

## My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone

### Chapter 131 131: 4.31 - Just an Extra

Lucian's heart ached in regret. Their fun time was interrupted yet again.

"Oh, if it isn't Lord Duremont," Celine pulled the string and aimed at Lucian again, "Has your blindfold been a fashion accessory all this time?"

"I'm blind in one eye, not in both. Please put down that bow, Lady Rochefort," young master Mathieu tried to reason.

"Remove your blindfold and I might spare him," she said as if she had found a new target for her cruel game.

"I will!" Mathieu exclaimed, he removed his blindfold, revealing the scars around his purple eyes that made him look terrifying. "Happy, My Lady?"

Celine kept her bow up, "Not really. Maybe going for a second round would make me feel better," she said and shot another arrow.

"!!!" Mathieu jumped in to block it with his body, protecting Lucian, "Run," he urged, groaning from the pain of being hit by the arrow, "I'll stall her, you get out of here."

"I can't leave you here like this," Lucian said in protest.

"Leave!" Mathieu shouted, "She won't kill a Duremont in broad daylight. You, on the other hand..."

Lucian didn't have a backer, powerful enough to stand against the Rochefort house, and couldn't risk his life just to save Mathieu.

"I'll call for help," Lucian said, a bit rushed.

"No, anything but that! I'll be fine, I promise, just go!" Mathieu urged Lucian to leave, to get as far away from Celine as he could.

Lucian got out of water with a splash, not forgetting to take the arrow with the note with him, "Don't die."

Mathieu struggled a nod.

"Witnesses should stay for the show, don't you think so?" Celine said, stopping Lucian in his tracks, "Lord Duremont jumped into the arrow's trajectory by himself, you saw it."

Lucian turned his head towards her as she fled the crime scene, letting Lucian do the saving, "Hold on."

He helped carry young master Mathieu to his tent. He broke the arrow, then used the medical kit he had in his backpack to stop the bleeding and clean the wound, bandaging it up.

'I warned him about meeting a bad ending when someone crosses my Celine's path...let's pray the arrow she shot at him will teach him that lesson...'

Celine immediately leveraged on Mathieu's earlier stunt in protecting Lucian by targeting Lucian again.

It gave Lucian an opportunity to get close enough to get some information out of Mathieu.

'We are great partners in crime, aren't we?'

Mathieu was sweating, gritting his teeth, enduring the pain, "Arrgh."

"Why do you keep helping me?" Lucian wondered aloud in worry, as if he didn't intentionally inflict pain to Mathieu, "I'm nobody to you."

Mathieu sighed softly, resting his head on the pillow, "Not just you, it's also Lady Rochefort I wanted to help. I can't let her ruin her life because she looked down on someone she shouldn't have."

"I'm just a merchant, what could I possibly have done to her?" Lucian asked, his tone light, as if he were just asking for the sake of conversation.

Mathieu chuckled and then winced in pain when Lucian pressed on the wound to bandage it tighter, "That's right...You've been enduring her abuse without retaliation, but what if one day she chose to target your loved ones instead? Wouldn't you want to strike her then?"

"My loved one?" Lucian had no idea what Mathieu was blabbing about. He only had one person he loved, and that person was Celine, "Who?"

Mathieu was getting nervous again, "Um, I don't know, but you don't plan to stay single your whole life, right? I was...I was just thinking of a hypothetical situation where you did find someone you loved, and then Lady Rochefort decided to make that person's life miserable as well...you know?"

"Who are you?" Lucian asked, there was a pinch of curiosity and innocent teasing in his tone, "Where is the old Mathieu?"

"What? Hahaha..." Mathieu laughed suspiciously, his voice rising in pitch, "Of course I'm Mathieu! Who else would I be?!"

The way he reacted to Lucian's questions was strange, but he was probably just trying to avoid getting into trouble, "You saved me, so I'm indebted to you now. Whoever you are, I owe you my life."

Mathieu seemed to trust Lucian's words completely and slowly calmed down, "You are such a great man, I don't know why she wouldn't choose you over that guy."

That cryptic talk again.

Mathieu looked like he was itching to tell Lucian something important, but held back every time he opened his mouth.

"Who is 'she'?" Lucian asked, his tone patient, "And who is 'that guy'?"

Mathieu bit his lip, his expression conflicted, "You have to swear on the knight's honor that you won't tell anyone what I'm about to tell you."

"..." Lucian didn't like the sound of it, but he agreed anyway, "I swear on the knight's honor that I won't tell anyone what you are about to tell me."

Mathieu sighed in relief, "Alright, I'm trusting you here," he began, "The truth is...I had a dream about the future and you were in it!"

"..." Lucian blinked twice.

Mathieu continued to explain how Lucian was a man, who had luck with money, but not with love. A man, whose kind heart was not rewarded by the woman he loved, but instead taken advantage of and used.

He talked about how Lucian would destroy the Rochefort house for the sake of his loved one. He would sacrifice himself to marry Lady Rochefort, and ultimately, help his love from the background, watching her fall in love with someone else.

Mathieu was vague about it, as if he didn't know much about politics. Just that there was going to be a war, a big war between the kingdoms, all because of one person capturing the hearts of many.

"What about you?" Lucian asked, "Who are you to her? To me from the 'future'?"

"Me? I'm just an Extra!" Mathieu said, a bitter smile appearing on his face, "A stupid, useless Extra! I will die a terrible death for helping Lady Rochefort bully you and the one you love."

Lucian remained silent.

"I know it sounds crazy, but there's an important event that will happen during the hunting competition."

Lucian leaned over to hear Mathieu's secret.

Mathieu whispered into Lucian's ear, "There's going to be a shackled attack during the competition, and it's going to cause a lot of casualties. Young master Edmund will become one of them. It will change Lady Celine forever. She will become even crueler than before. She's going to ruin many lives in the future, and I want to stop her from doing that."

"By saving young master Edmund?" Lucian guessed.

Mathieu nodded, "Yes. If young master Edmund doesn't die, then Lady Rochefort won't become the person I saw in the future! My life will be saved, the Duremonts will be saved, everyone will be saved! Including you, me and her!"

Mathieu even mentioned the fishing scene, where Lucian would one day share his past trauma to his "love", how Celine had forced him to catch fish blindfolded, and that she would shoot him with arrows when he failed.

"So that's how you conveniently appeared there," Lucian said, making Mathieu nod and groan in pain again.

Celine promised to help Lucian train catching arrows with his hand while he promised to help her with a new business strategy she had in mind.

They were always in an enclosed room, and wanted to take the most of this opportunity to roam around outside.

It's not like they had to be glued to each other to enjoy each other's company.

Lucian excused himself for a second and walked deeper into the forest, opening the note from the arrow.

'Try fishing with closed eyes, if you dare,' the note said.

┌──────── Author's note ─────────┐

Thank you for the feedback regarding the story's pacing in the previous chapter, please continue doing so, and don't be afraid to share your opinion.

As an amateur writer (I've been writing for 6-7 years as a hobby), I'm still learning, and what I want to convey to readers doesn't always get through. Every interaction you make with the story (reaction gifs, comments, reviews) helps me improve and write faster.

All who read this far, thank you too! 😊



## Chapter 132 132: 4.32 - The Prophecy

"Are you sure you didn't read too many romance novels before sleep?" Lucian returned to his tent.

It did look like everything Mathieu saw in his prophecy was mostly from the female's point of view.

"You don't believe me? Of course you don't," Mathieu said, trying to sit up. He placed his head in his palms, "I don't blame you. I'm in disbelief too."

"The story sounds interesting enough," Lucian said, "And I would like to hear more."

It didn't matter whether it was a real prophecy or not; Mathieu seemed to be acting on it, and it was a good chance for Lucian to use it to his advantage.

The easiest way to make a man talk was to make him think you were on his side...or torture him into talking. But why risk your reputation when there were easier ways?

Adapting to the situation was a life skill Lucian had to learn to survive. It wasn't about the rule of the jungle, or the strong always wins, it was about being able to change yourself in order to fit in with the new environment.

You acted ruthlessly in the presence of the ruthless, a victim to the righteous ones, a friend to the lost and vulnerable, and a leader to the hopeless.

Lucian listened to Mathieu intently, nodding every now and then to show that he was following along and interested in the prophecy.

Mathieu didn't seem to have an idea what business Lucian dipped in, didn't know about the world's affairs or anything else besides the academy and the heroine's love interests. He didn't remember the heroine's name either, only her looks.

The more Lucian questioned him, the more he became convinced that he was not the Mathieu he met at the cafeteria.

"How did I fall in love with the heroine?" Lucian asked, curious.

The person in Mathieu's memory didn't sound like anything he would ever fall in love with. She sounded disloyal and indecisive.

"She was kind and caring," Mathieu answered, "She reminded you of your deceased mother, who was warm and loving..."

"What about the villainess?"

Mathieu's eyes suddenly shone with admiration, making Lucian feel a little uncomfortable, "From the most hated woman in the kingdom, she slowly rose to become one of the most feared people in the whole world. No one could stop her and her ambitions. All the love interests had to work together to take her down. She was unstoppable until the end."

"End?" Lucian asked.

"She died," Mathieu said.

"And her ambitions?"

"Unfulfilled. She didn't succeed in obtaining what her heart desired the most," Mathieu said, his shoulders slumping in defeat. "It was her unfulfilled love that brought her down, and everyone else around her with her. If she could have just...if she had only chosen someone who could reciprocate her love, she wouldn't have turned into a villainess."

"You...care about her?" Lucian asked, feeling uneasy, "Despite everything she did?"

"Of course, I do," Mathieu replied, "What would I do for such a devoted and faithful person to love me? So many people are unfilial to each other, but not her. Not the villainess. She loved the man of her life with her whole being, and it was beautiful."

Lucian had to look away from Mathieu, having an urge to scoop Celine up in his arms and squeeze her until he heard her laugh and call his name, not the Crown Prince's, like the Celine from Mathieu's prophecy.

"She just shot you with an arrow," Lucian said, pointing to the wound on Mathieu's shoulder.

"She hates me, I know," Mathieu whispered and stood up from the bed, "My only chance to get on her good side is through her twin brother," he said, walking towards the door, "I will be leaving for today. Have a good night, Lord Arclight."

'Lord?' Lucian didn't have a noble title yet, but in the prophecy he did, and Mathieu spoke to him as if it were an actual reality.

There were plenty of crazy people who believed in prophecies and lived their lives based on them, so Lucian wasn't going to judge Mathieu too hard for it, but this one just happened to have a crush on his little wife...

He watched Mathieu's back as the other man left his tent and closed the flap behind him.

Lucian didn't have time to ponder over it for too long. He could predict Mathieu's moves in some parts now, so interrupting his steps shouldn't be too difficult.

He went to the cheaper camp, inquiring about Big Ray, and unintentionally dropped his access pass for the more luxurious camp.

Lorano shouldn't have a hard time picking it up. He was stressed enough as it was, and should have been looking out for an opportunity to get into the more exclusive area, so Lucian just handed him a good excuse on a silver platter.

Lorano didn't know that the pass belonged to Lucian, so he shouldn't be too nervous about being discovered. News of an injured blind noble heir from one of the richest houses had also spread fast, so it shouldn't take too much thinking to figure out the target.

The courtesans have also arrived, so Lucian halted Lady Lilly's horse, greeting her.

"..." Lady Lilly forced a smile, "Ah, Sir Arclight, I hope you've been well."

"Of course I have," Lucian replied, not at all bothered by the lack of enthusiasm in her tone.

He lost his access point, so he asked her if she could help him out. She didn't want to, but did she have a choice? She complied and let him tag by her side.

"I'm a bit occupied right now," she excused herself once they passed through the entrance.

"If you are on your way to young master Edmund, I'm going there as well," Lucian said, making her almost fall over the horse.

"Y...you can't," she stuttered, "I mean... it would be better if you didn't."

"Why?" he asked, tilting his head in confusion, "Do you have something against me seeing him?"

Lady Lilly's expression twisted in anguish, "Sir Arclight, please... I'm begging you. If you approach him now, you will only make matters worse for yourself."

## Chapter 133 133: 4.33 - A Bad Deal

'Worse for myself?'

Lady Lily's words made Lucian imagine Edmund's reaction upon seeing them together.

It would be for the best if Celine was present at the time as well.

They would talk it out, and Lucian could finally get the closure he needed.

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The Rochefort's camp was like a small village of its own. There were knights everywhere, looking less like a group of participants and more like guards, protecting the camp.

Lucian, who had entered the hunting competition by himself (to save money for his cultivation), could only admire the lavish lifestyle.

It was something to behold. There was even a stage and a dance floor for their entertainment.

Lady Lily seemed to have prepared a performance for them, and everyone was eagerly waiting for it to start.

Young Master Edmund sat leisurely on a chair, watching the stage with a bored look on his face.

He looked nowhere like the enthusiastic young man who was interested in getting along with just anyone, but like a future leader of an esteemed noble house.

Lucian quickly scanned the area, looking for a sign of Celine, and instead found a gagged young master Mathieu with his hands and feet tied up.

He was hanging upside down in the middle of one of the tents, like a pig waiting to be slaughtered.

'Seems like my methods are too soft compared to the Rochefort's.'

Celine was working inside her tent, not interested in joining the outdoor party it seemed.

Edmund would usually help Lucian and Celine meet up as a middle man, so Lucian didn't find anything strange about being invited to a private tent for a meeting. He followed the two knights escorting him in.

The tent was luxurious, decorated with beautiful furniture. Even from the inside, the music was loud enough to drown out any noise, which would have been great for ensuring their privacy if not for the ominous atmosphere.

Lucian gripped his axe by the handle tightly. He suddenly felt like a lamb, walking into a wolf's den, completely unarmed.

He only had a split second to react before one of the knights lunged at him.

Lucian flung the axe at the structure of the tent, tearing it open and exposing the inside. It flew in Celine's tent direction and stopped moving.

Edmund caught the axe, bending down to smile at Lucian through the hole in the tent.

Lucian was dangerously close to uncovering Edmund's true nature, but Edmund's steps were faster.

Lucian's mistake was trying to piece together the full picture, giving his future "brother in law" a benefit of a doubt.

"Lady Celine!" Lucian ducked, dodging the knight's fist, and rolled to the side, getting away from their range, "Lady Celine!"

He shouted at the top of his lungs, hoping she would hear him, but the knights' cheers from the outside drowned out his voice.

Being outnumbered wasn't the problem, but being read like an open book by the person who was pulling the strings was.

Lucian pulled out his short spear, using it to fight off his attackers, destroy the furniture, the tent itself, anything to buy himself time.

A kick to the back sent him sprawling, another blow to the chest left him gasping for breath.

Having no other option left, Lucian used the spear to cut his arm, letting blood trickle down.

"Damn it!" one of the knights cursed, realizing what he was doing. They seemed afraid of any evidence that would lead to their master being discovered.

'Tears disappear; blood stays.'

Lucian flung his bloody arm, splattering his blood on the walls and their uniforms, as if he was using them as a canvas.

The dark red painted a portrait of hopelessness, a desperate attempt to leave behind a piece of truth.

"Shit!" another one cursed, "Kill him, quickly!"

Lucian blinked away the blur in his eyes. He was losing a lot of blood and began swaying on his feet, enough to trick the knights to drop their guard down.

'Who knew that being an undead monster would come in handy one day?'

They thought he had given up and accepted his fate. They used this as their chance to strike, their kick breaking Lucian's limbs in an instant.

"Ugh," Lucian groaned out, falling to his knees. He coughed and winced in pain, his eyes flickering, and his lips curled into a pained grimace.

It was alright. He chanted to himself. The pain was manageable, as long as he could still think straight.

The knights tied Lucian's mouth and his wounded arm to stop the bleeding.

A blond man of similar stature to Lucian's took the spot by Lady Lily's side, acting as her servant. Her beauty had stolen enough focus for anyone to see the difference between the doppelganger and Lucian.

The knights threw Lucian's limb body in a bag and used the back entrance to escape into the forest. They were in a rush, looking nervous.

'Businessmen don't cry over bad deals, Lucian.'

Lucian forced himself into viewing his predicament as a logistical problem to be solved, not a trauma to be felt.

He was frantically doing math to drown out the sound of his blood boiling in his veins. The higher the debt, the less he had to feel the emotion of betrayal.

Mathieu was also carried away by the knights, his body limp, his head hanging low, as if he had been knocked out.

'Mathieu is the perfect person to pin the blame on. It's an opportunity that not even I would have let pass if I tried to hide my dirty deeds from Celine.'

The knights brought Lucian to his tent, listening to Edmund's instructions on how to set up the crime scene to look like a fight had taken place between Mathieu and Lucian.

"His female cousin should be looking for him soon," Edmund said, "Luckily her beloved cousin is still alive and can be saved in time, but not without a heavy price on his mind. His injury will heal, but not his soul."

Edmund talked about crippling Mathieu's mind as he watched his knights do the dirty work.

There was not a single ripple in Edmund's voice, as if he was just talking about a boring book he had read, "Hopefully, my sister will finally get her senses back, and start acting like a Rochefort again."

'I should have trusted Lady Lily's words, so why didn't I?' Lucian decided to trust his judgment instead.

He decided to trust an image of a man who spent years proving he was on Lucian and Celine's side.

Edmund consistently portrayed himself as less competent than Celine behind closed doors. He must have acted as mama's boy to lower Celine's guard as well.

Their "peaceful days" were a false sense of safety maintained by Edmund until he was ready to strike.

Lucian stopped internalizing the betrayal as Edmund's evil, but as his own stupidity for thinking a hay head could ever truly be seen as a family by a noble.

"You will not be forgotten, and you will be avenged," Edmund continued, his eyes moving to the bag that contained Lucian, "That much I can promise you, Lucian Arclight."

Caw-caw! Caw-caw!

Raven's caws filled the air.

Edmund's head snapped up in alarm, "Did she train more than one bird?!" he paused in realization, whispering, "She lied...to me?"

┌────────── Author's note ─────────┐

Edmund tried to compromise Lucian's morals and reputation by using Jax's courtesans first, then Lady Lily.

Edmund also tried to gaslight Lucian into believing that sleeping around was normal and expected, hoping Lucian would slip up, using himself as an example.

He wanted to lower Lucian's value in Celine's eyes, especially as a man susceptible to lust and infidelity. He almost succeeded when Celine caught Lucian with Jax's naked woman and broke up with him.

Instead of falling for Edmund's trap, Lucian began to investigate, becoming more and more suspicious of Edmund.

Edmund figured out he couldn't antagonize his sister forever, and took drastic actions before Lucian could counterattack.

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## Chapter 134 134: 4.34 - Broken Bones

Lucian stared at his broken body on the ground. There was no sign of life left in him.

Nobody would wait until he reached a sapphire rank when they could just easily kill him before that happened.

He hated pain, but what he hated more was the satisfaction others got out of seeing him suffer.

The barrage of insults from Voice was not helping, so he did what he did best; make it eat its own words.

'Could you fix my broken bones, Voice?'

He exchanged places with Voice in his mind, becoming an overseer of his body instead of the one experiencing it first-hand.

He might not have adapted his physical body fast enough, but he definitely had adapted his mind.

Becoming stronger than Voice was always his top priority.

It came above wealth, fame, or power. If he could not conquer his own mind, how could he ever hope to conquer others?

'Voice, fix my broken bones,' he repeated, but this time, he was not asking, he was demanding, 'Like how the southerners do.'

Voice did not like to be treated like this, and made it known, so Lucian tried to borrow Mathieu's body to treat his own.

Edmund and his knights already left, thinking Lucian was dead. Their plan was simple: make it look like Mathieu was trying to force himself on Lucian, the latter ending up dying in the process, the former in an eternal coma.

From what Lucian saw, they used an internal bleeding method on Mathieu, clogging his brain with his own blood, and making sure that he would never be the same person again.

Lucian had picked up a few of Voice's abilities, and learned to use them in his favor.

Shackleds could infiltrate a dead person's mind, for example, so Lucian had to kill Mathieu in order to achieve that.

'Voice, kill him for us,' he ordered, taking on the troubles being opportunities in disguise mindset, 'It's a great experiment opportunity for both of us to learn something new.'

Lucian's body twitched in response, slowly moving its broken arms towards its pocket, taking out a handkerchief to cover Mathieu's nose and mouth with it, suffocating him to death.

Mathieu was in no state to put up resistance. He died easily.

Lucian took control over his body, and it came naturally to him. He never noticed a shackled taking their time to adjust to the body they possessed, so he didn't either.

The body did what he wanted it to do without any problem. There was no last wish from the previous owner of the body, which made the body weaker. Lucian was unable to stop the rotting process of the flesh. He had to work fast to not become a walking corpse.

Mathieu's body was different from Lucian's.

He had no idea what kept its skin from turning blue, even after his heart stopped beating. It was as if he was frozen in time, in a state that he died in but refused to accept it. Stubborn like Lucian himself was.

He went straight for the treatment of the bones. He wasn't a physician, so he realigned his body to the best of his ability and knowledge, and then secured them with a splint.

'It will take me at least a month to recover completely. There's no time for that. Think, think, think...' he stopped, remembering that he had yet to pass the silver stage.

He could use this chance to try and speed up his recovery.

If he could melt his bones like silver and then reforge them, he would be as good as new. Or at least he hoped so.

He heard gallops in the distance, getting louder and closer. The Duremont's faction knights, led by Mathieu's brother. He had to hurry.

Still in the control of Mathieu's corpse, Lucian used it to carry his body outside the tent to the river and jumped into the water, letting the stream carry him away.

Edmund probably wanted to use Lucian's death to force Celine into helping him deal with the Duremonts once and for all.

No body, no evidence.

Lucian's business was not prepared for war, so he had to hide his body to avoid conflict for the time being.

Also, the more people searched for Lucian and Mathieu, the better. It should put some pressure on Edmund, and give Lucian a chance to escape.

He would have followed the Duremonts as Mathieu if it weren't for the fact that his body was dead and he couldn't control two bodies at the same time.

Showing miracles (coming to life from death) was not on Lucian's bucket list today.

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Lucian left the stream when the moonlight became too bright, and found a small cave to hide in. It was cold and damp inside, but it was better than nothing.

He switched bodies and started to silver stage the body.

"Ha..." He gasped for air as soon as he was back in his body, the pain from his broken bones made it hard to focus.

He already learned how to transfer heat to his fist to melt Blocky. Now all he had to do was transfer that same power to the broken bones.

"Ughh..."

The burning pain was indescribable. He felt like a cauldron of melted metal, slowly cooling down and hardening again. He had to protect his flesh from overheating and being burned alive.

This was not how the night was supposed to go. He was supposed to spend it on a refreshing walk with his Celine and not in a cave with a cold corpse.

Speaking about corpses. Did it just move? Was it Lucian or was it the wind playing tricks on him?

'Stop playing jokes on me, Voice. I'm in no condition to deal with a shackled.'

'It's not me,' Voice responded.

'Hm?'

Lucian paused his training to check on Mathieu's corpse.

"Where am I?" Mathieu sat up, holding his head, "Urgh, my head hurts." He looked down at the body and then at his hands, "Am I dead? Am I a ghost?"

He pinched himself and felt the pain, "Ow!" he cried, "I clearly remembered saving the mother with a stroller from the ice cream truck, then..."

This Mathieu was even weirder than the previous one, speaking loudly to himself like a madman.

Mathieu looked around and saw Lucian, who stared at him silently, jumping in fright, "Ahh!" and then he quickly tried to run away. He tripped over a rock and fell face first into the rock, dying on the spot.

Then another Mathieu crawled out of the same body that had been lying in the cave since the beginning. This one was silent and observant, looking at Lucian with suspicion.

Lucian could only guess that the previous Mathieu was not the last one.

## Chapter 135 135: 4.35 - Spread The Plague

Touching the blood on his forehead and feeling the pain, Mathieu began to look for a way to treat his wound.

"There... are some... bandages in the bag," Lucian weakly motioned to the bag by his side.

Mathieu carefully took the bandages and cleaned the cut before bandaging his head, "Thank you," he said, his voice calm.

"Do you... remember anything?"

Mathieu was about to shake his head when he grabbed it in pain, clenching his teeth. When the pain subsided, he opened his eyes, "I'm Mathieu Duremont."

What a spectacle.

"What are... my favorability points at?" Lucian asked, trying to test out something.

He didn't see anything strange when he occupied Mathieu's body, but he did overhear Mathieu panicking over Celine's negative favorability points when he left Lucian's tent.

People really shouldn't be talking loudly to themselves. There were eyes and ears everywhere, no matter where you went.

"0/100," Mathieu said, looking at the spot above Lucian's head.

Lucian resumed his experiment with his silver stage, no longer able to depend on Mathieu's corpse to carry him around.

The man disappeared into the forest and returned with a big pile of firewood.

'So confident,' Lucian thought when Mathieu started to make a bonfire.

It could alert unwanted guests, but this Mathieu looked confident, like he knew what he was doing.

Maybe he had something up his sleeve, like sending a signal for Duremonts to come and save him? Whatever it was, Lucian decided to go along with it, only to end up being right about catching unwanted attention.

Like on call, Lorano Turan showed up with the intention to get some coins out of Mathieu, but ended up getting killed instead.

It was a bit anticlimactic, Lucian thought, as if Mathieu was toying with Lorano. He had a unique fighting style that Lucian couldn't recognize. It was able to overpower a knight of the same rank easily.

'Can you change Lorano into a shackled, Voice?'

These Mathieus were endangering Celine's safety with their strange prophecies, and they had to go back where they came from, dead or alive.

Mathieu extinguished the fire and dragged the body further into the woods, leaving Lucian alone in the cave.

'There are plenty of high ranked knights. Surely they will be able to deal with one shackled, won't they?'

Voice didn't have to be asked twice and changed Lorano's dead body into a shackled.

'That should keep everyone busy for a while,' Lucian thought, quite surprised by Voice's cooperativeness, 'You refuse to move into Jax's body, but have no problem spreading the shackled plague, huh?'

The shackled was of a high level, giving Mathieu with silver knight rank a hard time. It probably sought money and tried to collect as much of it as possible, and its greed didn't allow it to die peacefully.

Lucian wanted to test out a lot of things, but couldn't do so at the moment. He returned to forging his bones no matter how much he wanted to see Edmund die by the hand of his lackeys, thinking of making some parts of the prophecy come true.

'No time to waste. The sooner I can move on my own, the better.'

Lucian had to spend a lot of energy on healing and repairing the damage that was done to his bones.

Just like how he broke A's wrist like a twig, the knights were able to inflict a similar amount of damage to his bones.

He could deal with regular people, but not the elites that surrounded Celine's world.

The rise was nice while it lasted.

The crushing defeat after was painful to endure.

He had lost his parents, had lost their life savings, had lost his friends, had lost Seline, and now was losing Celine as well.

Every time, there was little he could do but watch as everything he loved was taken away from him, and he was powerless to stop it.

'How did I trust her less than I trusted him?'

Lucian counted the times Edmund made him doubt Celine's intentions, and he didn't like what the numbers showed.

He was angry at Celine for revealing their relationship to Edmund, but maybe it was the only way to protect their relationship.

Going against Lucian would go against Celine, and that was not a place Edmund wanted to be in. She was buying time for him to become more powerful to be able to stand next to her.

Lucian viewed Celine as a danger he had to handle when she was actually his only shield.

He heard flapping of the wings, followed by a loud thud and squawk, as if something big had landed on the ground.

The silent footsteps were getting closer, making the birds fly away.

'Celine?'

Lucian could recognize the sound of her light steps anywhere.

The footsteps stopped, and there was a moment of silence. She took a deep breath as she crouched down.

"Celi..." Lucian whispered.

"Shh," Celine shushed him, caressing his cheek with her thumb just to yank it away in shock.

His skin was boiling hot.

Lucian cooled down a bit, turning his head towards her hand, kissing her fingertips gently, "I'm sorry...for doubting you. You can punish me all you want..."

Celine's eyes were red, but she didn't cry. No, she was furious, "I will skin that bastard alive if it was him. He's already in my black book, but now he'll be in my death book too."

Lucian chuckled at her attempt to lift the mood, "No, it was—"

"You two," Edmund's voice came from behind, interrupting their conversation.

There was a sound of a sword being unsheathed. Edmund held it in his hand and pointed it at them, "There's no time to be lovey dovey. Let's go."

"He can't move," Celine said as she noticed the makeshift splints on Lucian's legs and arms that kept them still, "And I'm not leaving his side."

Edmund was about to protest when Celine stopped him.

"Move the camp closer to us," she ordered, standing up.

"What? Why not just order them to bring a stretcher and help him," Edmund said, "Out of my good will. Nobody will susp—"

"Nobody will get near him," Celine hissed, her voice threateningly low as she grabbed him by the collar, "Nobody. Do you hear me?"

Edmund gulped, nodding, "Alright," he said, "But you owe me one now."

Celine scoffed, her eyes narrowing at him suspiciously, "I owe you nothing," then whistled.

The knight with the cat appeared inside the cave, "My lady."

"Order others to move the camp closer to our location," Celine ordered, "There's some experimenting to be done."

"I'll get to it right away," the knight said.

He gave Lucian a quick glance before disappearing again.

## Chapter 136 136: 4.36 - Beautiful Even When She Is Weary

Celine returned to sit by Lucian's side, "We have an audience," she whispered, "Don't say anything unnecessary. Focus on your silver stage, and I'll handle the rest."

Was it normal to feel safe around a woman who had just said to her subordinates that she was going to torture him? Because Lucian did.

He thought that only money could give him a sense of security, but it turned out that Celine was also on that list. He didn't have to be alert of his surroundings and the potential threats that could harm him, besides Celine herself, of course.

If it were any other day, he would have bickered with her a bit longer, but his body didn't allow him to do that.

He started to feel the pain for real now that the adrenaline wore off. It was a surprise that he was still conscious, despite his injuries.

Even though he wanted to act tough before his little wife, show off and maybe win her heart, his body was too damaged to move, much less to perform.

Celine knew Lucian too well, especially his tendency to procrastinate in her presence. She sent Edmund away and turned her gaze to the side to prevent Lucian from acting foolishly again, only holding his wrist to make sure he was still alive.

She was always the though lovey, melting his heart like a cauldron of gold.

It wasn't hard to imagine, as his body was already in that state, naturally getting into the right mindset without him having to control the process.

That's how he obtained the previous stages, living through them, dealing with them, experiencing them firsthand, and surviving. To be close to death, and then rise from the brink of it, stronger than before.

His insides sizzled, and he had to grit his teeth not to scream in agony. It felt like someone had put hot coals under his skin and was trying to cook him alive.

His muscles twitched and convulsed uncontrollably, and his skin turned red and blistered. His veins popped out of his arms, pulsing with blood.

Just a little bit more, and he would reach the silver stage; he was almost there...

Just a little more, and he could show his Celine how amazing he was.

The broken bones had already mended together, but they refused to go back to their right shape. They misshapened, protruding through his skin, making him look grotesque.

No, this wouldn't do!

The body knew better than him. He shouldn't have forced it to take the right form and should have let it do it by itself.

He assisted his body in keeping the bones soft enough for it to mold back to the way it was.

His bones were back in their sockets. The only thing that remained were the black bruises and the puffed red skin.

He slowly opened his eyes to see the dark hair of his little wife, her side profile covered in shadows.

She looked a bit disheveled, holding onto her forehead with one hand, and her other hand was holding his wrist.

The dark circles around her eyes told him that she didn't get much sleep, and he was partly to blame for it.

'How can a woman still look so beautiful even when she is weary from stress and exhaustion?'

She noticed his gaze and smiled softly at him, "How are you feeling?"

He didn't answer, just stared at her, mesmerized. He wouldn't have allowed himself to be enchanted by her beauty if it were in the past, and would have slapped himself silly, but now...she had his full permission to enchant him all she wanted.

"Like...new," he answered finally, a little bit of pain in his voice, "How long?"

"Four days," she responded.

What? She didn't sleep for four days straight?! That was unacceptable! He struggled to sit up, only to be pushed down gently by Celine.

She made him drink from a cup of water first, then lay by his side instead and closed her eyes, a tear escaping her lashes. He felt her body trembling as he palmed her cheek.

It was okay now; he was alive. She didn't need to worry anymore. He didn't know what to do in situations like this, so he just wrapped his arms around her, stroking her hair, and gently whispered in her ear that everything was going to be fine.

The warmth of their bodies melted together, soothing each other.

"You scared me."

"I'm sorry."

"No, you're not. I know you are not," she said, "You are going to do it again and again, and again."

"...it's not the right time to be right, Celine, but a right time to be a bit more sensitive," Lucian said, "I almost died, I need comfort, not scolding. You are breaking my little heart."

She let out a soft chuckle, her tears wetting his shirt, "Your 'little' heart is made of stone, Lucian, don't try to trick me into thinking I can hurt it with my words."

He smiled, "But I love you, so they do hurt."

Her fingers clutched onto his shirt, her face nuzzling into him, "What was I thinking when I chose to fall in love with a man like you..."

"Probably the same thing I was thinking when I fell in love with a woman like you."

She tried to hold back her laughter, which made him smile even more, "That you are an idiot for falling in love with me and thinking I was worth your time, risking your life, and going through all this trouble?"

"I was going to say 'she is the most beautiful and smartest person I have ever met, and I would give up the world to have her by my side,' but yours is also acceptable."

She sniffed and laughed at the same time, looking up at him.

He wiped the tears away, staring back at her lovingly.

She gave him a weirded-out look, "Stop giving me that look, I'm going to vomit from too much honey in your eyes."

"I'm trying to show you how much I love you," Lucian said seriously.

She looked away, avoiding his intense gaze, "What do you want?"

"Love me back."

"Already doing it."

"I want more."

"Greed is a sin."

"Love is a virtue."

"..." She covered his mouth with her hand, not letting him continue the sappy conversation, "Not before my brother."

"You are still in danger, so you'd better not get too comfortable with each other yet," Edmund said, interrupting their moment as he walked inside the cave.

Lucian's mouth was still covered, so he didn't reply. But he sent Edmund a look that made it clear that he didn't appreciate the interruption.

Edmund didn't pay Lucian any attention, continuing his talk, "There's a crazy shackled hiding in the hunting grounds, targeting nobles in the hunting competition. The royal army has already been deployed to search the forest, this time with a search warrant signed by the king."

When his sister didn't react, Edmund looked at Celine, "Do you want them to catch you torturing hay heads for fun and pleasure, or will you let Lucian leave you in peace before he gets dragged into the investigation?"

## Chapter 137 137: 4.37 - Laugh Or Cry?

A few moments ago...

Lady Lily slid the luxurious red dress from her shoulders, revealing her bare skin.

Yet the man did not even bother to glance at the beautiful woman lying next to him.

"My Lord?" She tried to get his attention by caressing his chest, but to no avail. His eyes were fixed on the ceiling.

Lord Edmund wasn't a womanizer, and never asked for her body, unlike other men she met.

His eyes were always absent of passion and filled with boredom. The only time he would show anything akin to emotions was when he was in the presence of his sister.

Many thought it was because he had to shoulder the burden of being the heir of the Rochefort house, while his sister was free to do whatever she wanted, but Lady Lily knew better.

"My Lord, what's wrong? Don't you want me anymore?"

'I checked three times to make sure,' Edmund raised his right hand, rubbing his pointer and middle finger against his thumb as if testing their sensitivity, 'How is he still alive?'

Lady Lily hissed when her hair was pulled hard, "My Lord, I don't like this."

Her collarbone was present to him, but Edmund couldn't bring himself to feel desire.

"The most beautiful woman in the capital couldn't sway a mere merchant to bend his knees for her?" he mocked quietly, making Lady Lily frown.

Playing with people's fates was Lady Lily's favorite pastime, and the one, who granted her that privilege, was Lord Edmund.

She thought the new business sensation, Lucian Arclight, would be a nice addition to her collection. She didn't expect to fail and lose the bet she made.

Lord Edmund had lost a lot of money betting against her in the past. She never failed before. Until now. The cost of a lost bet was too high for her to afford.

Edmund pushed Lady Lily to the side and got off the bed, buttoning his shirt that she painstakingly unbuttoned moments before.

'When you try to spend money, only for it to grow back tenfold, and when you try to kill a guy, only to find him alive and well... Do you cry or laugh?'

Lady Lily clutched the sheets with her fingers, holding back from gritting her teeth in frustration. "If Lord Edmund could help me save him from Lady Celine's torment, he'll have no choice but to fall for my charms," she said, trying to coax him back to bed.

Lucian's painful groans coming from the cave had subsided, and now it was only silence surrounding the camp.

"You lost the bet and dragged me into your mess, implicating my name in the process," Edmund straightened his clothes, "Why would I help you?"

"I know that I can't afford the price of losing the bet," Lady Lily said, sitting up on the bed. She wrapped a blanket around her body, covering herself.

"And I could afford losing it, yet here I am," Edmund walked to the entrance, pushing the curtain aside and letting the sun's rays in, 'If you succeeded in seducing him, I would have spared him, and wouldn't have to go through the trouble to kill him myself.'

Edmund remembered the day Celine first introduced Lucian to him. The poor guy thought she was being overbearing, not knowing she was forcing her own twin into the corner.

'If something ever happened to Lucian Arclight, I'm the first suspect she would come after.'

Celine had interrogated the people in the camp, and before long, she was going to start with the two knights who had helped Edmund.

Fortunately, they were attacked by the shackled, which made Celine believe it was the main culprit behind Lucian's injuries, until the time he woke up and told her the truth himself.

No matter what, Edmund wasn't able to make her leave Lucian's side for even a moment.

She continued to act like a guard dog before a juicy bone.

---

Edmund passed by the two guards, the cat's meow announcing his entrance to the cave.

Lucian and Celine would become a force to be reckoned with in the future, no doubt about it.

So why was it so difficult for Edmund to accept that?

Edmund wouldn't have interfered in their relationship if Celine were still in control of the situation, but she wasn't.

She was losing the upper hand the moment she began to rely on Lucian for comfort.

His sister was too blinded by Lucian's charms to see the truth. That Lucian was nothing but a deceiver, who was trying to separate her from her own family.

Edmund wasn't sure if he could trust his sister anymore, and that fact frightened him.

When had they become so distant from each other? Edmund knew too well. It was since the day Lucian Arclight entered their lives.

"...or will you let Lucian leave you in peace before he gets dragged into the investigation?"

"I can always defend myself by saying that Lucian could be a shackled, and I was only acting in the kingdom's best interest, to protect us from his potential crimes. What do you think, Lucian?"

"It's a good excuse," Lucian agreed, his voice muffled by her hand.

Lucian was only supposed to be Celine's pawn, and yet, he had become much more than that. He held Celine in his arms as if she were a pawn in his game of chess instead. And she didn't even realize it.

Lucian took his time sitting up, his lips were close to her ear, whispering, "You should be careful, though. You're a lady, after all, and your reputation might suffer from it. Why not let Edmund shoulder some of the blame? A man is supposed to take care of his family, not the other way around."

Edmund almost fell into his hole, but he was quick to react and pull himself out of it, "Says the man, who is currently enjoying the comfort of the woman, whom he is using to shield himself."

"You tried to kill me," Lucian reminded him, not sparing Edmund a single glance, "And failed. So here I am, enjoying the comfort of my Celine. What are you going to do about it? Try to kill me again?"

Edmund smiled, drawing his sword, "Do you think you would have survived if I wanted you dead?"

Whatever Lucian did to survive, it helped Edmund to justify to himself that he wasn't serious about killing him, and thus was not a murderer in Celine's eyes. It was just a fight that went out of control, a mistake.

Celine turned around, already standing between the two men, "What is the meaning of this?"

## Chapter 138 138: 4.38 - Like Father Like Son

"Celine, you're a Rochefort, not a fool, blinded by false love." Edmund called, looking into her eyes, trying to make her understand, "For how long do you plan to chase a man who claims to love you, but only when it's convenient for him? Did your self respect fly away in the wind too?"

"It sounds like you've been badmouthing me before your brother, again," Lucian said helplessly, holding Celine's shoulders, massaging them from behind her, "I told you nobody will understand what we have, but us."

Celine approached Edmund, her expression fed up as she grabbed the spear leaning against the wall.

She raised it over Edmund's chest, making Lucian wonder if she planned to beat up her brother and if Edmund would allow it.

Women were weaker than men, unable to become knights. It had nothing to do with their intelligence or will, only a natural limit of their bodies, similar to hay heads, but worse.

Lucian thought that maybe it were her blessings that made her people respect her, but as he watched her swing the spear, using the blunt side to strike Edmund's arm, making a cracking noise, he knew it was not the case.

A normal spear would have broken in half against a golden rank knight, so how did she manage to break Edmund's bone?

Edmund raised his sword against his sister's spear, blocking an attack, but it looked like a toothpick against a mighty tree. The blade broke as it came into contact with the spear's tip.

A blessed weapon.

It was Lucian's first time seeing one in action. Even in the royal army, you could barely see one of those. They couldn't be wielded by just anyone either.

Strength alone would not suffice, your affinity with the earth's core had to be strong enough to bear the weapon's destructive power.

Women were great blessings holders, capable of boosting the army's strength. It was mandatory during war for them to pray for their nation's victory.

The opposite of blessing was a curse, a power to weaken the enemy, not strengthen. It was still a mystery how it worked, but there were many jokes about some men turning weak in the presence of their wives.

Lucian had never seen a curse manifest to such an extent, and had no idea what training one would need to achieve what Celine was doing.

He gulped when another crack was heard from Edmund's other arm, the same treatment as the other one.

"Celine..."

Celine didn't listen, and moved to break Edmund's leg next.

Edmund clenched his teeth in pain, not daring to utter a sound. He received another strike, until his leg snapped, and he could no longer hold himself up.

A horn's blow echoed through the air, signalling the royal army's arrival, stopping Celine from continuing with the other leg.

"Is this enough of a Rochefort for you?" Celine asked Edmund, throwing the spear at Lucian's feet as she passed by him. Like it wasn't a blessed weapon, but a stick she was playing around with.

She avoided Lucian's touch and walked away. "Men," she cursed, "All the same, pathetic creatures, not even worth the air they breathe."

Her voice became more and more distant as she walked away, "Why do I have to keep proving myself to them over and over again? It seems like until I kill myself to please you all, you'll never be satisfied."

Her lonely back looked bigger than it was, as if she could carry the weight of the world on her shoulders, and the world was testing her to see how much she could take.

While Lucian was barely catching up to Edmund's golden rank, Celine took care of him so easily that she made their duel seem like it was a practice match for children.

She was a Rochefort first, a woman second.

Lucian realized that her heart would always be split in two because of her position.

He didn't have any duties to his family, not understanding what it felt like to have to choose between your family and your personal happiness.

She loved to act weak and helpless, but had no place in the world where the weak belonged. She didn't have a place among the strong and powerful either.

Lucian picked up the spear, approaching Edmund, "What else could she be hiding from me?"

He had no idea she had the strength to face a knight, a golden one at that.

Edmund didn't answer, his gaze was fixed on the ground as if he were in deep thought. His left leg was still untouched. She left it for Lucian.

Instead of breaking his leg, Lucian stabbed him in the chest, close to the heart.

"Arghh!"

'She's still protecting him.'

Lucian listened to Edmund's painful groan, but finding no satisfaction in it.

'Always forgiving, no matter how many mistakes Edmund makes, she's still ready to give him a chance to redeem himself. Is it the same for the rest of us? Will she forgive me if I mess up too?'

Celine didn't know Edmund tried to kill Lucian, thinking Lucian wouldn't have a chance if Edmund was serious.

Lucian would have been dead if he didn't have a back up plan.

If only he could reveal her the truth about how he survived the near death experience.

But he couldn't do it. It would expose his deepest secrets, and she seemed to be hiding some of her own as well. Her heart also wasn't fully devoted to him.

She wasn't an infuriated girl like Edmund made her out to be. She didn't blindly follow Lucian. Most would have eloped like his mother did to be with his father. Celine would never abandon her family, no matter who or what she would have to face.

It made Lucian a bit jealous of the Rochefort house. Not because of their wealth and power, but because they had the other piece of Celine's heart.

While other students wanted to escape their duties, responsibilities, and the pressure of being an heir, Celine embraced it. She rebelled against the society, but never her house. It was clear as day that she was a proud daughter, not ashamed of her heritage.

Edmund smiled in pain, "Like father like son...they say. I heard...he killed himself and his wife to save his son from a life of debt and poverty...but is it really true? Or did he do it after his wife tried to escape from him?"

"My parents loved each other dearly," Lucian said, pulling the spear from Edmund's chest, "Looking into my past won't help you find any weakness to use against me. If you are jealous that Celine took revenge on my behalf and not yours, then maybe you are not as special to her as you thought you were."

"On your behalf? No, it's my punishment for breaking a promise," Edmund laughed in agony, "What do you want? Do you plan to lock her up in a gilded cage as well? Like your father kept your mother?"

"I'm smarter than that." Lucian splattered the blood from the spear on Edmund's face, wishing he could kill him without consequences.

The wound wouldn't kill Edmund, but it should be painful enough to make him shut up.



People should start writing fairy tales about princesses keeping dragons as their pets, so Lucian and Celine could enjoy the story together with their kids in the future.

Even though he wished Celine would stop poking the dragon's tail, he couldn't deny the fact that he enjoyed every moment of her doing so. It meant he could burn her naughty fingers with his fiery breath and then lick the burn marks to heal them.

No, he already decided that he would not allow her to bully him. No risk of turning into a real dragon here.

'I thought you were afraid of her turning you into her obedient pet,' Voice was confused by the thoughts Lucian painted in his mind, a lamb with a dragon's tail looked as weird as it sounded, 'Is that not why you have tried to soften her cruel ways toward you?'

'I'm trying, yes.' Lucian already hinted to Celine in his drunken state that he might hurt her if she didn't stop suffocating him with her possessive ways (ch. 4.17) .

She mistook it as him viewing her as a freak of nature who couldn't control herself, when all he wanted to say was that he wished to be like her (ch.4.22).

He did end up blurting those words by accident.

'I must have been really drunk that day.'

He even went as far as hurting her wrist while reminiscing about his childhood (ch. 4.17).

Lucian stared at the bloody wall of reality that reminded him of his problems. The wall called Edmund was making Voice question his motives.

He hoped Edmund would crumble, but he just bled, forcing Lucian to see the ugly bits of it.

Edmund didn't call for help, knowing well his sister would come to get him out of the trouble.

Celine didn't get to choose her family members and accepted them as a part of her life with all of their faults. She would continue to spoil them, and then wonder why they were so spoiled.

Lucian couldn't ignore Edmund's way of protecting Celine either. He always supported her outside of the public eye, no matter how crazy her plans seemed to be (like marrying a commoner).

They only ever argued in public, never in private. Edmund even copied Lucian's behavior to open his sister's eyes and make her realize that she was acting biased.

It lowered Lucian's guard, thinking Edmund was afraid to go against his sister, when in truth Edmund trusted her that she knew what she was doing.

So when that trust broke, and Edmund was faced with the reality of Lucian's existence (that reminded him of the 'overprotective' duchess), he was no longer willing to support his sister.

Lucian wiped the spear's blade clean against his clothes and decided to take it as an offering from Celine.

His stomach growled in hunger, his energy reserves running low. He had to find a safe place to recover.

"Crazy...bastard."

Lucian used some of Edmund's blood to freshen up his appearance and make himself look like he went through hell, but managed to survive. He did, but blood always made everything look more believable.

"You are too weak...to protect her." Edmund groaned, "You are nothing but a burden. The Crown Prince... would have been a much better match for her."

Then, Lucian used the spear as a walking stick and left the scene, not allowing Edmund's words to affect him.

The Rochefort pride was something. Edmund would rather die than give Lucian the pleasure of victory over him.

"Lord Edmund...?" Lady Lily called out from the outside, followed by Celine holding her cat in her hands, stroking the cat's chin.

Lucian glanced at Celine, recognizing the expression she had when her heart made way to her head.

He made a slight bow like a gentleman to the two ladies and departed.

Lady Lily gasped in worry when she saw his state, covering her mouth.

"Does your body react to every man in sight?" Celine passed before her, blocking her view for a second, "If so, you should visit the church for cleansing, lest you'll be mistaken for a whore," she paused, "Oh, my apologies, I forgot you were one."

"..." Lady Lily quickly looked away from Lucian and followed Celine, using her wits to come up with a response, "I thought I was too lowly to be spoken to by you, My Lady? Has my status suddenly improved to reach such heights?"

Celine no longer spoke to her after that, but Lady Lily's smile didn't waver until she saw the state Edmund was in.

Lucian's heart skipped a beat for a second, but he continued to move, not looking back, 'Celine never learns, does she?'

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The royal army had arrived at the scene. Their warrant allowed them to search and investigate any suspicious individual, including noble sons and daughters.

Edmund's condition created a small panic inside the camp, but he just shrugged it off as preparation for his stage training.

Mathieu Duremont was also present, speaking in Lucian's favor and how he had saved his life, which spared Lucian from a long interrogation.

Offering help to the right people in the right moment could get one in their good graces. Lucian offered Mathieu some bandages and medicine, and Mathieu was now returning the favor.

That's why there was a saying 'Do good and good will come to you.'

Celine realized Lucian would be safer with a capable enemy than alone, so she didn't interfere after the truth about Mathieu's innocence was proved. The threat still remained, however, and Lucian would have to watch his back at all times.

Connections were important and if Lucian managed to make one more, then it would be beneficial for his survival later on.

Lucian followed the royal army and was led to a small campsite where they had set up a temporary base.

He bought a few portions of military ration and sat on the ground, eating silently.

He received a few pitiful glances from the knights, but none of them approached him.

It seemed they were busy dealing with other matters and had no time for him.

Mathieu had described to them how the shackled (Lorano) looked and its powers, acting like he was in charge of the mission.

'Was the royal army always this incompetent?'

Why did they make Mathieu sound like the smartest person in the room? The few royal knights came up with some silly tactics just so they could be proved wrong by Mathieu, and then were in awe of the tactics Mathieu mentioned.

Lucian was just a merchant, so he had no right to intervene with the royal army's affairs.

He decided to take a walk to clear his mind and get rid of his frustration instead.

After this fiasco, Lucian was sure he was not going to be accepted by the rest of the Rocheforts, giving him an excuse to delay the marriage with Celine for a bit more.

Any loss had to be recovered.

Lucian racked his brain, thinking about what other benefits he could get from this mess.

'Oh, so here's the real thing.'

He oversaw the captain of the royal knights talking in a hushed voice with his subordinates.

They seemed to be counting on the number of some knights and their rank.

'Why does it match the numbers and ranks of the people in Celine's camp?'

Lucian got a good glimpse of the Rochefort's formation before he was ambushed by Edmund, but what sold them away was a cat, and the information next to it.

'Pet, harmless, first target... eliminate?'

## Chapter 140 140: 4.40 - Severed Thread

Lucian's merchant instincts screamed that this was a situation he couldn't negotiate his way out of. He took a step back and turned to leave.

'I have to warn Celine.'

'She is in danger.'

'Her whole family is in danger.'

The Duremonts weren't the only ones who wanted the Rocheforts out of the picture.

It was the royal family as well.

Mathieu was just a scapegoat, meant to hide the bigger picture.

If a fight were to happen between the Rocheforts and the Duremonts, the Rocheforts could still come out victorious. But what chances did they have in the middle of the royal military base?

Lucian forced a smile as he joined a small group of royal soldiers lounging by the tree, asking if anyone had a spare uniform for sale.

"I'm afraid I will lure some wild animals if I keep wearing my current clothes," he joked, pointing at the blood on him.

"Sorry," one of the soldiers answered, "But we can't sell you our uniforms. It's a military property."

"Name your price," Lucian said, a bit too fast, "...I'll pay triple."

The soldiers were tempted, but ultimately refused to part with their uniforms. They offered to sell Lucian some of their personal belongings to make up for it, and he agreed to the deal.

Placing the shirt and the pair of trousers inside his bag, Lucian excused himself and left to clean up the blood on him. In case someone noticed his absence later on, he wanted to have an excuse to use.

As soon as he was out of sight, he scanned the area again.

He noticed that his radius of vision had increased by around thirty percent. From around 262 feet (80 m) to around 341 feet (104 m).

He spotted a patrolling knight. Lucian couldn't see his rank, so he approached the man, starting a small talk.

"Are you a new recruit? You seem younger than the others," Lucian asked casually, noticing the knight's unseasoned expression, which made him look inexperienced compared to others.

The knight gave him a quick once-over, his eyes lingering on the blood on Lucian's clothes, recognizing him as the tortured hay head from earlier. He relaxed, seeing only a weak victim, "Yes, I just joi—"

Lucian didn't let him finish the sentence, his elbow slamming into the knight's throat, causing him to gasp for air. He quickly grabbed his neck and snapped it.

'Forgive me. I will find a way to repay you later.'

Lucian dragged the body away from the path and stripped the corpse of his uniform, putting it on.

He did not have the luxury of thinking about his morals. He tried to solve the problem with money earlier, but his offer was rejected, and he didn't have much time to think of another way.

Three more squads have joined forces to form an army against Celine's small party. They were advancing faster than Lucian expected.

He wouldn't be able to warn Celine of the incoming danger in time.

300 knights versus 40. They were leaving no room for escape, just like how Edmund didn't leave any room for Lucian. It was all or nothing.

It made small bandit ambushes look cute and friendly in comparison.

Lucian felt sick in his stomach. Having a backup plan in case someone had tried to assassinate him like in the past, was not enough.

He had to think bigger, much bigger. But first, he had to get Celine into safety.

He followed behind the royal army, barely able to keep up with their pace.

They were marching in a large formation, their ranks varied, with the lowest being golden, and the highest being ruby.

Someone chose the elite of the elite for this mission, and Lucian could feel the danger of their intentions from their grim expressions.

They weren't here to play games, or to mess around, they were here to wipe out the only heirs of the Rochefort house.

'Change that knight, I've just dealt with, into a shackled, Voice.'

A small chaos erupted close to Mathieu's camp. A shackled appeared out of nowhere, attacking everyone in sight.

Lucian hoped the horn would delay the main forces, or at least warn them that there was a shackled in the area, making them rethink their plan, but they didn't.

The army continued marching towards Celine's location at an incredible speed.

The wind from their charge made Lucian feel like a child trying to run alongside a hurricane.

He was at the back, trying to catch up to them, but they began to move even faster. He couldn't reach the front lines. But his eyes could.

The royal knights activated their ranks, one after the other, flashing the aura of the color of their rank to the surroundings.

They leaped through the forest and landed on the ground on both sides, surrounding the Rochefort's camp in a half circle.

The army had no intentions of sparing anyone. There was no warning, no declaration of a war.

The watchers on the outskirts of the camp were the first to die.

Lucian panted heavily as he slowed down, straining his vision to take in as much information as possible.

'Voice, wake him up.'

One of the fallen Rochefort men turned into shackled, immediately attacking the army. It didn't last long, as the shackled was easily disposed of.

Its drive looked low, as if it had already given up at the sight of the enemy, dying while scared to death.

'Too weak,' Lucian hissed, more to himself than the fallen man, 'That one. He died angry.'

Another Rochefort knight lay twisted in the mud, his hand still gripping his sword, his dead eyes wide.

'He died while she is still fighting. He does not get to rest.'

crack

The corpse didn't just twitch; it convulsed violently.

The Royal Knight who had just defeated it turned, too late. The newly born shackled tackled him to the ground.

'Yes, serve her one last time.'

thud

Lucian's cheek clipped a branch he hadn't seen. He tripped and stumbled, but he kept running, looking like a pebble that tried to stop a landslide.

'Focus!' he yelled internally, shaking his head to clear the double vision. His body couldn't handle the terrain when his mind was that far away away.

He returned to his own sight and asked Voice to help him find her.

He avoided the branches and tree trunks as he ran.

By the time he reached the battlefield, only a few seconds have passed.

'Where is she?' Lucian looked around frantically. All he could see was a sea of people obliterating anything in their way, 'Where is she? Where?!'

The sudden appearance of shackles broke the army's momentum. The shock on their faces was apparent, buying Lucian a little time.

ting-ting

Amidst the roars and clashing metal, a small ringing of the bell echoed through the battlefield.

'The cat's bell!'

Lucian pushed forward, hiding behind a cart. If he attacked any of the royal knights, all would take him as a threat. He couldn't afford to make his presence known yet.

ting-ting

The little bell was ringing again.

'There!'

Lucian turned to the direction of the sound, to see a small, motionless heap of fur being crushed and stomped on by both sides.

Blood soaked through the blond fur, and its paws were bent in different directions.

'No...!' Lucian refused to accept the sight in front of him.

Celine planned to introduce the cat to him, their first child that they would both look after together while playing house. It took after Lucian's hair color, and was supposed to be a symbol of their future.

The creature was now dead.

The cat.

Their cat.

They were supposed to come up with a name together, with it getting used to his smell, and then based on its reaction they would decide on a good one.

One heavy boot came down, extinguishing the ringing sound.

The bell broke into pieces, and with it, the first thread of Lucian's and Celine's happiness was severed.