primary mission was to watch for any unexpected developments.

Without hesitation, Lumian activated the black mark on his right shoulder.

A faint light shimmered beneath his clothing, and he vanished from the shadows of Building 25.

Across the street in the apartment, Adaina and the impostor Theresa wrestled with the curtains while they were stuck to one another, attempting to shield the glass window.

Lumian's form materialized suddenly, two meters behind the fake Theresa, facing Adaina, whose eyes were clouded with desire and cheeks flushed.

Adaina's eyes narrowed, and her pupils dilated. She couldn't fathom how a tall, slender man with blond hair and blue eyes had appeared in her room out of nowhere.

For a moment, it felt like she was trapped in a surreal dream. The disjunction between her physical senses and her bewildered mind was stark.

Almost simultaneously, Lumian let out a heavy harrumph.

Two beams of white light shot from his nose, targeting the fake Theresa and affecting Adaina.

In unison, the two women closed their eyes and slumped into unconsciousness.

Lumian acted swiftly, catching the fake Theresa before she could fall to the ground. He then raised his right palm and delivered a firm strike behind her ear.

A mystical coma combined with a physical one!

With the fake Theresa safely incapacitated, Lumian gently placed her on the carpet, keeping a cautious distance from the unconscious Adaina.

He squatted beside the woman he suspected to be a Recipient and began searching her dress and handbag for canisters.

Having familiarized himself with the mystical drugs commonly used by the Bliss Society, Lumian located a canister of sedatives, unscrewed the cap, and brought it to the fake Theresa's nose, allowing her to inhale its contents for more than ten seconds.

Only then did Lumian exhale a sigh of relief. He stowed away the sedative, no longer concerned about the impostor Theresa waking up suddenly.

He stood up and made his way to the glass window, where the curtain was only partially closed. Lumian signaled to the fifth floor of the opposite building with his thumb and index finger forming a circle, while his other three fingers remained extended.

He was informing Franca that the operation had been successful. The target was under control, and she could join him now. Lumian might need to employ Magic Mirror Divination later.

After drawing the curtains shut, Lumian turned his attention to the unconscious fake Theresa and sighed inwardly.

Intel is crucial...

The same principle applied to the synergy of abilities.

Without a rough understanding of the names and characteristics of Sequence 9 to Sequence 5 within the Actor pathway, along with knowledge of their corresponding desires and states, Lumian wouldn't have taken such a calculated risk. He wouldn't have been able to resolve the situation in just a few seconds.

As for the Contractee's three abilities, if they weren't carefully chosen and harmonized, they could easily be defeated by a Sequence 9 Hunter, much like the mouth-orifice monster in Cordu's ruins. Even with Spirit World Traversal and the Spell of Harrumph, Lumian might stand a chance against some Sequence 5s, but it would be a formidable challenge to sustain such efforts.

As Lumian waited for Franca to join him in the adjacent apartment to Adaina's,

Browns Sauron remained hidden in the shadows, her keen senses tuned to the situation behind the wall as she gazed at the building opposite.

She could already discern the sounds of Adaina and the fake Theresa returning to the apartment, along with the rustle of curtains being drawn. These scenes seemed to play out vividly in her mind.

The situation tormented her. She felt a deep sense of injustice and pain, as though she had willingly sent her lover into the arms of her romantic rival.

Despite her understanding that this was a carefully planned trap and that her lover and her rival had been intimate on multiple occasions, she still felt an overwhelming sense of worry and anxiety. The sporadic noises only fueled her imagination with various scenarios.

Standing there made her uncomfortable, and leaning against the wall didn't alleviate her unease.

Observing Franca and her young lover's concealed apartment across the way, Browns Sauron couldn't help but mutter with frustration, "Why haven't they launched their attack yet?"

Chapter 418 Beatrice

Franca ended her concealment and quietly opened the door to Adaina's apartment. The first thing she saw was Lumian, a tall, slender man with blond hair and blue eyes. He was crouched beside the unconscious Adaina, vigorously wiping her face with a wet towel.

Franca lowered her voice and asked in confusion, "W-what are you doing?"

Shouldn't the target be the Bliss Society member posing as Theresa, the art dealer?

Lumian smirked and responded, "I've had a sudden thought.

"Actors can impersonate anyone. Once the imposter Theresa establishes an intimate relationship with Adaina, she can easily control this female companion and impersonate her to infiltrate the Red House Café's female orgies."

"Allowing Adaina, who everyone is familiar with, to convey the Bliss Society's philosophy and hidden evil god faith will definitely be more persuasive and trustworthy than a new member."

At this point, Lumian gazed toward the bedroom in a chilling tone and said, "Perhaps, the real Adaina is hidden in a corner here, in the form of a corpse."

Franca couldn't help but imagine such a grim scenario and took a deep breath.

She straightened her back and muttered to herself, “Not a bad story. I’ll share it with Jenna later.” After her muttering, she silently closed the door and approached Lumian, refuting his suspicion. “Browns Sauron is likely a Demoness of Pleasure. Surely, she can recognize the authenticity of her female companion? Furthermore, she interrogated Adaina and knows the approximate abilities of an Actor.”

Lumian, who had been “assisting” Adaina in removing her makeup, confirmed that despite her altered appearance, she was still the same person.

He chuckled and said, “Based on your description, I don’t fully trust Browns Sauron’s judgment. She clearly has less experience in the Beyonder domain than you. However, since she has the Demoness Sect backing her and confirmation has been made, the interrogation results are still credible.”

Lumian didn’t spare Adaina another glance. He gestured towards the fake Theresa, who had been hit with a triple dose of unconsciousness—the Harrumph Spell, a physical knockout, and a sedative from the Bliss Society. He turned to Franca and said, “Use Magic Mirror Divination to confirm if she’s a core member of the Bliss Society.”

While Lumian had already suspected the fake Theresa was a core member based on her performance at the concert, they hadn’t followed her closely the entire way. They had instead been waiting at their destination. What if she had sensed something amiss and had switched to a decoy during the journey?

Considering the fake Theresa possessed a unique concoction like the Bliss Society’s truth serum, she was undoubtedly connected to the Bliss Society. However, it remained uncertain if she was a core member.

This answer would guide Lumian’s subsequent actions.

Next door to Adaina’s apartment, Browns Sauron continued to monitor the commotion. She could hear faint and indistinct conversations but couldn’t detect much else.

Adaina and the fake Theresa plan to chat for a while and have some red wine? Though it isn’t overly passionate, it holds a romantic ambiance... Browns Sauron glanced at the building opposite, mentally urging Franca and her lover to begin, hoping they wouldn’t wait until the fake Theresa was completely engrossed in desire before launching a surprise attack.

In the living room of Adaina’s apartment, Franca raised her right palm and rapidly created a crystalline icicle. With precision, she pierced the fake Theresa’s hand, drawing a small amount of blood.

The fake Theresa instinctively pulled back her arm but hadn’t broken through the three-layered coma.

Franca then smeared the blood on a mirror, intending to use it as a medium and sacrifice to ask an entity from the Underworld, hoping to obtain a unique identification of spirits.

Once all preparations were complete, Franca picked up the mirror and recited in Hermes,

“The shadow that lingers in the Underworld, the friendly creature that can be communicated with, the unique eye that never dies...”

The surface of the blood-stained mirror suddenly emitted a dark green hue, and a pale-white aqueous light rippled.

After reciting the incantation, Franca asked respectfully, “Is the owner of the blood Theresa, the art dealer?”

“No,” came an indifferent voice from the mirror, as if enduring the corrosion of endless time.

Franca posed her second question.

“Is the owner of the blood a core member of Trier's Bliss Society?”

The indifferent voice gradually faded.

“Yes.”

Franca refrained from asking further questions, as the entity only answered two at a time.

She watched as the pale-white aqueous light rapidly receded, and the blood on the mirror's surface strangely seeped in and disappeared.

Turning to Lumian, Franca reported, “She's a core member of the Bliss Society.”

Lumian let out a soft sigh and said, “Unfortunately, I don't know how to perform a lobotomy. Anthony Reid isn't a Hypnotist yet, so we can only channel the spirit directly.”

Using the truth serum didn't guarantee that the fake Theresa wouldn't resist when she woke up. Given her faith and abilities, a fierce battle was inevitable when the time came, and there was a high chance that she would be killed. In that case, he decided to proceed now.

As Lumian spoke, he crouched down, his right palm ablaze with crimson flames.

The flames intertwined and swiftly converged, turning white.

Gently pressing his right palm against the fake Theresa's body, the blazing white fireball vanished into thin air.

Rumble!

A muffled explosion erupted from within the fake Theresa's body. She trembled a few times before life left her completely.

Franca had been busy preparing the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell during this entire process.

While she could forcibly channel the spirit while the fake Theresa was unconscious, it wasn't a safe option. It could lead to unnecessary trouble for her mind and spirit, and the fact that the target believed in an evil god meant there was a risk of corruption if she wasn't careful.

Next door to Adaina's apartment, hidden in the shadows, Browns Sauron sensed a subtle fluctuation.

Powers have been used. Has it begun? She wondered if the imposter Theresa had initiated the powers of the Mother Tree of Desire pathway to flirt or if Franca Roland and her lover had already infiltrated the target location and were preparing to attack.

Without hesitation, Browns Sauron, dressed in a black hunting suit, silently pushed open the window and crawled out through the shadows. She clung to the outer wall and slowly approached Adaina's apartment.

Franca completed the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell, and the dark and deep mirror aqueous light flickered, "reflecting" a beautiful yet pale-white face.

"What's your name?" Franca asked directly, using the simplest question to test the effect of the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell.

The fake Theresa's illusory voice replied, "I'm Beatrice Incourt."

"What's your true identity?" Franca continued to ask.

Beatrice Incourt's expression remained stoic as she replied, "I run a winery. It's from my deceased husband."

Franca then directed the question to the crucial point.

"Are you a core member of the Bliss Society?"

"Yes." Beatrice Incourt's nod was subtle.

Franca didn't delve into the Bliss Society's faith or any recent revelations. Although she wasn't as fearful of the evil god, the Mother Tree of Desire, as she was of the Celestial Worthy of Heaven and Earth for Blessings, to the point of not daring to channel spirits, she was aware of the risks involved. She knew what to ask and what not to ask, what was safe, and what could lead to corruption.

After a brief pause, she inquired, "Do you know Lumian Lee or Ciel Dubois?"

Beatrice replied in a daze, "I don't know."

I don't know... Lumian, who was listening, raised his eyebrows.

None of the core members of the Bliss Society know about Susanna Mattise's ultimate plan?

Franca was equally surprised. She frowned and asked, "Why did Susanna Mattise go to the market district before her death?"

Beatrice Incourt replied calmly, "She wanted to awaken the great divine tree and allow its roots to enter Fourth Epoch Trier, allowing its crown to reach into the kingdom of the false gods."

"Did she say what the awakening process was?" Franca pressed.

Beatrice Incourt's voice grew colder, and her expression became more wooden.

"She didn't say."

They really don't know that Susanna Mattise wanted to capture me and sacrifice me to the Mother Tree of Desire? Lumian's thoughts raced, and he whispered a name to Franca: "Maipú Meyer."

Franca understood and asked the spirit in the mirror, “Where is Maipú Meyer?”

Maipú Meyer was the former manager of Théâtre de l’Ancienne Cage à Pigeons, Susanna Mattise's paramour, and her most trusted subordinate.

Beatrice replied in a voice increasingly resembling the dead, “I'm not sure. He's a man, and we despise and keep a distance from him.”

Upon hearing this, Lumian was enlightened, roughly understanding the reason.

Regarding the Tree of Shadow, Susanna Mattise, who had become an evil spirit, was extremely extreme in her choices and actions. She didn't inform the other core members of the Bliss Society about the detailed situation or progress. Only her direct subordinates, Maipú Meyer and Charlotte Calvino, knew the complete plan.

After Susanna Mattise and Charlotte Calvino's deaths, Maipú Meyer, who had relied on the former to become a core member of the Bliss Society, was ostracized and suppressed. Consequently, he didn't divulge the relevant issues to anyone else.

This made sense. A secret organization centered around “desire” would undoubtedly experience a multitude of desires, both open and covert. Maipú Meyer was a visible anomaly among the core group that advocated women and loved women.

Franca pondered for a few seconds and changed her question, “What are Maipú Meyer's plans for the time being?”

Beatrice's face turned pale-white and green, and even her stiff expression vanished.

“A few weeks ago, Maipú Meyer mentioned that he wanted to sneak back to the market district to do something. I haven't seen him since.”

Sneak back to the market district to do something? Lumian and Franca were alarmed by this revelation.

Chapter 419 New Priestess

Why did Maipú Meyer return to the market district?

This question raced through the minds of Lumian and Franca simultaneously. They felt a lurking danger.

Could it be that Maipú Meyer genuinely cared for Susanna Mattise and sought retribution?

But even then, exposing the true killer and concealed secrets to the other core members of the Bliss Society seemed like the most fitting way to exact revenge!

Without harnessing the collective might of the entire organization, he would inadvertently aid his adversary, Lumian, by relying solely on his own capabilities!

As Lumian observed Beatrice's pallid countenance and vacant gaze, he tried to think from Maipú Meyer's perspective and find a rationale for his actions.

Maipú Meyer, a Sequence 6 Recipient, harbors an insatiable hunger for recognition and a fervent desire to accomplish something noteworthy...

Despite facing rejection and isolation from the other core members of the Bliss Society, he does have a motive to make a substantial solo contribution and earn genuine recognition...

While revealing the existence of the Tree of Shadow to Beatrice and the others could be seen as a contribution, it doesn't measure up to rectifying his past mistakes independently to appease the Mother Tree of Desire to the fullest extent. The latter would truly earn him recognition...

This peculiar competition might be perplexing to ordinary folks, but it isn't unusual for a Recipient to engage in it...

The question now is: What does Maipú Meyer hope to achieve in his quest for recognition?

Is it revenge against me? Although a direct confrontation holds little hope for him, he could pose a significant threat if he conceals himself in the shadows and suddenly influences me at a critical moment. After all, I lack a substitute ability, and my physical strength hasn't undergone a qualitative change compared to ordinary people. He could eliminate me with a revolver.

However, Maipú Meyer must have heard plenty about me from Susanna Mattise. There is a good chance he knows about the angel sealed within my body. Isn't he concerned that corruption might erupt after my demise, potentially dragging him down as well?

If he were to perish, how could he satisfy his yearning for recognition?

Or is it the mere notion of taking a formidable foe with him to the grave that would leave the other members of the Bliss Society awestruck and filled with genuine remorse and admiration? Is his ultimate aim to climax in tears and be propelled towards his demise by desire?

Otherwise, does he aspire to make a sacrifice akin to Susanna Mattise's? Yes, securing recognition from the Mother Tree of Desire is a higher-level and noble pursuit.

But the Tree of Shadow is severely damaged and won't recover for a long time. How can he even make such a sacrifice

Lumian struggled to decipher Maipú Meyer's plan or intentions, vaguely grasping his motives.

Nonetheless, Lumian couldn't suppress a surge of frustration and violence at the mere thought of a pair of icy eyes lurking among the pedestrians, nearby tenants, dance hall customers, and peddlers. It was as though someone close to him had been replaced by Maipú Meyer without anyone's awareness. He burned with anticipation to unmask the Actor.

The detrimental effects of the contracts, items, and brands on him continued to destabilize his emotions.

Franca, on the other hand, didn't dwell on this. Although the Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell endured much longer than standard spirit channeling spells, it was not entirely boundless. There was still a time limit, one measured in minutes. She was unwilling to squander this precious time on analysis that could be postponed.

She continued to ask Beatrice Incourt.

"Of all the members of the Bliss Society, who does Maipú Meyer have the closest relationship with?"

Beatrice's voice grew increasingly ethereal.

“He had the strongest bonds with the members in the market district, but they're either deceased or captured.”

Genuinely ostracized... Franca's hopes dimmed, and she inquired further,

“Who in the Bliss Society is most likely to be privy to Maipú Meyer's whereabouts and plans?”

Beatrice responded lifelessly, “No one, not even the new high priestess.”

Franca found herself at a dead end and changed her line of questioning.

“Who is this new high priestess?”

Beatrice's eyes were piercingly vacant as she replied, “It's Siber.”

“What's her true identity?” Franca pressed.

Beatrice's eyes on the mirror's surface seemed far more translucent than before.

“I don't know. She joined us later. At that point, we had evolved beyond a simple lesbian organization. We started concealing our true identities.

“Siber might still be a theater actress.”

On the outer wall of Adaina's apartment, Browns Sauron clung there in silence, resembling a colossal black spider.

Through the curtains, she could only discern two shadows not far away. The voices were even fainter and more distant than before, but she could vaguely identify them as female.

Adaina and the imposter Theresa are still conversing? That doesn't add up. At this proximity, with an Assassin's acute hearing, I should be able to clearly hear them even through the sealed glass window and thick drapes... What's happening inside? Browns Sauron's anxiety and curiosity swelled as she attempted to extend invisible spider silk through the gap in the window.

Franca's Magic Mirror Spirit Channeling Spell had reached its limit, and she concluded it rationally. She watched as Beatrice Incourt's image faded from the mirror's surface.

She wasn't overly disheartened because she already knew the crucial details about several core members of the Bliss Society and their weekly gatherings' time, venue, and method.

But there is no need to personally track them. They are unaware of Ciel. Even if the Rose School of Thought locates them, they wouldn't extract any valuable information... Franca cast a glance at Lumian, stowed away the mirror, and dispelled the wall of spirituality.

Amidst the howling wind, the two of them sensed a disturbance at the window and the presence of a figure that seemed human.

The wall of spirituality had isolated their movements, reducing interference but also affecting their perception and surveillance of the surroundings.

Franca's form abruptly vanished, and Lumian sidestepped, evading the window's direct line of sight.

They didn't rush to attack because they had a vague notion of who was outside.

Amidst the commotion, Browns, who had discreetly pried open the window, witnessed the curtain “self-consciously” part to either side, revealing her own silhouette.

Just as she was about to react, she spotted Franca Roland's current disguised countenance.

Their gazes locked, and silence hung in the air for over ten seconds.

Finally, Browns snapped out of her trance and inquired with concern, “Where's Adaina?”

“She's unconscious.” Franca gestured towards the carpet near the window.

Browns scrutinized her female partner, then glanced at the motionless impostor Theresa, and queried once more, “Has it been dealt with?”

“It's resolved,” Franca replied calmly.

The spirit channeling had already come to an end!

Browns's gaze darted between Franca and Lumian, her expression a mix of surprise and confusion. She inquired,

“When did you launch the attack?”

Before the curtains were fully drawn... Franca was about to respond, but she hesitated, realizing that revealing the timing of the attack might expose Ciel and her combat abilities. Instead, she quickly changed her response and smiled.

“Why don't you take a guess?”

Browns Sauron recollected the faint movements she had sensed but found no overt signs of a battle.

This left her even more astonished.

Could this wild Demoness and her young partner be truly that formidable?

Are their richer experiences and varied gains truly that advantageous?

Consumed by jealousy, Browns leaped into the room and shut the window.

She doesn't seem concerned about being attacked by us at all... Is she inexperienced, or does she have great confidence in the Demoness's various substitutes? Or is there something she's relying on? Lumian observed with indifference, making no move.

Franca maintained her smile and said, “We've gathered some intel, including information on the current high priestess of the Bliss Society and a few core members.”

She began recounting the information she had acquired from Beatrice.

The more Browns listened, the more astonished she became.

They managed to gather so much intel?

This should have taken a significant amount of time!

When did they attack and how long did they take to finish the battle?

It couldn't be that the impostor Theresa was ambushed the moment she entered the room and approached the window, could they?

Based on her observations, this member of the Bliss Society appeared to be a Sequence 6 Recipient, on par with her and Franca Roland, even surpassing the suspected Sequence 7 Pyromaniac, Ciel Dubois!

Franca paid no heed to Browns's reaction and continued, "I'm pleased to inform you that our problem is simpler than we thought, and it's been resolved. Now, it's your problem. Heh heh, Beatrice isn't the only core member of the Bliss Society with an interest in the Red House Café."

She was subtly suggesting that the Demoness Sect should "take over" in eliminating the remaining members of the Bliss Society.

"Are you instigating me?" Browns asked sharply.

Franca replied with a smile, "No, just a reminder."

While they continued their conversation, Lumian returned to Beatrice's lifeless form, crouched down, and conducted a more thorough search.

This time, he discovered banknotes and gold coins amounting to 1,500 verl d'or, along with a neatly folded note.

Lumian unfolded the note and read the Intisian written on it: "Go to the hostel and retrieve the painting within three days."

Hostel... What hostel? What painting is this referring to? This seems like a deal made by the authentic art dealer, Theresa, but somehow, the receipt ended up in the hands of the impostor? Where is the real Theresa now... We forgot to inquire about this... Lumian pondered the implications as he held the note.

He stood up, prepared to question Browns Sauron about the real Theresa's situation. Although Browns recognized that Franca was trying to instigate her, she couldn't deny that Franca had a point.

Browns looked down at Adaina, attempting to rouse her.

At that moment, all three of them halted simultaneously and directed their attention toward Beatrice Incourt's lifeless body.

The light over there seemed to dim slightly, and the corpse underwent a subtle transformation.

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Chapter 420 Beyond Item

Beatrice Incourt may have already been lifeless, but something within her appeared to stir. Slowly, it seeped out, rising like invisible steam, as if it sought an escape into some distant darkness.

This caused the ambient light to dim, making the apartment's ceiling appear strangely ethereal. Lumian, Franca, and Browns all felt an uncanny sensation, as if they were under scrutiny.

It wasn't as if an actual gaze was directed at them; rather, it was as if they were the sole occupants of the entire building, with no obstructions to the crimson moonlight in the sky, which inevitably cast an eerie glow upon them.

Thump, thump. Lumian's heart raced.

The two Demonesses, skilled in divination, experienced an overwhelming sense of imminent danger.

With a sudden snap, a translucent boil of blood materialized on Beatrice Incourt's lifeless face, followed by a strange, tree-like wart with a brownish hue.

The wart burst open, oozing blood-colored pus, wet and sticky.

Wh— Lumian's pupils dilated, caught off guard by this turn of events.

Although he had taken the lives of more than a few members of the Bliss Society and had spent some time beside their corpses, he had never encountered anything like this. Death ended everything. How could a corpse cause an unsettling undercurrent to surge around it?

Even though Lumian didn't fully grasp the situation, he swiftly formulated a plan.

He glanced at the hazy, illusory ceiling and the faint movements within the walls. His intention was to step forward, seize Beatrice's lifeless body, and “teleport” to the Albert Mines, a place he had visited previously.

The deeper they ventured into the Fourth Epoch Trier's underground, the greater the peril. Various corruptive elements that led to a loss of control lurked there. Even with a corpse on the verge of mutation, it shouldn't pose a significant issue.

That place was inherently an amalgamation of problems!

Lumian planned to utilize Spirit World Traversal for a third time, returning to the surface and avoiding any danger by abandoning Beatrice's body.

While Lumian made his decision, Franca instinctively moved toward Beatrice's lifeless form, which now had a second tree-like wart.

Her right hand reached into the concealed pocket of her dress, aiming to retrieve the ancient mirror she had discovered underground.

This ancient mirror was connected to a strange and perilous mirror world. She could attempt to encase Beatrice's body within it, allowing one form of danger to counteract another!

This would buy them precious time for further deliberation. Ultimately, whether the departed believer of the Mother Tree of Desire triumphed or the enigmatic mirror world absorbed the corruption and “stilled” the mutation, it wouldn't directly impact Franca, the humans present, or the surrounding residents.

Compared to them, the inexperienced Browns Sauron's initial reaction was to incinerate the remnants of spirituality in the corpse with her black flames, freezing the emerging mutation. This was the most Demoness-like approach to disrupting the deteriorating situation.

At that very moment, Lumian and the others sensed a significant dimming of the light around them, as if the crimson moon had vanished, leaving only a few dim wall lamps.

Instinctively, Lumian turned his gaze to the window and discovered that the glass had turned pitch-black, no longer offering a view outside. It had transformed from a “window” into a sealed barrier.

Simultaneously, the formless entity that had been slowly emanating from Beatrice's body appeared lost, unable to find its path to the infinite darkness. It seemed to meander aimlessly, gradually receding.

Their mystical connection to an unknown entity dissipated. Lumian, Franca, and Browns suddenly lost the sense of being “watched” from afar and “illuminated” by unseen eyes.

Thud! Thud! Their heartbeats slowly returned to normal as they witnessed the tree-like wart on Beatrice's body wither rapidly, and no more blood boils emerged.

The darkness surrounding the corpse gradually receded, and an imperceptible object began attaching itself to the diamond necklace adorning Beatrice's corpse.

Beneath the crimson moonlight, the building at 23 Rue Ménier lay concealed in darkness. Every window remained void of light, with no signs of life to be found. It exuded an eerie stillness and a sense of foreboding, reminiscent of a haunted house.

Across the street, within an apartment room, an unusual and ornate mirror rested in a spotless hand.

The mirror was adorned with intricately designed black serpents that intertwined. Each “snake” featured a large crimson eye on its head, devoid of a mouth or fangs.

In that precise moment, the mirror's surface remained crystal clear, revealing a well-lit scene.

Gas wall lamps emitted a warm, yellowish radiance from the windows on every floor of the building, where various domestic scenes played out.

The elderly guard on the first floor smoked a cigarette butt he had collected and leaned against the lobby wall, savoring the tranquility of the night. On the second floor, a couple occupied the living room, one engrossed in a novel, the other unfolding a newspaper in front of them. Near an ajar window on the third floor, a half-naked man kept a cautious eye on the door, ready to make a hasty escape to the street at any moment...

Meanwhile, on the fourth floor, Lumian, Franca, and Browns found themselves perplexed. One contemplated using his abilities to discern an escape route from the “crime scene,” while another delved into a concealed pocket with her right hand, seemingly searching for something. The third member appeared to have a premonition and distanced themselves from the other two.

Another spotless hand extended and lightly grazed the peculiar mirror, encircled by the one-eyed “snakes.”

In an instant, the well-lit building disappeared from the mirror's surface, and the silent, gloomy apartment at 23 Rue Ménier began to illuminate one by one. Figures were reflected one after another, and distant sounds could be heard.

...

Lumian surveyed the room and realized that Adaina's apartment had returned to its usual state. The unsettling anomalies, like the impenetrable darkness and the strange glass windows, had all dissipated.

Beatrice Incourt's corpse had reverted to its original form, and the horrific transformation now felt like a mere nightmare.

Lumian, who had been ready to whisk Franca away at a moment's notice, relaxed somewhat and exchanged a look with Browns Sauron.

The Demoness Sect won't just send such an inexperienced member to investigate Franca...

Had one of the powerful Demonesses, who had been covertly observing the situation, intervened to help resolve any potential anomalies?

This behavior doesn't seem characteristic of a Mid-Sequence Beyonder. A high-level Demoness, or a Sequence 5 Demoness of Affliction wielding a godhood item?

No wonder Browns had entered so openly, seemingly unconcerned about potential attacks from me and Franca.

I wonder if the hidden Demoness had seen my Spell of Harrumph...

Franca shared a similar thought. She diverted her attention from the window and regarded Browns Sauron.

She expressed her guess calmly but didn't inquire further. She looked down at Beatrice's corpse and asked with curiosity and confusion, "The necklace appears to have changed."

Lumian also noticed this transformation. The transparent diamond on the necklace seemed to reflect the light from the gas wall lamp in a captivating manner, causing his heart to race and his mouth to go dry.

Could it have become a Beyonder weapon similar to Fallen Mercury? Had the previous boons returned to their source because there were no abnormalities? Lumian formed a rough conjecture. He approached the corpse and knelt down cautiously.

As he reached out to touch the necklace, a multitude of desires surged uncontrollably, making him quickly retract his hand, shivering from the bloodlust.

With items like Flog and a host of contractual negative effects, he was no longer suitable for contact with the necklace, which had the power to awaken the deepest desires.

"You handle it," Lumian said, standing up and gesturing for Franca to take care of the necklace.

Franca accepted the task without hesitation and carefully removed the diamond necklace with anticipation.

Without further delay, the two of them bid farewell to Browns and made their way back to the market district.

Avenue du Marché.

Franca had successfully dealt with Beatrice and stood a chance of passing the Demonesses' audit. She had also acquired a Beyonder item that complemented the abilities of the Demoness of Pleasure. Her good mood was evident, and she almost hummed a tune to express her positive feelings.

She glanced at Lumian, who walked beside her in silence.

"What's on your mind?"

“I'm wondering where Maipú Meyer might be hiding...” Lumian replied, his tone serious. “Let's go underground now.”

Franca was taken aback for a moment but quickly understood Lumian's thoughts.

“Do you think Maipú Meyer might return to the place where Susanna Mattise once conducted the sacrifice to the Tree of Shadow?”

“Perhaps.” Lumian wasn't entirely certain, but he felt there might be some clues or traces left behind.

Franca, feeling confident in her gains from the spoils of war, didn't attempt to dissuade him. Together with Lumian, they entered Underground Trier from the Avenue du Marché entrance.

Using a fireball for illumination, they navigated a relatively familiar path, passing by the collapsed mine where Rentas, a member of the Bliss Society, had been buried and the location where Jenna had been drugged. They ventured deeper into the altar area, a place they had previously avoided.

The area was marked with scorching signs, devoid of any living creatures or the malevolent aura that once lingered. It was as if it had been exposed to intense sunlight for days, leaving behind only piles of withered bones from various creatures.

The cave's collapses and crevices had been filled with soil and rocks. Lumian examined the area carefully and noticed fresh marks around the original altar.

These marks clearly didn't belong to the same person and came from different “visitors.”

As Lumian examined the marks and the deep-rooted cave-ins, memories of the Tree of Shadow, the Samaritan Women's Spring, and the Iron and Blood Cross Order's conspiracy flooded his mind.

These seemingly disparate elements all pointed to one thing: They, directly or indirectly, pointed to the underground, to the hidden histories and perils lurking beneath Trier.