

Inevitability 61

Chapter 61: Description

The more Lumian listened to the lady in front of him, the more he concurred.

He was uncertain about what would happen at a higher Sequence. Among the few Beyonder creatures he had interacted with, the threat posed by the fellow with the vortex-shaped proboscis was far inferior to the monster carrying a shotgun.

Although he had become a Beyonder, significantly improving his close combat ability and exploitation of the environment, the problem primarily lay with the Contractee monster.

Firstly, it did not display a relatively strong pursuit ability. Secondly, it lacked long-range attacks. Thirdly, its invisibility ability was not ridiculous. It was completely countered by a Hunter's grasp of the surrounding environment and minute traces.

Moreover, it had the common problem of monsters. It did not have high intelligence and was not as combat-intelligent as the shotgun monster. It had easily stepped into the enemy's trap.

With all of this combined, the final outcome was obvious. Lumian just never expected it to be equivalent to a Sequence 7.

He didn't even compare it to the shotgun monster, recognizing the vast difference between the two. The shotgun monster was a force to be reckoned with, while the mouth orifice monster was weak.

Ability, intelligence, preparation, improvisation, environmental factors... There are too many variables that can affect the outcome of a battle... Lumian concluded inwardly and asked without much hope, "Can I directly pray for Contractee powers?"

The lady chuckled. "That's a good way to kill yourself."

She casually explained, "In theory, it's possible. After all, the power sealed in your body isn't limited to the Sequence 7 equivalent. But can your body withstand such a tremendous boon or rather, corruption? If you don't mind turning into a monster, a puppet of that existence, or transforming into another creature, then go ahead. Tsk, then it won't be long before I see you personally turning your sister into a sacrifice."

Lumian's hair stood on end from the woman's words, and a chill ran down his spine, realizing that he wasn't ready to advance beyond his current level.

He cautiously asked, "So, the most significant boon I can handle right now is a Dancer?"

"Yes, that's why I waited for you to become a Beyonder and digest some of it before telling you about it," the woman explained, taking another sip of her green liquid.

"Only when your mind, spirituality, and body have improved significantly will you have a chance of resisting the corruption attached to the boon. Then, you can slowly control the power.

“As your Soul Body and Body of Heart and Mind strengthen, and your body adapts to the slight changes brought about by the power of the boon, you can consider Alms Monk.”

For Lumian, the most crucial thing was to learn the mysterious dance. Initiating the incomplete activation of the thorn symbol would significantly improve his ability to explore the dream ruins. Therefore, he nodded slightly, no longer thinking about Alms Monk and Contractee.

“How should I pray?”

He had already learned the duality ritual, but he still didn't know the target's honorific name, domain, and corresponding ingredients.

“Ahem,” the lady coughed.

Then, she spoke solemnly, “What I'm about to say shall leave my mouth and enter your ears... You must not tell anyone, or you'll harm them.”

Leave my mouth and enter your ears... This is a sentence Aurore likes to write... Has this lady read one of her novels? Lumian thought.

“I understand.”

He thought for a moment and asked, “Will anything go wrong from hearing it?”

The lady took a sip of absinthe fennel and smiled.

“When did you have the illusion that there's nothing wrong with you?”

Lumian was stunned for a moment before looking down at his left pec.

The lady scoffed.

“You belong to the group of individuals who are on the brink of being corrupted. Luckily, the mark left by that great existence was activated, and the corresponding power descended upon you, sealing the source of corruption and establishing balance.

“Next, you will perform a ritual to confront the power within the seal and pray for the corresponding blessings. It is akin to proactively withstanding a certain level of corruption.

“So, why should you be afraid of minor issues that you hear?”

The more I hear, the more I feel that there's a huge problem... Lumian wasn't too confident.

The lady shook her head and smiled.

“Do not fret. When I reveal the corresponding words, I will provide you with a sufficiently concealed environment and secure protection. In the future, it would be best to perform the ritual in the ruins, where there is gray fog and the protection of the great existence. It will not directly draw the attention of that entity.

“Furthermore, before the ritual, scramble every segment and description. Attempt not to piece them together and analyze them in a complete manner. Otherwise, heh...”

She chuckled and did not elaborate on the outcome, but Lumian could imagine what would occur. Observing that he did not inquire further, the woman nodded slightly.

“Let us commence.

“The first part is the Power of Inevitability.

“Using it is sufficient. It corresponds with your black thorn symbol. The complete name of that being is not something you can comprehend at the moment. Even I must provide some concealment before daring to contemplate it.”

For some reason, Lumian felt the light around him diminish slightly, but he was unsure.

At that moment, the woman controlled her expression and said solemnly, “The second part is:

“You are the past, the present, and the future.

“You are the reason, the result, and the process...”

As the lady enunciated each word with precision, Lumian felt his senses spin. He realized that a vortex of dark wind was enveloping him.

The table, on which his absinthe fennel rested, writhed as if imbued with a life force of its own.

Suddenly, a sharp sound echoed.

An ebony worm, as long as an adult's index finger, slithered out of the wooden board, and an ominous aura spread instantaneously.

Before Lumian could observe the worm's features, the woman sitting across from him lowered her cup filled with the green liquid and slammed it onto the grotesque creature, reducing it to a pulpy mess.

Next, the woman produced a patterned napkin, wiped the glass's base clean, and wrapped the worm's remains in it.

She took another sip of the absinthe fennel, as if nothing untoward had occurred, and emphasized, “Remember, the first and second parts must be recited in ancient Hermes. Jotun, Dragonese, and Elvish are acceptable as well.”

Similar to how the initial “I” in the rite that worships oneself cannot be in Hermes... Lumian nodded to indicate his comprehension.

Although he had always been audacious, he felt slightly discomfited and uneasy when confronted with the strange phenomena that kept manifesting during their conversation. His heart raced, but the enigmatic woman acted as if she had merely detected some impurities in their meal. She continued,

“The third part can be spoken in Hermes. The text is as follows:

“I implore you,

“I beseech your benediction.

“I plead with you to grant me the power of Dancer.

“Remember, the three sentences are progressive.”

These words did not elicit a new environmental shift. The anomalies that had caused Lumian's unease and trepidation gradually subsided.

Lumian committed them to memory earnestly and followed the woman's instructions to scramble the words, to prevent any potential issues.

The woman savored the remaining absinthe fennel with satisfaction.

“The rest of the ritual is similar to common ritualistic magic.”

“The corresponding ingredients are gray amber, tulips, cloves, and deer musk. Choose any two to make candles. The remaining two can be used as herbs, essential oil, and extract during the ritual.”

Lumian furrowed his brow as he recalled the dualistic ritual he had learned.

“The spot representing the deity should have an item that's closely related to the deity, but my thorn symbol is on my chest. I can't skin it, right? Besides, I doubt it's useful even if I skin it.”

The power was sealed in his heart and Spirit Body.

The woman nodded slightly.

“Didn't I tell you to make candles?

“When making the candle, take 5 milliliters of blood from your chest. It doesn't matter if it's more or less. In any case, fuse it into the material and let it become a part of the candle.

“In the ritual, the candle is placed in the deity's location. There's only one candle.

“Because of your blood, the candle is 'awakened' by ancient Hermes. After becoming a symbol, it will point directly at you. Then, with the subsequent description, it will activate the power sealed in you to a certain extent.”

It feels like a special variant of the dualistic ritual. Aurore didn't mention that it could be done like this, so not many people know about it... Lumian thought for a moment and asked, “Can I use perfume with gray amber?”

He remembered that his sister had it, and she liked to call gray amber 'ambergris.'

The woman nodded. “Sure, use it like an essential oil.”

I possess the gray amber in that case. I have some cloves at home... Lumian pondered where he could acquire tulips and deer musk.

After much contemplation, he could only come up with three possibilities:

Firstly, Aurore, being a Warlock, might have already prepared the required materials. Secondly, the materials could be found at the administrator's residence. Thirdly, the padre's house could be a potential source.

Lumian decided to inform his sister about the ritual and break down the instructions into individual words. He planned to learn the corresponding ancient Hermes and Hermes words from her and inquire about the availability of the materials.

If she didn't have them, he would explore other options.

As the lady was about to depart, Lumian hastily questioned, "What was that lizard that crawled out of the deputy padre's mouth?"

The lady smiled and replied, "I cannot explain it to you."

Lumian struggled to maintain his composure and thought, Why not just say you don't want to tell me...

After the lady left, Lumian retrieved the pen and paper he had brought and jotted down the ritual instructions in a disordered manner. He then numbered them in the correct sequence.

Upon leaving Ol' Tavern, Lumian scoured the village for the trio of foreigners.

It didn't take long before he heard a faint tinkling sound.

Lumian's lips curved into a smile as he quickened his pace. As expected, Leah wore two bells on her veil and boots, Ryan donned a dark bowler hat, and Valentine had sprinkled powder on his head.

Lumian had an urge to open his arms and exclaim, "My cabbages, I missed you so much!" but he quickly remembered that he had not interacted with the foreigners in this cycle.

He kneaded his face to appear more serious and strode towards Ryan and the others.

As he brushed past them, he lowered his voice and said, "I know who you're searching for."

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine gaped at him in astonishment.

Lumian didn't pause; he continued walking forward.

The three foreigners exchanged glances, suppressed their peculiar expressions, and followed behind Lumian as if nothing had happened.

Chapter 62: Date

Lumian halted at the forest's edge, a short distance from his house, and glanced back at Leah and the others.

This spot was quite secluded, with no villagers passing through. The forest was thinly populated, making it easy to spot anyone hiding nearby.

As the tinkling sounds drew nearer, Leah asked with a smile, "How do you know we're looking for someone?"

Lumian remained silent. He pulled out the essential item he had brought with him.

The livre bleu from home!

He lifted the item and showed Ryan and the others the pages where some words had been cut out.

Without hesitation, Ryan nodded and said, "So you wrote the letter for help."

They had never mentioned a help letter in Cordu, let alone detailed that the letter was assembled from words cut from a livre bleu.

Unless the other party had a key informant in Bigorre, it had to be the letter writer.

Leah instinctively looked around.

The two small silver bells hanging from the veil above her head oddly didn't make a sound.

Valentine was about to ask what was weird about the people around him when Ryan asked, puzzled, "How can you be sure that we're here because of that letter?"

You told me yourself... Lumian smiled.

"There are very few foreigners who come to Cordu to begin with. Even fewer who don't buy wool, cheese, and lambs and only wander around the village to chat with people.

"Besides, I didn't say anything. I just showed you this livre bleu."

Realization hit Leah, and she laughed.

"So it's just a test."

"That's a brilliant idea. Those who don't know the letter won't understand your intentions, so they won't be too suspicious. At most, they'll think it's a prank, and you're the Prankster King of Cordu." Ryan nodded slightly.

This seemingly innocent line revealed that the trio had gleaned something from chatting in Cordu over the past few days. At the very least, they had identified the more prominent villagers and taken appropriate measures.

Lumian immediately flashed a teasing smile.

"You believed it? You seriously believed it?"

Seeing Ryan and the others' astonishment, he added, "I was just joking. I'll tell you the real reason later."

Leah gritted her teeth.

"As expected of the Prankster King of Cordu. Aren't you afraid that we won't believe what you're about to say?"

"You can choose not to believe it." Lumian wore an indifferent expression. "Or you can verify it yourself."

Valentine, visibly dissatisfied, asked anxiously, "In your letter, you mentioned that the people around you are getting weirder. What's so weird about them?"

Lumian exclaimed and cracked his knuckles.

"There's plenty. To be precise, the padre believing in an evil god, Shepherd Pierre Berry turning people into sheep and herding them back to Cordu. Madame Pualis rides a demon-drawn carriage through the wilderness. When the deputy padre sleeps, a translucent lizard-like creature crawls out of his mouth. Naroka is clearly not dead, but she wants to go to Paramita. Louis Lund, the administrator's male butler, has just given birth to a baby. The owl from the Warlock legends flies back to the village from time to time..."

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine grew increasingly shocked as they listened. They didn't want to believe it, but they felt that the kid before them couldn't invent so many absurd stories.

They were all seasoned official investigators who had dealt with numerous Beyonders incidents, many involving evil gods and mystic arts. However, none were as ludicrous or exaggerated as what they were hearing now. Only the padre believing in evil gods sounded normal.

More importantly, most of the incidents they had previously handled stood independently. At most, two or three would occur simultaneously. Moreover, they were closely related to each other, but Cordu had too many horrifying abnormalities!

What kind of place is this? Almost instantly, similar thoughts raced through Leah, Ryan, and Valentine's minds.

They suspected they had inadvertently entered the legendary Abyss or Hell!

When Lumian stopped, Leah couldn't help but ask, "You're not joking, are you?"

Was there anyone normal in this village?

Lumian smiled.

"I haven't finished speaking. There's another abnormality.

"This is the third or fourth time I've talked to you about something like this. Ryan, Leah, Valentine, my cabbages."

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine weren't surprised that Lumian knew their names. It was inevitable when they had been chatting in the village.

They were even more astonished and puzzled by the first half of the sentence.

"What do you mean?" Valentine asked with a frown.

"What I mean is that we've been repeatedly experiencing the past few days. In other words, we've fallen into a time loop." Lumian didn't let the three foreigners guess and provided a standard answer.

Without waiting for Ryan and the others to question him, he briefly mentioned what they had experienced together and finally said, "Think back carefully. Was it really March 29th when you entered the village?"

Leah and the others racked their brains.

After more than ten seconds, Valentine revealed a pained expression.

"My sense of time is hazy. I can't remember the exact date of the previous two months... But I remember. I remember celebrating my youngest son's birthday before I set off. His birthday is..."

Valentine raised his head and blurted out in shock, "April 10th!"

In other words, the actual date now is mid-to-late April? Judging from the looks of it, the number of cycles I went through before I had my memories wiped can't be more than a couple. It can't even be more than once... Yes, that was the first cycle. The loop hadn't even begun, so I could send a letter without the river's help. When the loop happened and time rewound, the corresponding memories would be replaced, but material objects beyond the range wouldn't be able to turn back? Lumian had a new theory about the letter.

He nodded imperceptibly and said to Ryan and Leah, "You can also wire the outside world and get the current date in a way that won't raise any red flags."

"When the time comes, you'll believe me."

"Yes, yes! Send a telegram!" Valentine snapped out of his stupor. "Ask the higher-ups for help!"

Lumian looked at him as if he were a fool.

"Ask for help?"

"In the face of such a bizarre time loop, what do you officials usually do?"

Ryan fell silent for a moment before saying, "Stamp it out directly to prevent the corruption from spreading."

"Therefore, asking for help now is as good as suicide." Lumian smiled and shrugged.

Valentine replied fervently, "According to the rules, we have to report back ASAP. I'm willing to sacrifice myself for this!"

"..." Lumian was stunned.

Such people exist?

No, I have to get rid of this guy immediately, or everyone will die together!

Fortunately, Leah and Ryan clearly felt that they could still be saved. They exchanged a glance and nodded.

Ryan patted Valentine's shoulder and said, "Stay calm. We still don't know what's going on. Perhaps there's a better solution."

“If we really can't save ourselves, we'll report it to the higher-ups.”

“That's right,” Lumian hurriedly added. He recounted the discoveries and speculations minus the symbol on his chest, the dream ruins, the mysterious lady, and the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society. Finally, he said, “The key to the problem most likely happens on the twelfth night. We have to survive until then. Only then can we truly resolve the issue in the next cycle.”

Seeing that he had revealed so many details and that they could verify them all, Ryan and the others were completely inclined to believe him. Valentine calmed down and remembered his wife and children.

Leah exhaled. “No wonder you know us and know we're looking for someone.”

It turned out that they had communicated in a previous cycle.

She subconsciously touched the silver bell above her head, wanting to do a divination, but she held back when she recalled the abnormalities Lumian had described.

She didn't want to blow up because of a divination that shouldn't be done before the real investigation began.

Ryan thought for a moment and said to Lumian, “You're telling us this because you want us to cooperate with you and your sister?”

“Very astute, my cabbage.” Lumian laughed and said seriously, “First, wire the outside world, saying that your investigation has made some progress. The padre seems to have a certain issue. Then, ask what the lizard-like thing that crawls out of a mouth is. This is the least likely to cause a destructive blowout of all the abnormalities. Ah, right, confirm the real date and be careful in how it's done. Don't let anyone outside suspect anything.

“Secondly, my sister will invite Madame Pualis to my house for afternoon tea this afternoon. I hope that you can sneak into the administrator's mansion with me and do a search.

“As for the future, it depends on the information we obtain today.”

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine looked at each other and felt that Lumian's request wasn't too unreasonable.

This was what they would have done.

The four of them arrived at the village square. Ryan went to wire the outside world while Leah, Valentine, and Lumian waited under the elm tree outside.

After calming down, Leah glanced at Lumian and asked curiously, “You're a Beyonder, and so is your sister?”

“Yes.” Lumian didn't hide it.

Leah laughed. "Aren't you afraid of being arrested by us?"

"We're in the same boat now. In the face of an emergency where the boat is about to sink, we can only help each other." Lumian shrugged. "As for the future, we'll talk about it later. It's still unknown if we can escape this loop."

"That's true." Leah turned her head and looked at Valentine.

The reason why she brought up this topic was to let her companion understand this and not do anything stupid.

Valentine's expression remained cold as he nodded imperceptibly.

Leah then asked about something she was more concerned about.

"Why can you keep the memories from before?"

"I'm not telling you." Lumian laughed.

Without waiting for Leah's response, he spread his hands and said, "I'm just joking. Actually, I'm not sure either. I somehow retained my memories, and it's only from the last two cycles."

"Think back to what happened back then. Perhaps this is very important," Leah said after some thought.

Lumian said sincerely, "I've been thinking, but I haven't figured out anything. Perhaps I'll only suddenly realize when I encounter something."

Leah was about to help analyze the situation when Ryan, who had received a reply, walked out of the administration building.

Chapter 63: Shocking News

Leah and Valentine asked Ryan in unison, "How is it?"

Although they had already believed Lumian's words, it was inevitable for people to hope for luck. They still held onto the hope that perhaps the problem wasn't that serious because the kid wasn't knowledgeable enough to exaggerate.

Ryan looked around and saw that there was no one else around the elm tree. He spoke in a low voice, "I was afraid to ask too directly. I only know that the real date is already late April. I don't know the exact date."

Leah and Valentine fell silent.

They had indeed fallen into a strange time loop!

Judging from the various files and information, this was definitely not something the three of them should face or deal with.

They were seasoned Beyonders who had handled many Beyer incident. It was the first time they had encountered such a serious and abnormal situation.

Leah couldn't help but turn to look at Lumian. "What kind of place is Cordu?"

There were abnormalities everywhere, each more exaggerated than the last!

"I don't know either." Lumian had an "innocent" expression. "Before the loop, this place was beautiful and the people were simple. Everyone was normal and hospitable."

He didn't tell the three foreigners that the person standing before them was also one of the abnormalities.

Ryan sighed and said, "I've never encountered so many abnormalities at once, and every one of them is serious."

"This is the most dangerous situation I've ever faced," echoed Valentine.

Lumian was already a little numb to this. He sneered and said, "It's normal that you haven't encountered it before, because those who have encountered one are dead."

"..." Leah looked at him with a smile. "Don't say anything if you can't say something nice. People like you won't survive past childhood elsewhere."

"Killed in the cradle?" Lumian mocked himself and asked Ryan, "Did you get an answer about the deputy padre?"

Ryan nodded.

"In the past few years, similar legends have emerged in various places across the Northern and Southern Continents.

"Legend has it that Heaven banished a group of sinful elves to the ground. They can only reside within human bodies, hoping to redeem their sins and gain absolution before returning to Heaven.

"In some versions of the legend, these elves appear as translucent lizards.

"However, the elf I'm referring to is not the ancient elf race. It is more akin to a mixture of fairies and various spirits."

Again in recent years? Lumian recalled that the legend of Madame Night had only surfaced recently.

What was wrong with this world?

He pondered for a moment before asking, "Did they specify which deity's Heaven it is?"

Ryan shook his head.

"What's remarkable is that every person who claims to have seen an elf believes it is from the kingdom of their local deity."

The local deity referred to the orthodox gods of the local faith.

Heavens of different deities? Lumian gazed up at the azure sky.

Did that lizard-like elf come from the sky?

However, according to Aurore, beyond the sky lay the cosmos. Each star represented a world.

So, were these extraterrestrial beings?

Or were they from an astral plane beyond mysticism?

As Lumian's thoughts raced, he asked curiously, "In some versions of the legend, these elves appear as translucent lizards. What about the other details?"

Ryan shook his head once more.

"That's all they could uncover in a short period. They may need to communicate with headquarters for more information."

Leah pondered and spoke, "I am familiar with the legend of elves."

"I once met a native of Lenburg who shared that farmers in many regions of the south-central zone have reported mischievous fairies in recent years. These creatures known as Alpes¹ would vandalize their homes and fields or play pranks on them."

The south-central zone referred to the area where Lenburg, Masin, Segar, and other small countries were located. It also included a few areas in the Intis Republic, the Loen Kingdom, and the Feynapotter Kingdom.

Most of them were located in the highlands, mountains, forests, areas filled with ruins and legends.

Lumian listened attentively and concluded, This is not an isolated phenomenon...

"Each elf seems to have their unique way of causing trouble," Ryan mused. "And the lizards that inhabit human bodies are perhaps the most malevolent. It is uncertain if they are the most dangerous. With so many abnormalities in Cordu, the parasitic elf shouldn't be an isolated phenomenon. Perhaps someone wants to use it to control the deputy padre."

Very clear line of thinking... Lumian looked at the villagers who were returning home after finishing their work and said to Leah and the others, "Meet me behind the hill where the administrator's castle is at 3:30 p.m."

"Will you join me to search for clues?"

"Of course," Ryan agreed.

Leah, however, called out to Lumian before he left, "Is that all? You should brief us on the situation in the castle, its inhabitants, and Madame Pualis' abnormality. We cannot explore and search without preparation."

Lumian did not want to recall Madame Pualis' matters, but he had to admit that Leah's request made sense. He had to endure the discomfort and tell them the entire story.

Ryan and the others were mentally prepared, but they still looked a little dull upon hearing the tale.

Leah lightened the mood with her tinkling laughter.

“It does not matter to me. I might experience such a thing in the future. This is an opportunity that most men never encounter. You must cherish it.”

However, Valentine ignored her joke and whispered with a cold expression, “All of this needs to be purified—purified!”

Lumian did not want to provoke Valentine and waved his hand.

“See you in the afternoon.”

After taking a few steps, Lumian turned around to look at Ryan warily and asked, “Did Bertrand have any knowledge of the contents of your telegram?”

Bertrand was responsible for the telegraph, and if he knew about the date and the legend of the elves, it meant that the administrator knew as well. And if the administrator knew, Madame Pualis would know too.

“Don't worry,” Ryan said reassuringly. “We have a secret code. He won't be able to decipher it.”

Lumian breathed a sigh of relief only then and left the village square, heading back to his building.

As he walked a distance away, he spotted Ava Lizier herding a flock of white geese back home.

“Hey there, isn't this our Spring Elf?” Lumian tried to push the bloody and cruel scenes from the Lent celebration out of his mind and greeted Ava with his usual quip.

Ava seemed a little embarrassed.

“I haven't been chosen yet!”

Her exquisite facial features made her grayish-white dress look less rustic.

“That won't be a problem,” Lumian said with a smile. “Reimund and I will help you campaign for votes.”

Ava looked surprised. “You don't know?”

“What don't I know?” Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

Had something happened in the village that wasn't a part of the “historical” process?

Ava observed his expression and suspected that he was teasing her.

After a few seconds, the girl frowned in concern and said, “Reimund's missing. You didn't know?”

“Huh?” Lumian was so shocked that he couldn't hide his expression as usual.

In the previous, previous cycle, he and Reimund Greg had met almost every day from the second day of March 30th until April 5th, Lent.

Back then, they had followed the waterside ritual procedure to lift Reimund, who had thrown the last offering, and throw him into the river. Like the others in the past, Reimund swam further away and could only return home after leaving the ritual site. He wouldn't leave the house until night.

In the two cycles that followed, Lumian had too much to do and didn't have time to find Reimund.

But now, Ava was telling him that Reimund was missing today!

This was something that had never happened in the previous cycle!

Upon seeing Lumian's expression, Ava's aqublue eyes cleared of confusion.

“You really have no idea... Reimund's father may come to you today to ask where Reimund has gone.”

Lumian suppressed the tumultuous waves in his heart and asked, “When did Reimund disappear?”

Could it be that something happened because I didn't follow the historical process of finding him?

“Two days ago,” Ava recalled. “It's said that he didn't return after leaving the house in the afternoon of the 29th. His family assumed he was at Ol' Tavern or chatting with the Greenwatchers. They only began searching for him last night. They should be asking you today...”

She paused and lowered her voice.

“They suspect Reimund of sneaking away because he doesn't want to learn how to shepherd.”

They think I instigated him, and are questioning me later? Lumian roughly understood what had happened.

The afternoon of the 29th reminded him of the beginning of the cycle.

The last two cycles had started on the afternoon of the 29th!

In other words, Reimund disappeared from the beginning of the cycle? This means that perhaps no one deliberately changed the course of history because it was too late... Then why is there such an anomaly and difference? Lumian fell into deep thought.

Ava glanced at him and asked softly, “Do you know where Reimund went?”

“I haven't seen him in the past few days,” Lumian said truthfully.

He began to suspect that Reimund's disappearance had something to do with being thrown into the river during the previous cycle.

However, it was impossible for Reimund to leave Cordu because of this. That would trigger the loop.

After bidding farewell to Ava, Lumian forced himself to remain calm and returned home.

He couldn't be bothered to discuss anything else. Initially, he divulged Reimund's disappearance to Aurore.

Aurore's countenance turned solemn as she furrowed her brows and whispered, “If you hadn't mentioned it, I would have completely forgotten about this person...”

She donned a simple rose-red dress and paced back and forth. Lumian began to contemplate potential reasons.

After a while, Aurore gazed at her brother and uttered solemnly, "I recollect that the crux of the Lent Waterside ritual is to offer sacrifices to the concept of a water source symbolized by the river. Is it probable that Reimund, who was thrown into the water, was also regarded as a sacrifice and was taken away by a certain entity?"

"Subsequently, as there was no corresponding tangible reward, the cycle portrayed his absence as a disappearance."

Lumian shook his head. "That will trigger the cycle."

Humans departing Cordu and the surrounding vicinity acted as a trigger.

Aurore asked in a profound voice, "What if it's in the form of a corpse?"

Chapter 64: Weapon

In the form of a corpse?

Lumian's heart sank upon hearing that.

If Reimund's body had left the loop due to the sacrifice, he wouldn't be able to revive through the loop. Once the abnormality in Cordu was resolved, he would truly be dead and not just missing.

Although Lumian wasn't willing to admit that a foolish chap like Reimund was his friend, they had known each other for almost five years. They had played together, pranked together, and experienced many things together. Regardless, he couldn't treat him as a stranger.

Recalling the past, he realized that other than Aurore, Reimund was probably the person he interacted with the most.

Didn't Aurore often say that the fools are the lucky ones? Why is this happening? Lumian couldn't help but retort, "Even if he became a corpse, there will still be a spirit. It will trigger the cycle."

Aurore sighed softly.

"Perhaps the entity receiving the sacrifice isn't interested in spirits and only wants flesh and blood? Perhaps He didn't want to trigger the loop and only wanted flesh and blood instead of Reimund's spirit, leaving him in Cordu or directly destroying him?"

In that case, Reimund's corpse was equivalent to pure matter without any spirituality. It could leave the loop without triggering a reboot.

Upon hearing his sister's retort, Lumian's mind instantly replayed what might have happened.

After everyone left the water, Reimund swam further away. Suddenly, an invisible force grabbed his legs, covered his mouth, and dragged him to the depths of the river, where he drowned.

After that, his spirit would remain at the bottom of the river or be destroyed. His corpse would drift to an unknown place and become a sacrifice...

At this thought, Lumian suddenly became inspired.

“Regardless of whether Reimund's spirit was left behind or destroyed, once the cycle restarts, he should appear in the form of a ghost.”

“Logically speaking, that's correct.” Aurore nodded thoughtfully. “After dark, I'll hold a psychic ritual and see if I can find Reimund's spirit. Yes, it's best if we have something he often uses as a medium.”

Lumian replied without hesitation, “After exploring the castle in the afternoon, I'll go to Reimund's place. His parents are looking for me to ask about his whereabouts anyway.”

When the time came, with his Hunter skills and Lumian's vigilance, it wouldn't be difficult for him to obtain an item that Reimund had used.

“Okay.” Aurore didn't object.

Lumian exhaled and asked, “Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, are you capable of channeling spirits?”

“As a Mystery Pryer, I possess knowledge on various subjects,” Aurore chuckled in self-deprecation. “How did your conversation with the three foreigners go?”

Lumian quickly recounted his discussion with the enigmatic lady and his conversation with Ryan, Leah, and Valentine, but he avoided mentioning the entity's prayer.

Aurore listened attentively and let out a sigh.

“It's perilous to actively resist corruption, but it's the only way to explore the dream ruins, uncover their secrets, and find the key to break the cycle. It'll be a difficult journey for you...”

“What's so terrible about it?” Lumian patted his chest. “I'm saving myself.”

Aurore nodded slightly.

“You can use my gray amber perfume. We have lilac at home, and I also have deer musk and candle-making ingredients. Only tulips need to be acquired elsewhere.

“I remember Madame Pualis has a garden, but I don't know if it's blooming.”

“It has bloomed,” Lumian affirmed with certainty.

During the last cycle, when he and Aurore visited the castle to borrow the carriage, they noticed that many flowers in the garden had already bloomed, which was unusual for early spring in the mountains.

Aurore acknowledged tersely.

“Regardless, you must explore the castle in the afternoon. You can pick a few flowers while you're at it. Will that woman send those items into the dream ruins for you?”

“Yes,” Lumian replied, feeling confident in his assumption.

Aurore pondered for a moment before saying, "I'll give you the Integrity Brooch before you depart this afternoon. Madame Pualis' castle is filthy, and it might involve the undead. It could be very useful."

"It's not necessary. Keep it with you to protect yourself from Madame Pualis," Lumian insisted, anticipating his sister's objections. "Valentine is a fanatical believer of the Eternal Blazing Sun. According to you, as a Beyonder, he should have chosen the Sun pathway. He would be more useful than the Integrity Brooch."

Based on Aurore's observations over the past few years, fanatical believers of the Eternal Blazing Sun typically chose the Sun pathway.

This also made sense. Eternal Blazing Sun believers who chose the Sun pathway tended to become more and more fanatical unless they didn't believe in this true god from the beginning.

"That's true," Aurore conceded. "You can practice the simplest way to activate Spirit Vision. Afterward, take a nap at noon to replenish your energy. I'll teach you the ancient Hermes and Hermes words required for the ritual tonight."

Upon hearing his sister's words, Lumian suddenly recalled something she often said when she was rushing her manuscripts: "The schedule is tight, and the task is enormous."

At 3:20 PM, Lumian stood on the hillside overlooking the administrator's castle when he spotted Madame Pualis approaching the village with her lady's maid, Cathy. Madame Pualis wore a stunning grayish-blue dress that had a slight fluffiness to it, and her hair was tied back in an elegant bun.

As soon as they were out of sight, Lumian hurried to the back of the hill where Ryan, Leah, and Valentine were already waiting. They appeared to be in their original clothes, having made no preparations for what was to come.

Lumian was surprised to see that they were unarmed and asked, "You're not carrying any weapons?"

Ryan, who was only slightly taller than 1.7 meters, smiled and replied, "I don't need to carry a weapon with me."

Valentine, dressed in a white vest and a thin blue tweed coat, echoed Ryan's sentiment, "I don't need a weapon."

Leah, on the other hand, pulled out a small, exquisite, silver revolver from her Marseillan boots. "This is my weapon."

She flipped open the barrel to reveal different colored bullets engraved with various patterns and symbols. "They have different Beyonder effects."

Pa! Leah snapped the barrel shut and asked Lumian with a smile, "What weapon did you bring?"

One of you doesn't need a weapon, the other doesn't need to carry a weapon with him, and one has such a good-looking and powerful revolver. It makes me look silly... He lifted the dark jacket on his back to reveal an iron-black axe tucked into his belt.

Without waiting for Ryan and the others to speak, he sighed and said, "You all act like Beyonders, and I'm like a gangster preparing for a fight."

Leah chuckled, her bells tinkling along, "You have a talent for self-deprecation."

"It's better than being mocked by others," Lumian pointed to the steep hill behind them. "Let's climb up now. We can't waste any more time."

"Alright." Leah, in her tight dress, was the first to climb.

She moved with agility and her balance was exceptional. Using the grooves in the terrain, she ascended the hill with ease.

What was even more remarkable was that the four silver bells on her person remained motionless and silent.

Lumian followed closely behind, using the Hunter potion to strengthen his body and scaling the previously unclimbable hill with the help of rocks and tree roots, although he wasn't as carefree and nimble as his companion.

After regaining his balance, he glanced back and witnessed Ryan seizing Valentine's shoulder and hoisting him up.

In a swift motion, Ryan vaulted onto a jutting boulder amidst the hill.

Without hesitation, he sprang forward once more, delivering Valentine to Lumian and Leah's vicinity.

Throughout the entire endeavor, his physique appeared to have expanded in size.

This left Lumian in awe.

Although the hill wasn't high, it was still too exaggerated to be scaled with just two jumps.

Hunters definitely couldn't do it!

After snapping out of his daze, Lumian looked at the castle-shaped building with two towers and the surrounding garden. He suggested to the three foreigners, "We'll go around to the back door."

"Wait a moment." Ryan stopped him and glanced at Leah.

Leah remained silent and strode two steps towards the rear entrance of the castle-like structure.

Her lips moved soundlessly, muttering something under her breath.

In the next instant, the four small silver bells attached to her veil and boots jingled.

The sound was not deafening, but it was urgent and intense.

Leah pivoted and addressed Lumian and the rest, "It's a treacherous path. A grave problem, indeed."

With that, she took two steps towards the front entrance.

Ding, ding, ding. The bells continued to ring, growing even more insistent and pressing.

"We'll likely encounter significant trouble if we attempt to enter through the front," Leah's tone was severe, but there was a hint of a smile on her face.

“What if we climb in through a window?” Ryan inquired.

Leah nodded and altered course, making her way towards the garden.

This time, although the bells rang, they were faint and slow.

Leah grinned and exhaled, “This route is safe.”

Lumian, who had observed the entire process, felt bewildered. He couldn't fathom what the three foreigners were up to.

Is this how Beyonders operate? He recollected his sister's teachings and queried, “Divining the danger?”

“Indeed.” Leah nodded and turned to Valentine. “I'll scout ahead. Be prepared.”

“Understood,” Valentine responded gravely.

“What preparations?” Lumian asked, confused.

Leah chuckled. “Prepare to cast divine spells and conjure flames.”

Then, what's the purpose of creating flames? Before Lumian could ask, Leah had strolled into the garden and headed towards the castle.

She arrived at a window and signaled that everything was clear.

“Let's go,” Ryan informed the group as he hastened towards Leah.

Valentine and Lumian followed closely behind.

As they passed a bed of tulips, Lumian reached out to pluck one, but Ryan stopped him with his forearm.

He didn't ask Lumian why he was doing this and only said gently, “There's no hurry. We can pick flowers later. If picking it causes some incident, our mission will be compromised.”

That's true... Lumian fully drew upon this experience.

Soon, they arrived at a row of windows on the side of the castle.

Chapter 65: Third Floor

The administrator's official residence was originally the castle of the Dariège nobles, with defense being the top priority. The windows were narrow and high up, making the lighting poor even during the day. However, to make it suitable for living, the owner had installed many new glass windows on the ground floor later on.

Lumian peered through the patterned glass and saw that the banquet hall was empty and deserted.

“There are very few servants...” Leah sighed softly.

With many open windows during the day, fresh air mixed with the fragrance of flowers flowed in, creating excellent conditions for Lumian and the others to infiltrate.

Taking advantage of the lack of servants on the first floor, the four of them climbed into the hall one after another. However, they didn't rush to go deeper and instead found a hiding spot nearby.

Leah turned her head towards Valentine, who was clinging close behind an ornamental pillar, and said, "I'll scout ahead; make preparations."

"Okay," Valentine nodded coldly.

Lumian was squatting behind a stone platform with a porcelain vase. When he heard this, he stuck his head out and reminded them,

"There's no need to explore the first floor.

"It's often used to entertain guests, so there's nothing unusual."

Ever since Administrator Béost and Madame Pualis moved in, his sister Aurore would visit the castle occasionally as a guest or borrow a pony. A few times, Lumian took the opportunity to follow her and freeload on cakes, bread, and drinks.

When the administrator and Madame Pualis were out, he would occasionally look for Louis Lund, the butler, and tour the first floor with him.

"I'll head straight to the stairs," Leah said, understanding.

She didn't attempt to walk in a straight line through the empty banquet hall. Instead, she hugged the wall and circled around towards the stairs.

The four silver bells remained eerily silent.

As she passed by one of the rooms, she suddenly heard footsteps approaching from very close to the door.

Lumian, in a prime position, even caught a glimpse of a male servant in a red shirt and white pants, about to collide head-on with Leah. She had no cover in sight!

Leah didn't panic. She turned around, placed her hand on the wall, and scaled the oil painting hanging two meters above the ground.

Then, she stood on her tiptoes and stepped onto the frame. She stood firmly with her back against the wall without letting the oil painting drop.

Lumian wanted to applaud because it reminded him of an acrobatic performance he had seen in Dariège last year at a circus.

The male servant left the room and instinctively looked around before walking towards the kitchen.

Just as he took a few steps forward, Leah slid soundlessly to the ground against the oil painting. Then, she rolled twice and hid behind a pillar. After the male servant disappeared from the banquet hall, she leaned against the wall again. Finally, she arrived at the staircase and confirmed that everything was clear.

Upon seeing this, Lumian darted out of the stone platform and ran over in a straight line.

He was so fast that he reached Leah in less than three seconds.

However, he wasn't the fastest. Ryan completed the journey in just the time it took to take one breath.

Valentine wasn't slow either. His physique was clearly stronger than ordinary people.

Without another word, Leah took the lead and the four of them hurriedly entered the stairs, arriving at the second floor of the residence.

There were closed rooms on both sides of the corridor, with two rooms having light shine in through the windows at the end of the corridor. The overall environment was abnormally dark.

Ryan suggested, surveying their surroundings.

“Let us split up and search different rooms. This will save time and make it easier to hide. However, we must remain no more than one room apart from each other, in case something happens and we cannot save each other in time.”

Leah and the others nodded in agreement.

Lumian promptly approached the nearest room, pressing his ear to the door to listen for any movement inside. After a moment, he deftly turned the handle and slipped inside.

The room belonged to a maid.

He searched for a while, but found no clues. He moved on to the next room.

In this way, the four of them carefully avoided the servants and explored most of the second floor.

Towards the end of their search, Lumian arrived at the door of the room that had traumatized him: Louis Lund's bedroom!

According to the historical sequence of events, this butler should have given birth yesterday.

His stomach had been torn open and, even with sutures, he would not recover quickly. He must be recuperating in bed... Lumian thought to himself, contemplating whether to push the door open and have a “chat” with Louis Lund.

As someone who had personally experienced bizarre phenomena, this male butler undoubtedly knew a great deal.

However, this would contradict their principle of observation and exploration. Lumian couldn't guarantee that Louis Lund wouldn't reveal his presence to Madame Pualis.

The fact that he had given birth to the other party's child meant there were no secrets between them.

Silencing him would only confirm Madame Pualis's suspicions.

What a pity. If only I knew something about hypnosis... Lumian sighed inwardly. He habitually pressed his ear to the door, listening for any sound.

Nothing.

As a Hunter, Lumian's hearing was acute enough to detect breathing from two to three meters away even with a barrier in between.

No one? Louis Lund has just given birth. Where can he go? Lumian turned the doorknob and slowly pushed the door open, peering inside.

The room was clean and free of the bloodstains he had seen before. Louis Lund was nowhere to be found.

Lumian furrowed his brow and stepped inside.

The signs of a recent human presence were evident: a blanket rumpled on the bed, a cigarette butt on the nightstand, a black coat hung on the chair, and faint footprints on the floor. In addition, there were blood stains on the edge of the bed that had not been cleaned.

Apart from this, Lumian also saw some blood stains that hadn't been wiped off from the edge of the bed.

Lumian nodded to himself. He had indeed given birth here yesterday...

Suddenly, faint voices outside the window caught his attention.

He hurried to the glass window, turned his body, and peered out.

In the stables, Louis Lund—black-haired, blue-eyed, and dressed in a white shirt, black suit, dark pants, and leather shoes—conversed with the carriage driver, Sewell, who had sent the siblings to Paramita.

Lumian was taken aback by Louis Lund's healthy and steady appearance.

Is this the person who had just given birth yesterday?

And it was a C-section!

Lumian suppressed the shock in his heart and listened carefully to what Louis Lund and Sewell were saying.

Unexpectedly, these two fellows were only exchanging experiences in gardening.

“What's the matter?” With Lumian inside the room for so long, Ryan, donning a dark bowler hat, pushed open the door and entered the room followed by Leah and Valentine.

Lumian quickly filled them in on Louis Lund's situation.

Ryan pondered for a moment before asking, “Have you heard of Earth Mother?”

The Dariège region had a border with the Feynapotter kingdom. Shepherds often went there. Coupled with his sister's basic education, Lumian was no stranger to this.

“Yes, the deity that Feynapotter believes in.”

Ryan nodded and said, “Earth Mother is associated with fertility, healing, and life. These domains are reflected in the Beyonder powers of the corresponding pathway. While I'm not saying that Louis Lund's situation is related to the Earth Mother, it's possible that his ability to give birth and quick recovery are linked to these domains.”

“Is that so...” Lumian found this plausible after some thought.

After all, men were already capable of giving birth. What was so strange about them being out and about after a C-section?

“Did you find anything?” Lumian asked Ryan and the others.

Ryan shook his head.

“They were all normal servant's quarters. We may have to check the third floor.”

Lumian felt a sense of unease wash over him.

Madame Pualis and Administrator Béost's quarters comprised a bedroom, study, solarium, and activity room, all located on the third floor.

This posed a significant risk.

“Very well,” Ryan replied without hesitation.

The four of them proceeded to sneak up to the third floor.

Many of the doors were ajar, and the corridor was brightly lit.

Lumian made a beeline for the bedroom, which was adorned with a light-colored velvet blanket on the bed, a small bookshelf stocked with bedtime reading materials, a capacious cloakroom brimming with a variety of clothes, a safe containing precious collections, a set of plush beige sofas, a table displaying five photo frames and documents, and a fluffy white carpet covering the entire room...

Lumian and company surveyed the room and simultaneously headed towards the table.

The books on the table were mostly popular novels, including Fors Wall's masterpiece, “The Adventurer 5: Vice Admiral Ailment,” and Aurore's latest work, “The Substitute Detective.” The documents pertained mainly to various matters in the Dariège area. As for the five photos displayed in the frames, four were of Madame Pualis, and one belonged to a man Lumian did not recognize.

“No photo of the administrator?” he exclaimed, surprised.

Madame Pualis was the sole subject of the four photos, each depicting her in different clothing and poses. The male photo was not of Administrator Béost, who, after all, was the male owner of the house. Wasn't this peculiar?

Leah nodded thoughtfully.

“Perhaps the administrator's status in this family is akin to that of a butler. Have you ever seen a butler's photograph displayed in someone's home?”

“Then who is this man?” Lumian inquired, pointing to the photo frame on the side.

The frame contained a color photograph of a man in his late twenties. He was wearing a red shirt, a black velvet coat, and dark pants with tassels. He sported a pair of short lace-up boots and was dressed very fashionably.

He bore a striking resemblance to Madame Pualis, with light eyebrows, bright brown eyes, and brown hair parted in an exaggerated 7-3 style. His lips were curled up, giving him the air of a hooligan who frequented high society.

All in all, this man's facial features were not extraordinary, but they were pleasing to the eye.

“Madame Pualis's brother?” Lumian hazarded a guess based on his appearance.

Chapter 66: Crib

Leah gazed at the man in the photo, lost in thought.

“After receiving the request for help, we set off two days later to gather relevant information,” she said.

“Madame Pualis's full name is Pualis de Roquefort, isn't it?” she paused for a moment before continuing, “We investigated the Roquefort family in Dariège and found no trace of Pualis.”

In Intis, a woman could choose to keep her maiden name after getting married. If there was a “de” in her name, it meant that she was once a noble. The Intis meaning of “de” was “from,” and the surname behind it was the fiefdom of the time.

“None?” Lumian was surprised. He knew something was wrong with Madame Pualis, but he didn't expect her identity to be fake!

Ryan nodded. “In Dariège, Roquefort is a large family with many members, including a provincial senator. We were in a hurry and didn't have time to conduct a more detailed investigation. We could only confirm that there was no such person as Pualis, but a man named Pulitt had been missing for over a year.”

“Pulitt?” Lumian asked. “What's his relationship with Madame Pualis? They look alike.”

Ryan shook his head. “Without enough information, it's impossible to make a guess. What we do know is that Pulitt de Roquefort was a popular dandy in Trier, and he had many illegitimate children. Many people hated and detested him. Perhaps this is why he had no choice but to leave or was forced to leave Dariège.”

“Dandyism?” Lumian was unfamiliar with the term.

Aurore subscribed to magazines and newspapers targeted towards women or focused on national affairs. There were some materials on the supernatural, but none involved male matters.

Leah chuckled. “To put it simply, it's a casanova who dresses fashionably, speaks elegantly, and acts freely.”

Lumian sighed and mocked, “The people of Trier sure know how to live life. They package their affairs as a thought, a doctrine, and a trend.”

When it came to cheating, Triers were at the forefront. The padre? In front of the Triers, he was still a child.

“In the past year, Trier has constructed numerous arcades,” Aurore remarked while sipping her marquis black tea, regaling Madame Pualis, Nazélie and the others with the latest trends from her two-story subterranean abode.

“What's an arcade? It's a covered street with glass roofing and marble flooring. Elegant and stunning shops line both sides. During the day, light filters in from above, and at night, gas lamps illuminate the area. Carriages are prohibited from entering. The most renowned arcade is called the Opera House arcade...”

Madame Pualis, holding a white porcelain cup filled with black tea, watched Aurore with her bright brown eyes, listening intently with a smile.

“That sounds like something I must see...” Nazélie sighed, imagining the elegance, fashion, cleanliness and brightness of the arcade.

Aurore's knowledge of the latest Intis trends was the primary reason why they had accepted the afternoon tea invitation.

After chatting for a while, the discussion turned to Aurore's work and relationships.

“Love is just so unfathomable and elusive...” Madame Pualis mused aloud.

So, this is why you fall in love with so many men at the same time? Aurore couldn't help but inwardly criticize.

Madame Pualis gazed at her with a faint smile and sighed.

“Sometimes, I get so angry because of his mistakes. I wish I could kill him and send him to his death, but when he's actually facing death, I can't help but save him and refuse to tell him. Perhaps, this is love...”

In the master's bedroom of the administrator's residence.

“Madame Pualis may have once fallen in love with Pulitt, a believer in Dandyism, and engaged in a forbidden relationship, resulting in her disavowal by her family. She then had to marry someone and use her family's connections to secure the administrative position in Cordu for him.” Lumian deduced this based on the stories and troupes written by his sister.

This explained why Administrator Béost's standing in the family was relatively low.

“Perhaps,” Ryan replied simply, “Keep searching, but don't attempt to open the safe or anything that may trigger an alarm.”

Lumian and his companions dispersed immediately and searched elsewhere.

Despite the Hunter's ability to observe subtle traces, Lumian still found nothing.

The same was true for Leah and the others.

They had no choice but to move to the study and search patiently.

As time passed, the four of them arrived at the end of the corridor, where a closed room stood opposite an open solarium. Beside it was a staircase leading to one of the towers.

Ryan, who had finished searching the solarium, turned to Leah.

Leah touched the small silver bell hanging from her veil, mumbling to herself as she walked towards the tightly shut wooden door.

This time, the four bells did not ring.

Leah heaved a sigh of relief and gently pushed the wooden door open.

It was an empty room with a rocking crib in the middle.

The crib was made of brown wood and installed inside a wooden frame. It was covered in clean but slightly worn cotton swaddling cloth that showed its age. The crib was empty.

This was the nursery where Madame Pualis's two children had once slept. Apart from the bed, there were no toys in the room. Scattered on the ground were wheat, barley, rice, rye, wheat, and other plants, making it look rather strange.

Furthermore, these plants were well-preserved, as if they had only been brought in a few days ago.

Valentine's body glowed as he entered the room and circled around.

Soon, he returned to the door and shook his head at Ryan and Leah.

"There's no evil aura."

"Alright." Leah looked at Lumian. "Shall we head to the tower next?"

Lumian had always been curious about the castle's two towers. He never expected to have a chance to "visit" them today.

Valentine left the strange nursery. Ryan grabbed the handle and planned to close the wooden door and restore it to its original state.

At this moment, Lumian's gaze drifted inside.

The brown wooden crib swayed gently, yet the tightly shut windows of the room and the solarium opposite, with their floor-to-ceiling panes, allowed no breeze to enter the corridor!

"Wh..." Lumian's pupils dilated.

Leah noticed his distress and turned to look.

The crib continued to sway, as though an invisible baby lay within its swaddling cloths.

Leah raised her hand to her glabella, as if trying to ease her tired eyes.

She readied herself to activate her Spirit Vision and see what lay inside the crib.

Suddenly, the four small silver bells on her veil and boots jingled, as if they were about to burst!

Ryan's face froze as he yelled, "Get out of here!"

With that, he dashed into the solarium, crashing through the floor-to-ceiling windows in an attempt to create a path of escape from the castle.

Bang!

A loud thud echoed throughout the room as Ryan hit the windows, yet there was no sound of glass shattering.

The transparent faces of young children appeared on the row of windows, some of them mere infants with pale, inexplicably terrifying faces.

As Ryan 'bumped' into them, they opened their mouths in unison and let out a haunting wail.

Their cries echoed through the third floor of the castle, casting an eerie gloom over the entire area. The walls and glass were adorned with the translucent faces of children, some wailing while others stared blankly at Lumian, Leah, Valentine, and Ryan.

Lumian shuddered with fear as he felt their cold gazes upon him.

Suddenly, Valentine's body was engulfed in a dark golden light, which quickly spread to envelop Lumian, Leah, and himself.

A warm sensation spread throughout Lumian's body, dispelling his fear and filling him with courage. He drew his iron-black axe with newfound confidence.

Meanwhile, Ryan seemed to grow taller and more imposing.

Dawn-like rays of light surrounded him, coalescing into a silver-white full-body armor and a massive broadsword of light.

With a mighty swing, Ryan cleaved at the floor-to-ceiling windows, dispersing the pale-white faces of the children into smoke as they screamed.

But the glass didn't break, and more faces appeared, their shrill cries tormenting Lumian and his companions.

"Who dares to trespass the castle?"

A woman's voice boomed, echoing through the halls.

Almost immediately, Lumian spotted a figure on the other side of the corridor, standing on the second floor.

She was a middle-aged woman with brown hair and eyes. She was rather good-looking without any wrinkles. She was the midwife who had helped Louis Lund's "delivery."

In her hand, she held a pair of enormous scissors that could decapitate a human while donning a grayish-white gown. It was as if she had just returned from pruning a branch in the garden.

She glared at Lumian and his companions and spoke in a deep, threatening voice.

"You deserve to die!"

In the subterranean two-story abode, Madame Pualis jolted suddenly, and her countenance altered.

She delicately placed the porcelain teacup on the table and smiled at Aurore.

"My apologies. I've just recollected an urgent matter that requires my immediate attention at home."

"Huh?" Aurore was shocked.

Pualis rose from her seat, her expression filled with regret.

“I had intended to stay and discuss your work and its beautiful and poignant portrayal of love.”

Aurore responded quickly, “Please, you're more than welcomed.”

“I cannot, unfortunately.” Madame Pualis shook her head. “It concerns my children.”

Chapter 67 Evil Spells

Valentine caught sight of the woman in the grayish-white dress. His eyes brimmed with hatred as he stretched his arms out as if embracing the sun.

A blinding pillar of light descended from the sky and struck the target clutching the enormous scissors.

The surroundings burst into light in an instant. The transparent faces on the walls and glass vanished before they could even scream.

The woman's body had clearly caught fire and was evaporating, but then it suddenly vanished.

Lumian found this scene eerily familiar. The mouth-orifice monster had displayed similar behavior when he was hunting it.

Invisibility!

The woman might not have concealed herself, but she certainly wasn't dead. Thus, Lumian didn't feel any relief. Instead, he approached Ryan, who now towered over him.

Ryan, covered in silver armor and wielding a broadsword of light, was the person Lumian trusted the most among those present.

It was evident that Ryan excelled at combat!

Leah stood there when suddenly, the face of a pale child emerged on the wall behind her, transforming into the woman in the grayish-white dress.

The woman's enormous scissors clamped down on Leah's neck.

Crack!

Leah's head drooped, but no blood spurted forth. Her body and head swiftly shriveled and thinned, transforming into a ragged, paper effigy that softly settled onto the ground.

Not far away, her silhouette donning a pleated cashmere dress outlined itself.

With a clang, Ryan, his face concealed by a silver visor, hoisted the Sword of Dawn and strode towards the spot where Leah had stood, sweeping the weapon diagonally at the woman.

The woman brandished her scissors in an attempt to block the attack, but was pushed back into the wall by the force of the blow.

Her form vanished once again.

As Valentine, clad in a thin blue tweed jacket, stood with his back turned, the woman suddenly replaced the swollen and pallid visage.

She leaned out and struck the nape of Valentine's neck.

“Look out!” Leah cried out as soon as she spotted the woman, alerting her companion.

Valentine snorted and crossed his arms.

Golden, illusory flames burst forth from the void surrounding him, intertwining and transforming the corridor into an ocean pulsating with the radiance of the sun.

The woman winced in agony as her body was consumed by the intense flames.

She retreated back into the “interior” of the walls, reverting to the swollen, pallid face.

The translucent face melted instantly into wisps of black gas within the golden, illusory flames before dissipating.

Clang!

Ryan's Sword of Dawn struck the same spot again, causing the entire castle to tremble.

Despite his efforts, he was still a step too late to stop the woman.

Lumian quickly grasped the gravity of the situation. The woman who had delivered Louis Lund was linked to the transparent faces of children on the wall and glass. Not only could she transform into one of them, but she could also transform into a ghost form, evading attacks and deflecting damage.

In other words, she could attack from any wall or glass on the third floor of the castle at any given time, and Ryan and the others' counterattacks were ineffective.

With this realization, Lumian immediately distanced himself from the floor-to-ceiling windows and the surrounding walls, and walked to the middle of the solarium.

At that moment, ghostly faces appeared on the ground and ceiling.

The woman suddenly emerged from behind Lumian's feet and quickly reached for his thigh with the pair of scissors.

Lumian's heart raced with a sense of danger.

Without bothering to confirm where the attack was coming from, he jumped into the air and dodged to the side.

Despite his efforts, he was still half a beat too slow. A deep gash was left on the lower part of his thigh, and blood instantly gushed out.

As soon as the drops of blood landed on the ground, the woman—who had switched spots—pointed at them and they condensed into a thin blood-colored figure.

Without any hesitation, the blood-colored figure turned to Lumian, who had rolled to the recliner, and pounced at him,

feeding on his blood and growing stronger with each drop.

At the same time, Lumian endured intense pain and felt his blood running out of control.

Almost instantly, Ryan jumped in.

In midair, he raised the broadsword of light high and slashed at the blood-colored figure, pinning it to the ground and shattering it with the transparent faces around him.

Leah had somersaulted to Lumian's side and pressed her right hand on his thigh wound.

To Lumian's surprise, the wound magically moved along with Leah's right palm, all the way down to the side of his calf, which wasn't rich in blood vessels.

The bleeding immediately decreased.

The woman suddenly appeared from the ceiling. Her brown eyes burned with a blazing life.

The blood dripping from Lumian's calf was ignited, producing a bright flame that resembled the spring sun. It quickly spread deep into the wound and into the blood vessels in his body.

At that moment, Lumian felt his life rapidly draining away.

With a pop, Ryan stabbed the two-handed broadsword condensed from light into the ground.

Around him, in the area where Lumian and Leah were, rays of dawn-like light appeared, filling all space.

In the morning light, the remaining blood-colored figures quickly melted, and the bright and beautiful flames on Lumian's calf quickly extinguished.

The second of burning had sealed his wounds together, stopping the bleeding.

Ryan pulled out his broadsword and bellowed in a deep, commanding voice, "This environment is unsuitable. We must depart at once!"

What he really meant was that the woman was not as powerful as she appeared. She was almost invincible and impossible to target due to the unique conditions on the third floor of the castle that greatly enhanced her abilities.

Without waiting for his companions to react, Ryan charged after the woman.

Although he was still slightly slower than his opponent, who could move with the aid of translucent faces, he spared no effort and attacked with powerful slashes, diagonal cuts, and stabs. He forced his adversary into a constant state of motion, forcing her to constantly shift positions after each attack.

Together with the holy light summoned by Valentine and the golden flames he conjured, the two of them managed to temporarily subdue the woman, thus preventing Leah and Lumian from being harmed.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, Leah leapt onto the armchair and dashed back and forth across the sofa, tables, recliners, and ornaments, making sure to avoid touching the ground.

Throughout this process, the silver bells on her veil and boots chimed incessantly, sometimes melodious and sometimes grating.

Lumian no longer felt safe on the ground. He climbed onto the table and scanned the ceiling above and the floor below, analyzing Leah's movements.

Drawing from his previous experience, he deduced the route the woman was attempting to use to escape.

Soon, Leah ceased her acrobatic maneuvers.

“To the tower, quickly!”

Just as she finished speaking, the woman thrust her head out of the ceiling and barked in a stern voice, “You damned bastards!”

Each word was enunciated with precision, causing Lumian and his companions' hearts to race, their heads to spin, and their vision to blur. It was a thoroughly unpleasant experience.

Valentine endured the discomfort and stretched his arms out once more.

A brilliant and pristine light flooded the ceiling.

“Let's move!” Ryan commanded.

Lumian immediately leaped off the table, enduring the pain in his calf. Stepping on the transparent faces, he raced towards the tower, with Leah and Valentine close behind. Only Ryan, covered in silver armor, wasn't in a rush to escape. He lifted the Sword of Dawn and sliced the woman who had poked her head out, preventing her from stopping his companions from fleeing.

After Leah and the others ascended the stairs leading to the tower, he turned around and gave chase with a leap.

A woman emerged from a transparent face on the side wall and let out a piercing scream.

Accompanied by the scream, a layer of black, malevolent flames ignited on the surface of Ryan's silver armor.

Ryan immediately felt his stamina rapidly depleting.

Without hesitation, he deactivated the Dawn Armor.

Spots of light resembling the morning sun scattered in all directions, along with the black flames, and dissipated into the air.

Holding the broadsword of light, Ryan took the opportunity to leap and depart from the castle's third floor, entering the stairs.

At this moment, Lumian, aware that he was a little weak and unable to make use of the environment, ran in second place. Ahead of him was Leah, whose silver bell was ringing softly.

Leah suddenly came to a halt.

Lumian hastily slowed down as he heard chattering.

He then looked ahead and was taken aback.

The tower was not large, and it could even be considered small. There were stairs leading to various firing ports.

The walls were densely packed with children.

They were dressed in different clothes. Some appeared to have just been born, while others were three or four years old. Their limbs resembled bird claws with unnaturally sharp tips.

Using their “bird claws,” these children were like birds in a forest, perching on the wall and occupying most of the area.

Lumian's scalp tingled as he saw over a hundred human children's faces, bodies, and wicked, sharp bird claws combined with an abnormal perching method. He once again felt as though his mind, eyes, and soul had been corrupted, just as when he had witnessed Louis Lund give birth.

The “children” had not yet noticed the intrusion. A small number of them were happily discussing different topics.

“The sky is so blue out there.”

“I want to go outside.”

“No way.”

“Mummy said we have to be able to retract our claws and be like normal humans before we can go out...”

At that moment, Ryan caught up to the three of them and said urgently, “Stay away!”

He then turned around and barricaded the entrance of the tower like a giant, holding the Sword of Dawn in his hand.

Leah and Valentine didn't inquire why. They ran frantically and found stairs and other obstacles to hide behind. Although Lumian didn't comprehend, his survival instincts told him to follow orders.

“All of you, come down here!”

The woman's sharp voice reverberated.

Each word drilled into Lumian and his companions' ears, weakening them simultaneously.

Immediately afterwards, the woman in the grayish-white dress appeared at the corner of the staircase. The entire tower was filled with the aura of life, and no pale faces were visible.

Chapter 68: Purification

Upon seeing that Ryan was blocking the entrance of the tower with the Sword of Dawn, the woman in the grayish-white dress felt a sense of foreboding.

She swiftly turned the enormous scissors around, clamped them around her neck, and pulled gently.

A vivid red stream of blood gushed out immediately, accompanied by her sharp cry. The blood flowed in every direction as if it had a life of its own, enveloping her entire body.

It was as though the woman had adorned herself with blood-colored full-body armor.

Meanwhile, Ryan held the Sword of Dawn in reverse with both hands and genuflected.

With a pop, he stabbed the two-handed broadsword, which had condensed from light, into the stone floor in front of him.

The broadsword disintegrated, transforming into specks of light that resembled the morning sun.

They were densely packed and innumerable, forming a flickering and violent hurricane that swept forward.

Wherever the Hurricane of Light passed, the stone floor was shaved thin. Some of the steps were flattened, and exaggerated cracks appeared. The woman was completely engulfed before she could dodge.

The blood-colored armor on her body lasted for a second before completely shattering and melting into the light.

This time, she had left the special environment on the third floor and was in a place filled with life force. She could no longer use the pale and transparent faces to shift position. She could only watch as tiny blood-colored cracks appeared on her body.

The cracks expanded rapidly and instantly turned into a hideous wound that cut through the woman.

As her screams reverberated, her body crumbled into pieces of flesh. The pieces of flesh and her spirit were still being ravaged by the storm of light until the hurricane subsided. The flesh was ground, and the spirit dissipated.

Although Ryan tried his best to prevent the Hurricane of Light from implicating the others, he was still too weak to control it. He destroyed a large swath of the walls on the side and the stairs behind him. If Lumian, Leah, and Valentine hadn't found cover in advance, they would have more or less been injured.

“Waa! Waa! Waa!”

The bird-clawed children who were climbing the wall were frightened and cried out.

Lumian and the others' ears buzzed as if they had suffered a noise attack.

“Let's go!” Ryan turned around and slammed into the most damaged wall nearby.

Crash! The wall shattered, and a large number of rocks fell.

A huge hole that humans could crawl through appeared.

When Valentine and Lumian ran over, Ryan grabbed each of them with one hand and jumped from a height of more than ten meters to a tree outside the castle.

Bam! In midair, he kicked the tree and flew diagonally away from the castle.

Leah descended on her own, using the protrusion of the castle's outer walls to descend rapidly, landing on the ground in a breath or two.

Ryan, Lumian, and Valentine waited for Leah for a few seconds as the trees shook violently. After meeting up with her, they ran to the back of the hill and left before the other servants caught up.

In less than a minute, Madame Pualis stood expressionless beside the ruptured hole at the entrance of the tower, wearing a grayish-blue fluffy dress.

The children crawling on the walls quickly accused the outsiders of being barbaric and cruel, calling out for their mother.

Madame Pualis, with an ashen face, remained silent.

In the forest beside Cordu Village.

Lumian and his companions stopped and looked back at the castle.

Leah was about to speak when she frowned and said, "I hear a baby crying, it's very close!" She turned to Ryan and the others and asked, "Can you hear it?"

Lumian was startled and listened carefully, vaguely hearing the sound of a baby crying, but it was not as close as Leah had described, in fact, it sounded distant.

"I can hear it a little," Ryan answered truthfully.

Valentine's expression changed as if he had thought of something.

At the same time, Leah's face twisted in pain, and she instinctively pressed a hand to her abdomen, where there was a distinct swelling and squirming.

Valentine quickly went over to Leah and placed his hand on her head, saying a word in ancient Hermes that Lumian had just learned, "Sun!"

Golden translucent liquid drops condensed out of thin air and sprinkled over Leah's body.

Illusory black smoke immediately rose from Leah's body, and her expression alternated between distortion and normalcy.

Finally, her abdomen returned to its original state and stopped squirming.

"Phew..." Leah breathed a sigh of relief. "I narrowly avoided becoming a monster's mother. Luckily, we took care of it in time before it could take root."

She wore a smile on her face, unfazed by the bizarre and terrifying experience.

Leah turned to Lumian, Ryan, and Valentine.

"Would you like to purify yourselves with holy water? I worry that you may unknowingly become mothers."

"Yes!" Lumian agreed immediately, but Valentine approached Ryan first. Placing his hand on Ryan's head, he uttered the ancient Hermes word, "Sun!" Holy water formed and sprinkled down, but nothing unusual happened to Ryan.

Valentine purified himself next, and no black smoke appeared.

He then walked over to Lumian and placed his hand on the hunter's head. "Sun!" he repeated, and droplets of translucent liquid fell. Lumian suddenly felt a sharp pain in his heart, as if a snake were burrowing inside. Each time it moved, Lumian's heart raced or slowed down, causing extreme discomfort.

In the next moment, Lumian heard the mysterious voice that seemed to come from an infinite distance but also sounded close by.

It wasn't as clear as in his dream, so it prevented him from entering a near-death state.

Just as Lumian couldn't take it anymore, Valentine stopped the purification and nodded coldly.

"There's nothing wrong with you either."

Phew... Lumian breathed a silent sigh of relief, feeling as though he had been pulled back from the brink of death.

At that moment, he roughly understood what had just happened.

According to the mysterious lady, he was severely corrupted by a certain hidden evil god. He could only maintain his normal state by relying on the timely seal of that great existence.

Accepting the purification of holy water was like a devil embracing holy light—he was bound to experience problems.

In other words, he was an evil god pollutant that needed to be purified!

Thankfully, thankfully. If Valentine had kept going or had been a little stronger, I would've exposed my abnormality even with the seal of that great existence... I can't undergo purification in the future. I won't even be able to find someone to exorcise the evil. I'm the evil that needs to be exorcized... Lumian rejoiced and didn't let the remnant pain appear on his face.

Upon realizing that his companions had been cleansed and all risks had been eliminated, Ryan promptly suggested, "If we make our way to the edge of the village now, we'll activate the loop. In the event that Madame Pualis discovers a clue and catches up with us, we can attempt to flee and restart the cycle."

Noticing Valentine's perplexed expression, Ryan added, "I'm concerned that if we die once during a cycle, there may be repercussions once the loop is lifted. Therefore, it's best not to perish at this moment."

"Understood," Leah agreed before Valentine could interject with any radical ideas.

Observing that his two companions had arrived at the same conclusion, Valentine simply nodded.

At that moment, Lumian glanced at them before waving his hand and declaring, "You guys go on ahead. I'm going home!"

Ryan furrowed his brow in confusion and asked, "Aren't you worried that Madame Pualis might come after you?"

Lumian grinned and replied, "I'm not like you. As soon as I entered the tower, I was attempting to avoid the monster children's gaze. They didn't spot me, and the midwife who saw me was killed by you. It seems that even channeling spirits is ineffective. How could Madame Pualis have suspected that a powerful infiltration team like yours had an ordinary person like me with them?"

"Think about it. Prior to your arrival in Cordu, no one had attempted to infiltrate the castle. The moment you arrived, something immediately occurred. Who else could be suspected but you guys?"

"If I escape with you, I'll be dragged down with you!"

Ryan, Leah, and Valentine were left speechless.

This was clearly an operation concocted by Lumian. Why did it appear as though he had nothing to do with it in the end?

Were they going to shoulder all the blame?

“Goodbye! If Madame Pualis doesn't dare to confront official Beyonders like you and the cycle isn't restarted, I'll see you at Ol' Tavern tomorrow!” Lumian waved his hand and dashed towards the edge of the forest, reminding them, “Take care, my cabbages!”

Once he exited the forest, Lumian's expression became serious.

The explanation he provided for not escaping with Ryan and the others wasn't the only reason. It was more of an excuse.

His primary objective was to return home immediately and rendezvous with Aurore.

As soon as Aurore invited Madame Pualis for afternoon tea, someone snuck into the castle, and they were the prime suspects.

Lumian had to inform his sister that if Madame Pualis came to interrogate and silence her, she should sell out the three foreigners and agree to Madame Pualis's imprisonment. She could discover and dangle a valuable secret to delay Madame Pualis for a while, preventing her from executing anyone on the spot.

Only by staying alive would there be a chance!

Even in the loop, Lumian couldn't afford to die easily in case something catastrophic occurred once the loop ended!

Furthermore, once Madame Pualis caught up with Leah and the others, if she emerged victorious, one of Ryan and the other two would trigger the loop and erase their memories. If she lost, what was there to be concerned about?

Lumian gritted his teeth and ran home through the village road, enduring the pain in his calf.

Upon seeing Aurore standing at the door, appearing completely unharmed, he breathed a sigh of relief.

“Is everything all right?”

“Is everything all right?”

The siblings both inquired simultaneously.

Chapter 69: Him?

In response to his sister's concern, Lumian shook his head and declared, “I'm fine.”

He surveyed his surroundings and suggested, “Let us talk inside.”

Upon reaching the stove, he briefly narrated his expedition with Ryan and the others. Lumian then advised his sister that if Madame Pualis were to attack them, she must surrender and betray the three foreigners without hesitation.

Considering the phenomena he had encountered in the castle, Lumian believed that the siblings could not defeat Madame Pualis. They were not even capable of handling the midwife.

Aurore listened attentively and couldn't help but chuckle.

“From a logical standpoint, your tactics are indeed the best, but why do I find it peculiar? It is as though I have become the villain in a story. Furthermore, I am not the principal antagonist—the charismatic kind.”

“What is important is the consequence,” Lumian stressed to his sister. “In your own words, one must endure the humiliation, bear the heavy burden, preserve the useful body, and wait for it to prove its worth in the future.”

Aurore couldn't help but rub her forehead. “Have I taught you too many strange things?”

“Yes,” Lumian earnestly nodded.

Aurore rolled her eyes.

“Okay, I understand. I will not confront Madame Pualis until the most crucial moment. When Madame Pualis noticed that the alarm had been triggered and attempted to leave, I did not stop her. I merely expressed reluctance and conversed with her for an additional minute. Right, please elaborate on the specifics of your exploration.”

She seated herself at the dining table and listened intently, just in case Madame Pualis were to interrogate her in anger.

Lumian pulled out a chair on the opposite side of the dining table and expounded on the expedition's accomplishments and battle process.

As Aurore listened, her expression gradually became somewhat peculiar.

“What is the matter?” Lumian noticed his sister's abnormality.

After considerable deliberation, Aurore inquired with a strange expression, “There is a portrait of a man in Madame Pualis' bedroom, and he resembles her. It's suspected that he is her brother?”

“Yes, the three foreigners speculated that he might be a missing member of the Roquefort family named Pulitt,” Lumian recounted Ryan and the others' statements, including Dandyism and the vast number of illegitimate children.

He added, “According to the three foreigners' investigation, there is no such person as Pualis in the Roquefort family.”

Aurore nodded and exhaled.

“Then I am quite sure that my guess is correct.”

Her expression remained peculiar, only growing more pronounced.

“What guess?” Lumian asked, perplexed.

Aurore gave him a sidelong glance before replying, “Perhaps Madame Pualis is actually Pulitt.”

“What? That's absurd!” Lumian exclaimed. “One is a man, the other a woman, and Madame Pualis had two children!”

“Who's to say she gave birth to them herself? Maybe the administrator did it for her,” Aurore countered, a sneer curling her lip. “And even if they are Madame Pualis's children, it doesn't necessarily mean anything. In the world of mysticism, anything is possible. Consider this: if Louis Lund can give birth to a man, then why can't Pulitt become a woman?”

“That may be true, but...” Lumian was still unconvinced.

Aurore gave him a sly smile.

“The reason I dare to make such a guess, unlike the three foreigners, is because I've heard something. Or rather, I've witnessed something.”

“Do you remember which pathway neighbors the Hunter pathway?”

“Assassin,” Lumian replied without hesitation.

He had been drawn to the name, which was undoubtedly cooler than Hunter.

“In our organization, uh—the Curly-Haired Baboons Research Society, there was a man who was fascinated by the idea of an Assassin and chose that pathway,” Aurore explained, her expression growing stranger by the moment. “At a gathering, he confided in us with a melancholy and troubled air that the potion an Assassin needs to consume after reaching Sequence 7 is called Witch.”

“Witch?” Lumian had a sinking feeling the moment he heard the potion's name.

“Yes, Witch. In the world of mysticism, Warlocks and Witches are two entirely different concepts. You used to get them mixed up and call me a Witch from time to time. It was rather unsettling,” Aurore said, taking the opportunity to enlighten him. “Drinking the Witch potion will turn you into a Witch. Acting as a Witch causes your body to undergo a complete transformation, turning you into a woman.”

Hiss... Lumian took a deep breath, relieved that his first obtained characteristic was that of a Hunter.

Had he obtained something related to the Assassin pathway, he might very well have been lost to it due to his eagerness.

“What happened to the man who was considering it? Did he drink it?” Lumian asked, unable to resist.

Aurore replied with a smile, “He agonized over it for a long time. He didn't want to become a woman, but he also didn't want to stay at Sequence 8. Eventually, someone persuaded him, 'Life is short, why not give it a try?'”

“After that, I met him again at a gathering. No, he was already a her by then. She was already a woman by then. A beautiful and charming one at that.”

“...” Lumian was momentarily speechless.

Aurore grinned at him and added, clearly enjoying herself, “In the future, should you reach Sequence 5 and find yourself unable to obtain the Sequence 4 materials for the Hunter pathway, you might consider the Demoness pathway instead. The Assassin pathway is also known as the Demoness pathway...”

Demoness... Lumian found the name “Assassin” bewildering.

The mysticism world was fraught with dangers!

He deftly steered the conversation back on track.

“So Madame Pualis is truly Pulitt the casanova.”

Even an Assassin could transform into a Demoness. A path that enabled a man to bear children was likely to transform a man into a woman.

Aurore nodded warily and gazed out of the window.

“I suspect that Madame Pualis transitioned to a woman only after reaching a specific Sequence. She had to disappear to avoid discovery by the authorities. According to the mysterious lady, the power of a deity's boon can also be divided into Sequences.

“Her abnormal pathway would also include the ability to promote fertility, manipulate life, and control the undead.”

Aurore deduced that she could manipulate life and control the undead from Lumian's battle with the midwife.

That was the same performance Madame Night, who looked like Madame Pualis, had showcased in Paramita with the undead chasing after her.

Aurore suddenly exclaimed.

“What's the matter?” Lumian asked cautiously.

Did his sister uncover another ominous truth?

Aurore scowled at her brother and replied, “At the afternoon tea, Madame Pualis said that love is unfathomable. She wished he would perish for his mistake, but when he faced death, she saved him and refused to tell the other party.

“I didn't comprehend it then, and I didn't dwell on it. Now, I wonder if she had an ulterior motive for saying that.”

Lumian was equally puzzled.

“She saved someone? When did she do that...”

Suddenly, he halted and stared at Aurore.

The siblings remembered that Madame Night had saved them by distracting the undead in Paramita.

“But that was from the preceding cycle...” Lumian was about to reject it, but he couldn't.

He and Aurore exchanged a look and realized their eyes were filled with shock and dread.

If Madame Pualis was referring to that incident, it meant she retained some of her memories from the loop.

“It's impossible...” Aurore muttered to herself. “Never mind. Let's assume it's true. I'd rather overestimate our foe than underestimate them.”

Lumian concurred. Then, he had a thought.

“Aurore, uh, Grande Soeur, considering that Madame Pualis might have been a man, did she fall in love with you?”

“I didn't do anything wrong. You were the one who spied on Louis Lund giving birth. Pualis is infatuated with you,” Aurore riposted.

Lumian muttered under his breath, “Perhaps she believes that you instigated me.

“I don't usually associate with her, but I did once bring some people to see her having an affair with the padre. She teased me for it. You, on the other hand, discuss literature and trends with her occasionally. You even go to her house to borrow a pony.”

“Huh...” Aurore's voice rose in disgust, “Then why was she trying to set me up with those awful men you told me about?”

Lumian paused before responding, “Maybe she's trying to discourage your interest in men and lead you to her instead.”

“What kind of strange things have you been reading?” Aurore glared at her brother.

Not only could Lumian provide a rational answer, but he did it with forceful verve.

“Your novels. You wrote something similar in one of them.”

“Is that so...” Aurore fell into deep thought.

After a moment, she looked out the window and said, “It's been a while, but Madame Pualis hasn't come after us. The cycle hasn't started again...”

“Perhaps she doesn't want to kill the foreigners. If an investigator sent by the officials were to be killed, it would cause even greater trouble,” Lumian speculated. “And she doesn't suspect me, so she doesn't suspect you either.”

The witness was dead, and no one else had seen him.

Aurore nodded and said self-deprecatingly, “I don't even feel like eating dinner.”

Suddenly, Lumian had an idea. "What if we go to the castle?"

"Is the perpetrator returning to the scene of the crime?" Aurore laughed.

Lumian nodded.

"I want to investigate the castle. Madame Pualis doesn't suspect me, so I can go unnoticed."

"Oh, and I haven't picked any tulips yet. I can ask for a few under the guise of making fragrances."

Since Aurore and Madame Pualis appeared to be friends, there was no issue with Lumian's actions.

Aurore thought for a moment before saying, "We can try, but we can't be sure that Madame Pualis won't cause trouble."

"Yes, if you don't return in half an hour, I'll go to the edge of the village and trigger the cycle to start again."

"Alright," Lumian agreed.

As Lumian arrived at the administrator's castle once again, the sun had already set behind the mountain, painting the horizon with a red hue.

Passing through the garden, Lumian reached the open main entrance and approached a male servant.

"Excuse me, my Grande Soeur Aurore is creating a fragrance. Could I please borrow some tulips from Madame Pualis?"

The male servant, dressed in a red shirt and white pants, responded without any hint of suspicion.

"I'll inquire with Madame."

He quickly disappeared into the castle. Shortly after, he reappeared.

"Madame says you may go straight to the garden to pluck them."

She really doesn't suspect me? Besides, it's as if nothing happened... Nevertheless, he refrained from entering the castle and headed towards the garden to search for the tulips.

It was there that Lumian spotted the flowers and a lady's maid pruning a flowering tree in the shadows.

As he casually sized her up, his gaze suddenly froze.

The lady's maid was in her forties, with brown hair, brown eyes, and a pretty face devoid of wrinkles. She was none other than the midwife who had fought Valentine and the others and was eventually killed by Ryan!

Yet, here she stood, seemingly unscathed, her face shrouded in a shadow cast by the flowers and trees.

Chapter 70: Spirit Channeling

The instant he laid eyes on the 'midwife,' Lumian's heart seemed to cease beating.

She's still alive?

I clearly saw her killed by Ryan, and her spirit was destroyed!

Lumian remembered vividly how the midwife had eventually been reduced to tiny pieces of flesh scattered on the ground. Some parts couldn't even be found.

This must be a freaking ghost encounter! No, wait, there's the sound of breathing! Lumian thought of some scenes from his sister's novels, and his heart went from stillness to rapid beating.

If it weren't for the 'midwife' not looking at him, preoccupied with trimming the branches of the flowering tree, he would have reacted to the stress.

Kacha, kacha. Tiny tree branches that grew haphazardly fell to the ground, snapping the stunned Lumian out of his daze.

He subconsciously took a step forward, walking towards the place where the tulips bloomed.

The 'midwife' didn't stop him or even turn around.

Lumian couldn't help but steal another glance at her. She was focused on pruning the branches. The shadows cast by the flowers and trees made her profile look dark and gloomy.

Not daring to linger, Lumian plucked a few tulips and left the administrator's castle.

His heart was still pounding even when he returned to the village.

After calming himself down, Lumian walked towards Reimund Greg's house. It was still too early for Aurore to trigger the cycle.

It was also a two-story building, but compared to Lumian and Aurore's house, it was clearly older, more dilapidated, and narrower. The outer wall revealed the gray color of stone amidst the many green plants creeping over it.

At that moment, the Gregs' door was wide open, allowing one to see the stove on the left, the table on the right, and the wooden buckets behind.

Lumian recalled that the wooden barrels were used for storage. There were two simple wooden beds in the space they isolated. They belonged to Reimund and his sister.

Lumian didn't knock and walked straight into the Gregs' house as usual.

Reimund's elder and younger sisters were helping their mother prepare dinner. Reimund's father, Pierre Greg, was sitting on a chair at the wooden table, drinking cheap wine with a gloomy expression.

"I heard that Reimund is missing?" Lumian asked Pierre Greg with a concerned look.

Pierre Greg seemed to have aged significantly, and the few wrinkles on his face were even more pronounced.

He looked up at Lumian and asked in confusion and surprise, "You don't know?"

At this moment, Reimund's mother and two sisters stopped what they were doing and turned to look at Lumian.

Lumian couldn't be any more honest.

“I've been busy with my own matters. I haven't seen Reimund for days.”

Pierre Greg had already inquired and knew that Lumian was telling the truth. Otherwise, suspecting that this rascal had instigated Reimund to run away from home, he would have gone questioning him that afternoon.

“Two afternoons ago—they said it was the 29th—Reimund didn't return after he left,” Pierre Gregg said with a gloomy expression. “We've been looking for him. His two brothers are still out searching. Where do you think he'd have gone?”

Lumian hesitated before responding, “He usually says that he doesn't want to learn shepherding, but he doesn't have much money on him. It's impossible for him to leave on his own. Let me see if he left anything behind...”

As he spoke, he walked naturally to the wooden barrels at the back of the first floor and passed through them to reach Reimund's bed.

The bed was very simple, as if pieced together with a few planks of wood. However, the grayish-blue bedsheets, the pillow stuffed with straw, and the quilt with traces of mending were all clean. It was evident that they were often washed.

This was because Aurore loved cleanliness and didn't allow lice to appear at home or on her body. Even Lumian had developed this habit. Therefore, when he interacted with his playmates, he would consciously urge them to maintain personal hygiene. He didn't allow those fellows to be dirty and live with lice and fleas all day.

If Reimund and the others slacked off at some point and were discovered by him to have lice, they would definitely be pranked. They might even be pushed into the river and made to wash up even if they refused to.

After a few years of “oppression,” Reimund habitually helped clean up the environment when he returned home.

“We didn't find any message,” Pierre Gregg said with a worried expression as he followed him to the bed.

Lumian sat by Reimund's bed and reached under the pillow.

He found two items—a cracked, dark-red fountain pen and an exercise book filled with handwriting.

Reimund was hungry for knowledge, but had little chance to receive an education.

In Emperor Roselle's time, villages like Cordu had mandatory township schools, housed in the same building as the administrator's office. The building also contained an army recruitment center, a recruit physical examination committee, and other institutions, but ultimately, there were only a few staff members.

In recent decades, many villages had lost their schools. The Church provided Sunday school for larger populations, but Cordu had to rely on educated elders to teach the children sporadically. Over time, some young people became illiterate again.

When Lumian was in a good mood, he would claim he needed money for drinks. So, he sold his old fountain pens and workbooks to Reimund, Ava, and others at a low price, teaching them some words in the process.

Reimund took every lesson as seriously as he did combat training and helping shepherds make cheese in the mountains to earn money.

He was determined to change his fate.

Lumian removed the fountain pen and exercise book, staring at them for a long time.

"I asked the padre. He said these are just simple words that don't form a sentence." Pierre Gregg sighed.

Lumian flipped through the exercise book, noting how the handwriting had improved from messy and ugly to something acceptable.

"True, there's no message." He agreed with Pierre Gregg before adding, "But I wonder if it's a code that can be deciphered into a sentence. You've heard a similar story, right? Aurore told it to many village children. Did they mention it at home?"

This included Reimund's younger brother and sister.

"Yes, they did." Pierre Gregg nodded.

Cordu villagers would often gather in the kitchen at night for conversation, laughter, and storytelling when they couldn't afford the tavern. First-time guests had to follow Intis social norms and bring a bottle of wine, even a cheap one.

Pierre Gregg had heard a similar story from his youngest son during such a gathering.

Lumian held up the exercise book confidently.

"I'll take it back to Aurore for her to examine and see if she can find anything."

"Alright," Pierre Gregg didn't think it was anything valuable.

After leaving the area surrounded by wooden barrels, Lumian walked toward the door, and Pierre Gregg sat down again.

A few steps later, Lumian heard Pierre Gregg sigh and mutter, "If he didn't want to learn shepherding, he could've told me. Why did he just leave... Our family will soon be wealthy. He won't need to learn shepherding anymore..."

Wealthy? Lumian's heart raced as he turned around, feigning curiosity.

"What's this chance for wealth?"

Pierre Gregg didn't look up, keeping his head lowered as he said despondently,

"Our family's horoscope is about to change. Our luck will improve..."

What— Lumian felt a chill down his spine.

“Who told you this?” he asked.

Pierre Gregg didn't answer, continuing to lament.

Upon returning home, Lumian immediately informed his sister that the 'midwife' was still alive.

Aurore frowned her blonde brows. “She's not necessarily a living person.”

“Huh?” Lumian was taken aback.

Aurore pondered and said, “Didn't we discuss this before? Madame Pualis' pathway might have the power to control the undead. That might be a zombie.”

“Impossible,” Lumian said. “I saw her without activating my Spirit Vision. Besides, there were no signs of stitching on her body. Back then, she was diced into many small pieces by Ryan.” Lumian recalled and said, “Also, I heard her breathing!”

At this point, Lumian paused.

“However, she was indeed a little sluggish. Her expression was gloomy, and her eyes weren't lively enough. She looked almost exactly like Naroka! The one I saw on the night of the previous, previous loop when Naroka took the initiative to enter Paramita!”

Naroka, whose face was pale and eyes were blank.

Of course, the 'midwife' obviously resembled a living person more.

Aurore nodded and said, “A special state that's closer to the undead?”

Unable to deduce an answer, she gestured for Lumian to say something else.

Lumian recounted everything that had happened in Reimund's father's words in detail, as if nothing had happened in the castle.

Aurore listened quietly and nodded.

“Madame Pualis doesn't seem to want to pursue the matter of the castle. I wonder what she's holding back...”

“Also, your discovery proves that a portion of the abnormality in the village is related to her, but she doesn't seem to be involved in the cycle...”

What she meant was that Madame Pualis's involvement in the abnormality was mainly the fertility, death, soul, and Paramita. Nothing to do with the time loop.

“I think so too.” Lumian had such an inkling during his explorations. “It seems that the person behind the padre and company is most likely not Madame Pualis.”

Referring to Reimund's father's words, he guessed,

“The one who spread the news that doing something can affect the horoscope and obtain good luck?”

Aurore acknowledged tersely.

“We'll investigate tomorrow and see if we can channel Reimund's spirit tonight.”

After dinner, Aurore saw that it was about time and began to set up the altar.

She was praying to herself, so she only placed a single candle, but the candle was replaced by another one made of slumber flowers and other materials.

Aurore sanctified a silver dagger and created a wall of spirituality. Then, she dripped the extract made of night vanilla and moon flowers onto the orange flames, stirring up a misty fog.

Seeing that the preparations were complete, Aurore glanced at the workbook on the altar and took a step back. She said in ancient Hermes, “I!”

As she uttered the word, her eyes darkened, as if an invisible wind was swirling around her.

“I summon in my name:”

This was the second sentence she said, and she changed it to Hermes.

As she didn't know where Reimund's spirit was, she couldn't directly communicate with it. She could only try summoning it. As a wild Beyonder, she didn't dare pray to the Evernight Goddess, who was in charge of this domain. She could only rely on herself. The chances of success weren't high, unless Reimund's spirit was indeed somewhere in Cordu and was very close.

Aurore continued to recite, “The spirit lingering in Cordu Village.

“The man named Reimund Greg.

“The owner of this exercise book...”

The orange candle flame suddenly swayed, absorbing the surrounding fog and becoming slightly larger.

Its light rippled and was dyed with a deep blue color.

Beads of sweat appeared on Aurore's forehead as she began to borrow strength from various materials.

Amidst the howling wind, a figure appeared above the blue flames.

Having already activated his Spirit Vision, Lumian saw a translucent figure. He had brown hair and eyes, looking rather ordinary. It was Reimund Greg.

He was indeed still in the village.

Reimund's body was bloated, his face pale, and blood-colored tears were dripping from the corners of his eyes.

Wh— Aurore was clearly stunned.

After the cycle was restarted, Reimund had only gone missing and hadn't drowned. How did his spirit end up like this?

That's right. If he hadn't drowned, how could he have become a spirit?

They were self-contradictory...

Amidst her confusion, Aurore asked, "Reimund Greg, why did you disappear?"

Reimund's expression suddenly turned ferocious as he shouted sharply, "They drowned me!"