

My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone

Chapter 151 151: 5.08 - Rapid Growth In Power

"Boss..." Jax held his knees and gasped for air, following behind Lucian the whole time.

They've been going at it for three whole days, without breaks. Tracking down ferals and then trying to tame them.

He communicated with Roland and Fishbone together with their people, coordinating their actions.

"Next..." Lucian muttered under his breath as another feral submitted to him. They've got twelve so far.

The more they caught, the faster Lucian tamed the beasts inside them, and the longer Jax had to run around like a bone that had been thrown for the ferals to chase.

Lucian made them fight each other, run, jump, and climb, training their bodies and minds on the go, and when they collapsed, he would collect them inside the wagon and continue moving.

Lucian had mentioned war to come, so Jax knew they were preparing to take advantage of the situation. He just didn't expect it to be this way.

He thought they would be gathering food, weapons, or anything else, but not ferals.

They had to rush from one place to another to get a hold of them before they were gathered by the Southern Kings and sent to fight at the borders.

Only when Lucian ran out of the drug he had used to knock out the ferals, did he let his underling rest.

In the middle of the desert, at the bottom of a canyon, a group of fifty men sprawled on the ground.

Jax looked at his boss, who brewed potions in a corner by himself. Lucian said he had learned it from the people he had sold the ingredients to, but who would share their secret trade like this?

But then, it was Lucian, not even Jax knew what Lucian had been doing before he joined him at fifteen.

Lucian's herb collection used to be his main source of income back then.

Jax found it strange from how Roland was reluctant to attack Lucian's wagon when he used to be a bandit, and when Lucian casually mention poison evies and stink bombs, things started to click inside Jax's mind.

Scent sachets were just a coverup to sell the deadly powders in them.

Perfume bottles were just a distraction to sell the dangerous liquid among a few harmless ones.

His dealings with dangerous people like Scythe and Savage, without them looking down on him and taking him for a weakling...

If this truth came to light, his reputation in the Northern Kingdom would plummet, but by that time, Lucian would be too big to be removed from the picture.

Jax tried to look through Lucian's mask, to see his true self.

The fire lit up his face in the darkness, making him look even more terrifying.

The soft features that made him look gentle, and the smile that made everyone think he was harmless, were gone.

When Lucian didn't smile, he looked like the kind of person you would run away from if you ever met him in the streets, alone, at night.

"They know the way now," Lucian said without looking at Jax, feeling his stare on him, "Split them into twenty four groups of two and send them to different locations."

He ordered Jax to use the one to two marked ferals as their force to capture more ferals.

"Bring them here for me, I should have enough of the drug by then," Lucian broke their illusion of a rest, making Jax's eyes tear up. He felt like he would die before the war even started, "Stay low and don't attract too much attention."

Jax passed on the message.

Roland and Fishbone didn't have the energy to protest. They could only blame their weakness, feeling like the failure was on their shoulders.

If Roland or any of them had acquired even a single mark, Lucian's business would have flourished beyond comparison.

They could scare regular citizens with their numbers, but not other hunters.

Lucian lacked strong fighters, but refrained from hiring mercenaries to protect his trading business. His focus was on his secret operations.

Luck and blessings could only take one so far, and the rest was pure planning and execution, so nobody understood why Lucian liked to depend on the Gods so much. Especially around people who had lost their faith in them. They would rather put their faith on him.

He did grow up in the church, so it must have had some kind of impact on him.

The ferals followed Jax's instructions, leaving Lucian to his own devices. He always seemed to have everything under control, even a loss would be cut in his favor.

The biggest one was probably the loss of Varia trading routes through the East Sea, which were now under the Merchant Guild's control.

Lucian was forced to give them up, but something told Jax that Lucian wasn't going to let them go that easily.

Jax could see Lucian monopolizing exports and imports between the North and South in the near future, and the power it would bring to him.

With multiple hunts running at once, Lucian's personal army was growing rapidly.

The Southern Alliance was a huge region, and ferals were everywhere.

They were kept at bay by hunter kings, outside the territories of their kingdoms, treated like wild animals.

Abandoned ruins were the perfect place to find them, since they often didn't build their own shelters. They didn't attack unless provoked, food or lust being a trigger for most to start rampaging.

More than often, their target would be the closest feral to them, not humans, which was why they couldn't be grouped up with the shackleds and labeled the same.

Roland and Fishbone were familiar with the lands, so they could easily spot the ruins that could possibly hold ferals.

It would take a while for them to bring the captured ferals to Lucian.

By the end of the month, there were at least a hundred in his possession.

After two months or so, Lucian's personal army had reached three hundred members.

"Boss?! Boss!" Lucian underlings' voices sounded from the distance as his body got flung in the air by an enraged feral's fist to his stomach.

Lucian had failed to increase the feral's fourth mark, which meant losing his control over the beast.

The group of six men jumped in to catch him before he landed on the ground, not wanting to see the aftermath of their boss' body splattering on the ground like a watermelon.

"Fuck! It's running away!" Someone yelled when the rest of the army of ferals went after the one who hit Lucian, chasing it in the opposite direction.

"Leave him be, we need to heal boss first!"

Lucian's silver rank body was strong enough to withstand the blow.

But it was his mind they were worried about, because his eyes looked like he just went through a nightmare and was still in shock.

"Why did nobody stop him from overexerting himself?!" Roland yelled.

"It's boss! He can do whatever he wants!"

"Damn, is there nobody who could talk some sense into him?"

They were all too blinded by the rapid growth of their leader, craving the rush of power that came from following such a man.

Chapter 152 152: 5.09 - Deserving of Happiness

They brought Lucian inside his tent, where Togo within the cage went crazy upon witnessing his state.

Laying Lucian down, Rolan and Fishbone turned toward Jax, as if he should have taken responsibility for Lucian's safety.

"What?!" Jax yelled.

"You always talk back to him! Why didn't you talk back to him this time?!" Roland yelled back.

"I'm not his nanny!"

"Then start acting like one! You should have at least noticed that he was overdoing it!" Roland continued to blame him.

"Who are you calling a nanny?!"

"YOU!"

Jax's veins were popping out on his forehead in rage, "I dare you to repeat that."

"Get the fuck out of my face before I make you!"

"Shut up, both of you!" Fishbone checked Lucian's pulse and breathing. "Why do you always argue at the worst times?"

"I'm not arguing!" They both shouted in unison.

Togo kept crashing itself against the bars, trying to get out.

"Calm down, you are making it worse!" Jax had to put a blanket over the cage to quieten Togo down.

Lucian slapped away the hand that was checking his pupils' dilation and sat upright, startling them.

He quickly removed the cloth that was covering the cage, letting the bird out. He brought it to his chest and hugged it tightly.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," he spoke in a soothing voice, trying to calm Togo, "It's alright, don't worry."

Togo tried to flee out of the tent, but he didn't let it. It eventually settled down after realizing it was not going to get out of Lucian's grip anytime soon.

The men raised their hands in defense and backed away from Lucian.

"Boss... Are you alright?" Roland asked hesitantly.

"Are you in pain anywhere? Should we call for a physician?" Fishbone added.

"No."

"Should we get some water or food?"

"Yes."

"Can we do anything for you?"

"No."

They immediately scattered, patting their hearts in relief.

Showing weakness in front of his people proved to be a bad thing. From doubting his health condition, to doubting his ability to lead, to doubting him in general.

'Is this how Celine feels when I show my weakness?'

Lucian didn't know how to describe the feeling of being trapped inside a feral's mind.

The time seemed to drag on forever, but it was only a few minutes in reality. He was in a rush, the beast felt it, and tried to use it to his advantage.

The time pressure was getting to Lucian, making it hard for him to stay patient.

He tried to rest, but his heart wouldn't slow down, his thoughts wouldn't settle, and his emotions were in turmoil.

He was forced to choose between Celine and building the army as of late.

The more time he gave her to overthink and analyze their situation, the more he was losing her. And the more he didn't want to lose her, the more it got into his head, and the less he was able to focus on his work.

He felt it in his bones that she was going to punish him from breaking the promise, just like she punished Edmund for breaking his promises.

He had to go back and show his devotion to Celine, to prove to her that he loved her more than any business or plan.

'No.' Lucian placed Togo back inside its cage, 'I'll send a message to her. There's too much to do here and I can't go back yet. That's right, that's the best option. She is safe with the Rochefort army. I don't have to worry about her. Just a bit more, and I can return to her.'

His death wish let him meet Celine in the first place, being selfish enough to want more was ungrateful on his part.

'You know what happens when you listen to the heart and ignore the head. Mistakes happen. You lose your grip. Everything becomes harder. Don't make mistakes. There's too much to lose.'

Jax brought him two buckets of water and a basket of roasted meat.

Lucian washed his face, noticing he was chewing the inside of his cheek in irritation.

He stared at himself through his third eye and pulled at the corners of his lips, stretching them to the sides.

'You are her sunshine in the darkest hour,' he repeated to himself, 'Her sunshine, not a rainy sky. You are her hope of a better tomorrow.'

There were times he wanted to tell her the truth, to break down in her arms and reveal every little secret he carried.

She was smart, they could find a solution together, right? She would understand, he knew she would.

They would have been an unbreakable couple that was in love and worked in tandem to achieve their goals.

Which gave Lucian more reasons not to tell her.

Being content and happy meant a wish fulfilled. A wish fulfilled meant a deal ended. A deal ended meant his death. Worse. It meant someone else would take over his identity.

Lucian swallowed his fears like a bitter pill.

'Stop. Thinking. About. It. Just. Stop.'

Wiping his face with a clean cloth, he grabbed the roasted meat and bit into it.

His stomach was tight, like a rock, and the food felt like sandpaper scraping his throat as he forced it down.

"Ugh!" he choked, and grabbed the bucket, vomiting inside.

Togo became agitated again, hitting its body against the bars.

Lucian put the bucket down, and then sat on the floor, leaning back against the cage, "I'm alright, I'm alright..." he said, more to himself than Togo, "I'm alright..."

It was so ridiculous, so hilarious.

So sad and heartbreaking.

He was supposed to be dead by now, and he was still trying to hold onto life.

'Do I not deserve to be happy?' he asked the Gods, 'Is it selfish to want to live?'

'Is that why You won't let me have peace?'

'Because I'm not allowed to be happy?'

'Because I shouldn't be alive?'

Chapter 153 153: 5.10 - Who cares about happiness?

Was this what they wanted from Lucian? To resent them for their cruelty, to blame them for everything wrong in his life, and to feel like he was a victim of their whims?

'Who cares about happiness anyway?'

That's what Celine would say, wouldn't she?

'Misery loves company too, more than happiness, I assure you,' she had responded to Lucian, when he got a bit philosophical in the past.

Lucian didn't want to be miserable, but he wanted to be with her. Even if it meant they were going to suffer together, and it brought him a bit of peace that she would rather have that too than not have him.

Who knew Celine's dark humor was the key to his appetite.

Lucian ripped a piece of meat off the bone and bit it, forcing it down his throat, and then another one, until there was nothing left.

He didn't calm down, but he managed to push his emotions aside. They would come back, stronger and more persistent, but that was for the future Lucian to deal with.

According to the prophecy, Celine would force an engagement out of the Crown Prince at the start of a new school year, together with an appearance of a new transfer student.

It sounded so absurd to Lucian, but there was something that was coming true, and it was about the products that he had yet to introduce to the market.

All these products were meant to confess his love for Celine, from perfume, to clothes, to accessories, and makeup.

All carrying a sentimental meaning behind them on the packaging, her favorite color, her favorite flower, or things that reminded him of her.

This collection of products were all based on his Celine.

Mathieu mentioned the gifts the heroine received from Lucian, and how she could barely cherish them before the Crown Prince's jealousy destroyed them.

Lucian could no longer ignore the fact that there were signs of his secret relationship with Celine in the prophecy.

It made him terrified to the core.

The prophecy's Lucian wasn't him, but a shackled Lucian, whose wish was granted and was then being used as a vessel for someone else.

Lucian turned toward the bucket and vomited again.

He would never cheat on Celine. Never.

He would never betray her. Ever.

'That will not happen. I won't let it happen,' he persuaded himself, 'I won't let it happen.'

He would kill himself first. He would do it. He would.

He felt strength leave his body, 'No, no, no, no, no...I'm fine. I'm fine,' he tried to take control of his feelings, not letting them affect his body.

He refused to die like those shackled, whose worst fears came true, either.

The men outside Lucian's tent jumped in fright at the scream that tore through the air.

It belonged to a man, and they knew who it belonged to, "Boss...?"

"Boss! Boss, what happened?!"

The sound of wood trashing came from inside the tent. The things were being thrown around, breaking and crashing to the ground.

The men hurried and barged inside the tent, "Boss!"

They stopped in their tracks when they saw Lucian standing in the middle of the mess he made, the mask with a smiling devil on his face, hiding his emotions.

"What's wrong, boss?" Jax asked.

"Nothing," Lucian said in a low voice, his face unreadable, "Clean this up," he ordered.

He picked up Togo's cage from the ground and took it with him, leaving his men to clean the mess he made.

The army of ferals gathered around Lucian, feeling their master's anger and despair, but unable to understand why.

Lucian pushed his fingers through Togo's cage, letting the bird bite his fingers to distract himself from his feelings.

He would continue to use his head, not his heart. His head, not his heart.

"Master, master!" The ferals chanted in their language, wanting to comfort Lucian.

"Quiet," Lucian's order was obeyed without a second of delay, "Stand in a line. Three steps apart. Five rows."

The ferals struggled to figure out which side they should be facing and what row to stand in, some turning to their neighbors for advice.

They were not the smartest or the most patient. In fact, they were a bit slow and dim-witted. But their coordination and cooperation was good, they had a strong sense of hierarchy and social order.

Fishbone, Roland and Jax joined Lucian's side, silent like mice, and watched him stare at the horizon in silence.

One hour passed. And then another.

Roland and Jax began to nudge each other, trying to decide who would ask the question they all had on their minds, but couldn't bring themselves to interrupt Lucian's thoughts.

The silence was broken when Fishbone whispered to Lucian in an almost inaudible voice, "Cansan found the woman you've been looking for."

Lucian had been tracking down the woman in the prophecy who was described as a 'heroine', whose name Mathieu had forgotten.

Sharp tongued, fiery temper, but at the same time kind and naive to a fault. A commoner with a mysterious background. Strawberry pink hair, petite body, and a smile that could melt even the coldest of hearts. Viewed all beings as equals, no matter their status, wealth, or upbringing. She had a unique charm that could captivate men and estrange women.

"What's her name?" Lucian asked.

"Bianca Lacroix," Fishbone replied, listening to his wife's word through the tattoo's link, "Adopted daughter of a bowyer, lives in a small town...uh..."

She defeated Celine in a shooting contest during the academy's archery competition.

'She truly exists.' Lucian clenched his teeth, 'She's not just some figment of Mathieu's imagination.'

Lucian's eyes finally focused on Fishbone, "Send someone to observe her, I want regular reports of her activities. Including Mathieu Duremont..."

He named some of the important figures from the prophecy, including the Crown Prince, Edmund, and the other people that were involved.

"Keep a close eye on them," Lucian said, "Make sure we're not discovered," he added.

"Understood," Fishbone nodded his head, "Anything else, boss?"

"No. That's all," Lucian answered, turning his gaze back to the horizon, waiting for a certain revolutionary group to appear.

Anything that wanted to go against the Gods, Lucian was in.

Doomstone City had finally sent someone to meet him, a group of ten on horseback.

They were all wearing masks that hid their faces. During the day they could be soldiers or farmers, and by the night, they would turn into rebels.

'No way...'

Lucian couldn't help but stare at the person at the front of the group.

He took a step back, his heart beating faster in his chest.

He would never mistake her for anyone else. Not even in the afterlife.

'You have got to be kidding me.'

A soul that he could recognize in a crowd of thousands.

She was wearing a mask, her hair hidden under a turban, and her body was wrapped in a thick cloak, but he could still feel her.

Since when was Celine growing her influence in the South without him knowing?

Stonetomb City was where Celine was born and where the Rochefort Estate was located. The names were similar, but that was just it. Nobody would have connected the two together.

She infiltrated the Southern Alliance openly, under everyone's noses, while Lucian was sneaking around in the shadows.

Chapter 154 154: 5.11 - The Only Way Out

==== Author's note =====

Shackled stages:

1st stage: the eyes turn golden. The wish is still in progress. The person still keeps their core, but their wish strongly influences them, so they may seem like a different person.

2nd stage: the eyes return to normal. The wish is complete. The person's identity is fully stolen.

I think I'll start adding these notes to make things clearer, instead of only relying on Lucian's guesses and observations. What do you think?

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Lucian didn't dare make a move, replaying the memory of Edmund's eyes turning back to blue, not letting himself forget what would happen if he ever allowed his wish to be granted.

He had asked Mathieu for more details about himself in the prophecy, and since he was a second male lead, his "screen time" was plentiful.

The prophecy only mentioned the color of Lucian's hair, not his eyes.

He thought that was strange, because his eyes were the first thing people usually noticed.

Did his eye color in the prophecy change back to normal like Edmund's?

He wasn't sure how he could still keep his personality. The wish must have conditioned him to stay the same. After all, the little wife was supposed to accept him, not some other man.

The silence stretched between Lucian's group and the revolutionary group.

His men found it a bit odd. Their boss would usually put on a friendly act to win strangers over.

He didn't even greet them, and the other group didn't seem to have any intention of doing the same.

"..."

"..."

"..."

Togo didn't seem to recognize its mistress either, from the looks of it. It stayed inside the cage, quiet.

Celine always let her pets roam freely, never putting them in cages. Unlike Lucian's father, who kept his mother inside the bedroom.

It's not that Celine didn't want to, Lucian knew. It's because the scale of her cage was so big that he could run around the whole world and never feel trapped.

Her influence was like a giant web, so subtle and invisible, yet so powerful that people would get caught up in it before they even realized it.

She was the spider, and people were the flies.

A new idea for Little Wife's collection popped up in Lucian's mind, a great way to distract himself: Spider silk wraps.

Celine couldn't cultivate her body like men, so an armor made out of ghostweave spider's silk could be a great protection for her skin.

It was the most durable and tough material he had ever come across, able to withstand sword strikes and arrows, and still stay intact. Still under research, and not ready for production yet.

Lucian occupied himself with the thought of developing her armor, so history couldn't repeat itself.

His men's lips twitched, seeing their Boss poke the bird inside the cage with his finger, as if the animal was suddenly more interesting than anything else.

The revolutionary group turned their heads toward their leader with the same thoughts.

The leader grabbed the axe on her belt and began to flip it in her hand, as if she was thinking of the best way to use it.

Lucian stopped bullying Togo, swallowing nervously.

The silence didn't get awkward at any point, but rather, it was filled with a tension that nobody dared to break.

'I should take a bath,' Lucian broke the silence with his steps, suddenly conscious of the smell of sweat and dirt on his skin.

What the fuck, was what all his people thought, watching their Boss walk away from the spot he had been standing on for hours, only to avoid the group of people he was supposed to meet and make a deal with.

An axe flew past Lucian's head, burying itself inside one of the ferals' heads, killing his soldier on the spot, "..."

His men took a step back when the feral's body fell to the ground, lifeless.

"You crazy-"

"Retreat!" Lucian shouted at the top of his lungs.

"Boss, what's going on?" Roland asked, "There's ten of them and hundreds of us!"

"Are you disobeying my direct order?!"

Roland shut his mouth. They scrambled to get away, not waiting to find out the reason behind their boss's frantic orders. They could see that he was not joking.

Lucian remained alone with the corpse of the feral on his side.

The leader also sent her people away.

She dismounted from the horse, walking slowly toward the axe. She pulled it out of the feral's head, and then proceeded to clean the blade with the feral's clothes.

"Don't kill my people," Lucian said softly, "I'll hate you forever if you kill one more of them."

"I already hate you forever. What are you going to do? Break another promise?"

Lucian was silent, her words stabbing him over and over. She no longer cared about his approval of her actions.

"It took me two months to collect them," he continued.

"That's a lot of time wasted."

She dismissed his hard work and dedication as if he had been playing around. She didn't care how much effort it cost him, or how much blood, sweat, and tears it took to get what he had.

So where did the guilt toward this cruel woman come from?

"What are you trying to achieve here? You know what will happen when you harm my people," Lucian wanted to shake her until she admitted that he wasn't the one at fault here.

She was the crazy one, not him. She was the one who should be punished, not him.

Lower her worth to raise his own, that's what he had always been doing, wasn't it? That's what made him feel better about himself, knowing he had the upper hand and could end it whenever he wanted.

She had always been ruthless; she just held back because she loved him. A part of his mind defended her, blaming himself for leading her on and then letting her down.

Who should feel betrayed here?

"War is not a kids' game. People will die no matter how much you scream for their mercy," she said, not wanting to hear any excuses or explanations from his thick skull. "Doomstone City doesn't welcome the likes of you."

She turned around after she had failed to punish him for real. A poor attempt at putting the blame on him, something that could have worked if she had been more forceful.

"Come here," Lucian made his way towards her as she kicked the corpse in another poor attempt to punish him.

She just wanted to be loved and was afraid of being despised by him, but she was ready to stay true to her principles.

"If you missed me so much you had to kill my soldier to get my attention, then come here and say so."

She took another step away from him, but he closed the distance between them with his longer strides.

He no longer had the energy to pretend to be the bigger man, the kinder man, the better man. The man who was worth her time, attention, and affection.

When in reality, he was only worth her rage and hatred.

He was not a hero who could sacrifice his own happiness to keep her alive and safe.

He was just a fool in love, who would rather have her ruined and by his side, than happy and away.

Lucian didn't know what he was hoping for either.

Becoming her enemy would ruin everything they had built together, and she was ready for this to happen.

She was ready to hate him, blame him, so she could be free from her feelings towards him.

He was going to be skinned alive, and then his skin would be made into a rug, and she would sit on it, and eat on it, and drink on it, a foot rug would be his final form.

That's what she was trying to convince herself.

Turn her love to hatred so she could survive without him.

Like hell he would allow that.

If she doubted his love, then what about he suffocate her with it until she couldn't breathe, and her only option was to beg for air?

Author's note

My longest chapter so far!

Ruining Celine himself becomes Lucian's only option to avoid both disasters: turning Celine into his enemy and becoming fully shackled.

Lucian had always admired Celine for who she was, and it's going to hurt him like hell to see a powerful woman turn into someone like him because of his selfish actions.

His love for her was holding back his yanderish tendencies this whole time.

There was never malice behind his grooming and control; he genuinely tried to heal her and stop her from becoming someone she wasn't. A yandere.

He views it as a disease that turns people unreasonable.



Chapter 155 155: 5.12 - Brainwashing Himself

"Come, tell me you missed me," Lucian cooed, "I'm not mad."

Celine was definitely not used to being pursued, especially not after doing such a bold thing. She expected a lecture from Lucian, not a warm reception.

Her right hand gripped the handle of the axe tighter, "What tactic to avoid taking responsibility is this?"

"I missed you, and that's all that matters to me right now," he continued his pursuit. "You can kill a hundred soldiers and I would still want to hold you."

He couldn't see her expression behind the mask, but the way her shoulders relaxed meant that she was willing to play along with him, or so he hoped.

"On your knees then," she tested the waters.

"..." Lucian would usually bicker back, but he only placed Togo on the ground and got on his knees, hugging her legs.

He could tell that she was tense, still in her murder-mode, and he wanted to bring her out of it.

He pressed the side of his face to her stomach, "Are you going to kill me, my lady?" he asked, using his soft voice.

She seemed to struggle with her thoughts, her reactions slower.

"Someone might see," was her response.

He would never do something like this in the open where someone could see him. His reputation was on the line, after all, but the mask he wore made it easier to do, so he did.

"I'm just begging for forgiveness at my lady's feet," he breathed in her scent, but didn't smell the usual perfume on her. "And also begging to touch and be touched by her. It has been a while..."

He apologized for being a hypocrite, for suddenly demanding her affection when he asked her to be fine with what they already had.

The axe hung loosely from her right hand. The lack of response was not a good sign, and Lucian was tempted to peek into her mind.

His hands started to travel upward to her hips, and then to her waist. "My lady has become thinner, is she not eating well?"

"I'm not going to apologize for killing your soldier," she finally said.

"I'm not asking you to apologize," he said.

"Then what are you doing?"

"Begging."

"You know how to beg now?"

"No," he paused, "But I'm willing to learn, to please my lady."

As long as he feared the wish that could turn him into a shackled, it didn't matter how he acted. He could marry her right here and now if he were able to control his mind.

Just like how he used to fear Voice, he managed to have a relationship with Celine without losing himself.

A slip could be deadly, so safety precautions had to be taken, even if they hurt their relationship.

Celine was still silent, confused by the sudden change in his approach.

He rarely admitted his wrongdoings to her, so she probably couldn't help but feel suspicious, but at the same time, she was also hopeful. She wanted to believe him.

"Can my lady find it in her heart to forgive this poor man who misses her dearly and is in need of her affection?"

Celine's body turned slightly to the side, away from his hug.

"Did you really miss me?" she asked, sounding doubtful, "You always say sweet things, but do a bare minimum to act on them."

"I'm scared to act on them," his honesty caught Celine off guard.

"Why?"

"You would leave me," he answered, his arms tightening around her, as if she was already running away from him.

A sting of pain at the back of his head made him wince, 'I'm fine,' he reassured himself, 'I'm fine.'

Just a little more, he could go a little further. Just a little more, for her to feel reassured and loved, 'I'm fine.'

As long as he didn't feel fulfilled with his relationship with her, he was not going to turn into a shackled. He was going to stay in control.

He even used his own fears to his advantage, making him feel like he could go further than ever before.

Brainwashing himself had always been his specialty. To make himself endure things he didn't want to endure, do things he didn't want to do, and live through things he didn't want to live through.

Only the outcome mattered.

The path he had to take to reach it was just a series of actions that had to be done.

Wasn't she the same?

She didn't depend on his words and actions alone. She rose in power to gain his respect, acted cute enough to earn his affection, lovely to soften his heart, violent to intimidate his mind, and so much more.

She didn't cage his body, she caged his mind, his heart, his whole existence. So even if she wasn't here, she was still in his thoughts, in his feelings and in his decisions.

She knew he was using the same tactic to bind her, and the question was: what was their true self and what was a manipulation tool to achieve their goals?

Lucian didn't care. He loved her mask as much as the person underneath it, and believed Celine loved him just the same.

She made him kneel for her, and he took it as a way to prove his devotion, nothing humiliating about that in his eyes.

He reached Celine's left hand, and unwrapped the thing she was holding.

His newest beauty product, a soft red lipstick.

The carving on the metal tube depicted an open bird cage and a pair of birds inside. The birds were free to fly away, but chose to stay. The thorns outside the cage showed how dangerous the outside world was.

"It represents you and me," he explained, while she listened, "The thorns represent the world that is trying to take us away from each other, or trying to harm us. The cage represents our relationship. We are free, but choose to stay."

Nothing about Lucian's behavior in the prophecy made sense.

Only his business ventures were realistic, which he explained as Mathieu looking into his current ones.

But the labels refused to leave Lucian alone, and he couldn't stop thinking about the second male lead role he had been given.

Pushing aside the plot, the role at its core fit the curse of his life too well to be a coincidence: unable to reach a happy ending with the woman he loved despite his best efforts.

Prophecies were always told in riddles and metaphors, which made them difficult to interpret.

Lucian stopped looking at it from a surface level, and started to read between the lines, searching for a deeper meaning.

He would have never invested in cosmetics and other beauty and hygiene products if it wasn't for his Cleine.

It required research and development, had a slow start, and the return was nothing compared to the amount he was getting from his other businesses.

He couldn't shout on top of a roof how much he loved her, and how much he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. So he used this move as his outlet.

For her, he was showing off his love, but to the rest of the world, he was just a man who cared for women's health and comfort more than his own profits.

Only a foolish businessman would do that, but Lucian was exactly that type of fool when in love.

That's why he was sure those beauty products he was known for in the prophecy wouldn't have existed if it wasn't for Celine's presence in his life.

The signs of their secret relationship was there.

Wolfberry lip balm, Wolf hair comb, Lady moon undergarments...

He planned to release many collections, and each of them had different themes and meanings.

Mathieu didn't specify the themes of the collections, but he said that the second male lead's beauty empire overshadowed all his other ventures simply because his products were all the ladies talked about in the North.

So much that even the clueless heroine couldn't ignore it. She thought that he, the second male lead, was taking advantage of women's insecurities and profiting off them. Thanks to that, she was not impressed by his wealth and business achievements in the slightest.

It intrigued the second male lead with how she was different from the usual gold diggers he met.

'Definitely not me,' Lucian thought, considering he was in love with the greediest of them all.

Chapter 156 156: 5.13 - Take Care Of Your Body Or I Will

⌋⌋ Author's note ⌋⌋

Content Warning (CW):

Non-consensual sexual contact.

⌋⌋⌋⌋

Celine made Lucian kneel for long enough to make him reflect on his mouth that loved to spew pretty lies and promises.

"Your words have lost meaning to my ears, Lucian, do you know that?"

It was her cold tone that made her sound like the most dangerous woman he had ever come across.

"I can no longer trust anything you say."

A woman of actions against a man of words, and the latter was losing ground fast.

The gifts and products that were filled with sentimental meaning were still not enough in the eyes of someone who was ready to give up everything for him.

She pulled out a vial from a pouch on her belt, "Fill it with your seeds. I want a child, and you're not going to get out of this one."

Lucian froze in shock, the image of a little Celine and little Lucian in his arms popping up inside his head.

"I'll wait for you with our children, and when you're ready to settle down, come and join us," she continued.

Lucian shook his head in disapproval, "I'm not ready to lose you and my children, just because you're impatient and greedy."

A kick to his stomach made him bend in half, but before he could fall on the ground, Celine pulled his head up by the hair, dragging him away from the corpse and Togo's cage.

"Ugh." Lucian felt his strength slipping away from him, "Celine..."

The name didn't have the same effect on her as before. She no longer hesitated when it came to harming him.

Lucian's plans to shower her with his love were shattering like glass in his head. He grabbed her wrists to make her release her grip on his hair.

He blocked her leg with his hand when she tried to kick him again.

"I'm not a breeding bull that you can milk and be done with, Celine."

She moved her head to the side to avoid the hand that was reaching for her mask, swiftly kicking him in the side, and then another kick in the back, making him fall face down.

She jumped on top of him and pinned him to the ground.

Whatever curse she was using was draining Lucian's energy faster than he could imagine.

The dark mist covered her body, but the weight of it was heavier than what she weighed.

"No Celine," he felt her hands reaching for his pants, and his arm was starting to lose strength to fight her off, "Celine, not like this."

He felt his pants loosen, and her hand was inside his underwear. He quickly grabbed a handful of sand and threw it blindly at her.

"Ugh," he grunted in pain when her nails dug into his skin, "What happened to the woman who didn't want to force herself on me?!"

"She lost the man who made her feel like that! You should have let me die, Lucian!" She screamed at him, "I didn't want to live without you! I don't want to live without you!"

"Celine, I'm not dead!" He tried to reason with her, but she wasn't in her right state of mind. He felt the nails digging deeper into his skin, "Stop! It hurts!"

She ignored his pleas, her only focus was on his body.

"Celine, I love you. Please, listen—"

Her elbow hit his neck, pressing down on him. "Hush. No more lies."

Lucian's body became numb, and he stopped resisting, waiting for the moment to pass.

"At least the body's here, right?" He could hear her voice cracking, "At least the body's here."

He laid on the ground like a corpse, feeling his body being violated. She knew perfectly what his weak points were, making his body feel things it shouldn't be feeling in this situation.

He bit the back of his hand to keep himself from moaning. His body reacted despite his mind telling him to stop. He hated it. He hated losing control of the situation, and of himself. He hated feeling helpless.

The moon was the only witness to the two silhouettes on the ground.

Celine kept going until he reached his limit. And when she was done with him, she left his body on the ground, like a piece of trash.

Lucian remained on the ground, feeling dirty and pathetic. He never thought he would feel this way with her, not after everything they had been through.

He slowly sat up, and fixed his clothes, feeling a wave of disgust wash over him, doing all he could to keep his dignity together. A nonchalant expression on his face, his eyes empty. His heart and his mind were torn in two.

Celine mounted the horse, "Take care of your body, I need it in good shape," she said coldly, before she left him alone with the moon.

'She thinks I'm a shackled... she thinks I sacrificed myself to save her... She knows about the shackled rules...that's why she did this...So that's why...'

He finally understood what happened in the hollow of the tree. Why she rejected his touch, and why she said the words she had said.

A laugh cracked his lips, and soon he couldn't stop laughing, his voice echoing in the canyon, reaching his ears and making him sound even more crazy.

'Liar? Me? What does she want me to say? That it wasn't me who sacrificed myself to save her, but her brother, who I killed?!

Lucian laughed so hard that he was out of breath, but he continued to laugh, even when his lungs started to hurt from the lack of oxygen.

'Is this my retribution for everything I have done?! Is this what I deserve?!

The laughter was interrupted by a coughing fit, his body trying to catch its breath.

Lucian fell on his side. His hands covered his head, and he took a deep breath to calm down, but he was still shaking.

Whether from laughter or something else, he wasn't sure.

He had no strength left to move. He felt drained, both mentally and physically.

All the manipulation and mind games he had been doing to her, only to end up like this, a loser in his own game.

'She's not innocent either. She couldn't have been honest with me since the beginning, right? It wasn't just me who wanted to bind the other, right?'

He wanted to hate her.

He wanted to despise her, to blame her, to make her feel sorry for what she had done, but the anger wouldn't come to him.

All he felt was an overwhelming pain that consumed his heart, his mind, and his soul.

He wanted to curl up into a ball and never wake up again.

"I guess that makes us even," Lucian whispered weakly.

Celine returned to pick the lipstick she had dropped earlier and stored it in her pocket, pausing at his words.

"I'm not going to repeat myself. Take care of your body or I will. You know which option is the better one," she threatened before leaving his sight, this time for good.

Author's note

Celine's POV next!

She will explain the shackles into more details, including the ancestors' debts to the Gods.

Chapter 157 157: 5.14 - No Remorse

Celine dismounted from her horse and handed the reins to her second in command, heading towards her tent.

The people mingling around the tents turned their heads towards their leader, bowing their heads slightly.

Celine waved her hand at them in dismissal, entering her tent.

"May," she called out.

A maid rushed to her side in seconds. Clothed in male's clothes and a cap covering her hair.

Celine ordered her to prepare a bath.

"With cold water," she told her, "And hurry."

Maya didn't dare ask for more information. She left the tent and sent a group of men to fetch her water.

Celine sat on a chair behind her desk, preparing for the pain that was about to come.

Her eyes closed and she inhaled sharply when the heart in her chest skipped a beat, like an invisible hammer had struck it, and it was trying to beat again, but the hammer kept hitting it harder.

'The awakened shackleds will do everything in their power to make you trust them, just so they could betray you when you least expect it,' she recalled the classified information only a few had access to, 'That's what the Gods made them for, to make us feel the betrayal we inflicted upon Them.'

That's how the awakened shakleds operated. They were like tyrants who would first start their rule with sweet lies and promises. And then they would show their true nature, bringing paranoiac fear into the hearts of the people.

They would betray their spouses, their houses, their families, their friends, their loved ones, their kingdoms...

She gritted her teeth and grabbed her chest. The pain spread across her whole body, as if she was being torn apart from the inside.

'Dying from heartbreak would be pathetic,' she cursed at herself. 'I didn't survive just to die from heartbreak! I can't die yet. Not before I make them regret the day they made an enemy out of me! I'll slaughter them all and decorate my halls with their heads!'

She could see the blood on the floor of the throne room, the smell of death in the air, and the heads of all those who dared defy her. It was a beautiful sight.

The numbness slowly took over, the pain fading away from her body.

Lucian, she remembered. Her heart clenched again. The image of a crying man appeared in her mind and her body went back to its painful state.

'You just had to ruin my fun, didn't you, Lucian?'

The pain was short-lived, and the feeling of emptiness started to take over.

The shock from nothing to everything was always a struggle to go through.

Her head fell backwards, and her eyes opened to the ceiling of the tent.

Lucian could make everything feel more enjoyable. Even when he was a headache on two legs, playing the victim in front of her. His charms still worked, and she wanted to punch herself for it.

The memories of his soft voice, and the way he spoke to her when they were alone, how he looked at her as if she was the most beautiful and perfect woman in the world. His eye candy smile that could melt her heart like it was made of butter...and the way he kissed her...

Her heart shut down further, forcing her to face the harsh reality of their situation instead.

What if Lucian's was still a first stage shackled? It was her first time seeing a strange case like his.

'He thinks he can trick me? No, if he was a first staged shackled, he probably knows that he can't hide it from me anymore.'

Nightmares? Her? Couldn't he find a better excuse than that? Did he think she was dumb or something? That she could not figure out what had happened to her?

He should have cleared the traces, not leave a whole trail for her to follow. He would have if he had the time, but he was in a rush to save their lives.

'It's either Edmund or Lucian who are the awakened shackleds.'

Celine recounted the events. Neither admitted to saving her. They were both trying to hide something from her.

'Could they be both shackled?'

She needed more proof to be sure.

Edmund's limbs were still broken at that time, so he shouldn't be able to move. But then he managed to successfully pass the emerald stage, which gave him some strength back.

He said it was her knight, who sacrificed his life for hers. He also confirmed that he left her in Lucian's care. Their stories matched, except the evidence was pointing out the opposite.

The rain prevented the fire from destroying everything in its path. It was a bad attempt to hide the truth. It didn't take long for her to realize that she had been deceived.

She warned father about Edmund, who was now under observation. How she wished to be proved wrong sometimes.

'Edmund better not be a shackled.'

She kept her silence about Lucian around her father.

Celine raised the hand that touched Lucian, above her face, as if she could still feel him on her fingertips.

Her heart went numb at the worst possible time. Analyzing the events from a cold and distant point of view, violence and cruelty were the only things she could think of at that moment.

It was impossible to tell if Lucian was a first or second stage shackled, but him being a first staged shackled this whole time would change everything she knew about him.

'What does he mean he will be fine with me killing hundreds of his soldiers?'

He acted the opposite of the Lucian she knew. He wasn't supposed to be so nice to her. He should have made her beg and beg and beg for his approval, not the other way around.

'Guilty. He feels guilty about what he's doing. What did he do that made him feel so guilty?'

He would intentionally go into disputes with her, making her look like she was the crazy one.

'Something is holding him back. Something he doesn't want me to find out. Something he has to keep hiding.'

He knew she would have accepted him even if he were a shackled.

'He has a secret that is more dangerous than being a shackled.'

'What could be so important that it could make him turn into a liar, and then lie to hide his lies?'

'Sometimes I think that he prefers when I act crazy, even though he doesn't like it.'

'Sometimes I think he is terrified of showering me with his love. Crazy women deserved no love, which gave him an excuse to love me less...'

'He might be one step away from getting his wish granted and awakening. It's obvious the wish has something to do with his little wife.'

As if she would ever forget about her first rejection because of someone's dream girl.

'Reaching an understanding doesn't seem to be possible, and if hate is all we can have, then I'm ready to become the villain he needs me to be.'

The numbness she felt quickly changed to despair and grief, and then back to the usual numbness, on repeat.

She was really going to go crazy at this point.

'What if Lucian is an awakened shackled?'

'Then there's only one way to bring him back.'

The only reason she let him roam free around the world was for him to collect enough sacrifices she could use later on.

The closest people to him had to die, sacrifice them all, one by one, until one of their wishes was fulfilled.

'He will hate you forever if you do this.'

'So?'

Was she supposed to move on from him?

Live a normal life without him?

The only reason she wasn't howling like a wounded animal was because she would make the world howl in her place.

She would not give her enemies the satisfaction of seeing her cry or suffer.

They would be the ones to do it, and she would be the one to laugh at their misfortune.

Only winners could write history, and she was going to write a bloody one.

She would make everyone understand that they could not take her Lucian from her.

Not the royals, not the shackleds, not the Gods.

Nobody.

══════ Author's note ══════

Sorry for the slow updates, I'm a slow writer. 🙄

Sometimes the craziest people are the most sane, imo. ☐

Celine feels absolutely no remorse about what she had done to Lucian. She grew up surrounded by tough love after all. She knows crossing a line would make him hate her, he made sure of that, so there are at least some boundaries, which are slowly being striped away.

While Lucian uses selfbrainwashing as a coping mechanism, Celine shuts down her emotions, keeping only her motivations. It doesn't stop her mind from being obsessed with him though. 🙄

Chapter 158 158: 5.15 - Smarter Than This?

A deep sigh left Celine's mouth, feeling completely empty. She could only wait it out.

There was no Lucian to speed up the process for her, and she was not ready to face the onslaught by herself.

'Maybe I should start daydreaming like him,' she thought, 'Let my little husband keep me company, since someone certain doesn't want to,' she complained to herself.

She had no idea where these desires came from. Maybe it was her soul, trying to remind her that she was a human being and not a dead fish.

Distracting desires that didn't stand in the way of her goals, and, in fact, were pushing her toward her goal of living her life, not just surviving.

"Master, the merchant from the north is outside the camp," Maya reported to her.

'He's not going to keep his distance without a fuss, is he?'

He should leave before she decides to take another piece of his flesh to chew on.

'He says I'm eager to die, but is it not he who keeps coming to me and offering himself up to be butchered?'

She thought Lucian had come to stop her from using his seeds and remained seated, resting.

It's good her face was covered. She didn't have to go out of her way to look presentable to him. She could look like the corpse she was inside.

Soon, a familiar silhouette stepped inside.

She didn't say a word and also didn't offer him a seat, so he took one on his own. By the buckets of water that were brought in for her bath.

He casually removed his mask and cloak, throwing them on a chair. His disheveled hair fell around his face, framing his features, making him look even more attractive in Celine's eyes.

He scooped a handful of water and washed his face with it, then rinsed his mouth. His head tilted to the side, his gaze landing on Celine, his expression a bit distant.

"I want to see your face," he said.

"Why?" she asked in return.

"I'm not a fan of talking to masks."

His tone was quite unsettling, given how calm it was.

It sounded like he had lost his usual playfulness and turned into the calculating devil he had always been underneath that mask.

He began unbuttoning his vest, revealing the bruises she had left on his chest, then pulled off his shirt, and started wiping the dirt off his body.

A particular one caught her attention. Definitely not her doing. She would have been irked at the sight of it if she were in her normal state. But instead, it was just an observation, and nothing more.

Once he was done with his upper body, he started to remove the belt and his pants.

"I want to see your face," he repeated, looking her straight in the face, "Now."

Her observations told her that Lucian was trying to regain his control over her.

"Or what?" she asked, "You'll throw a tantrum?"

He stood up and walked towards her, his pants hanging low on his hips, exposing the lines that disappeared beneath the waistband.

Tempting devil using seduction against a corpse was unfortunately not a winning strategy. She felt no temptation towards him, only a need to show him his place.

He was more complicated than a book of riddles. When she thought she had him figured out, a new page would appear in front of her.

But the more pages she uncovered, the more she would fall under his spell.

The spell of fascination and admiration.

'How is he able to control the shackled?' she wondered in hope that he was not an awakened shackled, because the thought of her being played with like a doll made her furious.

If Lucian was indeed an awakened shackled, then she was in danger of being betrayed by him.

Yet somewhere inside, she trusted his capability to control the situation.

At the same time, she had to keep her guard up. If he was not in control of the shackled, then the awakened shackled was going to use his knowledge of her to strike at her weakest points.

'Where are the good old misunderstandings that could be easily resolved through talking?'

Celine was not one to talk things out anyway, so she was not too concerned. But it would be nice to have the option, wouldn't it?

It all started with how he picked up a fight with her, only to end up giving her an apology hug.

He had already started showing signs of understanding what was going on at such a young age, but she had dismissed it as a coincidence and then tried to explain it away as his little ego not liking to be seen in a less favorable light.

From her friend to her avoider. She explained it as him being afraid of her status and his inequality to her.

She truly believed that was the case. Seeing him work hard to change his position in life was admirable. She even tried to help him, but was turned down with excuses.

The excuses started to pile up, but then again, they both had a lot going on in their lives.

Even his attempts at correcting her behavior were half-hearted at best, and the way he was trying to paint himself in a good light was laughable. Creating contrast to highlight his best qualities made him seem insecure and not a gentleman at all.

Weren't they smarter than this?

Their conflicts should have been solved with a wave of the hand, yet they were not. He kept pushing her away, and her pride wouldn't let her take it lying down forever without retaliation.

All of this just for him to show up, seduce her, and disappear.

He would pop in, make sure she was still infuriated, and then leave.

Then he would show up again, make her believe they were making progress, and then dash her hopes.

Over and over again.

Chapter 159 159: 5.16 - Pathetic

One really had to die to get a clearer perspective. Things began to click together, and when Celine looked up at Lucian again, she no longer saw the boy who was playing around with her feelings.

She saw a man who had to do everything in his power to escape his fate. He even had to hurt the woman he loved and then convince himself that it was for the best, just so he could live to see another day.

Lucian pushed himself in between her and the desk, showing his crotch at her face as if telling her to apologize to his hidden little general, who had done nothing wrong to deserve such treatment.

He reached toward her, but she slapped his hand away.

"Keep your hands to yourself," she said sternly.

"Or what?" he asked, sounding amused, "Will you bite it off? Or will you kiss it better?"
He leaned closer, "Is little general not your favorite toy to play with?"

His words would make her want to forget everything that had happened and just get lost in his arms again.

"It's Lucian's body," he continued to taunt her, "It's your right."

Celine stood up, the chair behind her clattering to the ground.

His face dropped onto her shoulder before her hand could strangle him.

"..."

"Hold me," he said, "My body is still hurting from the beating. You have to make me feel better, or I'll be a sad little man who cries himself to sleep."

"Pathetic," she muttered under her breath, not holding him, but not letting him drop on the ground either, "Can't even win a fight with a woman. What kind of a man are you?"

"A lucky one, for he has a woman who is stronger than him."

Shameless.

That's what he was.

She pushed his face away with her hand, "I have to bathe," she said.

"I can help you bathe," he offered.

"Get out."

"Can I watch?"

"No."

"Can I sit in the corner and pretend to be invisible?"

She pushed him away from her, "You'll get to watch me bathe when pigs fly."

"I can arrange that."

Why couldn't he be this clingy when she was in the mood? Why was it always when she was this close to snapping his neck?!

He moved into the corner of the tent by her bed and sat on the ground with his knees to his chest, making a gesture of zipping his mouth shut.

This man was truly unbelievable.

'You think you are in control, but then he just appears, and you are completely at his mercy,' Celine's thoughts mocked her, 'A little bit of attention, a smile, a touch, and you are a complete mess. Pathetic, just like him.'

She felt the anger and frustration slowly creeping back in.

Because she knew what would happen next.

She would fall into his arms, and he would hold her close, making her feel like the most important person in his life.

She would give him her body, letting him touch her like no man has touched before. She would feel like the luckiest woman in the whole world.

And then he would leave her.

"Let's see how long you are going to stay this sweet and caring to me this time," she said with a mocking tone, picking the chair off the ground, "If you want an excuse to reject me, I'll give you plenty."

He widened his eyes when she raised the chair above her head, looming over his figure. Her words could never reach him, but her touch always did, whether painful or loving.

"I'll give you a reason to hate me so much that the thought of being with me will make your blood boil with rage," she threatened, her tone filled with bitterness. "I'll make sure that the moment you hear about me, your heart will feel like it's about to jump out of your chest."

Her cursed powers turned the wooden chair into a weapon that could inflict serious damage.

He still believed she wouldn't hurt him. He didn't move an inch, didn't even blink until the last second. When she swung the chair down, aiming at his head. He caught it, but it dragged him to the ground, unable to resist its force.

"And then, I'll kiss you better after," she promised, smashing the chair on him a second time, and then a third, and a fourth, "I'll make you forget about all the pain and suffering I put you through. I'll make you believe that everything will be alright, and I'll make you believe in a bright future for us. I'll make you love me. And when you do..."

She threw away the broken chair and grabbed him by the hair, pulling him up to face her, "I'll make you regret that you ever met me, again."

His tears wet the hand she used to hold him up by the chin, his eyes closed tightly as if he was trying to hold back his sobs.

"I don't give up on things easily," she got on her knees, pressing his face against her shoulder to muffle his sobs, "Especially not you," her voice was softer than a whisper, "You can be the biggest scum of the world, and I would still be chasing after you. That's the least I could do to repay you for the life I didn't get to live."

He didn't hug her back, and his body was tense in her arms, but it didn't stop her from hugging him tighter.

She couldn't depend on him to keep his word to her to not leave her behind, but she could depend on herself to not let him go. He was a vengeful man who would never let go of his grudges, so she had to make herself a grudge he couldn't let go of.

'He won't die without making me pay first,' she reassured herself, 'That's the kind of man he is.'

An awakened shackled would also give up on gaining her trust, because the relationship was already ruined. It would look for another target to deceive. But not Lucian. He would do his best to make her suffer for the rest of her life.

She unclasped her mask and pressed her lips against his jaw, and then his neck. A whimper left his throat when her lips reached the spot under his ear where the chair just hit him, and she stopped there.

"Let go," he pushed her away from him, but she was stronger, forcing him down on the ground. He was panicking. She was slipping through his fingers, and he couldn't do anything about it.

Lucian hated being powerless, he hated being forced, and most importantly, he hated not being in control.

"Your lady commands you to stay still," she whispered in his ear, and his body tensed up in response to her order, "Or I will go further than just kissing you better..."

He stopped moving completely.

"Go to my bed and wait for me there," she stood up, picking up her mask from the floor.

He refused to move, not saying a single word, so she added, "Is force the only way to make you listen?"

He clicked his tongue in irritation, but obeyed her orders nonetheless, disappearing under her covers, "Don't take too long."

He recovered faster than she had expected, or he just didn't want to appear as a weakling before her. She was sure the former had more weight.

She had to admit, though, she was enjoying the momentary power she had over him. Her cheeks felt warm, and her heart was beating faster. He should show his obedient side more often. It was an addicting treat to witness.

"I'm not a patient man," he said from under the covers. Lies, "I won't wait for long," another lie, "So if you don't want to be disappointed in bed, I suggest you hurry," and another lie.

"Are you asking for another beating? Or are you going to behave?" she asked him.

He didn't reply to that and returned to sulk in silence. His cuteness and sense of humor were the only weapons he had left against her, and he tried to soften her attitude towards him, knowing how much she liked his playful side.

'He has too much energy to run his mouth like this.'

'Don't tell me it has something to do with his little wife wish, who is giving him shackled strength?'

'I can't let him become stronger than me. How am I supposed to win against him then?'

Just the thought made her want to weaken him in some way, so she would always have the advantage.

Chapter 160 160: 5.17 - Losing Control Of The Situation

Lucian stared at the broken chair by the bed's side, his body remembering the impact it made with his back, the dull ache in his spine.

His skin was covered in goosebumps, and he felt cold.

The fact that she didn't even hesitate proved that she had gone mad.

Now that his identity as a shackled was out, he was sure she was going to do experiments on him.

'It's over. We're over,' he had thought back then, 'We're not meant to be together. The world doesn't want us together, and now she doesn't either...'

She could have used a spear or a staff meant for combat, but she chose the closest thing to her.

This was no longer a punishment for a broken promise, but an impulsive act. She no longer feared his hatred; there was nothing holding her back now.

Celine had gone outside for a moment, returning with ropes and pieces of fabric. Sitting on the bed, she tugged on the blanket that covered his body.

Lucian hid his body from her when she began to restrain him, still in disbelief from her actions. His heart was hurting, the pain unbearable.

"I'm not running away. You don't need to tie me up."

She tied a fabric around his eyes, and then tied his wrists together with the rope, securing his arms behind his back. It wasn't a simple rope and knot, but a technique to restrain people.

"Who else knows?" she asked.

Lucian didn't answer, trying to pull his hands apart.

"Lucian," Celine hissed, "Who else knows?"

"Edmund," Lucian quickly answered, from her tone, it seemed like she was going to hit him again if he didn't cooperate, "Nobody else."

Celine placed the blanket over his shoulder and wrapped it around his body.

Then went to remove her clothes and boots to wash herself.

Lucian refused to use Voice's powers to see through the fabric of the blindfold. His heart had already taken enough beating.

He heard the sound of water splashing, and then silence, then more splashing of water.

The sound of footsteps approaching made him tense. He could feel her presence near his, and a hand pressed against the side of his face, the other hand on his cheek.

His face was forcefully turned to the right, making him face her.

"Now that's what I call a victim face," she commented, rubbing her thumb on his lower lip. "It suits you better than that of a liar," she added, placing his head back on the bed, sideways.

She rustled under her bed, and took something from the chest below it. A box, judging from the sound of its lid being opened and closed.

The smell of medicine filled the room. She started applying some kind of cream on his neck.

"Nothing is broken, so you'll be fine in a couple of days."

Her fingers continued to apply the cream on the rest of his injured skin, making him hiss in pain, "Ow, ow, ow!"

"Does it hurt?"

"A lot."

"It will get worse," she said, reaching a particularly painful spot, which made him yelp. "Be a man and take it," she cooed, stopping his exaggerated reactions.

He could only bite his lip, breathing heavily.

"I'm not a man, I'm a human being. Human. Being," he emphasized the second word, "I'm allowed to act like a human and feel pain. Just like a real human," he emphasized that being a shackled didn't mean he wasn't a human being and should be treated as one.

"Quiet."

"Human," he continued, "Being."

A slap on the side of his face made him shut his mouth.

Lucian's face turned red from her handprint, the hot feeling lingering on his skin.

Nothing he did worked on her, no matter how much he tried to appeal to her emotions or sympathy. She should be crying right now, mourning the end of their relationship, not him in her place.

She placed a piece of bread in his mouth, which he accepted without protest.

Chewing and swallowing, he was ready to repeat the same thing with a new piece of bread.

His heart started to race when she leaned in to kiss the slapping mark she left on the side of his face.

He yanked his head away, not wanting to receive affection from her, not after the things she had done to him.

She hummed, "You don't want my affection?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Really?"

"I don't need it."

"You don't?" she asked again, her hand brushing against his cheek, and then the other one on his chin.

"No," he answered, trying to get out of her grip, but the ropes on his body prevented him from moving, "I don't—"

She shoved the bread inside his mouth again, forcing him to shut up and swallow the piece.

"Well, I don't feel like giving you any either. We are finally on the same page. Good."

She was not going to let him feel in control of the situation, and she made sure he knew that.

He swallowed the piece, his mind already coming up with a response.

She was just pretending to be unaffected by his words. She just didn't want to give him the satisfaction of seeing her upset. She was just pretending.

She had to be. She was a master at acting, but he knew her better than that.

He didn't realize how much he focused on getting back at her that the fear of his wish getting granted had been pushed to the back of his head.

With how the situation was going, he was likely to die from his biggest fears coming true.

He didn't even know what his fears were anymore. So many of them had come true already, he didn't know which one he was afraid of the most.

Lucian didn't say anything as Celine leaned in to kiss his cheek, this time he didn't reject it.

It was cold, like a chore she had to go through to fulfill the promise she had made.

A promise about kissing him better after hurting him.

