

CIRCLE OF INEVITABILITY

Chapter 3: Dream

Lumian lingered atop the roof, reluctant to descend just yet.

His visage was a picture of stoicism, betraying no emotion. Gone was the mischievous young man who frequented the tavern, always ready with a grin and a jest. In his place was a composed and resolute figure, unrecognizable to those who knew him before.

Since discovering Aurore's magical powers by chance, Lumian had been obsessed with obtaining them. But Aurore always warned him against it, citing the immense danger and agony that came with wielding such abilities. She refused to divulge the secret even if she knew how to grant them to mere mortals.

Lumian couldn't force her to reveal the method, so he resorted to pleading and persuading her at every turn.

After a few seconds of contemplation, Lumian sprang to his feet and made his way down to the edge of the roof. He climbed back to the second floor using the wooden ladder.

He strolled to Aurore's room, only to find the brown wooden door ajar before peeking inside.

Aurore sat at her desk, scribbling away with a champagne fountain pen, dressed in a sky-blue gown.

What is she writing so late into the night? Is it related to witchcraft? Lumian placed his hand on the door and quipped, "Writing in your diary, are you?"

"Who writes in a diary, honestly?" Aurore replied without looking up from her writing.

Lumian wasn't satisfied with her answer.

"But didn't Emperor Roselle keep several volumes of diaries?"

Roselle, the last emperor of the Intis Republic where the siblings currently lived, had brought down the Sauron dynasty and assumed the mantle of Caesar, thereby declaring himself emperor.

The man had made countless strides in the fields of science and engineering, having been credited with inventing the steam engine. Not to mention, he had charted the sea route to the Southern Continent and sparked an age of colonization. He was the embodiment of his time, a symbol of a bygone era over a century ago.

However, in his twilight years, he was double-crossed and assassinated in the White Maple Palace of Trier.

In the aftermath of his death, his diary pages were disseminated throughout the world, yet they were written in a tongue that nobody could decipher, as if the words didn't exist in this world.

"That's why Roselle ain't no honest man," Aurore, her back turned to Lumian, scoffed.

"So, what're you scribbling there?" Lumian queried.

That was the crux of the matter.

Aurore responded with a shrug, her voice dripping with indifference, "A letter."

"To whom?" Lumian couldn't help but scowl.

Aurore paused, laying down her exquisite golden champagne fountain pen, intricately patterned, to review her words and phrases.

"A pen pal."

"A what now?" Lumian furrowed his brow, thoroughly perplexed.

What the hell was that?

Aurore chuckled, running her fingers through her lustrous golden hair as she began to enlighten her brother.

"That's why I keep telling you to read more and study more. Quit wasting your days drinking and carousing!

"Look at you. What sets you apart from an illiterate?"

"Pen pals are friends who become acquainted through newspapers, magazines, and other publications. They've never met and rely solely on letters to keep in touch."

"What's the point of having such a friend?" Lumian asked, rather concerned about this matter.

As he withdrew his hand from the door, he scratched his chin, deep in thought.

Aurore had never had a boyfriend before, so he couldn't allow her to be fooled by someone she had never met before.

"Meaning?" Aurore thought about it seriously. "First off, emotional value. Oui, I know you don't understand the concept. Humans need to connect with one another, but some things and emotions cannot be shared with the villagers, nor with you. I require a more private outlet to release my thoughts. These pen pals, whom I have not met in person, are perfect for that. Secondly, do not underestimate my pen pals. Some of them hold great power, and some possess extensive knowledge. For example, a pen pal gifted me this battery-operated lamp. Kerosene lamps and candles are too damaging to the eyes and not ideal for writing at night..."

Without waiting for Lumian to ask another question, Aurore waved her hand behind her.

"Get some rest, my inebriated brother! *Bonne nuit!*"

"Alright, *bonne nuit.*" Lumian replied, trying to hide his frustration.

Aurore instructed, "Don't forget to close the door. It's positively frigid in here with all the windows and the door open like this."

Lumian slowly shut the door made of brown wood, then headed to his room where he removed his shoes before sitting on the bed.

In the dimness of the night, Lumian could make out the wooden table beside the window, the slanted chair, the small bookshelf against the wall, and the wardrobe on the other side.

He sat still, lost in thought.

He knew Aurore was a woman who kept her secrets to herself, and there were things she had not revealed to him. Lumian was not surprised, but he was worried that her secrets might put her in danger.

And when reality hit, his options were limited.

He was just an ordinary person, with a robust body and a sharp wit.

Thoughts came rushing in like waves crashing on the shore, and just as quickly they receded. Lumian took a deep breath and made his way to the washroom to freshen up.

Afterward, he removed his jacket-style brown coat and collapsed onto the cold bed.

The April air in the mountains was still nippy.

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In the midst of his fugue state, Lumian perceived a murky mist, enveloping his surroundings and erasing everything in sight.

He trudged through the haze in a daze, yet regardless of which direction he took or how far he went, the fog always led him back to the same place—his bedroom.

The room was fashioned with a white four-piece bed, a wooden table and chair poised in front of the window, bookshelves, wardrobes, and the like.

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Phew. Lumian's eyes flickered open with a start, the morning sun casting a light through the thin blue curtains.

He sat up, staring blankly at the room, feeling as if he was still trapped in a dream.

The same dream he had been having for days—the gray fog that refused to clear.

He raised a hand to his temples and muttered to himself in a deep voice, "It's getting more frequent. I have the same dream almost every day..."

Lumian's calm demeanor belied the fact that this dream hadn't brought about any negative effects, but it certainly had also failed to yield any positive outcomes.

"I pray that hidden in this is something propitious," Lumian murmured, as he rose from the bed.

Lumian opened the door to the corridor and was immediately met with a sound emanating from Aurore's room.

What a coincidence... Lumian smiled.

But then, a sudden thought hit him, causing him to take a step back and stand at the edge of the door.

When Aurore's bedroom door creaked open, Lumian quickly raised his right hand and began to massage his temples with a slightly pained expression on his face.

"What's wrong?" Aurore noticed his discomfort.

Success! Lumian cheered inwardly as he tried his best to calm himself down. "I had that dream again," he replied in a deep voice.

Aurore's golden locks of hair cascaded down her shoulders as she furrowed her brows with concern.

"The previous method didn't work..." she murmured to herself before suggesting,

"Perhaps... I should find you a hypnotist, a real Hypnotist, and see what caused it."

"The kind with magical powers?" Lumian questioned deliberately.

Aurore nodded lightly in response.

"One of your pen pals?" Lumian couldn't help but ask.

"Why do you care about this? Think about how to solve your own problem!" Aurore retorted without hesitation.

Isn't that what's on my mind? Lumian muttered inwardly.

He took the opportunity to say, "Aurore, if I become a Warlock and gain extraordinary powers, I should be able to unlock the secret of the dream and end it completely."

"Don't even think about it!" Aurore replied without hesitation.

Her expression softened as she continued, "Lumian, I won't lie to you. This path we're taking is dangerous, painful, and downright treacherous. If I had

any other choice and if the world wasn't spiraling out of control, I'd be content with being a regular old writer and living a peaceful life."

Lumian didn't hesitate to interject, "Then let me shoulder the burden of danger and pain. I'll protect you, while you do what you love."

Those words had been repeating in his head for quite some time.

Aurore went quiet for a couple of seconds before a grin spread across her face.

"Are you discriminating against women?"

Before Lumian could say a word, she added with a serious tone, "It's too late to turn back now. Ain't no going back to what we had before."

"Fine, I get it. I'm gonna go wash up. You study hard at home today and get ready for the college entrance exams in June!"

"You said it yourself, the world is getting more dangerous. What's the point of taking exams?" Lumian muttered.

He believed that the key to success was strength, not some paper degree.

Aurore just smiled and said, "Knowledge is power, my uneducated brother."

Lumian had no response, so he just watched Aurore walk into the washroom.

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In the afternoon, in the bustling townsquare of Cordu,

Reimund Greg caught sight of Lumian Lee crouched under an elm tree. His thoughts were shrouded in mystery.

"Shouldn't you be holed up at home with your nose buried in those books?"

Reimund approached him, his voice dripping with envy.

Reimund was Lumian's confidant, standing at a moderate 1.7 meters, with brown hair and brown eyes. He was an ordinary-looking fellow with a slightly flushed complexion.

Lumian looked up at him and offered a charming grin.

"Did Aurore not fill you in? Even the hangman deserves a respite! I've been cooped up for so long, I needed a break."

All morning, he had been ruminating on the possibility of acquiring extraordinary powers without Aurore's assistance.

This required him to seek out clues and take the initiative to investigate.

Eventually, he felt that the rumors of magical powers circulating throughout the village held some truth and leads, so he purposely waited for Reimund here.

"If I were in your shoes, I wouldn't rest for more than fifteen minutes," Reimund drawled, leaning casually against the elm tree. "We don't have a sister who's well-read enough to teach us. I plan on learning how to herd sheep next year."

Lumian paid no attention to Reimund's remarks and spoke reflectively.

"Recall the tale of the Warlock for me."

Reimund couldn't quite understand Lumian's intentions, furrowing his brow in confusion.

"The one about the Warlock?"

"In the past, there was a Warlock in our village, but he died later. On the day of his burial, an owl flew in from outside and perched atop his bed. It only departed after the coffin was carried out.

"Then, the coffin became unbearably heavy. It took nine bulls to pull it."

Lumian pressed further, "How long ago was this?"

Reimund's expression grew increasingly perplexed.

"How should I know? I heard it from my father."