

My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone

#Chapter 11 - 1.11 A Headless Chicken [OLD] - Read My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone Chapter 11 - 1.11 A Headless Chicken [OLD]

Chapter 11: 1.11 A Headless Chicken [OLD]

┌──────── Author's note ─────────┐

[OLD] A Chapter (44) from my first version: *My Villainess Wants A Second Chance*. For those, who already read it, you can skip.

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Celine's little shoes clicked against the cobble street, her parasol casting a shadow over her face.

Every so often, a passerby paused to gawk. A noble girl, barely ten, was walking all alone through the city square.

Celine paid them no mind. Her grandfather had told her to walk slowly, let herself be seen. If people thought the duke's daughter could move freely, unharmed and unafraid, they'd believe the duke's rule was strong. That the duchy was safe.

But she wasn't truly alone. A woman buying apples from a stall, a few townsmen loitering by the fountain, they were all keeping an eye on her from afar.

Turning the corner near the tannery, she wrinkled her nose. The smell of smoke, leather and sweat was sharp and unpleasant. She quickened her steps, moving past it when a familiar voice rang out from within.

"I worked two weeks, Sir. You said you'd pay me today."

"You are lucky I let you work at all," a man snapped. There was a loud thud, a hard object hitting the ground. "Here's your pay, so stop complaining already!"

Through a crack between barrels, Celine caught a glimpse: a boy, around her age, was leaning down to pick up what looked like a small piece of hard, old bread. His shoes were worn and broken, and he looked hungry, his cheekbones visible.

"Hey! Where do you think you are going?! The job's not done!" the man chased after him.

"No pay, no work, Sir. I'm not a slave."

The tanner lifted a hand to strike the boy, "I should have known better to hire a street rat!" he barked, "With no parents, you're just another orphan living off of my charity! I've given you enough food to survive, you should be thankful for it!"

The boy yelped, cringing away from the older man's blow. It landed anyway, and the boy fell to the ground.

Celine waited for the boy to ask for help. But he never did. He didn't dare to cry out or call for help, as if he knew it was useless. Instead, he covered his head, "I'm not asking for charity. Just my pay, Sir. God gave you more sales when he saw you take me in, didn't He? If you cheat me now, He'll see it too!"

The man laughed, "God doesn't care about you, and neither do I! You were forsaken from the moment you were born! Trying to take advantage of my goodwill, you're just a greedy brat! I'll be doing the world a great service if I killed you right now! No one would miss you anyway!"

Celine stepped inside. "Are you going to get rid of the witnesses too?" she asked, causing the tanner to stop abruptly and look at her, "Or maybe bribe them so they'll keep their mouth shut?"

The anger shifted from his face, replaced by fear, "M-M'lady! This isn't what it looks like!"

"I believe I've seen enough to sent the city guards at you," Celine said, outstretching her little palm. "But I can be persuaded. If the price is correct."

The man hesitated for a moment before grabbing the coin pouch tied to his belt. He gave her all of it.

She counted the money and smiled to herself, "This will do for now," she said, hiding the coins in her small purse.

The boy took the chance to scramble to his feet, running towards the alley. The tanner didn't even bother to watch him leave, his eyes were fixed on Celine, "Is there anything else you'd like, m'lady?"

Celine moved in the same direction as the boy, smiling back at the tanner, "Not today, thank you."

The boy made a few turns here and there before finally slowing down to catch his breath. He stopped by the side of a building.

"What do you want?" he asked, his face full of wariness. "You shouldn't be here. These parts are not safe for a girl like you."

She approached him quietly, her face heating up from a strange feeling that had taken her over, "Are you worried about me?"

"Why should I? I have enough to worry about on my own." He spat to the side, trying to sound tough, "Did you come to laugh at me too? Or to make fun of how stupid and weak I am?"

She blinked a few times. The bruises and cuts on his body were ugly and red. It was more upsetting than anything. But the will to endure such pain, just so he could prove everyone wrong one day... that, was worthy of respect.

He was saving up for something important. She could tell. He had a stash of money hidden somewhere from his various odd jobs, and he was aiming to get even more. He had a goal and he was going after it, with all his might.

She could relate to him in a way, and the thought made her heart beat a little faster. It made her want to... do things. Things she wasn't supposed to. She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. She closed it and tried again, "..."

He raised an eyebrow, "You are weird." He gave her a final look, then started to walk away, "See ya, rich girl."

She stared at the boy's back as he walked away, her face heated. She never felt this nervous around a person before. But she had to talk to him, she had to.

"Wait!"

He turned around, "What? You want me to thank you?"

She shook her head, her curly pigtails bouncing around her face. It had been so easy before, she even persuaded him to sell her paintings. So why was it so difficult now?

"Want me to bow down to you and kiss your shoes?" he asked, a sarcastic grin on his lips.

She looked at her feet. Why did he have to be so mean? What did she do wrong?

"Hey...don't tell me you are actually crying?" he asked, sounding a bit panicked, his voice turning softer, "Look, I'm sorry, okay? I'm not in a good mood, my whole day was a waste of time. I didn't mean it."

She nodded and sniffed.

"Look at me," he said gently, taking a step closer, "I'll thank you properly, okay?"

She wiped her tears and looked up at him.

"I'm sorry for being rude. Thanks for saving my ass." He looked down and kicked a pebble on the ground, his cheeks a little red, "There. Happy now?"

She nodded, smiling a bit.

He looked to the side, avoiding her eyes, "Do you need help going back?"

She nodded again, this time more eagerly.

He sighed and started walking. She followed him quietly. Every now and then, he would look back at her, making sure she was still behind him. He was very observant, immediately noticing the guards following them from afar, "Must be nice being you. Protected and spoiled all day. No one would dare lay a hand on you."

"What do you know?" She huffed and stomped her foot, "A stupid, common boy!"

"Oooh, she speaks!" he laughed. "And here I thought you became mute."

She was embarrassed, her face heating up again, "Stop laughing at me!"

"Sorry, sorry," he grinned and stopped, "We are here. This is your stop, rich girl."

She glared at him, and he responded with another laugh, "You better get going before I get beaten up by your goons too. They look like they are about to attack me."

She quickly nodded and when she looked up, he was already gone. She completely forgot about the meat buns she planned on giving him. She failed to even say goodbye.

He would definitely come in handy in the future, but how could she persuade him to work for her when she acted like a brainless chicken around him?

How could she ever keep her cool if he was ever to work under her?

Celine shook her head. She'd need to learn more about him, his strengths and weaknesses.

Only then would she be able to talk to him without losing her mind. Only then would she be able to make him hers.

Chapter 12: 1.12 A Landscape Contractor

Connection was the key to earning more money, faster. The citizens were good customers, but Lucian needed access to people with more money and influence—the nobles.

With that in mind, he began to reshape the Badass Gang hideout into a display garden.

He was still a ten year old boy and didn't have a way to attract the attention of the rich, but if the garden was beautiful enough to catch their eye, they might seek out his services:

A landscape contractor.

It sounded innovative and original, and it was, because it was a business that didn't exist yet. Gardeners usually worked for one noble or at one town, never for several nobles or towns.

Lucian could distribute new species of flowers and plants across the whole continent. Build special greenhouses to keep the delicate species from dying from the weather, and use the seeds to grow more of them. It was a perfect idea for a new business!

'*Can you track out Jax, Voice?*' Lucian asked. He needed employee number one to help him out. Voice could give the assassin the tracking ability so why not use the same ability to find Jax?

'No,' Voice replied.

'*Useless voice,*' Lucian muttered.

'*Who is useless? The powers don't depend on my will, they are based on the desires of the person who makes a deal with me,*' Voice explained, '*Blame your cheap needs.*'

'*I'm a humble man,*' Lucian retorted, trying to balance his childish features with his 'mature' insides, '*I don't need a lot.*'

If he could make Celine redraw him his garden, he would be able to start advertising it even more efficiently.

And since Lucian was now a wandering vagabond, they were bound to meet sooner or later. Again.

He overheard the rumors about Celine getting sick and not being able to leave her bed. Lucian was very sensitive toward anything bedridden related and couldn't help but worry for her.

Especially after she had helped him deal with her father's men. No assassination attempt had followed since the shackled incident. His worries were eased a little.

'What are you doing?' the voice asked as Lucian combed his hair with his father's comb before a mirror above the sink.

'How do I look?' Lucian asked. The money he earned had allowed him to afford a new set of clean clothes and a barber to trim his hair.

The little boy still abused his young age to stay in churches, and the priests couldn't do anything about it because they had to keep their image as the good guys.

He would act like an abandoned child and get shelter for the night for a few pennies or free of charge. It was cheaper than an inn and buying his own house would be a stupid decision at that point.

'You look like a kid,' the voice said.

Lucian grunted, *'Should I grow a beard?'*

'You didn't even grow any armpit hair yet, and you want to grow a beard?' the voice scoffed.

'It's not my fault. I'm a late bloomer,' Lucian defended himself.

'...' the voice sighed. It was no use arguing with a kid, *'Why do you care about your looks all of a sudden this late in the day?'*

Lucian stepped down from the stool that helped him reach the sink and put the comb inside his shoulder bag where he kept his valuables, *'It's important to look presentable, and since the nobles are my target group now, I have to appeal to them.'*

'Admit it. You just want to look good to impress that duke's daughter.'

'What are you talking about?' Lucian's face turned red at the insinuation, *'I'm not!'*

'Hmm...' the voice hummed in doubt, *'I'm in your mind, you know?'*

Lucian's face turned redder as he grabbed a bouquet of flowers and stormed out of the church and into the streets, *'She is a duke's daughter...She is too far from my reach! And she is not my type! And I already have a future wife! And—'*

He continued to babble on his way to the inn where Celine was apparently staying. He was just going to check on her to see if she was okay, nothing more.

'You are going to get into trouble, again,' the voice warned, 'You should keep a distance from her.'

'I'm just going to see if she's okay, then I'll leave,' Lucian said, 'Don't worry.'

'Me? Worry? Hmph!' the voice harrumphed, 'Don't drag me into your troubles again. I don't care if you live or die.'

Ignoring its words, Lucian entered the inn to buy a stay for the night.

"Good day, one room, please," he said, pulling out a few coins.

The woman at the counter gave him a once-over before taking the money and handing him the key, "Breakfast at seven, and if you want a hot bath, you need to pay extra, kid."

"Thank you, Ma'am," he said, handing her a flower from his bouquet, "To match your beauty."

The woman blinked in surprise, "Aren't you a sweet boy," she chuckled, "Who taught you to be so charming?"

"My Dad," he replied with a bright smile.

"I see, he raised you well," she nodded, searching around her counter, and pulled out a small piece of candy, handing it to him, "Here, for being such a sweet boy."

"Thank you, Ma'am," he said, accepting the treat, and then shuddered as he felt a chill run down his spine.

Lucian turned around to see a girl staring at him from the stairs, her mouth set in a grim line. She was glaring at him. Her forehead was a bit damp and her breath a little heavy, as if having a fever.

Lucian, who didn't receive murderous intents often, could swear that she wanted him dead. He knew the look of a murderer very well, having almost been killed by one.

He immediately turned around to return the candy back to the woman, but she had already walked away to tend to her chores.

"..." Lucian looked back at the girl again.

She was gone, and so was the chilling feeling of murder in his heart.

Lucian slowly made his way to the stairs and to the second floor, looking around cautiously to avoid being ambushed by the said girl.

"Lady Celine, you must eat something, you will get even sicker if you keep starving yourself," he heard one of the maids say from the room at the end of the hallway.

"I'm not hungry," a familiar voice replied, "Just leave me alone."

"...but my lady..."

"Leave!"

"Yes, My Lady," the maid said dejectedly and exited the room, closing the door behind her.

Lucian quickly entered his own room, closing the door behind him. His heart was pounding in his chest as he opened the window. This was his chance.

It was dark outside. After making sure that there was no one in the alleyway, he climbed out of his window and hung onto the ledge, reaching for the window of Celine's room, which opened into a small alleyway next to the inn.

A creak of a window startled him, and he froze, not daring to make any sudden movements.

Her head leaned over the window's ledge, her eyes widening in surprise as she saw him hanging on for dear life.

"Umm," Lucian hesitated, not knowing how to explain himself, "Don't push me, please."

Chapter 13: 1.13 A Crush

Celine made way for Lucian to enter her room, silent like a mouse. She wrapped herself in a blanket, showing only her blue eyes.

Cute.

Lucian quickly shook the thought away and carefully entered the room. It was dimly lit, with only a single candle burning on the desk.

It was scattered with mountains of books and papers, and it seemed that the duke's daughter had been hard at work.

She blinked slowly at his hands.

Lucian held up the flowers, whispering, "A get-well-soon present. They symbolize good health and strength...so they should help you get better soon."

Celine looked around, her pointer finger pointing at herself, as if to say, 'For me?'

She didn't say anything, but she was quite expressive, so it wasn't that difficult to guess.

Lucian nodded. Being all wrapped up, she couldn't take the flowers, so he took the vase from the counter and filled it with water from the jug.

Celine just followed around, observing how he had made himself at home so casually. Well, she acted the same in his place, so why couldn't he?

He gently placed the flowers in the vase and put them on the counter, then turned around to leave, but Celine grabbed his sleeve.

Lucian's heart jumped to his throat, but he forced himself to calm down.

She led him to her desk, pointing at the books as if saying, 'Pick anything you want to read in exchange for the flowers.'

Lucian's face turned beet red, '*I can't read, only count,*' he wanted to say, but it was embarrassing, so he couldn't say it out loud yet.

'They are about economics, physiology & theology (political science), and agriculture,' the voice said, ready to help him pick the useful ones, only for the kid to bust its attempt again.

"I can't read," Lucian admitted to Celine.

She looked surprised but didn't comment on it. Instead, she sat behind a desk and took a piece of parchment and a pen, writing down the alphabet on it and a picture of a thing that started with each letter: apple, bird, cat, dog...

Then she handed him a parchment with all the books. She seemed a bit sorry about what her identity had caused him, and this was her way to make it up to him.

Why didn't she speak to him, though? She could talk to the maid just fine, so why not him?

"Thank you," Lucian took the parchment and put it in his bag, together with the books. "I'll be going then," he said.

Celine nodded in understanding, walking back to her bed and curling up in her blanket.

Lucian's gaze moved to the porridge that was left on the tray, then back at Celine.

"..." he picked the bowl and spoon, bringing them to her bed.

"Open your mouth," he said, and she shook her head. "Come on, eat, you have to get better."

Lucian insisted, but Celine only pulled the blanket over her head, "What are you? A baby?" he taunted playfully, "Rich girls really can't take care of themselves, huh?"

She dragged down her blanket. Looking a bit irritated, she opened her mouth to retort, but her words got stuck in her throat. She couldn't utter them. Her fever seemed to have worsened too; her face flushed more, and her eyes got more watery.

"I will feed you, okay?" he scooped some porridge with the spoon, not minding her expression. He blew on the porridge to make it cooler before feeding it to Celine patiently.

She frowned but opened her mouth, letting him feed her the porridge. When she finished the meal, he placed the tray on the nightstand.

She looked exhausted, flinching from every little movement of her body. Making one wonder how she managed to get to this state to begin with.

Lucian couldn't do anything else, and it was for the best to leave her to rest. He grabbed his gifts and was ready to leave when she grabbed his hand with hers.

"Cheater..." she rasped out, "You are cheating...on your wife...I saw...you..."

"What..." Lucian gulped down when he saw her accusing stare, quickly coming up with an excuse, "B-bribes shouldn't count! I was only bribing them to get their favors and get information..."

"Oh..." Celine let go of his hand and sank back into the pillows, "I see..." a small smile spread on her lips.

Lucian stared at his wrist where she had held him. Her skin was burning hot, a sign of a terrible fever, "...Do you have a medicine to help with the fever?"

He didn't want to leave her in this state.

She shook her head, "I need to endure it...for a bit longer...Go," she said, "or you will...catch...it too."

Lucian bit his lip, "I'll be back next door," he said, not wanting to leave her on her own, "Call for me if you need anything."

She nodded, her eyes following him silently.

Lucian returned to his room. Throwing off his shoes, he fell on the bed with his hands on his face, *'I can't like her. I can't like her. I can't like her.'*

He leaned against the wall that separated them, his face in his knees and his heart beating rapidly in a painful way, *'I like her.'*

Why couldn't she follow the rumors and just be the terrible person she was supposed to be? A spoiled rich girl who couldn't care less about anyone but herself?

After that day, they've crossed paths a few times, but she never talked to him again, just blushed and stuttered, which made it even easier for Lucian to misunderstand her and make him want to talk to her more.

'Give it a few more years and you'll get over her. By that time, you should be loaded enough to attract a proper wife for yourself,' the voice assured him.

'I hope so,' Lucian placed his ear against the wall, wondering if she had fallen asleep.

The routine continued with Lucian building his brand name and trying to forget his crush on a duke's daughter.

It was a slow process, with his childish features working against him; he was limited in what he could do.

Chapter 14: 1.14 Seline

A few months later...

"Seline," Lucian called out.

The dog stopped, looking back at her master. She was a skinny, dirty thing, just a few days away from death. Her eyes didn't have the sparkle they once had. They were losing hope just like him.

"We have to keep going." Lucian tried to sound encouraging. But, in fact, he didn't have the strength to take another step forward. His feet were bleeding inside his worn shoes, and his lips were cracked.

His companion didn't answer. Seline was too exhausted to bark.

The sandstorm came from nowhere, sweeping away the path he had taken to get this far. Lucian had lost his way and didn't know which way to reach the nearest town.

He'd been a fool to come to the southern land by avoiding the regular path. The fees to cross the border were exorbitant, and he wasn't sure the southern guards would let him through their borders without a good reason.

It was supposed to be a shortcut to help him cross Diamante Kingdom to Southern Alliance for cheap. He had not expected the weather to be so hostile.

His food ran out a month ago, and now his water was also gone. If he didn't find a place to restock his provisions, he wouldn't make it. He and Seline would both die out here, their remains becoming dust that the desert storms would carry away.

Lucian's stomach hurt from lack of nourishment. He was so hungry, and the only thing he could find to eat was sand.

Even though he was starving, he was not a beast that would kill Seline for food.

'Water. I need water. I need something to eat.'

Lucian fell on the sand. He didn't have the strength to stand up anymore. It didn't matter. No one would see him lying here.

He felt his companion licking his hand. She needed water, her tongue was dry.

"I'm sorry, girl. I'm so sorry."

He took her in because she reminded him of Celine, dark fur and beautiful blue eyes, and a determination to follow him around despite his refusals.

The sun scorched his body, and the sandstorm had scraped off the first layer of skin. The burning sensation made him feel like he was in a desert of fire. Perhaps this was hell, and this was his punishment for trying to leave the land of his forefathers.

His dream of becoming rich quickly by trading with the southern kingdoms was crushed. He was wrong to believe that he would be able to cross the border and do what so many had failed to do. He had no experience, only the desire to become rich and gain enough power to ask for her hand.

He couldn't move from Celine Rochefort. It only worsened the torment inside of him, knowing that he couldn't have her. He couldn't live in the same land as her, hear about her from other people, and see her walking down the street.

She would ask where he planned to go next, and he would make up something. Their path, however, always crossed again, and she would be as surprised to see him as he was to see her.

His feelings would then be rekindled. His longing would grow, and his heart would break a little bit more every time he had to leave her.

'Maybe she'll miss me when I'm gone. Maybe she'll even cry.'

He turned to his side and looked into the dog's eyes. She was lying on the sand, breathing slowly, her tongue out.

"I'm sorry. I should have never brought you with me." He put a hand over his head. "You were the only one who ever approved of our relationship. The only one who didn't tell me to stay away from her."

Lucian took a deep breath and moved his hand away. Seline had her eyes closed; her chest wasn't moving.

"Hey, Seline, are you sleeping?" Lucian crawled to her. He grabbed his dog by the collar and shook her. "Don't sleep, girl. We have to be awake. If we sleep, we'll never wake up."

Seline didn't react; she didn't even whimper in pain. Lucian placed a hand on the side of her belly. Her heart wasn't beating, and her body was cooling.

'Eat it.'

His stomach growled as Voice spoke, and the impulse became unbearable.

'It's just a dog. No one would miss it. No one would know,' Voice continued, and Lucian couldn't silence it. *'I'll show you the way out. I'll help you get back on track. Just eat the dog.'*

"Shut up," Lucian mumbled. "Shut up, shut up, shut up!" He grabbed his hair with both hands. *'You killed her! She's dead. You killed her! You know the path, you bastard! You were just waiting for Seline to die so I would be forced to eat her!'*

'Why do you keep blaming me?' Voice asked, and Lucian could hear a smile in those words. *'How should I have known that there would be a sandstorm?'*

'Then why am I still alive?!' Lucian shouted in his mind. *'I should be dead. I don't have food, I don't have water, and I should be dead by now! Save Seline! Bring her back! If you really have a solution, bring her back!'*

'You shared all the food and water with her, and she still died,' Voice replied, refusing to listen to Lucian's orders, *'Is the hunger worth it? Is the thirst worth it? You are only human. But I can make you more than that, but first, you must eat.'*

Chapter 15: 1.15 Beggar

No matter how much his insides were eating him from the inside out, Lucian couldn't die. He was hungry, thirsty, and exhausted, but he couldn't die. And it was all thanks to Voice, the entity that had made its home inside his head.

Lucian couldn't just leave Seline here to rot, not after what she did for him. She was loyal.

He scooped sand with both hands in an attempt to dig a hole. His hands burned, but nothing could compare to the hunger and thirst he felt.

'At least don't let her go to waste,' Voice continued with its persuasion.

Lucian was getting dizzy as the sky spun above him. When the hole was wide and deep enough, he dragged his dog and laid her down to rest. Then, he covered her with the same sand he had removed.

'You are wasting a good meal,' Voice insisted. *'You are being stupid. You won't satiate your hunger with sand. Eat it!'*

'No, I will starve and you will starve with me,' Lucian spat as he covered the dog's head with sand. *'And then I'll never have to hear you again.'*

The voice must have felt the hunger, too. The headache was enough proof of that.

Blinking his eyes, he noticed that his hands began to move on their own, unburying his companion.

'No!' Lucian fought against Voice, forcing his body to stop, but his hand was still moving, his fingers clawing at the sand to reveal Seline's body. "No, no, no! Stop!"

'Hunger is taking over your body,' Voice said. *'You don't have any more willpower, any more control over your actions. Your survival instincts are taking over. You can't fight them. It's a natural reaction.'*

'NO!!!'

His fingers stopped digging, but what happened next shocked Lucian.

Seline's eyes opened, and her body moved. In a matter of seconds, she was standing up.

Lucian crawled backward, but Seline followed. She growled, baring her teeth, and then she lunged at him.

He fell on his back, his dog's teeth sinking into his arm. He screamed, trying to push Seline away as her golden eyes glared at him.

She chewed on his arm as if he were her next meal. Lucian was so weak he could barely fight back.

And then, he realized. *'You're controlling her. Get out of her! Leave her alone!'*

Lucian's vision was blurry, but the pain was not. He could feel Seline's teeth biting into his skin and tearing off pieces of flesh. She was eating him alive. Lucian grabbed a handful of sand and threw it at her eyes.

She didn't flinch. Of course, she didn't. She was a shackled doll, a slave to her desires. He didn't know animals could become shackled, too.

'You should have listened to me and eaten her.'

"You could have attacked and eaten me if you wanted way earlier, right? Seline?" Lucian tried to reason with his companion, "You can hear me, right? Stop! You can fight Voice's control. You are stronger than this."

The dog shook her head and then jumped at Lucian, her paws on his chest. Her jaw opened, and her teeth were aimed at his neck.

Lucian didn't move. He remained on the ground, his arms open. He wouldn't fight her. If he had to die, he would rather have been eaten by his companion than be killed by the desert.

But what she did was completely unexpected. She didn't eat him, nor did she tear his throat apart. Instead, she bit her own flesh and tried to feed him with it.

'No, no, no!' Lucian shook his head, pushing her away. Seline growled, and then she was on him again, tearing a piece of her flesh with her teeth and then putting it inside Lucian's mouth. "Mmpf! Stop! Don't do this to yourself!"

'See? She wants you to survive,' Voice said. *'It's her last wish. Honor her death by surviving.'*

"I don't want to live like this!" Lucian shouted.

But the choice wasn't his. Seline was a determined girl, like the girl he had fallen in love with.

Seline tore more flesh, but Lucian couldn't fight her. He had no strength left. The more he tried to reject her offering, the more she forced him to eat. In a matter of minutes, she was reduced to bones and blood.

Lucian couldn't stop crying at the sight of her remains.

She had sacrificed herself for him, and now he was all alone.

Again.

With his dog's sacrifice, Lucian managed to gather some strength, and he continued his journey. He didn't know where to go. He didn't know where the path was or how to get back to town.

He just kept walking, one step after the other, until he finally found a village with houses made of mud.

Lucian collapsed in front of one of the houses and closed his eyes.

A life of a beggar soon began, with his hand scooped forward as he pleaded to the people passing by for food.

They never gave him anything, chasing him out of their way. Some even spat on him.

His gaze was hollow and unfocused. He was not familiar with the southern dialect. It was different from what Voice had taught him.

'I thought you knew the language,' Lucian had said.

'I do,' Voice had replied, *'It's just different from what I remember.'*

The people here weren't kind, not even to their own kin.

Lucian had seen how they treated their children, their elderly, and their sick. They were cruel, and he wondered how long it would take before they started to treat him in the same way.

He needed to go back and then return, pay back for how they treated him, but he didn't have the strength or the means to do so.

Not yet.

Chapter 16: 2.1 Five years later

Only when Lucian reached the age of fifteen was he finally old enough to look respectable and mature.

Though he still didn't have a beard, he grew taller and his voice deepened. It was enough for the people to take him more seriously.

"Heh, finally found you," Lucian muttered, looking at Jax from the top of the hill.

His binoculars were trained on the road below, where Jax walked in a group of people. They had collars around their necks and chains attached to their wrists.

Slavery wasn't tolerated by the kingdom of Diamante, but it was tolerated in the neighboring kingdoms.

Lucian traveled all the way here to get seeds that were only available in the enemy kingdom and ended up finding Jax.

'Finally, a possible employee, who will follow me through hell and back,' Lucian thought, feeling giddy, *'It's so hard to find a good worker these days...'*

'You know others usually prefer to avoid trouble instead of getting themselves into it?' the voice asked.

'Troubles are just opportunities in disguise,' the young man said, a smile spreading on his lips.

He put his binoculars in the bag and slid down the hill.

His beggar rags he wore years ago were gone. The moment he learned the southern language, he stopped begging and returned to his trading roots.

It was a long and exhausting process, but his persistence had paid off. He earned enough to cross the borders and get back to the Diamante kingdom.

But it didn't end there. He continued his trading, but this time, Southern Alliance became a part of his trading route.

The territory that almost killed him, became the foundation of his new fortune.