

My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone

#Chapter 2 - 1.2 Shackled - Read My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone Chapter 2 - 1.2 Shackled

Chapter 2: 1.2 Shackled

People with light hair had a weaker constitution and were more prone to catching various diseases.

People dyed their hair just to avoid getting sick and finding a job. Women had it easier due to their beauty being valued. Men, however, were left to their own devices.

Despite this prejudice, Lucian's mother still chose his father and gave birth to a son that had the same color of hair as him.

One year later...

Lucian was a bit smaller and thinner than the kids his age, but that didn't stop him from being happy and running around the town with a smile on his face.

He was waiting for a day when a little wife would fall from the skies and play with him; someone who would accept him even though his head was 'full of hay'.

He wasn't picky and didn't mind if she had some hay on her head too. She just needed to be brave enough to want to be with him.

The Rochefort territory was safe, but it didn't mean that it was without dangers. A shackled was currently being dragged through the town square by the guards. It was so strong that not even heavy chains could hold it down.

It was a beast in human form, a woman with the strength of twenty men. She looked fragile and thin, yet her eyes were that of a wolf. Golden like Lucian's but more feral. Her wrists were bleeding, but she didn't seem to care as she tried to break free.

"Illegal slave market?" a passerby asked, watching the woman being dragged to a cage. Lucian turned his attention to the conversation, listening to their words. "Oh, that's horrible... Did they manage to capture all the slave traders and save all the slaves?"

"Yeah, all thanks to her," the man nodded towards the shackled woman being dragged away and then lowered his voice to a whisper. "She went berserk and killed the buyers,

then broke out and killed the sellers. It was a bloodbath, and there's no doubt she'll be executed."

Lucian hid behind a building, wondering if he could pick up something that would earn him a coin or two.

His mother was getting better thanks to the medicine, but his father didn't have enough money to buy more. He didn't mean to catch a shackled's attention. "..."

He could feel the eyes of the woman slave on him, watching him intently. Then she talked, her voice low, almost sounding like a growl, "...Thank...you..."

"Go to hell, you monster!" A guard took the advantage to pierce her chest, making her cough up blood.

"...Gah!...You...human scum...I'll...kill you...all...I...will...haunt...your dreams... until... the end... of time..." The woman rasped and then started laughing like a lunatic until her last breath.

'Don't close your eyes, Lucian,' the little boy heard, forcing his eyes wide open and his body to remain frozen in place. *'You are stronger than this. Toughen up, or you will be the next one to die!'*

Lucian quickly switched his attention to what he came here for, and it wasn't to witness people dying. The havoc the shackled woman caused left a lot of mess in her wake, and where there was a mess, there was bound to be some broken things that could be revived back to life.

"Can I have this, mister?" Lucian asked, picking up a broken lantern, and showing it to the owner of a stand, who was trying to clean his goods.

"Go away," the man said, annoyingly snatching the broken lantern away from Lucian, "I don't need beggars near my stand."

"I'm not a beggar," Lucian said, "I'm a helper, and I'm trying to help you get rid of the junk. The sooner you clear your stand, the sooner you can start selling again. See, I'm not a beggar."

The man's eyes widened, and he raised his head to look at Lucian, "You are a smart brat, huh? If I catch you stealing any of my things, I'll call the guards! You hear me?"

Lucian nodded eagerly, "Yes, sir!" he said and began to clean and organize the man's goods.

A good deed after a disaster was like a sign from God. People's hearts were moved by the smallest act of kindness, and soon enough, Lucian found himself with a bag full of

goods that no one else needed or wanted. The Little Boy walked back home with an empty stomach, but a full heart.

"Dad, my good deed got rewarded again," Lucian announced, dropping the bag on the table, "Dad?"

He opened the door to the workshop, his heart stopping when he saw the collapsed man on the floor, "Dad!" he shouted and ran towards his father.

The man coughed, trying to stand up, but failing. Lucian helped him sit up, and the man smiled, "It's alright. Just a little tired, that's all. How did it go? Did you find anything useful?" he asked.

The little boy nodded with a grin on his face, "Yes!" he exclaimed.

"That's my boy," The man chuckled, pulling a wooden comb from his pocket to smooth down his son's wind-tossed hair, "You have mom's brains and dad's charm, it's only natural you turn out amazing! Our legacy will live on through you, and that makes us very happy, so don't be afraid to show people how smart and handsome you are, okay?"

"...okay?" Lucian said, wondering what his father was talking about. He couldn't possibly be talking about dying, could he?

The voice in his head said so, but he would rather trust his parents instead. They were a family, and a family stuck together, through thick and thin, through good and bad. They would not betray him, they would not leave him behind.

Would they?

One year later...

Lucian had his chin plopped on his hand, staring at the empty cart he used to sell his goods at, but not really seeing it. He had started a mobile pawn shop of sorts and had sold out all his items by the time the lunch hour came around.

One would think that a successful day was enough to lift his mood, but not for the boy who was still mourning his parents.

He tried to busy himself with the thought of the future, about how to earn enough money to buy himself medicine in case he got sick, when a loud slam startled him from his day dreaming.

A stack of papers wobbled and toppled onto his mobile cart's counter. Then a voice, cute but commanding, followed right after the thundering appearance.

"These are the most exquisite paintings in the entire city. I will give you the honor of selling them, and you will get fifteen percent of the profit."

Chapter 3: 1.3 Not Easily Erased

The Rochefort House?

The duke's family?

Lucian looked up to find a girl standing in front of him with her nose up in the air. Curly pig tails hung from either side of her dark blue hair. She was a bit shorter than him but still looked down at him somehow, as if the air itself was giving her a pedestal.

The most beautiful girl Lucian had ever seen in his entire life was trying to make a deal with him. He was careful not to offend her by staring too long, but in his mind, a pair of blue eyes were burned into his memory.

What the hell was the duke's daughter doing in this part of town, and what the hell was she doing talking to a commoner like him?! She didn't even need to introduce herself.

Some people were just too famous, and you could recognize them on sight. The superior blood in their veins made them stand out from the rest of the crowd.

"Are you listening?" the girl asked, "...Two silver coins each. If any don't sell, though I can't imagine why anyone would refuse a painting made by a Rochefort, I'll buy them back myself. That way, you don't lose a thing."

'Forty silver coins for all, enough for a modest horse. Six coins profit. I'll need to sell them fast or for more coins, otherwise the effort won't be worth it.' Lucian calculated in his head.

Gods, how he loved the nobles' brats. Their money, of course, not the snobbishness that accompanied their presence.

Lucian went through the papers with cute flowers and animals, assessing their value. "I don't have enough money to buy all these paintings. I'll pay you after they sell and we split the profit."

The girl didn't seem to like the offer, frowning at his proposal. "I'm not loaning Rochefort's art without a deposit," she said, grabbing the paintings to take them back. "I will sell them myself if you are not interested in our cooperation. Your loss."

Lucian quickly stopped her, "I will need to show proof to the customers that these paintings are from a noble house, and not a scam, otherwise no one will buy them for such a high price."

The girl pointed at herself as if she was the proof, "I can show up to prove their authenticity, but I don't have all day, you know? I'm a busy Lady."

"I understand," Lucian said. "A schedule would be appreciated so I can adjust my own."

She nodded, "Next Monday then."

"Wait." Lucian picked up her paintings and handed them back to her, "Bring the paintings with you. I will gather potential buyers and spread word of their sale on Monday. We can turn it into an auction and have the paintings sold by the afternoon."

She was taken aback, then an amazed smile spread over her lips, "You are good, commoner. What's your name?"

"Lucian Arclight," the boy replied, "And yours, My Lady?"

"Celine, Celine Rochefort," she replied, "See you on Monday."

"Monday," Lucian agreed.

The girl turned around to walk away, taking her paintings with her.

One week later...

Two children, huddled in the corner of a less frequent alleyway, covered their mouths to silence their laughter. Barely eight years old, yet their laughter was filled with a sinister undertone that didn't belong to the innocent.

"Fufufu...hahahaha!" The girl couldn't hold her laughter anymore and her childish voice echoed in the empty space around them. "SOLD. OUT!" She laughed, pointing a finger at her accomplice and teasing him, "You've outdone yourself with the last one."

"Sush, you. Someone will hear you." Lucian warned, pointing to his mouth with his index finger. He couldn't say much as his own shoulders shook with the effort to suppress his laughter as well.

"It's not a crime to laugh!" the girl said, "If you are so afraid, then I'm going to laugh alone, I don't care!"

"Okay, okay. Fine. Go ahead," Lucian couldn't argue with that and they both crouched there, letting their laughter subside as they split their profits.

She should only have 40 silver coins, but the profit was higher than they had expected. One gold coin! Which equaled 5000 thousand silver coins!

It was a small fortune, one they hadn't planned for. Lucian gave her five large silver coins (worth hundred small silver coins) and kept the rest.

She scooped up her share and hid it inside her pockets without any protest. "It was a good business transaction, good sir. See you next time. I'll come when I have new stock."

"Next time," Lucian echoed, grinning at the idea of making even more money with her in the future, "Can't wait."

Celine grinned in return, nodding her head in agreement.

Their joy, however, was short lived as the sound of loud footsteps approached the kids from behind.

"Here she is! Lady Celine!" The guards came running and captured the girl, lifting her in the air and Lucian felt fear grip his heart.

'RUN AWAY!' The voice in his head screamed, *'Don't let them capture you!'*

Lucian quickly backed away, clutching his bag to his chest and fleeing the scene, hearing the girl's shouts as she demanded the guards to unhand her.

'Leave her behind, she is a noble, and will be fine. Don't risk your life for someone like her.'

His mind was screaming at him to keep running, but his heart was aching, begging him to turn back, to go back and save his partner. They were friends, right?

He didn't have a chance to find out, as she no longer appeared again after that.

Lucian hid the money in a safe place and tried to move on, to forget the girl who would most likely end up living a luxurious life and forgetting all about him.

He had his own life to take care of, and he couldn't afford to think of others. But his memories were not so easily erased, and as the days passed, his mind was often occupied with thoughts of her.

Chapter 4: 1.4 Knight Tiers

Lucian was wandering the streets in search of some more treasures, his eyes open wide and searching. He was chewing on a piece of bread he had saved for the special occasion (dinner).

It was getting dark, but he didn't want to return to the church yet.

The orphanage had him as the only orphan, the rest of the kids would get recruited by nobles and families looking for loyal servants or knights to train.

The church wasn't a bad place, but Lucian didn't feel comfortable there. Not with the priests making him feel unwanted and always reminding him that they were doing him a favor by letting him stay with them.

Lucian had enough money saved up to last him for a while, and with his frugal nature, it would last him longer. Maybe he should start looking for a friend or a companion to ease the loneliness in his heart. His parents would like that, wouldn't they?

'You have no time for distractions, Lucian. Focus on earning money. You can't trust anyone. People will betray you the first chance they get. Don't trust them.' the voice said, making the boy frown.

'But...it's lonely,' he argued back.

'Loneliness is the best cure for weakness. Embrace it.' the voice insisted.

'But...' the boy tried to argue again, *'Can I at least have a pet?'* he asked, his golden eyes looking pleadingly at nothing in particular, as if the voice was right in front of him.

'Fine, if it will make you shut up and stop whining.' the voice agreed.

'It will!' Lucian said excitedly, running off to find a stray cat or dog to take home. *'I'll name it Celine, after my first friend.'*

'Friend?' The voice scoffed, *'She is not a friend. She used you to earn money, that's all.'*

'Lalala, I can't hear you,' Lucian sang as he ran forward, looking for the perfect pet on his way to the church, *'You are just jealous of my friend!'* he declared, *'You will never be my friend, I hate you!'*

'...Shut Up!' the voice shouted, causing Lucian to wince, *'Don't talk back to me, ever! I'm trying to save your life and you are wasting time on useless things! Idiot child!'*

Lucian's eyes watered at the voice's anger, and tears streamed down his cheeks, *'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you,'* he sobbed, *'Please don't be angry with me.'*

The voice didn't respond and Lucian cried himself to sleep that night. Curled up in his cold bed, he missed his parents more than ever before.

Early the next morning...

Without the voice to guide him, Lucian figured that he could do without it. It wasn't like it was actually helping him anyways. But he couldn't shake the feeling that he was forgetting something important.

His memories weren't as sharp as they used to be, images of his parents and the time they spent together were starting to fade.

Lucian rubbed his drowsy eyes, looking around the large room with eleven empty beds. Hearing a familiar voice, he moved toward the window.

A few knights stopped by the church to recruit some new members, but the priest sent them away. "We don't have any more children to offer. Sorry," the priest lied, not bothering to mention Lucian.

Yawning and stretching, Lucian left the church to start his day, but this day would not go as usual, he decided. *'Mission looking for a friend starts!'*

he cheered to himself, *'Pets too! I need to remember pets too!'*

The voice always reminded him to take advantage of the situation and this was one of those moments. Freedom of choice and action! He would be a fool not to take this chance to have fun.

Lucian walked the streets, spotting the leaving knights.

A knight was a human that could face a shackled without a struggle depending on their rank. Their special training allowed them to channel their inner power and use it to strengthen their bodies and weapons.

Their ranks were divided according to their abilities, from iron, bronze, silver, gold, emerald, sapphire, ruby, to diamond.

Lucian was so lost in thoughts of knights and heroes, that he didn't notice a group of three kids surrounding him. It was rare to see boys his age outside. Most were busy training to become knights, or learning a trade under the tutelage of their fathers.

"Hey, look, guys. It's the only orphan left. Do you know what that means? He has no one to miii~iiss him," one of them said, and the others burst into laughter.

Lucian laughed along with them, "Good joke!" he commented.

Compared to the mean things the voice kept saying to Lucian, these three boys were like saints. He should make friends with them. Maybe they would let him join their group. That would be great. A gang of his own to play with.

"Are you trying to be funny?" The biggest of the boys asked, grabbing Lucian's shirt and lifting him into the air.

"...No...I was trying to be friendly," Lucian replied, "Really, I'm a good listener, and you seemed like you needed someone to laugh at your jokes. I'm here for you, brother."

"...Are you making fun of me?" the boy asked, and Lucian shook his head rapidly. The boy tightened his grip on his shirt, raising him higher.

"I'm trying to offer you my friendship," Lucian explained, "You were right that nobody will miss me if I'm gone, so I'm trying my best to make friends. Please, don't let me die without making a single friend."

"..." The boy let go of him, dropping him on the ground. "You are weird."

"I'm Lucian."

"I didn't ask for your name! And who the hell would want to be friends with a weak orphan?"

"...A benevolent soul?" Lucian offered, then when the silence stretched too long, he added, "An angel?"

The boy snorted, "Follow me," he said, and the rest of the kids followed him toward the slums like a bunch of baby ducks, with Lucian following last.

They were looking for a new target to pick on, and soon, a poor boy caught their attention.

They were laughing and throwing rocks at him while Lucian was standing there, watching it all happen.

"Why aren't you joining us?" the boy who had grabbed him before asked.

"He looks like he will turn into a shackled if you continue," Lucian commented as he finished the last piece of his bread, "I'm here to make friends, not enemies."

Chapter 5: 1.5 A Gang Needs A Name

The boys stopped throwing rocks abruptly.

"What are you saying? Shackled are beasts in human form, stupid. You can't turn into one just like that! A whole world would have been turned into shackleds if every wronged person could turn!"

"Oh... right. You are right, I forgot about that," Lucian agreed, not wanting to argue with his three new friends. "I still think we should do something more fun...like starting a gang together. I have a place we can use as a base. It will be awesome."

The kids found the idea interesting, and looked at the bigger kid, who also seemed to like the idea of a secret hideout.

"Where is it?" the big kid asked.

"Nearby." Lucian approached the boy on the ground, extending a hand to him to pull him back to his feet. "What's your name?"

The boy with brown curls hesitated for a moment before accepting the offered hand. "Jax... I'm Jax. Thank you," he replied, looking at the other boys nervously. Nobody protested, allowing him to release a relieved sigh.

Lucian brought his new friends to a small plot of land on the outskirts of the town, surrounded by trees and full of weeds. He pulled out a deed from his bag and showed them that he owned the land.

He couldn't read, but the voice did, and it said it was a legal deed, so Lucian took its word for it. He had no reason to doubt the voice, even if it was a mean thing.

"Whoa! It's really yours?"

Lucian rubbed his nose with his finger, smiling proudly at his achievement. "Yes. I used my money to buy it."

The boys were impressed.

"I can get a few blankets and a tent," one boy said.

"I will bring some food," the other offered, and the rest pitched in to offer their help in setting up a new place for them all to hang out.

They raided their homes and brought their loot to the camp, setting up their new headquarters. Branches of trees were used to build a makeshift roof over their heads, and the ground was cleared of weeds and debris.

Besides the big noble kid, the rest knew a thing or two about construction, borrowing hammers from their dads without them noticing.

Lucian was amazed at his new friends' skills. He couldn't wait to see what they could accomplish together.

Sitting under the roof of the new hideout, five boys sat in a circle.

"A name. Our gang needs a name," Lucian said.

"What should it be?" Alain asked Lucian, since it was his idea in the first place. He was the locksmith's son, and the most friendly among them (after Lucian).

"I don't know," Lucian said, "I never named a gang before."

"Then why did you suggest it?!" Big Ray shouted, raising a fist to punch him.

"Because it sounded like fun?" Lucian replied, shrinking back, "I thought it would help me make some friends..."

"...Oh," Big Ray lowered his fist, and looked at the rest, "Any suggestions?"

Pascal, the shoemaker's son who knew his way with the hammer and nails, suggested, "The Wild Boars. No one messes with boars."

The kids started to throw names, from the wolf pack to the fox den, and even the dragon's lair. They argued and bickered until they settled on the most badass name they could think of, the most badass of all the badasses: The Badass Gang.

The following days were a blast, Lucian was having the time of his life with his newfound friends. They would meet up after their daily training and chores to gather at the Badass gang base to continue expanding their base.

They even had a few weapons and armor pieces to practice with, courtesy of the more noble boy (Big Ray) in their group.

Lucian broke the social system and made a little gang where anyone could fit in. A talent the voice would never approve of, since it hated humans. But the voice was gone, so Lucian was free to do whatever he wanted, and he loved it!

That's until signs of sickness appeared over his body. It was Lucian's tenth birthday. He planned to celebrate it with his Badass gang.

One of them was missing due to his knight training (Big Ray), but they could still have fun...or so he hoped.

Lucian coughed into his palm and saw blood, "..."

The kids panicked, quickly carrying him to the church. They grew fond of Lucian despite him being weak and useless at fighting, and the idea of their gang falling apart scared them.

"Is he gonna be alright, Father?" Jax asked, watching as the priest examined him.

The priest eyed the group of kids with a frown, "Shouldn't you be at home helping your parents? Go home, all of you, before your parents start to worry."

The kids exchanged looks, then reluctantly nodded. They said goodbye to Lucian and left him in the care of the priest.

"I wondered when you would finally succumb to your fate," the priest muttered under his breath when it was just the two of them, "It's a miracle you have lived this long without getting sick a single time... not even once."

No matter how hard Lucian pushed himself to work and earn money, he never got sick. It was as if the Gods themselves were protecting him. And now, it seemed that they had finally abandoned him to his doom.

The priest also stopped being lenient with him, letting him know that he was a burden on the church.

"Even with the money you are giving us, you're still costing us more than you're bringing in," the priest told him after Lucian revealed a hiding spot for a portion of his savings.

The boy kept silent, staring at the ceiling as the priest gave him his daily sermon, "You took the gift from God for granted, my child, and you are now suffering the consequences of your actions."

He paused then continued, "You are being punished for your pride, for thinking you can defy fate and survive on your own, without the help of God..."

Lucian coughed more blood in response, rushing the priest into feeding him his medicine.

The voice was punishing Lucian for trying to live without its guidance, but it had an opposite effect on Lucian. A small grudge was forming in the young boy's heart, his respect for the voice dropping further.

'That's not how you treat your family.'

'I will never forgive you for hurting me.'

'Never.'

Chapter 6: 1.6 A New Job Offer

Being healthy his whole life, the unfamiliar feeling of illness that plagued Lucian's body made him scream in protest. He didn't care what was worse, emotional or physical pain, he couldn't stand either of them.

He felt like he was going to die. And he didn't want to die. Not yet. Not without meeting his little wife! He still had a dream to fulfill!

It would take a whole day for the medicine to take effect, but as soon as it did, he would gather his things and go out to the streets.

Unable to move around much, he was forced to scrap his mobile pawn shop and find a job. One he could handle while sitting down; one that didn't involve heavy lifting or running.

It proved to be more difficult than he thought. No matter how good relationships Lucian had built with the town's people, they turned their backs on him, even the baker he always bought bread from, was now acting like he didn't know him.

"L-lucian...?" A girl's voice reached his ears from behind.

Lucian turned around to see who it was, and he saw her. The girl from before, the one he had made so much money with in just a few hours. Celine Rochefort, the Duke's daughter.

Lucian didn't want her to see him in this state and tried to run away, taking a step back.

"Hey!" She grabbed his shoulder to stop him, but she ended up pulling him toward her, and they both fell to the ground, with him on top of her, "Ack!"

Lucian shot out his arms to protect her head and to cushion her fall. She only hit her bottom which was hidden under the layers of soft fabric, making it look like he couldn't wait to smash her head with his palms, "..."

She was about to complain when she noticed his red eyes and tear-stained cheeks, "Ugh...if you try to frame me for assaulting you to get money from me, it won't work," she warned, quickly pushing him off her, "I have no money to spare."

Lucian quickly wiped his tears with the back of his sleeve, her words making him regret saving her, "You talk like you weren't born with a golden spoon in your mouth," he said, the words coming out harsher than he intended, "You are lucky that I was here to catch you, Rich Girl."

"..." The girl stayed on the ground as she held back from lashing at him, her eyebrows furrowed in confusion. Then, her eyes widened in recognition, "Don't tell me...you went bankrupt?"

"W-what?" Lucian was taken aback, "N-no, I still have plenty of money, pfft, why would you think I'm poor?"

"...Because you look like a stray cat that got kicked in the rain," she pointed out, standing up and brushing the dust from her dress.

"I don't!" Lucian argued, "I'm owner of land, you know?!" he boasted, "I'm a landowner!"

She widened her eyes at that, "Really?"

"I'll show you," he said, "Come with me."

She immediately tagged along, "Ordering me around like that, you must be really confident in yourself," she muttered, following him as he led the way.

The walk to the other side of the town was exhausting for Lucian, and by the time they reached their destination, he was completely out of breath.

"H-here," Lucian said, "What...uff... do...uff... you think?"

Celine stared at the small plot of land, "...". She didn't say anything for a while, and Lucian was starting to get nervous.

"Why plant flowers instead of food? You look like you need food more than a pretty garden," she commented, more confused than anything. Straight to the point and with no tact in her words.

'Why does she always have a point...?' Lucian thought. He sat on the ground to catch his breath while the girl wandered around, taking a closer look at his property.

"Your house?" she asked, pointing at the small tent.

"It's my gang's hideout," he corrected her.

"Gang's hideout?"

"I'm the leader," Lucian boasted again. Though most were too busy to show up recently, and his health was declining, so his title of leader was hanging on by a thread. He didn't tell her that, but by his expression it seemed that she could guess. No, not guess.

"They fled, huh?"

"NO! THEY DIDN'T FLEE!" Lucian shouted, surprising the girl with the loudness of his voice, "THEY WOULDN'T ABANDON ME!"

"Oh, so they abandoned you."

Lucian covered his face with his hands, his breathing becoming erratic. He couldn't stop the tears from falling, no matter how hard he tried to hold them back.

She crouched down beside him, "You can't expect people to stay with you when things get tough. That's why you break their wings before they have a chance to fly away."

'...Huh?'

"It's just a saying about taking advantage of the weak." She pulled her knees to her chest and rested her head on top of them, looking at him, "Your desperate situation may be a burden for some but an opportunity for others."

Her blue eyes reflected the light of the sun as she smiled, "Someone could see a chance to get a loyal servant that will do anything to please them."

Lucian scrambled away from her, putting some distance between them while wiping his tears, "I'm not selling myself to anyone. I have a dream, and I will fulfill it, no matter what," he declared, his voice firm and determined.

"What's your dream?" she asked, leaning forward in curiosity.

Lucian hesitated, then decided to tell her. "To marry a lovely wife and live a peaceful life with her."

Her smile dropped.

'*What's that reaction?*' He wondered. "What?" he asked, narrowing his eyes at her. Did she pity him?

"You plan to waste that," she pointed at the place in between his eyes, "...on some random girl?"

Lucian touched his forehead, feeling offended, "Why not? It's mine, I can do whatever I want with it."

"..." She didn't reply, and he could see her thinking about something. She bit her bottom lip, the shadow over her eyes becoming more and more ominous, and then she stood up. "Do you want to be my servant?" she asked.

"No," Lucian replied quickly.

"I will get you an unlimited supply of medicine."

"Still..." Lucian slowly shook his head, "...no."

"Still..." she slowly repeated after him, "...no?"

Chapter 7: 1.7 A Trespasser

Celine frowned as she pushed it further, "You're not even thinking about it. You're just refusing without considering the offer!"

Lucian hated when people bossed him around and expected him to obey. Also being a master of his own time was a must for a married man with a little wife to take care of. "No."

"Ugh!" She stomped her foot, "Fine! What about friends? You are not getting a better deal than this, ever!"

'*Friends?*' Lucian's eyes widened, the offer tempting him more than before. "No."

What if his little wife got jealous of his girl friend and forced him to choose between them? He couldn't betray his future wife, not when she would need him to protect and take care of her.

Celine hung her mouth in disbelief and Lucian found it a bit funny.

"Why not?!" she asked, throwing her hands in the air in exasperation.

"I'm already married to my future wife," he said and picked himself up, dusting the dirt from his pants. "I can't be friends with a girl," he explained.

She looked at him like he was crazy, "You are not even married!"

"Married in my heart," he replied, clutching his chest for emphasis. His drive to live had increased by tenfold, just thinking about his wife. The tiny, beautiful, cute wife that would need his full attention and protection.

"Business partners?"

"No." Lucian refuses again. At this point, he was just curious about her reaction.

"Uuuughhhh!!!" Celine groaned, making Lucian take another step backward, just to be safe. "It was a mistake coming here, I shouldn't have bothered."

She turned around to leave, muttering, "All the effort I went through to get out of the house, wasted. Wasted on a dumb boy with his head in the clouds."

Lucian's gaze followed the girl as she walked away, her every step filled with anger. She was the duke's daughter, he had to remind himself. His head might be in the clouds but his body should be on the ground.

"Wait!" he called out to her, and she paused. He walked up to her, "Thank you," he said.

"For what?" she asked, not looking back.

"For trying to help me and offering to be my friend," he said, "It made me realize that I have to work harder to be able to support my little wife as well. I can't let her save me, can I? A man has his pride."

A sniff came from her as she turned around to glare at him. "Don't thank me, I was never here to help you! I wanted to use you! Ha! I bet your wife will be no different than me, and you won't even realize it!"

Right. Why would the duke's daughter approach him despite his condition? Lucian's eyes dimmed, turning back to his hideout to hide his face from her.

She was right, and he hated that she was right. But what else was he supposed to do? If he didn't dream about his future wife, what did he have to look forward to?

He grabbed a basket and began to gather the calendula heads he had planted. The moment he got his hands on the recipe for the medicine from the church, he would start to make it himself.

He already knew the main ingredients needed by observing the stock the priests had in the basement, and now all that was left was to learn the right dosage and preparation method.

A shadow fell over him, forcing him to look up.

Celine stood above him, her arms crossed, "The church won't allow you to make the medicine yourself. They will find a way to prevent you from making it."

"H-how..." Lucian trailed off, unsure of what to say.

"If you can think of it, then there are others that can too," she said and went to sit inside his hideout, occupying his cushion. She took out a book out of her bag, opened it, and started reading.

"..." Lucian pressed his lips together before asking, "Where have you been all this time?"

She didn't look up from the book, "House arrest. Caught too much attention during the art auction. I had to lay low, or my father would send me to a monastery."

"Oh," Lucian was surprised she answered, "What's a monastery?"

"A place where they lock away naughty girls to keep them away from bad boys like yourself," she explained, making Lucian's face turn red.

"Y-you! I'm not bad!" he protested, not liking the implication. He was the goodest of good guys.

She grinned mischievously and poked her tongue at him. She then returned to reading her book.

He poked his tongue back at her angrily, throwing cellandula head into his basket. "Why did you return?"

"To read a book," she replied without taking her eyes off the page, "This is a good place to read without any distractions."

"But it's my place," Lucian complained, clutching his fist before continuing to gather the flower heads, "Payment is due for entering my property. A penny per minute. You can't be my friend, but a customer can do."

She shook her head, blinking her eyes in disbelief and then looking at him. "I'm not a customer, I'm a guest. Guests are not required to pay."

"You can't be a guest either," Lucian said, "I didn't give you permission to enter."

"I'm an uninvited guest then," she shrugged her shoulders and continued to read her book, "No payment is required."

Lucian frowned, "Then I'll kick you out, uninvited guests are trespassers."

"..." She began to chew on the bookmark in her mouth, gritting it with her teeth as if it was his head she was chewing on, "I dare you to try, peasant," she taunted.

Lucian opened his mouth to argue but was unable to think of a comeback. He would usually choose a friendly approach to avoid conflicts, but Celine just kept getting on his nerves somehow, making his temper flare up.

"Fine! I will!" he said and placed down the basket, approaching her with menacing steps. Stomping his feet with each step to add to the effect.

She always looked so out of his reach, the duke's daughter, sitting in her fancy dress and reading her fancy book. It didn't help that she was taller than him.

In the two years they haven't met, she outgrew him in height. It made him feel even smaller than he already was. And that just made him want to kick her out of his home even more.

"Rich girl," he muttered, crouching to pick up his cushion she was sitting on, and started dragging it toward the exit.

"Woah, woah! What are you doing?" She clung to the cushion, trying to keep herself from sliding away.

"Drag...ging...you out...by force!" Lucian replied, pulling the cushion with all his might.

Chapter 8: 1.8 An Apology

The wooden hut was small and cramped, but if it could fit five boys in it, then two fighting children should have no trouble at all.

"Get. Out. Of. My. House." Lucian grunted.

Celine's face reddened in frustration as she gripped the cushion with all her might, not allowing him to pull her any further. "You...can't...drag me out," she said through gritted teeth, "I'm the Duke's daughter, show me some respect!"

"Respect?!" Lucian scoffed, "You're the one who should show me respect!"

"Excuse me?! I'm the one doing the respecting, while you act like you own the world!" she yelled, jumping on him and tackling him to the ground, her hands going for his throat, "You should be begging me to spare your life, not demanding me to leave your place!"

She didn't use any force, just trying to intimidate him into submission. But the pain that was building inside Lucian was becoming unbearable. It hurt to have her before him, and it hurt to have her far. Why did she have to be the Duke's daughter?

The girl on top of him didn't seem to fare better, her eyes were glassy, her face flushed as her fingers held his neck in place, "Did someone pay you to be mean to me...?" she asked, the question surprising him, "I didn't do anything for you to hate me this much..."

Lucian blinked at that, her words confusing him even more. "I don't...hate you. I just..."

He wrapped his arms around her in frustration, unable to explain it with words.

She was too shocked to move as he hugged her tightly against his chest.

"I just...I'm sorry...It's not your fault," he said in hope it would be persuading enough to not make her think that he hated her.

He didn't know any noble etiquette, so he didn't realize how much his actions threw her off.

Celine's face turned completely red as she barely breathed in his embrace, "What a-are you doing?"

"Apology hug," Lucian said, his heart racing inside his chest, his face flushed as he tightened his hold around her. This felt too good. Too good to let her go. The warmth of her body seeped into his skin, filling him with an unknown sensation of joy.

"Oh..." she mumbled, not knowing what to do, she awkwardly hugged him back in the same manner, "...um...uh...Apology hug back."

"..."

"..."

"..."

They remained like that for a long time, neither of them knowing how to separate from each other. It wasn't until they heard footsteps outside his hideout that they jumped apart from each other in panic.

"Lady Celine, the time is over," one of the guards' voices said from the outside.

"!!!!" Celine quickly picked up her book and put it back in her bag, then realized she had forgotten something. Pulling out a meat bun from her bag, she handed it to Lucian before running toward the exit to join her guards.

The three guards gave Lucian a strange look as if expecting him to join them.

"He is not coming," Celine quickly told her guards, "Don't mind him."

"Yes, My Lady," the guards said, and the group walked away from his hideout.

Lucian stared at the meat bun in his hand, thinking he was alone again, and then took a bite. Chewing it slowly, he leaned over to grab his basket when an arrow landed on the ground near his leg. "!!!!!!!"

Choking out his food, Lucian ducked when another arrow came flying past his head. He rolled out of the way to avoid being hit, quickly crawling toward the wooden walls of his hut and hiding behind it, his heart pounding wildly inside his chest.

Searching for a weapon of any kind, he could only find his gardening shovel. "Who's there?!" he shouted, his voice cracking in fear.

He gripped the wooden handle tightly, preparing to fight for his life.

Footsteps approached, and the person revealed himself at the entrance. A man with his bottom face covered by a black cloth and dressed in dark clothing. He exchanged his bow for a short sword, slowly cornering the boy.

'An assassin?!' Lucian's eyes widened in realization. *'Someone wants me dead!'*

Lucian raised his shovel defensively, "You have the wrong guy, whoever sent you is trying to get rid of an innocent boy, I swear!"

The assassin stopped, looking at Lucian in silence, "Blame your luck for rejecting Lady Celine's offer to become her servant," he said, "It's nothing personal, just safety measures. Any future threats to the Rochefort bloodline must be eliminated."

Lucian looked for a moment to flee as the assassin approached.

'Kill. Kill him.' the voice suddenly came back to him, urging him to act. *'Or he will kill you. KILL HIM! NOW!'*

Lucian's eyes flashed gold as he threw his shovel at the assassin.

The assassin raised his sword to block it, but the strength behind the throw was far greater than what a boy his age could muster, throwing him off balance.

Lucian took the chance to dash at him with the speed of a wild beast, tackling him to the ground and slamming his fists into the man's face.

"Argh!" The assassin groaned in pain, his nose broken, and his cheekbones shattered under the boy's knuckles. Blood spurted out of his mouth and nose as he struggled to breathe. Not giving up, he threw a jab at Lucian, hitting him in the chest.

Lucian flew to the side, hitting the ground. His eyes lost their golden glow as he coughed violently, blood coming out of his mouth, "Ugh!"

'It hurts!'

'Too much power, you are not strong enough to handle it.' The voice said, *'Get used to pain.'*

The assassin quickly recovered and picked up his sword, "A fucking shackled disguised as a human child..." he muttered, no longer feeling any mercy for the boy. Not that he felt any in the first place.

"I'm not..." Lucian was still gasping for air when the man came at him again with eyes filled with hatred and malice. He knew it was the end. He couldn't fight anymore; he didn't have the strength left.

'Stupid. Foolish. Weak!' the voice kept cursing at him, *'Move! OR YOU WILL DIE!'*

Lucian was ready for the blade to pierce his body when the voice cursed at him again.

'I'm going to take over your body, you useless shit! Move over!'

'What?' Lucian thought, *'No, it's my body! My parents gave it to me!'*

'Your parents would have been ashamed to have such a waste of life like you as a son,' the voice said, *'They would have begged me to take over and save their precious son. Now, MOVE!'*

Lucian rolled to the side, barely avoiding the sword as it struck the ground next to him. While the voice tried to take over his body, its powers also gave him a temporary boost. He yanked the arrow that was on the ground and stammered forward, stabbing the assassin's leg as he did so.

"Arrgh!"

Chapter 9: 1.9 Take Cover

Lucian dropped to his knees in exhaustion, the pain in his chest preventing him from catching his breath.

The assassin was more experienced in fighting, heck, he was a trained killer, and could sustain much more damage.

Lucian couldn't do much with his fists against the man's build, that's why he went for the face the moment a chance showed itself.

The wound by the arrow barely fazed the the assassin, making him raise his sword to deliver the final blow at Lucian.

Lucian curled up in defence, and then screamed. Not in fear, but in anger at the voice that kept blaming him for his failures, "GET. OUT. OF. MY. BODY!" he yelled out loud, "IF YOU WANT TO KILL HIM, DO IT YOURSELF! YOU ARE WEAK!"

Bam!

The assassin's body flew in the air like a ragged doll from the shockwave, crashing into Lucian's hut, destroying it. His sword fell to the ground with a clang, grazing the side of Lucian's arm before, leaving a bleeding cut.

Crack!

Lucian's gaze shot up. The assassin's body moved unnaturally as he tried to stand, his broken bones cracking with each movement. His eyes turned golden as they glared at Lucian.

Lucian quickly picked up the short sword and threw it like an axe at the man, hoping to finish him off, but the assassin caught it with his bare hand, stopping it before it could penetrate his chest. His wrist twisted in an unnatural way, yet he didn't seem to mind.

Widening his eyes, Lucian scrambled to his feet and ran away from the scene, "A SHACKLED! A SHACKLED IS HERE!" he yelled, hoping to get the attention of the guards or any knights nearby. "HELP! A SHACKLED!" he screamed at the top of his lungs.

The strain on his body was unbearable, but a chance to turn the situation around had appeared, and he wasn't going to let it slip away. There was no way Lucian could escape Rochefort's reach, but a shackled's? He could even turn the Rocheforts against their own with it!

He knew his way around the town and soon alerted the people that heard his plea and screams of terror started to spread throughout the town, followed by the ringing bells of the church as a warning to everyone to take cover.

Lucian hid behind a corner, collapsing to the ground and clutching his injured arm. "...hah..." He couldn't stop shaking from exhaustion and shock, adrenaline still pumping through his veins.

He peered out slightly to see what was happening. The townsfolk were all in a panic, running away from the monster that had appeared out of nowhere.

"That way!" The town's people shouted, "The shackled went that way!"

'Yes!' Lucian cheered inwardly. *'Go that way!'*

He saw a group of guards and one knight approaching, their swords drawn, and ready to fight.

"Take cover!" one of them shouted, "We will take care of this!"

Lucian watched from a safe distance as they fought the shackled, who had a short sword in his hand.

He remembered the slave woman's words; she thanked the voice in his head, which probably meant that the voice had given her the powers she had used to cause a rampage.

When the voice also gave Lucian the powers, he became sure that it was a shackled.

'It has so much power so why is it always complaining?' Lucian wondered. The voice was silent so it probably entered the assassin's mind.

'I did not,' the voice said, making Lucian shudder in surprise, *'I returned right back after you tried to kick me out.'*

"..." Lucian was too scared to reply. So who was the shackled inside the assassin? Another voice? Another shackled?

'It's still the assassin. I just lent him my power after he died,' the voice explained, realizing that the boy would never cooperate with it if it kept him in the dark, *'It's like an agreement: power in exchange for granting your last wish.'*

'Wait, wait, wait,' Lucian was freaking out, *'You don't mean...'*

'I do,' the voice laughed.

Lucian peered around the corner again and watched as the battle continued. They were struggling against the shackled as it continued to roam the street.

Its eyes shone bright gold as it scanned the area, searching for its last wish.

"!!!" Lucian quickly ran away from the alley. The shackled assassin died while wanting to kill Lucian. Now it was using the voice's power to get that wish fulfilled. It was still the assassin.

Lucian made a detour, heading straight for the church.

'Good, that's the spirit,' the voice encouraged him, 'Take down the people who exploited your parents' situation and caused their deaths.'

'Don't you dare try to make this a bonding moment. I'm not going to forget what you did,' Lucian hissed, 'You left me to die too.'

The assassin caught the sight of the kid with striking blonde hair and immediately began to chase after him.

The guards and knight didn't hesitate and also chased after them.

'Weak voice, weak voice,' Lucian chanted, hoping the voice could feel as vulnerable as he did, *'You are weak! You are weak! YOU ARE WEAK!'*

'...' the voice went silent, probably not liking the fact that Lucian was using tactics that the voice always used on him.

Lucian had enough of being the voice's punching bag, and now it was the voice's turn to be his.

'...You are targeting the wrong person, I'm not the one who tried to kill you,' the voice argued.

'Yes, but you abandoned me,' Lucian said, feeling a weird satisfaction from the small victory over the voice's authority.

The first grudge he had ever felt in his life was toward the voice, the same voice that claimed it wanted to help him, yet took away his health and made him suffer when he wanted to choose another path for himself.

'...Nothing is free in the world, why should I help you for nothing in return?' the voice argued, not giving Lucian any power until he begged for it, *'You need to learn that everything has a price, and that's how the world works. The sooner you learn, the better.'*

'I didn't make any deals with you! It's you who need me to live. Not me!'

Lucian wiped his tears and snot from his runny nose. It left for two years, and now it came back when an opportunity presented itself, as if nothing had happened.

Did it really expect him to welcome it back with open arms?

Chapter 10: 1.10 At Limit

"...huh...hah..." Lucian's chest heaved up and down as he stopped, looking around to see if there was anything he could use as a weapon.

'Get up.' the voice urged, *'You're not safe yet.'*

'I need to rest,' Lucian held his knees for support.

If the voice had limbs, it would have probably kicked Lucian into motion, but it didn't have any, and he used the chance to take a break.

'Why can't you just take away its powers? You gave it away so you can take it back, right?' Lucian asked.

'Not possible. The deal was already made.'

'Why did you make it in the first place? Couldn't you just let him die?'

'If I could chose who I make a deal with, do you think I would ever pick a brat like you?'

"..huh...hah..." Lucian grabbed a pitchfork from the haystack near a shed. His legs just couldn't move anymore. His only option was to fight. He had the knights and guards on his side, so he might stand a chance.

'What's the limit of his powers, voice?' Lucian asked, taking in deep breaths. He had to know the enemy's strength before facing it.

'He can track you down from anywhere in the world. And won't die unless you do, or his greatest fear comes true.'

'What is his greatest fear?' Lucian asked, not expecting the voice to answer.

'Failing his mission and being forgotten by the world... It's the same as never existing in the first place.'

'What about me?' Lucian asked, *'How come you can occupy my mind without turning me into a shackled?'*

'You are in the middle of a fight,' the voice growled, *'It's not the time to ask questions.'*

Lucian didn't argue, but the questions kept lingering in his mind. He observed the approaching shackled.

Its eyes were still glowing gold. It had already killed two of the guards, and was currently fighting the remaining three guards and one knight.

Maybe if Lucian faked his death it would lose its purpose and weaken? Could he trick it that easily?

"Kid! What are you doing?! Get away!" the knight shouted at him.

Lucian snapped out of his thoughts. He no longer had time to think. He had to act fast. He had to protect the little wife that was waiting for him in the future. *'You hear that, future little wife? Your big strong husband is going to fight for you!'*

Who said he was going to the church? Lucian dug the pitchfork into the hay and spread it across the road, then he ran to the shed to find a lamp. There, he found a jar filled with oil instead, and he spilled it all over the hay and cobbled road.

"..." The knight realized what Lucian was up to and helped him, running in his direction with the shackled in pursuit.

The moment the shackled stepped on the hay, Lucian pulled a torch off his bag and threw it at the hay, setting it ablaze and blocking the way.

A knight picked him up and carried him to safety. Lucian noticed a pin on the knight's uniform and realized he was a Bronze Knight.

"Must be above tier two," the knight muttered to the guards.

Each shackled had a different character, and this one didn't seem to care about destruction, only about moving in a certain direction.

Carrying Lucian on his back, he continued to run, "It can't withhold the fire forever and it knows it..."

The shackled began to move even faster now, its body covered in flames and smoke, charging straight at them.

The knight swore under his breath, channeling his inner energy into his legs, "As long as we stall for more time, it will weaken!"

Lucian noticed it too. The shackled didn't have much energy left. It was using its last ounce of power to get to him before it ran out of time.

Sounds of horse hooves soon came in their direction. Lucian looked over the knight's shoulder.

A girl peeked her head from the carriage and when she saw the bloodied kid on the bronze knight's back, she gasped and covered her mouth with both hands.

Seeing the dire situation, her knight obliterated the shackled with ease, killing it once and for all. A Sapphire Knight, it was Lucian's first time seeing one.

Lucian and the Bronze Knight both breathed a sigh of relief.

Celine moved her hands away and got off the carriage, running to them.

The guards didn't dare stop her, which was a stark contrast from two years ago, where they had dragged her away like an unruly child. She must have gained more power and control over them, though Lucian.

He wanted to move his legs and flee, not ready to face another assassin so soon, but his legs were too tired, and his chest hurt. The knight was supporting him, so he couldn't run away even if he wanted to.

She probably sensed his fear from the way he looked at her, shaking his head from side to side. She paused her steps, stopping a good distance away.

Lucian winced in pain, the adrenaline faded away, leaving him sore all over.

Celine frowned, motioning to the knight to treat the wounded before returning to her carriage and leaving the scene.

"..." Lucian sighed in relief. They treated his wound and dressed it properly before sending him on his way.

One week later...

Lucian no longer stayed in one place after that incident. With the voice back, his health also returned. He no longer needed to drink the medicine.

He had dyed his hair green and began to move around the towns, looking for Jax while selling the dried calendula petals to the herb shops in towns.

Lucian had found out that the member of the Badass Gang had sought his help before he had gone missing. He overheard the priests speaking about Jax, afraid he would waste his money to help his friend, so they sent Jax away to 'protect' his money.

'These priests again!' Lucian thought, *'What have they done to Jax and the rest of my Badass Gang while I was sick?'*

On his way to the herb shops, Lucian had stumbled on Celine.

"I've covered your traces," she whispered as she passed him by, "Don't worry about my father's men coming after you again."

Lucian didn't turn to thank her, just kept on walking. *'How did she recognize me?'* he wondered. She disappeared faster than he could react. *'And what's the chance to meet her again so fast?'*

Very high. Lucian found out. Celine would parade herself around the streets of various towns in Rochefort's territory, to prove its safety to the people living there.

After that single meeting with Celine, a new business idea had entered Lucian's head.