

CIRCLE OF INEVITABILITY

Chapter 8: Owl

The idea hit Lumian like a bolt of lightning, but he didn't particularly fancy going through with it.

Ignoring the fact that years had flown by since the Warlock's demise and that the lifespan of owls was measly compared to humans, the sheer number of birds in the mountain was enough to make Lumian reconsider.

There were too many of the damn things!

That owl doesn't have any distinct markings... No, in the legends, there was no mention of anything specific about the owl. Naroka didn't disclose everything... We didn't inquire deeply enough... He snapped out of his thoughts and flashed a reassuring smile at Reimund.

"An owl tied to a Warlock could live for a hundred years."

As Reimund trembled with fear, he reassured him in a calm voice, "Don't fret, mon ami. This is my last resort. I do not wish to encounter a monster."

"Perhaps we should consult another old sage. Naroka may have overlooked a vital clue."

The man's tone turned seductive as he continued, "If I were a Warlock, I would not keep all my treasures with me or in my home. I would stash some away in case the Inquisition attacked me. I would not have the luxury of time to collect my belongings. When I must flee, I would be left destitute."

The Inquisition of the Church of the Eternal Blazing Sun was notorious for hunting down Warlocks and Witches. Their "heroic deeds" were celebrated throughout the countryside.

Reimund's face lit up with excitement as he exclaimed, "You are right!"

He said with a yearning expression, "It's a shame. Too many years have elapsed. The Church's discovered riches must have been spent ages ago."

"*Mon ami*, that's a dangerous thought," Lumian teased.

Undeterred, they continued their visits to Pierre-père, Naferia, and other elders of the Maury family.

Although their responses mirrored Naroka's, Lumian and Reimund, with their newfound experience, managed to extract more details.

For instance, the owl was of medium size and resembled its kind. It had a pointed beak, a feline face, brown feathers with scattered spots, brownish-yellow eyes, and black pupils...

However, it was larger than the average owl, and its eyes appeared to spin. It was not as rigid or dim-witted as its kind.

All these peculiarities made the owl seem even more sinister in their descriptions.

"Seems like we've hit a dead end," Lumian stated to Reimund as they traveled to the townsquare. "We must focus on other legends."

Reimund was not as discouraged as he had been earlier. "Agreed. But which one should we pursue?"

This fellow is so proactive and hardworking... Lumian silently praised Reimund's enthusiasm and diligence and readied a reward for him.

He nodded and said, "Take your time and reflect on it. We shall discuss tomorrow. I shall impart combat techniques to you this afternoon."

"Marvelous!" Reimund exclaimed, overjoyed by the unforeseen instruction.

Aurore was a skilled fighter. After all, how else could she handle the savage and rough men in the village? Her younger brother was likely to be just as proficient.

After bidding farewell to Reimund Greg, Lumian veered onto the trail leading to his home.

As he walked, he spotted a group of men approaching him.

The leader was in his prime, not towering above 1.7 meters in height. He wore a white robe and had light black hair.

With a regal demeanor and decent facial features, the tip of his nose curled slightly in undisguised disgust and malice as he glared at Lumian with his blue eyes.

None other than the padre of the Eternal Blazing Sun Church in Cordu, Guillaume Bénét.

"I have been awaiting your arrival for quite some time," Guillaume Bénét bellowed in a baritone voice. "Did you deliberately bring those foreigners to the cathedral?"

Lumian attempted to explain himself as he furtively took a step back. "I thought you were sleeping inside."

He had noticed Pons Bénét—the padre's younger sibling—standing beside Guillaume Bénét. Pons was in his early thirties, muscular, domineering, and a bully.

The other individuals with them were the padre's henchmen.

Guillaume Bénét signaled Pons with a glance as Lumian retreated.

Pons Bénét's grin turned sinister as he lunged forward, bellowing,

"Rascal, eet ees time zat you learn who ees ze father here!"

Before he could complete his sentence, Pons had already hastened his steps and pounced on Lumian. The other brutes followed suit.

In Cordu, a place where logic held no sway and apologies fell on deaf ears, brute force was the only language that could command respect. Guillaume Bénét, the padre, knew this all too well, having resorted to violence countless times before. So, when he learned that the outsiders had been ushered into the cathedral by Lumian, the priest wasted no time in making his move. He was determined to get hold of the ruffian and pummel him into submission until he lay bedridden for a month. The padre was keen to show Lumian the error of his ways and wouldn't rest until someone paid the price for his insolence.

Of course, he had to avoid Aurore.

Regarding the law, he only needed to notify the administrator and the territory judge, Béost. The city sheriffs were unlikely to investigate such a minor issue in the countryside.

As an outsider, Béost would not offend a local-born padre unless there was significant conflict of interest.

Guillaume Bénét felt fortunate that the foreigners had not divulged his affair with Madame Pualis, the administrator's wife, to anyone. He was still unaware of this.

Despite their speed, Lumian was quicker. Just as Pons spoke, Lumian pivoted and dashed away.

He was familiar with the padre's character and methods.

Previously, a villager had accused Guillaume Bénét of having multiple mistresses and embezzling offerings from the Eternal Blazing Sun. He had

also bullied others relentlessly in the village, hardly behaving like a man of the cloth. Subsequently, the villager had mysteriously died one afternoon.

Thud thud thud!

Lumian raced like the wind.

"Wait for your papa, eh? *Attends ton père!*" Pons shouted while chasing him. His pace was not sluggish either.

The thugs pursued closely behind him.

Instead of fleeing along the main road, Lumian darted into the nearest house.

The family was preparing lunch in the kitchen when they suddenly saw a stranger burst in.

With a swoosh, Lumian darted past them and leaped out of the kitchen window at the back.

By the time Pons and his cronies entered, the homeowner had regained his senses. He stood up to confront them and inquired, "What is going on? What are all of you doing?"

"Get out of ze way, old man!" Pons shoved the homeowner aside with force, but it slowed him down.

When they reached the window and jumped out, Lumian had already vanished into another trail.

After pursuing him for a while, they lost sight of Lumian entirely.

"*Sacrebleu, ces chiens fous!*" Pons spat on the roadside.

...

Outside the semi-subterranean two-story abode, Lumian gasped for breath before finally opening the door and entering the house as though nothing had happened.

"One, two, three, four; two, two, three, four..." A series of rhythmic shouts reverberated in his ears.

Lumian gazed at the empty space on the other side of the kitchen and observed Aurore's blond hair tied in a ponytail. She wore a flaxen shirt, tight white pants, and dark sheepskin boots, leaping around and drenched in sweat.

In Cordu, the kitchen occupied most of the space on the first floor, serving as the family's core. Cooking and dining occurred here, as did receiving guests.

She's exercising again... Lumian was accustomed to Aurore's eccentricities and was unfazed by her exercise regimen.

Aurore often did strange things without giving any reason when probed.

At the very least, exercising is beneficial, and it's quite a feast for the eyes... Lumian observed silently.

After a while, Aurore stopped and squatted to turn off the black tape recorder.

She took the white towel from Lumian and instructed him as she wiped the sweat from her forehead,

"Remember, we have combat practice this afternoon."

"I have to study and learn combat. Aren't you demanding too much of me?" Lumian grumbled nonchalantly.

Aurore glanced at him, smiling, and retorted, "You must remember that our objective is the comprehensive development of the five educations1 of morality, intellect, physique, aesthetics, and labor!"

The more she spoke, the happier she became, as if recollecting something beautiful or amusing.

I have already failed moral education... Lumian muttered under his breath. He queried, "What kind of combat?"

One of the things he failed to comprehend was that Aurore, who seemed delicate and frail, was an expert in combat. She mastered numerous fighting techniques and could easily overpower him.

Aurore pondered seriously, leaned forward slightly, and gazed into Lumian's eyes.

She then laughed heartily and declared, "Self-defense!"

"Huh?" Lumian exclaimed in astonishment. "Isn't that supposed to be for girls?"

Aurore stood tall and shook her head gravely, saying sincerely, "Boys must protect themselves when they are out. Who says boys don't encounter perverts?"

The smile on her lips was no longer hidden.

Lumian was unsure if his sister was joking or serious, so he remained silent as he retrieved the white towel and headed towards the stairs.

Suddenly, he felt something tighten under his foot, as if he had tripped over an obstacle. He stumbled forward.

In midair, Lumian hastily contracted his abs, extended his arm, and leaned on the chair beside him. He somersaulted and barely landed on his feet.

Aurore retracted her leg and chuckled.

"One of the fundamental combat principles is to be vigilant at all times. One cannot be complacent.

"Remember that, my novice brother?"

Her right hand had already clutched Lumian's back, but when she saw that he had regained control of his body, she let go.

"It's because I trust you too much..." Lumian grumbled.

He contemplated the matter and realized that this trust was meaningless. He had lost count of how many times he had been at the mercy of Aurore.

Aurore coughed and restrained her expression.

"How did it go with that woman?"

Lumian provided a brief summary of their conversation before declaring, "I intend to wait for your friends to respond before delving into the dream."

"Smart decision," Aurore affirmed.

Lumian changed the subject.

"What's for lunch?"

"We still have some leftover toast from this morning. I'll roast four more lamb chops for you," Aurore replied after contemplating for a moment.

"What about you?" Lumian inquired.

Aurore casually said, "I'll just have truffle bamboo chicken shreds topped with some cheese and onion soup. I tried it last time and found it to be quite..."

Before she could finish speaking, she suddenly froze.

The next moment, she raised her hands to cover her ears. The muscles on her face gradually contorted, making her appear somewhat ferocious.

Lumian observed silently, his eyes filled with anxiety and apprehension.

After a while, Aurore exhaled deeply and returned to her usual self.

Her forehead was drenched in sweat once more.

"What happened?" Lumian asked.

Aurore smiled and responded, "The ringing in my ears is acting up again. You know that I have this old problem."

Lumian didn't probe further. Instead, he said, "Alright, then I'll prepare lunch. Rest well."

Every time this occurred, his yearning for extraordinary abilities grew stronger, as it became a pressing matter.