

CIRCLE OF INEVITABILITY

Chapter 7: Naroka

Once Lumian had departed from the Ol' Tavern, he found himself standing on the uneven road, uncertain of where to go next.

The morning sun beat down upon him, albeit with a slight chill in the air.

As he deliberated his next move, Reimund Greg emerged from the side.

"I was just looking for you."

Lumian quickly regained his composure and queried, "What's the issue?"

Reimund appeared taken aback.

"Have you forgotten? Today, we're supposed to seek out the elderly, around the same age as my p  p  , and inquire about the legend of the Warlock."

Lumian groaned, pressing his hand against his forehead in agony.

"Is that so? Why can't I recall? Or is this just your imagination?"

Reimund's expression shifted from one of concern to one of fear. Just as he was about to inquire further and confirm whether he had imagined the events of the previous day, Lumian's face lit up with a mischievous grin.

"You rascal, you're playing a joke on me again!" Reimund cursed, unable to contain his annoyance.

"You need to work on your cursing," Lumian chided, shaking his head in disappointment. "Even Ava can curse better than you."

Ava Lizier, the beautiful daughter of Cordu Village's renowned shoemaker Guillaume Lizier, was now a goose herder.

Reimund's expression shifted as he muttered, "Ava..."

He then looked at Lumian. "She's our friend, right?"

Lumian nodded with a smile. "Indeed she is."

The trio, along with Guillaume of the Berrys and Ava's cousin Azéma Lizier, were inseparable teenagers who often spent their days together.

"Why don't we bring Ava on board to help us uncover the truth behind the legend?" Reimund suggested. "As you know, her father always said, 'Why must a dowry be paid when a woman gets married? How many good families have fallen like this?' It pains her to hear it. She might be relieved if she could get some treasure or reward from the investigation."

"I've also heard the heads of several families in the village say similar things, including our padre," Lumian added with a sly grin. "They wish their brothers would stay at home forever. Even if they get married, they won't venture out alone to establish a family. That would require them to split the assets and give them their deserving share."

Lumian shot a furtive glance at Reimund and continued, "Therefore, many families prefer to let one of their children become a shepherd. This way, he won't get married and will have a certain income. Most of the time, he can support himself."

Reimund's expression gradually darkened as he considered the implications of this issue.

He had never thought too deeply about it before.

This was precisely why he enjoyed spending time with Lumian. Although most people in the village believed that Lumian had a poor character and enjoyed

lying and playing tricks, he was actually more knowledgeable than anyone his age. Reimund, on the other hand, felt like he didn't know much and spent his days in a daze, simply following through with his family's arrangements.

It's good that you know... Lumian thought to himself before skillfully steering the conversation back to their investigation.

"It's too late now. We must hurry up and ask around. We will get Ava tomorrow. Yes, we can also bring Guillaume-junior and Azéma on board later. Not only will this potentially lead to gains, but it will also be a fascinating activity that can train our abilities."

"Bring Guillaume-junior and Azéma too?" Reimund grumbled begrudgingly.

The more people involved, the less his share of the rewards would be.

Furthermore, if he included them, he would have fewer chances to win over Ava's affections.

Lumian regarded him with a touch of kindness and pity in his gaze.

Silly child, do you think Ava will fall for you? Her eyebrows are very high, and she only wants to marry into a good family. She clearly has a certain favorable impression of me, a 'villain', yet she can control herself...

In the Dariège region, having "high eyebrows" meant having high standards, and they wouldn't settle for just any average bloke.

"My sister always said there is strength in numbers," Lumian explained simply.

"Who are the old croakers that we need to visit?"

"You didn't investigate?" Reimund asked in surprise.

How could I have the energy to investigate after the incident with the Wand card? Lumian smiled and quipped, "Of course I investigated. I am just testing your ability to gather information."

Reimund had no doubts.

"There are nine elders who are still alive in the village. They are about the same age as my pépé, or a little older..."

Six women and three men. Ladies do live longer... Lumian listened quietly, deep in thought.

"There's no need to visit the last two. They're from another village and came here through marriage.

"Let's start with Naroka. She's the oldest and might have been an adult when the Warlock incident happened."

Naroka's real name wasn't actually Naroka. It was a title of respect for her.

In Riston Province, married women from prominent families or those who were the actual heads of households were entitled to the title "Madame". More than that, their names were marked with an "a" to proclaim their femininity, and prefixed with "Na" to signify their authority as Madames reigning over their domains.

Madame Pualis's family had been in decline for a long time, and at home she dutifully deferred to her husband Béost, the provincial administrator.

Therefore, she didn't have a "Na" prefix or an "a" suffix. She could only be addressed as "Madame".

Naroka had been widowed early on in life, and as a result, she took over the family's accounts. Despite her two sons coming of age, getting married, and having children of their own, she kept her hand positioned squarely on the purse strings of the family fortunes.

This was a rare occurrence in Cordu, where men usually took charge of the family's affairs. In families where the father was absent, the eldest child would naturally take back the authority to manage the entire family from their mother once they reached adulthood.

"Okay," Reimund acquiesced without questioning Lumian's decision.

As they walked by a few buildings, Lumian spotted four old women basking in the sun as they chatted casually in front of a two-story house.

They sat very close to each other, catching lice on each other's bodies, which was a form of entertainment in the countryside of the Intis Republic that served to bring people closer and express affection.

"Do we ask her now?" Reimund hesitated, concerned that their pursuit of the truth behind the legend might spread throughout the village.

"Let's wait a little longer," Lumian replied solemnly, knowing that many rumors in the village were generated and spread through such gatherings.

After a while, the other three old women left one by one because they still had work to do at home.

"Good morning, Naroka." Lumian immediately walked over.

Naroka's hair was grizzled, and her eyes were slightly turbid. She wore a dark dress made of rough cloth, and her hands were covered in a layer of chicken skin with obvious patches on her face.

"When will Aurore join us? Many people in the village miss her," Naroka asked with a smile.

The men, I suppose? Lumian entered a state where he spoke his truth while the other talked about another matter and asked curiously, "Naroka, have you really seen a real Warlock? The one whose coffin nine bulls couldn't move?" Naroka's visage shifted ever so slightly.

"Who told you that?"

"His pépé came back one night to tell him." Lumian began to spout nonsense.

Naroka was stunned. "Can souls really return..."

"My papa told me that P  p   had mentioned it when he was alive," Reimund interjected, unable to watch Lumian deceive the elderly woman.

Naroka's expression fell. After a moment of contemplation, she spoke up.

"Before he passed, none of us knew he was a Warlock. He acted perfectly normal."

Just like how you don't know that Aurore is a Warlock... Lumian thought to himself.

"Until he suddenly died and that owl flew over..." Naroka trailed off, lost in her memories.

The rest of her tale mirrored the legend.

Lumian pressed further.

"Where did that Warlock reside at that time?"

Naroka glanced at him.

"It's where you and Aurore are dwelling now.

"After that Warlock was laid to rest, the padre and a few others ransacked the place and burned it to the ground. For two or three decades, no one dared to approach that site. Eventually, the matter was forgotten. Later, Aurore came and purchased the land to rebuild the house."

Our place? Lumian's heart skipped a beat.

This answer was completely beyond his expectations!

In a flash, he realized that there were a multitude of problems he had previously overlooked.

With Aurore's knack for making money and her mysterious, unearthly abilities, why on earth would she settle down in the rural countryside of Cordu?

Cities like the provincial capital, Bigorre, the bustling textile center of Suhit, or even the capital itself, Trier, would be far better options. Even if Aurore was seeking a place with fresh air and a pristine environment, these urban centers boasted plenty of areas that would suit her needs.

Aurore once told him, "The best way to hide is to hide in a big city..." Lumian's mind raced as he struggled to calm himself.

Today, he learned that the land Aurore had chosen for their home, the land where their house stood, had once belonged to a powerful Warlock...

"Where is the Warlock buried?" Reimund interjected, unable to contain his curiosity.

With no hope of finding riches in Lumian's home, he could only hope that the Warlock's body held some sort of valuable secret.

Naroka said with amusement, "This was quite the affair. It undoubtedly sounded the alarm for the padre.

"In the old days, nine bulls were gathered to pull the coffin to the cemetery beside the cathedral. The padre performed a ritual to purify it. Eventually, the body was cremated and the remains were buried in a grave."

Reimund couldn't conceal his disappointment and muttered, "I see."

"Why do you inquire?" Naroka scrutinized Reimund's face before questioning.

Lumian cackled and spun a tale that sounded more like a fabrication. "We seek the Warlock's treasure."

"Kid, don't waste your time daydreaming," Naroka warned.

"Understood," Lumian replied meekly.

Lumian and Reimund bade Naroka farewell and hit the road toward the townsquare.

"There ain't no hope, Lumian. None at all," Reimund muttered, his spirits sinking as they circled a building.

"Indeed. All that could have been burned, has been burned. All that could have been taken, was taken decades ago," Lumian replied, nodding in agreement.

Despite the bleakness of their situation, Lumian wasn't disappointed thanks to the opportunity in his dream.

Reimund agreed.

"Aye, you're right. Of all the tales, only that blasted owl still remains."

Lumian's eyes lit up as he turned his gaze to the forest beyond the village. "Owl..." he murmured.

Reimund recoiled in horror and added hastily, "But it must have died years ago.

He wasn't one for consorting with the likes of owls and other evil creatures.

Down south in Intis, owls, nightingales, and ravens were thought to be sinister beings that served demons, stealing away human souls and bringing only misfortune.