

My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone

Chapter 121 121: 4.21 - [NSFW18+] Let's be perverts, together

"You are lying. I can see it. You are not fine," she muttered, "You should have just taken care of it, like any normal person would have. Why are you torturing yourself like this?"

Lucian used to complain about how girls had it much easier than boys. Nobody could see their arousal, so they didn't have to endure so much embarrassment.

But now, besides the embarrassment, there was a little bit of mischievousness to it. He started to look forward to their naughty moments, much to his dismay.

This was the only time when Celine would get more talkative than him, and he was not sure how to answer Celine, but she already knew what to say to him.

"Touch yourself," she ordered bluntly, "I know you want to."

"I don't want to," Lucian quickly replied, not wanting to shoulder the shame himself, "It's you, who wants me to do it...so you could have an excuse to do it yourself, and not feel like the only pervert in the room."

"...true," she admitted, rolling on her back. She laid her head on his shoulder and turned to the ceiling to stare at it, "That's why you should start and I will join in. We will be perverts together, the two of us."

Lucian was glad that his face was not visible from this angle, because she would be able to tell how eager he was, and how much he wanted to act on these words she said to him.

"What if I won't be able to stop myself and end up wanting to do more? How do you plan to stop me once I get really into it?" he asked. She depended on his celibacy to not make a move on her, challenging his ability to hold himself back, but never taking it too far for him to completely lose it.

She paused for a moment, as if she was thinking about it, "At least open your pants a little bit or little general will become a cripple at this rate, and we can't have that, can we? I need him to be fully functional."

She backed out from the challenge, pretending to fall asleep again.

"Celine is such a chicken, a scaredy-cat, a little shivering baby bird..." he whispered in a singy song tune, "Her wet kitty needs to be petted, yet she doesn't dare to ask for it, tsk tsk..."

"..." Celine cracked one eye open.

"She would rather degrade her sweet Lucian than to say a few words out loud...that she wants him to touch her...and make her feel good..."

She closed her eye and snored loudly, making Lucian laugh. He was having fun embarrassing her back at her own game. She was the one who started it.

"...and kiss her..."

"..."

"and lick her..."

"..."

"and suck her..."

"..."

"and beg him for more..."

"...!" She covered her face with the blanket, "Will there be a day when you stop going against me at everything?! You are supposed to follow my lead, not to go against it..." she muffled her complaints from underneath.

"Just follow mine for once," Lucian turned around and slipped his right hand underneath the blanket, "I promise you won't regret it."

She let out a shaky breath as he moved his hand up and down between her legs.

"I'm a Rochefort, we don't fall to the temptation of our desires. I'm not the type of woman to lose control and let my body decide things for me."

"I know, I know," Lucian was on his knees on the floor. Her head was still covered by the blanket and rested on his shoulders as he put more pressure into his touch, rubbing her through the fabric.

"I'm only doing this to wrap you around my finger, not to please my desires." She stopped moving and acted like a dead fish to prove her point.

"Sure you are," Lucian said, kissing her on her forehead through the blanket, "You are a very dedicated person. I'm lucky to have you in my life."

"If I turn stupid because of you, you'll have to take care of me, alright?" She spread her leg a little further apart, "Dumb chick. Only wants to lay eggs. That's what you made me into, and that's what you're going to have to deal with."

"Only for me, right?" Lucian whispered, trying to hold in his laughter, "You are smart and cunning to everyone else, right?"

"Annoying to others, a dumb slut to you."

"Celine...don't call yourself that," he scolded her, "Even if you mean it in a playful way."

She was frustrated and it reflected in how she was talking about herself. She wasn't supposed to feel bad about herself, but it seemed that she couldn't help it sometimes.

"Celine..." he repeated, his voice softer this time, palming her in a way that he hoped she would find more soothing than arousing, "No matter how much you try to destroy the mood to prevent yourself from giving in to the pleasure, you will only end up making me more determined to make you feel good."

He felt her surrender to his touch, her body becoming more receptive to his caresses. He moved his hand to her waist, sliding it under the shirt, and tracing a line down her navel, and then untied the button of her pants, and continued downwards.

"...I'm going to make a mess on your hand. It's going to get all wet and sticky," she threatened him with the most pitiful, soft voice that he ever heard.

"I will gladly be the recipient of that mess," he assured her.

"Mmm," she hummed as he felt her wet skin with his fingers.

He rubbed it slowly, causing her to lift her hips, so that she could feel his fingers better. He traced the shape of her slit, before sliding one finger between the folds, and then another.

He played with her like that, drawing circles and patterns, and then sliding across the small bump.

"...free little general," she mumbled, probably trying to distract herself from the sensations he was giving her, but failing miserably. He could feel her getting wetter and wetter. "...please."

A twitch in his pants made its presence known.

"Alright then," Lucian whispered, choosing a peaceful solution, "Do you want to free him yourself?"

┌────────── Author's note ─────────┐

They both are a switch, but don't know it yet (they enjoy being dominant, but also submissive, at least on the inside). There are lots of factors that prevents them from acting on their desires. 😊



Chapter 122 122: 4.22 - [♡NSFW18+] - I wish I could be more like You

"Mhm," Celine hummed in agreement, moving her head from his shoulder to the bed.

Lucian sat up on the bed, his right hand still moving underneath the blanket while his left one moved her hand to his pants like he was a puppeteer.

The blanket served as a surrendering flag for both of them, covering the scene of their defeat (their out of character behavior).



She quickly caught on to what he was trying to do and slowly released him from the cage of his pants.

It was good his pants were soaked wet, making it hard to tell whether the stain on his underwear was from the rain or something else.

He felt her fingers run up his length, spreading the slick, and then squeeze gently, before loosening her grip. She didn't pay much attention to him, seemingly content with just holding him.

"Better?" he breathed. It was a rare moment for them to find a middle ground, and he didn't want to ruin it by bickering over who had more power over the other.

"Better," she responded happily. Her body relaxed further after he handed over the reign of his body.

Lucian bit his bottom lip. He felt her fingers trace the veins along his shaft. Her thumb found its way around the head, circling it slowly before sliding down again.

"Mmph..." he let out a muffled groan, feeling the heat building in his abdomen and spreading in waves of pleasure.

He grabbed the towel and threw it quickly over her hand that was wrapped around him.

"Mhm," he panted as the hot liquid shot out of his tip, staining her hand and the towel.

He was so pent up, he didn't even last a minute. He was scared she was going to laugh at him, feeling a bit embarrassed about it.

"Celine?" he whispered when her reactions to his touch stopped being pleasurable and started being languid. No moans, no squirming, just satisfied breaths.

"Hm?" She made a sleepy noise, not saying anything else.

He pulled his hand from under the covers. His fingers were glistening from her juices and he was tempted to taste them. After a brief moment of hesitation, he licked his finger.

No taste. Different from when he was in direct contact with her kitty, where his brain could pick up on all the flavors.

She loved to eat fruits, especially the exotic ones, which left a unique aftertaste on her skin. His mouth watered as he remembered the first time he tasted her.

She protested when he removed his hand, murmuring something incoherent, "Hrrm...ore."

"More?" he asked.

"Hmmm," she hummed and nodded under the blanket.

"I'm going to use the bathroom first, then I will give you more," he promised.

She was still holding onto his general, who wasn't showing signs of retiring any time soon. He didn't know if he should be thankful or scared of this new discovery.

"Can you let go of me?" he asked.

"No," she refused.

"I need to use the bathroom," he repeated.

Her other hand slipped from under the covers, wiggling her pointer at one of the empty bottles on the nightstand. "There," she suggested, "You don't have to go anywhere."

'Do all paths lead to us bickering with each other?' Lucian thought. She was not making it easy for him to be romantic with her.

"Let go of my general first," he said. His head had cleared slightly and there was an uncontrollable itch to wipe the sticky mess from his crotch. He wanted to get rid of the evidence of his lustful desires and get his general to retire.

She shook her head and tightened her grip on him, "I don't want to be left alone."

Lucian groaned and squirmed as she gripped him even harder, "Don't," he gasped, "You are going to break something."

He was not joking. Her grip was incredibly strong and it was starting to hurt. His general was not a chew toy, nor did he want it to become one.

"Here, hold my hand instead," he offered, giving her his wrist to squeeze.

She grabbed his wrist silently, acting needy, yet possessive. He took the chance to wipe himself thoroughly.

He then reached for her under the blanket, noticing that she was rubbing herself. Her hand was in the way, preventing him from touching her.

He gulped as the heat rose in his face, imagining her touching herself. The warmth didn't last long as he felt like a failure for not doing his part as a lover, "Allow me."

"Stay still," she ordered, her voice commanding.

"But..." he protested before being interrupted.

"I can take care of myself," she said, her words hurting him more than they should have.

Her body trembled slightly beneath the fabric, her breathing becoming more audible until it steadied, and then slowed down.

It felt forced compared to what she was like when he was touching her. She looked like she wanted to be over with it, so she could go back to sleep.

The sight made his stomach twist. He felt a pain in his chest, like someone had stabbed him with an icy knife.

♡

"Go pee now," she said, sounding tired, releasing her grip on his wrist. She didn't even let him see her face, and he didn't dare to look under the blanket.

Lucian stood up, feeling like he had been kicked out of the bed.

"I wasn't serious about peeing in a bottle," she laughed weakly when she heard his footsteps, thinking he was going to leave, "Don't worry about it."

"It's alright," Lucian grabbed the bottle and moved closer to the window, where the rain could hide the sounds, "I'm not leaving you alone tonight."

"..." She peeked from under the covers at him, seeing his back turned to her, "You don't think I'm a freak?" she asked, her voice quieter than before.

"No, I wish I could be more like you sometimes," Lucian said, "I would probably have fewer regrets."

Maybe it was Celine's presence beside him that made him feel less fearful of making a mistake. She had shown him that one could always make it right if you knew how.

Celine tilted her head curiously, her eyes glassy and red, watching him relieve himself. The corners of her lips bloomed into a beautiful smile as she dropped back into the bed. "...I wish I could be more like you sometimes too," she replied, "Liked by all, respected by all... and not this... whatever I am."

"You are respected by me," Lucian joked, "Isn't my love enough?"

"It is," she replied.

He didn't know where to put the bottle after filling it, and he didn't know how to get rid of it, so he just corked the lid back on it, and placed it in the corner nonchalantly before removing his wet shirt and wiping himself with it.

He didn't bring a change of clothes, and swore to always bring a second pair from now on. He always ended up naked around Celine for some reason or another.

══════ Author's note ══════

I need some click baity reviews, 3 starred ones preferably. 🙏 I enjoy writing Lucian as an MC, but I'm not sure about your opinion on him, would be nice if you shared some in the review. ☐ Don't be afraid to be critical and help this author improve, thanks!

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Chapter 123 123: 4.23 - A Sick Person

Early the next day...

Jax struggled against the chains he was in, trying to get out of the storage room.

Uldric and Klaus appeared in the doorway, quickly covering him with a cloth, "Stop struggling, or everyone will know it's you."

"Mmpf," Jax muffled his reply, but they didn't take off the gag, not trusting him to keep quiet.

They managed to drag him outside, and then to the carriage where Lucian was waiting inside.

Jax groaned in pain as he was thrown onto the seat opposite Lucian.

Uldric and Klaus then took the reins of the horses and drove the carriage away.

Inside the carriage, Lucian was just finishing eating a steak over a foldable table. After wiping his mouth, he used his cane to lift the cloth off Jax's face.

Jax was gagged and chained, but otherwise unharmed. He looked around, and sighed in relief before the cloth was put over his face again.

"Wrong expression, Jax," Lucian commented gently, "You are supposed to be a hostage in the hands of an enemy, after all."

Jax paused, then let out a dreadful grunt.

Lucian lifted the cloth again, and Jax tried his best to look scared, "Mmpf!"

Lucian chuckled, "You are not doing well. Where did the little damsel in distress go? How are you going to get saved if you are not convincing?"

Jax widened his eyes and looked at Lucian pleadingly, shaking his head in refusal.

"You don't want to be saved?" Lucian asked. He picked the steak knife from the table, wiped it with a napkin before using it to cut off Jax's gag, "What is it that you want then?"

Jax coughed, taking deep breaths before answering, "We are not kids anymore, Boss. I'm a man now. I can't play games like that," he said carefully. They were nineteen already, not eight!

"Who says adults can't play games?" Lucian asked, "We can play all we want, no, it's actually more free than when we were kids. You get to play with real weapons, build real bases, have real fights, order people around for real. Isn't it amazing?"

Jax was the closest to him among all the Vices. They only saw a capable leader, but Jax knew that Lucian was a person who viewed the world as a playground and people as toys. A very sick person stuck between the world of reality and fantasy.

"I'm not good with this game, Boss. Let's play a different game," Jax said in an attempt to persuade him, "Let's hunt some beasts and cook them."

Lucian's eyes glanced at the finished steak on his plate and then at Jax, "I already had a full course meal. Thanks for offering though. I appreciate it. You are a good friend, Jax."

"Friend, right! I'm your friend and you are my friend! Brothers in arms, partners in crime! That's who we are," Jax exclaimed in a forced cheer, trying to make Lucian change his mind about whatever he was planning. He had a bad feeling in his gut.

"Indeed, you and I, we go way back, don't we?" Lucian asked, "It was a rainy day, just like this one, if I remember correctly. Someone got lost in the woods and was crying for help. Do you know what happened to him?"

Jax gulped, "...He got rescued by you and your gang...after you sent him into the woods in the first place."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk, you make it sound like I did a bad thing, Jax," Lucian said, "Who was the one who wanted to prove himself and win the respect of the rest of the gang? I just recommended you to face your greatest fear and spend the night in the woods by yourself. You agreed."

"..." Jax frowned, trying to remember what happened that day. It was years ago and he was a kid. The details were blurry.

"How much did you reveal to Lady Lily?" Lucian asked after instilling doubts in Jax's head, giving him no time to collect his thoughts and prepare an answer, "What information did you trade to gain her favor? Did she promise you something in return?"

"Nothing, I swear!" Jax quickly denied it. He had a feeling that this was a serious accusation, "She was the one who approached me, and I just couldn't refuse her, okay? She is my type. I didn't reveal anything to her, I swear! I would never betray you!"

Lucian didn't comment, nor did he move a muscle. He just sat there, staring at Jax, the corners of his lips pulled upwards in an unnerving smile.

'Who knew that the person who made Jax behave out of place would be myself this whole time? Did I wrong the Vices by assuming they were the ones who had a hand in it?' Lucian thought about the scuffle between Jax and the rest of Vices on the ship (ch. 3.29).

He still believed that something or someone had been changing Jax's perspective of him.

"If not Lady Lily, then who? What are you hiding from me, Jax?"

Jax realized he was making things worse and that Lucian was losing his trust in him. He decided to confess, "The...the more I train my tattoo, the more sensitive it gets, especially around you Boss. It's...it's like an instinct, and... and I'm trying my best not to let it guide my actions, but it's just too strong sometimes. You have to believe me."

The southerners' instincts were usually correct and helped them survive, but it often made them look feral and wild to northerners.

"I'm not being taken by my beastly nature, boss, I'm not!" Jax insisted, bowing his head down, "Don't get rid of me...please."

The more Lucian learned about the southerners, the more he wondered if he was a southerner and Voice was the beast they had been talking about. If only Voice didn't have an ability to turn fresh corpses with big regrets into shackleds.

'Are you trying to get rid of me after all I've done for you?' Voice asked in irritation, reacting to his thoughts, 'Again?'

'I can't marry Celine if I can't control you, Voice. You would get in our way.'

'I lent you my powers, taught you the way, saved your ass multiple times and this is how you thank me? Does it mean so little to you?'

'No, it does not. It's what makes you a good tool, Voice.'

Lucian couldn't hide his thoughts from Voice. It would continue to suspect his intentions to become independent of it no matter what.

You had to change your whole thought process in order to outsmart a creature that could read your mind.

'Isn't it right, Voice?' Lucian asked jokingly.

See? He could think about getting rid of Voice, and Voice would take it as another childish banter.

The love-hate relationship between him and Celine was the perfect training ground to practice its perception of Lucian's intentions.

┌ Author's note ───────────┐

I updated the world map and added some new characters to the front page. 🖱️

I'm excited for some action, though I suck at it, what about you? 😊

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Chapter 124 124: 4.24 - No need for a new label

Lucian noticed that Voice couldn't fully grasp the complexity of human feelings and emotions.

Its reactions had a repetitive pattern, like an employee who had to follow a certain protocol in every situation, never straying from it. Unless they were in danger and had no choice but to do what they were not supposed to do and improvise.

Or like an old plague that had been cured and had no choice but to evolve in order to not die out. It would mutate to fit the new circumstances and try to find a weakness in the new medicine.

'I don't want to be labeled as a new shackled mutation.'

There were only three publicly known ranks of shackleds: the low, mid and high. They've almost been eradicated, and yet, here Lucian was, carrying a potential threat inside him.

'I'm not a special cookie. There might be others like me out there, laying low until the opportunity arises...'

Addiction was dangerous, and Lucian didn't want to get used to Voice's powers to a point where he couldn't exist without them, especially when he couldn't really depend on it.

'...an opportunity, hm? What kind it could be?'

If Lucian wanted to turn the kingdom upside down, he would start by killing those he knew were the most important and influential figures in it.

The upcoming hunting competition was the perfect place to start a new reign of terror, if a shackled was so inclined.

'Take Jax's body, Voice. You'll have a harem of girls to kneel at your feet, have food delivered to your mouth, and be groomed like a king. It would be so much better than being a tool for a human, wouldn't it?'

Voice ignored Lucian's bait, making him think that not every host was a good fit for it. It was picky.

Lucian knew how to push Voice out of him. It's a pity he didn't have any test subjects besides himself to practice transferring Voice into other people.

He could try animals, but he didn't want rumors to spread about him killing animals for experiments to reach Celine's ears. She would be furious at him.

Jax carefully avoided being alone with Lucian, asking him for a restroom break before he decided to turn him into a princess in need of saving.

The Badass Gang used to play bandits and heroes together. There were no girls around, so the boys were taking turns pretending to be sissies just to avoid facing Lucian.

Lucian only ever played the hero role, and would fight anyone who dared to kidnap the appointed princess. Brutally so. He was weaker than them, but vicious enough to compensate for it.

"Boss...I'm scared," Jax pleaded. Maybe putting aside his manliness and acting like a damsel in distress could get him some sympathy points and be spared, "Please don't hurt me."

Lucian's attention turned to Jax, chuckling. He used the cane to turn Jax's face to the side, making him hiss in pain. The blunt hit from yesterday was still fresh.

"Did the tattoo's beast make you interrupt my time with Lady Lily? Or was it your own doing?" he asked.

Jax pressed his lips together, not knowing the answer to that question himself, "I wasn't myself, Boss. I swear. It's like I was possessed."

"Bring it out, the beast," Lucian said at the same time as the carriage came to a stop.

Jax's eyes widened at his words, "No way," he shook his head, "It will take control of me, Boss. Southerners can't use external aid to advance, remember? It will lose all respect it has towards me, and might even decide to kill me."

Lucian got off the carriage, throwing the key he got from the brothel's owner at Jax, "You have been practicing how to tame it, right? Let's see the results of your training."

Jax twisted his body to grab the key, unlocking his bindings, while Lucian walked deeper into the woods by the road.

The rain had stopped falling, leaving a damp smell in the air.

Lucian removed his suit jacket and rolled up his sleeves, waiting for Jax to join him.

Uldric rushed to his side, helping him carry his belongings while Klaus stayed behind to watch the carriage.

Jax cracked his neck and stretched his arms as he sprinted over to Lucian, "I don't want to end up like my father, Boss. My mother is counting on me to take care of her. I don't want to die here."

Uldric was surprised by Jax's sudden change in behavior from an overconfident brute to an obedient servant.

Lucian's expression softened, "I will take care of her in your stead if anything happens."

"..." Jax thought about Lucian already deciding on his death, before shaking his head in resignation. "Hey guys," he contacted the southern Vices, "It was fun while it lasted. Farewell."

"Bye. You won't be missed," Roland said, having no idea what was going on, he was simply happy to be able to say his final words.

"Bye!" Goblin was more enthusiastic in his farewell, not knowing what was happening either.

"...Bye?" Leaf joined in, not understanding, but not wanting to be the odd one out.

"..." Fishbone didn't know if this was a joke or not, and remained silent.

Jax's expression changed from resigned to furious, "You bunch of assholes. I bet you will miss me when I'm gone, and regret not treating me better!" he shouted, "Roland, I'm coming for your soul first, just wait and see!"

Uldrick found this Jax to be more familiar to him.

Jax's eyes suddenly turned red and his body grew bigger. His skin turned dark red as he attacked the person closest to him, Uldric, "What are you staring at, bastard?"

"Wha-!" Uldric took a step back in terror, tripping over a fallen branch, and landing on his rear.

Lucian swung his cane, hitting Jax in the shoulder, causing him to growl in anger more than pain.

Jax's red eyes turned to Lucian, "What the fuck was that for?!"

Lucian didn't answer, just waited for Jax's next move. The beast seemed to be out of the cage.

Jax's gaze shifted to the cane. "Oh, you are so dead, pretty boy! I will break that stick and shove it up your ass, you hear me?" He picked it up and broke it in half, leaping towards Lucian with them, ready to stab him.

Lucian grabbed him by his collar, twisting him around and slamming him into a tree, knocking the wind out of him and disorienting him. His foot hit the back of Jax's knees, causing him to kneel.

He grabbed the back of Jax's neck, the bruise from the grip turning purple, and slammed his face into the tree, breaking his nose.

Uldric's eyes almost popped out in shock at Lucian's display of brutality against his closest Vice, and he could only stare at the scene in disbelief.

Chapter 125 125: 4.25 - A normal northerner

"My face!" Jax snarled, blood gushing out of his nose, his breathing blocked, affecting his speech.

He expected Lucian to target his face, but his guard was not enough to prevent the attack from succeeding.

"I'll kill you!" He tried to punch Lucian, "Fuck you! Fuck! Is breaking noses your fetish? You sick fuck!"

"Language," Lucian dodged his attacks before kicking him down and grabbing him by his neck from behind, "Is it a fetish if it's effective?"

Nothing broke easier than a nose, and nothing looked scarier than a bleeding face. Especially during a group brawl where everyone would get scared seeing the same fate awaiting them.

Least effort for the greatest impact.

The goal was not only to inflict immediate physical damage but also to disrupt an opponent's mental state. The sudden image of breaking a nose, the shocking display of blood, all worked to throw an opponent off their rhythm and instill fear.

Lucian didn't have much aura, nor the strength of an average northerner to rely on. He had to find a way to compensate for it with an element of surprise. There was only one chance to strike and he had to make it count.

Jax tried to free himself but the disparity in their ranks was too wide. And what used to be a one chance opportunity for Lucian became a one-sided beatdown.

Lucian slammed Jax's face into the tree a few more times, before he squeaked like a frog, "B..boss.."

"Summon it back," Lucian ordered, "I'm not done with it yet."

"It's not listening to me," Jax choked out, blood dripping from his mouth, "I'm done...for... my cultivation is destroyed..."

"I would rather have it destroyed than have it run wild again. Summon it back," Lucian ordered again, pulling on his hair, "I'm not asking."

"It's gone, I swear..." Jax sobbed, "It's all gone, it left, and it's never coming back. I can't feel it anymore..."

Lucian let go of his hair, and Jax slumped forward, falling into the dirt. He didn't move, didn't try to get up, and didn't try to defend himself. It was like he had lost all motivation to live.

Lucian bent down, searching for Jax's pulse and listening to his breathing, "I will look for another way to restore your ability to cultivate. You don't need to depend on the beast for that."

"Fuck...you," Jax mumbled weakly, spitting out blood from his mouth.

Lucian chuckled at the response.

'Seems like it's still here,' he thought, and continued to persuade Jax to give up on the beast, "Look at me, see what I was able to achieve without relying on my innate talent. Just because you were born with an unlucky tattoo doesn't mean you are doomed to be an unlucky man."

"Shut...up," Jax said and got his face slammed into the ground again, "Arrgh!"

"Nobody's talking to you," Lucian said and pressed on when the beast returned, "Be gone. Nobody wants you here. You are a nuisance, a burden. Unwanted, unneeded. Leave and never return."

"Yeah..." Jax said weakly to the beast, even though he knew the words had no effects on the beast, but they seemed to help him at least, "No more women...for you to breed with."

"Right." Lucian laughed at that, "It's all it knows how to do. Breed. Pathetic."

Jax's body began to twitch, his muscles spasming and bulging out, "Arghhh..."

Lucian noticed a few parts of Jax's tattoo begin to glow, the rest of it was dim and lifeless.

"Aaargh," Jax's wounds began to heal at a rapid pace, the blood flow stopping, "I will show you pathetic!"

Lucian ducked out of the way as Jax's fist flew past his face. His movements were much faster than before, and his strength had increased significantly.

"Let's go, let's go!" Jax growled and charged at Lucian, his fists flying at Lucian's face in a flurry of strikes, "Your nose is mine!"

Lucian blocked and deflected the incoming punches with his arms and legs.

This was just the first stage beast and it was already such a pain to deal with for Jax.

Jax's father was trying to become a three marked hunter when his mother fled to the north due to it, making Lucian wonder what their household must have been like.

The northerners risked their sense of security, getting into debt, serving their entire lives to the nobles...all in exchange for the opportunity to become knights. The kingdom at least shrouded it under a noble lie.

The southerners, on the other hand, risked their sense of reason, their pack values, in favor of power, becoming slaves to their animalistic instincts if they weren't strong enough to break free of them.

The sun had risen above the horizon by the time the beast had finally exhausted itself. Jax was covered in sweat, blood, and dirt. He was panting heavily, and he could barely lift his arms.

Lucian panted as well, but not nearly as badly. He was able to keep up with Jax's attacks without too much difficulty, taking the opportunity to study Jax's movements and find weaknesses.

The ground around them had turned into a muddy pit, and the trees were all scratched up as they used them as shields and launching pads.

The beast's motivations weren't honorable. You couldn't provoke it to fight your enemies for you, you couldn't reason with it.

It was a horny, ugly, and stupid creature.

Taming it would only lead to self ruin, and yet there were people who succeeded. The most powerful hunters in the South were proof of that.

"Congratulations," Lucian said between heavy breaths, "One marked hunter you are now. Let's keep this a secret from others for a bit longer, shall we?"

"Sur...ugh," Jax groaned in pain, too tired to argue.

They both turned toward Uldric, who immediately shuddered and tried to make himself smaller, "I won't tell a soul, I swear!"

"I did it," Jax whispered in disbelief. He had a lot to process and sort through in his mind, "I actually did it."

Lucian didn't give him time to bask in the glory of his achievement, using the opportunity to cut his wings, "The gardening squads are short on storage keepers, so you will be filling in that role until further notice."

"Yes.. wait...what?" Jax's brain couldn't keep up with Lucian's orders, "Why... does it sound like... I'm being demoted?"

"Because you are being demoted," Lucian replied, grabbing his jacket from Uldrick's arms, "Your cut of the profit will be deducted according to your new position, and helping you advance will be calculated based on northern standards."

Jax whined, crawling on the ground and raising his arms in the air in a dramatic gesture, "Bo~ss."

He looked terrifying, but not as terrifying as his regenerating ability that was slowly fixing his face, not visible to the naked eye, but Lucian could tell. It would be a matter of few months and it would be as if Lucian never touched him.

Lucian checked his arms and knuckles. They would have been bruised from blocking and throwing blows if he was still the old Lucian.

Instead, the skin was intact and smooth as if there was armor that took the brunt of the attack.

'I finally feel like a normal northerner now,' Lucian thought.

Hay heads weren't born with it, but the rest of northerners were.

Celine's skin was bouncy and soft to touch, yet it was very resistant to hickeys, for example.

'I forgot to try to give her one again. I should do it next time,' he made a mental note to himself.

Chapter 126 126: 4.26 - Wait In Line Like Everyone Else

"Oh right, my cane," Lucian's words made Uldric look at the two halves of Lucian's cane that Jax had broken and thrown away earlier, "Its loss will be added to your debt as well."

Jax didn't even try to negotiate. Lucian could break his bones, and he would still somehow end up thanking him for it, feel guilty about it, and compensate him for it. "I will repay it, Boss," he promised, "With interest."

"Good, you are improving."

The praise made Jax a bit happy, even though his body was in pain. It's been a while since he got wrecked in such a one-sided manner, "Thank you, Boss."

With a slight nod, Lucian ordered Uldric to take care of Jax.

"Y-yes, Sir!" Uldrick rushed to pick up Jax, patting the dirt off of his body, his own hands trembling in fear.

If Lucian could treat his Vices, his closest confidants, his right-hand men, like this, then what about the others?

He tried to persuade himself that it was for Jax's sake and that Lucian was simply trying to save Jax from himself, but it didn't help much to calm him down.

Was this what Jax meant by a desensitized Lucian being the worst thing that could happen to anyone who had a debt to him?

Klaus' eyes widened at the sight of the half-dead Jax in Uldric's arms. He quickly opened the carriage door for Lucian to get in, then helped Uldric place Jax on the carriage roof.

Lucian was more prepared this time, having a change of clothes ready.

'Isn't there a cleaner way of fighting? Why do my clothes always have to suffer the most?'

He was going to stick to darker colors for the hunting competition, the ones he used to wear for gathering herbs.

The hunt would start on the 10th day of the month and last until the 18th day.

The cost to participate in the competition was based on the camp one chose to stay in, with the most luxurious ones being secured by the royals and nobles.

The participants were allowed to bring servants and guards to assist them in the competition. The more helpers one had, the fewer contribution points they got, and thus the lower their final ranking would be.

The limit was set to six people, excluding the participant. There couldn't be two participants in one group either, everyone was on their own (+their helpers).

Every two days at noon, a horn would signal for the participants to return with their caught beasts to the hunting grounds campsite, and to have their catches weighed, measured, registered, and then roasted or smoked for the public to enjoy in the evening.

Merchants and other non-participants could rent a spot to sell their goods.

It was an exciting festival that would bring the whole kingdom together.

The hunting area was off-limits most of the year and heavily guarded by the military. The reason for the restriction was a few cases of shackled beasts emerging in the area from time to time. It was only opened once it was deemed safe enough.

If a shackled with a body of a weak, slave woman had the strength of twenty men, then what a bear would be capable of after becoming a shackled?

'Do people know that shackleds act based on their host's dying wish?'

Lucian wondered as he took out a toolbox from under his seat and proceeded to dismantle the broken cane, revealing the needle mechanism hidden inside it.

'Maybe one short spear and one axe?'

Lucian contemplated what he should pack for the trip. He had to keep the weight of the luggage in mind.

He usually used traps to catch his prey. Bow was a classic, but not very suitable for close-range combat.

'A rope and a knife for sure, sleeping bag, a canteen...'

He traveled a lot, so he always had these things inside his carriage, packed and ready to go.

He only had to buy the short spear; the rest of the materials he already had in stock.

Forward to the 9th day of the month, the day before the hunting competition...

Large banners hung from every pole, welcoming the participants to the hunting grounds. The road leading to it was busy, filled with people all headed to the same place.

A lot of merchants had set up shop along the way. Lucian caught sight of a few familiar items among the other stalls that he imported from the Southern Alliance.

The Glory of Snow had also set up its stall: one side was stacked with perfume bottles and oils, the other with floral and herb byproducts such as balm remedies, candies, and honey.

His employees greeted him as he stood in line, waiting to pass the inspection.

The line was long, and there were a few nobles complaining about the lack of priority.

Silence descended as a black carriage stopped next to the line. Everyone recognized the Rochefort emblem on the carriage door, hoping it wasn't the Duke's daughter they were about to meet.

Their wishes weren't granted, as Celine stepped out of it, wearing a dark blue riding outfit with a matching hat.

She followed her butler's lead, frowning after finding out that she had to wait for her turn, just like everyone else, "Why am I waiting here like a commoner? What is the meaning of this?"

The person the Rochefort house had assigned to hold their place in line ended up two people behind Lucian, which made him chuckle at Celine's 'unfortunate' circumstances.

The butler apologized, bowing deeply to her. "I'll try to talk to the inspector to let you in first, My Lady."

"There's no need," Edmund appeared from inside the carriage, wearing a hunting suit and boots that matched his sister's.

Two knights with their faces covered in masks and light robes accompanied them, each one taking a stance next to them as if they were their shadows.

Lucian would have described how intimidating they looked, if not for the fact that one was carrying a fluffy cat in his arms and the other an embroidered fan, fanning the mentioned cat.

Their ranks were concealed, but Lucian recognized the sapphire knight from his past, who had dealt with the shackled assassin as if he were an ant.

"My dear sister will wait like everyone else, and will not receive any special treatment," Edmund continued, smiling at her, "Right, dear sister?"

Completely ignoring her brother, Celine silently eyed the two people who separated her from Lucian. She looked like she was pondering whether she should have a little chat with them or not.

Chapter 127 127: 4.27 - Like Reborn

The people around nodded in approval at the sight of Young Master Edmund disciplining his twin sister, showing their support for his actions.

How would the family name survive with a shameless woman tainting it? Did the Rochefort house finally realize that they couldn't just sweep her problematic personality under the rug?

Edmund didn't seem to appreciate the way Celine ignored him, but was not sure how to deal with her either.

'Did those two get into a fight?'

Edmund stared at his sister like he was trying to burn a hole through her back as she embarrassed him by not acknowledging his presence.

It was subtle and quick, but Lucian caught it nevertheless.

Celine went ahead to pick up a fight with the poorest and weakest-looking participant, a sole person without any servants or guards in the company.

Lucian anticipated Celine to pick him, seeing as the other participants wore expensive clothes that indicated their financial status and their connections. Some even wore knight's badges representing their rank.

He pretended like he didn't see her walking towards him, focusing on sharpening his axe with a stone, holding back a smile.

He waited and waited but she didn't approach him.

Lucian raised his head, staring at the back of a man that obscured his view of Celine. The curve of his smile slowly changed into a straight line.

"You can take my spot, if you like," the man said, standing before Celine and blocking her path, panting slightly, as if he ran over to catch her before she could reach Lucian.

"Young Master Mathieu!" a servant ran from behind the man, stopping beside his master, "That's... that's..." he said in a hushed tone, "Lady Roche—"

"I know, I'm not bli...wait, I actually am..." young master Mathieu corrected himself with an awkward chuckle. The bandage around his eyes made it impossible to tell if he could see or not, and his body language didn't look out of place either.

"I recognized her voice," young master Mathieu continued to explain his blunder, "That's how I knew who I was talking to, not because I recognized her face or anything of the sort."

Lucian said that he didn't want to depend on Voice's powers, but he had to see what was going on.

Celine had a frown on her face, indicating her displeasure at being stopped in her tracks.

Her eyes wandered to Young Master Mathieu's face. He became unfavored after the incident, so she didn't have a need to sweet talk to him, "My, my, one might think you are trying to protect that hay-head if I didn't know better. Well, if Lord Duremont insists, I'll accept your offer."

And just like that, Celine was lured away from Lucian. She took the spot in the front, showing no interest in engaging in a conversation with a Duremont.

"..." Edmund and the Rochefort staff couldn't believe that Celine somehow got her way, again. They switched places with the Duremonts, their baffled expression matching that of the Duremont staff.

Young Master Mathieu sighed, standing next to Lucian, "Don't mind Lady Rochefort's words. I believe she is going through a hard time now and is taking it out on people around her."

Lucian didn't respond, his mood getting worse by the minute.

'Did he just defend my Celine?'

Young Master Mathieu was not discouraged by Lucian's lack of reaction, continuing.

"Oh no, don't misunderstand my intentions, I have no interest in you, or men for that matter," he clarified, waving his hands in the air, "I simply want to make sure that you are not disturbed by Lady Rochefort's malicious words and one day decide that you've had enough and that you want to get rid of her."

'Did he just try to protect my Celine?'

'From...who?'

'Me?'

Lucian hid the urge to press the axe against the other man's neck for integration, and only kept his half smile.

"Did young master's injury come with a newfound wisdom or have you always been so perceptive?" Lucian asked.

The young master choked on his saliva, struggling to find a good reply, "My injury has helped me see more clearly," he replied, "I've changed, for the better, for the worse, I don't know, but I know that I don't want to go back to how I used to be."

"Elder cousin, you shouldn't be talking with that person," a woman interrupted, her aura reminding Lucian of the Crown Prince. Cold and distant, though lacking the same weight. "People will start to talk about your old habits."

"Adeline," young master Mathieu smiled, "Why are you here? Your party is in the front."

The woman, Adeline, turned her attention to Lucian with a lack of interest before looking back at young master Mathieu, "I was just making sure you didn't run away from your responsibilities again. I'm going now," she turned around and left.

"Wait," Young Master Mathieu called out to her. She stopped and waited for him to continue, "I'm sorry for dragging you into my mess...and thank you for looking out for me."

Adeline's eyes widened slightly, not expecting him to thank her. "Don't mention it," she quickly said and left, suppressing a tiny soft smile that tried to crack her cool facade.

Lucian sensed that everyone was surprised by this change in Mathieu, in a welcome way. Young master Mathieu didn't have a good relationship with any of them and now suddenly acted like a human being towards them. Something had definitely changed in him, and it wasn't a minor detail.

A near death experience, a life-changing injury, or a sudden realization, whatever it was, had made him a better person. Or... a more cunning one.

Lucian couldn't tell yet, and wouldn't have paid it much attention if it weren't for Celine's involvement.

"Thank you for your concern," Lucian said, his tone a little more relaxed. "But for your safety, I suggest you also keep your distance from Lady Rochefort. People who cross her path often seem to meet a bad end," he warned good-naturedly.

"Right, thank you," Young Master Mathieu said, but Lucian didn't need to look at him to know that his advice was not going to be taken, "It will take some time until she understands that I've changed, but that's okay, I'm willing to wait."

'You are willing to what?'

"Young Master Mathieu," another person approached before Lucian could engage with him more. This time it was a young maid, who bowed politely, "Young Master Meurin wishes to speak to you in private, please follow me."

"My brother? Alright," the young master Mathieu agreed, following the maid.

He seemed to be used to walking around without the use of his eyes, without a cane's aid.

'Could he be a shackled?'

Lucian's pulse quickened, his senses sharpened, and he became even more alert.

'Is the old Mathieu still in control of his body? Or was he taken over completely?'

Lucian wouldn't embrace such an idea under normal circumstances.

The shackles weren't capable of blending in with society in the long term from what people believed. They were like a fire that would eventually consume itself.

But...he was himself an unusual case.

'Voice, do you sense anything? Does he have a Voice too?'

Author's note

I noticed a spike in views, readers, and reviews these past few days! Thank you for all the insightful feedback. Keep sharing your opinions! It's boosting my writing mood! 🙏😊

I added a new character to the character list. Go check it out. 🍷■

Who is happy that Mathieu isn't just some average, cannon fodder, villain, who only exists to be face slapped by the MCs? 😊



Chapter 128 128: 4.28 - Lost East Walls

The crowd was composed of people from all classes, from the rich nobles at the front, to the poor commoners in the back. Everyone was in good spirits, anticipating the upcoming event.

Except for two individuals in particular, who were both feeling rather down.

Celine didn't utter a single word since then, only taking the cat from the knight's hands before sitting on a stool the butler provided for her.

The other was Lucian who had his plans of enjoying the hunt with Celine ruined.

Their minds were racing with different ways to handle the situation.

A person who suddenly acted out of character would raise suspicion. It was not the same as the natural growth and development of one's personality, but rather a sudden, drastic change in a span of one month.

One month was enough time for an entitled heir like Mathieu to become wise beyond his past's self.

'Does nobody else find it strange?' Lucian thought, 'How was he able to convince everyone?'

Muscle memory showed that it was indeed Mathieu's body (the way he stood and walked), but a lot of things didn't add up. Mannerisms and speech patterns were not Mathieu's. Body language and reaction to things that weren't the same either.

While Celine must be thinking the old one was a bad doppelganger or an impostor, and the new one was the real deal (which would explain how he could see through the

blindfold), Lucian believed that the old Mathieu was the real one and the new one was a shackled.

Voice didn't answer his question, so Lucian could only force the answer from Mathieu himself.

He observed the area, looking for something or someone to 'help' him find out, and his gaze landed on a few noble ladies, who were chatting with a group of nobles near the front.

'I would like to test his moral compass first.'

Lucian continued to wait in line, the large steel gates of the hunting grounds still remained closed.

The high stone walls enclosed a massive area of the forest, stretching as far as the eyes could see. The walls were built long ago, serving as a barrier to protect a kingdom that no longer existed.

Lost East Walls, was the name of the border walls, and it had a tragic story behind it.

They were built to protect the citizens from the invading army of the neighbouring kingdoms, but the people never got a chance to use them as the sea had swallowed their

land in one big gulp. The sea then retreated, not fully, leaving a part of the land underwater forever.

The Diamante Kingdom and Southern Alliance have been fighting over the eastern territory for centuries, with the Diamante Kingdom holding on to it and using it as a royal military base.

Except for Celine, nobody tried to take Lucian's place in the line, much to his disappointment.

When one thought about it, there existed only one hay head with a knight rank in the whole Diamante Kingdom and he was right here.

They didn't recognize his face, but being the only hay head to join the hunting competition was more than enough proof to identify him as such, no questions asked.

The Glory's founder and the current leader of Loan Lenders; Lucian Arclight.

It was said that a small group of loansharks have sought his guidance in investment strategies in the past, which he 'reluctantly' agreed to. They've grown from a gang of thugs to a successful business in the span of a few years, holding Lucian in high regard from that day on.

Only Mathieu's and Celine's kind were clueless about world politics enough to look down on him because of his looks.

Lucian knew he couldn't hide this side hustle from the public for long, and decided to become the official leader, not founder. It was nice not having to dye his hair green and demand money from people anymore. He could do it openly now.

He bent to the side to look behind him, catching a few glimpses of the people behind him in the line.

A few familiar faces immediately looked down, trying to act invisible to him. They were definitely not going to confront him in public like Celine did, but they might want to deal with him later on in private, when the competition begins and they run out of excuses to avoid paying their debts.

'What a bunch of lovely losers,' Lucian straightened his back, 'Does self defense work as an excuse to kill someone? If they can't pay off their debts, then they could at least offer their bodies as compensation.'

Even a dead body had a certain value, especially to Lucian, who was in a desperate need of a few fresh corpses.

'But first, let's give them a chance to get rich quick. There's plenty of wealthy people here for them to borrow money from, especially a blind young master from a prestigious family.'

Lucian finished sharpening his axe and moved it to his belt. He adjusted his backpack and made sure that his boots were properly tied.

The heavy steel gates began to open with a loud creaking noise, allowing the first wave of participants to enter.

A loud cheer rose from the crowd, and Lucian joined in, cheering along with everyone else.

Celine stood up to move ahead and noticed him raising his fist in the air, waving at her, while whistling with his fingers, smiling and looking like a complete fool.

Who cared about appearances? Acting like a sour cucumber all day would only make him more miserable.

"Let's go, let's go, let's go!" Lucian shouted, his voice lost among the crowd, but Celine seemed to hear it.

She raised the cat's paw in response. It looked like she was just playing around with it, but Lucian knew she was waving back to him, in her own way.

Lucian laughed, feeling a surge of energy in him. They shouldn't let any outsiders break them apart, they should be doing the breaking instead! That's how it should be, yes!

Entrance tickets were collected at the door, and Lucian made sure to have his ticket ready.

The soldiers found him crazy to enter by himself and he just responded with not being alone and having Gods by his side.

A few even asked him to pray for them, thinking he was a priest, so he gave a few blessings to them and their families.

He made a sign of the cross on his chest and continued walking forward with a map they gave him.

'There are two silver knights among the debtors. Both one rank above me,' Lucian noted the information his people gave him, 'They wouldn't be stupid enough to target me, right?'

One might think that people, who owed him a debt, would be afraid of him and steer clear, but the truth was far different.

Some would turn into the most aggressive bunch when under threats, often more scary than the loan sharks themselves.

His people needed to be extra careful around them. A debt could be cleared with a simple death of the creditor, after all. Many got injured in fights when the debtors turned into desperate cornered beasts.

'So many targets, so little time. If only I could clone myself,' Lucian thought sadly as he pumped into his first target, making it seem like he was not looking where he was going, being too occupied with his map.

"Hey! Watch it!" The target growled and turned to face Lucian, his hand reaching for his weapon.

"You know, same old, same old," Big Ray replied, "You, on the other hand, have become even more famous since the last time we met."

The knight stage training must have steeled his heart. He was no longer hot headed and angry like in the past.

They walked together, chatting about their experiences, catching up on the latest news, and discussing the upcoming hunt.

Small tents, which belonged to commoners, were located in the far corner of the area, stacked closely to each other. They were made from simple cloth and had no decorations or special features.

Big Ray came from lower nobility and was the only one who managed to become a knight among his siblings.

Lucian used this chance to subtly steer the conversation towards the topic of marriage.

His question was met with a laugh.

"I can't afford a wife yet, Lucian." Big Ray shook his head, his expression wistful.

Most knights were in debt to the nobles who had paid for their education and training, as the cost of becoming a knight was astronomical. Big Ray had been fortunate enough to have his family support him, but he wasn't debt free.

Anything below gold rank knights had to live on a strict budget to survive. They were a glorified workforce until one reached gold rank. Only after reaching the gold rank would real money making opportunities start to present themselves.

Lucian was a good listener and Big Ray had a lot of things on his chest.

"You need to unwind once in a while," Lucian suggested jokingly, "I've got some connections, maybe I can hook you up with someone... The Queen of the Night, perhaps?"

Big Ray laughed in dismissal, "Don't even joke about it. She's way out of my league." When he saw Lucian's serious expression, his smile disappeared, "Are you serious? How do you even know her?"

"Lady Lily was a bit persistent in getting to know me better," Lucian replied, making Big Ray roll his eyes, "But it didn't work out in the end. We're still on good terms, though. I can introduce you to her, if you're interested."

Big Ray bobbed his head up and down, his eyes shining with excitement as they passed by a few groups of knights. Among them was Lando Turan, who had his ears open upon hearing Lady Lily's name.

"Lady Lily owes me a favor," Lucian continued leisurely, "She has a good head on her shoulders and is not the type to marry for status or money. I'm sure you two will get along well."

"What's the catch?" Big Ray asked, his enthusiasm slightly dimming, "I know your prices, so don't think you can pull a fast one on me."

Lucian moved his eyes to Lando Turan, "He was an iron rank when he borrowed money from me, and now he is silver, so there's not much my people can do to him, except wait for him to return to his senses. I think that's all I need to say."

Big Ray followed Lucian's gaze and noticed the man he was referring to, "Lando Turan?"

They served the same house, and Lucian didn't want to assume that they were on good terms just because of it, but Big Ray's reaction confirmed that they were.

"Could you remind him of the debt he owes me? I'm sure he will listen to you."

Big Ray used to be part of Lucian's gang, and knew how dangerous it was to cross the Badass gang.

"You got it," Big Ray nodded eventually, cracking his fingers, thinking that all he had to do was threaten the crap out of Lando, and he would get Lady Lily's attention.

They were the same rank, but Big Ray had more 'friends', and thus the upper hand.

Lucian leaned over to whisper, "I still want my money back, so if he finds a way to repay his debt by tomorrow morning, let him off the hook. I don't care if he steals or borrows money from someone to pay me off, but I want it in coins, not in favors."

Big Ray's lips pulled into a smirk, "You're still the same as I remember. It's good to see that you haven't changed."

"Unlike your master," Lucian commented humorously.

Big Ray laughed, trying to slap him on the shoulder but failing to do so because Lucian had already moved away from his reach, "..."

He shrugged it off, following next to Lucian, "I can't praise our young master Mathieu enough for turning over a new leaf. The bad rumors about him will disappear in time, he is no longer the trash that everyone knew."

Lucian didn't pause, "Oh? Did he advance?"

"Ah..." Big Ray realized he shouldn't share that information with anyone and stopped himself from confirming it.

Lucian didn't know why Young Master Mathieu would want to hide such an achievement from the world to begin with, but Big Ray was not going to risk exposing him it seemed.

"I'm sorry, I can't tell you," Big Ray scratched the back of his head in apology.

Lucian didn't comment further and let the topic drop.

Big Ray stayed in a cheaper camp, so they had to separate for the time being.

Lucian invited him to the more expensive campsite to drink and enjoy himself.

The more expensive camp was a place where nobles mingled with each other. Nobody was allowed to step in unless they were accompanying their master or were running errands for them.

Big Ray happily accepted the offer.

Lucian didn't forget to mention Lady Lily again before they parted ways.

He felt Lorano's nervous gaze on him, and when their eyes met, Lorano quickly looked away, pretending to be busy with something else.

Lucian rarely had to step in to assist his people with demanding money. He was usually the last resort, the final nail in the coffin.

'Well, that should take care of that,' Lucian thought, walking away from the scene, satisfied with the outcome.

If Lorano chose to target Mathieu, that would be even better.

'Maybe a little extra push will do the magic.'

┌────────── Author's note ─────────┐

You know how there's always someone picking up fights with certain MCs like they have a death wish? 😊 I present you: Birth of cannon fodders, Lucian style! 🗡️

□ Has anyone read Nexus Ascension: My Comprehension Defies The Heaven? By Shennn3k? It's a new webnovel sensation by a complete newbie author. In case you plan to check it out, post a Luffy gif/pic in the comments, so I can blackmail him into giving me a shout out for my Villainess novel as well. Thank you. □



Chapter 130 130: 4.30 - A Face-slapper?

A few soldiers were stationed outside the more luxurious camp's perimeter to prevent any uninvited guests from entering.

They immediately blocked Lucian's way, demanding his status card. After he showed it to them, they apologized and stepped aside, letting him proceed.

"Sir," A voice called out, making Lucian stop in his tracks, "Would you like me to help you with your luggage?"

Two servants, dressed in a simple, black uniform. The woman was holding a basket of fresh fruits, glasses, and a jug of water, while the man was empty handed.

"Please," Lucian replied.

The male servant immediately took his backpack, leading the way to a carriage.

"Halt," the same guards from earlier demanded someone else's status card.

Lucian continued to follow the servant, observing the situation.

Young master Mathieu stood before the soldiers silently. He was alone and looked like he didn't know he was supposed to carry a status card with him in the first place.

"I'm afraid that we can't let you pass without it," the soldier said.

"The people from the Duremont house should be inside," Mathieu explained, "They will confirm my identity."

"I'm afraid that we can't let you pass, My Lord. It's the rule." The soldiers drew their weapons. "You can come back later when you have your card with you."

"Move along, you are blocking the entrance!" a noble shouted impatiently from behind.

Lucian entered the carriage, leaving Mathieu to fend for himself.

"I heard he changed for the better," one of the people present whispered to the other, "And even saved a hay head."

"Mhm, he was forced to act that way," the other replied, spreading a new wave of rumors, "He's just trying to save face. He's not fooling anyone."

Lucian was silent as he listened, wondering who had twisted the reality against Mathieu so fast and so thoroughly.

He could see the man in the distance. His face was emotionless, taking a step to the side to let the people pass.

"Looks like the Duremonts can't afford to waste any more money on their useless son," someone hushed a comment behind their palm as the people close by joined in on the laughter.

But then, Lucian saw something that he didn't expect to see.

After the complaining noble passed, Mathieu peacefully took out his card and gave it to the soldiers, who quickly returned it after a glance, letting him through.

Young master Mathieu successfully face slapped everyone who was gossiping about his standing in the family.

'What's going on?' Lucian frowned, not getting a proper read on Mathieu's abilities just yet.

The small carriage took Lucian to a more secluded place.

The sound of people vanished, replaced by the sound of water and birds chirping.

A small stream of clear water ran nearby, surrounded by trees and greenery.

Lucian's tent was much bigger, enough to fit ten people. The privacy was also welcome, as one didn't have a clear view of their neighbors, but he was still unsure if the tent was worth the amount of money it cost him to stay there.

Lucian had his own bedroom, which was divided by a curtain from the rest of the room. There was a large, comfortable bed, a table, and a chair, and even a small stove for cooking. A latrine was built next to the tent, together with a bathtub, and a storage area.

This wasn't even the most expensive camp. It was the one that had the best ratio between comfort, price, and location.

Lucian was still full of energy even though the day had been long. The hunting competition started tomorrow, so maybe taking as much rest as possible would be the best way to start it?

There were around a thousand and six hundred participants from all over the kingdom.

'I wonder what invasive species they plan to make us hunt this year. Snakes? Wild Goats? Boars?'

They would receive a list of targets to hunt, and each kill had a different amount of contribution points. Some targets would have more than others, and some might not have any at all.

Lucian opened his watch and looked at the time.

'Still too early for the courtesans to be here.'

They were one of the main attractions, their presence highly anticipated.

It was also a signal to meet up with Celine, they should blend in with others and no one should pay attention to them.

'Does she really want to spook couples that do it on their horses?'

He wasn't sure, but was willing to accompany her to do so.

Lucian drolled up the bread he bought from the food stalls to feed the little snitch, before realizing that it was unnecessary.

He didn't see Togo all day yesterday and today. There were many predators around the hunting grounds, so Celine probably hid it away somewhere.

'Or it's a traitor and is avoiding me.'

The sky was slowly turning orange, the clouds scattering in all directions. A cool breeze blew, making the leaves rustle.

Lucian didn't want to waste the food, so he decided to feed the fish in the stream with it.

He made it a routine to turn anything he could into training opportunities, and that included catching fish with his bare hands.

He rolled his sleeves and pants up, stepping into the water.

He sprinkled the bread and then bent down, slowly moving his hand closer to the surface of the water.

He had to be quick and precise, otherwise he would miss his opportunity.

Whosh!

An arrow pierced through the air, next to Lucian, hitting the water.

He quickly turned to see who shot at him, seeing Celine's evil smile from above a cliff.

She held the bow in her hand, having aimed it at him.

"I missed," she said, pretending to be disappointed as the knight by her side handed her another arrow.

Lucian's heart was racing, and he tried to keep calm. There was a small note attached to the arrow. He pretended he didn't notice it, staring at Celine.

Mathieu, who also witnessed the scene, looked like he was about to faint from Celine's actions. He quickly recollected himself and shouted, "Lady Rochefort, stop!"