

MY VILLAINESS EX WON'T LEAVE ME ALONE

Chapter 172 172: 5.29 - Morning Sickness

Lucian reached out, his hand dripping wet, and took the envelope, opening it and reading the contents.

He completely neglected his teaching duties in the Royal Academy, and it was probably a miracle that they still considered him a guest lecturer.

"Will you go?" Jax asked, leaning against the doorway, watching his boss relaxing in the tub.

The old bruises on his body had faded over time, but the new ones still looked like someone had tried to turn him into a punching bag.

Fighting two hundred men every day did that to him.

Lucian became so good at dodging that they had to use dirtier tactics to land a hit on him, using the element of surprise and numbers. It was the only way they could land a solid punch.

The feral soldiers were also improving in their combat skills, and their loyalty was getting stronger.

Lucian leaned his head back against the edge of the tub, his sharp nose pointing to the ceiling.

It had been four months since he last saw his child's mother, and he missed the little rascal in her belly.

He could feel its presence, even though he never met him or her yet. The mother didn't seem interested in seeing him. All the talk about chasing him to the end of the world had turned into silence.

"Boss?"

"Send my regards," Lucian sighed, the invitation slipping from between his fingers onto the ground, "I'm not interested. But ask Mumbai to send a donation on my behalf."

She would know what kind of donation to send to keep up appearances.

"Alright," Jax nodded, turning to leave.

"Wait." Lucian stopped him.

Jax turned back, waiting for further instructions.

"We will depart to the north in two days," Lucian informed, "I need to check on the other business ventures, and prepare for the next phase of the plan."

"Understood." Jax bowed his head, and left him to his bath.

Lucian stayed in the water for a while longer, 'What would be the cost of kidnapping the duke's daughter?'

It was not like their relationship was going to get any worse than it already was, so what was there to lose? Love? Respect? Was there any left to begin with?

'If I don't do it, she will. She has the resources, and the manpower. I might as well do it before she does.'

Lucian smiled to himself, playing with the water in the tub. He was having wild thoughts, but they were not too far fetched. He could pull it off if he put his mind to it.

The gold mine could serve as a fortress, the southern alliance would hold back the north's forces in his stead.

Nobody would reach them here.

One week later...

Celine didn't seem to be in the south anymore. She had abandoned her southern post and went north due to her father's summoning.

Lucian had used his third eye, and there were no traces of her in the southern borders, but he caught the new fashion trend. Corsets went out of style, and a new type of dress was in.

It spread just below the breasts and flared out in a loose skirt, hiding the waist and the hips. It apparently added to a woman's innocence and modesty, and was the latest hit among the noble ladies.

Lucian took over another Lucian's (employee with the same name) shifts as a gardener in the Rochefort's gardens after finding out where she was staying.

He felt a bit nervous, but that was to be expected. He had not seen her in a while.

He carried his tools and went to trim the bushes, a straw hat on his head.

The rest of the gardeners worked more diligently than usual, for their boss was watching over their shoulders. Glory's founder had grown bigger and more muscular compared to last time, making him appear more imposing.

Lucian activated his third eye, searching for the person he came here for.

She was sleeping inside her room, the covers pulled over her head. He could feel a faint tug at his chest, but ignored it.

He continued his work, tending to the plants. It's been a while since he tended to a garden, and he found it relaxing.

He was trimming a rose bush when he noticed her waking up. His hands paused.

He watched her through the walls, her dark blue hair spilled over her shoulders as she sat up, the blanket sliding down to reveal her nightgown.

She stroked her belly, rubbing it gently, the curve of it visible even through the fabric.

Her eyes half lidded from sleep, her face turning from white to green. She gagged, holding her mouth, and rushed to the washroom.

She leaned over the chamber pot, vomiting.

The scissors in Lucian's hands fell to the ground, his feet moving on their own, running towards her balcony.

Celine continued to throw up, her hair a mess around her face. She leaned back, catching her breath, her hand resting on her stomach.

Lucian stopped abruptly below her balcony, his breathing heavy. He could climb up and see her, but there were too many eyes watching him.

Celine wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and went to the mirror, looking at her reflection, her eyes fixed on her stomach.

"Do you have to take after your father?" she muttered, her voice hoarse. "You are going to make me suffer for another five months, aren't you?"

She glared at her belly, as if blaming the child for her morning sickness. She washed her face and cleaned her mouth, then went to open the balcony doors to let fresh air in.

Lucian took a step back, hiding behind a tree before she could see him. He peeked from behind it, watching her take a deep breath before going back inside.

She moved to her vanity table and sat down, picking up a brush and beginning to comb her hair.

A lady's maid entered the room, carrying a tray with breakfast on it.

She placed it on the table and curtsied before her mistress, "Good morning, my lady. How are you feeling?"

Celine gave her the brush, letting her take over the hair brushing without a word. Her eyes followed the maid's movement in the mirror, "Do I look okay to you?"

The maid smiled, "You look beautiful, my lady."

Celine sighed, "I feel like a beached whale."

Lucian snorted from behind the tree, covering his mouth.

Celine frowned, her eyes darting around the room, "Did you hear that?"

┌── Author's note ──┐

I would like to remind that the only way this novel can earn is through gifts donations.

There's no paywall, so any small amount you can spare to support me will be greatly appreciated! Thank you!

(≧▽≧)ノ



Chapter 173 173: 5.30 - Sweet Defeat

"What, my lady?" the maid asked, trying to suppress a laugh. Celine's sense of humor had not deserted her, it seemed, even if her temper was frayed.

"Hear what?"

Celine put on an outer robe over her nightgown, walking towards the balcony doors, and opened them wider. She looked around, but couldn't see anything out of the ordinary.

"Leave," Celine ordered, her back still turned to the maid.

The maid curtsied again, and left the room. The door closed behind her with a soft click.

Celine stayed on the balcony for a while, looking down at the garden. The young gardeners were all hard at work, their backs bent, their hats shading their faces.

Her intense gaze swept over them, making them look up, feeling her scrutiny. They bowed slightly and went back to their work, not daring to hold eye contact with the Duke's daughter.

"..." Lucian even noticed their cheeks flush, they were clearly flustered by her presence.

She certainly looked softer without make-up and a fancy gown. The way the morning light caught her hair made it look like liquid sapphire, a luxurious color that no painter could replicate.

Her eyes, even from this distance, were sharp, searching. They landed on the dropped scissors on the ground, the one Lucian had dropped.

He cursed silently in his head, a bead of sweat rolling down his neck.

She then counted the gardeners, her brows furrowing before letting out a soft chuckle. It sounded like wind chimes, a sound he missed dearly.

Lucian punched himself internally, 'I can't believe I am still thinking like this.'

Celine stayed there for a few more moments, noticing the gardeners looking Lucian's way as if wondering what he was doing behind a tree.

Lucian couldn't hide forever, so he had no choice but to re-emerge and pick up the scissors. He could see her smirk from above as he bent down to retrieve it. It was a knowing smirk, one that said, 'Got you.'

Lucian forced a smile, tipping his straw hat at her. He then went back to trimming the rose bush, acting as if everything was part of his plan. That he was the one who wanted her to find him.

Celine even brought her tray of breakfast and sat on a small chair at her balcony, enjoying the food from above. She ate her food as if she was watching a very entertaining show. He was the entertainment, of course.

'Trapping me with a child, a child she knows I care about, so I'd come running back to her no matter how she treated me,' Lucian thought, 'And look at me. I did.'

Celine finished her breakfast and left the balcony, but she left the door open. A clear invitation.

"..." He wanted to go up there, he really did. But he also wanted to strangle her. She was unapologetic, unremorseful, and worst of all, she was enjoying this.

'I would understand if she thought I was shackled and beat me up...'

How little did Lucian need to warp everything to make her actions forgivable in his own mind. He was making excuses for her, because he still had feelings for her. He was a fool.

'...but you don't kiss shackled, or flirt with them, or... or do anything else she is doing with me.'

She must have deducted that he was still her Lucian, and not a copy, after she had failed to provoke him into acting like a shackled.

She just no longer cared about his feelings toward her, and was using other means to get what she wanted from him.

Later that night, Lucian slipped into her room through the balcony, like a thief in the night.

The security was tight, and if Celine didn't assist him, he would have been caught. What a scandal that would be, a gardener sneaking into the Duke's daughter's room.

Celine was already in her bed, wide awake, waiting for him. He could see her silhouette in the moonlight.

She didn't say anything as he walked towards her, his footsteps silent on the carpet. He sat on the edge of the bed, the mattress dipping under his weight.

Silence hung in the air between them. Lucian didn't acknowledge her, and went straight for her stomach. He placed his palm over the small curve of it.

He then placed his ear against it, listening for any sounds of life, whispering sweet nothings.

Celine's hand paused, her fingers hovering in the air before she decided to rest them on top of Lucian's head. It wasn't a gentle lullaby kind of touch, but more of a 'how dare you greet your child before your child's mother' kind of grip.

"Are you eating properly?" Lucian asked, still not looking at her. "Are you taking the necessary medicine? The one for the child's health."

His question was not about her well-being, but about their child's. He was being petty, but he couldn't help it.

Celine didn't answer him. Instead, she pulled on his hair, forcing his face against hers, pressing his lips against hers.

Lucian didn't respond to her kiss, he just stayed still, like a statue. Her free hand gripped his chest, his heart pounding under her touch, selling him out.

Her tongue traced his lips, sucking on them. When he didn't reciprocate, she scoffed against his lips, and let go of him.

Lucian pulled away, and wiped his lips with the back of his hand, as if to get rid of the taste of her.

But then he remembered the physician's advice and leaned in, kissing her forehead, a gentle touch that conveyed a different message, "Don't stress yourself. It's not good for the baby."

He then grabbed his shoulder bag, not looking at her, and rummaged through it.

"Here," he said, placing a box on the bedside table, "A gift for the child."

Various snacks were also taken out, a mix of sweet and savory. He had heard that pregnant women had cravings for certain foods. He prepared for that.

Celine grabbed him by the collar, and got herself another kiss, breaking his little heart and mending it at the same time. He hated this feeling.

When she let go, she was smiling. She went through the snacks, a sweet pastry shaped like a fish was the one she chose. She took a bite, and then held it to Lucian's lips.

Lucian turned his attention back to her stomach, "Does your mother always watch the garden from her balcony? To make sure the workers are doing their job, or...? "

Celine did not allow him to ruin her mood with words, and offered him another bite of the fish pastry.

She made it feel like he was the only suffering party.

Lucian took a bite. The pastry tasted like defeat. A sweet defeat.

When she went for another kiss, Lucian pushed her back down into the bed, his hands on her shoulders.

"You're the worst," he said, and he meant it, "The absolute worst."

"Are you going to kiss me properly or do I have to kick you around a little bit? Maybe you will be more willing then?"

The cruel, sweet smile on her face made Lucian's blood boil. But he did as she wanted, and kissed her, so properly that she would either have to push him away or choke on his tongue.

"Mmpf!" she pushed his face away from hers. His tongue had gone further down her throat, making her cough, "Hah...you...insane...mpf!"

They were so close to each other, yet separated by a pit so deep, it was swallowing all their chances of reconciliation.

Chapter 174 174: 5.31 - How Will They Raise A Child Together?

Lucian covered her nose, taking her breath away.

His other hand wrapped around her nape, tilting her head, her gasp swallowed by his suffocating kiss.

He held her pinned. His lips moved with a ferocity that matched the storm inside him, fueled by the warmth of her mouth.

Celine's fingers clawed at his chest, trying to pry him off, the air slipping from her lungs.

He expected her to use the curse on him, and she seemed to have the same idea.

He started to feel weaker, but not weak enough to lose his grip. Her curse wasn't as powerful as before; it was weaker and weaker, until he couldn't feel it anymore.

It seemed it depended heavily on her mental state. The more distracted she was, the less effective it became.

She tried to bite his lips, but he moved his face away in time.

"Crazy....Mmpf!"

Her words were cut off by another kiss.

He avoided the slap that was meant for his cheek by grabbing her wrist.

Celine's other hand came to slap him, but Lucian pinned it down too.

A knee to the stomach sent him flying off the bed; her curse working again.

He landed on the floor with a thud, panting, looking at her with a crazed smile on his face.

Celine continued to cough, massaging her throat as she took in his expression from her bed.

"My Lady, is everything okay? We heard a loud noise." A guard's voice came from outside, making Lucian's face drop.

Celine got down from the bed and straddled Lucian's stomach, her hands pressing on his chest to keep him down.

"Lady Celine?" the guard asked again.

She leaned down, "Kiss. Me. Properly. And I will not scream for help."

"Lady Celine, if you do not respond, we will have to break down the door," the guard warned.

"HEL—"

Lucian's lips crushed against hers before she could utter another word, pecking her, once, twice, then three times. Each one soft, sweet, and heart-melting.

Celine took her sweet time as he kissed her gently, his tongue tasting every corner of her mouth, then she let him trace her jaw with soft kisses, all the while his stress over getting caught grew.

"Celine..." Lucian warned, his breath hot against her jaw.

She pecked his lower lip before turning toward the doors, "Return to your post! I was just testing you!"

"Yes, my Lady," the guard answered, and the footsteps outside faded away.

Celine returned her attention to him, the adrenaline in her eyes almost scary, "That was close."

Lucian's expression was not as playful. He didn't like how she held his life in her hands, ready to ruin him if she wanted to.

She lay on top of him, her head on his chest, listening to his heartbeat, which was so loud and fast, she could feel the vibrations of it on her cheek.

"Are you staying the night?" she asked when he submitted to her whims, her voice soft. Her pointer finger traced circles on his shirt.

She got what she wanted, so she turned sweet, until the next time he did something she didn't like, then she'd turn ruthless again.

"Do I have a say in the matter?"

She rested her chin on his chest, her blue eyes looking up at him. "You don't want to stay?"

"You just tried to have me killed."

"You just tried to kiss me to death."

"..." He had no counter for that. "Do you want me to love you still after everything?"

"Love is to be trusted as much as a hungry dog with meat." She rested her head back on his chest. "I'm just making sure it stays on a leash."

Lucian failed to change her view of love, and the cold moonlight agreed with her statement, the way it cast a dull light over them.

"So, you don't love me anymore?" he asked.

"Apparently not, by your standards. Love is respect, kindness, caring, gentleness, bla bla...right?"

Sighing, Lucian carried her back to bed. "How are we going to raise our child together if we don't get along?"

She didn't resist, her hands wrapping around his neck for support, "We? There is no we; I will raise this child. Your only duty is to please me, and I'll let you see the child from time to time."

"..." He placed her on her back, his body on top of hers, taking a deep breath, "Come with me to the South. I will take care of both you and our child. Nobody will dare to harm you there. Those who try will die."

She looked at him in silence, her eyes searching his face. Instead of the usual bickering, he looked dead serious. A rare sight for her, and she didn't know how to respond immediately.

"Leave everything behind? For you?" she whispered.

"For our family," he replied, making a decision, "You, me, and our child."

This might work. They could fight, keep things between them hot and heavy. Celine didn't seem to care if they had a happy relationship anymore, as long as they stayed together.

Lucian could offer her that. A little hurt here and there was a small price to pay to escape the wish, no? He could endure it. Anything for his little family.

Celine looked away, thinking, "What about marriage? Would you give me that, too?"

She was probably still under the impression that he was not being serious, and resumed her torture of his heart, "A bastard child is not the life I want for our child, though my surname would surely sound better than yours."

Lucian's hand reached for her chin, gently turning her face back to him. His thumb caressed her cheek instead of pushing her buttons back with a snarky comeback.

She leaned against his palm as if she could feel his soul's silent plea for help.

The redness in her eyes grew, but she didn't shed a tear. The blue in them deepened as if she could tell that the shackles around his neck were growing tighter with each day, and his desperation to escape them was leading them both into ruin.

Her little vocabulary she had built over the years of being with him was translating his actions and words into a different language, one that didn't speak of lies and deceptions. The language of his soul, begging for her to understand.

As fast as it appeared, it disappeared. A scoff escaped her lips, "Kneel and beg, maybe I will consider it."

He cuddled closer, his head in her neck. "Anything else you want to torture me with, my lady?"

"A kiss."

"Another? I can't feel my lips anymore."

"That's your problem, not mine."

He was about to kiss her when a loud bang came from the door. Both of them froze.

They heard the lock turning, the wood cracking, and the footsteps of guards coming in.

════ Author's note ═════

Explanation, for those who want more clarity:

It's hard to describe what's going on. They both are more aware of each other's intentions now, and are trying to find a way out of the shackled situation.

It's causing Lucian's boundaries to break, becoming more tolerant of her behavior. And the more tolerant he becomes, the more extreme Celine's actions have to get in order for the wish not to activate.

It's a downward spiral they try to pull each other out of, and I hope you can see it more clearly now. Lucian's victim mentality, Celine's confusion, and now her path to villainhood. □

By the time the heroine appears, Celine should be the villainess, and the prophecy will be set in motion, or maybe it already was.



Chapter 175 175: 5.32 - Suspicious Order

Celine's eyes went wide. She immediately shoved Lucian toward the edge of the mattress.

Lucian slid his body underneath the large, canopied bed.

The stealthy way they had barged in was highly suspicious. He hadn't heard a single clatter of armor or heavy footsteps in the hallway until they were already at the door.

When he was with Celine, he preferred to shut Voice out and give her his undivided attention, otherwise he would have noticed them with his third eye.

"My Lady, it's an evacuation order from the Duke," the soldier bowed his head. He also scanned the room for intruders, his sword in hand. "The front line has fallen to the Southern Alliance. We must leave the Summer estate immediately."

Celine didn't betray a single hint of panic or reveal that a man was hiding mere inches beneath her feet.

She walked over to where Lucian's leather bag sat on the floor. Without a second of hesitation, she picked it up, turned it upside down over a nearby waste bin, and completely emptied it. She was using her body to hide the content.

Lucian watched in absolute horror as his spare clothes and the leather ledger tumbled into the trash.

Celine then casually swept the snacks and the gift Lucian had brought for their future child inside it, using his bag as her own personal carry-on.

A maid placed down a pair of boots for Celine to wear as she followed the soldiers outside, then draped a cloak over her mistress. She then returned to pack some necessities in a hurry.

Lucian was left behind, hiding under the bed, waiting for them to leave. He listened to the commotion outside, the servants running around, the carriages being prepared.

He crawled out from under the bed when the room was empty to retrieve his items into a bag he found in her wardrobe. He stole a few of her personal items, to make up for his stolen bag as well.

There were still people in the hallway, so he had to wait for the perfect moment to slip out.

He opened the balcony window and jumped out of it, landing softly on the grass.

He kept to the shadows, avoiding being seen by the guards while listening to the conversation between Celine and the soldier.

"What happened?" Celine asked from inside the carriage.

"Lord Edmund...has gone missing. Rochefort's army was called back to search for him," the soldier replied from outside the carriage, his voice low, "The Southern Alliance has taken advantage of the situation."

"Are my parents safe?" Celine asked, her voice steady.

"His Grace and Her Grace are safe," the soldier replied. "We must rejoin them as soon as possible."

Celine lifted her chin, the darkness of the night cloaking her expression. "Proof of it?"

The soldier quickly handed her a letter, which she took and read in silence.

Lucian's third eye caught the words on the paper.

The Duke's handwriting was rushed, the ink smudged in some places. The Duke was ordering his daughter to join the army and not leave their side for safety reasons. He didn't trust anyone but his own army to protect his daughter.

The carriage started to move, the wheels crushing the gravel under them.

Lucian's kidnapping plan was quickly cancelled by the turn of events. It seemed that fate had other plans for them.

'Of all the times...!' Lucian cursed in his head. Just when he had gained some standing, Edmund had to ruin it. Again.

Lucian went to pick up the rest of his belongings, and then left the estate on the wagon he had arrived in. He ordered his people to report back if they found anything about Edmund's whereabouts.

They should have been keeping an eye on him in the first place, so he hoped they would have something to share soon.

In the following days, news of the front line's collapse spread like wildfire, igniting panic among the people of the North.

The blame fell on the Rochefort family for abandoning their post at such a crucial moment. Their absence on the battlefield was a big blow to the army's morale.

It was said it was due to Lady Celine Rochefort demanding her father to marry her to the Crown Prince, and that her father was doing everything in his power to grant her wish.

Lucian hoped it was not the Duke, who was spreading such rumors to have his daughter marry the Crown Prince, to distract the public from the real issue. He wouldn't put it past the man to do such a thing.

Lucian got off his horse, making his way inside a local pawn shop when he noticed a strange sight.

A girl had entered the shop as well, her strawberry pink hair and eyes drawing attention to her. She started to argue with the shopkeeper, a determined expression on her face.

She was dressed in a simple white dress, her shoes worn out. She looked like a commoner, but there was something about her that made her stand out.

She was pretty, with delicate features and a petite figure, but there was a fire in her eyes that made her look anything but delicate.

The way she haggled with the manager would make Lucian want to recruit her for the Glory, had he not known who she was.

It was the heroine, Bianca Lacroix.

The same girl who was destined to bring ruin to the villainess, capture the hearts of many men, and unite the three Kingdoms together, bringing peace to the world.

From the looks of it, she must have just gotten her invitation to the Royal Academy, and was getting ready for her new life. She was trying to buy the necessary school supplies, but with a limited budget.

Lucian looked around the pawn shop, grabbed a bow and walked toward the counter, asking the shopkeeper for its price.

"Be careful," she warned and came to Lucian when she overheard their conversation. "It's thin, it's cheap, and it's not worth half the price he is asking for."

Chapter 176 176: 5.33 - Evaluation

The Royal Academy's structure was designed to maintain the kingdom's social hierarchy.

First were the Junior grounds (ages six to seventeen), attended by sponsored commoners, saintess aspirants, and knight trainees.

Next came the Senior grounds (ages eighteen to twenty). This was where the nobles entered the Academy to mingle. Though nobles and commoners shared the Senior classes, the commoners knew their place, keeping their eyes and heads low.

Most commoners and standard knights graduated at twenty-one after completing these Senior classes, immediately entering active service to pay off their sponsors.

The last were the Elite grounds (ages twenty-one to twenty-five), a post-graduate tier, which was a highly exclusive playground reserved for royals, high-ranking noble heirs, and the occasional once-in-a-generation prodigy.

The Heroine would be the only commoner in the elite grounds, a small fish in a big pond.

And the villainess would be the one to remind her of that fact.

"Hello?" The heroine waved her hand before Lucian's face, snapping him out of his thoughts. "Are you listening?"

Lucian shook his head and smiled, "I am."

"Then pay attention," she scolded him. "The bow I'm pointing at is a fake, a replica of a real one, but with half the quality. It will snap with the first few uses. Don't let him rip you off."

Lucian looked back at the shopkeeper, who wanted to strangle the girl for ruining his sales. "Is that true?"

The shopkeeper coughed, trying to regain his composure. "Of course not. I assure you, this bow is of the highest quality. It's a rare item, made by the best craftsmen."

The girl scoffed, "Liar."

The shopkeeper glared at her, his face turning red with anger, "You...you insolent little...!"

He was about to say something nasty, but a look from Lucian shut him up.

Paying for more than what's worth was how Lucian was making his money. He was no longer interested in recruiting this girl. She would definitely cost him money with her righteous ways.

"You must be new here," the girl said to Lucian. "This place is known for its overpriced goods. There's a better store just down the street, more affordable, and more reliable."

She pointed outside, indicating the direction of the other store. She then picked up her own bag and left, not giving the shopkeeper another glance.

Lucian thanked her and followed after her. He walked beside her, his hands behind his back, "Thank you for your help, Miss. I would have been fooled by him if you hadn't warned me."

She looked up at him, her eyes assessing him. He was tall, handsome, and dressed in fine clothes, but not too flashy. He had a friendly smile and a gentle voice, nothing like the arrogant people she had met so far.

"You're welcome," she said, looking ahead. "I hate it when people try to trick others like that. It's not fair."

"Is it you who has been helping out other customers to get the right price for their goods?" he asked, already knowing the answer. It was why the shopkeeper looked so annoyed with her.

He was going to scare her away with his goons sooner or later, but it seemed she had no clue what danger she was bringing on herself.

Maybe she thought the justice she believed in would protect her. Lucian admired such individuals, and he had tried to be one too. Helping for a good cause, making the world a better place, and such. A hero's dream.

"I can't just stand by and watch it happen. I have to do something," she said, a spark of determination in her eyes. "That's why I want to be a Saintess, to help people who need it."

She finally found someone who listened to her dream, and she felt the need to share it.

If it were another man, they would have probably had their hearts captured by her.

Compared to the meek and submissive commoner girls and the haughty noble ladies, she stood out in an amazing way.

She was polite, but also assertive. Kind, but also bold. A mix of traits that made her appealing.

But Lucian was not another man. He didn't look at her with admiration, but with a sense of envy. Her dreams were being supported by the world, while his were being crushed.

There was no point crying over it, for the only thing he would gain was a sore throat. Instead, he would try to find opportunity in troubles, and make the most of it, like he always did.

Lucian returned to the weapon store to pick up the "worthless" bow, a smile on his face.

The shopkeeper flinched when he saw him coming back. He had failed the promotion process that the Glory held for potential future managers.

They would usually get an unreliable store with a bad reputation, and had to make it flourish to earn their title. Glory's reputation was not to be tarnished by the actions of the individual.

Some people could make the impossible possible, and Lucian needed more of those in his team. But this shopkeeper was not one of them; he could not turn the situation in his favor, and the test store was losing money.

"You're fired," Lucian said as soon as he entered the store.

The shopkeeper paled, his eyes widening, "What? Why? I...I didn't do anything wrong."

He tried to justify his actions, to beg for a second chance, but Lucian cut him off, "You let a young girl ruin your business. If you can't handle her, how do you expect to handle our competitors?"

"You can't fire me! I... tell everyone about your practices, how you..." The manager stopped himself when he met Lucian's eyes.

"How I...?"

"Nothing, sir. Please, give me another chance. I promise, I'll do better."

"Clear out your belongings," Lucian said and walked past him, ignoring his pleas.

He went to the back of the store, where the candidates were waiting.

They had been watching the whole scene nervously, not knowing which one would be promoted and which one would not.

"Congratulations," Lucian said, handing one of them a paper with the new Glory store location, "You're the new manager."

That day, the old store's pawn shop was closed, and a new one opened in its place to continue the undercover evaluation process.

Chapter 177 177: 5.34 - A Smitten Smile

Lucian was able to track down Edmund, at the same time as the Rocheforts. He was hiding within the academy grounds, making it harder for any of them to get to him.

Any sign of violence against their own heir could cause an uproar and further decline the Rocheforts' reputation.

Rumors were fine if they remained just rumors, but when they became proven facts, it was a different matter.

The Academy's defenses and many eyes were the perfect cover for Edmund.

'It's not a place for pregnant women to stay,' Lucian packed his bags and prepared to leave for the academy.

Celine was supposed to drop out, stay under house "arrest" for her behavior and focus on giving birth, not get entangled in the mess her brother had caused.

'I'm burning that place to the ground, I swear,' Lucian fumed in his head, trying not to pull out his hair in frustration.

Celine couldn't trust any academy staff to help her during her pregnancy, all were a possible threat to her. He had to be with her. She had to stay within his sight.

He also wasn't sure about what the deal was with the shackled Edmund and whether he posed a danger to Celine.

Lucian threw his bag over his shoulder and was on his way.

It took him about three days to arrive at the Academy, and he was already feeling restless.

The security measures were much stricter than the last time, with guards and patrols all around the perimeter.

They inspected the carriages and the visitors thoroughly before allowing them inside.

Lucian went through the usual checks, and then was escorted to the guest quarters.

They didn't treat him like a criminal, but rather a liability. The dispute with the church and merchant guild still wasn't resolved, but news of him obtaining a gold mine traveled fast.

He was a guest that brought money to the table, so they were forced to treat him with respect.

Lucian didn't even unpack his things and went outside for a "walk" to clear his head.

The sun was shining through the leaves in the Academy's forest, casting shadows on the ground.

The heroine's shoes were getting dirty as she ran through the bushes, her long hair flowing behind her. She was running away from her bullies, trying to find a safe place to hide.

She spotted a tree with a thick trunk, and decided to climb it, hoping the nobles wouldn't find her there. Her fingers gripped the bark, and her feet stepped on the branches, lifting her up higher and higher.

She reached a sturdy branch, and sat on it, catching her breath. She looked down, and saw the nobles walking below, looking for her.

"Where did she go? I swear I saw her running this way," one of the boys said, scanning the area with his eyes, "Lady Celine told us to make sure she won't make it to class today."

They were still searching for her, unaware of her presence above them.

Then, she heard a faint meow coming from a small cat, trapped on a branch, too high for it to jump down from. The cat was scared, and it was clinging to the wood for dear life.

"You poor thing," she whispered, feeling sorry for the cat. "Don't worry, I'll get you down."

She climbed further up, reaching for the cat, her hand outstretched. The cat saw her, and tried to move towards her, but it lost its balance, and slipped.

"No!" she gasped, and lunged forward, trying to catch the cat. But her foot slipped too, and she felt herself falling.

She closed her eyes, bracing for impact, when she felt a pair of strong arms wrap around her, stopping her fall.

She opened her eyes, and saw a coldly handsome face looking at her with a mixture of annoyance and amusement.

It was the crown prince, Aldric. He had noticed her, and had caught her before she hit the ground.

"What are you doing up there?" he asked, his voice low.

She blushed, feeling embarrassed, and grateful. "I...I was trying to help the cat. Put me down!"

Prince Aldric frowned and dropped her on her feet, "You don't know who I am, do you?"

The heroine shook her head, confused, "No, I don't. I'm sorry, but I have to go. Thank you for catching me."

She turned to leave, but he grabbed her arm, stopping her.

"Wait," he said, his eyes narrowing, as if he was studying her, his grip firm on her wrist. "You're the new commoner, aren't you?"

She felt a bit offended by his tone, and pulled her arm away from him. "Yes, I am. Is there a problem with that?"

He looked at her as if she was a curious creature, his curiosity piqued. "No, there's no problem."

He was not used to commoners acting so boldly around him, or having no manners. Most of them would bow and scrape, and agree with everything he said.

But this girl was different. She was not afraid of him, or intimidated by him. She was defiant, and challenging, and somehow, he found that...interesting.

She left him behind, and ran away, not caring about his royal status. She had to get to class before she was marked as absent.

Celine, on the other hand, watched the whole scene from a thick tree, snacking on the treat Lucian gave her.

A head leaned over her shoulder, taking a bite of the treat, making her turn to the side.

"Boo." Lucian wrapped his arm around her belly, taking another bite of the pastry from her hand she lifted to his mouth. "Surprise."

"..." She knew he was there, but didn't react to him, letting him hug her from behind. "Why is this child so obsessed with sugar?"

"Must have a sweet tooth, just like me." Lucian's lips brushed against her ear, "What are the rumors about the engagement between you and the Crown Prince lately? I hope they're not true."

He kissed the sensitive skin beneath her ear, his hand caressing her baby bump, his chest pressed against her back.

Celine leaned against him, closing her eyes, savoring the moment. "You came."

"Did you expect me not to?"

She didn't answer, and took another bite of the pastry, chewing it slowly.

"Why are you bullying that girl?" he asked when she remained silent, his tone casual, as if he was asking about the weather.

"An eyesore," Celine replied, her voice cold, but not in a hateful way. More like a dismissive way. "This one better last until the end. Too many crumble too soon, it's getting repetitive. No wonder men seek novelty, it gets boring when you've seen it all."

"Should I start worrying about you getting bored of me?" Lucian teased her, his fingers playing with the edge of her dress.

"I pray for the day you bore me to death, so I can live in peace."

He chuckled, and kissed her cheek, "Do you need help with her?"

"What can you do besides saving her from every situation like the gentleman you are?"

"Competition and rivalry between men exist, My Lady. And I'm quite good at making other men jealous of me, and envious of what I have."

Celine slowly looked up at him, a lovely smile spreading on her face.

It was a smile that said: I love it when you do that.

Lucian's heart skipped a beat at the sight. It was a dangerous smile, a smitten one, meant to lure him to his doom.

'I will burn the school a bit later,' he thought, hugging her closer.

Chapter 178 178: 5.35 - Unclassified Teacher

Celine and Lucian had to split, despite having the same destination. She arrived before him, while he had to make a few stops on the way.

Lucian had to pull some strings to get a new position in the academy, a teacher for the elite in particular.

A guest lecturer for freshmen as an occasional attraction was fine, but not enough to remain long within the academy's walls.

The classroom doors were already closed when Lucian arrived, and he pushed them open with a loud bang.

Lucian avoided the falling chalk dust, "... " and made his way to the teacher's desk, placing the papers he had prepared for his first class.

"No education background, no teaching license..." Celine listed on her fingers, slowly approaching the teacher's desk, "On what criteria did you become a teacher?"

"Your Ladyship..." Lucian's eye twitched when she began to question his classification as a teacher in front of the whole class. "Please take your seat and refrain from causing further trouble."

Using Ladyship honorific was meant to show that he was aware of her position, and didn't want to cross any boundaries.

She slammed her hands on the table, doing the opposite of his request, her beautiful face twisted in a mocking smile.

"This is the royal academy, where the best of the best gather to learn from the best. So, how did a lowly merchant with no qualifications end up here?"

"Your Ladyship, if you have concerns about my teaching, you are free to lodge a formal complaint with the Headmaster," Lucian replied respectfully, preparing his papers for the lesson, the blackboard behind him.

The room went silent when she grabbed his papers, crumpled them up, and threw them down on the floor.

"Here is my complaint. I don't want you here," she said, her tone full of entitlement, as if she was the one in charge of the Academy. "Get lost."

It was scary how many joined her side in a blink of an eye, all looking at Lucian with disdain.

The Crown Prince wasn't present to witness Celine's tyranny, and that allowed her and the rest to be more brazen, and openly hostile.

"I second Lady Celine's request."

"Me too. He's not qualified."

"A fraud shouldn't be teaching us."

Many voices rose in agreement, making it clear that he didn't belong, that he was an intruder in their world.

Celine returned to her seat, waiting for the outcome. She just chose him as her new target to pick on. It would be strange if she didn't. She was well known for her spiteful behavior toward those society considered inferior.

Lucian picked up the papers from the floor, straightening them out as much as he could, "Let's get to the lesson, shall we?"

He didn't leave, nor did he back down. He turned to the blackboard and started writing the topic for the day, "The Art of Negotiation."

The sound of chalk on the board filled the room. The students were too curious about the topic to protest, except for the young lady who didn't need his lessons, and didn't want him to share his knowledge with others.

Thud. A crumbled paper flew and hit the board, followed by the Lady's laughter, who thought it was the funniest thing in the world. Quite annoying, must have she looked to anyone witnessing it.

Her position, her bloodline, and her power, all of it made her untouchable. That's what she "believed", and that's what she wanted everyone to believe.

Lucian was supposed to beg for forgiveness, and run with his tail between his legs, filling her with the sense of victory and superiority she "craved".

But he didn't, and that "angered" her.

Lucian turned around, another paper falling to the ground, rolling to his feet. He picked it up, uncrumpled it, and read the word written on it.

Love you, xoxo.

Another piece of paper flew. He caught it mid-air and read it.

Die.

Another one.

Die.

And another.

If you love me, make me sit close to you.

"Your Ladyship," Lucian faced the board, his right eye twitched again, "Your attempts to get my attention are becoming childish. You can take a seat close to me, if you want to learn more. The chair is waiting for you."

A few students sucked in a breath, as if Lucian had committed a grave sin, daring to assume Celine wanted his attention.

It was hard to bully a man who refused to play your game, as they were finding out.

Lucian's public persona remained unshakable, a friendly gentleman, who wasn't afraid to tease death in the face.

Celine's chair moved, creating a loud scraping sound that made everyone wince.

She walked toward the front of the class and took a seat behind the teacher's desk, her legs crossed.

The view of the dreamy expressions on a few female students' faces turned to awkward eye avoidances.

"How low standards have fallen, to fawn over a commoner," Celine mocked the air.

A couple of ladies blushed, looking down at their desks, embarrassed, as if they had been caught committing a crime.

Lucian began his lecture, ignoring the presence of Celine behind him, "Negotiation is an art of reaching an agreement that benefits both parties involved. Let's start with an example..."

He turned his head slightly, "Lady Rochefort, could you tell me what you want to achieve by kicking me out of this class?"

Celine was caught off guard by the sudden question, but she quickly recovered. "I want you gone."

"And what do you think I want? In exchange for leaving?" Lucian asked, his voice smooth.

"I don't care."

"This, right here, is a failed negotiation," he held back a laugh, turning back to the class. "And failed negotiations lead to...?"

"War!" a student shouted, eager to answer.

Lucian went to Celine's side as if ready to start a war with her, leaning on the teacher desk with his hands. "Is that what you want, Your Ladyship? To go to war with me?"

"The Rocheforts don't go to war with street rats," she grabbed a pencil and pierced his hand with it, poking in the middle of his palm, "We exterminate them."

"Ugh!" Lucian retracted his hand and stepped away from her.

The students' eyes widened in shock.

Celine wasn't done yet, she rose from her seat, "Who will join me to put an end to this farce? Let's teach this lowly commoner his place."

A few nobles rose to their feet like sheep following their shepherd, ready to follow her lead and beat the commoner, who refused to know his place, into a pulp.

Chapter 179 179: 5.36 - His Bully

Lucian held his injured hand, looking at the group of four students approaching him with malicious smiles.

He sighed, "It seems we are in for a more...practical demonstration today. Let's see how well you fare in a real-life negotiation scenario."

Before the nobles could lay their hands on him, Lucian moved, his speed catching them off guard.

He dodged the first punch, and countered with a strike to the stomach, making the noble student double over in pain.

He then blocked the next attack and pushed the student back, making him stumble and fall on his desk.

The other nobles tried to surround him, but Lucian was faster, and more skilled. He used their own momentum against them, making them hit each other, or trip over their own feet.

It was a chaotic scene of flailing limbs and yells of pain. Lucian was in the middle of it, using the opportunity as an excuse to beat up some of Celine's enemies.

The young Lady watched from her seat, failing to hide her "shock" at the turn of events. She pretended not to have expected this outcome, when in truth, she had.

She waited patiently until the last one got defeated before throwing another tantrum.

"Y-you! How dare you raise your hand against a noble!" She stood up, her eyes flashing with anger, and pointed her finger at Lucian. "You are done for. I will make sure you never set foot in this Academy again!"

Lucian, who was currently holding a student by his collar, said, "I forgot to mention that I'm allowed to defend myself in extreme situations like this, it's in my contract."

He raised his injured hand, showing the blood and proof of the extreme situation, "So, unless you want to face charges of assaulting a teacher, I suggest you sit down and enjoy the lesson, Lady Rochefort."

"..." Celine was forced to sit down, her face red with frustration, or was it a blush? She hid it behind her hand, her teeth grinding together.

Their new teacher was not someone to be trifled with, the students realized.

They all returned to their seats, a bit more subdued and cautious than before.

Lucian smiled at them, his demeanor changing back to friendly and approachable, as if nothing had happened.

"I'm sorry for being late!" a girl with pink hair entered the classroom, panting, and apologizing profusely. "I was...oh."

Her eyes widened in surprise when she saw the state of the classroom, the scattered papers, a female student with a red face sitting behind the teacher's desk, and a male without a school uniform standing in front of the blackboard.

She looked at Lucian, and recognized him as the man she had met at the pawn shop.

"You're the...the teacher?" she asked, making Lucian curse internally.

Celine's blushing face slowly turned back to normal, her sharp eyes now focusing on the pink-haired girl.

Lucian nodded, "Yes. Take a seat, Lady...?"

"Bianca. Bianca Lacroix," the Heroine replied, and took an empty seat, which belonged to Celine originally, not knowing who it belonged to, just that it was empty.

"Let's continue our lesson..." Lucian said, not wanting to draw more attention to the fact that she had chosen to sit in the wolf's den, of all places.

The Crown Prince also entered the classroom late, and was about to take his usual seat, when he noticed his new neighbor.

He raised his eyebrows, but didn't say anything, and sat down next to the heroine.

Celine was fuming as she watched the scene unfold.

Lucian added more salt to the wound by letting the students practice their negotiation skills by working in pairs.

He paired Bianca with Prince Aldric, much to Celine's "dismay" and Prince's "indifference".

Lucian took the handkerchief he had in his pocket and wrapped it around his hand.

Celine tried to stand up and stop the other pairings from happening, but Lucian had other ideas.

He gave her extra tasks to do to "make up for her earlier behavior", such as making her write on the board in his stead as he dictated his lecture notes.

Because she was pregnant, he had to be careful with how much he bullied her back. Celine took advantage of his softness for her, enjoying the attention Lucian gave her.

They were no longer the center of focus.

The Crown Prince and the commoner girl were having an intense discussion over a hypothetical negotiation scenario.

The commoner girl was speaking her mind freely, without fear of offending the prince, making him more interested in her.

She was not impressed by the Crown Prince's status, nor intimidated by his presence. She treated him like an equal, and that intrigued him.

Wasn't this why Celine got intrigued by Lucian in the first place? Why was she so obsessed with him? He had to remember to ask her later.

Lucian finished the class without further incidents, and dismissed the students, except Celine, whom he made stay behind to clean the mess she had caused.

Celine sent the heroine a few ugly looks when she was walking out of the classroom, her face showing her dissatisfaction.

The heroine didn't seem to notice, too busy rushing to her next class, hoping not to be late again.

The door closed, leaving Lucian and Celine alone in the classroom.

Lucian grabbed her wrist and pulled her towards the faucet to wash her chalked hands.

She watched on silently, her eyes following his movements, not offering any resistance.

Her fingers were soft without callouses, so he had to be more gentle with them than with his own.

"She seems to know you," Celine commented, her voice low.

Lucian glanced at her, then went back to washing her hands, "I met her at the pawn shop. She helped me pick out a bow. Nice girl."

No longer deeming the heroine as an important topic, Celine wiped her hands against his shirt, drying them, smearing the wet marks, "Now, nobody will dare to touch you." she said, a hint of satisfaction in her tone.

Nobody would dare look down on Lucian when even the elites of the Academy couldn't lay a finger on him.

There was a disadvantage of being a non conflictive person. People didn't pick up fights with Lucian, but they also didn't respect him. They would still look down on him instead of admiring him.

They might have not taken him seriously at first because of his commoner background, but now they would have to admit that he was someone to be reckoned with.

Lucian couldn't have done a better job than that. He started cleaning the mess in her stead, throwing die letters in the bin, keeping the loved ones as souvenirs.

"Won't you be jealous?" he asked, "That I'm going to pay someone else attention?"

He expected her to say no, just to annoy him. But she didn't.

He turned to see her sitting on top of a desk, her legs swinging, and her eyes looking down at him as he picked the crumbled papers in a crouched position.

She enjoyed being above him too much, this girl.

"Maybe," she said, her voice quiet, as if it was hard to admit it.

She was territorial, which could have been mistaken as jealous behavior.

Jealousy was when you wanted something that someone else had.

Territoriality was when you wanted to keep what you already had.

She had claimed Lucian as hers, while he was still unsure if she was his.

Her heart had a strange tendency to slip out of his grasp when he thought he had it in the palm of his hand.

Especially when she felt threatened, or...

...or when it came to her behavior around the Crown Prince.

He knew it was all an act, but she was too good of an actress.

'Stupid, I'm here to protect the child, not get jealous over my bully's victims.'

Three days later...

From one forbidden relationship, to another forbidden relationship. Lucian was digging his own grave as Celine fed him the shovel with her schoolgirl antics.

Bullying her teacher with her father's name to give her better grades? Check.

Throwing ink at the heroine in class in order to be reprimanded by her teacher? Check.

Kissing the teacher on the cheek after class as an apology for bullying him? Check.

Evening time was usually when the teachers stayed back to grade papers, or prepare for the next day's lessons.

Lucian, being the new teacher, had to stay longer to study the curriculum and make his own lesson plans.

Celine had waited for him to finish his work. Both were inside the library, but on the opposite sides, ignoring each other.

There were plenty of students still lingering around, so they had to be careful and not act like a couple.

When the crowd thinned out, Celine gave him a note with the message: meet me in room 302.

Celine pulled Lucian into the empty classroom. She then pushed him against the wall, her knee between his legs, making him bite his lip.

The danger that she represented had turned into a hook, a sharp one that could pierce through his skin and hold him captive.

She grabbed his hand, stroking the back of it, where the bruise from the pencil had formed, "Parading it like a badge of honor, hm?"

He nodded slightly; his hand had been throbbing all day, making him think of various ways to get back at her for it. He tried to get her expelled, but the school was too lenient with her.

Celine's lips brushed against the wound, leaving a soft kiss, then she kissed his wrist, and his forearm.

"Open your mouth," he said, stopping her advance.

Celine did, letting him slip something inside her mouth, "Mmm?"

"Dried mango," Lucian answered, "It's good for nausea."

Small portions every hour or so were helping with her morning sickness. It was still there, but less severe.

Chewing on the treat, she climbed his body, her legs wrapping around his waist, her hands holding onto his shoulders for support. "Hug me," she ordered.

Lucian fed her another piece, his other hand supporting her weight, his elbow under her bottom, "I can't feed our child properly if you're clinging to me like this."

"Do I have to be dying to get a little bit of attention?" she finished chewing, refusing to get down from him, "And I don't need a reason to cling to you. I'll do it when I feel like it."

She took another piece into her mouth, but she did not eat it. Instead, she held it between her teeth, and brought her face close to Lucian's.

He raised an eyebrow, but leaned in, taking the mango from her lips.

Getting to a man's heart through his stomach seemed to be her motto, always sharing something to eat with him. No matter how angry at her he was, she knew he hated wasting food.

"Is something bothering you?" he asked, sliding off the wall and sitting down on the ground with her in his lap. It was more comfortable this way, and he could move his arm freely, feeding her while she rested.

She wasn't in a mood for kisses and just wanted to be held. The thought of her needing his warmth and comfort, made Lucian's heart swell.

"My brother..." she trailed off, her eyes losing focus, "It's not him. He doesn't...feel like my brother anymore."

Lucian's hand stilled, "How so?"

"He's known for skipping classes, but suddenly showed up to all classes with the pink haired girl...he acted so strange around her. He's not the same."

"Mm, I noticed too," Lucian started to suspect the worst, "It's more dangerous for you to interact with him than him ignoring you. I don't want him near your or our child."

He used Varia's language, which she understood. His third eye was making him a bit lethargic from overuse, but he still pushed himself to keep an eye on Celine's surroundings, just in case.

"He knows too much, he can expose our secrets...I have to get him out of the Academy, quickly. Father is waiting for an opportunity to do so."

Lucian had tried to set a fire in the male's dormitory, to have everyone evacuate, and let her father catch Edmund as he tried to escape. But the fire was put out before it spread, and the opportunity was lost.

After feeding her the last piece, which took quite a while, Lucian cleaned his hands with a napkin, and then cleaned Celine's mouth with a gentle touch, "... his thumb lingered a bit longer than necessary.

Celine didn't notice, she seemed too distracted by her own thoughts to pay attention to his actions.

When he licked his thumb, she gave him a questioning look, and he cleared his throat, "You look tired, let me accompany you to your dorm."

She nodded and got up from his lap. Her mind agreed with him that she needed a good night's rest. It was a bit funny how it sometimes worked, always standing in the path of their true desires.

Lucian kept an eye on Celine until she was inside her dorm, promising her a date under the skies to end their day.

Still no kiss was demanded. It made him stare at his palm on his way to the gardens, wondering if he should take it as a good or bad sign.

Good because he wasn't being tormented further, or bad because he had rejected her kisses for too long, and she had given up.

Lucian didn't like the atmosphere of this place, and it had nothing to do with the people. The academy's ground was dark, and the energy was even darker, like a heavy fog, that made him want to grab Celine and run away.

The grand halls, the prestigious teachers, the elite students, the royal status of the place, nothing could cover the rottenness of its foundation.

Lucian turned off his third eye, leaning his head against the wall after he was far enough from Celine's dorms, waiting for the throbbing in his skull to stop.

His vision became blurry, and he closed his eyes to rest. The sound of footsteps approaching him made him open them again.

He saw Heroine shoes first, then her uniform, and finally her face as she looked down at him with concern.

"You look pale. Are you okay?" she asked, her hand hovering over his forehead.