

MY VILLAINESS EX WON'T LEAVE ME ALONE

Chapter 181 181: 5.38 - Protective Even After Death

Lucian avoided the heroine's hand and moved away from the wall, hiding his discomfort.

He began walking toward the gardens, trying to lose her, but she kept up with him. She was surprisingly fast for her short height, or he was too slow.

He found a bench in the gardens and lay down on it, covering his eyes with his arm.

He occupied the whole length of it, making it impossible for her to sit on it, but she didn't leave.

She stood next to him as if unsure of what to do, "You shouldn't be sleeping on a cold bench like this, you'll catch a cold."

When she received no answer, she sighed, "We don't know each other that well...um... Your class was the most interesting one I've had today, no matter what the others say. Thank you for the lesson. And, um..."

Lucian listened to her words. It seemed like she could feel his pain and wanted to help, but misunderstood what was causing it.

She had found an unfinished die note Celine didn't have a chance to throw at him, saw the scattered mess inside the classroom and made her own conclusion.

She touched his shoulder, "...If you need someone to talk to, I'm here."

Lucian felt the tiredness of his body slowly fade away as his body regained its strength from the blessing seeping out of her touch.

He quickly yanked his shoulder away from her hand, "I'm fine, leave before the rumor about you and a teacher alone together starts spreading."

"W-what?!" She looked around, embarrassed, "I just..."

"Touched a man's shoulder?" he raised his arm, a sleepy smile on his face that could make one think he was being flirtatious, "Be careful, some might misunderstand your actions as a romantic gesture. Unless you meant for it to be so, Lady Lacroix."

She jumped away from him, horrified, and her face turned beet red, "Who would have such wild thoughts! I'm a saintess aspirant, I'm not interested in...in...my teacher!"

She turned her back on him and ran away.

'Good riddance,' Lucian finally relaxed on the bench.

While Celine had to seek out trouble, the heroine seemed to be a trouble magnet herself because she crashed against Edmund's chest face first as she ran blindly through the gardens.

They both fell down, and the heroine ended up on top of him.

"What are you doing?" Edmund grabbed her shoulders and pushed her off of him, making her yelp in pain when she was about to apologize, "Get off."

"You could have done that without hurting me," Bianca glared at him, rubbing her arm. "You're just like her."

"Who?" Edmund frowned, his eyes scanning her.

"Your sister," Bianca said, looking at him like he was an idiot, "Who else would I be talking about? The only people who hurt me are her and her followers. Not that it matters to you, anyway."

She turned to leave, not wanting to waste her breath on him. But Edmund stood up and grabbed her wrist, stopping her, "I'm not like her."

"Then... prove it," Bianca said, pulling her hand from his grip. "Show me that you're not a heartless noble who only cares about himself."

"How?" Edmund asked, his shoulders dropping.

"By being nice. By not treating me like dirt. By apologizing for pushing me."
Bianca listed, her eyes challenging him.

Edmund was silent for a moment. He looked at her, as if he was weighing his options. Then he sighed, "I'm sorry. For pushing you."

Bianca's eyes widened in surprise. She didn't expect him to apologize so easily.

She didn't know what to say, so she just nodded, "I apologize too, for not watching where I was going. And for comparing you to her. You're not like her."

They both sat there, looking at each other, as if they were seeing each other for the first time and then laughed.

It was awkward at first, but then it became more genuine.

"She treats everyone like that," Edmund said, shaking his head. "Even me. I'm used to it, but it's still annoying. It's like she enjoys making people miserable."

"Tell me about it," Bianca agreed, rolling her eyes. "She thinks she owns this place, and everyone has to bow to her. I don't know how the teachers and the headmaster put up with her."

"Because she's the Duke's daughter," Edmund said, chuckling bitterly. "Father always spoiled her, gave her whatever she wanted. He never cared about me, but he adored her."

"Aren't you his child too? Why wouldn't he care about you?" Bianca asked, curious. She sat down on the grass, and patted the spot next to her, inviting him to join her.

Edmund hesitated, then sat down, keeping a distance between them. "It's a long story. My sister paints me in the worst light, and Father believes her. Whenever I try to do anything to redeem myself, she ruins it somehow."

Lucian would have believed this meek Edmund was his true face if he didn't meet the cruel Edmund before. He would never forget how much of a facade this man could put on when it suited him.

Bianca looked at him with sympathy, "That's terrible. I'm sorry you have to go through that."

"It's alright," Edmund said, trying to smile. "I don't expect your pity, or anyone's. I just want to be left alone. I don't care about the family business, or the politics, or any of that. I just want to live my own life."

"Is there anything I can do?"

Edmund was a bit surprised by her offer, then he gave her a faint smile, "Don't get involved with me. It will only make things worse for you."

"Too late for that," Bianca sighed, "I'm already involved. Whether I like it or not."

Lucian had tested whether Edmund could use the third eye too, but it seemed like Edmund didn't negotiate with his Voice like he did with his.

This Edmund seemed almost the same as the old one, except this one had lost a chunk of memories, especially the good ones related to Celine and his family.

'He is still protecting Celine,' Lucian thought about Edmund's sacrifice.

The old Edmund knew how the shackles worked, which meant that he worked his way around the wish. He must have wiped part of his memories before death as a part of the wish as well.

Edmund knew he would be the risk to the Rochefort house, especially Celine, if he ever became a shackled, and made it obvious to her and his father, so they could deal with him before it was too late.

The result was this strange creature that had no recollection of being loved, was tortured by his family and was hated by his sister with a passion.

Edmund also somehow believed that Lucian was his friend instead of being Celine's lover.

A bit ironic, when the real Edmund despised him.

The heroine and Edmund continued talking under the night sky, unaware of the eyes watching them from the shadows.

Lucian sighed as he removed his arm, glancing at the female dorms in the distance.

They planned to stargaze together, and he didn't want Celine to see him with another woman, even though he had her approval to make the Crown Prince jealous, by being his rival in love.

Celine's little heart chose the most convenient path to reach her goal. For her, their public image didn't matter in the greater scheme of things.

'She didn't fall for me because I treated her like a normal person. She fell for me because I made her want to cry, scream, and pull her hair out, but also smile and laugh like a maniac?'

Lucian recalled the answer he got to his question.

'She is not romantic at all.'

He drew a piggy Celine, connecting the stars in the sky. He wished he could show it to her, but he knew she would make him erase it, and draw something else.

Then, she would draw a Lucian piggy, and they would bicker about whose piggy was more accurate.

The rest of the night passed in silence. It was a long-distance date under the stars, where they shared the same sky, but not the same space.

A few days later...

Lucian took another nap on the bench, which became his well-known habit among the students and staff.

He would often be found sleeping around the campus, in the most random places. Sometimes in the library, sometimes in the garden, sometimes in the empty classrooms.

He was recharging his third eye whenever he could, storing energy for when he needed it the most.

It was not the most noble way to conduct himself, but people seemed to like him for it?

He didn't understand the appeal of a lazy-looking, sleeping man, but it seemed to have made him more popular among the female students, who would often bring him snacks by his sleeping spot, and leave them there for him to find when he woke up.

He would test the snacks for poison, share them with Celine in secret, give her the letters that came with the snacks, then go about his day as if nothing happened.

She seemed to enjoy reading them, and he enjoyed the look on her face when she read them.

Celine crumbled the letter in her fists, chewing on the savory crackers as if they were the bones of the letter's writer, "You scoundrel, flirting with other ladies left and right."

"During my nap at that, that's quite the talent I possess, don't you think so?" Lucian checked for any sign of jealousy, but instead found a proud smile on her face as she ate.

It was as if she had stolen something precious from someone else, and was enjoying the taste of victory. He was the stolen treasure in this case.

Celine ended up in detention again for bullying the Heroine. Her background couldn't win against the Crown Prince's favoritism this time, and she was forced to face the consequences of her actions.

Celine acted like it was the end of the world when, secretly, she was happy that it happened. She had found a way to meet with Lucian more often after all.

Lucian would sit in the detention room with her, "supervising" her as she was forced to write lines. But he was the one who ended up writing them for her.

"It's only right you do it, splitting the punishment with me since we are partners in crime," Celine said, lounging on her chair with a glass of juice in hand, acting like a queen, "I can't have my hand cramped because of you."

"Your Ladyship," Lucian stopped writing and looked at her, "I'm only doing this because you are carrying our child. Otherwise, I would have left you here to suffer the consequences of your own actions."

Her shoulders dropped for a moment before she pretended not to hear him, sipping her juice. It was hard to tell if she was hurt or not, because her lips curled into a smile right after, her eyes crinkling at the corners.

"..." She must be warping his words into something else in her mind, something more palatable for her, like 'I'm doing this because I'm that stupidly whipped for you', or something.

Lucian leaned back in his chair, stretching his arms. "Do you want to sit on my lap while I finish this?"

Celine almost choked on her drink. She coughed, wiping her mouth, giving him a suspicious look.

"You look like you need a hug," he casually replied, patting his lap as an invitation, "You have a tendency to pounce on me when you need one, so why not skip the hassle and just come here?"

She stared at him for a few seconds while grabbing the unread letters. She approached him, sat sideways on his lap, made herself comfortable against his chest, and continued reading the letters.

Lucian resumed writing, his other hand resting on her waist. He didn't mind the weight of her, it was comforting in a way. The child's pump was more visible now, and she was getting bigger by the day.

"Is it for the child again? Or for me?" she asked, placing the letters on his desk and laying her head on his chest.

"Does it matter? It's for the family, the family you and I will make."

Her eyes closed, and she nuzzled against him, her finger drawing circles on his chest. "Let's have another one, after this one is born."

Lucian almost poked a hole through the paper with his pen. "You want more?"

"A part of you I can keep, yes," she murmured, "One that will love me back, no matter what. A sibling for the firstborn, too, so they can both watch over each other. They can team up against you and torture you as payback for how you are treating their mother."

Lucian put down his pen, "What makes you think they will love you? A cruel, cold-hearted mother like you? They will be afraid of you, just like everyone else."

Celine ignored his taunts, no longer interested in talking to him, and looked out of the window, humming a lullaby.

She stroked her stomach gently, a soft smile on her face like she was in a different world where only she and her child existed, far away from him and his harsh words.

The nagging feeling in his chest made him put down the pen completely and wrap his hand around her neck, bringing her lips to his.

Celine widened her eyes, her hands gripping his shoulders as he kissed her deeply. The lullaby in her throat turned into a moan.

When he pulled back, she looked dazed, her breath ragged, "..."

"Try the same stunt as last time," Lucian warned, referring to the time she forced herself on him, knowing how she would do anything to get what she wanted, "I'll cut up your womb, and you won't ever bear a child again, am I clear?"

Chapter 183 183: 5.40 - Love Letter

Lucian's own words shocked him. It was the first time he had threatened Celine with violence, and it was a terrible one at that.

Celine's body tensed in his arms, her hands clenching into fists.

The man, who said he would never raise a hand against her, was now capable of spewing the cruelest words at her without a flinch.

"You refused to give me the only thing I ask of you, so I have no other choice but to take it," Celine eventually replied, unfazed by his threat, "The moment we are married, you can be sure that I will make full use of my rights as your wife. Your little general will finally meet my little queen, and we will raise an army together. You can count on it."

"..."

Monotonous tone, blank face, and a bigger threat in return. Celine just doubled down on her desire to have more children with him. She didn't even blink.

"..." Lucian was used to her crude language, but sometimes it still managed to catch him off guard, "You are sick in the head," he mumbled, releasing her neck, and resuming his writing.

Celine didn't answer. Instead, she leaned back in, capturing his lips with hers, her arms wrapping around his neck.

This time, it was her who kissed him, and he who let her. His hand moved from her waist to her back, pulling her closer. His other hand cradled her cheek, tilting her head to deepen the kiss.

Why he couldn't pull back was a mystery to him, or maybe he didn't want to find the answer to it.

He was somehow fine with being her victim, as long as she never let go of him. Or was he the one who never wanted to let go of her?

He excused his actions as a way to keep her under control, but he knew that one didn't kiss someone like this if they didn't want them.

They eventually broke the spell, parting their lips, otherwise it would lead to more than just a kiss, and that would be harder to hide on a moment's notice.

Lucian tried to look unfazed, his hand reaching for the pen again.

Celine resumed reading the letters aloud, "I admire your knowledge and your passion for teaching, and I would love to learn more from you, outside of the

classroom...my, she really wants to study under you, I see. In what subject, I wonder?"

"Probably anatomy," Lucian replied, making her laugh.

They were supposed to be on the same side, but they were acting more like enemies. The only thing that could make them stop fighting was a common enemy.

He waited for her laughter to die down, and then moved his face closer to her ear, "Should I put a stop to my admirers?"

"And miss the chance to have them pin after the pink head?" Celine crumbled the letter and moved to another, "Every few decades, a female fatale appears. Kingdoms weaken, men go to war over her, and the world is for the taking. It would be a waste not to take advantage of the opportunity, no?"

She was using the heroine as bait, to attract men's attention and lead them to their downfall. She was making a political move, to draw more eyes on the heroine, a commoner, and make everyone question the status quo.

The men would be so distracted by the heroine, that they wouldn't notice Celine's own machinations until it was too late.

Lucian was impressed, but also worried, "You're not worried about the competition? She might even steal your man."

"See? That's why you don't depend on love, or men for that matter. You'll always end up disappointed," she said, tossing a balled up letter in the bin, "Torture them, punish them, keep them on a leash, that's the only way they'll stay loyal."

"You're just describing a slave."

"I would rather be a slave master, than a slave of love."

Lucian leaned his chin on her shoulder, "What if I become a slave of love for you? What would you do?"

"You have already lost your mind, what's the difference?"

"..." Lucian wanted to bite her ear for that, but refrained himself, "Let's write a love letter to each other, to see who can write a more passionate one. If I win, you'll be my love slave, and if you win, I'll be yours."

"I will wipe the floor with your pathetic love confession," Celine grabbed a paper and a pen.

They decided to give themselves a month to write it, exchanging the letters on the last day of the Autumn season.

One page was the limit.

If there wasn't a wish standing in his way, these confession letters would have been a wonderful way to express their feelings to each other.

But now it felt like a competition, where the winner would get to control the other.

Lucian hugged her tighter, "Do you ever regret it?" he whispered.

"Regret what?"

"Your decision to not let me go."

She was quiet for a moment, then she sighed, "Every day."

Lucian smiled sadly, "So do I."

She didn't say anything else, and they stayed in each other's arms, finding comfort in their shared misery.

Everything was going well until Lucian was summoned to the South to deal with the ferals, for periodical checkups.

It was a long journey to make, and the sooner he left, the sooner he could come back.

He made Celine promise him not to bully anyone until he came back, and she reluctantly agreed.

They said their goodbyes, exchanged their 'love' letters, and Lucian left the academy, heading south.

Inside the carriage, he carefully opened the letter he had been keeping in his pocket, the one Celine had written for him.

He didn't need to read it to know how heart wrenching it would be, her words always made him bleed.

'...I will force my way into your heart, and make it my home, even if you kick me out a thousand times... because my love for you is a madness that knows no cure.'

A blush crept onto his face as he read on, and he was glad that nobody could see him right now.

People would see a shy boy, blushing over a love letter, and not a grown man, who was supposed to be the leader of a powerful organization.

'She won't leave me alone, even in death. I'm so doomed.'

His expression didn't match the dread in his words.

There was a goofy smile on his face that could make the sun jealous of its brightness.

Chapter 184 184: 5.41 - Favorability points in negative

[Favorability points: -85]

Sitting in the back of the cafeteria, Mathieu stared at the negative points hovering over Celine Rochefort's head.

His vision had returned, but the scars hadn't healed. Shades made the scarring more noticeable, so he continued to wear a thin cloth around his eyes.

Celine Rochefort was sitting beside the Crown Prince at the top table, acting as if she were the only woman in the room.

He could see the hatred in her eyes when she looked at the pink-haired girl at the bottom of the table, who was trying to keep a low profile.

The fierce expression on Celine's face made it hard for one to linger on her features for too long. She looked as scary as she acted, yet there was something attractive about her, a dangerous charm, maybe?

She probably felt his stare because she glanced at him.

Mathieu stiffened.

Her expression twisted before she turned away like she'd seen something unpleasant.

[Favorability points: -86]

Mathieu choked on his food and coughed, grabbing a napkin to cover his mouth, 'WHAT DID I EVEN DO?!'

"Cousin? Are you alright?" Adeline asked, her hand patting his back.

Mathieu turned to see his female cousin, a noble lady who was also attending the Academy.

Her favorability points showed 78, a sign of her strong affection for him.

"Yes, I'm fine. Just something in my throat," Mathieu put down his fork.

As an ex-mercenary turned noble, Mathieu was trying his best to fit into this world, and the favorability system was a huge help.

He could see who liked him, and who didn't, who he could and couldn't trust, then adjust his behavior accordingly.

He remembered playing the villainess route in his past life, being Celine's sidekick, and bullying the heroine with her to gain her favor.

The lore had many adaptations, a novel, a comic, and even a musical. The game itself was built for both male and female players, so the players could choose their love interests.

Mathieu had chosen to pursue the villainess, and the game route had ended with him getting his head chopped off most of the time.

He couldn't obtain Celine Rochefort by trying to change her for the better, or by being loyal to her.

He bet the developers made her unattainable on purpose, to make players want to buy the new updates and expansions, hoping for a different outcome.

Even when he took on the Crown Prince's role, expecting Celine to be head over heels for him, she would only end up using him for his status.

The most brutal route was her romance with the second male lead. Every option he chose as a second male lead, and every action he took, led to torture, abuse, and a very tragic ending.

The repetitive trauma she inflicted on the characters he played raised the difficulty level to almost impossible. She would gradually leave the characters he played with fewer and worse choices.

A masochistic player might enjoy it, but not Mathieu.

He was not into that kind of thing, and he was determined to avoid her at all costs. He just wanted to live a peaceful life in this world, and not get involved in any drama.

But the problem was, the villainess had a huge influence on the game's plot, and if she was not dealt with properly, the whole story would collapse.

He couldn't let her destroy the Academy, the Kingdom, and the world, just because she was a spoiled, arrogant brat who didn't get her way.

He had to find a way to stop her, and maybe even turn her to his side. But how?

"Cousin? Are you listening to me?" Adeline asked, frowning at Lady Rochefort's table.

Mathieu realized he had been staring at the villainess again and quickly looked away. "Sorry, I was just...thinking."

"About what?" Adeline asked, cold eyes returning to Mathieu, "Lady Celine, perhaps? Are you interested in her?"

"No, no, nothing like that," Mathieu shook his head, trying to sound casual. "I was just wondering if there is a way to...get along with her. She seems to hate me, for some reason."

Adeline's frown deepened, "Why would you want to get along with someone like her? She doesn't deserve your kindness."

"I know, but..." Mathieu hesitated, not sure how to explain his reasoning without sounding crazy.

The truth was, he wanted to reduce the negative favorability points between them. He hoped that if they became friends, or at least neutral, the villainess would not cause too much trouble for him or the others.

He had learned from his experience during the game that the lower the points, the more likely they would become his enemies, and the more likely they would try to harm him or the people he cared about.

That's why he made sure to keep his favorability points with Adeline high, by being nice, and spending time with her.

"Have you tried talking to the new teacher? Mr. Arclight?" Mathieu remembered Adeline having a crush on the second male lead, who was able to brighten her day with a simple smile, according to the game's lore.

"I don't know him that well," Adeline said disinterestedly.

"He's really handsome," Mathieu tried again, feeling like a matchmaker instead of a villain, "And smart, and nice. He's also very popular among the ladies. Maybe you should try to get to know him better."

Adeline looked at him suspiciously and asked, "Why? Do you like him?"

"What? No! I mean, I like women, not men. I just think he's a good person, and you could be happy with him." Mathieu said, trying to convince her.

He didn't want her to be alone, especially since she had a sad backstory of being neglected by her family.

Adeline looked away, "Cousin should worry about his own marriage prospects, rather than mine."

"I'm third in line, I don't need to worry about that yet," Mathieu replied. He should be engaged to a foreign princess as per the lore, but he hadn't met her yet.

"Besides, he is a commoner. It would be a disgrace for a noble lady like me to marry someone like that." Adeline added, taking a sip of her tea, "I prefer someone who would match my own status...and bloodline."

Mathieu was not sure if he should be relieved or disappointed. "Well, you know what they say, love knows no boundaries."

Adeline listened carefully for any hint of teasing in his tone, but only found a kind sincerity, making her face soften, "Maybe."

Mathieu smiled, hoping he had planted a seed of interest in her heart, "I'll help you, if you want."

"You'll..help me?" Adeline raised her eyebrow.

"Yeah, I can talk to him, and find out what he likes, and what he's looking for in a partner. Then I can tell you, and you can use that to your advantage."

"What do you look for in a partner?" Adeline asked instead.

Chapter 185 185: 5.42 - Bold And Stupid

Mathieu was caught off guard by the question. He never really thought about it before. Being cheated on in his past life made him a bit wary of relationships, "Loyal."

That's why he loved yanderes, the tamable ones. They had no shortage of men chasing after them, but they usually had no eyes for anyone but their chosen love interest.

He went into the game expecting Celine Rochefort to be a yandere, but she was not. She didn't have that obsessive, possessive, and protective nature that yandere usually had. She was more of a sadist who enjoyed making others suffer.

It was as if she was mocking him through the screen, laughing at how he allowed his character to be tortured by her, until he had no choice but to kill her, or get killed by her.

"Loyal?" Adeline asked, her straight bangs moved slightly with the tilt of her head. She still had trouble expressing her emotions, but she was slowly getting there.

Mathieu nodded, "Someone who won't cheat on me, or lie to me. Someone who will be faithful to me, no matter what."

"I see," Adeline said, thoughtfully raising her hand to cover her mouth as if to hide a smile, "That sounds...reasonable."

Adeline was a minor villainess. She looked down on the heroine but never directly harmed her.

They finished their meal and left the cafeteria, both going for a walk in the gardens to digest.

Mathieu spotted Lady Celine walking in their direction and quickly pulled Adeline behind a tree.

Adeline blushed, "Cousin, your hand..."

Mathieu realized his hand was on her chest, and he hastily moved it away, apologizing, 'Why am I hiding?'

He peeked around the tree and saw Lady Celine walking alone.

She stopped by a bench and sat down, looking at the sky. The soft wind blew her hair, making her look less intimidating, and more...lonely.

"Cousin...?" Adeline whispered, her face still red.

"Let's go," Mathieu released Adeline, passing by Lady Celine quietly.

He felt his favorability points drop again and couldn't help but wonder what he had done to deserve her hatred.

He finally approached her, his hands starting to sweat as he gathered up the courage to say something.

He was an ex-mercenary for goodness sake. He had talked with the most dangerous men, fought the most vile monsters, and survived the harshest environments. Why was he so nervous talking to a noble girl?

"Good afternoon, Lady Rochefort," he said, bowing politely, "I hope you are having a wonderful day."

Lady Celine tilted her head to look at him, her eyes scanning him from head to toe, before settling on his face, "I was, until someone decided to ruin it."

"..." Mathieu bit the inside of his cheek, trying to keep his composure. He didn't know why he was even trying; he should have known better.

But deep down, he wanted to change her opinion of him.

While other characters could fall in love with anyone, depending on the player's choices, Celine Rochefort was the only one who remained consistent.

The game made many players believe that anyone who would be able to claim her heart would be truly the one and only. It was a twisted loyalty many gamers sought.

"I apologize, I didn't mean to disturb you," Mathieu said, trying to sound sincere, "I just wanted to...apologize for whatever I did to offend you. I hope you can forgive me."

Lady Celine moved her lips, like she was about to say something harsh, but then stopped herself, "A young master, begging a lady for forgiveness? What kind of world are we living in?"

"I..." Mathieu didn't know what to say. The modern world had made him forget about all these stuffy etiquette rules.

Seeing him struggle, Adeline stepped forward, facing Celine, and spoke in a cold, dignified tone, "My cousin was being polite, Lady Rochefort. There was no need to mock him for it."

Mathieu felt his stomach drop, "It's okay. Let's just go."

Adeline ignored him and kept staring at Celine, "It seems that you have forgotten the basics of noble etiquette, Lady Rochefort. Showing off your temper, throwing yourself at an uninterested man, is truly unbecoming of a noble lady."

Celine responded with a chuckle, moving silently from her seat and slowly walking toward them. Her heels clicked against the stone path, each step echoing like a warning.

Adeline stood her ground, not backing away.

"Etiquette is for those who don't have the power to make their own rules," Celine stopped in front of Adeline, looking down at her with a smirk, "And I don't see any point in following the rules of those who are beneath-" she paused.

Adeline raised her chin, refusing to show any sign of weakness, but the latter already walked away, putting an end to their conversation.

"...Let's go," Adeline turned toward Mathieu, "Cousin...?"

Mathieu shook his head, "I'll be right back. You go ahead."

"..." Adeline watched on as Mathieu ran after Lady Celine, her fingers digging into her palms.

The bangs of her hair covered her eyes, hiding her true expression.

Mathieu didn't deem Adeline a danger, confident that he had kept her favorability points high enough to avoid any major conflicts.

He kept his distance as he followed Lady Celine, entering the school building, and watching her go to the library.

She grabbed a few books, sat down at a table in the corner, and started reading.

Mathieu hesitated for a moment, then decided to join her. He sat across from her, opening a random book, pretending to be interested in it.

'She still sees me as Mathieu Duremont, doesn't she? Not me.'

That's why she was still hating him, even though he was trying to be friendly.

Imagine returning home after a long day and seeing your waifu waiting for you there, treating you like a responsibility she didn't ask for.

You didn't have to please her or make her like you; she was trapped with you no matter what.

The fourth wall-breaking theories were just a cherry on top of the cake, forcing players to keep playing, even if they were being treated like shit. They grew immune to the abuse, even detaching themselves from their characters, and joined Celine Rochefort in tormenting them.

Mathieu, who saw all the characters as cheaters, started finding twisted comfort in seeing them suffer as he offered them to Celine Rochefort.

See? He was not a masochist.

'What now? I don't have any lines to pick from, it's not the game anymore,' he thought how he sometimes wanted to make his own choices, and not rely on the game's script, 'I have to improvise.'

There was a new AI update coming out for the game, but he died before he could experience it.

'If I'm not going back, at least I got to meet my favorite character in real life,' he decided. He was going to make his otaku heart proud.

He worked with mercenaries, who liked fury cosplaying. Big, deadly-looking men in cute outfits. He believed he was still in the spectrum of "average" despite his interest in 2D characters, but he never admitted it out loud.

"Is there something you need, Young Master Duremont?" A smile played on her lips, daring him to try his luck. "I'm not very generous with my time, so do speak quickly."

Mathieu swallowed, trying to calm his nerves. "I...am...a fan of yours, admi... I mean...I admire you..."

That was the boldest and stupidest thing he had ever said in his life, and he immediately regretted it...

'What the fuck did I just say?!'

Author's note

It's start of a month, so do share some of ur GT and gifts with this story, please. Thanks! 🙏

Chapter 186 186: 5.43 - Truly Sick, Or Just An Excuse?

"Finally, someone with taste," Lady Celine seemed amused by his confession. She leaned forward, resting her chin on her hand, "Unfortunately, my heart

already belongs to someone else. You will have to find another lady to admire."

Celine Rochefort's infamous "I'm taken" line. In this world everyone believed she was madly in love with the Crown Prince, a one sided love that she was not ready to give up.

But the players knew better. The more they pushed their version of the Crown Prince to reciprocate her feelings, the more she revealed that he was not the one she truly desired.

Some delusional players believed she was breaking the fourth wall, talking about them, the players.

Mathieu couldn't believe he would fall for the same trap and believe that she was talking about him inside the game too.

"I didn't mean it like that," he clarified his confession, "It's more like—"

"This is a library, Young Master. If you wish to worship someone, go to the temple. Maybe they'll appreciate your flattery more than I do," she replied,

looking at her book again. "Now, if you don't mind, I would like to read in peace."

Mathieu forced a smile, standing up, "Of course. My apologies for bothering you, Lady Rochefort."

One didn't know if she was playing hard to get, flirting, or just plain mocking. But she knew how to get under people's skin.

"A fan toward his idol," Mathieu finished his confession with a mutter as he walked away.

Celine's soft laughter followed him out of the library, "What was it? I couldn't hear you over the sound of your heart beating."

Mathieu almost tripped over his own feet, the curious looks of other students burning holes into his back. He felt his face turn red as he quickened his pace.

The novel's lore didn't do her justice, and the comic made her too cartoonishly evil to be taken seriously. The game, however, portrayed her in all her glory, with her sarcastic wit, cruel humor, and irresistible charm.

Her voice acting, her facial expressions, her body language, everything was designed to make the player fall for her, even if they didn't want to. And it worked, oh boy did it work.

'Feeling it on my own skin is a whole different level,' Mathieu leaned against a wall, catching his breath. He felt like he had just run a marathon, 'She can burn the world for all I care. I'm not getting involved with her.'

If she wasn't pretty, nobody would put up with her attitude. He was sure of it, until he talked to her. He realized he was barely able to keep a conversation going, let alone argue with her.

The rumors about Mathieu Duremon having confessed to Celine Rochefort and getting rejected spread like wildfire, and Mathieu became the laughingstock of the academy.

The story had been twisted, making him sound more desperate than he actually was. It had made him the center of attention, and not in a good way.

'Don't all transmigrators get all girls to flock to them upon first interaction? Why am I getting bullied instead?! For being nice, no less!'

He could barely enter the cafeteria without hearing snickers or whispers behind his back.

His favorability points with the other students had also dropped. Some of them seemed to enjoy his humiliation.

Adeline, on the other hand, seemed to be the only one who didn't find it funny, or at least she didn't show it.

"Cousin...is it true?" Adeline caught him after one of the classes, looking at him with concern and something else he couldn't read. "Did you really try to confess to her?"

Mathieu was shameless enough to go along with the rumors, "I just wanted to make sure there was no chance between us, so I can move on, I guess. She made it very clear that she hates my guts, so...yeah."

The favorability points were a good indicator of that.

"I see..." Adeline said, her voice low, "We haven't gone horse riding in a while, how about we go this weekend?" she suggested, smiling slightly.

"Sure, why not," he said, returning the smile. Time to move on from the villainess, and focus on the other routes, he decided.

But then he spotted the villainess again. She was ignoring the pink haired girl's existence on the other end of the hallway.

She was more behaved as of lately, he noted, but she still had that aura of menace around her. The way she walked, the way she looked, the way she spoke, it all screamed "don't mess with me."

A group of students, a mix of nobles, were gathered in the hallway, blocking the heroine's path. To his surprise, the villainess waved them off to let the girl pass. The small group dispersed, giving Bianca a free way to leave.

"That was unexpected," Mathieu commented.

Celine's head turned toward him, and their eyes met for a brief moment. She then walked away. Mathieu could have sworn he saw a smirk on her lips.

"So easily impressed, men are," she chuckled, knowing he would hear her.

He snapped out of it, and shook his head. 'Get a grip, man. She's not interested in you. She's just toying with you, like she does with everyone else.'

"Foolish cousin..." Adeline muttered under her breath, before pulling Mathieu by the arm, leading him away. Her hand lingered on his arm as she walked with him, side by side.

She had been doing that a lot lately, touching him more than usual.

Sometimes, he felt like she was holding onto him a bit too tightly, or for a bit too long. He didn't want to make assumptions, but he hoped it was just his imagination.

In the next few days, Mathieu didn't see the villainess as much. She returned to her dorms to rest, and only came out for classes.

Her brother, Edmund Rochefort, was a different story.

After the heroine challenged Lady Celine for a horse riding competition, he was helping the heroine with the preparation.

The riding competition was held on the academy's grounds, a vast field with fences and obstacles.

The stands were empty except for a few students who had heard about the challenge and wanted to watch it.

Not far away from the stables, the contestants were adjusting their gear and their horses. Adeline was among them, ready to challenge Celine as well.

The crown prince was also there to watch the spectacle, sitting in the first row.

There was one problem though. Celine refused to participate.

"I'm not letting you embarrass our family any further," Edmund said, dragging her away from her seat, "If you really want to impress the crown prince, then prove it with your skills, not your status. You can't expect him to marry you just because you're the Duke's daughter."

Edmund sounded like he was doing it for her sake, and his words made sense to many onlookers.

The crown prince spoke up as well, a rare sight to witness, "Lady Rochefort, your brother is right. If you want to be my partner, you have to prove that you are worthy of me, not just rely on your father's influence."

"Not today, my Prince," Celine showed a pained expression as she tried to resist her brother's pull, "I will challenge the ladies another time, when I'm feeling better."

"Are you truly sick, or are you just making excuses?" Prince Aldric asked, challenging her coldly, "Shall we call the physician to confirm it?"

Celine hesitated for a moment, then nodded, "If you insist. I have nothing to hide."

The loose coat on top of her uniform did its job in covering her body. The weather was chilly, so nobody questioned the choice.

She was two months or so away from giving birth. The baby knew it shouldn't show itself yet, so it behaved, not giving its mother any trouble, besides the nausea and back pains, of course.

"How would I know you didn't bribe the physician to lie for you?" Edmund was relentless in trying to make her participate, "We all know how you operate, dear sister."

The way he said 'dear sister' made Celine's skin crawl.

"I forfeit then," Celine said, riding a horse was too risky at this stage, "Take the victory, as you wanted. I will not participate in this farce."

She turned to leave, but the pink head had to step in front of her, blocking her way.

Sitting on top of a horse, the girl looked down at her, which made Celine appreciate the horse on her eye level instead.

"Will you promise to leave me alone after this?" The pink head asked, calming down her horse by patting its side, "Or will you still find ways to make my life miserable?"

"I give you my word, as a lady, to leave you alone after the next competition," Celine replied.

Just wait after she gave birth, then she would make the father and child cheer her on as she drowned this pink rat in the sea of her own defeat.

She had promised Lucian to behave in his absence.

He was late, and that annoyed her more than this competition.

They let her pass, not trusting her words, but knowing they had no choice but to accept them.

Celine walked away, leaving behind a tense atmosphere.

The competition commenced without her, but the horses didn't seem to like the idea.

They suddenly scattered in different directions, dragging their riders along, or breaking the hinges of their enclosures.

There were at least twenty of them outside and around a hundred inside the stables.

The horses became too aggressive, attacking everything in their sight.

Most of the riders managed to jump off in time, but some were not so lucky, and got dragged along the ground, injuring themselves.

"Look out!" someone yelled.

Celine turned around, a horrified look on her face.

A dozen horses were charging at her, their eyes wild, their hooves ready to crush her.

Celine leaped to the side, avoiding the hooves by a hair's breadth.

Another horse came from behind, forcing her to roll forward, barely escaping its path.

She didn't try to protect her face or brace for the fall. Instead, she curled entirely in on herself, her arms wrapping desperately around her swollen belly to form a human shield for the baby.

She made another leap away from the stampede, seeking refuge in the forest by the road.

She found a hiding spot behind a tree, and sat there, catching her breath. She held her belly, feeling a slight pain, but it was not too bad.

The hooves of horses approaching her hiding spot made her tense up.

"Found you."

It was Edmund. He was holding a rope in his hand, his eyes scanning the area as he lured more horses in her direction.

"What did you do to the horses?" Celine whispered, realizing Edmund was the culprit behind this.

"Not me, you, by the look of it," Edmund ran over to her, avoiding the horses that tried to attack him as well, "Why else would you not join the competition?"

Celine jumped back, making him miss.

"Because you knew the horses would go crazy," he answered himself.

Celine's chances against an emerald knight slash shackled were as high as Lucian marrying her. Almost zero.

From what she knew, advanced shackleds wouldn't target people whom they already had bad relationships with.

He should be making a move on that pink rat, not on her. Unless he had something else planned that included her.

"An accident caused by your own foolishness would be a perfect ending to your miserable life," Edmund continued, a twisted grin on his face, "I wish you'd be trampled to death already. Your corpse is overdue."

The screams of the students, the shouts of the guards, and the whinnying of the horses, would definitely drown out her own pleas for help.

"My corpse?" Celine asked, picking up a rock from the ground while running away, stalling for time.

"You've told something to our dear father, that got me tortured for a month straight. I was locked up for half a year," Edmund lured the horses in her direction. "With you gone, he should return to his right mind."

Celine rolled away from the horse's hooves, getting grazed by its iron horseshoe.

The pain made her grunt. She held her belly tighter, feeling a sharp sting.

"It would be a shame if a horse trampled you to death, or a fence impaled you. But accidents happen, right?"

He lassoed a horse's neck, and pulled it toward him, mounting it, and directing it toward Celine.

She knew she shouldn't have been running around like this and hurled a rock at Edmund's head, striking him directly on the temple.

He barely flinched, despite it carrying her curse. She was blessing her child's health at the same time, and doing both at the same time wasn't possible. Fighting with him was simply out of the question.

Celine avoided another horse, knowing he wanted to make it look like an accident and ran toward the woods, where the terrain was more uneven and hard for the horses to gallop.

Father didn't trust her fully, giving Edmund a chance to prove his innocence and she was now paying the price.

For all she knew, Edmund could have persuaded father into believing that she was the one who was shackled.

"Ugh!" She avoided a direct hit, but the horse still managed to kick her in the side, and they both fell to the ground.

The horse recovered, while Celine was left groaning in pain.

She curled up, holding her stomach, her hands still locked over it in blind, maternal panic, praying that the life inside her was still breathing.

That's when she saw a shadow jump out from the trees, landing in front of her. He bent down, shielding her with his body, protecting her from any more harm.

All the horses scattered at the arrival of a new presence.

The person had dark blue hair, a strong build, and a fierce look in his eyes that matched Celine's. He looked like an older version of Edmund, but more rugged and scarred.

"Father..." Edmind whispered.

Father did not respond, nor did he reach for a weapon. Instead, he turned his fierce blue eyes toward the monster wearing his son's face.

Northern knights drew their power directly from the earth's core, and the Duke was the absolute apex of that power.

A sickening, crushing pressure bore down on Edmund's shoulders. Even with the durability of his emerald-rank body, he could not resist the sheer, concentrated weight of the earth's core energy.

With a sickening crack, Edmund's knees violently buckled, slamming into the dirt and splintering the ground beneath him.

The immense gravitational force pushed his shoulders down, pinning him to the earth as if he were a common criminal awaiting the executioner's blade. He couldn't lift his arms; he could barely draw breath.

Without a word, the Duke leaped back into the trees, disappearing with Celine in his arms.

Celine coughed, clinging to her father's neck, "My child...Father, my child..."

He looked down on the blood that stained his hands, soaking through her skirt.

Her voice was weak, and her face pale as she used all her strength to bless the child, to keep it safe and sound.

Her father's hold on her tightened as they ran through the forest.

He passed through a secret passage that led them out of the Academy grounds, appearing in the building where their people were stationed.

He barged through one of the doors, and placed her on the bed.

Celine lay there, panting, her hands still clutching her belly.

Chapter 188 188: 5.45 - Personal space

"What happened here?" Lucian ran through the forest, spotting Edmund kneeling on the ground.

The area around him was dented inwards, the soil sinking.

"Where's your sister?" Lucian continued to ask, searching the area with his third eye.

Edmund dug into the ground with his bare hands, dirt caking his fingers, "I don't know. She ran away... after she caused this mess."

"Caused this mess?" Lucian repeated, recalling the guards and teachers having to put the hundreds of horses to sleep, "How?"

"Probably spiked the horses' water," Edmund slowly got up, wiping the dirt off his palms, "She ran away because she doesn't want to face the consequences of her actions. That's the only explanation."

Lucian's heart pounded against his ribs as he picked up something small in the dirt.

It was a piece of dried mango, the exact treat he had carefully packed for her morning sickness two weeks ago.

Ignoring Edmund's lies, Lucian broke into a desperate sprint, 'Celine hurting horses? No, that doesn't sound like her.'

He followed the blood trails staining the forest floor, until they vanished into nothingness.

His heart felt like it was being crushed by an invisible force, the pain spreading throughout his body, consuming him. He had to find her, he couldn't lose her, he couldn't...

He couldn't...

She had said she had some people on standby in case she was in danger. She must have escaped the academy, and she was fine. She had to be. There was no other option in his mind.

Lucian spun on his heel, not knowing the location of the hidden passage, he had to rush back to the academy. He couldn't even grab a horse from the stables.

Like a sick déjà vu, he found himself running after her again.

Outside the gates, he fetched a horse, and rode to the place they had last parted on his birthday night, hoping to find her in one of the nearby buildings or hiding somewhere.

'Celine?' Lucian halted his horse near the alleyway and got down.

The room he found her in was lit by candles, the light flickering across the walls. She was laying on the bed, surrounded by blood.

The physician by her side was feeding her medicine, her hand moving to her neck to feel her pulse.

Three more people, cloaked in shadows, stood in the room's corners, whispering blessings of healing in her direction.

Another person observed her closely when suddenly, he turned his head towards Lucian's point of view, causing the three others to turn their heads towards him as well.

Lucian froze in his tracks, refusing to turn off his third eye and look away, but Voice cut off the scene in his head.

'What_are_you_doing?' Lucian was still standing in the middle of the alleyway, looking like a mad man as he stared at the wall that separated him from Celine, 'Show her to me! What happened to her?!

'ARE YOU TRYING TO GET CAUGHT?' Voice snapped, it was guarding his surroundings through his regular eyes while he relied on its third eye.'Your presence was detected.'

There were people keeping watch outside, and Lucian looked too suspicious.

Silent footsteps came from all sides of the alleyway. They did not sound like a soldier's march, but like soft steps of assassins.

They searched the place Lucian had stood in a moment ago, but could only find the horse as Lucian had already retreated, far away from the alleyway.

Lucian entered an alehouse and went straight to the counter. He ordered a drink and downed it in one go. He slammed the glass down, and demanded another. And another.

He untied the tie around his neck and loosened his collar. Then he removed his cloak and threw it over the counter chair.

He continued drinking, his third eye surveying the area around the building Celine was in. It operated as a clinic, and there was a waiting area outside, filled with patients.

He lifted his head and looked around the place. He just had to break someone's nose or something, offer to fix it and he would have a valid excuse to visit the clinic.

He couldn't see anyone who would pick a fight with him at that moment. He even made himself look drunk, to look like an easy prey.

'Why is no one here looking for trouble? What's wrong with people?'

Lucian tugged at his collar, leaning against the counter.

Instead of trying to pick a fight, some man decided to sit next to him and strike a conversation.

Lucian was born with looks that could attract both men and women. Instead of people picking fights with him, they would often hit on him like this man was trying right now.

It always happened when Lucian was wearing simple clothing instead of his usual fancy suit made out of expensive fabric. It was good for business, but not good for blending in with the crowd.

"Drinking alone?" the man asked, eyeing Lucian's exposed neck, licking his lips.

Lucian took a sip of his drink, looking at him from the corner of his eye, "Alone and miserable."

"Maybe I can help," the man smiled, leaning closer.

'Maybe you can,' Lucian lifted his hand; buying another round and sliding it to the man, spiking the drink at the same time.

The man took the glass eagerly, not suspecting a thing. He finished the drink and set the glass down, a smile playing on his lips as he leaned in closer to Lucian.

"What brings a fine man like you to this place? Want to have some fun tonight?"

Lucian threw a punch from below the man's jaw and sent his head snapping backwards. He grabbed him by the collar, "Personal space, I don't appreciate you invading it."

"You-!" The man raised his fist, but Lucian punched him again in the stomach, then slammed his head onto the counter.

It was a bit excessive. Blood spurted from his forehead as he slumped to the floor.

"Aaargh!"

The whole place went silent, witnessing Lucian's strength.

His build was larger than a typical hay head's. His aura was not as intimidating as his punches, and people didn't know what to make of it. They just knew to stay away, letting Lucian do his thing.

"Ah, my bad. I got a little carried away." Lucian apologized, grabbing his coat in one hand, "Allow me to pay for your medical expenses as an apology. I will take you to the nearest clinic."

He paid a few coins to the bartender for the troubles then asked the biggest guy in the room to help him carry the stranger to the clinic. Easy coins were easy coins, after all.

A guy with a large build stepped forward, lifting the unconscious man on his shoulder and followed after Lucian.

The stranger groaned, his head lolling from side to side, his consciousness skipping in and out as he struggled to make sense of what was going on around him.

Lucian paid the people in line to skip the queue, and was able to get inside the building in no time.

When a physician finally saw him, Lucian was told that his "friend" had suffered a concussion, but he would be fine after the treatment.

Lucian "waited" outside the examination room, as in, trying to get closer to Celine.

In case an investigation on his identity would happen, Lucian had a reason beside Celine to visit the clinic more frequently.

There's no way she would be left alone in the room, so Lucian could only sneak inside the closest storage.

He slid his back against the wall and sat on the cold tiled floor.

If Lucian couldn't see through his third eye, he could at least use it to hear what was going on.

Celine's words from the past came to Lucian's mind: 'We are living in unstable times, waiting for things to become stable is just a waste of time.'

It was a foolish decision to become pregnant at this time, and a very careless thing to do, but Celine's world had never been stable and safe. She had stopped waiting for it to become so.

She told Lucian that any heir would be a blessing to the Rochefort house.

The Duke would not reject their child, but he might use him or her to his advantage, especially if he could control the mother.

If the Duke found out who the real father was, he would definitely make use of him too.

'Maybe I should just go to her father and ask for her hand,' Lucian mused. They could all use each other like a big loving family.

Her father was right next room. All Lucian had to do was to get up and go talk to him.

He could stay with Celine and not feel like a criminal sneaking in to see his own child.

Lucian had the necessary funds, the connections, and the power. What more could the Duke want?

"Is it the Crown's prince?" The Duke's voice came through his ear, not even asking who the father was. He was stating what he wanted the answer to be.

"Whoever assures my child's safety," Celine whispered weakly, "...is the father."

Lucian's head dropped in his hands, his fingers pulling on his hair in frustration. Right, he was not a noble.

"It's not the Crown Prince's," the Duke concluded.

And he was not wrong.

Celine's muffled whimper made Lucian's heart jump.

"What are you doing?" she gasped, "Don't touch me."

Lucian was up on his feet in an instant, ready to break down the door, but the physician's words stopped him.

"Your Grace, the child is endangering her life. I advise we take it out," the physician said, "The longer we wait, the more Young Miss will over-exhaust her body to keep it alive. Please, consider it."

"No," Celine gasped, her breathing ragged, as if she was fighting for every breath. "I...I need the child. I need to have the child. Don't take it away from me. Don't take it away."

Lucian pulled at his own hair, his teeth grinding against each other. He couldn't stand listening to her begging for their child's life while he stood helplessly on the sidelines.

"I...I need the child. I...need to have the child. Please," Celine thrashed in her bed, trying to fight off the physician and her father.

Lucian had activated his third eye and saw her father trying to restrain her, together with the cloaked figures.

They were all females, wearing male clothes but their distressed voices gave them away.

"Young Miss, you have to calm down! You can't strain yourself!" They tried to reason with her, "You can have as many children as you want in the future. Just let this one go! It's impossible to bless it to full term! You will die!"

"Useless!" Celine screeched, "Can't even save a child. A child! You are all useless! Let go of me! Bless it to health. Bless it to health, you worthless maggots!"

"Put her to sleep," the duke ordered.

"NO! No! No, you can't...you can't...you can't!"

"Calm down," the duke grabbed her hands while they grabbed her legs, "You are going to hurt yourself."

"I...don't care," Celine hissed, "If you do this to me...I will kill myself. I will kill myself. Do you hear me? I will kill myself!"

"Celine!" the duke's voice echoed through the room, "Stop this nonsense. Stop it right now!"

"I'm not...talking...nonsense. I'm talking...sense. You think you can stop me...?" She laughed, her laughter mixed with sobs. "I can't even...give life to my child. How am I going to live with this shame? How?"

Lucian covered his mouth, stopping himself from making any sound.

"Take it out," the duke commanded.

Celine's scream was the most horrifying thing Lucian ever heard. It was full of pain, despair, and hopelessness. It was a scream that would haunt him for the rest of his life.

Lucian's legs gave out, and he slumped to the ground, covering his mouth with his hands harder, stopping himself from screaming with her.

She didn't cry when her soldiers died, she didn't cry when her brother turned on her, she didn't cry when she repaired the broken cat's bell, yet she was now crying her soul out.

The drugs they gave her did not work, she continued to bleed as she refused to let them touch her stomach.

She was crying, screaming, cursing them all, and the curse she cast on whoever touched her was taking effect.

She was using both the blessings at the same time, causing her to cough up blood.

Her father started to cough up blood as well, their faces pale as death.

Lucian grabbed his mask from his bag, then pulled the hood over his head, storming towards her room.

He burst through the doors, going straight to Celine's side, the hood of his cloak pulled low to cover his face.

"It's okay. It's okay. I'm here now. I'm here now," Lucian whispered in her ear. His hand cupped her cheek as her pinned body trembled on the bed.

"You are here..." she muttered in relief.

"Your cries summoned me," he choked a chuckle, trying to lighten the mood.

She didn't laugh, "Protect...our child," she threatened through gritted teeth.

"I will, I will," Lucian assured her, wiping the sweat from her brow.

Celine finally calmed down a bit, shocking all the people present.

He could feel the curse slowly dissipating, and her trembling slowly subsiding. The drugs were finally taking effect, and she was losing consciousness.

Lucian took a deep breath when her body went limp, pressing his forehead against hers.

He couldn't feel her warmth, the mask was blocking it.

The smile of the demon on the surface hid his grief underneath, allowing him to stay composed despite his next words.

"Perform the operation. Now."

Lucian rose, taking a step away from her.

Nobody cared to question him, not even her father. Everyone was in a hurry to keep Celine alive.

"I need more hot water, and clean towels!" the physician shouted as she worked. Her hands were bloody, moving wild with concentration.

Celine's blood soaked through the sheets, into the mattress, and Lucian was afraid it wouldn't end.

They cut her stomach open and removed their child.

Lucian quickly wrapped the small, unmoving, bloody baby in a towel, "I'm leaving her in your care."

The Duke wiped the blood from his mouth with his arm, weakened by the curse he was under, but he still managed to keep his composure.

"If I see any of your people following me, I won't be kind," Lucian continued.

The Duke had no time to answer as Lucian was already running out the door, carrying his child in his arms.

'You can't die, you hear me?!' Lucian looked down, speaking to the child, 'A child of Lucian Arclight and Celine Rochefort cannot die so easily!'

They both swore not to let history repeat itself.

Lucian and Celine had discussed some emergency plans for the worst-case scenarios.

However, the timing was never right, and Death didn't have a schedule.

It was trying to take away someone dear to them again, and they would be damned if they didn't try to prevent it.

┌────────── Author's note ─────────┐

End of Arc 5. Huray! 🎉

Any thoughts?

I noticed a small spike in the powerstones, GTs and gifts. Thank you! The consistent boost is really motivating! I won't say no for more motivation, though. 🙏 😊



Lucian rode towards the Church of Eternal Light, pushing the horse to its limits. He jumped off the saddle before the horse came to a full stop and ran to the entrance, slamming the large wooden doors open.

He scanned the interior, looking for the person he needed, the High Priest. He spotted him talking to a group of believers in a corner and marched towards him, ignoring the curious glances of the people around him.

"I need to speak with you," Lucian said, looking up at the High Priest's face, his expression grim. "Privately."

The High Priest's eyes lit up with recognition. He quickly excused himself from the believers and eagerly led Lucian to his private office. It was a familiar place for Lucian, as he had visited it many times before to 'donate' to the church's funds.

"What is it that you wish to discuss, my son?" the High Priest welcomed him with a warm smile, glancing at the bundle in his arms.

Lucian circled the man smoothly, revealing a dagger he had hidden in his sleeve, and pressed the cold steel against the priest's neck in a split second.

The High Priest's eyes widened in fear, his face turning pale, "My son...what are you doing?"

"Shh," Lucian pressed the blade harder, drawing a thin line of blood on the man's neck. "My son is still sleeping, so I would appreciate it if you keep your voice low and don't wake him up."

The High Priest swallowed hard, feeling the blade against his skin. He nodded slowly, trying to show that he understood and wouldn't cry for help.

"You see, your holiness, I need a blessing for my son." Lucian cradled his son in his arms, keeping him close to his chest, "Could you bless him? Genuinely pray for his well-being, from the bottom of your heart?"

"Of course, my son..." the High Priest muttered, his hands shaking as he raised them to pray, "May the Gods bless this child..."

"Not that one, the real one," Lucian interrupted, pushing the blade further against his neck, "The kind where the more my son suffers, the more your church burns if you're not sincere enough. You know the one, where your life depends on it, please do not forget that detail."

"Y-yes...yes,. I will...I will, my son..." The High Priest closed his eyes and started to pray again, this time more fervently, "Oh, Gods...bless this child with your divine protection...watch over him always...and keep him safe from harm...in the name of the..."

"If my son doesn't wake up with a healthy glow within a minute, I will assume you don't mean it enough," Lucian's threatening tone cut him off again, "I don't want to feed him your drugs this early in his life, you understand?"

The High Priest used to be a hay head too, and probably thought that the child was a hay head in need of medicine, and wanted to replace it with a healthier option.

"Yes, my son...yes, I understand..." the High Priest said, his hands still raised, "May the child wake up soon, healthy and strong—"

In the middle of his prayers, at the pinnacle of his despair, a dagger pierced the priest's throat, making him gag on his own blood. It was fast and unexpected. He didn't even have time to scream before he collapsed onto the floor, his body twitching.

"The debt has been repaid with interest," Lucian pulled his dagger from the High Priest's throat, "Donations from the Glory may continue in the future, if the church proves it's able to repay the favor in kind."

He then cleaned the bloody blade on the priest's robes and placed it back inside his sleeve.

Lucian had tried to use regular people to grant his wish before, but most didn't have the strong willpower necessary to fuel a powerful wish.

It needed to be someone with deep conviction or a strong desire for change. The high priest had been training his whole life for that position, so his conviction should have been among the strongest.

The bundle moved, signalling that his son inside was about to wake up from his slumber.

"Hungry?" Lucian's face softened as he spoke to his child in a gentle voice, "Let's go find you something to eat, shall we?"

He opened the door and stepped out into the hallway, closing it behind him.

Lucian would come to deal with it later, once he had taken care of his child and built some alibi for himself. Whoever the shackled priest decided to hurt in the meantime was not his problem. His son came first.

While exiting, Lucian turned toward the altar, wondering if his parents were looking at him from heaven, 'The boy who you tried to teach how to earn money the honest way has grown up to be a criminal. You must be ashamed of me, aren't you?'

He gave them a quick bow and left.

Lucian needed a wet nurse, and quickly, but not any wet nurse would do.

He moved to his next destination. Afraid of the horse's hooves hurting his child, he called for a Glory carriage with the best shock absorbers before he arrived at the church.

His son was still a newborn, so every precaution was necessary.

The carriage was already waiting for him outside the church, a coachman at the ready.

Lucian climbed inside and gave the driver directions, "Wait until I give you the signal to leave."

He added more hot stones to the heater, which was placed at the bottom of his feet, meant to warm the interior.

He leaned back on the cushioned seat and unwrapped the baby, revealing his small face. His son's eyelids were still closed, and his little fists were balled up. He barely weighed more than a bag of sugar.

Lucian created a nest of blankets and pillows on the seat next to him. His son was too young to have preferences yet, but Lucian hoped he would like the softness of the fabric.

Using warm water from the bottle that his people prepared, he gently wiped the child's face, and the rest of his body.

His son didn't seem to mind being handled by him, his lips parting and closing, as if he was trying to suckle on something in his sleep.

"I'll be quick," Lucian whispered to him, wrapping him in a new blanket, then covering him with the black cloak. He bundled him up and placed him back on his chest.

He made sure the baby was secure before knocking on the carriage's roof. He signaled the driver to go while absorbing any bumps from the road that could make the ride unpleasant.