

My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone #Chapter 17 - 2.2 Souther Alliance - Read My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone Chapter 17 - 2.2 Souther Alliance

Chapter 17: 2.2 Souther Alliance

The Southern Alliance was a group of smaller kingdoms, with common laws and rules, but not one ruler.

It was said that their lands were blessed by the Goddess of the Sun, granting them the strength and resilience they needed to survive the harsh environment.

Born with black tattoos that could not be erased, the Southerners were stronger and more resilient than a regular man.

But it wasn't without the cost. Their nature was wild, and they would often lose themselves to their instincts.

The weak suffered the most from their kin's aggressive nature, many trying to escape their lands in hopes of finding a better life in the Diamante Kingdom.

Jax's mother was one of the people who had fled the Southern Alliance, and his father was the one who infiltrated the north to drag the runaways back. (According to Lucian's sources.)

The initial gift that was supposed to keep the southerners united, the ability to communicate as a pack through their tattoos, ended up turning against them.

Lucian pulled the hood of his cloak over his head as he walked down the street, wearing the same tunic and loose pants as the locals. The wind was cold, but the sun was scorching hot, a typical day in the south.

He commissioned a few locals to gather seeds and saplings, and he had a wagon prepared to transport them, but it wasn't the time to get excited.

The atmosphere in the streets was heavy; one wrong move and a brawl could break out. Ugly stares weren't directed at Lucian only, but at each other.

Even the air seemed to be charged with violence. The southerners just loved to fight. Their recovery abilities were far superior, and it made them reckless.

Lucian could only bite on his imaginary napkin in jealousy, remembering his days as a sickly boy, *'Must be nice not to think of death every day.'*

"Oi!" One southerner shouted, "You steppin' on my shadow, bastard!"

"..." Lucian slowly took his foot off the man's shadow. Seriously not the time to get excited.

He barked a laugh at Lucian's reaction, "What? You scared? Huh?!"

His friend laughed with him, slapping his back, "No one is scared of your stinkin' shadow, dumbass! Be careful with that one, he is one of Savage's men."

Lucian sighed in relief as they continued to laugh and joke around. He was getting closer to his destination, a small shop at the edge of the town, made out of red clay bricks.

He pushed open the door to the shop, hearing the bell above his head ring. A woman was standing behind a counter with a bored expression on her face, her chin resting on her hand.

She didn't look like she was interested in doing business, but Lucian approached her anyway.

He cleared his throat, reciting a secret code, "The grass is green today, isn't it?"

The woman's eyes didn't move as she pointed her thumb at the back door, "In there," she said in a raspy voice.

"Thank you," Lucian said politely before heading to the back door and pushing it open. The narrow corridor led into a large room, filled with wooden crates and boxes stacked against one another.

Three middle-aged men stood around a table, talking in hushed voices. They stopped when they heard the door open. Their eyes fell upon Lucian.

Lucian held up his hand, greeting them, "I'm here to sell goods," he announced, "The ones you've requested for."

The leader of the group, known as Savage, nodded in approval, motioning for Lucian to come forward.

Lucian placed a satchel on the table and opened it. Inside were several bottles filled with different scents of perfume. Race and background meant nothing to a seller. Anyone could be a customer, as long as they had money.

The leader picked one bottle and sniffed at it, smiling, "The King's wives will love these."

The items weren't illegal per se, but the effort of transporting them would be too much, so they would rather get them through Lucian and pocket the extra money.

He led them to his wagon outside the town, where he kept the rest of the merchandise. The men unloaded the crates from the wagon and placed them on the ground. Replacing them with their crates of merchandise.

Lucian checked the contents of the exchanged crates, and once he was satisfied, he nodded his head. "Good," he said.

It was a fast, efficient transaction.

"How can you travel with such expensive items without the bandits attacking you?" one of the Savage's men asked. It was not only the Southern routes but the Northern ones too.

"I'm a good negotiator," Lucian replied, "And I'm also a very lucky man," he added, chuckling.

The man laughed, "I bet."

Lucian invited them for a drink in the tavern, which they accepted.

Inside the bustling tavern, they took a seat at the bar.

"Not the combat ones," the man answered Lucian's questions about purchasing a slave, "Those are reserved for the army. The labor slaves should be fine, though."

"I see, thank you," Lucian nodded, taking off his hood and revealing his blond hair. It was quite eye-catching among the group of burly southerners, which was a good thing. The more people saw him befriend their own, the less they would target him.

He couldn't help Jax escape when there was a chance of him being tracked down and returned to slavery. Buying him wasn't a solution either. Lucian needed to free him through other means.

"You look quite weak to be traveling alone," Savage said, noticing his features, "An easy target to be picked on."

"Are you implying that you are going to rob me now?" Lucian joked.

Savage laughed heartily and shook his head, "And lose my best supplier? No, no. Take a few of my men with you. Until you reach the borders at least."

What a nice chance after a year of hard work, Lucian thought. He used to sneak in only with a backpack filled with spices and perfumes, and now he was transporting whole crates of goods.

Lucian smiled at that thought, "I appreciate the gesture, Sir." He patted the man's shoulder, "You are a good man. Let me buy you another drink."

Jax needed a backer; Savage needed the King's favor; Lucian needed more managers to supervise his business. Three different goals, a single common ground, it was the perfect scenario.

Thought it wouldn't be Lucian if he didn't try to get even more out of the deal than he bargained for.

After the two finished their drinks, Lucian asked if Savage had a plot of land he could rent for growing his saplings into bigger plants.

"My backyard could fit a few," Savage said, scratching his chin in thought. Plants sounded harmless enough, so he didn't think much of the consequences, offering his backyard for a reasonable price.

Chapter 18: 2.3 Run

Lucian accompanied the men to Savage's property. He planned to stay the night and depart in the morning. It was the safest place for him to stay, for his wagon too.

Savage was the local boss, so who would dare to steal from him?

Well...

Lucian looked up, seeing smoke and fire rise from inside the Savage's mansion outside the town. The gates were wide open, with few guards having their throats slit while others were still fighting with the enemy group.

There were at least thirty people, armed to the teeth with swords and knives.

'The bigger the people you deal with, the bigger the danger that follows.' Lucian knew the risks, so he couldn't complain. But still, couldn't they wait for another day to fight?

Lucian would like to turn his head and walk away, but it was too late; they were already surrounded. *'I'm sorry, little wife. Your husband might not come back in one piece...'*

"Here to die, Savage?" the leader of the other group taunted, his eyes shifting to Lucian, "Who is this? A foreigner? What did you do? Sell your soul to the northerners?"

The relationship between the South and the North could be described with a few words: bad, terrible, and bloody.

Savage was too out of his mind to respond to his question. "You fucking traitorous sonofabitch-" he cursed when they brought a pregnant woman over. Her face was bruised and her clothing torn. "You are not getting away with this!"

"Get away with what?" the rival laughed, "Your woman is mine now!"

The woman was crying and struggling in the men's grip. Lucian could see the men grinning behind their boss. They were getting off on this.

"Let her go, Scythe," Savage gritted through his teeth, his mustache quivering in rage. He was a tough man with intricate tattoos that resembled vines all over his arms.

The more detailed a southerner's tattoo, the more powerful they were.

"Hand over the northie," Scythe said, his arms covered as much as Savage's, "And we might consider it."

"..." Savage looked at the woman, then at Lucian, and then back at the woman, biting his lower lip.

The woman widened her eyes when Savage and his men shielded Lucian, ready to protect their investment instead of saving her.

"Honey, no..." she whispered in disbelief.

The leader laughed, "What a cold-hearted man you are, Savage. You won't even save your woman?"

Savage was regretting it, but his greed seemed too strong. "I will avenge you...Karolaina...I will kill him and his children...and his children's children!" he promised, staring bloody murder in Scythe's direction, "They will all pay!"

"Bold words," Scythe laughed, "For a dead man," he motioned to his men to attack, "Get that northerner. He seems important to Savage's business."

The two gangs charged at each other, and Lucian felt the ground shake under their feet.

The formation of the two groups was like the fangs of a wolf, closing on each other, ready to rip each other's throats out.

Moving to a safer area, Lucian's focus shifted to the woman, Karolaina, who was held by the Scythe's man. They were both separated from their groups by the brawl.

The betrayal had shattered her will to fight, and she was crying in defeat.

Lucian could wait it out, let the two groups fight and weaken each other, then use the state of the winner to build an alliance with them. Or help Savage's side, which could endanger the child inside Karolaina's womb.

Both choices would be beneficial to him, so Lucian could just stand and wait...but who was Lucian? He wanted to believe in love, believe that Savage did it for the second reason, to protect his family and not out of greed.

He waited. Until everyone had an opponent to deal with. And when they did, Lucian tried not to shake from the excitement as he ran to Karolaina, ducking his head from the flying fists and blades.

His combat skills weren't the best, but he had something else to compensate. A big bag of money, to be specific. Lucian threw the bag at the man holding the woman hostage.

The man caught the bag with one hand, and in that moment of distraction, Lucian jumped in, pulling Karolaina out of his grasp and piercing his dagger in the man's groin.

"Run," he ordered her, and she did.

The gut-wrenching scream of the man was enough to draw the attention of the people fighting. There was a dagger sticking out of his groin, and blood was gushing out of his wound. He was screaming like a pig, rolling on the ground in pain.

Lucian raised his leg, then kicked him in the face, sending him to the ground again, "Ah, sorry, I missed," he said, "I was aiming for your mouth," and then, another kick.

Karolaina, who had turned back to see what had happened, had the same expression as the rest of the people. Shock.

Lucian grinned at the audience and stomped on the man's face again, provocatively, without regard for his own life. The man seemed to be still alive and wanted nothing more than to torture Lucian to death.

"I'm trying to save you all," Lucian said as he grabbed the man's sword. He raised the blade and cut off the man's right leg, and then the left.

Then he stabbed him in the chest, twisting the blade as the man's eyes turned golden, "A shackled was hiding amongst you. It's your lucky day, gentlemen, for I've saved you from a disaster," he said with a wider grin.

The man on the ground began to move frantically, "I'll kill you!" he growled at Lucian, "Kill you! Kill you! KILL Y—"

His limbs tried to regenerate, only for Lucian to cut off the new growth, making him scream in hatred and anger. His golden eyes were fixed on the boy, swearing revenge.

"Ah, so tired," Lucian said as if he had just gone through a day's worth of hard labor, letting everyone know how dealing with a shackled was not easy.

He picked up the bloodied bag of coins and walked away, leaving the man to his miserable state as both groups jumped on him.

Their swords and blades were cutting him to pieces; his screams of agony and hatred never stopped, not until they chopped off his head and tore his heart out of his chest.

'...' the voice said nothing. It was probably busy looking for a way to pull at Lucian's hair and punch a few teeth out of his mouth for using it like some sort of contagious disease (by releasing it like in his childhood). It was not how its powers were supposed to be used!

Chapter 19: 2.4 Pocketed Back

Lucian hopped toward Karoline in a mischievous manner, his hands behind his back, and a big smile on his face.

"How is the baby? I can't believe it's already been a year since we last met," he exclaimed, "I can't wait to meet the little guy!"

Karoline got on her knees, ignoring her bruises, and bowed her head to him. Her forehead touched the ground, "Thank you, thank you!" she sobbed, "You saved us! I-I'll never forget this!"

"It's alright," Lucian smiled, helping her up, "I couldn't leave a woman in trouble, and a pregnant one at that."

The men stopped fighting, the battle coming to an end as the two leaders stared at him.

"Come now, let's get you two to a safe place where you can rest," Lucian helped her walk.

The group parted, making a path for them cautiously as if Lucian had just parted a curtain instead of a group of thugs.

Lucian gave Savage a side eye as if saying that he was disappointed in him for not stepping up still.

Savage quickly wiped the blood off his nose and ran to her, "Honey, are you alright? Did they hurt you? Is the baby okay?"

Karolaina slapped him, her eyes wide, "They hurt me!" she screamed, "They hurt me! You let them! You let them!"

Savage flared his nose in anger, but Lucian's stinky side eye stopped him from lashing back. "I'm sorry, but if he knew how much I cared for you and our child, he would have used you against me..."

Savage explained, "He would have threatened to harm you...I had to pretend to not care..."

Karolaina screamed and cried, hitting him in the chest as hard as she could.

Lucian listened to Savage's argument in satisfaction and nodded along.

Scythe scoffed at the sight, approaching the young man, "Who are you?"

Lucian turned around and smiled, "Lucian Arclight, at your service. The best landscape contractor in the Diamante Kingdom."

He continued with a flourish, "I travel lands in search of exotic plants, the rarest seeds, and unique saplings. If you ever want a garden to rival a king's, you know who to call. I'm your guy."

Then he finished with a hushed tone, "And I also dabble in the trading business to interested parties. Traveling gives me many opportunities to get my hands on rare items that are in high demand in certain regions."

The man frowned, looking at the remains of the shackled, asking how Lucian had dealt with it. Lucian said shackleds released a certain scent that allowed him to detect their power up before they attacked, giving him the advantage to strike first.

"My nose is my best weapon," Lucian joked, then added, "I wouldn't have produced the best scent sachets if it wasn't for it. Fragrant and strong, long-lasting, and yet not overwhelming."

"You could smell it from such a distance?" Scythe frowned suspiciously as Lucian handed him a small sample from his shoulder bag.

"If murderous auras could be felt from a distance, then why not smells? Do you doubt the power of smell? What about your instincts? Or your gut feelings? How do you

explain them?" Lucian asked, "My talent is at least tangible, which makes it more reliable than any other."

"You don't seem to be lying, but I still can't believe it," Scythe continued, sniffing at the sachet, surprised at how good it smelled.

Then he sniffed a few more times, finding it quite calming and soothing for his aching head, "I'm Scythe, leader of the Night Blades."

"It's an honor to meet you," Lucian said politely, "If possible can you spare my business partner's wife and unborn child? I don't wish to visit this place one day and find their tombstones. I will be devastated. I will feel like I should've done something to save their lives...or at least tried to...ave—"

Scythe raised his palm, "Alright, alright. I get it. You are a real chatterbox, aren't you?" he grumbled, "I'll spare the wench, but in return, you have to give me an advantage over Savage."

Savage tried to interfere, but Lucian kept giving him a stinky eye to keep him quiet.

"You have to understand that it is a lot to ask for from a humble land contractor," Lucian said, "I don't have enough manpower to supply both of your factions."

Scythe frowned.

"But..."

Scythe leaned in.

"If you two will be able to get hands on a few slaves without the issue of getting tracked, I could consider it," Lucian said, "It will help me increase my productivity, and you will gain a valuable ally that will bring you profits."

"Is that so?" Scythe said, stroking his chin as he glanced at Savage from the corner of his eye. "This needs to be discussed in private."

"Of course," Lucian yawned into his palm. "It's getting late, and I need to get some rest. You two talk amongst yourselves, and I will be back in the morning to hear the final decision. This is just a side hustle of mine, I have a lot more business partners in the southern lands, but none of them is as powerful and resourceful as you two...combined."

Lucian didn't wait for the two to react and went to find a place to rest, a wall to lean against. Draping the hood over his head, he showed that he was open to the idea of working with them.

They could become rivaling giants and obliterate the smaller factions...

...Or they could kill the chance, by getting rid of Lucian and his business to make sure he didn't sell his goods to their competition.

Who would try to attack him after that stunt? A treasure chest that could bite?

Lucian never planned to take sides.

They either took his deal, or they didn't.

Simple.

Saving Karolaina's life made him look good, and he might even get a loyal employee out of it. In case Savage and Scythe rejected his offer, she would become an excellent spy.

Lucian wished his future wife goodnight and closed his eyes, *'Wake me up if they try to kill me, Voice.'*

'I'm not your watch dog,' the voice said.

'Then you will be responsible if they kill me,' Lucian said.

'...Go to sleep already,' the voice relented.

It was hard to fall asleep at first, but Lucian soon drifted away to his dreams, with the sounds of Savage's and Scythe's argument in the background.

Scythe burned down Savage's house after all. Maybe they would clash again, but Lucian didn't really care.

What mattered was that he got away with a new opportunity in his pocket.

Chapter 20: 2.5 Slave Camp

'So cold!' Lucian's teeth chattered in his mouth as he shivered under his cloak, a fierce wind blowing against his face.

The nights were freezing cold in the Southern Alliance.

Riding a horse, he was traveling through a stony desert, led by Savage and Scythe. They had taken Lucian's deal, and were now leading him to the place where the slaves were kept.

Treason was not something to be taken lightly, and that's why Lucian operated under his real identity, though it may seem foolish to do so for some.

'Honesty can disarm suspicion better than lies can hide it,' Lucian thought.

People would keep politics away from him, knowing he dipped his hand into both sides of the conflict.

The irony was that rulers who hated each other still needed trade: spices, silk, metals, horses, and luxury goods kept economies (and wars) running. So merchants like Lucian were often tolerated.

He took advantage of his weaker constitution, which was unwanted by the military and burdensome to society. The expensive medicine for his illness gave him no choice but to make money, a lot of it.

His net worth now was higher than that of most of his peers: he expanded his small garden by an acre (4000m²) and built his first green house made out of glass.

He also bought four acres of land near the south; further away from the towns. He didn't have the means to protect it yet, only the garden by bribing the town guards to keep an occasional check on it (cheaper than hiring his own).

So when he saw the large army stationed near the slave camp, Lucian realized that the slaves earned more than enough coins to make up for the security costs. It was a large fenced area with a watchtower on the top.

There was a Gold Mine nearby and Lucian couldn't help but salivate at the sight. Messing up with it could bring a death sentence to anyone, even a duke.

"..." Scythe looked at Savage then at Lucian, and then at the army up front, "Maybe we shouldn't..."

"Are you scared?" Savage taunted, "After coming all this way? Are you turning back now?"

Scythe snorted, "Not in your life, you bastard." He motioned for the rest of the men to move, "You better know what you're doing, northerner," he told Lucian before he went on.

Lucian smiled knowingly in response, but inside, he was as nervous as them, *'I hope I do too.'*

The slaves were the kingdom's property by default. They posed a high risk, so not many bought slaves for their protection or their workforce.

Prisoners would be a better word to describe their circumstances. But instead of being held inside cells in a prison, they were sent to the slave camp to work.

The person responsible for the slave camp was a bald man, strict and harsh, he didn't take bribes nor did he negotiate with anyone. He was a soldier and a loyal one at that.

"Why do you need slaves?" he asked after a small talk with Scythe and Savage.

They were inside one of the tents in the camp, sitting around a round wooden table.

"Your ability to communicate with each other through great distances is very useful," Lucian began, "but I can't risk Scythe's and Savage's men's lives in case someone accuses them of a crime against their kingdom."

Lucian continued, sipping on the offered cup of water, "Slaves, on the other hand, have no support network to rely on. I will also have an easier time explaining to my authorities the reason for their presence."

The man, Grim, listened with a stoic face, but he seemed to be considering Lucian's words. "Can you also get a hold on the new species of dogs in the North? I heard they are very intelligent and obedient," he said.

Lucian smiled, "I can get them," he agreed.

Grim nodded in satisfaction, leading them to the selection area while ordering his people to line up the candidates.

"Choose your men," Grim said.

There were at least two hundred of them, all beaten down and tired-looking.

Lucian could see that they had been worked to the bone. He walked up and down the line, examining each of them. His eyes stopped on a familiar figure.

"This one," he called out, "What are his crimes?" he asked, looking at the man in charge of the camp, "Why is he here?"

After they explained to Lucian the reason for Jax being a slave, he made his choice.

Jax didn't recognize Lucian due to the hood and his lack of care.

Lucian didn't mind, his eyes scanning the rest of slaves for any reaction to the news.

Only one person had an expression he was looking for. It was subtle, but there was a hint of worry in his eyes. Lucian approached him, "This one."

Another scan for reactions. A hopeful look was all he needed, "This one," Lucian said.

And the best for the last.

Lucian's gaze fell on the person who had shown a begging look. The person who was the most desperate to be chosen.

A little boy with a dirty face and ragged clothes.

"I'll take this kid as well," Lucian decided.

Around eight years old, the kid was the youngest in the group, but his determination was the strongest of them all. He had a fire in his eyes that reminded Lucian of himself.

The boy's eyes lit up when he saw Lucian point at him, "T-thank you, sir!" he cried, wiping his face with the back of his hand, "I won't disappoint you, sir! You can count on me! I'll do anything you ask!"

"Tsk. Tsk. Tsk. So young and so eager to die," Lucian couldn't help but tease the kid, "What if I treat you worse than this camp? You might die before you can say 'I regret it'."

The kid shuddered in fear, already regretting it. He didn't seem like the smartest person around, but he was eager to serve and quick to obey.

"Done," Lucian turned to Grim, "I'll take these four. They will do."

Grim raised an eyebrow at his choices, but didn't comment on them. Nobody could come this far and not have a good sense of judgment. Arriving with not one but two backers was a sign of someone that would go far.

He approved Lucian request and returned to the tent to sign documents that gave Lucian full ownership of the slaves.

After Lucian left, Grim put down the blood soaked bag of money, "... " looking inside without counting the coins one more time.

He just thought about how he had probably earned a connection worth more than this bag of coins. His guts were telling him so.