

My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone #Chapter 51 - 2.36: A Kingdom Beyond The Sea - Read My Villainess Ex Won't Leave Me Alone Chapter 51 - 2.36: A Kingdom Beyond The Sea

Chapter 51: 2.36: A Kingdom Beyond The Sea

Jax wanted to show off too, putting more effort into his fight and delivering a swift kick to the older brother's stomach, and then used his elbow to knock him out.

There was still Southerner's blood coursing through Jax, together with the power he gained from it.

It was his mother who ran away from her hometown when she was pregnant with him. She forced him to try and fit in as a local, which meant no fights, no being loud, no being a southerner.

The chanting grew louder.

"See?" Jax yelled at them, "That's how you do it!"

"Boss! Boss! Boss!" the crowd continued.

"..." Jax groaned, turning to look at what was going on Lucian's side after defeating the older brother.

It's not that he was jealous of them cheering on Lucian. It was that he didn't want them to encourage their Hay Head Boss to extort more out of himself than he was capable of.

After all, Jax was there when they had to carry the half-dead Lucian to the orphanage. He didn't want a repeat of that, not on his watch.

Seeing his older brother getting defeated as well, "I yield," the younger brother admitted.

The crowd erupted in a roar of approval.

Lucian's legs gave out, and he collapsed to his knees, his hands flat on the muddy ground.

"Boss!" They ran to his side, the crowd surging forward to help him.

Lucian A. got to him first, pulling him up and draping one of Lucian's arms over his shoulders.

Another worker, Lucian T., grabbed his other arm, and they half-carried, half-dragged their Boss towards the main house.

"What about them?" Jack asked as he stripped himself, keeping only his underwear on, and began to shower under the heavy rain.

"Invite them to dinner after you wash yourself," Lucian said.

He had no personal servants to help him clean up or change his clothes, but some of the workers were eager to please, asking him if he wanted them to prepare a basin of hot water and such.

"A herbal bath would be nice, thank you," Lucian said as he sat down by the entrance, hiding from the rain. Someone brought him a hot stew, and he ate while the workers prepared a bath for him.

Repeating a movement while someone was punching back wasn't easy. He should have started with the basics if he knew there were so many to begin with.

Just look at Jack. It came naturally to him just as breathing. A real talent. Unfortunately, Jax was a bad teacher.

Lucian sighed and then looked at his hands. They were numb as if he didn't even have them anymore, so it was a struggle to hold the bowl and feed himself.

'Would she feed me if she were here?' He wondered, his mind going to his little wife. *'I want to find out.'*

Winter would arrive in a month, so his schedule was tight.

He didn't have to do much manual labor like before, but he still had to give directions and supervise the work of others. Some things required him to be there in person.

He returned to Goblin's greenhouse to check on its progress while cramming some training in between his projects as well.

By the end of the month, Lucian had made a few official visits to Celine's home, where she showed him the path they would take to sneak him into her room.

He was currently sitting on a plush armchair, feeling out of place, as if he were a piece of old furniture that had been brought in by mistake. The room he was in wasn't even the main library, but a personal one.

Celine sat opposite him, and Edmund sat between them like a buffer. Lucian was taking notes on the logistics of his business while they were discussing the current affairs in the Varia Kingdom. The conversation soon moved to their language.

Lucian remembered how Celine got grounded the first time, with all her allowance money taken away. It was because she failed her language lessons.

It looked like she still didn't fare well in this subject because the teachers didn't really speak the language they were trying to teach either. Also, why should she learn their language when no Rochofert spoke it either?

Varia Kingdom... It was a kingdom beyond the sea, and their culture was very different from his own. It was a nation of powerful warriors who borrowed strength from the spirits of the dead.

You didn't die in their lands, but instead, got bound to the land and used as a tool to protect the living. That's what the Diamante Kingdom told its citizens at least. The reality was probably more complex.

Lucian would like to expand his business into the Varia Kingdom in the future, and knowing the local language would be a big help (he didn't trust Voice in this regard anymore).

Maybe he could study it together with Celine during the winter?

'How romantic would it be?' He thought. There would be no third wheel and no interruptions. It would be just them and a pile of books to read. The thought alone made him want the winter to come sooner, which used to be the worst season of the year for him.

"What would—?" Lucian could barely finish his sentence before a female's voice cut him off.

"Edmund, dear," a woman's voice called from outside the library. Her voice was sweet, but there was a hint of steel in it that made the hairs on the back of Lucian's neck stand up. "Are you in there?"

Edmund scrambled from the sofa and hid under Celine's skirt, his movements so quick and desperate that Lucian was taken aback.

"Pretend to be my servant," Celine whispered to Lucian, her voice urgent. "Stand up and pretend to dust the shelves."

Lucian was confused, but he did as he was told. He stood up and grabbed a feather duster from a nearby table, his heart pounding in his chest. He didn't know what was going on, but he knew that he had to play along.

The door to the library opened, and a woman walked in. She was beautiful, with dark brown hair that was piled up on her head and a dress that was the color of the midnight sky. The mourning dress. The Duchess of Rochefort. Edmund and Celine's mother.

"Where is Edmund? I was told he was here," she said, her eyes scanning the room, her gaze lingering on Lucian for a moment before moving on. She didn't recognize him. To her, he was just a servant. A piece of furniture.

Chapter 52: 2.37: Liberating Action

"I sent him on an errand, Mother," Celine responded from her seat, "He'll be back soon."

The Duchess' composure changed then, her expression morphing into cold fury, "You sent him on an errand?! Without my permission?"

"He needed some fresh air," Celine said, not backing down. "All the studying has been stressing him out."

The Duchess's eyes narrowed, "And you," she said, turning to Lucian. "You are new. I don't recognize you."

"I am, Your Grace," Lucian said, his voice steady despite the uneasiness that was coiling in his stomach.

He noticed Celine rubbing her temples at his response, and he realized he had made a mistake. He should have just bowed his head and kept his mouth shut. He should have acted like a servant, not a person.

"Have him removed," the Duchess commanded before leaving the library, her skirts swishing behind her. "New rules shall be applied starting today. I will not have just anyone roaming my halls, especially not after..." she trailed off, not finishing her sentence, "Tell Edmund to see me immediately when he returns."

"Of course, Mother," Celine said, her voice dripping with a sweetness that was as fake as the smile on her face.

As soon as the door closed, Edmund crawled out from under his sister's dress, his face pale. He looked like a mouse that had just escaped a cat's clutches.

"Thank you," he whispered to Celine. He kneeled on the ground, hugging her stomach tightly.

'My mom hugged and kissed me too, there's no need to be dramatic over it,' Lucian tried to persuade himself, but he couldn't help but feel something strange at the sight of Edmund's reaction.

There were instances where noble houses wanted to keep their bloodline pure and marry within their own family. It was more common in the southern kingdoms though.

"This is why I have to marry soon," Celine said, pointing at her clingy brother jokingly, "The pressure is getting to him. He is not built to take over the Rochefort legacy."

'I wouldn't be so sure about that,' Lucian thought, remembering the iron grip on his arm from a month ago, *'I think you are being tricked by your own brother, Celine.'*

Edmund removed his hands and stood up on his own two feet, he dusted off his pants and turned away from his sister, giving Lucian a smile that was a little too wide, a little too bright.

He took a step closer to Lucian and patted his shoulder, his fingers digging into his skin, "You have my gratitude. Mother can be a bit... overprotective."

"She seems to dislike servants," Lucian said, trying to keep his voice neutral.

"She dislikes change," Edmund corrected him ambitiously, "She dislikes people who are not part of her world. She sees them as a threat. As something that could...take away what she has."

The last part was whispered in his ear, a secret shared between two men, one that made Lucian's skin crawl.

Lucian's fist flew out, hitting Edmund square in the stomach. The sound of his knuckles connecting with Edmund's flesh was a satisfying thud, a sound that made his heart sing with joy.

Lucian stormed toward Celine, grabbing her arm and pulling her behind him, "The next time you allow another man to hide under your skirt, we are done."

"What? What do you mean... done?" she asked, skipping along beside him, a gleam in her eyes, "Could it be... Are you...Jealous?"

"Disgusted," Lucian corrected her, shielding her with his body as he faced Edmund again, who was now rubbing his stomach, "He just implied he is in love with his sister. Is that normal for high society?"

Edmund made a strangled sound, something between a laugh and a cough. "She is my twin. She is the other half of my soul. My love for her is not something that you, with your...simple upbringing, could possibly understand."

"Simplicity is not a disease," Lucian shot back. "But what you just described sounds like one."

Celine peeked over his shoulder, her chin resting on the crook of Lucian's neck, "He is just trying to scare you. If he wanted you dead, do you think he would have warned you first? But really, did you just hit a Rochefort?"

"I have you on my side, don't I?" Lucian asked, "If I die, at least you will know who to suspect first."

"Ooh..." Celine hummed in agreement.

Edmund took a step back, raising his hands in mock surrender, "I would never harm my sister's choice. I was simply...testing your character. And you passed. You are a man of action, not just words. I approve."

It was hard to tell if Edmund was being genuine or not. Which one was real? The frightened child or a cunning manipulator?

"All the Rocheforts go through rigorous training," Celine explained to Lucian, "Even the weakest one among them can deceive the most perceptive of people. Just because he fails to do his duties as the heir doesn't mean he lacks the skills. He lacks the will."

"You speak as if I'm not in the room," Edmund said, straightening his back, "Nobody wants to be a third wheel in their own home. I don't want to cover up for you both without getting something in return. I want to have a life, too. I want to try the commoner's life for a few days without being recognized."

Celine pointed at Lucian, "He is hiring people all the time. I am sure he can find a place for you. Food, accommodations, the whole package."

Lucian looked from the future Duke to Celine, "I only hire people who are skilled. Does he have any skills? Other than hiding under his sister's dress?" The last part was said in a sour tone, still annoyed at the situation.

"I can cut my wig and dye it," Celine offered, swinging Lucian's arm in a 'grant me my wish, please' kind of motion.

The siblings asked Lucian for assistance. It wouldn't be possible without his help. He had to agree.

They began to pace around the library, discussing their plan.

"What does a commoner do for fun?" Edmund asked, smiling with curiosity.

"They don't hide under their sister's skirts," Lucian said.

A fist flew out, but it wasn't Lucian's. It was Edmund's. It connected with Lucian's stomach. The force of the blow caused him to fly backward into the wall of books, knocking them off the shelves.

"They also seem to love punching people," Edmund said after he returned the punch, "And I'm starting to see why. It's quite...liberating."

Chapter 53: 2.38: Common Cure For Bruises

The air was forced out of Lucian's lungs as he fell to the floor. He gasped for breath and clutched his stomach in pain.

His body felt like it was going to crumble under its weight, but he endured it. He didn't want to look weak in front of Celine, but the contrast between their strength was too big to ignore.

As expected of another Rochefort. They were a crazy lot. But this was a different kind of crazy.

He lifted his gaze to see a faint glow of Edmund's skin fade away. Someone had gone through the knight training and already reached the gold rank it seemed.

Celine's reaction was more on the "cold" side than "scared for Lucian's safety" side.

She grabbed Edmund by the ear and pulled, "Before my eyes go blind from the amount of stupidity you possess in your head, apologize and ask him for forgiveness."

Edmund tried to pull himself free, but it was no use. "But he hit me first!"

"I would have hit you too if he didn't get ahead of me," Celine replied, squeezing harder, "If mother found out you were hiding under my skirt, I would be the one on the ground coughing up blood."

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry," Edmund apologized, rubbing his ear as Celine released her grip.

"So it's not an occurring thing?" Lucian asked, referring to Edmund hiding under Celine's skirt.

"It's the first and last time," Edmund swore with his right hand raised, "I'm sorry, I overreacted."

"Don't apologize. It sounds strange for a noble to apologize to a commoner," Lucian said as Celine helped him stand up, "I'm sorry, too. I shouldn't have hit you in the first place."

Edmund frowned at Lucian's words, "Why does your apology sound so familiar? Did she teach you that?"

Lucian glanced at Celine, adjusting his answer to her expression, "Maybe... I don't remember."

He didn't remember Celine teaching him how to apologize, the opposite. From Edmund's reaction, she probably passed on Lucian's words to her brother.

It was a strange situation, to see the duke's children acting so casually around him, without any regard to their rank or status. Did they treat this as a game?

Just like that. They made up faster than his parents would after fighting over who loved the other more.

Celine clearly wanted to bridge the gap between their worlds. She saw it as a puddle she could easily jump over. But Lucian saw it for what it was. A chasm that could swallow them whole if they were not careful.

"Now go to mother before she sends the guards to look for you," Celine said, sending her brother away. She then turned to the cabinet with first-aid supplies, "Sit down, let's treat that wound."

Lucian sat on the sofa, and she took a chair and placed it in front of him. Her eyes were fixed on his stomach as she rolled up his shirt to reveal the bruise.

"...Someone had been training, huh?" she muttered to herself, "No wonder you are throwing punches like you own the world. Since when were you a brawler, hm?"

"..." Lucian hissed in pain as she put ointment on his stomach, his cheeks feeling a bit hot. "Shouldn't you be worried? I'm hurt, you know."

He noticed a split second of hesitation in her hand, followed by a moment of silence, before she answered him, "Would worrying help the pain go away? If not, I might as well help you recover faster."

Lucian faked a sob, trying to get some pity out of her, "I believe a kiss will make the pain go away faster. It's a common cure for your beloved's bruises, you know."

Celine looked up at him, her gaze softening a bit, "Is it?"

A few days later...

Edmund exceeded Lucian's expectations in terms of talent.

Under the new identity (another Lucian Arclight), Edmund's grasp of Lucian's business and methods was impressive, and he was already starting to make his own decisions, showing his leadership skills in coming up with a new perfume line inside Lucian's workshop.

Lucian sulked above his desk, writing down the numbers that the boy gave him.

'I'm being replaced by a newcomer that has no experience whatsoever,' Lucian thought to himself. The thought was so depressing that if he had a tail, it would be lifelessly hanging down.

"What's wrong?" Edmund asked, noticing Lucian's gloomy expression, "Did I do something wrong?"

"..." Lucian looked at him for a moment, before shaking his head. "Is the job I give you too easy?" he asked instead of answering the question. He was not used to having the smartest person in the room not being him, "You can tell me if you're bored."

"Huh? What are you talking about?" Edmund questioned, fixing his commoner's attire, "It's relaxing to work like this. It's simple. I just do what I am told, and I'm done for the day. I wish I could stay here forever, to be honest. How about you take over the Rochefort family and I become Lucian like the others?" he asked jokingly.

"Is being a Rochefort that troublesome?" Lucian asked, thinking of Celine. They had a strange freedom to come and go as they pleased. It certainly didn't seem like it was that bad.

"I don't know how much information my sister shared with you, but I'll tell you one thing," Edmund said, leaning in closer, "Learning the way of a commoner is more of a survival lesson than an escape from the real world, Lucian."

That's when Lucian started to take notice of the way the boy carried himself, the way he walked, the way he talked. The subtle mannerisms that marked Edmund as a noble have been slowly disappearing over the past month. He was a fast learner, and he was picking up on the customs of his surroundings.

Edmund wasn't here for an incognito holiday. He was here to learn how to blend in with the masses, by himself and with no support, like a commoner, not as a noble with a bodyguard.

Edmund's stomach grumbled at that moment, and the both of them turned their attention to it.

"I'm also hungry, so let's go get something to eat," Lucian said, standing up from his seat, "Or is the food too low quality for your taste?" he asked when Edmund remained seated.

"Hunger is a distraction, a distraction is a weakness, a weakness is a mistake, a mistake can cost your life," Edmund mumbled to himself, probably quoting some family teachings, "I'm good. You can go."

Chapter 54: 2.39: The Duke's Daughter Bedroom

"...Is that what Celine is also taught at home?" Lucian asked.

Edmund paused before nodding, "She can make her stomach shut up on command, unlike mine."

'Why didn't she ever tell me that?' Lucian thought. He always assumed she was living a luxurious life. *'No wonder her temper is so short. Her hunger must be making her cranky.'*

Lucian didn't force Edmund to come with him, but instead went out and purchased a meal from the inn, which he ate in front of him (sausages, cheese, bread).

"...you evil person," Edmund mumbled under his breath, watching him eat, "Gluttony is a sign of a weak character...Self-control is the basis of a strong mind..."

"Gluttony?" Lucian asked, taking a bite out of a sausage, "I'm just enjoying the food that's available to me. Would it be better to just throw it away?"

"...I know what you are trying to do, and it's working," Edmund finally snapped, "Give me one."

Lucian offered him his plate.

Edmund grabbed a sausage and a piece of bread. He ate them quickly and quietly, trying to hide the fact that he was enjoying his meal, "I'm just eating this to keep my strength up."

"They are the tastiest in the area," Lucian took another bite, "I was told that these sausages are made with meat that's marinated in red wine for days."

"..." Edmund choked on the next bite of bread, "Wine...? There's alcohol in this?"

"Just a little," Lucian said, "It evaporates after a while."

Edmund drank some water, and his eyes narrowed, "I'm not allowed to drink alcohol. It dulls the senses."

"..." Lucian's mouth twitched as he looked at the sausage, "And the cheese?"

"I can eat cheese," Edmund said, reaching for the plate of sliced cheese on the table. He ate one slice and then another, "What are you looking at? You are not going to eat?"

Lucian took a piece of cheese and ate it. He was starting to doubt if Edmund knew how to have fun. Her brother was a complete opposite of Celine, who would drag him to do the craziest stuff.

Edmund would show up for a few days, using Lucian's distribution wagons as a way of transportation, hiding his traces, before leaving again. Nobody questioned his whereabouts since Lucian's people were known for traveling around.

Edmund was building a second identity for himself, and Lucian provided the necessary means to do so.

His little brother in law to be was not one to let his debts go unpaid, and would help Lucian in return, by delivering gifts and letters to his sister.

From what Lucian heard, Celine was busy. Very busy. So busy, she rejected a few meetings and was close to being disowned by her father (the duke).

What was that girl up to this time?

Whatever she was up to...

'Did I ever mention that she is crazy?'

Lucian wiped the sweat off his forehead as he lifted the metal structure of the crinoline, crawling from under Celine's skirt. The attempt to sneak into her room was close to his sanity.

Celine locked the door to her room with a click, "Now, no one can bother us," she grinned, raising her hands and wiggling her fingers in an attempt to look scary, "It's just the two of us. No escape."

She made him feel like he had just walked into a spider's nest, and the spider was currently ogling him out, deciding where to start eating.

"Help," Lucian teased with a smile on his face, "I don't want to become a father yet—ouch!"

"Do I look that desperate to you?" She stepped on his bottom, stopping him from trying to crawl away, "I'm not one of those women who have to give birth to keep their husbands. If you are so afraid, I'll just get you a chastity belt. How about that?"

"What's a chastity belt?" Lucian wondered, turning his head slightly to look up at her, not really bothered by her attack, "And why do I have a feeling I don't want to find out?"

She looked stunning even from this angle. Her cheeks were rosy from the cold weather outside, but her eyes were shining brightly. She didn't look desperate to him at all. Just excited to see him. Too excited, probably.

"Just as the name suggests," she explained, stepping over his body and motioning for him to help her with the dress.

Her handmaiden should be the one doing this, but she acted angry and sent her away, just so they could have some time alone.

Celine stopped before her mirror, "A chastity belt is an undergarment that protects a person's virtue."

Lucian scrambled to his feet and began unclasping her dress, "That sounds useful..." he mumbled.

"Doesn't it?" she smiled, lifting her arms to help him, and looking at his face in the mirror, "I should get us a pair."

"Okay," he agreed, his fingers trembling in excitement. "You should definitely do that. Definitely."

Once the large metal crinoline fell to the ground, he helped her out of the outer skirt, the inner skirt, and the bodice (looks a bit like a corset but is less restrictive).

Her legs were covered in a pair of white stockings, which were fastened above the knees with garters. Her undergarments consisted of a pair of drawers, which were tied at the waist with a string, and a long-sleeved shirt.

In Lucian's eyes, she still had a lot of clothes on, while Celine took it as him already seeing her half-naked.

The word shy wasn't in their vocabulary, but they were blushing like ripe apples. Not because they were embarrassed, but because it felt like a milestone in their relationship.

Lucian helped her fold the clothes and placed them on the nearby couch, then roamed around her place.

Her room was as big as the whole floor of his store in the city.

It had a large, canopied bed in the middle, with a dressing table on the left side of the room, and a vanity table on the right. The room was decorated in shades of blue, giving it a cool and calming effect, and there was a door leading to her private bathroom.

She also had a private study room and a library, which was adjacent to her bedroom.

Her closet was bigger than his office.

What more, this girl even had her own art studio!

Chapter 55: 2.40: You Need Some Beauty Sleep

Celine dropped on her bed, watching Lucian move around the room and examine everything. She didn't stop him, nor was she surprised by his behavior, "Shouldn't I be the center of your attention?"

"You are," he said, opening her drawers and peeking inside, "Everything around you is a part of you..." he paused, looking for the right words, "so I'm paying attention to the whole you."

"..." Celine rolled on her stomach toward the headboard, hiding her smile in a pillow. She kicked her legs in the air, her toes curling inside her stockings, and wiggled her butt like a happy pup. It was surprising she wasn't jumping around him like one.

Lucian continued to look around, finding a haircomb with a wooden handle on the dresser. He picked it up, and the next thing she knew, he was sitting on the bed behind her, brushing her hair.

"Why do I feel like you are treating me as a dog?" Celine mumbled as he removed the pins from her hair and untangled the knots, "An abandoned dog at that."

"..." Lucian's hands froze for a moment, and his cheeks flushed, "Why would you even mention that?"

She shrugged her shoulders, "You like attention and are very demanding of it," she pointed out, "that's why you started to roam around my room, playing hard to get, expecting me to chase after you like I want to get adopted. It's the same thing."

"Stop analyzing me," Lucian slapped her bottom with the back of the hairbrush, then he went back to brushing her hair. "And I'm not demanding of your attention."

He was just starved of it, and it seemed like he wasn't the only one.

Celine purred, melting into the bed, the soft rhythm of the haircomb through her hair lulling her into a state of bliss.

"Don't fall asleep, My Lady, you have a guest," he placed the comb aside and laid on top of her, wrapping his arms around her waist from behind.

"Make yourself feel at home, why don't you?" She turned her head to the side and his cheek rested next to hers.

Lucian kissed her cheek, "Make me feel welcome, Celine."

"You never made me feel welcome at your place," she complained, "Always chasing me away."

"Hey, it happened such a long time ago," he tightened his hold on her and buried his face in her neck, "Don't you have anything else to remember, aside from all the bad things I've done? Like all the time I cheered you up when you felt down?"

She snorted, "I cheered myself up. You were there just to witness my glory."

"..." Lucian bit her neck lightly. Well it's true that she always invaded his space like a stray dog, but he was the one who'd always end up petting her, giving her a treat, and letting her stay. The treat being himself, obviously.

"I could sleep like this," Celine mumbled, "You are a good blanket."

"You are a good bed," Lucian complimented her back. "Sleep if you want to. I will watch over you," he said, "When you wake up, I want you to play with me though."

Celine rolled around, wrapping her arms around his neck, "You should also do something with your eye bags, Lucian. They are so dark I can see my face in them."

"Maybe I'll steal some of your beauty sleep then."

"Mn," Celine agreed with her eyes closed, "I have enough beauty to share."

"..." Lucian caressed her back, waiting for her to fall asleep, but then her voice broke the silence again.

"Lucian," she called.

"Yes?"

"...I love you," she said, her grip on him tightened, and Lucian felt his chest tighten as well.

"Me too," he said, and she looked up at him, her eyes round and cute. He grinned at her, "I love myself too."

Celine's face fell, and she slapped him across his back, "You jerk," she hissed, "I hate you."

Lucian chuckled, "That's not what you've just told me."

"I take it back."

"Go ahead, your confessions need some work," he agreed, kissing away the frown between her eyebrows, "But you can always practice on me. I'll be happy to listen to all of them."

She pounced on his neck, her teeth scraping on the skin, "I want to hear it."

Lucian gave her more room, tilting his head back, and sighing when she started to suck.

He closed his eyes, indulging in the feeling of her warm mouth and wet lips. The slight pain from the bite only heightened the sensation, and he was soon drowning in it.

"Say it," she ordered.

"I don't want to. You always wrap my words and twist them to your liking," Lucian refused playfully.

"Because you always speak nonsense," she murmured, "I have to make sense of them."

Lucian chuckled and turned his head, catching her lips with his own. Something must be making sense if she kept on returning to him. And if not, he would make sure to make his point clear. Again, and again, and again... not with his words, but his body and soul instead.

"Are you still planning to sleep?" Lucian asked when Celine continued to leave marks on his neck, "You don't seem that sleepy anymore."

She saw his eyes and placed his head on her chest, "Mn, let me sleep some more. I'm tired," she said and closed her eyes.

"Do I look that tired?" Lucian wondered out loud.

"You do," Celine said and then smiled, "But it's alright. I like it when you look like a corpse too."

"..." Lucian squeezed her tightly, his fingers digging into her sides. "Are you worried about me?" he asked, his voice soft, and she shook her head, her arms tightening around him, "I'm not going to die from lack of sleep and exhaustion, Celine. I have enough energy to keep you entertained for the whole night, and then some more."

She snored in response and Lucian almost lost it. "..." He had no choice but to close his eyes.

He listened to her breathing, and the sound of his heartbeat. There were some lewd images dancing in his mind, and instead of pushing them away, he made them run wilder and hotter.

'I need to practice more,' he thought, his mind in full imagination mode. He had to satisfy his hungry little wife. *'It's all for Celine. I need to do my best.'*

The poor girl did not know what was coming for her, the addiction to the new desires he was going to awake, and the sweet, sweet doom he was going to bring to her life.

Chapter 56: 3.01: Too Busy! No Time!

'Too busy. Too busy. I'm too busy!'

Lucian's mind screamed, but his mouth only managed a tight, forced smile.

"Boss, there have been complaints about our perfumes causing skin rashes," a manager of his shop tried to speak softly, but the worry made his voice crack.

"Goblin's greenhouse's structure has been showing signs of water leakage," Jax added, passing on a report from Goblin and Fishbone. "The trade route to the southern alliance has been blockaded by a rivaling merchant guild. Our supply lines have been severed."

One complaint after another fell upon Lucian's ears as he packed his suitcase. He grabbed his cane by his bed and headed for the door, "Get the carriage ready. I'll be taking a personal look at each one. Starting with the complaints. The customers come first."

He left his office and headed to the store front.

"Poison! This is poison!" A portly merchant slammed a crystal vial on the ground, "My daughter's skin is covered in welts! She used this 'Whispering Lilac' nonsense once! Once!"

Behind him, a queue of unhappy customers had formed, throwing bottles and curses at Lucian.

Lucian stepped forward to address the man who had spoken first. "I apologize for the inconvenience caused by our product, sir. Please allow me to compensate you for your troubles."

He then turned to the staff, "Write down the names and addresses of the affected customers. Also, gather all of the Whispering Lilac products back for testing. The latest batch must have been tampered with."

He then turned to the manager, "Give me the names of people in charge of the latest batch's production."

The manager nodded and left to get the names of the workers.

Lucian then turned to the crowd, "Please be patient with us while we investigate the issue. For now, we will provide you with free treatment at our expense, a doctor is on the way. Again, I apologize for any discomfort."

After calming down the crowd, Lucian entered a carriage that was waiting outside.

Inside the carriage, he sat down and leaned back against the seat, "Summon Fishbone and Roland to meet us at the borders of the Southern Alliance."

Jax passed on the message to the rest of the group.

Only Lucian's gardeners seemed to be doing alright, as none of the nobles had complained about the greenhouses and landscaping so far.

'Her eighteenth birthday is coming up soon,' Lucian mused to himself, *'I need to make sure I'm free that day.'*

The thought of Celine's birthday brought a smile to his lips. He couldn't wait to see her again.

Leaf had been planting a new type of tree that will help them with the production of new material.

Lucian's wealth had tripled, but his workload had also increased, which was contrary to what he had planned. He had no time to spend with his little wife, at all!

From all the people he hired, there were only two new ones who proved to be reliable: Cansan and Loran.

He stumbled upon Cansan, son of a minor nobleman, who had disowned him for eloping with his maid and marrying her. He was an intelligent young man who could

manage accounts, and mainly, he was the best negotiator Lucian could get his hands on.

Loran was a talented alchemist in charge of uncovering hidden potential of various plants. His eccentric personality made it difficult for him to fit in with others, but he was a genius in his own right.

The walking cane Lucian was holding was one of Loran's latest results. It could easily break a skull without a trace of the damage being visible on the cane. Not only was it an instrument of self-defense, but it also helped with the image of a successful businessman.

He traveled days, dealing with the complaints as they came, visiting every greenhouse to check if there were any problems with them. It took him a while to deal with everything, but he managed.

On his way to Stonetomb City, Lucian made a detour to one of the Viscount's houses located in Duremont' duchy near the border.

The Viscount had commissioned Lucian to build a greenhouse, and he was currently overseeing the project. He changed into his gardening robe just in case he needed to get his hands dirty.

The guards at the gates let him pass after seeing his badge, and Lucian walked through the garden toward the building site.

"Mr. Bunny, come back!" a girl's voice echoed from behind him.

Lucian raised his leg to avoid a fluffy ball of fur running in between his legs.

"Ah!" a girl's scream came next, and a pink head fell face-first into Lucian's chest.

Out of nowhere, Lucian found himself on the ground with a female on top of him.

"Oh no, oh no, I'm so sorry!" She latched onto his clothes, her hand grabbing onto his cheap shirt as she tried to stand up.

Lucian grunted as she pulled on his clothes, and a few buttons of his shirt popped off, leaving his chest bare.

"..." Lucian grabbed her shoulders, and before he could shove the girl away, a familiar feeling of being watched washed over him.

His head snapped to the left, and his eyes met Celine's as she appeared in the garden, with Viscount's two daughters by her side.

She had the biggest and the blackest 'What the hell is happening?' face Lucian had ever seen.

"..." Lucian quickly pushed the girl off him, and stood up, fixing his shirt as he did so.

The girls by Celine's side giggled like they couldn't believe their luck to witness such a scandalous scene. "She arrived only yesterday and is already seducing men in broad daylight? How shameless."

"Look, she even ruined his shirt! She must have been trying to take off his clothes," the other one said, looking at the girl's disheveled state, "Disgusting. Just wait until father finds out about this."

"I...it's not what it looks like," the girl tried to explain as she scrambled to get up, "He...he just appeared in front of me! I didn't see him!"

Lucian walked over to greet Celine, but stopped when he realized they had no relationship in public.

Noticing his hesitation, Celine took a step back before she walked away.

The girls by her side snickered and followed after her, "A gardener and a whore's daughter. How fitting."

Chapter 57: 3.02: An Excuse To Be Closer To Each Other

"What did you just say?" Celine stopped mid-retreat, turning so slowly that the two girls flanking her flinched. "Good fit? He makes more money in a month than your father in a year. Are you implying the whore's daughter has better chances at success than you two?"

A warm, fuzzy feeling settled in Lucian's stomach at her words, and he couldn't help but chuckle, "Thank you for defending my honor, My Lady," he bowed his head to her, then turned to the other two ladies, "Please, let us not fight. I'm here on official business, not to cause a scandal. I'll take my leave now."

The girls' giggles died in their throats when they saw a few servants and workers bow to Lucian as he passed by, confirming his status.

"We're sorry, Mr. Arclight! We didn't recognize you!" They curtsied, their cheeks red. They followed him with their eyes, before turning to glare at the pink-haired girl, "Why are you still standing there like a fool? Go fetch the tea!"

"..." the pink haired girl nodded and ran off to the kitchen.

The three girls moved to a gazebo near the construction of the greenhouse, where the servants had set up a table and chairs.

Lucian could hardly focus on his work as he could hear the Viscount's daughters bullying the pink-haired girl.

"This tea tastes like dirty water. Make a new pot."

"Where are the biscuits I asked for?"

"My cup is dirty, clean it."

Lucian wasn't a fan of bullying or harassment, and Celine knew it. She didn't stop the Viscount's daughters from being cruel to the poor thing and even smiled from time to time.

Lucian walked over to the gazebo, and the girls quieted down, turning to look at him.

"May I join you ladies for a cup of tea?" he asked, smiling at them.

The Viscount's daughters frowned at him, it was obvious he was here to rescue the pink-haired girl from their clutches, but what could they say to refuse him?

They had to be nice to him since he was doing work for their father.

"Of course, Mr. Arclight, please sit," the older of the two said, gesturing to an empty chair.

Lucian took a seat and noticed Celine's smile widen a little. He could tell she was amused by his reaction to their bullying, and even dropped her spoon on purpose so the pink-haired girl had to pick it up.

Lucian gave her a look of disapproval as he picked up the spoon, "You don't seem to have a good grip on your cutlery, My Lady," he said, handing it back to her.

"Mm, I'm second guessing my grip on a lot of things," Celine replied, looking at her hand, "It seems like I can't keep anything to myself."

"..." Lucian would have liked nothing more than to hold her and kiss her until her worries melted away, but the situation was not ideal.

The girls at her side giggled at her response, thinking Celine was finding a good excuse to drop more stuff and have the pink-haired girl pick them up.

"Is this the new way of having fun among young women?" Lucian asked, adding sugar to his cup, "Picking on those weaker than you?"

The girls exchanged glances, looking at Celine for guidance, and she merely looked at her manicure and answered in their place, "Yes. A very popular thing to do these days. Would you like to take her place, Mr. Arclight? You seem eager to."

"I would much rather take a stand in stopping it," Lucian replied, stirring his tea with a spoon, "but I don't want to impose on your fun, after all, so if you want me to take her place, I can't say no to you, My Lady."

The girls gasped, not expecting him to go along with it. They thought he was just a goody-two-shoes who wanted to ruin their fun, but now he was willing to take the girl's place and be bullied instead? Who was that whore's daughter to have a man who was willing to do that for her?!

The pink haired girl also had her eyes wide open. Her cheeks reddened as she looked at Lucian, "You don't have to do that, sir. I can handle it," she said softly.

Lucian smiled at her gently, "It's alright. I don't mind."

Who was he trying to fool with this chivalry act? He just wanted an excuse to be closer to Celine.

Everyone was eating it up except Celine, who seemed to be enjoying a private joke.

"Fan me then, Mr. Arclight," Celine said, passing him her hand fan, "I feel hot."

Lucian took the fan from her hand and started to wave it back and forth, creating a nice breeze for her.

The Viscount's daughters stopped with the harsh treatment of the pink haired girl and began to focus on Lucian instead.

"Mr. Arclight, I'm also feeling hot," the older one said, batting her eyelashes.

"Fan me too," the younger one said, handing him her fan as well. "I'm feeling faint," she added.

Lucian chuckled helplessly, "I'm afraid I'm only capable of fanning one person at a time. You wouldn't want me to neglect your esteemed guest, would you?"

The girls reluctantly accepted his refusal. On one side, there was a person of power and influence (Celine), and on the other side there was a nobody living off a man's favor (pink haired girl).

Celine studied the pink haired girl, making the girl shift in her seat uncomfortably. The girl seemed to want to hide somewhere, anywhere, but under Celine's gaze.

Lucian moved the fan to obscure her view of the girl, "What do you think of my fan technique, My Lady?"

"It's lacking," Celine said, reaching for a pastry. As she did, the tip of her fingers brushed against his knuckles on the table briefly.

It was enough to make his heart skip a beat, but not enough to show on his face.

"I'm not feeling any better," Celine continued, "Do you want me to die from overheating?"

'She's actually bullying me!' Lucian thought. It was the first time they had seen each other in months, and she was already picking on him. The little snot.

'If she is so hot, I can help with undressing her later,' he thought, and the idea made him feel a little bit hotter too.

Chapter 58: 3.03: It's Over

"Lady Celine, we are all set to go," one of her servants announced, entering the gazebo.

'Is she leaving already?' Lucian thought to himself. They had barely spoken, and he was already missing her.

Celine took her fan from him, saying her farewell to the Viscount's daughters, and walked away.

Lucian couldn't just let her go like that, not without at least a proper goodbye. So he got up from his seat and also excused himself.

He watched how she entered the carriage from afar, admiring the sight. It was rare to see her put on such an elegant display. She looked like a proper lady now, with all the poise and grace that came with it.

'Next time...' he thought to himself.

"Mr. Arclight," the pink-haired girl approached him shyly, "I want to thank you for standing up for me."

"It was nothing," he said, not looking at her, "I would have done it for anyone. There was nothing personal about it."

He left the girl there, and went back to work, not wanting to waste any more time.

What Lucian didn't expect was to be caught in another scandalous situation by Celine again.

One of Jax's women had tried to make a move on him, and Celine just had to catch him dragging the woman out of the inn room where he was staying.

Celine seemed to be traveling in the same direction as him and they would run into each other often.

Lucian leaned over his inn window to see hers closed and the curtains shut. "..."

Lucian's mood was at an all-time low as random girls kept on trying to get close to him, trying to start something he wasn't interested in. And of course, Celine had to witness it all, and it only made him look even worse in her eyes.

'It's over,' Celine said to him one day when he waited for her to open her inn window. 'We're done.'

She had given him his freedom back.

He was a free man again.

"..." He really didn't want his freedom back though.

Sitting on his bed, Lucian scratched his scalp, his feet tapping on the floor. He was frustrated. Angry, even. He wanted to break something. To scream. To punch a wall. To cry.

'She can't just end it like that.'

His eyes were open wide in denial. He refused to believe that it was over. That he had lost her.

'She'll come around.'

'She always does.'

'She's probably just angry.'

'She'll get over it.'

'She loves me.'

'And I love her too.'

'She can't just throw it all away. Just like that.'

'No way...'

He didn't notice that he had already hit the wooden frame of his bed, until his fist started to ache. The frame was cracked, splintered, and there were a few drops of blood on it. His blood.

"..." Lucian stared at his fist for a moment, before wiping away the blood on his pants. He was still wearing the same clothes as the day before. The same shirt and pants he had worn when they had last spoken.

"Boss?" Goblin asked from behind the door, "A new shipment of wood has arrived, do you want to take a look at it?"

'Right, there's still work to do,' Lucian shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts. "I'll be right out," he replied.

'No time for self-pity,' Lucian stood up and washed his face, *'I have a business to run.'*

The constant ache in his chest was hard to ignore, but there was still a small hope in him that everything would go back to how it was.

'Maybe it's a test? To see if I'll take advantage of my freedom and do something stupid, or if I'll stay faithful to her?'

'She probably regrets it by now,' he thought, *'It must be killing her to keep her distance from me.'*

'I should just play along with her. Let her think I'm happy without her.'

'She'll come back soon enough.'

'Yeah, that's what I'll do. I'll ignore her, and she'll come running back.'

Lucian waited, and waited, and waited.

Days and nights passed, and no invitation for a birthday party came from the Rochefort's household.

He tried to contact Edmund to see how his sister was doing, and Edmund agreed to meet him.

Lucian washed himself thoroughly, and dressed in his best clothes, making sure his hair was combed and his teeth were clean.

"Long time no see," Edmund greeted him with a smile, motioning for him to sit inside his office, "How have you been?"

"Great, and yourself?" Lucian replied, trying not to seem too eager.

"Not so great," Edmund sighed, flipping the family seal in between his fingers, "Listening to your sister calling herself a dog in heat and hating herself for it... it's so painful to listen to... I want to crush your bones into dust for it, but it's not your fault she has bad taste. It's mine for not being able to protect her from it," he admitted, a hint of sadness in his eyes.

Lucian bit the insides of his mouth and held his breath, the words 'a dog in heat' echoed in his mind, over and over again. Did the women coming after him reminded her of herself? Was she disgusted with herself?

"Why is she telling it to you instead of me?" Lucian asked, unable to hide the bitterness in his voice.

Edmund didn't respond, keeping his gaze fixed on the seal, his fingers still playing with it, "I don't know. The only time she shares her thoughts is to trick people or get her way. I see you as my friend Lucian, and she knows it. Ah...no wonder. She is using me to get to you," he shook his head.

"Get to me?" Lucian looked at him, confused.

"Isn't it obvious?" Edmund asked, his smile widening, "She is playing hard to get. She wants to drive you crazy, so you would chase her, beg her to come back, maybe even kneel and cry."

"..." Lucian blinked and then blinked again, "Why would she want me to do that when she has you at her beck and call?"

"..." Edmund's smile stiffened and then disappeared, "I really hate the fact that you are not wrong."

"Let's grab a drink?" Lucian suggested, "I need something to wash away the guilt."

"Yes," Edmund said, "I need to get wasted and forget about my sister's existence for a bit. Let's go."

And they did go.

They entered a winery inside the estate's premises, showed a few bottles into a bag and returned to the office.

Chapter 59: 3.04: Brother In-Law To Be

"Do you want to know why I dislike women?" Edmund asked, his eyes unfocused, "It's because they always pretend to be innocent, but they are not. They smile at you, but they are not happy. They cry when they want to, but they don't mean it...They lie, Lucian. They all do."

"..." Lucian took a sip from the bottle, "You are just describing Celine," he pointed out, "Not all the women are like that, you know? There are some that are honest, caring, and genuine. If you want, I can introduce you to someone."

"Okay," Edmund said, his head dropping to the side, and then back up again, "I'll take a look, she better not be like my sister. I still don't trust your judgment. It's like you have a devil fetish or something...and I'm not into that."

"..." Lucian moved his finger from right to left in disagreement, "Celine is the most amazing creature in the world. She is the... queen of my heart, and the ruler of my world. Anyone who can't see that is blind and deserves to have their eyes plucked out."

"..." Edmund looked at Lucian, and then at the wine, and then at Lucian again, "I'm not drunk enough to deal with this."

He took a few big gulps and then coughed, his eyes watering.

'Everyone is making fun of her behind her back, but they can't even reach the sole of her shoe.'

Lucian chuckled to himself, his head slightly falling backward.

'Cowards that are afraid to face the devil, yet still dare to speak ill of it. And then, they get surprised when it comes knocking on their door.'

'Why am I even angry?' he thought to himself, 'I've always known this was going to happen... I should have enjoyed the time we had together while it lasted.'

'Are you just going to accept it?' Voice questioned.

'Nobody said it,' Lucian answered, *'I can just wait until she is at her lowest and then swoop in to save the day. That's how she got me, didn't she? Through dependency and vulnerability...'*

"..." Edmund wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, "I'm quite popular with ladies myself, you know? I have a few admirers that send me letters and gifts."

"That's nice," Lucian said, "Good for you."

"I'm not a virgin," Edmund said, his voice lowering a pitch as if trying to appear more manly, "My first time was with my personal maid, and we still do it from time to time. When I have the urge for it."

"..." Lucian blinked, taken aback by the information that came out of nowhere, "Does Celine know about this?"

"I tell her everything I do," Edmund said, his cheeks flushing, "She is the one who tells the maids to wash themselves thoroughly before serving me. She also told me that if I don't want to sire bastards, I should wear protection and not spill my seed in them. She is too young to be an aunt, she said. Also..."

"..." Lucian's eye twitched, "...Also?"

Edmund's smile became smug, and he leaned over his desk, his breath smelling of alcohol, "You must be experienced in the matter since you are so good with women. Tell me, do you have a preference in the position?"

"..." Lucian didn't know what to say, he wasn't sure if he wanted to answer or if he should just ignore him. "I don't know...I haven't done it yet."

Edmund's mouth dropped, "Don't tell me you are saving yourself for Celine. Who's going to believe that a man like you is still pure? Are you trying to make me look bad here? I won't fall for it."

"..." Lucian sighed, running a hand through his hair. He never had this type of talk with anyone, and he definitely didn't want to share his intimate details with his brother-in-law to be. It was awkward enough as it was, "I'm not really that interested in that kind of thing..."

It was true. They never went beyond cuddling just to test their self control and have a laugh at their bodies reactions. Celine was not ready for more, and he respected that.

Edmund's mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water, "...are you really a virgin?"

"Yes," Lucian said, "So what? It's not like I'm going to die if I don't do it."

"..." Edmund leaned in closer, "Do you have the right equipment down there?"

"..." Lucian gave him a deadpan stare, "I'm not an animal that needs to be checked for breeding potential."

"Ugh, why are you talking like Celine out of a sudden?" Edmund grimaced, taking another sip from his bottle, "I just can't see you as a virgin. You don't act like one, don't speak like one, and definitely don't look like one. I was so sure you had some experience already. Just look at how you are holding that bottle. Do you know how many men would kill to have your charisma?"

"Would you like some tips?" Lucian asked. He wondered if Celine viewed him in the same light as her brother.

She usually acted like he was her property to do whatever she pleased with, not someone she admired or looked up to. He, on the other hand, usually treated her like a puppy, and it was a miracle she hadn't bit off his hand yet.

Edmund's eyes lit up, "Finally a man I can talk to. It's like I only have a sister and mother, and I can't talk about these things with them, right?"

"Right," Lucian chuckled, not expecting his offer to be taken seriously, "Instead of focusing on how to sit right, imagine you are being surrounded by lions. No shaking or fidgeting. The lions around you can smell fear, so you have to look back at them like they are a bunch of kittens..."

"Got it," Edmund said, relaxing his posture, "How is this?"

"You are blinking too much," Lucian said.

Edmund took a deep breath, "It's a bit different from what I've been taught."

"How have you been taught?"

Edmund looked at his hands, trying to recall the lessons, "Fearless in the face of the enemy, confident in the face of danger, poised in the face of death. All that while you are being hit by a wooden stick. Over and over again until you are numb," he made a pause, "I didn't know I was supposed to relax."

"What teacher would fail to point that out?" Lucian asked like he knew what he was talking about, "That's the basics."

"A dead one," Edmund said and drank the rest of the bottle's contents, "I was supposed to kill him if I wanted to pass."

'Oh...' Lucian cleared his throat, "Well...that explains why he didn't correct you. Somebody else should have noticed though. Did no one ever tell you that? Like your father? Or your sister?"

Chapter 60: 3.05: I Prefer A Clingy One

"There's no correct way," Edmund replied, "As long as you have the desired effect on others. I have that effect, that's why no one bothered to tell me. I tried to copy you, but something was off. Maybe it's the way I sit?" he paused, looking at his posture, "I was taught to sit straight at all times, but you are slouching."

'Just enough to be comfortable,' Lucian checked himself through the bird's eye view. It gave an impression that he was not interested in fighting, but was also not afraid of it. Just a reminder, that if someone pushed him, he would push back.

Lucian found his brother in law to be quite tolerable, a person he could get along with.

Edmund's mother was currently busy making preparations for the birthday party, nobody had time to pay attention to the drunken heir except his sister.

Celine walked into the room and took a sniff of the air. "...". She walked around the room and opened all the windows, allowing fresh air to come in.

Lucian's heart skipped a beat. He was still in love with her, still wanted to be with her, and this was a great opportunity to get back together with her.

She gave Lucian a single glance before turning her attention to her brother.

"Celine..." Edmund grinned at his sister. He was sprawled across the desk, his face pressed against the wood, "Lucian promised to introduce me to honest and caring women..."

"..." Lucian wanted to knock himself out.

Edmund just had to mention how Celine was the queen and ruler of his world and heart, and how Lucian had no interest in other women.

But Edmund did the complete opposite of that, "A girl that is not you, Celine, not a devil. Mmh..."

"..." Celine didn't say anything, and her expression didn't change. She just pulled her brother up and dropped him on the floor before taking his seat. "Get out," she said, pointing at the door.

Lucian stood up and walked around the desk to help Edmund off the ground, and then assisted him to the sofa. He then sat back on his seat opposite of Celine.

She ignored him, her gaze focused on the paperwork in front of her.

"Do you need any help?" he asked.

"No," she said, not looking up.

Lucian shuffled his chair closer to the table and supported his cheek with his palm. "You look beautiful today," he said, "and every day."

She raised the papers and read them, obscuring his view of her face, "Get out now or I'll have you kicked out," she threatened.

"Your brother is drunk. He needs someone to take care of him," Lucian said, "I'm not leaving until he's sober enough to go home. I promised to watch over him."

"..." she didn't say anything, and he took that as a sign of her relenting.

For the next half an hour, he watched her work. It was torture for him, but it was also a sweet kind of torment. Her presence alone was enough to keep him going.

"I prefer a clingy Celine," Lucian said, crossing his arms on the table and laying his head on top of them, "She is cute when she is being needy," he said, letting his eyes fall to her hands.

The sound of the paper on paper was the only response he received.

"I like her when she is trying to annoy me. I like her even more when she is being selfish, and I like her when she is being greedy. I like her when she smiles, when she laughs, and I like it when she is being a little devil on my shoulder."

Celine put the papers down and signed them before moving to another stack. Her eyes were glistening with tears she was holding back, but she still kept a straight face and didn't show any sign of weakness, "That's an interesting way to let out your resentment after I ended our relationship. You must be feeling really good about yourself."

"...Why did you?" he asked, raising his head to look at her.

"Why did I what?"

"Why did you end it?"

"Even after all these years, you still expect our relationship to fail eventually, so why should I waste my time on it?"

"..." Lucian looked up at her, but she was already busy looking over a new document.

He waited for her to speak, but she didn't. Instead, she moved to another paper, and she opened her mouth to take a deep breath. Tears were clearly pooling in her eyes, but they refused to fall.

He outstretched his hand toward her, and she avoided the touch by pulling away. His hand froze in mid-air, and he curled his fingers into a fist, his knuckles turning white.

"There are plenty of others who will beg for your attention," she said, her voice cold, "Who will be jealous of anyone who gets a glance from you, who will smile at you no matter how horrible you are. Train them well, and you'll have your perfect woman."

Lucian let out a breath, "You have a point there," he said, "but you forgot one important fact."

"Which is?"

"That you are not replaceable."

"You mean replicable."

"..." Lucian fell silent for a moment, "Do you plan to replicate me?"

"That would be a crime against humanity."

"..." Lucian choked on his breath, "That was mean."

"But true."

"...I'll let that slide," Lucian said, trying to contain his laughter. It was good to see her playful again, and it meant that she was in a better mood, "I will start to hope more. I will stop waiting for the day when you leave me, alright?"

"..." Celine gave him a doubtful look. She knew him better than that. He wasn't going to change his views of the world just like that, not without a proper reason. She tried for years after all. He almost accepted their break up as well with no reaction to them (if only she knew how bad he had it a couple days ago).

He tiptoed his pointer and middle fingers on the desk, slowly getting closer to hers, giving her a chance to move away.

She did. On the last second before he touched her.

An irking feeling washed over him as he wiggled his fingers in a 'help me, I'm hurt' manner.

"My hand is lonely," he sulked, "It misses yours, and I can't do anything to help it," he looked at her from under his lashes, "I need you to save it."