Ignobility

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/5610589.

Rating: Explicit
Archive Warning: Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Underage
Fandom: Code Geass
Relationship: Everyone/Everyone
Character: Gilgamesh eu Britania
Additional Tags: all the sex, Self-Insert
Stats: Published: 2016-01-02 Updated: 2016-05-27 Chapters: 21/? Words: 60597

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Summary

You know that story where a good person is born into a bad position in life and they manage to resist the temptation to become just like everyone else? They rise up as a great hero or heroine, straining against the traditions that have corrupted so many others to become a paragon for others to aspire to. Finally, after so many trials, they emerge victorious and cut away the tumors that have rotted away society, eventually reforming the world into a beacon of light and hope?

That isn't this story.

This story is about a person, a person who remembers another life, but is born into a station of power, of wealth, and very little morality. Everyone likes to think that, when faced with the choice to do, as Albus Dumbledore said, "what is easy and what is right," that they'd take the right path, the harder choice, the moral choice in many cases. Most people, though, aren't made of the stuff of heroes or legends.

This story is about someone, me, choosing what is easy, rather than right.
Chapter 1

1.0

Her name was Zoe.

She was all of twelve years old, slightly tall for her age, but not even barely grown into her lithe form, but what curves she did have were a delightfully bronze shade she'd inherited from her ancestors. I think that was why I'd wanted her, originally at least. Her skin was utterly flawless, a beautiful expanse of dusky flesh that made my mouth water even before I'd been capable of sexual desire. Part of me, of course, knew what I was doing was wrong. I was taking advantage of a girl who couldn't comprehend the nature of the act she was committing, I was sullying her, dirtying her, and twisting her to my whims. There were days where I woke up, her warm body curled by my side, hating myself.

I tried to console my aching conscience, though.

I had, even at the beginning, more than two years ago now, explained with painstaking detail what I was asking of her, what I wanted from her. She'd looked at me with childish innocence as I'd showed her pictures, movies, and finally coaxed her out of her clothing to dance my fingers over her flushed skin. I'd taken her virginity before the night was out, leaving her a quivering mass after a half-dozen orgasms and utterly addicted to sex.

That was two years ago, when I'd been twelve and she'd been ten.

If we'd been a decade older apiece, no one would have looked askance at either of us. Even just five years added to each of our ages would have eased the strangeness of our relationship to onlookers. Granted, by all appearances, Zoe could probably pass for a child a year or two older, but then no one knew what I knew. I didn't have the excuse of immaturity or the stupidity of youth, because this wasn't my first rodeo.

In short, I'd lived a life before this one.

I'd lived a full, if relatively short, life, enough to be advantaged over people twice my age, much less those younger than me. When it came down to it, though, I wasn't the kind of person who resisted temptation. I enjoyed power, and power corrupts, sometimes to a frightening extent.
So, when it came down to it, I just didn't care enough.

Well, to be more precise, I cared more about getting off than I did about some abstract moral or ethical construct that said what I was doing was 'wrong.' I cared more about experiencing physical pleasure than I did about preserving children's innocence or virtue. Also, more to the point, I could get away with it, given who I was. If I'd been born 'average' or 'normal,' then I wouldn't have had the opportunities my station granted me...I'd have been more inclined to follow the social norms.

So, as I thrust into her warm, wet cunt one more time and felt my cock spasm, I bucked into her in the final throes of that night's passions. Beneath me, her back arched and she threw her head back in ecstasy as I ejaculated within her. Another benefit of this life was never having to worry about unplanned pregnancies, provided one had the money and resources after all.

I had those in spades.

As we collapsed in shared afterglow, Zoe muttered soft exclamations in her native tongue, a language I knew as Spanish, but also as the commoner tongue used by the second-class citizens known as Threes. A moment's thought translated the words, which I responded to in a happy, sated tone, teasing her as much as I extolled her abilities in pleasing me. I ran my hands over her blossoming chest once more, settling in beside her for the night as I breathed in our mingled scents. Another tired and sweaty form rolled towards me, already half asleep, as I began drifting off.

Then, of course, the phone had to ring.

“Fuck,” I uttered softly, knowing at once that there were only a short list of people who possessed my private, encrypted, and unlisted cell number. If someone was calling me, let alone at this hour, I was obligated to answer. Given the precise cadence of the ringtone, it was almost certainly my elder brother on the other end of the line.

Groaning, I snatched the accursed device up from it's charging pad and swiped a finger across the screen. “Ody, it's two in the morning, I was just getting to sleep. This had better be good.”

The response snapped me out of whatever drowsiness lingered in the face of my already interrupted sleep.

“I'll be right there,” I replied, flicking the phone off and sighing deeply into the stillness of my room.
I took the time to throw on something that looked mildly presentable, as well as the armored body glove I wore underneath everything and the trio of holdout weapons I usually carried. Even as I dressed, I'd dialed up a few different numbers, coordinating a conference call between my medical team, my security team, and a few others. None of it, except the call to the hospital, were truly necessary, but appearances had to be kept. I couldn't look any more informed than anyone else on this matter, lest I invite unfortunate suspicions.

“Gil?”

I paused on my way out the door, turning to take a few quick steps and kiss Zoe on cheek. “Go back to sleep, it's something I have to attend to.” Then I leaned over to give the boy beside her another tender kiss, he was exhausted to the point where he didn't even stir. “Keep watch over Alex, your brother needs his rest as well.”

Then I was gone.

It was a long walk to the underground rail car that took me back to civilization, but I was both in good health and used to the strenuous exercise that a quick trip in my home necessitated. Well, I said 'home,' but really I meant fortress. Out in the world at large, I was a living target, and I knew it. In my home, my fortress, I was as safe as possible though.

Finally, after a few dozen kilometers, I stood in front of a large, hermetically sealed door reinforced by armor that would make most tanks jealous. On my right, a bank of screens showed the outside of my 'public' compound, the address to which my physical mail was sent, where I received guests, and threw the necessary parties and balls to entertain my myriad constituencies. Right now, of course, the cameras showed only empty grounds, save for a dozen uniformed men and a small convoy of armored vehicles.

“Captain Jones,” I spoke into the intercom on the wall. “Recognition phrase: Succulent Fruit.”

“Window Dressing,” the head of my security team replied stonily. “Your Highness, we are at delta green danger level. The perimeter is clear and overwatch has reported sniper positions of primary, secondary, and tertiary opportunity vacant. Vehicles have been cleared by search teams and canines. Two decoy convoys are set to leave simultaneously on different routes.”

“Excellent,” I nodded, triggering the thickly armored door to open with the touch of a button.
Of course, I didn't trust the entire team just because I'd received a simple recognition phrase. There were also a series of on-duty communicators that I'd mandated all of my security personnel wear. All of those were black-boxed and locked to the bearer's biometrics. While they were on, they would respond whenever I pinged them with a certain data transmission. All of my precautions were, to any bystander, probably insanely paranoid beyond reason, but...

...well, no 'but,' actually.

I was probably insane as well as paranoid.

As the old saying went, though, that didn't mean 'they' weren't out to get me.

As we pulled in to the garage level of a private hospital I owned through a subsidiary company, my security team fanned out and did a routine check. As it was technically 'my' hospital, I had the on-site staff to run surveillance twenty-four-seven, so I was less concerned about an attack on my person coming from within the structure itself. Also, given that the decoy convoys had arrived without incident, it seemed that what I knew of events was holding to be true.

From the garage, it was a short trip to the private room where my half-brother had been placed.

Given what I knew of what had happened, I should have been expecting what I found. Instead, though, I was shocked to a standstill. I'd forgotten, some time in the past years, that the dark-haired boy in front of me would grow up to be something between a demon and savior for billions of people. Right now, though, he was just a broken child who'd watched his mother die in front of him.

“Oh god, Lelouch...I'm so sorry.”

Purple eyes slowly tracked upwards, fixing on me as recognition dawned. “Gil...they killed her. They killed her and Nunnally, Nunnally was-”

“Nunnally is going to be okay,” I lied through my teeth. “I have my best surgeons on call, they're seeing to her right now. No one is going to touch either of you if I have anything to say about it. My security teams have taken over and locked down the hospital.”
As I'd spoken, I'd crossed the distance between us and crouched down to clasp the younger boy in a tight hug. “Everything will be okay,” I whispered, trying as hard as I could to make it sound as though I believed my own words.

As Lelouch finally let out a sobbing moan and began to cry on my shoulder, I sighed.

Maybe things would be different. I had hoped I could change things, prevent so much unnecessary suffering...but, that had been years ago, before I'd tasted the decadence of the Britannian Empire, before I'd decided I liked the role I'd been born into. Maybe there was still enough of me left to care about Lelouch and Nunnally...

Did I regret the fact that Marianne was dead? Not really. She'd finally reaped the consequences of her insane conspiracy with Charles. Did I regret the fact that her death had to hurt Lelouch and Nunnally so much? That...yes, that I regretted. Maybe I was still human enough to help them...

Gilgamesh eu Britannia had a heart, wouldn't that be a surprise for everyone?
“...and without further ado, I’d like our studio audience and those at home to give our other guest today a very warm welcome! Please say hello to the Fifth Prince of the Empire, His Royal Highness, Gilgamesh eu Britannia!”

I walked onto the stage, plastering a sincerely happy smile on my face as I waved to the audience and the cameras arrayed before me. It wasn't as hard as it might have been; at twenty years old, I was fairly gifted as far as charisma went. As onerous as interviews were, I got away with significantly fewer than most of my siblings and half-siblings. However, also due to that fact, I received a far greater amount of attention whenever I deigned to make a public appearance.

“Hello Margaret,” I greeted jovially, allowing her and the two other guests to stand and give me courtly bows before greeting the remainder of the people on the stage. “Joseph, it's been ages,” I smiled with a handshake, “I simply have to have you and Diane over for my next party! And Gretchen! You simply must see the new art piece I've selected for the main hall!”

“Uh, Your Highness?” Margaret Thatcher, talk show host and television news media anchor interrupted politely with a cough.

“Oh my!” I chuckled self-consciously, “I almost forgot where I was, for a moment there.”

A few scattered laughs and applause carried throughout the large studio.

“I do apologize,” I smiled, “It's just such a treat when I get to see friends when I can, even at such a public venue. How do you do, Lady Thatcher?”

“I do very well, thank you, Your Highness,” she replied, looking very pleased indeed to have landed me on her show. Of course, why shouldn't she be? Along with Clovis and Euphemia, I was one of the 'media darling' royals for this generation. I was, indeed, very careful to cultivate positive PR and had an entire score of analysts to advise and contribute on any matter that had my name embossed upon it.

“If I could be so bold, though, might I broach today's topic? I'm sure the audience isn't keen to listen to us blather on about personal matters,” the host requested.
“Of course, of course,” I nodded. “Well, I'm certainly glad to oblige a Lady of your stature, so shall we get down to it, then?”

“Thank you. Well, to start things off, you've been making real waves in the education community with your private schooling initiatives. Care to share details?” She asked, the question deliberately soft-balled for such an important guest.

“Absolutely,” I grinned. “The private schools I've been opening as part of the Eureka Foundation, of which I am the chairperson, are designed to accommodate the lower-performing students from a variety of backgrounds in order to maximize their chances at success and turning themselves into productive members of society to contribute properly to our great nation.”

“Indeed. While those are certainly pleasant platitudes, I was hoping we could get some substance on the matter. What precisely does your foundation hope to accomplish?” She asked piercingly. Hard enough so that no one could accuse her of 'going easy' on me, even though that was exactly what she was doing.

“-and what do those aims have to do with your so-called 'students'?”

I smiled back to Joseph Reed, Vice Minister of Education as he interrupted my 'interview.' “Joseph, I'm afraid I don't know what I could have possibly done to deserve that tone of voice. Pray tell, what precisely do you find so objectionable about my project?”

Joseph scowled. “You're recruiting orphans and Numbers for these 'schools' of yours, Your Highness, I feel I have a right to be concerned. These dregs of society are hardly deserving of such personal attention from so powerful an individual as yourself.”

I laughed, delicately covering my open mouth.

I hoped Clovis was watching. He'd be so proud.

After all, he taught me that laugh.

“I suppose I am,” I replied honestly, to a few shocked gasps in the audience. Oh, the shame of having been outed as a 'humanitarian' in Britannian society! “Of course, given that the Eureka Foundation is focused on developing experimental educational strategies and new methods of
teaching, I could hardly volunteer proper Britannian children for the process. After all, there is the chance that some of the students may not react well to some of the newer learning strategies implemented, and I wouldn't want to endanger the schooling of children who actually have a future.”

There were a great many chuckles throughout the audience.

“I see,” Joseph nodded, “that explains what I'd read on the schools being year-round boarding facilities.”

“Indeed.” I replied. “For the experimental data to be valid, I need to isolate the children from variables that might contaminate my sample group. That is, of course, why I've selected primarily Numbers and orphans. After all, it isn't like they'd have better lives in their current settings.” Another light chuckle from the audience. “Really, even to the ones who have parents, I'm doing them a favor and giving them a much better education and life than they could otherwise hope for. It's not like their parents are actually qualified to raise them, being mongrels and uncivilized barbarians, but this way, they can at least be useful to their betters.”

There was light applause now, as if I'd just proven myself worthy of my station.

“Interesting, and you've said these schools are being run by a foundation? Are they not-for-profit, then?” Margaret asked, pushing onward.

“Oh, no,” I shook my head, “they're for-profit institutions, one and all.”

She appeared surprised, and some of that might have even been honest emotion.

“Could you explain, Your Highness?”

“Certainly.” I coughed slightly, taking a sip of one of the cups on the desk. My security staff had already checked the cups, the pitcher, and the water itself for poisons or toxins. “Essentially, my policy has been to employ the students as staff wherever I can. There are no janitors, technicians, or mechanics of any kind anywhere on the grounds. The students maintain the school by themselves, cook their own food, and perform other necessary tasks.”

“Amazing,” Margaret replied, “and this system works so far?”
“There have been a few hiccups,” I admitted freely, “after all, what new system doesn’t? The actual teachers themselves room and board at the school and double as supervisors for the classes, which I'm proud to say offer an unprecedented 10:1 ratio by students to teachers.”

“Impossible!” Joseph practically growled. “You'd have to hire enough staff to cover three schools to get those numbers! How do you pay that many teachers and still run the schools for-profit?”

I smiled. “It's fairly simple actually. Teachers are encouraged to implement skill-focused learning and practical lessons that give students a practicable craft by which they can make a living by. By doing this, these teachers are granted a portion of the money which their students secure by making their crafts and selling them or providing services to the nearby community.”

“Slave labor, then?” Joseph asked shrewdly.

“Not at all,” I replied congenially. The word 'slave' had a strange stigma attached to it in Britannia. No one could be so barbaric as to actually keep 'slaves,' but Britannians in general approved of the chattel system. So, you wouldn't find 'slaves' in Britannia, you'd find 'indentured servants' or any number of other, more comfortable euphemisms. “Students are not required to work beyond a few maintenance chores, but I feel that giving students an outlet for their energy and the ability to work and make money is an important factor in teaching them responsibility. In turn, responsibility is a key factor in teaching them to be productive members of society.”

“Fascinating,” Margaret continued, “Although, I hear that hasn't been your only project. How has your...I'm sorry, what did you call it, the Eureka Foundation? I've heard interesting things regarding how different sections of your foundation have been advancing science and technology.”

“ Quite. Some of it, you'll have to understand, I can't talk about. Quite a lot of it falls under the protective banner of military or corporate secrets, but I'm very happy to report that our improvements to bio-engineering fields have created some very impressive new strains of disease and pestilence-resistant crops, such as corn, wheat, and rye, as well as others.” I explained patiently. “On the materials sciences end of things, I believe that we're also close to a breakthrough in harnessing several new meta-materials to improve Britannian standards of living across the board.”

There was polite applause again as I settled in to explain my expansive promises.

The overall interview was positive. Joseph and I argued back and forth about matters of education
and society, while the other guest, Gretchen, picked my brain over technology and scientific matters. While Joseph Reed was the Vice Minister of Education, Gretchen held a similarly high-ranking position in the Ministry of Science and Technology. The two were friends from back in University, but had completely opposing views on me, personally.

Joseph hated me, and for some reason, repeatedly refused my offers to have a few drinks and 'get to know each other.'

Gretchen was probably deeply infatuated with me and I made sure to invite her into my bed whenever possible.

“You Highness?”

I blinked, turning to Zoe as she held my coat open for me. Shrugging it on, I acknowledged her with a smile, which widened as I saw her cheeks heat up. “Very good Zoe, now that I've paid my debt to society, what's on the docket for today?”

“Ah, you have an interview for the newest applicant for your executive assistant position.” Zoe explained in that soft, yet strong voice I'd come to treasure.

“Good, good,” I replied, for once looking forward to the interview process. “...and we're sure this one isn't an OSI spy? I don't really have anything against giving them more oversight on my public business, but I'd rather have a secretary who isn't going to be planting bugs in her off-time.”

“No sir, she's passed the background checks and has come highly recommended by her uncle, Lord Randall Newsom.” Zoe explained, passing me a data tablet which I absently scrolled through. Pressing a hand to my ear, I keyed the transmitter/receiver 'on' and spoke aloud, “Security team, this is the golden fleece. Are Jason and his Argonauts ready to receive?”

“Indeed, sir,” a gruff voice replied even as I finished scanning the information on my latest applicant. “There's been an announcement, though. You've been summoned by the Emperor to Court in Pendragon.”

I bit back a curse as I began to move faster towards my waiting vehicle.

“We'll be heading straight to the airport, then, gentlemen.” I stated through the earpiece. Looking
to Zoe, I added, “have the girl, Charlotte, taken to my private plane, please. Inform the pilots that they’ll need to have the jet read for takeoff shortly...and has anyone heard anything regarding why my dear father has seen fit to summon me?”

I wracked my mind momentarily, thinking of some slight or crime I could have committed that would have merited a 'public demonstration' before the Emperor's Court itself. Honestly, though, I was one of the more 'behaved' royal siblings, owning as I did a profitable series of businesses and firms, contributing to the war effort through research and development, and even furthering Britannian medical technology. In light of my successes, the Emperor, who doubtless knew of my many sins, was inclined to excuse my 'excesses.'

Zoe cleared her throat as she looked up from her cellphone. “One of your allies in the court just contacted me, Gil. Although it's not public yet, His Majesty has announced plans to appoint you as the new Viceroy of Area Eleven.”

I dropped heavily into the plush leather seats of my armored limousine, my head suddenly spinning. Forgetting myself for a moment, I said the first thing that came to mind.

“Fuck.”
Stepping into my private jet was a unique experience for the uninitiated.

A lithe male teenager, obviously of Number heritage was on all fours in the middle of the plane, his dusky skin covered in a sheen of sweat as his nude form shifted awkwardly against the thrusting body behind him. He had somewhat longer black hair, which had been tied into long braids with metal beads strewn throughout, several locks of his hair currently being held in the grasp of a comparatively small hand.

“Alex!” I enthused, stepping over to his pleasure-wracked form. “You look like you're having a good time.”

As I teased him, my hand slid underneath him to grasp his throbbing member and I kissed him passionately.

“My Lord,” Alex gasped, pleadingly, as I pulled my lips away, keeping hold of his penis. “Please.”

“I don't know...” I temporized, smiling as I looked up to the the individual sodomizing Zoe's younger brother. “What do you think, Anya?”

Anya Alstriem eyes focused slightly from her position above Alex, fixing me with a slightly vacant expression as she took gasping breaths to keep up with the rapid pace she was setting. The strap-on dildo she was using was her favorite, I knew, the same pink shade as her eyes and hair...and her flushed young chest, which was bare at the moment, the tiny pebble-like nipples jutting out from her under-developed breasts.

“Almost,” Anya whispered breathlessly, “done.”

“Well,” I nearly purred, “if that's the case...”

My other hand, the one not encompassing Alex's cock, reached behind the tiny pinkette, careful not to disturb her rhythm as she pounded the larger teen's ass. With the utmost care, I began to probe at Anya's backside, massaging her own asshole with my middle finger, using some of the feminine lubricant which had leaked onto her taint to whet my digit as I slowly slid it into her backdoor. Anya's eyes, fixed on me since my first touch, widened when I first made contact with her asshole,
then nearly bulged as I penetrated her, her hips thrusting forward and forcing the dildo to a new depth inside Alex's bowels. Simultaneously, I switched my grip on the boy's tool, running the coarse pad of my thumb over the sensitive head of his member.

The reaction was instantaneous.

I felt semen spray into the palm of my hand even as Anya's anus clenched on my middle finger, her own body convulsing deliciously as I thrust my finger in and out of her core, prolonging the orgasm. The best part of the entire tableau, in my opinion at least, was the shrill cry Anya gave as she came, an unusually loud noise from the typically demure girl.

Finally, though, after a short eternity, The two slowly collapsed onto the floor of my private jet, the strap-on still buried in Alex's ass as I carefully extracted both stained hands, still dripping sexual fluids, from the small pile of heated flesh. I looked to Zoe, who had raised a small digital camera and was taking a selection of pictures as the primary participants gently began to nod off. As she lowered the camera, I smiled and offered her the palm full of her brother's semen.

With flushed cheeks, she smiled slightly at the sight of the milky fluid, obediently bending her head to lap at my palm.

As her tongue massaged my hand, drawing her brother's semen into her mouth bit by bit, I was finally reminded of my own hardness.

I considered it a penultimate achievement to have lasted as long as I did, restraining myself from pouncing on her.

I lasted all of ten seconds.

One breathless moment later, I had pinned her to the wall of the plane, smearing her cheek and neck with her brother's sperm as I mashed my lips against hers in a heated exchange. My other hand, fingers still smear with anal leakage, pressed through the waistband of Zoe's pants to grip the full globe of her ass so hard it would doubtless leave a bruise. My lover moaned into my mouth, partly in pain, partly in pleasure as I ground my hardness against the apex of her legs and-

“Oh ho! You never cease to amaze, Gil! I leave you alone for a few minutes and I come back to a miniature orgy...although, I shouldn't be surprised, I think I've lost count how many times this has happened.” A bright and cheery voice interrupted the progress of my passions.
“Gino,” I greeted, a wry grin on my face as my breathing evened out. “You're late.”

“Hey, hey,” the blonde disagreed, smiling widely, the young Eleven girl on his arm blushing slightly as she looked over Anya and Alex. “I'll have you know I just relieved Marika and Liliana from duty, and you moved up the departure time by five hours, so I don't want to hear any criticism, Your Highness.”

“That is not His Highness' fault,” Zoe interjected, finally regaining her wits. “The Emperor has summoned him to court. Gil is to be appointed Viceroy of Area Eleven.”

The Eleven girl's eyes widened, but Gino merely dropped into the expensive leather couch and began to laugh. “Oh boy! That's rich...you in charge of an entire Area!”

I rolled my eyes as the knightmare frame pilot rapidly dissolved into insensate giggles. Looking to the Number, I decided to ask the individual more likely to give me an actual answer. “Yui? Have Liliana and Marika finished stowing their frames yet?”

Yui stiffened at being addressed directly and bowed slightly rather than meet my gaze. “Yes, Lord Gilgamesh. Both Sutherlands as well as Lady Alstreim and Lord Weinberg's Glouchesters have been stowed on the plane.”

I sighed. That was good news at least, although it was strange that they hadn't reported directly to me...oh. “Did Marika and Liliana happen to mention they would be refreshing themselves?”

She blushed slightly once again and looked away.

You'd think the girl would have gotten used to the constant sex after working in my employ for over a year. I shook my head. “They're fucking in the shower again, aren't they.”

Her continued silence and Gino's renewed laughter answered my question more than any affirmation. That was okay, since it hadn't really been a question anyway.

“Someone tell them to wrap it up quickly, please,” I waved them off. “We need to be in the air fairly soon. Charlotte Lawson, the girl interviewing for my new administrative aid, will be here.
momentarily, and then we still need to discuss the ramifications of my appointment to Viceroy.”

Gino, having laughed himself out, pulled Yui down next to him, the girl complying with a startled squeak even as Zoe finished straightening her clothing and marched off to give Marika and Liliana a suitable warning. The blonde knightmare pilot picked that point to comment on the two still-sleeping forms on the plane floor.

“Well, at least Anya seems to have enjoyed her day off, huh?” He smiled and, at my silent motion, threw me the folded blanket next to him, allowing me to cover their nakedness, if only for the sake of not catching a cold.

Honestly, if it were up to me, I'd rather leave them bare, but Anya was one of my principle bodyguards, and it wouldn't do to have her incapacitated by a flu...

“What, jealous?” I asked, teasingly.

Gino rolled his eyes, his arms wrapping around Yui tighter. “Just because the squirt like to hop in our bed every now and then doesn't mean I'm not perfectly content with what I have, thank you very much, Your Highness.”

Before I could reply, of course, my phone began to ring.

I groaned as Gino unsuccessfully tried to hide a shit-eating grin.

“Well this day ever end?!” I growled, wishing I could just stomp the device underfoot and see if Marika, Liliana, and Zoe were up for a little group fun. Instead, I slammed the phone into a terminal at my desk and tilted the screen away from Anya, Alex, Gino, and Yui.

“Gil!” The exuberant voice at the other end of the line cried.

I immediately recognized the voice of one of my many, many younger half-siblings. In this case, though, I could at least tolerate the specific individual. Smiling, I replied, “Marybell, good to hear from you. How are the Glinda Knights? I assume you and Oldrin are doing well? Euria is doing well, in case you're curious. She's out on assignment with Orpheus or I'd put her on screen.”
“Oh Gil, I just heard about Albert! Isn't it just horrible!?”

I winced at the volume, “You just heard?” My question was slightly slightly disbelieving, given the situation. “Albert killed himself over a week ago. How have you just heard about the Governor-General of one of the most important Areas of the empire committing suicide?”

Marybell Mel Britannia winced, looking down in shame.

I sighed. “I'm sorry, my Sweet Belle,” I crooned apologetically, “I've been...stressed today, ever since I heard it through the grapevine that I'll likely be appointed Albert's successor.”

“Ah,” Marybell nodded, clasping her hands under her bosom. “I understand, I'm sorry for calling so unexpectedly given everything, but I've been shipboard in the Philippines hunting pirates with the Glinda Knights for the last three weeks. I would have told you, but Schneizel asked me as a personal favor to keep it hush-hush.”

I rubbed at my eyes tiredly.

“I'll have to remind Schneizel that, as the principle financial backer for your knights, I'm obliged to be informed of extended assignments like that,” I waved her off. “At any rate, it's not your fault, Mary...and I'll probably need your help anyway, given the mess Area Eleven is in.”

The Eighty-Eighth Princess of Britannia smiled brilliantly, though there was something of an edge to it. “I'd be delighted to help Gil, Albert would never let my knights move on any of the terrorist cells in Area 11, I always thought it was such a pity that he was too proud to accept any help.”

I shrugged, “Albert was a bit of an egotist.” Which was both true and said something unfortunate about my deceased half-sibling, given the usual size of Britiannian Royal Egos. “Granted, he did let Lelouch's Black Knights settle things a few times.”

Marybell rolled her eyes in a very un-princess-like gesture, “Only because Lelouch made him pay through the nose for it. Honestly, not to speak ill of the dead, but it was as though Albert couldn't accept that anyone could authentically want to help him without stabbing him in the back.”

I snorted. “Well, enough about that, how is Oldrin? I hope you two got to enjoy at least a little time alone on those isolated beaches and tropical islands.”
Marybell snorted, though there was a tinge of pink to her cheeks. “You know, I wish all of those romantic movies mother loved warned me about how those wonderful tropical islands were just crawling in bloodsucking insects. It’s very difficult to ‘enjoy a little alone time’ in those circumstances.”

Despite myself, I began to laugh.

“Well,” Marybell shook her head, “I’ll let you get back to work, Gil, and inform my sister that I expect a call sometime soon.”

“Absolutely,” I smiled, looking up as Zoe escorted a demure-seeming young woman onto the plane. With platinum blonde hair down to her shoulders, a steely gaze, and tightly-held posture, I recognized her instantly from her photograph. “I’ll have to talk to you later, Marybell, my appointment just arrived.”

With a quick farewell, I turned my full attention on the young woman only two years my junior.

“...and you must be Charlotte Lawson. It’s a pleasure.”

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But! Implications abound! And, yes, Marybell mel Britannia is a canon character, specifically from Code Geass: Oz the Reflection, as are several other characters which will make an appearance. Much like Akito the Exiled, Oz the Reflection is canon compliant with Lelouch the Rebellion, but they happen outside of the central story focus. Have fun trying to puzzle out what all of this means!

Oh, and no, I will not be incorporating the crazy geass-powers from Nightmare of Nunnally, nor will I be using the weird bullshit from Suzaku the Counterattack, Renya of the Dark, or A Record of the Strange Tales of the Bakumatsu Era...or at least, I’ll be carefully picking and choosing what is ‘canon’ for this fic.

Right now, the canon list for Ignobility is as follows: Lelouch of the Rebellion R1&2, Akito the Exiled, and Oz the Reflection.
Charlotte Lawson fulfilled several important criteria I had specified to my Human Resources department when I considered finally hiring a personal secretary. Mostly, I'd split the job between Zoe, Alex, and the head of my security team. Between them and the actual corporate structure I'd surrounded myself with through my foundation, my research institutes, and private school system, I tended to have enough people on hand to handle pretty much any crisis. However, over the past two years that had been changing. I'd been, more and more, taking aggressive steps in various markets which needed a more personal touch. This, in turn, meant that I'd spent a great deal of time communicating with the various heads of departments I needed to light a fire under.

Merely talking to the department heads wasn't a bad thing, in and of itself.

It became tedious, though, when I was spending an average of eight hours every day in teleconference with over three dozen people.

Charlotte was part of my long-term solution to fix this oversight of my corporate design.

I smiled as she dismissed the sight of Anya and Alex cuddled together under the blanket. The scent of sex was still fairly prominent in the air, and it was obvious what they'd been up to. Gesturing to a cushioned seat, I spoke. “Lady Lawson, a pleasure to meet you at long last. Your uncle has had nothing but compliments for his lovely young niece. How are you this fine day?”

Her gray eyes met my own blue gaze fearlessly for a moment before her eyes cut downwards as she bowed. “I am well, Your Highness, apart from the sudden change in schedule, of course.”

“Of course,” I nodded. “You'll have to forgive circumstances. I've just been notified that my father has expressed intent to create me Viceroy of Area Eleven to replace my dearly departed younger brother.”

Her slight widening of the eyes was the only hint of her shock.

“...and, as such, I'm afraid the nature of this interview has changed as well,” I smiled regretfully. “I'll understand if you'd like to withdraw your application, but seeing as how I'll likely soon be taking up a position administrating an entire Area, your job will be quite a great deal more work than merely helping me run a multi-billion dollar business.”
There was silence for a moment, as she considered my ultimatum.

“If it's all the same to you, my lord, I'd still like to interview for the position. I'm given to understand that it will still consist mostly of administrative duties?” Her voice was clear, confident, and self-assured.

I nodded. “Indeed. In addition to scheduling some of my corporate functions and foundation meetings, you'd also be handling 'doorkeeper' duties, both electronic and physical, and deciding what is or is not worth my attention. I'd be expecting you to know enough about the ins and outs of the systems to redirect individuals and requests to the relevant departments should they be found less important.”

“I've reviewed as much as is publicly available on your relevant holdings,” Charlotte replies, taking the saucer and cup Yui has prepared even as I can hear the ground crew making the final preparations for liftoff.

“Excellent,” I smile. “I do feel compelled to remind you that I'll be needed in Pendragon post-haste, so if you feel comfortable, I'll be holding the remainder of the interview while we're in the air. Otherwise, we can reschedule after all of this is sorted out. Of course, if you decide not to take the position or need certain items retrieved, I'll be more than happy to allow you the use of one of my private jets, or have some of my employees gather whatever you need. If you do choose to take the position, your housing needs will be met for the duration of our stay in Pendragon and however long you continue in my employ while we're in Area 11.”

“I understand, sir,” Charlotte...doesn't quite smile, but certainly seems more relaxed as she takes a long sip of her tea. “I have the week off from my school and I find a trip to Pendragon fits easily within my plans. Thank you for accommodating my interview.”

“Not a problem at all,” I smile, taking a sip of my own tea and looking up as Zoe sits down.

“This is Zoe Esteban,” I introduce. “She and her brother, Alex,” I motion to the younger man cuddled with the even younger girl, “have been in my employ for nearly a decade now. Zoe handles a great deal of the grunt work I need done as well as serving as one of my bodyguards. She'll be showing you the ropes and seeing to it that you have a remedial training course in hand-to-hand and close-quarters-combat. In the event of an emergency, of course.”

Charlotte nods sharply, “I've had a bit of training...my uncle insisted, but I'll be happy to see how I measure up.”
I almost, almost, don't catch the look that passes between Charlotte and Zoe, but...

“The you don't have any problem taking direction from a Number?” I ask, raising an eyebrow.

“...not as such, no, my lord,” she answers, her voice slightly hesitant for the first time.

“Good,” I smile, just a little too broadly. “One of the reasons I'm looking for a more permanent administrative aid is that there have been a fair few parties and functions I've attended where Zoe has been...less than welcome. She's endured rather a great deal on behalf, something I dislike having to admit...but, you'll see that I am far less forgiving about that kind of behavior in-house, as it were.”

It's a relatively mild warning, all things considered, but I think it gets the message across.

“Zoe, will, of course show you every possible nicety befitting a woman of your station,” I add, not even bothering to look at Zoe, but knowing that she's received the message as well. “I employ people to work for me, not against each other. I don't particularly care for empty phrases, but I very much hope that everyone under my employ does understand that they're 'on the same team,' so to speak.”

“Yes, my lord,” Charlotte replies, sitting a bit straighter.

“Now, your school...the Niagara Christian Lady's Preparatory Academy,” I recall, enjoying her eyes narrowing a bit, “Your uncle has given me to understand that your parents approved of you excusing yourself from your degree and coming to work for me?”

“Yes sire,” the woman answers. “I believe I've...learned all that I can from the institution and hoped to broaden my education in the real world, rather than remain in the classroom.”

“Indeed,” I state, taking another sip of my tea and allowing Yui to refill my cup. “I would suppose that is because of the rather conservative attitudes of the Academy, no?”

A slight hesitation on her part.
“...to a certain extent, I suppose,” Charlotte explains. “Niagara's stances on certain issues of public concern feel as though I'm limiting myself on possible opportunities.”

“Like extramarital sex,” I intone blandly.

I'll give her credit, even though I'd timed it so that she would be taking a sip of her tea, she covers the choking well and manages to meet my gaze without flinching. “I beg your pardon, my lord? I'm not sure I understand.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Charlotte, your uncle and I are good friends...and he's explained some of the difficulties you've been having. I believe it was...a year ago now? That story about a wealthy girl of breeding being kidnapped and forced to serve as entertainment in some deviant sex club full of degenerate low-lives?”

Charlotte swallowed and took a deep pull from her tea.

“Although...” I temporize, “I have to admit I'm at a loss regarding how or why these 'low-lives' had the time, resources, or wherewithall to have a custom leather...outfit fitted for your sizes. I'm given to understand your parents were...somewhat upset by the revelation of your...abduction.”

“It was...a traumatic time for us all,” Charlotte admitted, “I don't know what I'd have done without my uncle. He's always been...someone I can turn to for advice, help, and...relief.”

My previously stern visage thaws a bit, turning into a slightly naughty smirk.

Charlotte's mouth twitches upwards, despite her heated cheeks. “If I may, though, my lord...in my research regarding your company, I came across certain...rumors. My parents dismiss most as hearsay and poppycock and I understand that any important person has a certain amount of talk and gossip about them, but...well, given the state of your associates, I have to wonder if there is more than a ring of truth to them in this instance?”

My eyes tilt to watch as Anya finally wakes, perhaps to the rumbling of the take-off, and begins to remove her strap-on, then stretch languidly before standing and yawning widely, completely unmindful of her nudity. The small pink triangle of pubic hair shimmers with drying sexual fluids as she makes her way towards the restroom.
“Sleepy,” she mumbles, her pink eyes drooping. “Piss, shower. New girl, staying?”

“Maybe,” I say, giving her a lingering kiss on the lips. “We'll see. If Marika and Liliana are still in the shower, tell them I have someone they'll need to meet.”

I turned back to Charlotte, smiling widely as she turned to follow Anya's underage ass across the room. Somewhat suddenly, she stiffened and turned back towards me, knowing she’d been caught out.

“Is...that why I'm being interviewed? Because you know about my...habits?” She asked, intently. “Am I just supposed to be a new...toy for you, sire?”

I shrugged, relaxing into the sofa. “Well, yes and no. You're at the top of your class. You're beautiful, insightful, deviant, have experience working with high society in relaxed and...unusual settings, and you're well-connected. If I have to miss out on...certain experiences to get you to sign on board, I'm willing to abstain. Granted, that doesn't mean I won't be having sex in front of you, or around you, or...well, you get the drift. So, what do you think, Charlotte?”

Next chapter will be in Pendragon, because...well, Gil has great HR people, right?

But, more seriously, sometimes the tinfoil hats are right.

Comments and critiques are welcome. Next chapter will feature more in the way of 'conflict and story progression.'
Interlude – Anya Alstreim

A.T.B. - 2010

Eden Palace, Family Residence of the Eu Britannia Royal Branch:

Anya remembered it well, the day she had first met him.

The day, such as it was, had started out...badly. In short order, she'd found herself wandering the halls of the grand manor that now served as the primary home for Her Imperial Majesty Olympia eu Britannia, First Consort-Wife of the Emperor of Britannia. It was an enormous wonder of architecture and engineering, though much of that had been lost on a teary-eyed child of only eight years old.

“Now who do we have here.”

The first time she'd heard his voice...she wouldn't lie, it had startled her. She'd squeaked and turned, ready to flee until the sight of a tall young teen in what could only be royal finery striding up to her with the strangest look on his face.

“I-ah, ex-excuse me, My Lord!” Anya cried, knowing her mother would scold her for being caught out in such a disheveled appearance in front of someone she knew was important.

“No, no, that won't do at all,” he shook his head and then, with a wide, charming smile, knelt on bended knee before her and took her muddy hand to press to his lips, not grimacing in the slightest as he stained his face with watery dirt. “My name is Gil, little lady, not 'my lord'! Why I've never even met this 'my lord' person in my life, though people keep mistaking me for him...we must look alike.”

The conspiratorial wink he threw her way sent her to giggling.

He beamed at her, the smile on his face seeming as if the sun had come out from behind the clouds for the first time today. Gil swept his sandy blonde hair back with one hand met Anya's less-teary gaze with his own blue-gray eyes.

“Now why don't we get you cleaned up!” He said suddenly, sweeping her eight-year-old self up
into his arms, smearing his thousand-pound suit with muck.

“Sire,” the woman at his side, a darker-skinned individual with an appearance and clothing-style that fairly screamed ‘Number’ prodded politely. “Your meeting with Her Majesty?”

“Let mother hand out a few I.O.U.s for dates,” Gil stated dismissively. “She enjoys doing that more than having me around. Relay some story about...a board meeting! Yes, we haven’t used that cover in a while. Jenkins called a meeting to reorganize...acquisitions after the Steiner Konzern takeover. Drop a few tidbits about how I own most of the private-sector Knightmare development and the fact that we just passed into the ten-billion-pound range in terms of assets.”

Anya blinked as she was carried away and dropped into Gil’s lap, further dirtying his clothing, and still trying to compute the information she’d just gained as the vehicle they’d just entered sped off towards another building in the massive palace-complex which made up the grounds of Eden. Even as the woman, who she would later learn was named ‘Zoe,’ began to make a phone call, Gil’s attention turned back to her.

“Now if I understand things correctly,” he started, “you're the young lady miss Anya Alstreim, correct?”

“Y-yes My Lord,” Anya squeaked at being addressed once again. “I-I’m sorry I got lost in the palace. Her Majesty, the Empress, she told me to get cleaned up after Lady Sophia pushed-I mean, after I fell into a mud puddle while we were touring the grounds. I’m terribly sorry.”

Gil merely smiled through her tiny rant and used the gloves he wore, the gloves that she now understood to be worth a great deal of money, to wipe tears and dirt from her face.

“It's okay, Anya, it's okay...honestly, mother is sometimes so...ugh. I swear she just started tutoring young ladies because Her Highness Marianne vi Britannia...I had no idea she’d snatched you away...hmm,” Gil stated, his gaze growing distant as he thought aloud.

Anya, though, didn't care about whatever the young man was talking about, because she'd finally recognized exactly whose lap she was sitting upon, whose clothing she was dirtying, and whose time she was taking up. Her parents would be so angry when they found out...

“Your Highness! I’m so sorry, I didn’t think you were, but it was-I can’t, I shouldn't be taking up your time like this! I'm so, so sorry!”
As Anya Alstreim carefully washed the mid-sized pinked dildo, making especially sure to clean the ridges and nooks that could gather filth so easy, she ruminated on how she'd spent her day. Alex had been kind enough to accompany her on a few shopping trips, especially to the pornography studio, where she doubted she'd have been allowed in without the paperwork Gilgamesh had happily provided. It wasn't specifically for this little jaunt, of course, Gil was just thoughtful like that. Anything she wanted, within reason, Gilgamesh eu Britannia provided.

He was sweet.

He was kind.

Gino Weinberg, the man Gilgamesh had introduced as her partner nearly two years ago, shared these characteristics. It was probably why they got on so well, she reflected. Both were...happy people, at their core. They enjoyed smiling and felt like a warm blanket when they were wrapped around you. They liked protecting people, too, which was something rare she'd been finding out in the last few years, but...

Despite the fact that they were so similar, Gilgamesh was very, very different from Gino.

That was why she was in love with Gilgamesh and not Gino, after all.

Her lips twitched, slightly, as she licked her lips in memory of the sensation of his skin against her own, that pleasant frission of pleasure...

“Oh, hey Anya.”

Pink eyes blinked as Anya turned from the sink, reaching for a towel to dry the now clean sex toy as she watch Liliana and Marika, wearing towels, step out of the sunken bathing area and into the toilet and changing room with her.

“Gilgamesh wants you to meet his new assistant,” Anya stated softly, inspecting the dry pink plastic and the strap on harness for any dirt or missed spots. “She's cute. He wants to fuck her.”
Liliana sighed as Marika shook her head.

“See, I've been here for three months and I still don't get that,” Marika objected. “The guy you say you're in love with regularly has sex with other women, is practically attached at the hip to that Number servant girl Zoe, and even has sex with other guys...” She stopped and shrugged. “I mean, don't get me wrong, he's a great boss and he's hot as hell if you're into guys, and he hasn't spilled the beans about me and Liliana to our parents, but...”

“What Marika means to say,” Liliana took over, “is that we don't understand how you can be comfortable...sharing him, like you do.”

Anya blinked slowly and shook her head, reaching underneath a cabinet to remove her bathing supplies. “He shares me, why shouldn't I share him?”

The two lovers stared at the rosette, at a momentary loss for words.

Marika shook herself. “Y-yeah, but you just have sex with that Alex kid and Gino and...well, us. Gilgamesh jumps anything that moves, practically! Don't you get...jealous, like, at all?”

“Jealous?” Anya frowned, stopping for a moment to consider the notion.

It took a long minute for her to think the matter over. Marika and Liliana, in the meantime, stood silently, used to the quiet girl's languid thought processes.

Finally, Anya shook her head. “I...asked Gil about that a few years ago, I think. Zoe was spending the night with two upper-class male prostitutes and I wanted to know why he wasn't jealous. When my father found out my mother was seeing another man...he was very angry. I didn't want Gil and Zoe to be angry.”

Anya paused, holding her bath supplies to her chest as she stood, staring into the middle distance, still uncaring about her nudity. Her mind drifted back...

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She and Gilgamesh were resting on his bed, the immense spread of sheets and pillows currently being used to construct a large 'fort' from which the girl and young man were watching the tail end
of some animated movie that Gil had been funding. She couldn't remember the title exactly, but it was something about a forest...

What she did remember, though, was the feel of his hands around her, caressing her softly and gently. Even then Anya had understood, as Gil had painstakingly explained to her, the difference between a sexual touch and one which was merely comforting. At the moment, the older boy, fourteen at present, was not even hard, his limp penis merely pressing warmly against her outer thigh. Anya had let her head fall to rest on his chest, listening to the slow beat of his heart.

Nakedness, even at that point in her life, had ceased to truly bother her...at least with Gilgamesh eu Britannia. She looked up at him, content to bask in the softly-playing music coming from the credits and asked the question she'd been afraid of.

“Is Zoe coming back?”

Gil had looked down at her, confused, and quirked an eyebrow, “Why wouldn't she?”

“Aren't you...mad at her? For spending time with other men?” Anya continued shyly.

Gil smiled softly, “Oh. Well, I don't think I can explain it exactly.” Here, his hands moved to slowly trace the crack of her ass. “You'll tell me if I make you uncomfortable, right?”

Anya arched slightly against him, pressing against him as he casually touched marvelously sensitive places. “Please...keep going.” Her mother had told her that she wasn't to ever let anyone do what Gil was doing with her, but...Gil was kind, Gil was gentle, and he never hurt her like her mother said people would.

Gilgamesh grinned, then leaned back in thought, a finger still massaging her rosebud.

“Okay...it's like this.” Gil decided, nodding, then explained.

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“He said...'Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”
Liliana scowled, “Isn't that...the Bible? Oh, I know this...that's Corinthians! I wouldn't have thought a guy like Gilgamesh eu Britannia would be very religious.”

Anya scowled at some perceived insult to her patron.

“Gil...said he liked bits and pieces of certain religions. Those are his favorite verses...and when Zoe came back to bed the next night, she surprised Gil when she brought the disc she'd made with the prostitutes. Alex, Gil, Zoe, and I watched it together. It was fun. Then we all had sex. That was fun too.” Anya smiled warmly at the memory.

Marika and Liliana stared.

“Just because Gil loves Zoe doesn't mean he loves me any less,” Anya finished, her slight smile still apparent. “Zoe loves me too and I love her. So does Alex. If Gilgamesh only loved me and I only loved Gil...I don't think any of us would be as happy as we are.”

Marika appeared to shake off her shock.

“Anya...how old were you when that happened?”

Anya blinked. “Eight.” Unspoken, of course, was why the question or the answer mattered at all.

Liliana whitened. “Oh, that...that bastard! I don't care if he's a prince, he doesn't get to-to-“

“Gil was very careful not to injure me,” Anya interrupted. “He only penetrated me anally that night, and that was after a large amount of preparation on both our parts. I very much enjoyed it and was upset when he refused vaginal sex with me. If you insult my lord again, though, I will not be held responsible for my actions.”

Liliana and Marika blanched.

“Thankfully, with some stretching I was able to accommodate a vibrator the second time he took me in the ass,” Anya continued, packing away her 'toy.' “After my parents separated permanently, though, and Gil acquired my guardianship, I was much less worried about being taken away from
him, which meant I was willing to progress our relationship at a more sedate pace.”

“I...think I need to lie down,” Liliana stated softly.

“I'm afraid I'm not currently in the mood for coitus,” Anya replied, shrugging minutely. “But Gil will likely be talking the new girl into bed soon, if he hasn't already. I know you have stated before that male genitalia does not appeal to you, but I would urge you, again, to allow Gilgamesh at least one chance. He's quite talented.”

“I'll bet,” Marika muttered.

Anya raised an eyebrow, one pink arc rising high.

“Gil has stated that wagers are good ways to build camaraderie and a sense of team bonding. I would participate in a casual 'bet' if you would like,” Anya stated.

Marika blinked, then exchanged a grin with Liliana.

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So, there's that. Anya turned out to be a difficult character to write. She was scared and skittish as a child, a minor noble in a big, big pond until Gil taught her the ancient art of 'Giving No Fucks.' She was an apt student.
Pendragon.

It was the heart of an Empire spanning two-thirds of an entire planet. The population of this single city outnumbered New York City, Saint Francis City, Shanghai, and Jakarta combined. It was, in all likelihood, the largest city in both geographic area and population ever constructed by human hands. The urban sprawl was truly something, especially viewed from the altitude we were traveling at. The city proper was a mass of glittering steel and glass, finely polished to mirror-finish by the glittering facade of solar panels which provided the primary power supply to the area. It was a feat of engineering which I still found awe-inspiring, given what I knew of a history that had never happened in this world.

“Have you been to Pendragon before?” I idly asked Charlotte as we reclined in the larger armchairs on the upper level of private plane.

“A few times, sire,” she admitted, relaxed as she was given the two glasses of wine I'd plied her with. Her platinum-blonde hair was swept aside to reveal the delicate curve of her neck and I resisted the temptation to broach the subject of sex again. If I pressed too hard, I'd likely scare her away. Better to let her get acquainted with her surroundings first. She seemed eager enough, but...she had an air about her that spoke of 'waiting for the other shoe to drop.' Likely, she thought her situation was too good to be true.

Her Uncle, Duke Randall Newsom, had often told me of how constrained his niece felt by the preparatory school her parents had forced her into. Suddenly granted freedom from that environment probably needed some time for adjustment.

“Mostly uncle's parties,” Charlotte continued to explain as I swept a hand through Zoe's long black hair, her warm form soothing to me as she napped lightly on my chest. “My parents have always been of the opinion that uncle is not likely to father any children to inherit...and my brother is being groomed to take the position.”

Unspoken, of course, was that she had her own designs on the title.

It was why she was fucking her uncle, after all.

He knew it, I knew it, and she knew that both he and I knew of her little scheme. In my more frank
discussions with Randy, he'd admitted thinking about getting Charlotte pregnant and letting her 'inherit' that way. It was a bit horrible of the man, but Charlotte might not be so disagreeable to the idea, especially if she got to rub the whole affair in her parents' faces.

It didn't surprise me at all that she hated the both of them.

“Oi, Gil!” Gino's voice rang out as he meandered up the stairs, holding a plate with a few sandwiches nicely placed. “Yui wanted me to bring these up. You can have the lot, I already fixed myself something in the kitchen.”

“Ah, yes,” I murmured, accepting the plate, “you stepped out for food just as the young Ms. Lawson arrived. Charlotte, I'd like you to meet Gino Weinberg. Gino, Charlotte Lawson.”

Gino gave something slightly more casual than an elegant bow as he very nearly pressed his lips to the back of her hand. “A pleasure to meet you, milady.”

“...and you as well, sir,” Charlotte murmured, eying Gino with interest.

I swallowed a bite of my sandwich and smirked. “Fair warning, Gino is in a committed relationship with Yui, the eleven servant girl you've seen coming and going. If you want to get in bed with him, you'll need to ask Yui and be very, very polite about it. Gino is a bit...overprotective.”

Gino snorted, but there was a serious glint in his eyes as he smiled and waved. “I've got to get back to Yui. You three have fun now.”

Charlotte looked between myself and Gino's retreating form, disbelief clear on her face as she studied me. “You...really don't care, do you? You allow your servants more freedom than any noble I've ever seen, much less a royal...and you just...do you bother with any social convention regarding sex?”

I shrugged and began to unbutton Zoe's blouse, undoing the front-clasp of her bra and allowing her chest to bask in the open air. I smiled genuinely at Charlotte's slight flush and began to trace my fingers over Zoe's slowly-hardening nipples. The girl herself stirred in my grasp, giving me a sleepy smile as she stretched languidly to make her body more available to me.

“Charlotte,” I said quietly as I finished removing Zoe's top and pulled her into my lap, her breasts
within easy licking distance. Charlotte's eyes flickered between my face and Zoe's exposed tits.

“You are a beautiful woman,” I said seriously, smiling at her gently. “You have a wonderful heart, you open your body to the love of those who need it most badly, to those who have desires that society has decried as deviant and wrong. You love your neighbors and friends wholly and without reservation, with the entirety of your body.”

Charlotte had stilled entirely now, her eyes locked on me.

“Take a step back and think about what I just said. Really think about it. What part of that is a bad thing? What part of loving another human being should you be ashamed of?” I asked her softly. “A person who can give of themselves like that is the most beautiful person in the world.”

There was a complicated mixture of expressions on Charlotte's face, something that was so utterly lost and lacking in understanding that it almost broke my heart. I finally reached up to touch her face gently, my thumb caressing her cheek. “I love you, Charlotte Lawson. Do you love me?”

“How can you say that?” She asked breathlessly. “You don't know me. We've only just met.”

“You are another human being to whom I am sexually, romantically, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and physically attracted to. I trust myself to know when I meet someone who is compatible with me. The fact that you have an incestuous relationship with your uncle does not bother me, the fact that you worked at a burlesque house and brothel for the high nobility arouses me, and the thought of you in my arms fills my heart with joy.”

“...how do you do that?” Charlotte asked, swallowing as she wiped at her eyes. “I've had so many people say they loved me, then they turned around and told me that who I was wasn't acceptable. That my...that what I wanted to do was wrong and...twisted. How can you just...”

“A great deal of practice and an even greater deal of honesty.” I replied frankly. “Having money and influence doesn't hurt, I'll admit, but the most important thing I've found is being able to admit what you want. What do you want?” I asked pointedly.

“I...don't know,” Charlotte admitted slowly, bringing her hand up to mine. “I don't mind having sex with you, my prince, but...” She flushed. “You're asking...for too much, I don't think I can do what you're asking me to.”
I smiled and kissed her gently even as my other hand cupped Zoe's breast.

“Let me show you,” I replied, pulling her close. I looked back to Zoe, who was pulling her skirt off, her mons shaven clean and unencumbered by panties. She did wear a garter belt, though, something she'd managed to work out that I found intensely attractive. “Charlotte, this is my lover, Zoe. I've opened myself to her, and it would fill me with joy if you could one day love her. Zoe, this is Charlotte, she would like to learn how to open herself to another person, and I'd like you to help me. What do you think of her?”

Zoe smiled and kissed me, then moved in to kiss Charlotte. The other woman flinched slightly, but allowed Zoe to make a quick contact of lips. “My lord Gilgamesh eu Britannia is the love of my life. He has cared for me for as long as I care to remember. I trust him and believe in him to take those in his bed and heart who he deems worthy. You are a lovely woman, I desire you, and I want to share my body with you.”

She didn't resist when I reached for her clothing.

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“You wear body armor?” Charlotte asked as we stepped out of the plane.

“All of my entourage does,” I replied casually, pressing a hand to my ear as the security team did their routine checks. “I'll have you fitted for a low-profile set sometime this week. Zoe will be making a schedule up for you to familiarize yourself with my regular appointments. There will be a waiting period while we do a more thorough background check and look through your personal history. If there is anything you feel I should know about, tell Zoe. Normally I'd see to you personally, but...with this appointment, I'm afraid my time is going to be in high demand over the course of the next few days.”

I sighed, taking the last few steps to the waiting limo quickly.

“I understand my lord,” Charlotte nodded, turning to look at the two women waiting next to the car door.

“Ah, yes. This is Marika Soresi and Liliana Vergamon. I believe they've just rotated on to the duty roster. I'd wanted to introduce you during the plane ride, but I believe they were...otherwise occupied.” As Marika opened the door for me, I grinned. “They make a cute couple, don't they?”

The two girls stiffened slightly as Charlotte bit her lip.
I looked back to see my two guards, Gino and Anya, who were stifling giggles and twitching lips respectively, opted not to comment as they stepped into the car with me, taking up positions on opposite sides of the vehicle. Yui slipped in as quietly as a ghost behind her boyfriend, her quiet presence almost lost in the hubbub. Liliana and Marika filed in a moment later.

If the limo had been any smaller, it likely would have been too cramped. As it was, the vehicle was one of the many luxuries I afforded myself...along with the not-so-mini fridge I selected a beverage from. “Can I get you anything, ladies? Gentlemen?”

“I'll have cranberry juice, Gilgamesh, if you have it?” A voice responded.

I hummed under my breath. “Well, I'd be happy to get you some juice, miss, but it's only right that you first introduce yourself.”

The rosette sighed. “Gilgamesh eu Britannia, you know perfectly well who I am.”

I gave her an appraising glance, “well, you resemble my sister Euphemia, but I know you can't possibly be the young lady in question because my other sister, Cornelia, never lets poor Euphie out of her sight. So I'm afraid I'm at a loss as to your identity miss.”

Euphie gave a demure giggle as I passed her a glass.

“So, what brings you out from under Nelly's watchful eye?” I asked, raising a brow as I took a sip of some fizzy apple juice.

“I think you just answered your own question, Gil,” she replied, smiling with a slightly naughty tinge to the expression.

“...and remind me when I became an acceptable target to point Cornelia at?” I asked lightly. “I seem to recall the last time I 'kidnapped you' that threats were made. Very pointed and disturbing threats generally and specifically involving my manhood.” I frowned thoughtfully for a moment. “There was also a mention of a woodchipper, a knightmare frame, and...”

“As many crocodiles she could get her hands on,” Anya filled in beside me without looking up from her device.
“Thank you Anya,” I replied cheerfully, then turned back to Euphie. “So, yes, as I was saying, why do you hate me, Euphie?”

Euphie rolled her eyes. “Cornelia is a big cuddly teddy bear, Gil, and you know it. You're one of the only people she trusts with me and Lelouch and Nunnally are never around. Can you imagine if I tried to talk her into letting me spend the day with Carine or something like that?”

I affected a far-off look for a moment. “Clovis has always wanted to fiddle as a capital city burns around him. The Emperor might not be as appreciative, though.”

Euhpie gave another giggle as I sighed happily. Sometimes the simple pleasures in life were the best. “Well, at any rate, I have good women at my side, a fine drink in my hand, I think we should be off to prepare for my execution!”

Zoe shook her head, “My lord, please do not joke on these matters. You're to be created as Area Eleven's Viceroy, not executed.”

This time I was the one to roll my eyes. “Let's not quibble over fine details, Zoe-dear. I suppose I should start the prepwork in motion, though. Have the acquisitions department put a hold on their current work and looking at Area Eleven. They have free reign to draw resources and personnel from the investigations branch. I want them to do a broad financial workup of the Area over the past ten years as well the ten years prior to the invasion. After that, look at the individual holdings of top...ten percent of the wealthiest nobles and military personnel. If they start whining, and you know they will, they can pull some of the programmers from the Market project and use a few cycles on the Sebastian servers.”

I sighed, worrying at my chin for a moment as I considered the situation.

I looked to Gino, and grinned. “Gino, bosom-buddy!”

Gino looked up from where he was cuddling with Yui and eyed me warily. “Oh, no. Nononono, I'm not doing it. I don't know what it is, but there's no way I’m going to be roped into another one of your schemes. I'm your bodyguard, Gil. I thought Euria and Orpheus were supposed to be your spies.”

I waved him off cheerfully, “Oh Gino, this isn't spy work! I just want you to give Lelouch a call.
Just a nice, friendly phone call to let him know that I'll be in the Area soon...if he doesn't know already, but there's a courtesy to these things, you know?"

If anything, Gino's eyes narrowed further. “Uh huh. Sure, and this doesn't have anything to do with the way Lelouch stopped taking your calls after you dragged him to that party in the Lima settlement last year, right?”

“He had a great time,” I defended valiantly. “He wound up with an awesome tattoo, ended up in bed with two supermodels, and-”

“-we never did find out how that jungle cat got into the penthouse,” Gino deadpanned. “And, oh, hey, I still have claws marks on my back! Not the fun kind either! We barely survived that party with our lives!”

“And you keep a framed copy of the next day's newspaper on your wall as a conversation piece,” I replied bluntly. “I especially liked the photo of us carrying the dead beast into the hallway for the courtesy staff to take care of.”

Gino snorted and shook his head, “Fine, you've got a point, but I'm still not calling Lelouch for you.”

Euphie coughed.

I turned, eying her expectantly.

“I...might be willing to give Lelouch a call for you,” she said primly.

“For a price,” I finished, “which would be?”

“I want to come stay with you and Lelouch in Area Eleven.” She stated firmly. “Cornelia is going on campaign against the Middle Eastern Federation and I'm going to be stuck in private school or on a secure military base for months if I go with her.”

I groaned. “Euphie...there is absolutely no way Cornelia will ever agree to that.”
“She will if it's you.” Euphie replied with certainty. “She trusts you, Gil. She might not act like it, but she does. You're the only person in the family who's more paranoid than Lelouch and Schneizel. You take your security seriously, and that's something Cornelia likes.”

I slumped, then looked to Gino. “Fine, if you won't call Lelouch, call Nonnette. I've got a marker I need to call in.”

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Next part will be a bit at court, probably a conversation with the Emperor, and dealing with Cornelia, which is so much fun.

Hmmm...comments, criticisms?
“...and then he says he's going to revenge himself on me, so I had a few of my staff take the rabble out back of the club and break a few bones,” Baron Geoffrey laughed.

I joined in the tittering idiocy of the group's amusement as I adjusted my reading glasses. “Absolutely smashing tale, Brian,” I smiled, “I take it the bugger was trounced thoroughly and learned his lesson?”

“I suppose he would have,” here the Baron took a long pull on his cigar and tapped the ash into a bowl held by one of the imperial palace's staff. “though one of my men got a little overzealous. You know how it is?”

I was amazed that I could keep smiling through the insinuation, but my million-pound-smile had weathered worse than the apparent death of a poor man who'd had the bad luck to bank with the wrong business. He was merely one amongst the hundreds who found themselves crushed under the heel of the nobility that ruled Britannia. Of course, the same could have been said of the millionaires and billionaires of my old world. People in power abused those without power, to a lesser or greater extent.

I downed the remainder of my champagne and reminded myself that I didn't actually care enough to do anything about it.

“So, Gilgamesh,” I twitched as someone addressed me from behind. I knew that voice. “Fancy seeing you here. You're such a stranger these days it's almost as if you've forgotten where you came from. You never call, you never write, such a poor son.”

“Mother,” I smiled politely as I turned, taking in the woman's latest collection of sycophants and ass-kissers. “I must say this is a surprise, you're usually so busy spending the Emperor's money, I didn't realize you had time for cavorting at court, but I suppose when one has nothing else to do with one's life...”

Once upon a time, I had tried to like this woman. I had tried to be a good son, and let her be a mother to me.

“Speaking to your own mother like this,” her eyes narrowed, “if I hadn't borne your weight for so many months myself, I'd doubt your heritage. Besides, I am one of His Majesty's consorts, such
menial tasks as you concern yourself with are...beneath me.” Dear God, I didn't know how she managed to thrust her nose in the air just so without looking like an idiot, but the money I'd pay for acting lessons that let me do it...

“But evidently not so far beneath His Majesty that He pays no attention to those affairs,” I noted airily, enjoying watching her stiffen. “After all, if the rumors are true...”

“Then they are a sure sign that your father holds more pity for you than even my own feelings. What, perhaps you believed you earned such a prestigious appointment?” She sneered.

I affected a gasp and pulled back in shock, “Hark! What base accusations my ears doth hear! The Emperor, growing soft enough to feel pity, surely you do jest mother!” I relished the flicker of fear in her eyes as the people around us smelled blood in the water. “Such insinuations...doubt my capabilities all you wish mother dearest, but dare not slander the character of our sovereign.”

“Hmph!” She threw her head back regally as I mock-bowed to her. “If you cannot even understand the words I speak to you, then surely you are beyond all hope, Gilgamesh. I will not stand by and hear you pervert my own words against me.” As she moved to turn, I knew I'd won, though not without cost.

The frowning figure who stepped up to take mother's place was the price. His build was slightly thicker than mine, his hair slightly darker, and his demeanor much more grim than my own at the moment. “Gilgamesh, did you really have to do that?”

“Odysseus, you know as well as I that I can't afford to lose any standing in court,” I defended lightly, sending a clear message with my eyes to those attempting to discreetly listen in. That should at least drive off the cowardly eavesdroppers.

My older brother sighed and sipped at his drink. “I do wish the two of you would mend bridges, Gil. It's difficult playing peacemaker all the time.”

“The day mother accepts that I'm not going to marry some spoiled sow to appease her political and financial interests is the day we have a civil conversation again.” I replied pointedly. “Speaking of which, I'm sorry for my part in the whole Anna-thing.”

“You mean my marriage?” Odysseus asks, shaking his head and smiling in what I imagine to be fond exasperation. “Anna and I are perfectly happy in St. Petersburg, Gil. She would have come,
too, but she's expecting in a month or two and didn't want to travel. She sends her best wishes and congratulations, though. You know you're her favorite of the family.”

“You both deserved better than to have wedlock forced upon you,” I sighed. “That said, it's nice that it's agreed with you. I think I can actually see a bit of spine in you now, brother.”

Ody perked up, straightening his back slightly as he looked at me with a raised brow. “You really think so? I remember you once commented that I had a 'rope of wet noodles for a backbone,' you know?”

“Sounds like me,” I granted magnanimously, “Well, give Anna my best and remember to send me an invite when my nephew is born.”

“You'll be far too busy to attend with all this happening,” Ody shook his head.

“If I can't at least fly out for a day or two,” I replied sternly, “to see the birth of my brother's first son, then I'm a failure both as a sibling and as a Viceroy.” I clapped the larger man on the back, “Now, I've dawdled enough here. Time to mingle...once more into the breach, Ody.”

My brother rolled his eyes and we parted without another word.

Scanning the crowd, I caught the eyes of a statuesque young woman with steel-silver hair. Returning my gaze, she tilted her head to the left. I doffed an imaginary hat to her and steered myself rightwards with a faux-casual speed.

“Oh boy, I know that walk,” someone mentioned, stepping up from my side. I intentionally took a quick step to place him between myself and Cornelia as she passed by behind the speaker. “Who are you on the run from?”

“Nathan,” I greeted with exaggerated and too-quiet politeness, “what in heaven's name are you talking about? I am a proud son of our glorious Emperor and run from no man, woman, or beast.” I peaked over his shoulder. “...coincidentally, if you see Cornelia, I'm not here. Never was here. Never even going to be here, actually.”

Nathan sighed a long-suffering sigh and put his iced lemonade to his forehead. “One day I'll figure out what I did in a past life to be fated as your friend in this one.”
I relaxed as Cornelia vanished into the mass of people. “You say that like being my friend is a bad thing. Speaking of which, how's your sister doing?”

Nathan shook his head. “Well, actually, although she missed your traditional birthday present. Is there a reason you've broken your pattern or did you honestly forget this year?”

I grinned. “I'm flattered she's expecting my attentions. Now all I have to do is pretend to lose interest and wow her with a late, but suitably amazing, gift. Once she sees what I've gotten for her this year, she'll be putty in my hands.”

Nathan rubbed at his forehead. “Spectacular. Well, I'm glad you've thought this out at least. I wonder if I should be more against the idea of you openly courting my only, younger, sister for sex. I really think I should, but I can't help but think getting her laid would do wonders for her attitude. If you could get her to stop competing in those bloodbaths, I'd probably even help you instead of standing by and snickering as your plans implode around your ears.”

I rolled my eyes. “She's the reigning champion of the tournaments, a crowd favorite, and her fights are the highest grossing on my network. If anything, I'm trying to find an opponent that'll give her a run for her money.”

“Spectacular,” Nathan repeated. “Now, if you'll excuse me, I actually had more than one reason to come here today. Father wants me to begin probing at the possibility of a merger between some of the other larger shipping lines and our own branches.”

“Good thinking,” I praised. “I'll throw you some business if you give me your sister's schedule.”

“I'll think about it,” the auburn-haired man replied. “Congratulations, by the way. I have faith you're just what the Area needs.”

I laughed, then paused. “Oh, wait, you're serious, let me laugh harder.”

“Well, either you're what the area needs, or it'll all end in fire and tears,” Nathan conceded.

“That's the spirit,” I enthused, allowing him to walk off.
Chancing another glance at Nonette, I watched her nod subtly as she met my eyes and I shifted appropriately. Although, honestly, I think I’d have been better off with the Witch of Britannia given who I bumped into next.

“Well if it isn’t the man of the hour!” Jacob Foxe grinned, toasting me with his group of hangers-on. I spied Julia Manfredi, Sylus Wallcock, Eugene Hull, and Terrance Burns…the usual suspects. Never one to retreat…at least when there were so many witnesses, I pushed forward with a grin on my face.

“Jake, you old fox,” I greeted, enjoying the man's eye twitch far too much. “How is the illustrious Knight of Six today?”

“Well, I could be better I suppose,” he temporized. “I mean, I tried to talk the Emperor out of one of his decisions, but I suppose it's just a tactic to let someone foul things up and prove they're chaff for the mill.”

“The Emperor does so love to give a man just enough rope to hang himself,” I granted, “I mean, I don't know what I would do if one of my life's ambitions just collapsed to dust before my eyes. Why, if I were that large of a failure, I'd probably just do the world a favor and end it all.”

There was real rage in his eyes now, and only the prestige he would lose kept him from gutting me on the spot. Well, that and the armor I was wearing, but he didn't know about that...I was pretty sure at least.

“True,” Jacob shrugged with practiced non-nonchalance, “I doubt you, at least, would have the grace to fall back on other talents. You're just so good at the game of business, after all, that I would wonder how you'd have time for other pursuits. Thankfully, a better man than either of us has decided to review the current tariffs and taxes for businesses in your financial bracket.”

Translation being that he'd hinted to the Emperor that I was growing to powerful economically and he'd tried to take me down a peg or two. Good. I'd let him have that victory, empty as it was, and gave him an offended sniff as I pretended to concede the point.

Thankfully, before we could start in on each other, trumpets began to blare.

Joy, Father had arrived.
Implications abound! Gil's been a busy little guy, hasn't he? So, yes, there are hints of future plot hooks and I've introduced some people that Gil absolutely does not get along with, including one person who can be legitimately dangerous to even him.

Next chapter will deal with some aftermath at the court, including Cornelia, and then straight on to Area 11. I'd do the ceremony itself, but I'm worried I'd butcher it.
Chapter 8

I dropped onto the sofa, lying down completely and setting my thousand-pound shoes to rest on the opposite arm of the furniture.

“Father will be expecting you in a few minutes after he's closed court for the day,” Schneizel stated from behind me.

“You know,” I mused. “I hate court fashion. I mean, honestly? These pants are awful. They cost too much, they look horrible, and they ride up so badly I think I'm going to have a rash.”

“I'm sure you can have one of your...assistants apply a soothing balm to the offended regions, Gilgamesh,” my older half-brother replied with a glimmer in his eye as he sat down and ran a gloved hand through his carefully trimmed blonde locks.

“Oh, are we doing banter now?” I asked, grinning lopsidedly and Schneizel's smile twitched upwards. “Or was that a joke? Did the Prime Minister just display a sense of humor? The tabloids will be shocked, shocked I say!”

I could tell Schneizel wanted to roll his eyes, though he was a bit too refined to do so, sadly.

Instead, I looked to his manservant, the slightly effeminate young man standing quietly by his lord. “Kanon, nice to see you again. Is my big brother keeping you satisfied?”

“Greetings to you as well, Lord Gilgamesh,” Kanon didn't even blink as he gave me a brilliant smile in return. “Absolutely, Your Highness. My lordship is more than attentive enough to my needs.”

I opened my mouth to respond, then closed it.

“Oh, you're good,” I stated admiringly, tapping my chin thoughtfully. “One day, though, Kanon, I'll see you reduced to a stuttering, blushing mess.”

Kanon gave me another gentle smile. “Your Highness does set himself high goals.”
I gave Kanon a comically-serious stare before nodding and flicking my gaze back to my brother. “So, how's Rakshata? I heard Lloyd complaining that she's already finishing up the Lancelot.”

“She seems to be progressing well enough,” Schneizel granted. “You'll forgive me if I don't go into specifics, though. I trust you'll be taking Earl Asplund with you to Area 11?”

I gave a vague nod of agreement, looking upwards to the art-covered ceiling of the waiting room.

“I was wondering if you had any plans regarding Area 11? I've already lost a sibling to this situation and am loathe to lose another. If you need any help…” Schneizel led off.

“I think I'll be okay,” I shrugged. “I've got an evil scheme that I'll have Lelouch look over and fine-tune, but the broad strokes are sound. I might need to call Marybell...if she and her knights aren't on pirate-hunting expeditions.”

Schneizel nodded with the point I'd scored. “My apologies, but the operation was sanctioned by the OSI and suitably off-the-books. I'd have informed you, but secrecy was paramount.”

I frowned. “Which means you've got a mole that's feeding information to these 'pirates' and you thought he was associated with me. I'm guessing the operation went south anyway?”

It was Schneizel's turn to frown now. “Should you ever decide to involve yourself politically, Gilgamesh, I should fear for my status as Prime Minister. Have your...agents, turned up anything?”

“Nothing of real substance,” I deflected, then paused and sat up stretching as I looked around and popped my neck. Catching Schneizel's eye, I discretely tapped my ear.

Understanding bloomed in those crystalline blue eyes and I could see the dots connecting, confirming his suspicions. Schneizel wasn't after some two-bit pirates, after all. Nothing short of a pirate king closing every trade lane in Indonesia would actually give him cause to send the Glinda knights out on something so paltry. No, Schneizel was hunting different prey...and it was the same prey he'd been hunting for years now. After all, with an operation like he'd been planning, if the leak wasn't with himself, and it wasn't with my own organization, then...
“Remember, Schneizel,” I cautioned, “I'm on your side about things, always have been. If you don't believe that by now, there's nothing I can do that will convince you.”

With that parting shot, I stood just as the door to the Emperor's personal office opened, snatching up my briefcase as I went. It'd already been thoroughly searched of course, the sealed missives inside left unaltered, but doubtlessly scanned to within an inch of their lives. Stepping into the office, I knew Schneizel and Kanon were right behind me, but they weren't the subject of this meeting. I'd noticeably forgone bringing any aide or notary to further disabuse the Emperor of my perceived weakness or dependency on others he might have believed I suffered from.

“Gilgamesh eu Britannia,” Charles zi Britannia intoned without any pomp or circumstance to his phrasing. Still, I had to hand it to the man, even without the half-dozen titles and positions I held that were worth mentioning, he'd managed to bring a certain gravitas to the room that few could do as well as he. “Newly appointed Viceroy of Area 11 and Fifth Prince of Britannia, in recognition of your new station, your appeal for an audience with your Emperor has been granted. See to it that you do not waste my time, boy. Now, what concerns do you have that you believe merit my attention?”

Notably, I was not asked if I wished to sit.

I smiled sunnily, doing my best to appear both completely unaffected by the man while still being utterly nonthreatening. “Your Majesty is most kind to grant me such an audience, especially at such short notice. In the interests of reorganizing the province you have granted me to rule in your name, I have compiled a list of terribly important documents which necessitate the Emperor's signature if they are to have the force required to take full effect.”

I handed my stack of paperwork over to an aide, who dutifully passed it to the Emperor.

A minute passed in painstaking silence as I pondered my gambit, Charles zi Britannia paging through the stack at a rapid pace. It would be fairly easy to, after all, they all amounted to the same thing form, merely filled out some fifty times.

“This is quite the request, Gilgamesh,” Chuck replied eventually. “and I have no doubt it will disrupt the business of the empire to a great extent. Pray tell me why I should show such obvious favoritism to one mildly important governor?”

I hesitated a moment. “Beyond the long-term effects of Area 11 running far more smoothly, and thus enriching the crown further,” I qualified, “I suppose I could take care of the situation myself, though I'd have to kill a great many people to do so.”
There was a moment of stunned silence in the room, then the Emperor began to laugh, his great booming voice filling the room with sound. The noise was deafening in its intensity, propelled seemingly by a force that was greater than the organs of a mere mortal man. Even struck as he was by the black humor of what I'd said, the Emperor still possessed the power of personality to make himself more of an untouchable object, a terrifying concept, rather than a man laughing himself silly.

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“Here’s to alcohol!” I toasted, raising my glass, “the cause of…and solution to, all of life's problems.”

Schneizel and Kanon made noises that were just a bit too polite to be called a snort and downed a significant portion of their own drinks.

“Gilgamesh, it occurs to me that I should be curious as to how you managed to make it through that meeting without offending the most powerful man in the world,” Schneizel mused. “But…honestly, I'm not sure if I want to learn this particular skill of your social repertoire.”

I sighed. “I've merely perfected the art of being irreverent to the point where most people consider me irrelevant. Add a dollop of 'precocious scamp' and you'll have a good approximation of the methodology.”

“Fascinating,” my older half-brother stated, “though I think my image revolves too much around the perception that I am an inscrutable stately diplomat to indulge in…your caliber of appealing shenanigans.”

“To each their own,” I shrugged, “I prefer not being taken seriously, though. It makes it easier to skip out on meetings and whatnot. Tedious things, those.”

As Schneizel opened his mouth to reply, the door opposite him banged open to allow the seething form of Cornelia li Britannia into the lounge, Guilford dutifully following in her footstep while another of my siblings, Clovis la Britannia, strolled casually into the room as if he's just gone for a morning perambulation about the grounds.

“Tedious, tedious things, those,” I repeated lowly for good measure, Schneizel and Kanon's lips twitching as I turned my full dapper smile on Cornelia. “Nelly! How are you this fine-”
As I stood, Cornelia grasped the front of my ludicrously expensive shirt with both hands, hoisted me up, and then pressed me back down into my seat. Admittedly, it was not quite as painful or serious a threat of physical harm as it could have been, but it was still jarring. Immediately, I held up a hand towards the chair in the corner.

“Anya, put the spike away,” I stated very clearly, staring straight into Cornelia's eyes as she flicked a gaze towards the small rosette who had a hand cocked back to throw the weighted decorative hair ornament she'd worn to accompany me today. Coincidentally, it was also a viciously sharp weapon that had a poison charge inside it. Her other hand was closed on her cellphone, ready to press the hidden switch that would turn it into a time-release flashbang.

Combined with the dozen other weapons on her person, they made a good low profile load out for diplomatic situations.

“Cornelia,” I stated calmly, drawing her attention back to me even as Guilford somewhat belatedly moved between Cornelia and my bodyguard. “I am perfectly capable of being an adult about this situation. Your sister is in absolutely no danger and is being watched by one of my best security teams. You know she sneaked out, you know she comes to me when I'm in town, you know that I'd never harm a hair on her body. Calm the fuck down and chill the hell out before Anya signals my other security team to storm this building and we have a national incident on our hands, okay?”

Cornelia visibly took a deep breath, closing her eyes and releasing the obvious tension she was holding.

“Also, if you keep leaning over me like this, I'm going to keep looking down your shirt,” I grinned lecherously.

The violet-haired woman flinched back, pressing a hand over the fashionable dress she'd worn to court rather than her usual battle regalia. Likely an attempt to garner more of Schneizel's attention, speaking of which...

“Now, now,” the Prime Minister stated, smiling with amusement at our antics. “I'm sure this is all just a huge misunderstanding. Cornelia, I take it Euphie has disappeared from her security team again?”

“Quite,” Cornelia bit off, still blushing slightly as she glared at me. Guilford's look was no less poisonous, though I made him avert his gaze after a particularly flirtatious wink sent his way.
“I...apologize,” the Witch of Britannia ground out, not looking at Schneizel as she did so, “for my impropriety. I’ve merely been...anxious to talk to Gilgamesh and had been planning on doing so before his creation as Viceroy, merely to ascertain Euphie's security, at the very least.”

I rolled my eyes and refilled my glass with something nonalcoholic. I'd had enough today and didn't want to be caught drunk in an unprotected environment. “By which you mean you'd have liked to threaten me using your status as a general and my then-nonexistent official political status as anything other than a civilian noble. Also, you'd have done so in the middle of a packed room full of our fellow royals, all of whom would probably have found it very, very interesting to learn that Euphie had slipped her watchers, let alone that she was capable of doing so on a regular basis.”

Cornelia stiffened, paling as I drove my point home.

“You've been on the front lines too long, sister,” I entreated gently. “The court is not a battlefield that you may charge across, lance raised. I hope you'll thank Nonette as well. She was kind enough to give me forewarning of your movements.”

“You've made your point,” Cornelia hissed bitterly, dropping into a chair as my teenage rosette bodyguard stood and paced over to me, sliding easily into my lap to give my violet-haired half-sister the evil eye as Anya curled around my body and pressed half of her face into the nape of my neck.

“So glad to see us all together,” Clovis enthused, breaking the tension. “It's terribly rare to have us all in the same room, after all. We must do this more often.”

“We may not survive such a proposal,” I mused, grinning as I wrapped an arm around Anya.

Cornelia eyed the two of us warily, she knew more or less what Anya was capable of, even without a knighmare frame to call upon. Nevertheless, she pressed forward with her agenda. “I'll be dropping by your estate soon to pick her up, Gilgamesh.”

“...Nelly,” I pointedly ignored the way she ratcheted up her glare at the nickname, “what would you say if Euphie wanted to come with me to Area 11 for an extended-”
“Absolutely not!” The general growled, cutting me off. “Euphie is going back to her school, where she'll be safe, not some terrorist-ridden backwater!”

“Cornelia,” Schneizel cautioned, the one word doing more to calm the Witch than anything I could have said.

Breathing deeply, my half-sister continued at a more reasonable volume and tone. “Area 11 is not the kind of environment I want Euphie exposed to. Racial tensions are too high, a large percentage of the population has not converted to honorary citizenship, and there's still an organized resistance to imperial rule.”

“She would be under my personal watch, in conjunction with Lelouch, who seems perfectly fine with Nunnally living in the Area, and you know how he is about her safety. She wouldn't be leaving the Settlement,” and certainly wouldn't be going to any sakuradite conferences, “and I'd be financing her security through the Black Knights, not the Purist Faction-led military.”

Cornelia heaved another breath, obviously restraining herself. “Gilgamesh. I understand that you are fairly competent in arranging for security details, but I still feel that the arrangements I've made are superior. In addition, my reputation is such that no one would dare touch Euphie, while under your aegis, certain people might see an excuse to strike at her with impunity, correctly assuming that I would blame you for any lapse in her protection.”

Clovis snickered and all of our heads turned. Containing himself, he waved us off, “I'm terribly sorry, I just...Cornelia, he never told you, did he?”

I stiffened, in my arms Anya went still as well, alarmed at my reaction.

Across the table, Schneizel sighed and reached for a tumbler.

Cornelia shot each member of our group a look, then turned back to Clovis. “What exactly didn't 'he' tell me?”

“Clovis,” I said warningly fixing him with a look.

The fop shook his head. “Gil, she should know what she's dealing with, especially if you're planning to try and convince her to allow Euphie to stay with you. Let me take care of this. After
all, I owe you for warning me about the Area 11 Viceroy position,” he said somberly, “you were absolutely right. I only wish Albert...well, it can't be helped.”

We paused a moment to remember our passed sibling.

“...at any rate, though,” Clovis continued, pouring himself a glass of brandy, “what Gil hasn't told you is that he's the reason Lelouch and Nunnally are still alive.”

“I'd surmised such,” Cornelia admitted, favoring me with a softer glance. “It's not hard to imagine what would have befallen them if Gilgamesh...or myself, or some patron wasn't available to protect them. Still, while that does establish Gilgamesh's credentials, I'm afraid I'm not convinced of his capacity to protect Euphie in particular. While there are a great many people who would wish harm on Lelouch or Nunnally because of their heritage, there are a great many more ruthless individuals who would target Euphemia to get to a high-ranking general in the army.”

Clovis sighed. “Perhaps I was being too vague. Very well, then. I believe it was about...a week? In any case, soon after Nunnally's ninth birthday, two squads of twelve men stormed Gilgamesh's residence on the Eden Estate. This was back before construction had finished on Târgoviște, you understand.”

Cornelia nodded eying me strangely now. “Why was I not informed of this? Such an assault on a royal estate, especially so soon after Marianne's passing...”

“It is because my mother let them in,” I admitted, sighing as I resigned myself to the story. Cornelia stiffened in surprise. “You should know that she did not like my association with Lelouch and Nunnally, especially after their mother's death. I'm not entirely sure how involved she was in this plot, but if I understand things correctly, she bartered Nunnally's and Lelouch's lives for political favors as well as a promise I wouldn't be harmed.”

“The men,” Clovis picked the story back up, “were deniable assets. Scoundrels and criminals who'd been promised exoneration if they succeeded when the most they could reasonably hope for was a quick death.” He paused here. “I'm afraid I'm not terribly clear on exactly how, but Gilgamesh managed to take all of them more or less alive.”

I swallowed and nodded. “Mother didn't know that, when I'd made plans to construct my own residence on the family estate, I'd planned on living in a bunker underneath the house itself. Steel-reinforced concrete several feet thick, blastdoors able to withstand some artillery fire, and more. The house above I'd turned into a fairly elaborate deathtrap...poison gas, fixtures that I could electrocute at a moment's notice, chemical sprayers that could knock a man unconscious anywhere
in the house. I'd list everything, but we'd be here all day.”

There was a long silence in the room as Anya pressed herself against me comfortingly.

“...and you said you took the men alive,” Cornelia noted quietly, visibly reassessing me, “what happened to them?”

I cut a glance towards Schneizel, who's eyes were steady and unwavering. I'd always suspected he knew, but neither of us bothered to broach the topic. “I...needed to send a message, a very firm statement that could not be misunderstood in any way. Lelouch and Nunnally were under my protection and I would not allow anyone to harm them...so I resorted to rather extreme measures.”

Clovis averted his eyes here and I could understand he was sorry to have brought this particular incident up.

“I...called Luciano Bradley,” I admitted, not bothering to comment on Cornelia's wide eyes and growing horror plain on her face. “This was when he was still a Wildcount, with only the lands in South Africa to his name. I think he was starting to earn acclaim with the...decisive and ruthless way he quelled the tribal conflicts in the area, but he hadn't caught the Emperor's eye yet. He was more than happy to lend me the services of his most skilled and experienced tanners and taxidermiests, as well as someone to work ivory.”

The silence was oppressive now as I busied myself with tracing a finger along the rim of my half-full glass.

“I sent...certain families a number of...presents. Carine's mother had been one of the greater proponents of the whole operation. I sent her two dresses, one for herself and one sized for Carine, both made of human skin.” I swallowed dryly. “I sent my mother a variety of jewelry made from the teeth I'd had pulled from the mens' mouths while they were still alive. Other people got other...gifts, but they all got a disc that displayed the lengths I'd gone to in order to get as much information as I could out of the would-be assassins.”

I sighed deeply, leaning back and staring at the ceiling. “It's like that joke people tell, about prison and how you need to shank the toughest guy you can find, kill someone brutally and coldly your first day and no one will think twice about crossing you.”

“That's why you named your estate Târgoviște,” Cornelia commented with a hushed voice.
“Vlad Tepes was a monster,” I shrugged, “but...well, examples need to be made, sometimes, so I can understand where he was coming from. After that, I took Nunnally and Lelouch to Târgoviște, which makes my home in Eden look like the garden it's supposed to be, and I've only had a very, very few problems ever since. It's why, even though I'm gregarious and a bit of a fool, and everyone looks down on the 'Merchant Prince,'” I snorted at my nickname, “they know not to cross certain lines. Thankfully, it looks like the statement I'll be making in Area 11 will be much less...distasteful.”

I drained my glass.

Anya, wonderful little Anya, wrapped her arms around my neck and pulled herself closer to me. I sighed as I breathed in her scent, relaxing in the familiar and pleasant memories it awoke. Zoe had told Anya what I'd done almost immediately after the incident had happened, giving the poor girl nightmares for weeks...actually, Zoe, Alex, and I hadn't been much better off in that regard. Still, it meant Anya knew some of the darkest secrets I kept and she didn't care. In fact, I think the realization that someone could have potentially been in a position to kill me made her go behind my back to Zoe and ask for her first lessons in self-defense.

“I'll be stopping by Târgoviște to talk to Euphie, Gilgamesh,” Cornelia stated, not looking at me, “just to make sure that she understands that she is to listen to you as if you were me.”

“No one will touch her,” I promised.

“Besides Lelouch,” Cornelia stated, audibly rolling her eyes, “and that Ashford girl. I know your attitudes about intimacy Gilgamesh, but so help me if my sister returns pregnant, I will geld you.”

I snorted and shook my head. “Well, I think that's my cue then.” I swept Anya off my lap and onto the ground, pulling a smile on as I stood.

Schneizel, so silent I'd almost forgotten he'd been in attendance, stood as well and solemnly clapped me on my shoulder. “Better men than you, Gilgamesh, would have slaughtered whole families for that offense, your actions showed an uncommon restraint. I know it might seem terrible, what you did, but know that I am thankful every time I see Nunnally smile, every time Lelouch and I play a game of chess. Those memories are dear to me, so thank you.”

I nodded, my smile honest and softer at the admission. “Thank you as well, Schneizel. It's something I took no joy in, but...” I drifted off, but the Prime Minister nodded.
Clovis, standing at the doorway, gave me the faintest of apologetic expressions and then nodded goodbye. I was grateful, I don’t think I could have stood a conversation after what he’d dredged up.

"If it’s any consolation," Schneizel stated as we walked out, "I think you’ll make a fine Viceroy."

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

How do you make sure no one gets any ‘smart ideas’ about taking your position for themselves? Or targeting the ones you care about?

Simple. You make sure that everyone knows you’re absolutely batshit insane when it comes to a disproportionate response to any type of threat. Verbally besting someone is all well and good, but making a visceral example of someone(s) sticks in people’s memories.
Interlude: Kaname Ohgi & Shinichiro Tamaki

“Oi, dumbass, you're gonna' be late if you don't get your ass outta' bed!”

Kaname fairly jumped out of bed at the declaration, his mind whirring as he looked to his alarm clock wondering why it hadn't-

“...Shinichiro, goddammit,” Kaname muttered, resisting the urge to crawl back into bed for another hour...as well as beat his flatmate senseless for his indiscretion.

“Hah!” Shinichiro Tamaki crowed from his seat in the kitchen, “works every damn time!”

“There better be breakfast ready,” Kaname threatened, pulling a shirt on with a sigh, “It's your turn.”

“The hell it is,” Shinichiro shot back from the other room. “I did it yesterday. It was boloney and beans.”

“No, it was eggs,” Kaname scowled as he marched into the kitchen. “I did eggs, over easy.”

“It was boloney and beans,” Shinichiro repeated adamantly, “It's your turn.”

The two flatmates stared at each other over the counter for a long, hard moment, before Shinichiro held up a closed fist. Kaname sighed, rolling his eyes, before nodding. “Jan-Ken-Pon!” The both cried, throwing out...

“Ugh,” Shinichiro scowled at his hand as if it'd betrayed him. “Fine, I'll make the damn breakfast. Fucking Settlement food is trash anyway. You need to make a run down to the market, get some fish and we can have some real breakfast. Remind me why we don't live closer to people who know you don't have to dip something in lard to eat it?”

Kaname sighed and turned on the television, only to scowl at what he saw.
“In other news, there was another riot in the Saitama ghetto today which resulted in the death of two military police as well as twenty armed protestors. Experts believe this is a result of the absence of a Viceroy's authority to coordinate the garrisons of the Tokyo Settlement-”

“You asked why we don't live closer to the ghettos,” Kaname pointed with the remote, “that's why. Once it got out we were Honorary Britannians, the clock was ticking against someone deciding to make an example out of us. You know how the resistance fighters are.”

Shinichiro snorted angrily as his eyes flicked between the television and the stovetop. “Yeah, stupid hotheads. Still, news reports like that make me wonder if we wouldn't have been better off bucking this whole honorary citizen shit and-”

“-what?” Kaname frowned, not looking at his friend. “Thrown our lives away in some stunt that would be forgotten the next week? Nao-Nathan's right Shinichiro. He did us a huge favor by getting us citizenship papers, we shouldn't spit on that.”

“I know, I know,” Shinichiro sighed, “and it's awesome that I get to take hot showers and don't have to tote my own crap out in a bucket and all, but...well, just might help me sleep at night if I was doing something that mattered.”

Kaname sighed as he leaned back to watch the news in greater detail. There was another segment on the jap-no, the Eleven terrorist factions that had been broadcasting pirate radio frequencies, urging revolt against the Britannian government while the leadership was weak. There evidently had been an upswing in violence, though it hadn't amounted to much after the Knightmares were brought in.

“It's not like I don't feel the same way,” Kaname said finally, “and we've vouched for a dozen people each to get honorary citizenship, so it's not like we're ignoring the problem, but...”

“I hear ya,” Shinichiro muttered, stalking over to the couch and dropping a plate of eggs, bacon, and toast. “Not like any of us know anything about being terrorists, anyway. Maybe if Naoto had been there for us...”

They both fell silent at the statement, remembering the red-headed friend they'd known in their youth, someone who both of them had watched pointless and repetitive sentai shows with, running around and shouting about high ideal and higher oaths to uphold justice and...and...
...then Naoto had started getting more involved with his father's business, their family taking trips to the empire's homeland more and more often. Soon enough, they'd heard his mother calling him 'Nathan' instead of Naoto.

“I still remember that fight you guys had back...I guess it was two or three years before the invasion?” Shinichiro reminisced with a grin. “Nao-Nathan, he popped you right in the nose, I heard the crack from three meters away! Then you gave him that black eye-”

“-and we teased him all summer over wearing makeup to cover it up,” Kaname snorted taking a sip of juice. “Yeah, we almost beat each other senseless because he didn't want to dye his hair black like the teacher kept suggesting and then told us he was moving to a private school.”

“A Britannian school,” Shinichiro sneered slightly, “Oh, man, we gave him shit for that! But...yeah,” the brown-haired man sobered, “Nathan was always the leader type, we'd have followed him to the depths of yomi back then if he'd asked us to.”

Neither spoke the thought insidiously refusing to quiet itself as they watched the latest reports of a riot being quelled. The thought that, as much as they joked about Naoto, Nathan, being able to lead them to hell if he wanted...

...that maybe, maybe he had, and they just hadn't noticed it until it was too late.

“I should get ready for work. I'll go in early and review my plans,” Kaname decided, letting the unsaid topic drop.

“Yeah, guess I gotta' head in too,” Shinichiro sighed as he scooped up the last bit of bacon. “Eh, it might taste like grease, but it's still better than getting shot at.”

Kaname grunted his assent as he started towards the shower.

The hot water helped soothe the strange tension in his muscles, letting him relax back into his slacks and shirt as he looked himself over in the mirror for a final time. Giving himself a nod, he grabbed his keys and headed for the elevator, calling a goodbye to Shinichiro as he went.
“Shinichiro, you got those reports done?”

Shinichiro scowled and closed his phone, “yeah, yeah, lemme’-what's that word for putting things in order that's all fancy and shit?”

Naomi frowned for a moment, obviously working through her knowledge of her non-native language. “Ah, collate, I think.”

The brown-haired man snapped his fingers as he rooted through a stack of files, “that's it! Collate! Lemme' collate that shit and I'll have it out pronto.”

Naomi nodded and moved to leave, then paused. “You know the boss doesn't like doing private business while you're on the clock.”

Shinichiro scowled as he tapped out a ream of paper before feeding it into his copier. “Yeah, well, he's not the one signing my paychecks is he? I'll just take it up with Red. She'll back me up.”

“Do the words 'bad for team morale' mean anything to you?” Naomi Inoue asked idly. “What's so important that it's got you ready to start another one of those pissing contests between the manager and Red?”

Her coworker scratched at his hair anxiously and looked through his office's glass window suspiciously before sighing. “Okay, look, it's my dad. I just wanted to make sure the nurse got his medicine, okay?”

Naomi's widened slightly, realizing she's overstepped her bound. “Ah, sorry, that was insensitive of me.”

The brown-haired man's dismissive wave was response enough, “don't worry about it. You're just watchin' my ass is all. Don't think I don't appreciate it.”

“Right, sure,” Naomi audibly rolled her eyes. “So...what do you think has gotten Red so pissed off these days?”

Naomi giggled slightly and Tamaki fought to hide his smile at the sound.

“Alright,” Naomi nodded, “but do you think it's got anything to do with the new Viceroy? Kento says she chucked a pool cue through the breakroom's tv when the news story came on. Maybe she's got a grudge against him?”

“Don't even joke about that,” Shinichiro groused. “I've got enough problems filling out paperwork without the Viceroy himself shitting at us from on high. Do you have any idea how hard it will be to buy military surplus if that happens? Then I have to go to the Black Knights and they charge an arm and a leg, if they're willing to sell at all. Then there's the licenses that'll need to be renewed in a few months so we can keep up the training areas and the firing ranges—”

“Okay, okay!” Naomi laughed as she cried out, holding her hands up to stop the outpouring of grief. “Sorry, I was just thinking aloud. I wouldn't even know how our glorious leader would know the new Viceroy anyway.”

“Maybe he turned her down for a date or something?” Shinichiro pondered, scowling as he finished applying his signature on the last of the forms and handing them over.

“I'm surprised he's still alive in that case,” Naomi muttered. “But isn't he supposed to be the guy who started the whole Knightmare Battle Royale thing? You'd think Red would be more...appreciative.”

“Hell if I know,” Shinichiro repeated. “Probably some weird sex thing. Brits are all supposed to be prudes anyway and this guy is supposed to be some sorta' swanky billionaire. Prolly has girls crawling all over him lookin' ta' seduce him outta' his money or somethin'. Maybe Red came on to him to get some better press or a better contract and he shot her down?”

“Maybe,” Naomi considered, turning the matter over in her mind. “If he's a billionaire, think that means things are looking up for the Area? After everything that Albert's put the ghetto's through...well, I hope the bastard rots.”

“Amen,” Shinichiro grunted sourly, looking surreptitiously at the door again and knowing the shit...
that would fall on him if the wrong people were to hear their bitching. 'Anti-Britannian Sentiment' had a wide definition, after all... “Glad the bastard's dead. I could probably done a better job than him, you know? This Gilgamesh guy might not be a complete fuckup at least, but I wouldn't hold my breath if we got a skinflint noble prince runnin' things, even if he's puttin' money into all those schools the news was talking about a week back.”

Naomi nodded thoughtfully. “From what I heard, he's supposed to be a pretty good guy, just rich as sin. They say he got started making money in stocks and then moved into entertainment. Did you know he actually wrote and directed Terminator?”

Shinichiro blinked, cocking his head oddly. “That one about the time-traveling robot? Man, that thing was awesome!”

“He even got his younger brother to star in the sequel, from what I read,” Naomi nodded. “Apparently there's a lot of rumors on the net about how he's secretly behind a lot of the new action movies in the last few years. The one about that cop who takes out a hotel full of terrorists, that series where the guy with the eyepatch rescues people from all those destroyed cities in the future where the gangs have taken over, and he even is supposed to have written Sammy the Vampire Slayer.”

“Well, can't win them all,” Shinichiro rolled his eyes.

Naomi shook her head, “But you loved Empire's Fall!”

“Hey, hey,” Shinichiro grinned, “I like any movie that has Pendragon turn into a smoking crater, aliens or no aliens. Suck about the ending though, I mean, Britannia managing to kick their asses? Bullshit, such bullshit.”

“The sequel, Empire's Rise, was pretty good, though,” Naomi stated admiringly. “I loved the special effects, even if it was a lot gorier. Anyway, that was Gilgamesh eu Britannia, too.”

“Damn,” Shinichiro nodded, “takes big brass b-ones to blow your own capital up, even if it's just in a movie.”

“So...” Naomi shuffled awkwardly, “I've got to get back to work, but if you're not doing anything Friday?”
Shinichiro looked away, “Yeah, I mean no, I’m not doing anything. The usual place?”

Naomi smiled and opened the door, happily ready to go about her day for the date she’d just made.

Shinichiro Tamaki grinned, a slight blush on his face as he pulled out another stack of forms. Maybe life wasn’t all bad, then? He had himself a good job, he could take care of his old man, he had a girl...and even if the Brits were assholes, he could always go home and cue up a movie to see their cities blown the fuck up just like they had to his. Maybe not ideal, but he’d take what he could get.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Kaname Ohgi straightened his suit as he stepped out of the speed train car along with a dozen other men, though the others wore the uniform of the Black Knights as they stepped crisply along the tunnel towards the command center he’d seen on occasion. His business, though, took him towards the private elevator off to the side. No one approached him or bothered him as he waited, his presence was almost expected by this point and the men knew not to bother him. Even if they did, though, his ID badge was more than enough clearance to silence any questions.

A moment's ride and he was delivered to a small waiting room and reception area a few stories above the busy workplace of many Black Knights, presenting his ID to an electronic scanner which would unlock the inner door as alwa-

“Good morning, Kaname-san.”

Kaname Ohgi stiffened slightly before forcing himself to relax, both at the sudden voice behind him as well as the use of a traditional, and forbidden, Japa-Eleven honorific.

“Hello Sayoko-san,” he replied, forcing out the honorific with surprising difficulty. It was one thing to know they were absolutely secure from anyone overhearing them, it was another to attempt to overcome years of conditioning in a matter of months. “How is everything today?”

“His Highness is doing well,” Sayoko bowed slightly, “though he seems to be having a somewhat tense conversation over the phone at this moment. I took the liberty of acquiring the adjusted lesson plans you submitted from his desk so that he would not need to be disturbed.

“Ah, thank you,” Kaname smiled, bowing stiffly himself as he took the offered folders and began to leaf through them. There were several small annotations throughout the documents in a cramped and exacting hand which was by now intimately familiar. “...and Her Highness?”
“Just finished with her morning physical therapy,” Sayoko confirmed. “The doctors cleared her to walk without the braces and believe that her muscle growth is sufficient that she will not need another surgery.”

Kaname felt a wide smile light up his face. “Th-that's amazing! I mean, I'm glad Her Highness is recovering so well. The atrophy they were discussing was very concerning.”

Sayoko favored him with a knowing gaze that sent chills up his spine, but she stopped short of saying anything on the subject. “Her Highness is finishing her ablutions and will be ready momentarily. You may wait in the study until she is ready.”

“Oh, uh...Sayoko-san,” Kaname swallowed, a certain promise ringing in his mind memorably as he contemplated what Her Highness' recovery might mean, “I just wanted to make sure that you knew were weren't, um-Her Highness and I are er...”

Eyes glinting with far, far too much amusement for their own good, Sayoko Shinozaki turned her head slightly to look at the sputtering man over her shoulder. “You would do well to remember that there is nothing that occurs on these premises that is outside of His Highness' notice, Kaname-san. If he took umbridge regarding the methodology of your lessons, you would be made aware of it.”

Ohgi Kaname blinked, his mouth working silently.

“Still, it is good to be cautious about these things,” Sayoko nodded approvingly. “As servants, we do not have the right of refusal to such advances. Offering our lieges relief should indeed be one of the highest goals we espouse to.”

Raising a hand up, Kaname pinched his arm harshly, flinched, and proceeded to marvel at the lack of a sudden and violent awakening from this obvious dream. Still in something of a daze, he watched as Sayoko vanished around a corner, then pushed forward autonomously towards the study where most of his lessons took place.

The first indication he had that any time had passed at all was the soft noise of a handle being turned. Looking towards one of the doorways, a thin girl no more than thirteen paced into the room as quiet as a night breeze. The honorary citizen swallowed again as he took in the thin, almost too-thin, sundress she wore that matched the color of the can she was using to probe at the ground in front of her. With evidence of long practice, she easily found her way towards her usual seat at the slightly smaller desk in front of him, her study materials already laid out before her.
All while humming a happy, upbeat, tune.

Kaname fought his dry throat once again as he remembered the particular genre of music Nunnally vi Britannia preferred. “I’m glad to see they took the braces off,” he offered awkwardly.

“It’s a great relief,” Nunnally nodded, smiling as she swung her feet freely, the light sandals smacking against the floor as she moved. The motion reminded Kaname of exactly how young the girl in front of him was once again. “Though I believe I’ll enjoy fulfilling a certain promise much more.”

Kaname coughed. “Ah, Your Highness, don’t you believe it would perhaps be better to wait until you're older...”

Nunnally pouted slightly, “Ohgi-sensei, I know we've discussed my sexual experience before. I remember the noises you made when you found out that Lelouch and I slept in the same bed.”

The older man shifted uneasily, fingering his too-tight collar.

“...and I know you've enjoyed the liaisons we've shared so far,” Nunnally continued, her eternally-closed eyes still conveying mock-confusion as her brows furrowed. “So I know that it can't be because you find me unattractive...”

“That's not it, it's just” Kaname hastened to explain as Nunnally stood and carefully made her way around the desks and through the few feet that separated them to seat herself in his lap. “-it's just that...I'm a...I mean, you're a-”

“I am a Princess of Britannia and you are an Honorary Britannian, I am aware,” Nunnally stated gently, pressing her lips to his. “But a promise is a promise...and you did promise,” she breathed quietly.

Kaname heaved a deep sigh as his arm closed around her slight form.

Much as Sayoko had commented, there was little he could do in this situation. He'd known both young girls and even adult women who fantasized about being 'taken' by a noble when he'd worked
for the private outreach program that had been his job before this. They'd endlessly romanticized the notion of being dragged off to live a life of luxury and steamy sex as they poured over trashy romance novels. It was probably ironic that he was now in a position they'd found so appealing.

Still, he couldn't deny that Nunnally was correct. He had enjoyed their 'liaisons' as she'd called them, much to his shame. What he'd dismissed a year ago as a childish crush had proven surprisingly resilient to his many deflections. A little over three months ago, though, his pupil had tricked a kiss out of him as a 'reward' for a test grade and their relationship had escalated from there...to his shame.

Although he'd been unable to appeal her advances to her brother...because, what would he say? How did one inform a royal that their sibling was making passes at a member of nearly the lowest social class in existence? If one liked to prolong one's life, one did not, it was as simple as that.

“I didn't think you were so close to having your braces taken off,” Kaname admitted as he tenderly gripped the younger girl's sides while she adjusted herself so that her knees were parted across his thighs.

“I suppose I just needed the proper...motivation,” Nunnally breathed, exposing her swan-like throat to her lover's lips. “It has been...frustrating, these last few months. You are a very inconsiderate man, Kaname Ohgi.”

Despite himself, the older man grinned against her sensitive skin. “My deepest apologies, Your Highness.”

Nunnally gasped aloud as his hand finally braved low enough to grasp a handful of her rear, leaning closer to him and pressing her tongue against his ear. “My brother has been very...occupied, you understand. Sayoko tries, but I've found there is little that can meet my needs except...”

Kaname took a deep breath as the imperial princess in his lap explain in long, arduous, painfully hard detail what exactly she desired.

“Your brother's been busy? I thought you said I was inconsiderate,” Kaname stated as calmly as he could, very aware of the pressure on his lap.

“Lelouch has been flirting with monogamy,” Nunnally admitted, “so he's been preoccupied with a
single lover...which is such a shame. There are several girls at school who would appreciate his attentions.” She paused as she ground herself against him. “He's also been avoiding Gil's calls. I love my brother, but I suppose it is a princess' fate to be surrounded by inconsiderate men.”

“Gil?” Kaname asked desperately, reaching for anything that could prolong the conversation and give him a chance to escape.

“Gilgamesh,” Nunnally explained as her fingers deftly loosened his shirt buttons, stopping only to press one of her lover's hands to her chest. “He's one of my brothers and was just appointed the new Viceroy. He practically raised Lelouch and I...after the accident,” she summarized with a quick deflection, devoting her attention instead to pressing her lips against his pulse-point.

Kaname gave in to a low groan as he pressed back against Nunnally's hips. “That's, ah...interesting. Does he know that you and your brother...?”

Nunnally giggled and kissed him more deeply and hotly than before. “Ohgi-sensei, as much as I enjoy the idea of discussing Gilgamesh's sex life, I think it far past time you realized the only way you're getting out of this chair is to set me on your desk and fuck me.”

Kaname Ohgi had, once, considered himself a man of fairly strong will, a man who would do the right thing when called to it, but... That felt like it had been a lifetime ago, before an invasion that had all but destroyed his homeland, before someone he'd almost called a brother talked in into accepting the occupation rather than fighting it. After seven years of a tolerably, if not outright enjoyable life fulfilling his ambition of teaching, of helping people under the rule of Britannia...

...he could say that this was his recompense.

Kaname stood, lifting the light girl in his lap with him, pressing her against his chest.

...he could say that this was his punishment.

With one hand, he kept her tight against his own body, her hardened nipples pressing through the thin fabric of her sundress temptingly.

...he could say that this was weakness brought on by living as a dog of the empire.
His other hand, swept across his desk, throwing lesson plans, pens, and other things to the floor so
that he could lay the blind princess in his arms onto the dark oak.

...he could say that this was, indeed, his duty to his liege, as Sayoko had stated.

Desperately, he unbuttoned himself, letting his pants drop as he dragged his boxers down to expose
his hard member. Dragging the young girl to him, his breath caught as the dress caught and
revealed she hadn't worn any undergarments today.

...but, honestly? By this point, he'd stopped caring.

“Are you sure?” He asked breathlessly, only deeply ingrained courtesy holding him back from
assaulting the girl immediately.

In answer, Nunnally reached down between her parted legs and gently grasped his dick, her fingers
bringing a pleasurable hiss from Kaname as she aligned him with her entrance, humming quietly all
the while.

“...you know,” Kaname couldn't resist saying, “I always thought a princess would have different
taste in music.”

“I suppose I am a bit inconsiderate myself, then,” Nunnally gasped as he slid into her. “Mmmh,
Hmm, Mmmh...got it bad, bad, bad...I'm hot for teacher...”

Kaname groaned, more towards the sensation of velvety warmth around his cock than the quietly
sung phrase of the song. Truthfully, the world seemed to fall away as he thrust long and deep into
the princess beneath him, who was desperately gripping the wooden desk as she moaned aloud.

“Ohgi-sensei, sensei!”

Maintaining his motion, Kaname reached down and gently teased the exposed nub of flesh at the
apex of her legs, watching with gratification as Nunnally vi Britannia arched into an orgasm. Still,
the tightening vice of her young orifice was all he could stand and, within moments, he released a
flood of semen into her.
As Nunnally pulled him into a languid kiss, she sighed with contentment, “Do I pass, sensei?”

Sighing, Kaname decided to play into his 'role' rather than fight it, “Full marks.”

As he pulled free from her and lowered her to the floor, he tried to reassert what little authority he still had, “That doesn't mean you're getting out of reviewing calculus, though.”

Nunnally gave a playful groan and wiped a finger through the secretions on his penis, licking off the mixture of semen and vaginal fluid with a faux-innocent expression. “Perhaps I could take the review...orally?”

Kaname gave a tired sigh.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

...<opens mouth, closes briefly, opens again>...

I...don't know how this happened. I set out to do an interlude around Ohgi, but then I got ideas and Tamaki proved entertaining to write and there was sex and...I think I gave Nunnally an actual personality instead of the morality chain-ill girl that she was for most of canon. Oh, and Gilgamesh is a horrible, horrible influence on other people, as well. Well, at least he isn't monopolizing all of the kinks in the story...

...so, comments, questions? As I think there will probably be many for this chapter...
I sighed and looked over the reports cluttering my desk.

“I’m surprised you actually do all of this work yourself,” Charlotte commented with a raised brow from where she was scanning a datapad.

“His Highness prefers to be in charge of his own affairs,” Zoe smiled from across the room, where she was working on numerous other projects that would eventually make their way to my own desk.

“I am the master of my fate,” I quoted idly, “I am the captain of my soul.” I flipped through another report, infinitely glad I’d finally gotten the hang of speed-reading. “I know it's unusual for someone like me to be so involved in the day-to-day, but...hmm, how to explain?”

“Your Highness has no need to explain himself to me,” Charlotte deflected.

I groaned. “Okay you two. Enough's enough. Zoe, I know you're trying to out-respect Charlotte, but she doesn't know any better. We're alone. My name is Gil. If you absolutely must, it's Gilgamesh, but I am sick and tired of hearing 'Your Highness' today. I swear, the next-”

I stopped myself, eyes wide and alert as I stood suddenly.

There was silence. Sweet, blessed silence as I looked around my expansive office. Plush chairs, entertainment center, sequestered kitchen and bedroom through the far door...and all was still as I inspected it.

“Your Highness?” The intercom's screen lit up.

I sighed and glared at Zoe's smirk. “Yes, I know I asked for it. Don't get too smug or I'll have your ass.”

“Whatever my lord should require,” Zoe smiled graciously.

“Good,” I nodded, then turned to the intercom, tapping the screen to answer the call. “Cecile, I know I've told you before. My name is Gilgamesh. I have no idea who this 'your highness' person is you keep calling...perhaps a secret lover?”

The violet-haired woman blushed, “Your Highness, please!”

“Oh my,” I waggled my eyebrows, “getting it while on a call to your boss, huh? The 'your highness,' must be an excellent lover for you to moan his name in front of a prince of Britannia...or, wait, could it be a woman? Lady Croomy, you never cease to amaze!”

The poor girl...actually, she was some four years my senior, but so fun to tease I couldn't help but
think of her as younger. At any rate, though, her face was aflame to the point where I was beginning to worry for her health. Thankfully, her flush died a bit as a jackal's laughter could be heard off-screen. Reaching over to pick up a clipboard, Cecile's face briefly contorted with anger as she flung the object to her right. A loud yelp, noises of complaint, and a clatter of debris testified to her aim. As she turned back, despite the fact that her face was still red as a tomato, her voice was far more even.

“Now, Your Highness,” Cecile Croomy stated coolly, her eyes narrow, “I was just calling to see if we were still on for the inspection tour you had scheduled. Congratulations on your appointment, by the way.”

I considered pursuing my teasing, but decided not to. Cecile was a bit scary sometimes. “Ah, yes. I'll be coming down presently. Please do make sure Lloyd isn't bleeding, will you?”

Bidding her a temporary farewell, I stood and beckoned Zoe and Charlotte. “Okay Charlotte, let's go down to R&D and have a looksee at our resident mad scientist, shall we? Zoe, make sure your brother's back on his lessons, would you? After that, double-check on some of the quarterly reports. I really want to review everything before we leave later this week...oh, and get Gino and Anya to start building a list of candidates for a formal royal guard unit...and see if he's had time to start talking with Oscar about the Viceroy's Palace.” I sighed. “Sorry to depend on you so much, sweetheart.”

Zoe smiled and kissed me lightly. “It's not a problem Gil. That is what I'm here for, my lord.”

I sighed and shook my head, giving her ass a grope as I moved past her and into the hall.

“See something you like?” I asked idly as one of the walls dropped away to reveal the balcony-walkway that overlooked my central plaza.

Charlotte swallowed as she looked over the huge tropical-themed fountain in the middle of the large hall. Within the display was a group of people, all nude, sleeping in the lazy heat of a careful arrangement of lamps. There was only one boy among the half-dozen figures, the remainder being five women of various voluptuous body types, curled around the young teen boy, perhaps no older than twelve...

“Are...displays like this common, Your Highness?” She eventually managed to ask.

I grinned. “More or less. I have a calendar and people volunteer for days. They're free to just lounge for a while or actually have sex. Of course, there are various fringe benefits to volunteering...especially since it's essentially a paid vacation day. The only rule is that you have to be naked for the entirety of your time.”

“...and people just agree to this?” Charlotte asked doubtfully.

I shrugged. “Well, it didn't hurt that I took a few days myself at the beginning. I have to say, people make the funniest faces when they're trying to talk to their boss about a corporate takeover while he's balls-deep in a woman.”

Charlotte cleared her throat and gave the group one last look before we stepped into the elevator and out of sight.

Looking about the massive maintenance bay, I never failed to be impressed with Lloyd.
The humanoid mechanical figures that towered over me were a testament to the man's genius. I'd never been mechanically-minded, but whenever I came down here, I began to wonder if I'd just never put forth the effort to become good at it. Even if I had, though, I'd likely never be as good as Earl Asplund already was with only a quarter century under his belt.

“These are...Knightmare Frames?” Charlotte asked, her tone such that I didn't doubt that she found the machines impressive, but was not learned enough in military matters to distinguish between different generations of hardware.

“Indeed,” I nodded, taking a moment to appreciate many of the half-dismantled giant forms. “That's a Glasgow, the Frame that conquered Area 11 in under a month, the first Frame to be mass-produced, and a Fourth Generation model.”

“Did your company design it?” Charlotte asked with interest.

“Sadly no,” I admitted. “I was only fourteen at the time, but shortly before the invasion itself, my company bought out Steiner Konzern, the actual designers. It was a fairly marvelous coup, honestly. After their performance in Area 11, the company's stock skyrocketed in value. My net worth almost quadrupled.”

Charlotte nodded absently, her mind visibly preoccupied.

I wilted slightly. “You know, I do try to abstain, but every now and then it's fun to brag just a bit.”

My companion colored slightly, “My apologies, my lord. I'm terribly sorry, but...it's just, I was remembering what I've read regarding the information available on you and...I was wondering, if it's not too impertinent...how exactly did you start making this much money?”

I blinked, then chuckled, rubbing at my chin idly.

“Well...that does take me back,” I hummed, my gaze drifting over a few dozen machines and prototypes in various stages of construction. “I suppose...I suppose it starts with the fact that I was lucky enough to be born into a wealthy position in life to start out with. If you've ever heard the quip, 'you must spend money to make money,' rest assured it's quite true.”

“...but a simple stipend and fief wouldn't account for...” She made an expansive motion with her hands. “...all this. I'm terribly sorry, Your Highness, but I'm merely trying to understand how a person might go from making hundreds of millions dollars from primarily entertainment ventures, to being one of the top ten wealthiest individuals in the whole of the Empire. You own entire sectors of technologies, nearly the whole of Knightmare Frame development and production, electronic component manufacture, software creation, and....”

I held up a hand for silence, slightly amused.

“You certainly did your research,” I nodded appreciatively. “Well...the short answer to your question is that the first industry I really started making inroads into was software development. The long answer...”

She raised her eyebrows expectantly.

I grinned, “...will have to wait. We're here.”
Charlotte sighed, her lips forming a delightful pout.

I buried my smirk and pressed forward towards the sound of machinery being operated.

The first person to come into view was the violet-haired Cecile Croomy wearing what was technically the uniform for this branch of my company, but I hardly held anyone to that standard save for special occasions. Cecile, though, was rather exacting in her mannerisms, as I'd come to know and expect from her. “My, my! Assistant Director Croomy, you're looking lovely today.”

The twenty-three year old sighed as she turned. “Your Highness, always a pleasure, though again, as always, I'll have to decline whatever advance you'd like to make on me today. I'm afraid I'm not terribly in the mood to play, if you'll pardon my bluntness. Lloyd has been...difficult, with the looming deadline and all.”

I waved her off. “Cecile, honestly. When have I ever been angry at you for refusing me. We've been over this. Your body, your rules. Just because I think you're smoking hot doesn't mean I'll take it personally if you don't want to warm my bed. You seem stressed, though...do you want a hug?”

Cecile blushed and stammered.

I stepped up, arms wide, “C'mon, Cecile! It's a hug. I promise my hands will stay above your waist...heck, I won't even tickle you!”

“Lord Gilgamesh, this is highly improper-!” Cecile squawked as she flushed.

I stepped closer then carefully wrapped my arms around her, despite her halfhearted protestations. “Okay, now take a deep breath, relax...there we go. Hug time is best time.” I cooed softly as I felt the stress flow from her body and a long sigh escape her. Slowly, her own arms wrapped themselves around my back and her head came to rest on my shoulder.

“There we go,” I whispered, “that wasn't so bad now, was it?”

Cecile snorted lightly, “You, Gilgamesh eu Britannia, are incorrigible.”

“I aim to please, dear heart,” I murmured with a smile, stepping back and placing a light kiss on Cecile's forehead.

Her absolutely radiant blush was more than enough reward.

The ensuing clapping, though, saw her back muscles tense up almost painfully. “Encore, encore! Such a touching romantic scene between two young lovers! A shame I don't have flowers to throw!”

As Cecile began to work up a full head of steam, I turned to grin at Lloyd.

“Awww,” I smirked slyly, “it sounds like someone's jealous.” Lloyd's hands stopped mid-clap as he froze, his violet-haired subordinate trying in vain to appear as though she wasn't wearing a smirk of her own. “You know, if you wanted a hug of your own Lloyd, you could have just asked!”

Lloyd Asplund, a Peer of the Realm and notable eccentric scientist, looked positively aghast at the
very idea, reaching to grab the largest wrench he could find to brandish it at me. “Now see here Gil, we've thoroughly established that my person is not to be hugged! Your affections, though very flattering, are unrequited, and I would like it very much if you kept your hands to yourself.”

I grinned at Charlotte, “he just likes playing hard to get.” Turning towards the pale-haired scientist, I crouched as if to pounce. “You know, I am the one who signs your paychecks. Injuring your boss probably means you won't get as much money for new toys.”

Lloyd's eyes widened and, dropping the wrench, he fled.

I cackled and gave chase, “Hugz for the Hugz God!”

Lloyd's pout finally eased when we transitioned to talking about the new Knightmare Frames.

“Most of them are finished,” the engineer stated confidently, then wilted slightly at the glare Cecile gave him. “Technically?”

“Technically?” I asked, looking over the diagrams.

“We need actual field trials,” Cecile explained. “…and competent test pilots.”

I sighed, scratching my head tiredly. “Honestly, my appointment to Viceroy is looking more and more like a blessing in disguise...”

“You Highness?” Cecile blinked in confusion. “What do you mean? It almost sounds as if-”

“-I don't want the job?” I interrupted mildly, then shrugged. “Honestly? I don't. It's a nightmare of a position, but I don't have much choice in the matter. Back to the topic at hand, though...I'll be taking this one. I helped you with the concept design, after all, and I am a trained Knightmare Pilot. I'll need to be on the battlefield at least a few times and it should be enough put Oberon through his paces.”

“Your Highness!” Cecile cried, even Lloyd's eyes widening slightly.

“Your objections are noted and summarily overruled,” I stated bluntly. “I'm a prince of Britannia, dammit, and if I want to pilot a giant robot, then I damn well will.”

“Your Highness,” Lloyd stated more calmly, “Need I remind you that the Oberon and the Merlin are the least conventional Knightmare Frames ever produced? On the generational scale from one to five...these may as well be marked with letters instead of numbers.”

“So you're saying something you built won't work?” I asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Tch!” Lloyd snorted, scowling. “I have the utmost confidence in my work! They're masterpieces by any stretch of the imagination! Still...” His eyes went distant. “Your Highness has yet to explain where he acquired the designs for Oberon's primary weapons...or the Merlin's Druid system.”

I hummed vaguely in response and thought for a moment.

The ideas...weren't truly mine. I'd merely known where to push the sciences and technologies of the day to move them to the next level. The Merlin was based on what I knew of 'my' world's advances in constructing computing materials, little as it was. Comparatively, this world, my new world's,
computing devices were positively primitive. Evidently, sakuradite counted for a lot in bridging what should have been barely-digital devices into the realm of 'super-tech.' Between what I'd helped point them towards and the advantages of having a natural high-temperature-superconductor...the Merlin...

The Oberon, though, well, that was an entirely different beast.

I shrugged, “maybe I'll tell you one day, Lloyd. For now...Gino is going to take the Puck, and Anya will take the Morgana. The Merlin will be Lelouch's unit, should he chose to take me up on it. If not...we'll tackle that when we come to it.”

“...and dare I ask where you're going to acquire another devicer of the requisite skill for my final masterpiece?” Lloyd asked idly, looking beyond me towards the giant red and blue machine, trimmed with gold.

“Why of course you may ask,” I grinned, then answered. “I'll be recruiting the Red Queen to pilot her, of course!”

Lloyd blinked, his eyes widening as his face slowly transitioned from surprise to something disturbingly close to girlish glee. In fact, a high-pitched squeal began to leak from his frighteningly wide smile as he hopped in place.

Cecile twitched as Charlotte took a rapid step back, clearly unnerved.

“Q1?!?” Lloyd cried, grabbing at my shirt. “She's going to be the devicer for Titania?!” Lloyd's suddenly more manic gaze locked onto my own. “She'll be using Titania in the battle royale, won't she!”?

Without waiting for an answer, Lloyd Asplund danced off happily, laughing with an unusually high-pitch to his voice.

I frowned thoughtfully for a long moment, then turned to Cecile with a raised eyebrow, “I take it he's a fan?”

Cecile sighed. “He never misses one of her matches...Zoe got him season tickets.”

I nodded, “thoughtful of her. I owe that girl a raise or something. I never knew Lloyd was this much of a fan.”

The violet-haired woman shook her head. “It's more of an obsession with her piloting technique. He goes on and on about how she takes even regular Sutherlands far out of their performance envelope. Even though I'm a bit tired of the subject, I will admit she's a very impressive pilot to get that much out of unmodified knighmare frames.”

I hummed absently, smiling as I looked the Titania over again.

“I think she'll like it,” I grinned, then turned back to Cecile. “Remind Lloyd that he's going to need to pack everything up given the fact we're moving operations to Area 11.” We both pointedly ignored the laughter in the distance. “If this...mood persists, see medical for tranquilizers.”

Cecile sighed.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*
Zoe pulled my body armor free, her talented fingers working their magic on my neck.

I sighed in bliss as her questing hands trailed down my chest, her breasts pressing into my back. “I think I’ll make good on that promise from earlier,” I groaned as she reached my dick, massaging it to hardness.

“As Your Highness wishes,” Zoe whispered, reaching for the lube, then pausing. “Is it truly wise to allow Charlotte so much free reign?”

I shrugged, taking the tube from her and beginning to apply the fluid. “Well, much like my dearest father, I'm fond of giving people just enough rope to hang themselves, as you know, Zoe.”

The bronze-skinned girl chuckled, then gasped as my fingers began probing her rosebud.

I passed the tube backward and dropped it into Alex's hand. A moment later, I felt a single digit knocking at my own back door. “Oh yes, that's nice. Ughhh...”

I sighed as I slid into Zoe's ass, feeling her clench slightly around me, just enough to remind me how well she'd trained her anal muscles. Carefully, Alex began to push into me from behind as I arched my back. Grinning, I looked towards the two rosettes who'd also taken up a post on my monster bed. As Euphie squirmed under Anya's talented tongue I allowed myself an honest smile.

After I was done having sex with two siblings, I was going to fuck my own sister's ass.

As I thrust deeper into Zoe's core, I sighed with contentment and, in the back of my mind, prepared myself for the journey to Area 11.
Alex sighed as he did another check of his reflection.

Gone were the feathers and beads he loved to braid into his hair, gone were the braids themselves, too. Finally, just to add insult to injury, almost all of the 'noble savage' style he'd carefully cultivated had been banished. This would be the first time he'd been allowed out on his own, so he knew the importance of his restyling, but it still hurt to see so much of his image be cut away. Wearing a cheap, though still finely cut, dress shirt and slacks, it was easy for him to fall into the persona he'd been cultivating.

His sister, Zoe, stepped up behind him and wrapped her arms about his torso.

“You're far too tall,” she whispered, leaning against his shoulder.

“I like it,” Alex snorted, turning to kiss his lover. “It makes me look older. I could probably pass for eighteen if I could grow decent facial hair.”

Zoe sighed. “You know you don't have to do this. Gil won't make you.”

Alex ran a hand through his depressingly straight hair. “I want to. We've talked about this, sis, and it's my decision. Gil supports it, why can't you?”

“Is it too much to ask for my only brother to be safe at my side rather than off somewhere with no one to protect him?” Zoe frowned, turning and releasing her sibling.

“Zoe, I can protect myself,” Alex stated pointedly, his tone bespeaking of a subject that had been covered numerous times. “I've completed all of the weapons courses, I've had live-fire training, martial arts classes, and those are just the physical lessons. You know Gil's taught or had people teach me everything from covert surveillance to counter-espionage to money laundering. I know how to speak Finnish, Zoe. Finnish. I'm as prepared as I'm ever going to get.”

His sister sighed deeply, the sound ringing of defeat. “You're just so young...I wanted you to be my little brother for a few more years.”

“I'll always be your little brother,” Alex whispered, looking his sister in the eye despite his blush. Corny as it was, things like this were important to say every now and then. If he had an accident in the field during his first mission...Zoe deserved to know these things. “Just like I'll always love you.”

Zoe pressed her head against his, gave him one final kiss, and said a final goodbye as they parted.

The car wasn't licensed in his name.

In fact, it was probably older than he was, Alex reflected as he drove down the interstate. The vehicle had been retrofitted with a electric motor and rode slightly oddly given that it had been
designed for a gasoline engine. Still, all told, it was a decent car with several tens of thousands of miles on it, two rebuilds, and a replaced axle several years ago. There was enough trunk space for a moderate road trip, the air conditioning worked, and the radio only glitched when you drove past high voltage. The paint needed a new coat, there was dirt and scratches marring the appearance, but everything was up to safety standards and it handled well on even icy and wet roads.

So, yes, it was a good car, even if it wasn't quite in the style that he'd become accustomed to living with Gilgamesh eu Britannia.

Of course, that was the point, really.

Driving around in one of the armored tanks that Gil jokingly called 'cars' wasn't exactly inconspicuous, which was the whole goal. Hence, again, why the car wasn't in his name.

Oh, the license, registration, his identification, and all of the extraneous paperwork was legal...-ish.

Certainly, the forms themselves were legal. Even the insurance was valid. It's just that the identity to which all of these pieces of paper and plastic cards and electronic files pointed towards...didn't exist.

So, legal-ish.

Just like the bundle of identities tucked away in the car's secret compartment, in case of emergency. Just like the gun in that same compartment, licensed to several of his identities. Just like the various other accoutrements he was carrying to fluff out the life of Herman Cortez, the name to which he answered at the moment.

Legal-ish.

Alex smiled as he drove on, the growling of his stomach the only thing giving him pause. Sighing, he signaled and moved off the motorway.

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“And what will you have?”

“Cheeseburger, please. Hold the onions, medium-well for the burger,” Alex responded easily, smiling as he took in the roadside diner. On the occasion that Gilgamesh had decided to take a road trip, they’d often used one of the larger buses his lord owned and stopped at places like these. It was part-bar, part-diner decked out in dark wood that echoed the design of a pub slightly, the overall theme definitely evocative of the original Britannian homeland, one of the many little throwbacks which had worked its way into society.

“Don't usually see a number out these parts,” a voice observed as Alex turned, already measuring the tone and gauge of the man's words.

Dark haired, broad build, almost certainly working class, with two people who were likely friends or coworkers set to back him up. He had the look of Russian heritage, probably descended from the wave of West coast immigrants Britannia saw a century ago during the fall of the Russian Empire. His friends, too, had the same look about them, which likely meant this small California town was dominated by their ethnic presence, a fact which would count against his obvious Middle-American heritage if trouble stated and the bobbies were involved. He'd need to play things a bit more 'simple' than he usually did...no sense in irritating the men by seeming 'too smart.'
Alex gave a broad smile and dumbed down his expression a bit.

“Just passin' through, sir. Be outta' your way soon as I eat my fill.”

The man nodded. “Where ya' headed in such a hurry, then?”

“My...uh, boss. He's got me driving some files up to Seattle from headquarters,” Alex explained easily, keeping his slightly submissive smile on.

“That so?” The man asked. Alex shrugged silently. “Well, good to see a kid your age making something of himself. Too bad you're a number or I'd say you're a credit to the country. Not like my son.” Here, the man raised his ale, taking a swig in disgust.

“I'm actually an honorary citizen, sir,” Alex corrected gently.

“Hmph,” he frowned. “Honorary citizens. Biggest load of bull I ever heard. Numbers were getting along fine before those bleeding heart politicians got it in their heads this kind of shit needed happening. I remember my father telling me about when they passed those blasted laws.”

Alex wisely kept quiet on his opinions.

“Now come on Valentin,” one of the other men at the bar elbowed his friend good naturedly. “Get off your high horse and think about it for a minute. We've hashed this out before and you know it.”

'Valentin' grunted in displeased acknowledgment.

“Why don't you boys leave the high ideals at the door,” the waitress advised as she dropped a burger in front of Alex. “Last time you mixed politics and alcohol, I had to call the sheriff.”

Robert and his friend both snorted, slight smiles adorning their faces.

“Don't pay any mind to them, sugar,” the waitress sighed as Alex began to slowly devour his food. “They like to think they're the town geniuses. Smartest kids in high school growing up, but they never did anything with it, now did they? Tinkering in your garages all day and what have you got to show for it, Sergei? Valentin?”

“Aw, Matilda, don't be like that!” Robert whined. “We're just waiting on our big break! You should see the kind of things we've got back in our workshops! If someone would just look at our patents, they'd-”

“-throw you two in the loony bin!” Another man interrupted loudly, his voice echoing drunkenly.

Alex chewed thoughtfully as he watched an ill-disguised flash of rage wash over Sergei's face. Valentin, though, seemed to have been exhausted by the conversation, a stark contrast to his earlier behavior. As laughter surrounded them, the two dark-haired men tapped their glasses and downed their drinks.

“What do you have patents for?” Alex asked with practiced blank curiosity.

Valentin sighed and shook his head. “...hell, I guess there's no harm in telling him, eh Sergei?”

“We design spaceships,” Sergei said bluntly, a scowl on his face as he slammed down his glass on
the counter. “Ships, rockets, stuff that can get us to the moon and the stars beyond, boy, but no one seems to want to look up. It's always war this, war that nowadays. Don't get me wrong, the Empire's grand!”

A few men toasted at that, reminding the men that their conversation wasn't exactly 'private.'

“God save the Emperor!” A voice rang out, and glasses were raised as the chant ran its course.

“...but,” Valentin picked up, “nobody seems to wan to hear about what's up there,” he pointed to the ceiling, “when they're interested in putting people below that,” he snorted blackly and shoved a finger at the ground.

Serge sighed again, “a rocket isn't important unless it's got a bomb on it's tip. It's a crying shame.”

Alex nodded slowly, listening as the men poured their hearts out, scratching diagrams onto napkins as they ranted and raved about the twinkling stars in the night sky above. At the end of his meal, Alex shook both their hands and thanked the two for the conversation in the slightly-stupid way his guise had shown before. Getting in 'his' car, Alexander Esteban pulled a cellphone out and began typing out a message that would be sent to a secure data vault before being retrieved in the morning by his sister.

Sergei Korolev and Valentin Glushko would have job offers in-hand by the following evening.

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The unexpected affair of his dinner out of the way, Alex faced several more hours of driving before pulling into a driveway in front of a nondescript house near the outskirts of Seattle. Positioned far enough outside the city, it was unlikely any casual observer would see his vehicle stop here. Any more dedicated watchmen would likely face the other countermeasures which had been installed on the premises.

“Alex. It's good to see you.”

Looking up from where he stood next to his car, Alex was reminded that, of the defenses for this particular property, none were likely more potent than the man before him.

“Chicken Toothpaste,” Alex responded and relaxed slightly as Orpheus Zevon's right hand came into view with a gun, holstering it smoothly.

“Euria!” Orpheus called back into the house, turning enough that Alex could almost believe the older man had let him leave his field of vision. “Romeo Green!”

In other words, it was all clear.

Gilgamesh did so love his code phrases.

Granted, that wasn't the only subtle cue either of them had given for recognition, but those were the big ones. The code phrases could mean anything from 'everything is fine,' to 'tailed, incoming hostiles,' to 'suborned, kill me first.'

In short order, Alex was seated in the living room sipping at a mug of tea.
“Not what you were thinking your first mission would be, huh?” Orpheus asked lightly, scanning the documentation on his computer.

“Whatever my lord requires,” Alex deflected easily. “Even if it's just a courier, I will fulfill. I...believe you had something for me to return with?”

Orpheus nodded, removing a small data card from his pocket. “The latest on Pluton's movements, a list of V.V.'s agents in the OSI, and what little we could find on the Directorate itself. You might want to tell Gil to warn Schneizel to back off on his investigations a bit. Or at least point them somewhere else.”

Alex nodded once. “I'll relay the message. I assume everything is in order on my part?”

Euria leaned over the laptop, sweeping her chestnut hair back with one hand. “V.V. Won't like that there's so much redacted from the Ascendency file. His Highness is really playing that project close to the chest, isn't he?”

“While it is one of Gil's highest clearance endeavors, it's also a good red herring for V.V. to chase,” Alex explained. “I'll be interested to know what Charles' brother makes of the limited information we're giving him. From the specifications, it's likely he'll believe it's a huge piece of artillery, though I can't blame him for coming to that conclusion.”

“It shouldn't be too much of a problem.” Orpheus finally stated as he perused the files more closely. “The details on the Fairie Court should appease him. Gilgamesh's new Knightmares are impressive...”

“He just wants to have one for himself,” Euria teased, noting the longing in her lover's tone. Orpheus sighed, running a hand through his sandy-blonde hair, “it would be nice to have something on this level when things eventually come to a head. I understand that His Highness is occupied with everything, but...”

Alex rubbed at his chin for a moment, considering. “His Highness has devoted a sizable amount of resources to a parallel project he's calling the 'Winter Court.' As it's a 'white project' there won't be any paperwork to show it ever existed, but Gilgamesh said that, 'if shit hits the fan, you'll find your equipment at the New Place.' He said you would know what it meant.”

Orpheus grinned suddenly, a fierce expression on his normally sedate face.

Euria sighed, “Now you've done it, Alex. Orpheus won't even be able to sleep now that you've promised him a new toy. Oh! There is one more thing..."

Alex frowned at the duo's dual looks of trepidation, as well as the enveloped that was produced and handed over in short order. Blinking, his mouth slowly dropped open as the proverbial penny dropped. "Oh dear...this is accurate?"

"Quite," Orpheus nodded. "They're blood-related."

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**Guile.** I believe you were the one wondering 'What's Alex doing?' This is what Alex is doing. Some combination of Gopher and Superspy. For those curious, I've already named Euria and Orpheus' KMFs as well. Euria's will be the Mab and Orpheus will have the Banshee.
Hmm...that it? I think that's it. Back to Spiritual Strawberry for the moment! Comment and criticism are welcome.
“Couldn't father have found anyone else?” The eleventh prince groused as he looked the digital board over.

“Likely,” the prime minister noted absently over the private communications line, “though that would deprive him of the pleasure of seeing Gilgamesh struggle.”

Lelouch scoffed. “Gilgamesh doesn't struggle.”

There was wry humor in Schneizel's voice as he replied, “as infuriating as it is, I suppose that much is true. I wonder how he makes his successes look so effortless?”

Lelouch paused in raising a finger to the digital screen, debating the wisdom of pointing out to his brother that many, many people felt much the same way as Schneizel as they did about Gilgamesh. Taking the higher ground, he let the remark slide, shaking his head disbelievingly.

“The secret Gil imparted to regarding his methodology was merely to cease caring completely,” Lelouch stated with a sigh, moving his next piece into position. “Apparently, doing so allows him to take decisive action in high-risk situations.”

“Because nothing truly matters to him,” Schneizel finished knowingly. “We had much the same talk after he sold the titles he inherited when he was ten. It seemed he'd gone mad when he traded away dukedom, a barony, and dozens of square miles of highly profitable farmland that included a major port city. Instead, he merely gave me this strange smile and said I would understand eventually.”

Lelouch hummed thoughtfully. “I remember that...if only vaguely,” he admitted. “Mother thought it was the funniest thing she'd ever heard. I believe Olympia was an interesting shade of puce for the rest of that month.”

"You have to understand," Schneizel replied, "although the buying and selling of noble titles and such is an institution as old as feudalism itself, the brazen way Gilgamesh auctioned off hereditary ranks just wasn't done. If he hadn't been so audacious about it, there might have been enough of the upper crust not in shock to bring the matter before the emperor. I can't say it would have gone entirely favorably for Gilgamesh if such a complaint caught father's attention. Fortunately..."

"The transactions were completed almost by the time the press caught wind of it," Lelouch nodded. "Mother and Cornelia enjoyed recounting the scandal over tea. From what I recall, Gilgamesh was practically the laughingstock of court. Purchasing the title and rights to an entirely undeveloped wilderness for nearly a hundred-million pounds? A number of the papers were mocking him publicly in spite of the reservation against the libel of nobility."

The prime minister chuckled darkly. “Until Gilgamesh's first prospectors reported in. I really do wonder what goes through his head sometimes. A decade ago, Australia was a worthless piece of land in the furthest corner of the empire save for the few free-ports. The continent was believed to
hold little of value and what few trade lanes went near it were better served by the Indonesians. Even after they formally joined the Federation, China knew better than to close those routes to us.”

Schneizel sighed, his voice a sudden rush of static over the line.

“...and yet,” Lelouch replied, “Gilgamesh traded the lands and titles he'd been gifted with at birth, save for his position in line for the throne, for the title of Grand Duke of Australia and Tasmania. I dare say someone should have known something was up.”

“You were too young to remember it,” Schneizel answered, his tone colored with nostalgia, “but there was talk of committing him for a bit. Then Gilgamesh cornered the market in precious opal a month later.”

There was silence on the line for a moment.

“After that,” Schneizel started, “I believe it was the gold market, then diamonds, then lead, then zinc and aluminum, then...well, you get the idea, I suppose. You did live with Gilgamesh for all those years.”

“Quite,” Lelouch nodded, though the other prince couldn't see him. “Though he didn't particularly like to talk about business. He very much more interested in films, entertainment, games, technology. Business always seemed a secondary concern to Gilgamesh.”

“Which is likely why the Emperor selected him,” Schneizel hummed thoughtfully. “Gilgamesh doesn't enjoy the spotlight as Clovis and Guinevere do, nor as I pretend to. He goes out of his way to appear friendly, agreeable, and even somewhat weak in the few interviews he gives. He never threatens, gets angry, never even throws an insult if he can help it.”

“Gilgamesh would prefer to shoot all of his enemies in the back,” Lelouch snorted. “That's assuming he has to fight at all. Honestly, I think Gil has perhaps the least political enemies out of any single member of the royal family.”

“Because he stays out of politics, as much as is possible,” Schneizel smiled, closing his eyes as he made a soft exclamation of realization. “Giving Gilgamesh a position of power, such as Viceroy, forces him to make enemies, forces him to take action rather than be the largely non-threatening neutral economic power he has been until now.”

Schneizel chuckled lowly.

“Bravo father. Bravo.”

“Do you think Gilgamesh will actually run into difficulties?” Lelouch asked, steepling his fingers thoughtfully.

“I would surmise a large part of that depends on whether you decide to accept his offer,” Schneizel replied, tapping the screen once more on his end as a piece moved into place.

Lelouch sighed. “I really had hoped to keep my residence in Area 11 a secret for a bit longer. It's been...an interesting change of perspective to lead a somewhat normal student life, as opposed to that of a prince.”

Schneizel frowned slightly. “I had thought you were attending with the young Lady Ashford?”
“Milly would treat the Emperor like a school chum if she thought she could get away with it,” Lelouch snorted. “I’ve enjoyed having people treat me like a normal human being over the course of the last two years.”

“So you’ve decided to reject Gilgamesh’s offer of the position of Sub-Viceroy?” Schneizel asked, quirking an eyebrow.

Lelouch was silent for a long moment, his eyes closed in thought. “I’ve been avoiding him, you know? Euphie had to call me to set up a brunch for the two of us.”

“Lelouch,” Schneizel stated softly. “If you’re that against the position, you know Gilgamesh wouldn’t force it upon you. You’re already doing more than enough running the Black Knights. They’re an important deniable asset in many of the Empire’s less publicized conflicts. Gilgamesh would understand that you’ve devoted yourself to them, Nunnally, and your education.”

“I know,” Lelouch nodded. “It’s just...”

There was silence as the two regarded each other over the video channel.

“Nunnally and I moved to Ashford Academy to grow into our own. I’ve always been grateful to Gilgamesh for helping us after...mother...” Lelouch trailed off and sighed deeply. “...but, Gil liked to coddle us. At first, it was smothering, then I got to like it...I didn't have any real responsibilities for once, no lessons to go to that I didn't want to, Gilgamesh would listen to any complaint I had and...he'd listen, Schneizel. Really listen...it was as if Nunnally and I were...as if he was...”

Lelouch visibly swallowed his confession, shaking his head.

Schneizel, mercifully, said nothing as he moved another piece on the electronic game board.

“Then I decided I wanted to...do something with my life,” Lelouch explained, skirting the truth of the secret resolution only three other people knew of. “...and Nunnally and I move to Area 11 so I could start up the Black Knights and build up my own power base.”

“If I’m understanding your dilemma correctly,” Schneizel replied thoughtfully as he watched Lelouch move his own game piece into place. “You tire of being in Gilgamesh's shadow. Again, I have to ask why you don't simply tell him?”

“Because he'd be...understanding,” Lelouch ground out the final word as if uttering a foul curse, “about everything. Just once I’d like Gil to be unreasonable about something! But I can't tell him that, because he'd accommodate me in that way as well. I love Gilgamesh, but sometimes I just can't deal with how...nice he is. It's like trying to stay angry at a more annoying version of Euphie.”

Schneizel coughed suddenly, violently, to cover the undignified snort he'd loosed unexpectedly.

“There's also the fact that he'd want to meet my significant other,” Lelouch groused slightly, looking at once irritated and worried over the matter.

“While we are on the topic,” Schneizel interjected, “I would very much like to meet this mysterious individual as well. Perhaps I could accompany Gilgamesh-”

“Which would be completely unnecessary,” Lelouch riposted, scowling. “I'll have a hard enough
time with Gilgamesh's attempt to build me a harem...and Milly's subsequent addition of herself to the conspiracy.”

“I feel as though I should warn you that Euphie will be accompanying Gilgamesh to Area 11,” Schneizel commented, reaching off-screen to acquire a glass of wine as he enjoyed the rictus of complex emotions that froze his younger half-brother's face for a long moment. “Cornelia was initially against the notion, but Clovis and I convinced her that studying abroad will do her some good.”

Lelouch sighed and pulled free a nondescript flask from his desk before pouring himself a small ration of the honey-colored liquid inside. Tossing it back, he recapped the flask before glaring at his older brother. “Schneizel? Do you bear some hideous grudge against me? If I've somehow wronged you—”

Schneizel smiled saintly as he interrupted his brother. “The hair dye incident.”

Lelouch's mouth dried a bit, he wished it was only from the alcohol. “Ah.” He should have known listening to Gilgamesh's whispered suggestions of a 'prank war' would one day bite him in the backside. “In that case, I think I have preparations to make, especially if I am to be beset upon on all sides by such a force. Shall we call the game here?”

The blonde prime minister stared at the board for another long moment, before nodding. “Quite. Another tie, you're improving greatly, Lelouch.”
“We’re going to have to remodel,” I sighed, resigning myself to the tedium.

“As you say, Lord Gilgamesh,” Charlotte replied, taking the data tablet from my hands. “Would you like to discuss alterations now or after your visit with Prince Lelouch and Princess Nunnally?”

I hummed thoughtfully, then looked over to the other woman sitting beside me. “Zoe-dear, do you happen to have the layout for my manor house at Darwin?”

Zoe blinked, surprised at the topic change, then nodded slowly. “Not the palace at Sydney?”

I frowned for a moment, then shook my head. “No, I like the one in Darwin better. It's roomier, more inviting...mix things up a little and show Charlotte some of my usual interior design choices, but we just can't leave Albert's decore stand. I'm something of a fan of the spartan look and it has it's places, but there's a limit to these things...especially if I'm to entertain guests.”

“Very good, Lor-” Charlotte began.

“Gil,” I interrupted. “Just Gil. If we're in front of a crowd, it's one thing, but we're alone now. As much as I adore the little banter of always needing to remind you one more time to call me by my name, you're actually trying to be stiff and formal about this, which I don't need. I get enough of that, 'on the job' as it were.”

Charlotte breathed deeply, then sighed exhaustively. “Very well...Gilgamesh.”

I rolled my eyes. “Better than nothing, I suppose.” Blinking, I held up a finger. “Also, leak it to the press that the new Viceroy's first official act of office upon entering the country will be remodeling the Viceroy's residence...no, call it a 'palace.' Make sure they get it right. After the accusations of incompetence and misuse of taxpayer money make their rounds, we'll hold a press conference to announce that I'll be funding it out of my own pocket and hiring local labor as one small part of a larger economic stimulus plan. I have ideas about some infrastructural improvements that I can justify employing numbers for.”

Charlotte blinked several times rapidly. “You'll be hiring the...elevens, my-erm, Gilgamesh?”

“Quite,” I nodded, smirking. “Hopefully, we'll get a few terrorists who'll rat the plans out. It's a long shot, but after the remodel is done, call in my private contractors and turn the entire place into a deathtrap. Build my personal residence near Toyko bay with sea access and connect the two using some of the old subway lines.”

“This is all...fairly elaborate, sir,” Charlotte frowned, rubbing at her forehead. “If you'll forgive me for asking, won't this be sending mixed signals?”

“Which is entirely the point. If you can't blind them with brilliance, baffle them with bullshit,” I grinned. “After the initial uproar settles down, I have a few more plans to muddy the waters...
“Sire—I mean, Gilgamesh,” Charlotte asked. “Are you sure you're attending to this matter as seriously as it deserves?”

I reclined, dropping the data tablet in my lap as I pillowed my hands behind my head. Looking up at the roof of the car, I sighed. “…if you were in my position, Charlotte, what actions would you take?”

The pale woman blinked, then narrowed her eyes thoughtfully. “Given the current native insurgency in Area 11, I would make it my first order of business to meet with the local military leaders. After that, I would likely ensure that sakuradite transfers continue to go as planned to demonstrate my competence as Viceroy.”

I hummed thoughtfully. “I'll give you a C. Not quite failing, but your strategy leaves much to be desired of, Ms. Lawson.”

Charlotte scowled now, obviously biting back a retort. I had to give her credit. For a person who had such obvious problems with the societal conventions around sex, she was almost wholly conventional in her other ideologies. If anything, that made her even more perfect for the position I was grooming her to undertake. She would be the secretarial 'face' of my organization and do an excellent job of keeping the more problematic and liberal elements away from me. After all, I couldn't really afford to be seen cavorting with 'those people.'

“If Your Highness,” Charlotte stated pointedly, “would explain his reasoning, please? It is my responsibility to see your will done and further insight would be valuable, especially as to your general plan of action in this area.”

“You think I'm full of bullshit,” I grinned teasingly, enjoying her flush. Then I shrugged, “well… I think we need a little background first.” I paused, thinking how to start. “What do you know of Japan, Charlotte?”

“Area 11 is the primary source of the world's sakuradite deposits as well as—”

That was as far as she got before I held up a hand, shaking my head. “You're telling me about Area 11. I asked you what you knew about Japan.”

Charlotte paused, her eyebrows furrowing deeply. “The only relevant point that I can see to make regarding the nonexistent nation, Your Highness, is that it was conquered and it's territory occupied by the Britannian Empire six years ago.”

“Which is about the sum total of knowledge that any Britannian considers,” I nodded. “The problem is that while we consider the majority of the populace to be numbers, they consider themselves to be Japanese. Britannia has only occupied this area for six years, that's hardly enough time for a new generation to be brought up and learn the benefits of Britannian governance. The overriding culture, the social norms, the language they're going to be speaking when their Britannian minders aren't going to be looking... all of that will remain Japanese for some time, at least until the region's been properly pacified, if not longer.”

Charlotte's jaw worked soundlessly.

“So, when attempting to govern this Britannian area, I am in reality attempting to govern a foreign
country," I explained patiently. "Or at least a foreign populace. Despite the fact that I have immensely larger resources to, at least theoretically, draw from, the locals know the terrain, each other, and their own culture better than we probably ever will."

Charlotte managed a nod, still strangely quiet.

"A large part of the problem with our occupation of Area 11," I pointed out now, changing tactics, "is the fact that we're looking at it as an occupation. Long-term, we're planning on absorbing the former-Japanese populace and making them part of the Empire. Looking at the insurgency problem as a purely military difficulty is incredibly obstructionist to actually solving the issue instead of merely treating terrorism symptomatically."

One of Charlotte's eyebrows had started twitching now.

She should probably get that looked at.

"So, this brings us back to your strategy of seeing to a military intervention immediately." I smiled, now fully into my lecture. "Ignoring the fact that you haven't done the proper research into the common tactics currently in use by the larger terrorist factions, such as the Blood of the Samurai and the Japanese Liberation Front...as well as the fact that you don't understand the ideology behind their continued resistance or the common military culture which has grown up around the Code of Bushido...there's also the fact that there are political ramifications to meeting the military leaders of the area first."

"H-how so?" Charlotte asked haltingly, having seemingly finally found her voice.

"First off is the message that it sends to observers," I explained pointedly. "That kind of approach says that I will look for military answers to problems first and foremost. It may mean that negotiations that would otherwise have been possible won't be considered because of my perceived bias towards violent solutions."

Charlotte nodded, now thoroughly entranced.

"There's also the fact that the military leadership of this area is composed predominantly of Purist Faction party members." I scowled. "If I want to attempt any kind of social reform, they'll use their influence to block me at every turn."

Given the reality that almost every one of these officers are going to have been appointed by Albert, the late viceroy, there's going to be at least a little friction and doubt as to my capabilities."

"Wouldn't that give you even more reason to be conciliatory towards the army? I know there are a great many of the more powerful nobles involved with the Knightmare corps, at least. Courting them would make for valuable allies," Charlotte reasoned.

"Potentially," I allowed. "However, you're ignoring the fact that I'm rather closely aligned with Lelouch and Nunnally vi Britannia, whose mother was a commoner by birth. Even if I had a mind to court the military's powerbase, I'd have significant hurdles to overcome. Additionally, if I approach the military right off the bat, it says that I'm desperate for allies or out of my depth in the situation in general. I'll give them about a week to see if they'll approach me first, before I schedule a 'routine inspection' or something to give me enough of a pretense to open lines of communication."
“...and if they come to you,” Charlotte nodded slowly, “it will subtly show your supremacy in the partnership. That's, um...Your-er, Gilgamesh, that's...a very detailed and thoughtful analysis of the situation.”

I shrugged. “It helps to think of tactics like this as a delaying action. Sound and fury signifying nothing, just a smokescreen to allow me to move my pieces into place while I act like a fop to distract everyone.”

There was a long, long silence as I stretched out, laying my head down on Zoe's lap and closed my eyes. The bronze-skinned woman smiled and began sliding her fingers through my hair, her nails lightly dragging themselves across my scalp.

“Gil?”

I looked up slightly, opening my eyes to see Charlotte staring at me with the strangest look I'd ever seen. Granted, I'd only known her for a short while, so that wasn't saying much, but...I don't think the odd combination of confusion and consternation was something she was accustomed to wearing.

“Yes Charlotte?”

She frowned for a few moments, then finally spoke. “If you'll pardon a further question, why is it that you pretend to be less intelligent than you truly are?”

I snorted, shaking my head.

“I'm not pretending,” I scolded her lightly. “Everyone always thinks I'm pretending, but I'm not. I'm just me. I give situations the exact amount of seriousness they deserve, sometimes a bit less if I've got a good reason for it. That way, when people start to look underneath my 'act' to find my real motivations, they'll see things that aren't really there and act on their hallucinations, instead of seeing what I really am.” I laid my head back in Zoe's lap and sighed contentedly as she resumed her ministrations, “sometimes...being overestimated can have the same benefit as being underestimated.”

Charlotte pursed her lips.

We rode in silence for quite some time.

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It was hard to imagine this land as the Japan I knew from...before.

I'd known a great deal about the country, the culture, and the people of the Asian archipelago during my prior life. The Japan, Area 11, that I now found myself in. As the limo drove on, I stared impassively at the decayed structures of the eleven's ghettos, watching as various semi-homeless individuals shuffled about their business. I, myself, was safely distanced from them by the high-rise freeways the empire had installed.

Uncharacteristically, I decided to wallow a bit in the...in my Empire's many sins.

Truthfully, Area 11 had weathered the invasion and subsequent occupation by Britannian forces rather well. The total population of the region had decreased by less than one percent, which still meant death tolls in the hundreds of thousands, but...
Well, other countries hadn't been anywhere near as lucky.

The early surrender of the Japanese forces, combined with the speed of the conquest, meant that most of the infrastructure had been left in tact. Tokyo was perhaps the worst example of the living conditions for the average number or honorary citizen, in actuality. It had been the hardest hit during the invasion and was immediately occupied by Britannian forces, ousting most of the native population to the worst-damage area of the city, those that would become the ghettos.

The rest of Area 11 had fared better. Some of the major cities, such as Kyoto, had been subsumed by the empire peacefully, for the most part, after the 'suicide' of Genbu Kururugi. That wasn't to say that there hadn't been...incidents during the invasion that served to justify the elevens' hatred of Britannian.

A massacre here and there, usually of military units that had kept fighting after the surrender, but a few more tragic and horrific mass murders of civilians were on record.

All in all, beyond the problematic insurgency and overall resentment of the populace, Area 11 wasn't in bad straits after the invasion.

No, the true difficulties which I would have to deal with emerged during Albert ri Britannia's rule.

Strictly speaking, Albert hadn't been a bad viceroy, he'd just been particularly lacking in creativity, common sense, and vision.

He'd gone into Area 11 with what had become the 'standard' practices of subjugating remnant militants and managing a large native population. The problem was, the common Britannian normal practices had evolved in a completely different environment than what Area 11 represented. The majority of experience Britannians possessed in dealing with newly colonized former-countries where the population was primarily uneducated, technologically disadvantaged, and in some sort of political turmoil.

Mexico had been in the throes of a civil war following the cessation of Spanish rule when Britannia had begun to take over regions of the country. Given the relative chaos of the many-sided civil war which had been occurring and the atrocities the militia armies had committed on the civilian populace, Britannian rule had, at least initially, been welcomed as a stabilizing influence. Of course, there were some partisan forces that cropped up once it became clear the empire had no intent of leaving, but overall, it was a fast, easy, and popular war.

Area 11, though, had all the making of the Vietnam war, if handled badly.

Albert had handled it badly.

He'd taken group of natives hostage, he'd destroyed Shinto and Buddhist shrines on the idea that they might be bases for terrorist holdouts. Albert had targeted the rare civic organizations which tried to help native peoples in difficult positions, branding them as likely conspirators in partisan activity. There was evidence he'd ordered more than one massacre of 'suspicious individuals,' whatever that meant. Basically, he'd done everything to further exacerbate relations with the Elevens.

I shook my head and sighed, looking out the window again and immediately frowning.

I turned back to the small window at the front of the cab and spoke.
“Stop the car.”
As my convoy rolled to a stop in the emergency lane of the highway, I stared at the scene below. A police car, lights flashing, had pulled up next to a large brick expanse on the border of the ghetto and the Britannian Concession. On the wall had been painted a mural three stories tall and nearly a block long. It was an impressive piece of artwork, all told, but I was more interested in the content than the size. I shook my head, laughing softly as I allowed myself a long moment to take it all in.

Narrowing my eyes, though, I watched as the 'artist' and the uniformed officer conversed, with the foregone conclusion being self-evident.

“Quiz time!” I announced gaily, grinning at Charlotte.

The woman started, looking up from where she'd been studying files.

“Pardon my-er, Gilgamesh?” She asked, obviously trying to compose herself.

“Quiz time,” I repeated happily, smiling as she gave me the whole of her attention. “Here's your assignment. You are to take a pair of guards and go down to that police man, who is currently arresting an incorrigible graffiti-punk. Convince the officer to release the artist into your custody without revealing who you work for and at a minimum expense for myself. The fewer resources you use to accomplish this goal, the higher your score. If you have to invoke my name or the office of the Viceroy, you fail the quiz.”

Charlotte blinked, then slowly nodded. “I...believe I understand my...Lord Gilgamesh. May I ask why?”

I frowned thoughtfully, then shook my head. “For bonus points, see if you can determine the reason of this exercise by the time you and the artist return to me.”

Charlotte nodded decisively once, “As you wish, sire.”

I smiled as the woman stepped from the car and quickly requisitioned one of the four armored cars that held my security escort. Two men stepped out, the remaining two driving down the off-ramp as the evicted security personnel moved to stand watch over my limo.

Meanwhile, I sighed deeply as I pondered what to do to pass the time.

Then I smiled and looked to the other woman who'd been in the car with me.

“Zoe-dear,” I asked, giving a slightly flirtatious grin, “if you wouldn't mind terribly?”

Smiling, the bronze-skinned beauty dropped to her knees between my legs, deftly undoing my pants and unfastening the codpiece-like armor beneath that was meant to allow me to use the restroom without completely disrobing. Of course, it also allowed me to easily receive a blowjob when the urge rose.
I relaxed as I felt Zoe's hands and lips begin to coax my dick to attention.

Then my phone had to ring.

I sighed and pulled the offending tech out of my pocket, listening to the soothing melody of a glass armonica and debated whether or not to answer it. Resignedly, I tapped the screen once, stifling a groan as I held it to my ear. Looking downward, Zoe's eyes twinkled with mirth as she swirled her tongue again.

“Gil speaking.” I spoke with remarkable steadiness.

I had practice, after all.

“Big Brother,” the voice on the other end of the line answered.

“Nunnally,” I replied, having already divined who the caller was from the ringtone I'd picked for her. “How's the world's cutest little sister doing?”

“Well enough, I suppose. Lelouch is being frustrating again,” she confided.

“Our dearest brother? Lelouch? Bite your tongue Nunnally! Such a saint could never frustrate anyone!” I exclaimed, hiding the hitch in my breath with overdone sarcasm.

My act at least earned a giggle from the young princess, a noise which put a thousand kittens' purrs to shame for sheer adorableness. With my free hand, I worked my fingers into Zoe's hair and began to control the tempo of her ministrations.

“There's a girl at school who has a crush on him,” Nunnally explained, fighting off giggles. “Well, there's actually lots of girls, but this one named Shirley Frenette, she's so repressed...” Nunnally sighed. “...and whenever I try to give her tips, she chastises me for unladylike behavior and becomes so flustered everything I say goes in one ear and out the other.”

I exhaled slowly, allowing Zoe to lift her head off my member and lower her head to my testicles, where she began to give each a luxurious tongue bath. “Well...I suppose I can try to talk some sense into the poor girl.”

“You're already in the Area?” Nunnally asked, sounding surprised. “You're usually a bit more cautious. Lelouch wasn't expecting you until later this week.”

“Ah, but Nunna,” I teased, allowing the grin to leak into my voice. “That's what they expect. I have my publicly registered private plane coming in on Thursday.” Left unsaid was the fact that I'd be keeping a low profile until then, making my first public appearance during my 'arrival' that same day.

“Then you have a day or two to come see us!” Nunnally enthused.

I hummed, “Lelouch might not be too receptive on that front. I have a safehouse ready, don't worry.”

“Nonsense,” Nunnally replied, her voice as hard as she could make it. “You'll be staying here at Ashford.”
“I...suppose,” I sighed, unable to turn her down. I'd never been good at denying Nunnally things, the little minx. She knew it too. “I won't be able to stop by until later, though. I have an appointment.”

“Oh?” Nunnally asked, “who with?”

It was a legitimate question, given the fact that, supposedly, I wasn't in the country quite yet. I sighed and attempted to hide my sudden hitched breathing as Zoe's lips took over from her hand once again. “...do you remember, Nunna, when I explained that I would never lie to you?”

There was a short pause on the line.

“...but there were certain things you wouldn't tell us,” Nunnally finished. “Certain questions are dangerous to ask, certain answers even more dangerous to hear. I do wish you and Lelouch wouldn't treat me like a porcelain doll.”

“I'm not refusing you,” I clarified. “But, I'm not going to explain over an unsecured line like this. Later tonight, if you're really sure you want to know, I'll tell you. You're more than old enough to know.”

“Really?” Nunnally asked, her tone more than slightly surprised. “Lelouch won't like-”

“You let me worry about that,” I replied, pulling Zoe's head down one last time and releasing my load into her mouth. I breathed out in a nearly-silent hiss.

“Thank you Gil,” Nunnally replied. “I should be going now, break's almost over. Oh, and do tell Zoe hello for me, once she no longer has her mouth full, at least.”

I blinked as the line went dead, pulling my phone away from my ear and staring at it oddly.

“I may have created a monster,” I noted idly.

“~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~
So where the hell are we going?”

“You should keep a civil tongue in your head while speaking to his highness,” Charlotte practically hissed at the Eleven girl.

Mutsuki Minase was young, disaffected, and disenfranchised. I knew that just from looking at her once. Her clothes were dirty, her hair unkempt, and she looked as though she hadn't eaten well a few days. There were bags under her eyes and an unhealthy pallor to her skin. All in all, she looked a wretch, but I'd had enough experience with people her age and younger in much, much worse conditions, to know that a month of good meals and a warm bed could do wonders. Still, the fact that she had a sporty, lithe build with long legs and long brown hair didn't hurt that promise of possible beauty. She was just my type, too.

“We're meeting with the Sakuradite Trade Commission Board of Directors,” I explained absently, rooting around in my briefcase for a set of papers.

Mutsuki narrowed her eyes, scowling as she obviously searched her mind for information on the organization I'd named. Suddenly, her blue-green orbs flashed wide. “Those collaborationist pigs! No way! Look, I'm grateful and everything, but...I really don't want to have anything to do with
those traitors.”

I looked at Charlotte while I pointed towards Mutsuki, “See! This is what I was talking about. The people here are still loyal to the idea of a free Japan. This girl doesn't see herself as an Eleven, an Honorary Citizen, a subject of the Crown, or an Imperial Citizen. Until that changes, there won't be any peace in this land, no matter what we chose to call it.”

Mutsuki blinked, giving me a strange glance. “…who are you anyway? Your, uh...secretary didn't name names or anything, she just kinda' walked up and asked to speak with the kei-er, cop...and then he uncuffed me. What do you want with an Eleven chick like me?”

There was a suspicious glint in her eyes, as if she already knew the answer. Likely, she was readying herself for an attempt at the limo's door. No matter that we were speeding along at a nice clip and she'd like die from even the best attempt at an escape, she didn't seem like the type to 'lie back and think of Britannia' if I tried to force myself on her...and it was easy to see that was what she believed I was going to do.

“Here,” I stated, handing over a clipboard with a thick set of stapled sheets attached.

“What's this?” She asked, looking over the document glancingly.

“They’re called 'Terms of Indenture,' which probably doesn't mean much to anyone who's not a lawyer.” I hummed thoughtfully, tapping my knee as I thought. “Essentially, think of it as an employment contract, only a bit more...inclusive. Basically, this is a document used by a lot of rich people who want to have long-term servants.”

Her face soured and she shook her head, “No way-”

I held up a hand to stall her. “-but, it's not a one-sided deal. In exchange for your servitude, I would be legally obligated to see to your needs. Food, clothing, shelter, education expenses should you require them, and a reasonable amount of entertainment.”

Mutsuki bit her lip, staring at the document anew, before shaking her head and setting it aside for a moment. “So, what? You'd want me to spread my legs for you? That your idea of a job?”

I snorted, grinning as the asian woman tensed. “Direct. I like that. Put bluntly, as you seem to be fond of, yes. I'd like to have sex with you.” I watched silently as her knuckles turned white. “I won't take a woman by force, though. So, while I'd like to have sex with you, I'm willing to wait. In the meantime, I have some new properties I've acquired and would like some murals painted.”

Mutsuki blinked, thrown off by the admission.

Then her eyes narrowed, “you want me to paint? Just like that?”

“I'm not that stupid. I know what you said.”

“Just like that,” confirmed. “Your work back there showed promise. I'd guess before the invasion you were a student? Probably looking at art school?”

Her suspicion was derailed again by my compliment, though it surged as she replied. “...yeah. How'd you know? Did you look me up or something?”

I shook my head. “Not quite. I have a brother who's into art. I spend enough time around him to pick up a few things. Aspects of your work show you've studied Picasso and Van Gogh, as well as
some of the Dutch Masters, likely. You're also intelligent enough for your artwork not to be immediately noticed as anti-occupation propaganda. Instead of being marked as a terrorist sympathizer, you were likely going to get booked for graffiti on an abandoned building. If you could make bail, you'd be out in a day or so. Smart.”

She tensed again, for an entirely different reason.

“I liked the oni in the suit, by the way,” I smiled with a wink. “I'd read it as a commentary on the imprisonment of traditional Japanese culture and the repression of the true nature of Japan by Britannian authorities?”

Mutsuki's mouth worked silently, before she nodded slowly. “Pretty much...you really liked it? No offense, but...you don't seem the type,” she stated, giving my general appearance a vague motion.

I shrugged. “No offense taken. I'd like something a bit more conservative for the more public sections of my properties, but there are a few private locations I'll let you loose your artistic creativity on. Then, of course, you'll have free time to pursue whatever you like. I'd also pay for your education, as I mentioned earlier, if you'd like to continue your formal schooling in the visual arts.”

There was still suspicion in her eyes, but as she pondered silently, they strayed towards the contract which lay silently tempting.

“How do you know I don't already have a job?” She finally asked, running her thumb along her lip.

“Beyond the obvious consideration you're now giving to my job offer?” I shrugged. “Well, the combination of your appearance, which is somewhat disheveled and the fact that you referred to yourself as a Number, rather than an Honorary Britannian. If you do have a job, it's likely base physical labor without much security, probably on a temp basis.”

She scowled as I listed off my deductions and reached over to the contract, beginning to seriously study it for the first time.

“How do you know I don't already have a job?” She finally asked, running her thumb along her lip.

“Beyond the obvious consideration you're now giving to my job offer?” I shrugged. “Well, the combination of your appearance, which is somewhat disheveled and the fact that you referred to yourself as a Number, rather than an Honorary Britannian. If you do have a job, it's likely base physical labor without much security, probably on a temp basis.”

She was quiet for a long moment, her eyes scrolling across the page. “...and you want to fuck me. That'd be part of...this job or whatever.” There was obvious distaste in her voice as her eyes hardened and glanced up at me. “I'm not a prostitute.”

I raised an eyebrow. “I'm not interested in a prostitute. I'm more interested in intelligent conversation, a potentially great young artist, and an inside view on what life is like for the Number population of the Area. The sex would be...an optional bonus. If you'd like, you can ask Zoe or Charlotte here, I'm quite good in bed.”

Mutsuki twitched, her eyes snapping towards the other two women in the limo, looking them over. Fixing on Zoe's obvious non-Britannian heritage, she turned back towards me, pointing at the bronze-skinned woman, “So, she's one of your servants too, then? How long did she sign up for?”

I frowned slightly. “You may ask her. I don't restrict people in my employ from answers questions
on non-sensitive work matters. Zoe is very much her own person.”

Mutsuki gave me an intense look at the rejoinder, but looked back to Zoe, the question in her gaze.

Zoe smiled softly and gave me a look that spoke of devotion more strongly than any words could. “I am My Lord’s servant for as long as he wishes. The contract I signed does not have a duration.” As Mutsuki’s surprise dawned, Zoe suddenly smirked, flicking her a sideways glance. “I’ll also confirm that he's very good in bed.”

Mutsuki pinkened and scowled, looking away from us even as the car rolled to a stop.

“Here already?” I asked, feigning surprise as I peered outside the windows. Contrary to what little we'd seen of the Six Houses of Kyoto, our meeting was not going to be taking place at the base of the Mt. Fuji Sakuradite Refinery. Instead, we'd arrived at the offices of the megacorp itself, which within the Tokyo Settlement itself and occupied several very large building which glistened with huge solar collectors and doubtless employed hundreds, if not thousands, of administrative staff.

I tapped my ear, “I'll assume we're in the clear given no problems have come to my attention.”

A gravelly voice replied. “We're in the clear, Your Highness. Forward scouts reported back five minutes ago and the two businessmen we sent in for appointments before yours, the ones from the crimson fisheries? They reported no suspicious activities.”

“Excellent,” I replied. “Gentlemen and Ladies, we are now at an increased threat level. Please take appropriate measures.”

There were a few murmurs of confusion over the line, but those quieted quickly. These men were well-trained and had been with me for years. When I said there might be danger afoot, they listened.

I looked towards the Eleven girl with a smile. “If you don't mind, Ms. Minase? I'd very much like you to accompany me. I think you'll find the meeting...enlightening.”

Mutsuki scowled, “...and what's that supposed to mean?”

I grinned now, “Nope. Either come with and find out, or sit on the sidelines and never know.”

I hid my smirk as she slid along the seat.

I'll admit it, I struck a pose.

“Greeting and Salutations my loyal subjects!”

There was a wave of sudden...well, almost seizures, the movements were so fast, as heads that had been buried in reports, looking over documents, or turned away from the door in conversation snapped up to look towards where I had presented myself. Collectively, jaws loosened as they took in my regal form...or wondered who the crazy was and how he'd snuck in the building.

I picked out a blue and green suit for the occasion, one of my more elaborate numbers that actually came with a cobalt cape. Gold and silver thread bordered the rich fabric, highlighting my every move as it caught the light. Precious opal and diamonds from my holdings in Australia enhanced the effect. Doubtless I looked every inch the rich fop, though with at least a half-hearted effort at
I glanced at the floor to hide my smile. It was a mistake. They knew, my audience knew. And it was
remaining tasteful.

“Have no fear,” I stated with a broad and confident ‘lady-killer smile,’ “your new Viceroy is here!”
I made an expansive wave of my hand. “Righting wrongs, and fighting terrorists! Exposing
skullduggery and naughtiness! To all those who flout the will of our glorious Emperor, in the name
of Britannia, I will punish you!” I completed the motion, pointing off into the middle distance out a
window as I struck another pose.

The silence was deafening as no one dared to move for a short eternity, no doubt attempting to
process what had just happened.

Then the clapping started. Almost simultaneously, both Zoe and the sole woman who was seated at
the table before me. The collection of older men who made up the rest of the board seemed to still
be rebooting their cerebral hardware, so I focused my attention on the smiling faces of my attendant
and Kaguya Sumeragi.

“Thank you, thank you!” I bowed to the two, sweeping the motion with a corny flourish. “You're
too kind!”

“Ah, Lord Viceroy,” Kirihara Taizo finally seemed to pull himself together, “your arrival is an
unexpected pleasure. I apologize for not assembling a proper greeting, but you seem to have caught
us quite off-guard. We were assembling for a series of meetings with other large business that
effect the Sakuradite trade in Area 11. If you'll give me a moment, I'll clear the schedule-”

I held up a hand to interject as politely as possible. “That's perfectly alright, CEO Kirihara Taizo.
You've actually already scheduled my meeting today. I believe you had a three hour block marked
off for the head of an Australia-based steel manufacturing company? Under the name Gil V. Roy?”

There was another moment of silence as the penny dropped, punctuated by a few twitches and
slumping shoulders as well as the giggling of a fourteen-year-old corporate heiress allowed the
humor to get to her.

I smiled openly at the laughing girl.

Was it any wonder that I liked women as much as I did?

“So did His Highness desire to truly anything of note or did he merely call upon us to mock us?”
One of the other men spoke, a more sturdy individual in a breasted suit named Tousai Munakata,
despite the glare Taizo sent his way. He stroked his large beard as he fixed me with a piercing
glare.

“What my colleague means to say, honorable Viceroy, is that meeting with us under these false
pretenses is somewhat...confusing. Pray, would you enlighten us as to the precise reason for your
grace's visit today?” A third man, thin with a pointed goatee stated diplomatically, who I knew to
be Hidenobu Kubouin.

I raised an eyebrow, taking care to look puzzled. “Didn't any of you listen to my declaration? I
mean, I was pretty clear there when I introduced myself.”

Tatsunori Osakabe blinked, leaning forward as he obviously fought against an ingrained instinct to
bow in apology. “I'm sorry, Your Highness, but we were so very...surprised by your appearance
that your introduction was perhaps not fully digested.”
Kaguya, though, was giving me an intense stare, the likes of which I was more accustomed to seeing from Schneizel or Lelouch.

I sighed and went to speak, before stopping.

“Then, I suppose I should reintroduce myself,” I smiled. “I am Gilgamesh eu Britannia, presently the Viceroy of Area 11, the Grand Duke of Australia and Tasmania, Founder and owner of the Eureka Foundation and subsidiary organizations, and 5th Prince of the Holy Britannian Empire.” Kirihara and Kaguya obviously noted the order which I'd listed my titles, but said nothing on the subject.

Stepping to the side, I gestured to the platinum blonde at the door. Looking distinctly nonplussed, she scowled as I introduced her. “This is Charlotte Lawson, niece of Duke Newsom and currently employed as my administrative assistant.” I now gestured to the bronze-skinned woman also nearby, “This is Zoe Esteban, my personal assistant and confidant.” I paused, then looked to where a hesitant and suspicious native woman was hanging at the threshold of the room. She, of all people, looked most out of place dressed in care-worn and somewhat dirty casual clothes rather than the understated finery that everyone besides myself wore.

“...and this is Mutsuki Minase, a graffiti-artist I picked up off the street about half an hour ago,” I stated honestly.

The addressed woman scowled at me lightly, seemingly preoccupied with the revelation that I was the new viceroy.

Old man Kirihara frowned at me, his gaze flickering between the people I’d already introduced, no doubt attempting to puzzle out the significance of each individual and how, exactly, Mutsuki rated a spot in my entourage. His bony fingers flexed over the head of his cane as he nodded decisively once.

“Although I’m sure His Highness has already acquainted himself with our identities,” the vulture-like man complimented, “if he will permit us the honor?”

“Of course,” I smiled grandly.

“I am Kirihara Taizo,” the bald and wizened figure stated bluntly, “the most senior member and head of the Sakuradite Trade Commission. The remainder of the board is as follows: Hiroyosi Yoshino, Tatsunori Osakabe, Tousai Munakata, Hidenobu Kubouin, and Kaguya Sumeragi.

Although it has been said before, this august body offers you the full greetings and honors necessitated by your station. I am sure I am not alone in welcoming you to Area Eleven and offering you any hospitality you should require.”

A chorus of surprisingly sincere-sounding agreements sounded around the table as pleasantries were given.

“I give thanks for all your warm welcome,” I replied congenially. “Although, if you will permit me a certain amount of bluntness, might I strike the first order of business?” I asked, moving towards an empty chair at the table and sliding into it easily.

“Of course. We are all interested in what business brings a man of your stature to our organization
in such a surprising and covert manner.” Kirihara replied stoically.

“Well, honestly?” I smiled, “I've come before you to politely and sincerely ask that you all stop supporting the miscellaneous terrorist and insurgency factions of Area Eleven, as well as the Japanese Liberation Front.”

It seemed I had a talent for inducing absolute silence.
“Your...Highness...” Kirihara Taizo began slowly, his surprise withering as he asserted control before the other members of board could begin to panic or waver in the face of my declaration. “I'm afraid you're terribly mistaken. We of the Sakuradite Trade Commission hold ourselves to the highest standard of ethics, especially where we handle the money entrusted to us by our stations. Whoever implied that we supported the partisan factions of Area 11 was either terribly mistaken or wishes to cast aspersions on our honorable and loyal institution.”

I smiled at the older man and pulled out a sheaf of papers from my briefcase.

“Mr. Kirihara, while your general records for the Sakuradite Trade Commission are, indeed, clean of any indiscretions, you might want to be more careful about the middlemen you use for your transactions.” I flipped open the stack of forms until I found the one I needed. “For instance, your overseas accounts were an interesting trail to follow. Minor note here, the Chinese Federation? Possibly the most corrupt banking system on the planet. Something of a double-edged sword when the person tracking down financial evidence can bribe people more effectively than you.”

As many of the men finally seemed to realize they were facing actual evidence of their crimes, they began to show signs of stress. Errant shifting and nervous tic emerged from the previously stoic individuals, their pallor growing sweaty and pale as they fought their instincts to fly or fight their way out of the situation.

“Lucky for you, I don't care!” I enthused with a wide grin, throwing the financial report over my shoulder, where the fluttering pages echoed loudly in the once-again-silent meeting room.

“Y-your Highness!” Charlotte gasped, shocked. “These people! They're traitors! Criminals! They deserve to be put in front of a firing squad, not-”

“-up, bup, bup!” I overruled, raising a hand to forestall her objections, giving her a rare chastising glare, under which her protests withered. “Me Viceroy,” I pointed at myself, then her, “you administrative assistant.” I waggled a finger. “This is viceroy-time.”

“I apologize, Your Highness, I was out of line.” Charlotte replied, her eyes downcast.

“You're forgiven,” I announced grandly, “but, you must be punished.”

She winced, no doubt imagining some terrible fate. After all, high society was full of horror stories of those who managed to truly piss off their betters. Interrupting a prince in the middle of an important meeting more than qualified. Instead, I tapped my lip, turning to the most junior member of the board who squirmed slightly under my sudden scrutiny.

My smirk turned wicked as I had an idea.

A viciously cruel idea about how to make my point stick even better than I'd hoped.
Kaguya swallowed under my speculative gaze.

“Ms. Sumeragi, I’ve heard good things about your managerial skills from my investigators. What do you think an appropriate punishment would be for an insubordinate individual?” I asked casually.

Certainly, the question didn't have any double meanings at all.

Kaguya stared at me for a moment, then coerced her expression into a smile, though it was obviously strained. I could see her mind working furiously behind her eyes as she pondered my question, the weight of the room's attention on her shoulders.

Her tongue whet her lips, the barely perceptible pink organ tracing them slowly as she thought about my proposal. I was, after all, asking her for advice on how to punish a subordinate who had acted contrary to their superior's will. Either knowingly or unknowingly, either willingly or unwillingly, I hadn't specified. It was patently obvious that the whatever opinion she expressed could be applied to her just as well as it could be applied to Charlotte.

I was offering her an out.

Still, she hesitated. Was it a trap? Did I have some unknowable plan or plot by which I would use her own words to entrap her? Was I insane? Was I just merely insane or had my madness bred some canniness or cleverness that was just as dangerous as conventional logic?

Finally, she sighed as her eyes slid closed, breaking the lengthy staredown we'd indulged in. When she spoke, it was haltingly, with the utmost care and attention to her words.

“I suppose...something that made it clear about who was in charge? Maybe? Something that didn't inconvenience me too much...after all, good employees are hard to find, and even harder to replace. It would definitely be troublesome to train people to do such a complicated task as I'm sure being your aide is, Your Highness,” Kaguya offered with as much of a guileless smile as she could summon under the circumstances.

There was quiet for a moment as I pretended to ponder her suggestion, then I turned to Charlotte.

“See, for some reason, whenever people argue for harsher punishment,” I explained slowly, “they'll use their next breath to argue for their own clemency. It doesn't matter how heinous or minor either crime is, it just matters that someone else committed it and that they're punished for it.”

I let that statement hang in the air a moment.

“So,” I sighed, drumming my fingers against the table, “All of you should be able to understand why I have a personal objection to putting you all to death, despite the fact that I have more than ample cause to do so.”

I let my eyes linger on Charlotte for a moment as she flinched, the unspoken, but acknowledged reprimand resonant in the room as she dropped her head in submission. Honestly, I was thankful this had happened in at least a semi-controlled environment rather than in front of the press, or god forbid, in royal court. I'd be nearly obligated to at least give her a severe beating, if not outright kill her to save face in front of the other nobility.
As much as I was the probably the most easygoing royal in recent memory, I was still a royal. I had my obligations. I had to maintain an appearance of strength at all times, or at least the illusion of being unaffected by those around me.

“You'll pardon me for saying I find your supposed forgiving attitude more than a little suspicious,” Taizo stated suddenly and bluntly, then narrowed his gaze. “Certainly for a Britannian of your...heritage.”

The other individuals around the table shifted warily as they looked between myself and their senior member nervously.

I shrugged carelessly. “Well, I didn't say I was going to let you completely off the hook. I'm still going to punish you. I'm just not going to have you crucified, impaled, or...well, you get the drift.” Several members obviously swallowed the sudden fear that rose in their faces.

Taizo snorted, “We are all patriots here. Killing us would only serve to inflame nationalist sentiment. If it means the revival of the Japan we so dearly loved, our lives are a pittance to pay.”

“Noble sentiment,” I complimented, watching as the men around the table firmed under Taizo's declaration. “But, rest assured, none of you would die a martyr's death. You would die, remembered not as heroes but as the greatest villains this land has seen in modern memory.”

I was apparently truly gifted at creating silence.

Grinning darkly, I reached for another sheaf of papers, waggling them in front of the group. “See, what none of you cared to take into account is the fact that smuggling weapons across international borders requires either dedicated black operations personnel or deniable assets. For a multitude of reasons, your organizations have largely used Chinese and Japanese organized crime syndicates to move weapons and ammunition.”

Of course, the Chinese government had contributed some amount under the urging of Sawasaki Atsushi, but I'd save that ace for a different time.

“The problem with using the Triad and Yakuza to move illegal arms,” I continued, “is that they tend to not only want a cut of the profits, but to also use the shipments to move their own goods as well.”

Taizo's scowl deepened, but he said nothing as the other men looked at each other with furrowed brows. Kaguya, though, proved once again to be sharper as her eyes slowly filled with something resembling horror, her head dropping into her hands. When she spoke to me, her voice was quietly appalled.

“...is it true?” She asked softly.

I sighed and nodded to myself, “Women, both ways, for forced prostitution. Opium and raw ingredients from the Chinese Federation, more refined drugs shipped back from Area Eleven like heroin and refrain. There's also a fairly lucrative trade in miscellaneous other restricted or banned substances.” I levied a look at the remainder of the board with a scathing glance. Taizo, notably, met my gaze without surprise or shame. “Which you've been supporting through funding the JLF.”

“Which is largely the fault of the Britannian Empire,” Taizo replied sharply. “It is only to be expected that strife and corruption would raise their heads in such a world as your people have
created. I will not have you blame us for actions that are ultimately your Empire's fault.”

I snorted, shaking my head. “The actions of an individual or a group should not be blamed upon anyone except themselves, otherwise I would be blaming Napoleon for Britannia’s expansion, which we would both know as a bold-faced misrepresentation of facts. Besides, if we truly wished to point fingers, Taizo, we could speak of the First Pacific War...Second Lieutenant Kirihara. I imagine there are just as many Koreans who wish retribution against you as there are Elevens who wish it against my countrymen.”

The old man stiffened, visibly quelling the outrage within him as his stiffly steepled his fingers and outright glared at me over the arch of his hands. Around us, anxiety gave way to confusion as eyes and faces looked between the two of us.

“You've made your point,” Kirihara conceded, an arctic rage blazing within his eyes.

“No,” I countermanded. “I don't think I have. Perhaps we should talk about what the Sakuradite Trade Commission recommended prior to the invasion of Area Eleven?”

My rhetorical question sent a shock through Tousai and Hidenobu as I crossed my arms. Kirihara's scowl deepened as he shot the two men a warning look.

"Internal memos of the Japanese government from before the war indicate a study was done on the probable effect of a sakuradite tariff on Britannia's imports. Originally, it was an effort by one Taizo Kirihara to raise the profit margins of his company, but was seized upon by Tousai Munakata and Hienobu Kubouin as a political strategy by which they would be able to strengthen ties with Europe as the strain of the tariff stalled the Britannian war machine. Somewhere along the line, the plan was altered. Instead of a tariff, a complete embargo would be issued. Britannia would be forced to halt expansion in Southern Africa, and a number of lucrative shipping contracts would make up for the loss of revenue until Britannia buckled and renegotiated trade agreements, while the Euro-Universe propped up a few anti-Britannian African governments. It didn't quite go to plan."

I crushed the twisted smile that threatened to erupt as I heard Kaguya and Mutsuki gasp, horror plain on their faces.

"That's my point," I finished sharply. "We either stand here all day pointing fingers and assigning blame or we move forward. Continuing to fund the insurgency does more harm than good. It frightens off aid workers, forces what few Britannians would fund relief efforts for food and housing to stand aside for political reasons, and makes a hardline stance against terrorism the only palatable reaction to the masses. Additionally, Britannian enforcement against yakuza smuggling rings and human trafficking has been hampered by the partisans and insurgency forces that you've been funding. Despite the fact that your stated goal is to help the people of Area Eleven, your actions are causing systemic harm to the populous.”

“Systemic harm!?" Taizo nearly yelled really, truly, angry now. “The depredations of Britannian rule over Japan will-”

“Japan is dead,” I interrupted bluntly, meeting his eyes with all the calm gravity of the rising ocean tide.

“Japan will rise again,” the old man hissed. “You may kill us today, you may not, but the people of this land will not lie down and-”
“I don't care.” I replied without emotion. “It's not a matter of commitment on your part or your people's. It's not a matter of money or time or resources. The total estimated number of resistance fighters in Area Eleven is nearly eleven thousand, tallying combat and support troops. Britannian forces on these islands are easily ten times that in combat forces alone. The total population of Area Eleven is nearly ninety million if one counts men, women, and children...a bare fraction of which are either willing or able to fight an organized military force. Britannia can, at need, commit a force ten times what we've currently deployed as a garrison.”

I paused to let that sink in.

“That means, baring an all-out-war between the Chinese Federation and Britannia, there is no force within realistic striking distance that can displace a military force one-tenth the size of this Area's entire population,” I explained slowly, making sure to stare down Taizo as I did.

“If you are actually attempting to incite a war between the Chinese Federation and Britannia using sakuradite as a bargaining chip, Area Eleven will be a primary battlefield and most likely damaged to a point where rebuilding would take decades. That is, of course, ignoring the loss of life, which would be nothing short of horrendous.”

“You're exaggerating,” one of the other men tried, the angry one who'd taken to stroking his beard anxiously. Tousai Munakata, one of the youngest members besides the Sumeragi Heiress, but still more than four decades her senior. “A certain point will be reached wherein even Britannia will find it untenable to commit more forces. A war of attrition would wear down even your nation's imperial army eventually.”

“Ignoring, for the moment, the technological disparity which the Chinese Federation suffers from in comparison with Britannia,” I dismissed airily, “There is the fact that the empire's war effort hinges on a steady supply of sakuradite. If we lose Area Eleven, it completely removes any possibility for a war against the Euro-Universe.” I shrugged here. “They know it's coming. We know it's coming. We won't sacrifice Area Eleven because sakuradite is literally as indispensable as oil was a century ago. Beyond that, though, if we allowed an Area to rise in successful rebellion, it would set a disastrous precedent and deal a hideous blow to national pride and military morale.”

I looked around the room, making sure that my points were being heard, if not well-received.

“Even assuming, in the plausible though unlikely happenstance that the Chinese Federation is victorious,” I granted generously, “there is still the matter of the enormous death toll incurred by the civilian populous of Area Eleven as well as the remaining military forces of the former nation of Japan. In the, frankly extraordinarily implausible, chance that enough people, infrastructure, and skilled laborers survive the conflict to rebuild Japan, the Chinese Federation would not have expended so much material, capital, and soldiers just to allow you to resurrect yourselves as a free agent. The absolute best you could hope for would be admittance to the Federation as a member state with a puppet government. More likely, you would become a military district similar to India; not at all too different from the current administration of Britannia. You would merely have different masters.”

As I finished I reached into my coat pocket and took out a small flask, taking a quick swig as I finished, the motion deliberately casual and infuriating.

“I'll open the floor to questions now,” I waved tiredly, turning to stare out the right-hand windows
of the conference room.

At least a minute went by before Kaguya was able to raise her head to meet my gaze. Her eyes were hard and bore little of the fourteen-year-old girl she should be. I met that gaze impassively as I waited for her to speak.

‘...why are you telling us this? Would not killing us be kinder?’ She asked quietly.

‘Spare me the drama, Ms. Sumeragi. If you are so much enthralled with dying for your ideals, I won't stop you from doing so. I merely thought you would actually like the opportunity to help your people, rather than sentence them to an even more stringent military occupation.’

‘...and how would following the advice of a philandering child barely out of his teens benefit our people?’ Taizo finally rebutted, rallying where I thought I had dealt a crippling blow. Inwardly, I applauded his spirit; it was difficult to come back from such skeletons being dragged out of closets you'd thought long forgotten.

I pondered if this was the time to pull out my trump card, but another man took my hesitation as permission to lay his own grievance on the table.

'I, in particular, wish to know something,' Tatsunori Osakabe spoke, looking like he, specifically, wished to be the one who struck back first in this little war of wills. From what I remember, he was the one most obsessed with honor out of the group. Honor which I had trodden and spat upon. Despite my relaxed state, I watched him cautiously. If anyone were to do something stupid, it would be this man. "In looking over your history, I note that, when you were barely ten years old, you sold your birthright and bought lands on the other end of the planet. How do you explain this frank betrayal of your legacy and inheritance? With such a display of blatant mercenary financial interests, how can you expect us to move forward under your guidance when it seems you will sell the rights to these lands just as easily?"

I suppose, from his point of view, highlighting such an action would be as much of an insult as anything else. Even in Japan, especially in Japan, there was a sense of cultural identification with your homeland. The titles I'd been given at birth weren't exactly representative of my area of birth, but they had been inherited through my family for generations. It would be...beyond mercenary for a formerly-Japanese individual to see someone so easily cast off something with so much traditional value.

I shrugged languidly. "Well, Mr. Osakabe, I suppose this is something of an alien concept to you, but I've been appointed directly by the Imperial Throne of Britannia." I narrowed my eyes. "For the uninformed," I drawled and was gratified to see his scowl deepen, "This means that, to put it bluntly, I'm stuck here." I allowed the penny to drop before explaining further. "An appointment by imperial edict isn't something you say 'no' to, not if you value your own health. Either I demonstrate the ability to capably rule Area Eleven or I admit that I'm incapable and I would be either exiled or killed for the sake of saving face." The truth was easier and more likely believed here, and I'd chosen the expression 'saving face' for exactly that reason, as anyone who knew Japanese social customs would understand. "Beyond my inability to refuse the position, though, there's also the fact that I sold my birthright because it was developed, prosperous, and had only minimal room for improvement."

'Face' was a tricky concept in Japanese society. Intertwined with the concept of honor, it could be translated as the ability to face your peers in society, or the ability to appear as you should to your friends and acquaintances. As with honor, there were numerous acts which could detract from it,
most notably being overly indebted to another individual or having done something disrespectful to your own or another family. At least by that measuring stick, I was probably the lowest-ranking individual at this table.

I cut my glare across the room. "I bought a wasteland and turned it into, in at least one instance, a literal gold mine. I picked Australia because it was almost completely undeveloped. It had potential." I dropped my hands from behind my head and laid them on the table as I spoke. "Area Eleven has potential too, which is one reason I'm actually going to try and help your people, because it's a good challenge." I gave them a smirk and made a calculated insult. "It isn't as though you were going to win any awards before the war, after all. A society built on isolationism, xenophobia, and misogyny." As barely-restrained tempers flared around the room, I turned to Kaguya, who looked no less incensed than anyone else. "You should thank the Empire for your station, Ms. Sumeragi. You would doubtless be looking at an arranged marriage by this point in your life if the invasion hadn't occurred."

Kaguya scowled and turned away, but refused to meet my eyes as she did so. Both she and I knew her standing on the board resulted from a vastly unlikely series of circumstances, not the least of which was Britannia's view on rather strict equality of the sexes.

"It's interesting that you speak of social engineering," Taizo noted, almost absently, the man himself likely being the best at controlling his temper in the room...besides possibly me. "Given what I know of your private...education system."

I raised an eyebrow in silent challenge, then decided to cut his attack off at the knees and leaned forward with my lips still set in a smirk. "I'm guessing you're going to object to how I recruit...although you might use the word 'kidnap,' children from warzones and poverty-stricken area around the world, put them in institutions of my own making, and brainwash them into mindlessly loving Britannia. Close enough?"

The looks of disgust on many of their faces answered that question, for the most part. Kirihara's speculative caution proved him to, at least, be cannier than most.

"In the interest of honesty," I smiled darkly. "I'll also include the fact that the vast majority of 'students' I acquire are purchased, not kidnapped, from various human trafficking rings in Asia, Africa, Indonesia, and Europe." I let that sink in, enjoying the opinions they were already forming about me. "After the initial purchase has been made, I then hire the Black Knights to run roughshod over local, corrupt, law enforcement...if it even exists, and kill the slave traffickers." The transition to blank, stupified surprise was even more gratifying with the setup I'd given them. "Then, yes, I give those children an education," I admitted glaring at them.

"I hire psychologists to rehabilitate them. I give them good food, warm beds, and clean water to wash in and drink." I stated plainly. "I teach them skills that they can use to make money...carpentry, metalworking, gardening...and a classical education in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Then I make sure they know where that education is coming from," I sneered here, lightly. "The Holy Empire of Britannia saved them, raised them, fed them...is it any wonder they'd be more accepting of the empire than those would allow the slave traders to prosper because of some tenuous hopes of political freedom?"

I leaned back now, my point struck again as I tapped a finger on the table and spoke once more. "To answer the question you haven't asked, the number is one-hundred and twenty six. One-hundred and twenty six children you would identify as ethnically Japanese. Thirty two of them had been raped before the Black Knights pulled them out of that hellhole. Sixteen others had already
been...dismantled, for the black market organ trade.” At least one of the men looked as though he might be sick here. Kaguya looked as though something had died inside her. Even Taizo had cracks showing in his armor.

I clapped and clasped my hands together as I enjoyed the shame I’d rained down on them. People who believed they had the moral high ground were especially fun to break.

"Now, I think that's everything?" I asked rhetorically, a happily-mocking smile on my face. Then I snapped my fingers. "Oh, wait! You wanted to try and blackmail me over my sexual liaisons," I waggled my finger at Kirihara, as if chastising a child. "Don't think I didn't hear you say 'philandering,' Taizo. Since you're curious, though, I've had sexual relations with forty-seven different people this month. My all-time-record is sixty-nine in one month." I shrugged, then.

"That's not counting multiple times with a single individual, though. If you actually have enough evidence to present to the press that doesn't make this one of the more tabloid-worthy renditions of the various conspiracies about the royal family, go ahead. I've been waiting for an opportunity to take a stand on sexual liberation. Hell, give me a few days and I can have a new line of T-shirts made up. I'm thinking something like, 'Real Men Take it up the Ass.' What do you think?"

Silence, again. Glorious, empty silence...

...except for the wheezing laughter of an old man.

I crossed my arms and frowned. "Okay. I thought it was funny, too, but not quite that hilarious."

Strangely, Kirihara's laughter did to his expression what glares and scowls and gnashing of teeth could not...it made him truly frightening. His flesh was twisted by emotion, pulled back from his lips and giving him a visage not unlike a death's head.

"Pardon," Taizo managed. "Do pardon my behavior, Your Highness. After all, you present such a brave facade in the face of accusations of rampant homosexuality, which, though not a crime any more, is still frowned upon as a practice. However, a man of your...voracious appetites should doubtless be held accountable for them, if we are to be held accountable for our own...excesses. I was just wondering what your response would be if I brought up the identities of your bedmates. You have demonstrated quite laudable talents in gathering information about both myself and my board members, Prince Gilgamesh, but we have not been idle either."

The threat hung in the air, unspoken but sharp as the newly oiled assassin's knife.

From the air of confusion in the other board members' eyes, this was his own trump card. Something he'd held in reserve, but perhaps didn't want to reveal...save for the fact that I'd come in and trampled over what should be his territory. If he didn't at least score one blow, he'd lose substantial face among the other board members. I'd forced his hand.

Damn. Well, there was nothing for it now, but to call his bluff. I'd made such a strong showing now...if I retreated...

"Actually," I commented with a relaxed grin, leaning back and placing my hands behind my head, "I'm somewhat curious what you've dug up. Be sure not to hold back now." I was tempted to add 'old man,' but decided to save the base name calling for a more desperate occasion. Right now, we could at least pretend to be polite.
"I was merely wondering..." Taizo "if you'd memorized the numbers of children you'd taken to your bed as well as those whose lives you'd saved."

Well, it seemed someone else had an affinity for halting sound.

Several people in the room shifted, looking at me in a new, distasteful light.

I forced myself to take a steady, even breath.

Did he have proof? Accusations of pedophilia weren't a stain that was easily washed away. I'd made sure such liaisons were kept in the strictest confidence, but...could I say with complete honesty that I believed every man and woman in my employ beyond bribery or blackmail of their own? Between their lucrative paychecks and the knowledge of what I was capable of if truly angered...most of them wouldn't betray me. Most. All?

It could be a guess. A damned lucky one if such were the case. Kirihara could believe himself to be correct, even if he had no evidence. It could even be a bluff.

"Well, that's an interesting angle of attack to take," I said with a tired, yet still amused grin, playing the comment off with the air of a royal not deigning to touch something so far below their station. "Destroy my credibility in the education community by implying that I'm raping children. It would probably give cause to mount a formal investigation into my schools. Although they wouldn't find any evidence, they'd likely find something objectionable. The press is like that, you know." I danced around the topic, doing my best to never commit an answer. "If you're going to play the game like that, I might as well kill you all here and now."

Many of the old men at the table swallowed, Kirihara didn't. He met my eyes evenly and gave a single, small nod.

It was an acknowledgement. I could kill him and, whether or not his accusations were true, he could deal a grievous injury to me.

"However, Ms. Sumeragi was correct when she said that good employees were hard to replace," I sighed, drumming my fingers on the table, making a production of the ponderous movement to draw their attention away from the discussion of only a moment ago. "I think we've all had our fill of posturing now. The facts are thus: You have a reputation to protect. You have things you're ashamed of. I have significantly fewer, and I have more money than you. I'll win that fight, just like I'll win a PR campaign if you go public with the fact you've been funding JLF and try to die as martyrs. We can do our best to destroy each other, or we can move forward, as I originally tried to convince you was more profitable...for both our groups."

The old man smirked slightly, reminding me he was not defeated quite yet. "Yet, you have not made the notion of becoming true dogs of Britannia palatable to us. Surely there is some concession Your Highness can give to soothe our honor?"

It was likely the closest I'd get to an open acknowledgement that he'd play ball...for now, at least.

I removed yet another stack of papers from my briefcase. At least the dratted thing would be lighter by the time I left. I turned back to the board, sliding the stapled packets down the table towards each in turn, finishing on Kirihara.

Turning back to the rest, I continued.
“Part of the reason I'm not keen on pressing charges or having you killed is because, under my brother Albert's administration, this was the only viable course of action you saw to strike back against the system. That changes now.” I tapped the copy of the document in front of me. “This is an outline I've drawn up for a staged reform of Honorary Citizenship rights and privileges, as well as numerous other ways private organizations can be formed or taken advantage of in order to help the disenfranchised native population. As viceroy, it is more than within my power to support these various endeavors. In exchange...”

I left the request hanging.

“You'd want us to fall into line,” Kaguya stated blandly. To her credit, she managed to keep the accusation out of her tone, but not from her stare. “Stop funding the JLF, cut ties with the insurgents, promote cooperation with the occupation authorities.”

Kirihara said nothing, his eyes still scrolling through the benefits and allowances my rule would bring. He, more than the others, had confidence that he might be able to hold me to these promises.

“I feel compelled to point out that was understood as part of your original agreement to maintain your stations,” I pointed out somewhat dryly.

Kaguya blinked, possessing the grace to flush slightly at the accusation.

“Essentially, yes,” I responded eventually. “I have a few other conditions, not the least of which is that Taizo Kirihara step down from his position and you, Ms. Sumeragi, step us as Chairperson of the board. We could privately discuss other matters at your leisure,” I offered with a shrug, feeling worn by the entire meeting.

The young Sumeragi started at the announcement, as did several of the other board members. Taizo, notably, stayed silent as he flicked his gaze up to meet mine. Slowly, his eyes tracked to Kaguya before tracking back to me. There was a moment of tension as a speculative gleam filled his gaze and hint of shame flared before it drowned in dismissal.

He suspected, then, or believed his suspicions whether or not he had proof, at the very least.

Tiring of the chattering, I raised a hand for silence and felt gratified to receive it almost immediately. Standing, I gave the remainder of the room a final glance as I made my parting remarks.

“I understand that I've given this august body a great deal to discuss. I will be making my public arrival to Area Eleven some time in the next week. You have until then to decide on the matter I've put forward for your consideration. I will be expecting Ms. Sumeragi to convey your decision no later than three days after such a time,” I stated, meeting each of their gazes in turn.

“Let me be clear. I do not expect you to like me, I do not even expect you to agree with me. I do, however, hope that if you feel an ounce of true loyalty to the people of this land, to the remaining fathers with daughters, to the remaining mothers with sons, to those brothers and sisters and friends and loved ones who wish for nothing more than to be allowed to live their lives in peace...for that great sum of humanity which will be cut down like chaff before a terrible reaping...”

I sighed here, shaking my head tiredly.
“If you care for them, understand that just as I have been merciful and forgiving in this room, in this moment, you will see me breathe fire and ash down upon those you profess to love so dearly that you would fight for them to the death. You will see the streets paved with the bones of thousands of restless dead should you decide to raise the banner of true rebellion.”

Kirihara and I matched gazes one last time, something of an understanding passing between us.

I picked up my briefcase and turned, allowing my cape to billow out behind me.

“I bid you good day.”

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

I pressed a finger to my ear and spoke as I slid into the vehicle. “This is a step-down order, I repeat: step-down. Return to procedures for a neutral zone. Hostile territory cleared. Horris? If you could tell Gino and Anya to stand down? They won't need to come in guns-blazing today. Please also inform Liliana, Marika, and the beta guard that the pink diamond is clear for delivery to the black castle.”

I sighed, stretching and relaxing as the anxiety of the meeting bleed away. Truthfully, I'd considered Kyoto to be smart enough not to try something inane like an attempt on my life...immediately, at least. Still, there was always the chance someone would be stupider than I'd expected.

That was why contingencies existed, after all. The security squad I kept with me would be able to hold out for the thirty seconds it would have taken for Anya and Gino to deploy with the reinforcements to evacuate me. The cover story for such a possibility would have been, ironically, a terrorist attack on a high profile meeting between the new viceroy and the Sakuradite Trade Commission.

Unfortunately, all members of the board would have tragically lost their lives if such an attack had occurred.

I was thankful it hadn't been necessary, though. As Kaguya had said, competent replacements would have been hard to find. I scowled, thinking back on that conversation and turned my attention to another, more immediate problem.

“Charlotte?”

The platinum blonde nearly jumped out of her skin when I first broke my silence after the limo door shut behind her.

“Y-yes, Your-er, um...”

I turned a tired smile on her and shook my head. “I am sorry you had to be subjected to that. Why don't you come here and put your head in my lap?”

Stiffly, warily, the young woman slid down the long bench-seat and lowered her head into my lap at my request, her eyes still filled with the memory of the look I'd given her earlier. Sighing I began to run my fingers through her hair, delicately undoing knots and tangles as she slowly relaxed over the course of several minutes. Finally, after I could feel the last bit of tension leave her taut muscles, I traced two fingers down her cheek, causing her eyes to flutter open.

Despite my actions, there was still a bit of trepidation in that gaze.
“You understand why I did what I did?” I asked, my expression placid, but serious.

“Yes sire, I-” She quieted as I pressed a finger to her lips and swallowed.

“Good. Then I won't reiterate how important a lesson it is, not to undermine me in the future like that,” I replied gravely. The woman in my laps swallowed, but nodded. “...and as for punishment...” She tensed again, despite my teasing smile.

I idly traced a finger across her neck. “I'm thinking...a collar, to remind you of exactly to whom you belong.”

Mutsuki shifted nervously during my ministrations, repeatedly throwing unnerved stares my way as I spoke in undertones to both Zoe and Charlotte, leaving a flustered blush on the latter's face as well as Mutsuki herself. Finally, though, as we neared Ashford Academy, she seemed to find her voice.

“...is that why you wanted me to come along?” Mutsuki asked, staring not at me, but at the contract in her lap.

“Is what why?” I asked mildly, much more at peace now that the whole debacle was over.

She scowled, looking up to meet my eyes now. “Don't...I get it okay? Resistance is futile...smug Britannian prince,” her eyes flickered off to the side. “I just want to know...was this some weird attempt to win me over or manipulate me or something?”

I sighed and turned my eyes skyward.

“Have you ever heard that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder?'” I asked, getting a curious look for my troubles. “Think of it this way...a person is what you see them as. Do you think those people saw me as a hero for trying to prevent additional bloodshed or a tyrant imposing the will of a ruthless emperor?”

My rhetorical question made her frown as I continued. “If I give millions to educate and house orphans, am I a weak bleeding heart or manipulating hundreds of children into being loyal to Britannia?”

I shrugged, throwing another question out. "The Sakuradite Trade Board...were they greedy industrialists who bluffed just a bit too hard or did they want to curb the perceived excesses of a dangerously expansionist government before it was too late?"

I looked down to Charlotte and smirked. “That's the real lesson here. If I pick up a pretty young girl in trouble with the law because of a hard life and a blossoming talent...am I just being a good Samaritan or am I looking for an easy lay? People see what they want to see.”

I let the question linger as I lay back, one hand still petting Charlotte's hair.

“It's like one of those magic pictures that you look at from different angles and see different things,” I explained. ‘The 'why’ is only a pretty picture...or an ugly one. It doesn't matter. All that really matters is what happens next.” I grinned. “Do my actions inspire anger and ignite destruction or do they inspire understanding and create peace?”
To this day, I'm not completely sure why Mutsuki signed her contract, but...

...well, that would defeat the purpose of the lesson, wouldn't it?

After all, I didn't know why, myself. Maybe I was a manipulative bastard. Maybe I was a kind-hearted savior. Only time would tell.
Documents were strewn across the desk.

The boy who had once been known as Victor zi Britannia knew of the burgeoning fad of ‘paperless offices’ as they were being called, but given that he'd just celebrated his sixty-first birthday he felt he was entitled to the more...traditional methods of maintaining his affairs.

The tactile sensation of being able to grip an offending sheet of paper displaying mutinous information and hold it responsibly for its treason...yes, there was just some things electronics could not replicate.

Currently, one such leaf of information was within his grasp, frustratingly highlighting the gaps in its data by displaying long bars of black ink.

Scowling, he slammed the offending report onto the desk, before shaking his head and leaning back into the cushions of this throne-like chair and crossing his arms in dissatisfaction.

“Why couldn't you have had more children like him, Charlie?” VV asked quietly, closing his eyes as he let himself relax onto the headrest.

“It would help if I knew which of my progeny you were speaking of, dear brother.”

VV's eyes snapped open, widening as he perceived the immense form of Charles zi Britannia sitting opposite him, smirking slightly.

“Brother,” VV stated, coughing when his voice cracked slightly, “when did you-?”

“About five minutes ago,” Charles dismissed as he checked his pocket watch.

The young-seeming immortal looked away from his brother's gaze, flushing slightly as he frowned. “Such a lapse in attention...I apologize.”

Charles merely chuckled, leaning forward to look at his brother over his folded hands. “It's not a problem, truly Victor. On the contrary, it was interesting watching your face as you puzzled over whatever it is that has caught your attention. I don't suppose I can help, especially since it seems to be one of my children which has flustered you so.”

VV frowned, debating the wisdom of taking Charles up on his offer.

“Why did you appoint Gilgamesh to be the new Viceroy?” The young immortal asked finally, both answering and dodging the question at once.

Charles raised an eyebrow and leaned back again, rubbing at his goatee as he studied his brother.

“Several reasons,” Charles answered at length. “I suppose I just wanted to see what the boy would
do, really. Gilgamesh is interesting, at least in the manner he tries so hard not to be. A child who think he's clever enough to dodge me at every turn...adorably naive in many ways.”

VV grunted slightly as he scowled.

“I've been going over intelligence reports on those of your children that believe themselves smarter than the OSI,” VV explained as he drummed his fingers on his desk.

The emperor quirked a grin in amusement, “If you've found adequate proof that the boy is treasonous, you need only give the word and I'll have one of the Rounds bring him in. I think Jacob Foxe would be ecstatic.”

“Foxe is a brute who doesn't even possess all the finesse of a hammer. I wish to give him no more leeway to harass any of my nieces or nephews than he already has,” VV scowled. “Besides, if I already had any actual proof, I think you would agree that Gilgamesh would hold no fascination for me.”

“True enough.” Charles granted gamely, chuckling deeply as he did so. “So, what is it that has your interest so aroused about the boy?”

VV sighed and toyed with one of the long locks of his hair, carefully formulating his answer.

“He...” the young immortal began, licking his lips, “he...is too good.”

Charles hummed deeply, thoughtfully, in the back of his throat. “I would say he would have to defy expectations to some degree if he wished to retain his standing.”

VV nodded, conceding the point, “but...he's too...simple.” Here Victor scowled, as if unhappy with the phrasing. “No...that's not quite right. What I mean to say is that he accomplishes things too simply, too easily. It's not that he's unintelligent in comparison to what he's accomplished, far from it in fact, instead it's as if...the pieces fall into place around him.”

His gaze narrowed, directed at some thoughtful middle distance rather than any material object.

“Yes...” The young immortal nodded slowly. “He makes all the right moves, but it's not that what he does is particularly easy, it's that he goes about it in such a fashion that takes advantage of things he shouldn't know.”

Charles watched as a burgeoning light of realization began to dawn in his brother's eyes, his words speeding up as the thought blossomed into fullness.

“That business with the Wings of Talleyrand,” VV pointed out, no longer fully talking to his brother. “He was able to deduce Wilbur Melville was secretly formulating a terrorist organization by studying the Steiner Konzern Conglomerate for buyout. I remember the briefing he gave OSI after the fact...he’d gotten Schneizel's approval to take care of the matter personally. He practically blackmailed the Weinburgs and Konzerns with the threat of making the scandal public!”

Suddenly, VV's vitriol drained as the dawning of some epiphany shown...

...and he began to laugh.

Charles, on the other hand, merely watched in amusement as his brother chortled and guffawed, the
immortal's smaller form shaking with mirth. "Dear brother, as I can't read your mind, I do have to wonder what amuses you so. Would you care to enlighten me?"

"Don't you see, Charlie!?" VV asked, grinning excitedly as his laughter abated. "That green-haired bitch! He's one of hers!"

Charles frowned at the mention of CC, thoughts of the other immortal leading to, as they always did, thoughts of the love of his life...and his brother's betrayal.

“CC?” Charles eventually asked, taking care to make sure his voice was level, piqued only with curiosity. “Gilgamesh...does not seem to be what she usually looks for in a contractor.”

VV pursed his lips thoughtfully, shaking his head. “I wouldn't think so either, at first, but...Gilgamesh's success is far too...miraculous, Charles, you must realize this. His successes seem logical in hindsight, but the way he navigates obstacles, the manner in which he makes so many correct guesses based on the most lackluster of evidence...”

“One could say similar for Schneizel...or Lelouch,” the emperor argued, if only to play devil's advocate regarding the situation. “Even Cornelia, for that matter. All three of them have demonstrated a similar ability in fields of their choosing. Cornelia has won pitched battles any sane man would expect her to lose. Schneizel opened meaningful trade relations with Europe after a three decade cold war. Lelouch, at the age of fifteen, might I remind you, is operating a mercenary organization with ongoing assignments across four continents. Surely you won't accuse their prowess of being Geass-crafted next?”

VV scowled, “for a moment there, Charlie, you almost sounded the doting father figure.” His tone took on a teasing cadence. “Is it possible you're actually proud of some of your children?”

Charles zi Britannia snorted, then chuckled deeply. “Is it not a father's right to be proud of his children's achievements? They move heaven and earth because they fear my gaze upon them, after all.”

Victor zi Britannia nodded slowly, “Quite. The fact remains that I believe Gilgamesh to be in possession of a Geass.”

Charles shook his head slightly, “Be that as it may, brother, it's hardly conclusive proof. CC rarely lets her contractors wander and neither hide nor hair of her has been seen for nearly seven years now. Ultimately, though, what would it matter if he did. Gilgamesh is no fool. He would not challenge my authority after all of these years of cringing from my very presence.”

VV sighed and tapped the documents in front of him thoughtfully. “I suppose it is a bit of a stretch...still, I'd rather the Power of Kings be confounding me instead of some teenage brat.”

“Is that what you were so enthralled by when I first entered?” Charles asked, leaning forward to look over the desk as well.

“More or less.” VV conceded. “It's a project under Gilgamesh's Foundation. He's called it 'Ascendancy' in the internal memos, but it appears to be under the strictest secrecy.”

“Not so much that you've gathered no information on it,” Charles noted idly, drawing a thick sheaf of papers to examine, an eyebrow slowly rising as he looked the data over. “...or perhaps not.”
“It's the cleanest copy my people could acquire,” VV stated somewhat sourly, well aware of the numerous redacted lines and blocked-out print. “Given the apparent security he has on the project, the supply manifestos for the primary testing site are particularly interesting.”

Charles hummed deeply in his throat. “That is quite a lot of sakuradite... More, in fact, than I believe even his company should be able to acquire, and a great deal of it is higher-grade ore or refined product.”

“Oh, that,” VV tch'd quietly. “I'd been wondering on that subject as well. It took some doing, but I managed to insert a few of my more capable agent into some of the Indonesian pirate gangs. Gilgamesh has most of them under threat of death or has bribed their leadership to the point where they're willing to do as he says. Apparently, they've been instructed to raid primarily European Universe and Middle Eastern Federation ships while leaving Chinese Federation and Britannian vessels largely alone.”

Charles chuckled. “...an interesting tactic, and it does explain some of the tension between the Universe and the Federation as of late. I'd be interested in knowing how exactly Gilgamesh has them under 'threat of death,' though. Economic savant he might be, I'm certain he doesn't possess the right skill set for directing the kind of military operations...”

The emperor frowned, looking at he was at the unfurled map which lay under the assorted documents. His large digits ghosted over a set of stubby pins placed along the coast of Australia and a few small, barely visible at the map’s scale, islands in Indonesia. In all, there were seven of them, denoting locations of importance in some way, no doubt. That was not what caught his attention, though. No, what drew Charles' eye was their color.

They were black.

“He and Lelouch always have been close,” Charles scowled, wondering how he's missed this development until now. Eyeing his brother, he narrowed his gaze. “I take it Marianne's son has been aiding and abetting this venture.”

VV nodded solemnly. “For years, the pirates in the area have operated with a wink and a nod from the local officials, mostly by way of bribes. Gilgamesh and Lelouch, though there is little enough evidence to support these claims, appear to have 'cut out the middleman' as it were and are engaged in deals directly with the Chinese Federation officials sent as oversight. The positions in that region tend to free themselves up rather rapidly, partly due in fact to the piracy itself and the perceived failure of an individual to adequately deal with especially bad outbreaks.”

Charles fixed his gaze on the ceiling, his eyes distant and assessing. “Anyone in their position would be desperate to save their own hide. Between Lelouch and Gilgamesh, Indonesia is likely under their defacto control.”

“Most of the ports, harbors, and major cities as a result,” VV confirmed. “The waters are patrolled by a number of submarines, I'm not sure how many exactly, but they've destroyed a few bases the pirates once used and taken them over. Between the fact that the Black Knights are much better funded and positioned, can call on a number of bribed and threatened pirates as backup, and the Chinese Federation officials responsible for reporting this kind of activity are actively paying your sons to keep the pirates at bay and maintain their positions...”

Charles shook his head, an admiring glint in his eye.
“It gets better,” VV nearly spat. “I was using Geass Directorate personnel to subvert some of the pirate groups into acting against Gilgamesh's instructions. That meddlesome Schneizel, however, has been engaged in a rat-hunt through OSI and tried to root out what he thought were rogue operatives by sending in the Glinda Knights.”

Charles' shoulders began to shake silently.

The young immortal, though, was scowling as he looked off to the side, unknowing of his brother's state. “So when the pirates begin to move against some of the Northern Australia Black Knight's positions, the Glinda Knights find them in Britannian territorial waters.”

The emperor closed his eyes as he placed a hand over his mouth, still shaking.

“The end result is that apparently the remainder of the pirates have been further scared into obedience and Gilgamesh and Lelouch's stranglehold on the trade lanes are stronger than ever. I can't decide if the entire thing was an elaborate trap or just blind, stupid luck...and I don't know which pisses me off more!”

Charles' laughter finally broke through, his face purpling as the walls of the office practically shook with the force of the large man's heaving mirth.

Victor scowled at his younger brother, crossing his arms in a way which he would deny was either petulant or made his scowl look like a pout.

Finally, after what seemed like an age, Charles laughter petered to a stop and left the man clasping his stomach tiredly. “Ah, brother. I do apologize, but you must understand. To see you work yourself up so much over such a minor matter...”

“A minor matter!” VV cried, outraged. “Charles! They've practically suborned one of the member states of a foreign nation! Gilgamesh and Lelouch's growing power needs to be redressed!”

“Which I have already done,” Charles pointed out, raising a hand to calm his brother. “Gilgamesh will no doubt entreat Lelouch to take the position of sub-viceroy for Area Eleven. Even without knowing the depth of their cooperation, I had expected such. I doubt that the quagmire Albert made of the region will take anything less than their full attentions to resolve, if they prove up to the task.”

“Brother,” the young immortal sighed, shaking his head, “I still believe that Gilgamesh, at least, should be restricted further than a mere occupation of his time and attention.”

Charles shook his head, a smirk on his face. “If anything, their ambitions set my mind at ease. They, too, have displayed they are preoccupied with this world of lies and impotent power. Let the children squabble for scraps while we pursue the true goal of the Ragnarok Connection. Let Lelouch play cloak and dagger as he wishes. Allow Gilgamesh all the gold his coffers can hold, all the men and women his bed will support. It will all amount to the same in the end anyway.”

Victor zi Britannia scowled, but nodded.

His brother was right, after all. It was ultimately unimportant what the brats did, as long as he and Charles kept perspective.
Even as he and Charles moved the topic to more pleasant topics, though, he was still thinking on the annoyances Gilgamesh and Lelouch had become. Perhaps he should prompt some of his disposable pawns in court to attempt another round of assassinations?

A smile played at his lips idly.

They had been so close with the jaguar, too. Such a shame.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Hours later, Charles walked back to his private rooms with a thoughtful expression on his face.

His conversations with his older brother were always illuminating, but this one had perhaps taken the proverbial cake.

Sighing, he listened for the telltale ‘click’ of the lock as his bedroom was secured, then smiled as he looked towards the other presence in the room.

"Charles, how good of you to finally come to bed."

The emperor snorted. There were perhaps only two people in all the world allowed to speak to him in such a way. Victor was one. The other lay nude under his sheets, waiting not so patiently for him to disrobe as well.

"It was a taxing day, my dear," Charles deflected as his coat dropped to the floor. "You wouldn't believe what conspiracy my brother has concocted this time."

Empress Marianne, if not in body, then at least in spirit, answered him with a snide smile. "Seeing as how one of his previous spirals of paranoia led him to murder me in cold blood? I just might."
The first time Lelouch saw Gilgamesh having sex was before he'd properly known what, exactly, the act his brother was participating in was. To this day, Lelouch didn't know whether Gilgamesh knew he'd been watching and put on a performance for his nine-year-old self or if his older half-brother was merely feeling particularly...enthusiastic that day. Nevertheless, he'd been able to understand something of the situation and had kept his mouth closed on the matter, trying to simultaneously work up the courage to ask his mother or Gilgamesh himself about what he'd seen.

He honestly wasn't sure if catching him in the act the second time was made worse or better by the first experience.

Lelouch stirred slowly from his slumber, raising his head sleepily only after he registered he wasn't in his room.

Looking around, blinking the drowsiness from his eyes, he took in the comforter thrown over his lower body, the meager pillow, and the chaise lounge which had served as his bed for the previous night. The walls were a calming shade of blue with deeper green accents. There wasn't any window, but a series of carefully tailored televisions had been set into the walls, showing various nature scenes even as hidden speakers played a hushed soundtrack of rain and nature sounds.

Finally, though, his eyes tracked back to the most luxurious hospital bed he'd ever laid eyes on and he felt his stomach drop away as he was shocked back to wakefulness fully.

Nunnally, his younger sister, lay unnaturally still in the larger bed, only the slight rise and fall of her chest giving any indication that he was not staring at an intricate and lifelike doll...

...or a corpse not yet laid to proper rest.

Lelouch took a shuddering breath, pinpricks of tears threatening to fall as he remembered the previous three days.

Waking up to find his mother dead, his sister gravely injured...

The journey to the hospital and the indeterminable wait as surgery commenced...

Collapsing as the day wore on, waking to find himself in a hospital bed next to Nunnally's...

Gilgamesh explaining the trauma, physical and mental, that meant the doctors recommended a medically-induced coma so she could recover...

Gilgamesh.

Lelouch swallowed, the final thought snapping into place as he recognized his surroundings. Focusing his attention on the comatose girl, Lelouch watched her, taking her hand gently in his as he willed back the torrent of emotions welling up. Breathing deeply, he pressed his forehead
against the back of the small hand and repeated the words he'd said so many times.

“I'm so, so sorry Nunnally,” he whispered.

A knocking at the door interrupted his penance and his eyes rose to meet the apologetic gaze of the doctor his brother had introduced. The man stepped into the room, but made no move to dislodge the young prince immediately. Instead, Lelouch sighed and gave his sister's hand one more kiss before backing away and allowing the doctor nearer.

“Your Highness?”

Lelouch blinked, turning back towards the doctor, who even now was looking over Nunnally's medical chart.

“If I may be so bold, I would implore you to break your vigil for the day. I'll be needing to wheel in a number of pieces of equipment and I wouldn't want a technician to stumble over you while occupied with your sister's care. Might you be willing to take a respite for a few hours, if not for your own welfare, then so you will be well enough to greet Her Highness when she awakens tomorrow?”

Lelouch grimaced and turned away, looking towards Nunnally's sleeping face.

“I...I'll be back Nunna,” Lelouch whispered, stepping close to his sister's bed again and pressing his lips to her forehead before moving away and towards the door.

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“Mr. Lamperouge? I don't suppose you'd be able to enlighten us?”

Lelouch's eyes snapped up from where he'd been staring into his text, even as his mind worked backwards over the previous few minutes of the lecture. “Regarding the protracted cultural, economic, political, and social standoff between the Euro-Universe and Britannia or who that contributed to the empire's continued growth and prosperity?”

The teacher, who's knowing smile upon seeing Lelouch's vacant stare, now faded to an irritated frown. “Both Mr. Lamperouge, since you seem to have been paying such rapt attention.”

“Of course, sir,” Lelouch smiled slightly, apparently taking the 'compliment' at face value. “Beginning in the late 1950's, after the disintegration of the economic federation known as the European Union and the subsequent formation of the Euro-Universe, a properly federated single-government superstate began to grow increasingly wary of the Britannian Empire's expansion.”

“An interesting way to start the narrative, Mr. Lamperouge,” Mr. Horrock replied with a tilt of his head. “Would you credit the Brittanians or the Europeans with these tensions?”

Lelouch raised an eyebrow, “Truthfully? I wouldn't say that either party was truly at fault during this time. The tensions between Europe and Britannia have, traditionally, waxed and waned numerous times throughout history. When Britannia began to absorb former Spanish, French and other colonial possessions in Central America and the Caribbean there were numerous talks of conflict between the two, but the outbreak of the Great War halted any possibility of pursuing such an action.”

“A good answer,” Mr. Horrock nodded. “Now, working on the idea that the recent period of relatively warm relations with Europe is part of that cycle, to what do we attribute the primary
cause of this...'defrosting.'"

Lelouch frowned thoughtfully. "I'm afraid I can't give a single casual factor, sir, though I can say that the eloquence of Prime Minister Schneizel in his former post as the primary diplomatic envoy to the Euro-Universe was no doubt pivotal. In addition to the reopening of the sakuradite trade after Area 11’s successful addition to the empire, there has been a much greater amount of discourse between Britannia and Europe.”

The sounding of the class bell momentarily interrupted the teacher's response.

Mr. Horrock sighed. "Well, a fairly succinct answer for the time we had left, I suppose. All of you! Two pages on whether or not Princess Cornelia's recent prosecution of the war against the NAL will negatively impact relations with Europe. Cite sources, people!"

A universal groan emanated from the class as the teacher caught Lelouch's eye and made a silent beckoning motion.

The violet-eyed student sighed and gathered his materials, checking his watch before affirming that he had a small window of time for whatever the man wanted.

Approaching the older man, Lelouch noticed the slight touch of gray at his temples, the well-built features, and the still-fit body. Maybe he'd throw this one at Gilgamesh as a distraction? He was handsome enough that Lelouch could appreciate him and, according to all reports, the man was still very much a bachelor.

“Lelouch, I just wanted to make sure everything is okay,” Ben Horrock asked quietly, intently, holding up a hand to silence the boy's objections. "It's more than readily apparent you're not getting anything out of this class. Would you like me to ask the Headmaster about moving you up a year? I took the liberty of asking your other teachers. The general consensus is you'd nearly be ready for graduation is you chose to push it.”

Lelouch sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “Sir, not that I don't appreciate the thought, but I do enjoy my time at this school. Besides which, my brother has made it clear that he disapproves of allowing me to cut the social ties I've made here. In any event, though, I am taking a class or two per semester by teleconference at Tokyo University, so you shouldn't worry that my academics will suffer.”

Mr. Horrock exhaled slowly, but nodded. "As you wish. I can't say I'm not relieved, though. It'd be a shame to lose such bright student,” here he smiled, “and about the only one I have this year that seems to understand how important history is.”

Lelouch snorted. “Those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it.”

Ben Horrock's smile widened, “You've read that philosophical text! Stolen Wisdom, by the Fifth Prince! If you'd like, I could assign you an analysis of it instead of that research paper we have coming up next week. I'd be interested in seeing your thoughts, particularly.”

Lelouch forced himself to relax, biting the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing as he nodded slowly. “I...might take you up on that, sir. It's always been an...important book, especially to my brother.” Lelouch's smile turned a bit wily, “in fact, he may be coming by campus soon. Maybe I'll have the opportunity to introduce you to each other?”

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Lelouch swallowed dryly as he looked on the spectacle before him.

“Hmm...awkward,” Gilgamesh, his brother, commented from where he sat, largely unclothed, save for a pair of green silk boxers. On his lap Anya Alstreim, a young girl who Lelouch had seen accompanying Gilgamesh in the last months, completely nude and pressed lewdly up against his chest.

Of course, the true centerpiece to the entire scene was Zoe and her younger brother Alex, who were in a similar pose, a thick piece of green plastic erupting from the crux of Zoe's hips into Alex's rear end. Between the boy's legs was an erect dick standing shameless and proudly.

Lelouch heard the door click closed behind him and shifted nervously, trying to look anywhere except at the exposed flesh on display.

“So, Lelouch,” Gilgamesh began with a slightly strained smile. “I...suppose the doctor is with Nunnally?”

“Y-yeah.” Lelouch nodded, blushing furiously. “I-um, I'm sorry for not knocking. I just-you, you said that I shouldn't, if I needed something-”

Gilgamesh sighed, then smiled. “Lulu, why don't you come over here and sit down?”

Lelouch blinked, biting his lip as he looked over the room again...as quickly as he could. “Maybe I should...go. I mean, Nunnally might need me-”

“Lelouch,” Gilgamesh stated firmly. “Come here, sit down, and let me explain this. After that, if you want to take Nunnally and go live with Cornelia and Euphemia, I'll help you.”

Lelouch hesitated, his eyes narrowed as he stared into the middle-distance, his hand outstretched towards the door behind him. Biting his lip, he took the first tentative step towards the large sofa, his eyes straying fleetingly towards the...enticing girl sitting in Gilgamesh's lap. Anya was watching him, her pink eyes intent even while she curled up on his brother's legs, while her own were spread just wide enough that...

Lelouch's head turned away at the same time he made contact with the sofa, shocking him out of the strange malaise he'd found himself in.

...why had he sat down again?

“So,” Gilgamesh stated, “you obviously have questions. Ask. Anything. You can ask me any question you want to, Lelouch, and I'll answer you with the absolute truth. I promise you, okay?”

Lelouch took a deep breath. “My mom...told me about people who like to do things...like this. She told me that I should tell her if...if...”

The eleventh prince took a shuddering breath as the tears began to flow.

His mother.

She was dead.

Nunnally might never walk again.
When the sobbing stopped and his eyes cleared, he found himself sandwiched between Anya and his brother. The pinkette was only slightly larger than Nunnally herself, but Gilgamesh was fourteen, with a larger build than Lelouch would likely ever have.

It was the first time Lelouch had felt safe since finding his mother dead on Ares Villa's grand staircase.

“How about I get dressed and we go see about little Nunnally?” Gilgamesh asked quietly into the hug.

“O-okay,” Lelouch whispered back, equally as quiet. “Gil?”

“Hmm?” Gilgamesh eu Britannia asked with a hum deep in his throat.

“I...don't want to leave. I want to stay here.” Lelouch replied.

If anything, Gil’s hold on the younger boy tightened. “Then stay you shall, Lelouch. If you don't want to walk in on moments like these, though, you might indeed try knocking...unless it's an emergency, of course.”

Lelouch bit his bottom lips lightly as he contemplated his next course of action.

So quietly Gilgamesh almost didn't hear him speak, Lelouch posed his embarrassed query. “Y-you said...I could...ask things?”

Gilgamesh’s reply was a complicated mix of hesitation and enthusiasm. “Anything, brother.”

“What...are they doing?” Lelouch asked, turning just a bit to eye Alex and Zoe from the corner of his gaze. The two had stopped moving, but were quietly observing the two princes on the couch, even as Zoe's hands wrapped about her brother, massaging his shaft and stretched asshole clenching intermittently around the sex toy.

Gilgamesh burst out in laughter.

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“...you've never actually told me why you're so skittish about your brother visiting.” His lover asked quietly, toying with a lock of Lelouch's hair idly.

Lelouch sighed, drawing a hand down the other person's chest as he curled into them. “I've told you plenty about Gilgamesh.”

A low chuckle was Lelouch's answer.

“Don't think you can fool me like that, Lelouch. I know you've told me about Gilgamesh and from what you've said, he cares about you and Nunnally deeply. Even I can see that and I'm-”

“-finish that sentence and I'll spank you,” Lelouch threatened bluntly, not raising his head from the other person's chest, but putting the force of a real threat in his voice. “We've talked about this. Outside of the bedroom, I can be your prince, but once our clothes come off...”

“As you wish, Your Highness,” the amused tone replied with an audible smirk.
There was quiet for a time.

The post-orgasmic hazes were likely Lelouch's favorite moments of any given day. Sex altered neurochemistry, after all, changing thought patterns and emotional composition. The downshift in his mental processing speed was likely due to such, the eleventh prince knew, but combined with the pleasant soreness and the ability to merely...float, not have to think, not have to ponder the latest plan or action...

...yes, these few moments of bliss very nearly proved themselves superior to the act itself.

Nearly.

“You still haven't answered my question.”

Lelouch sighed again. “It's...something private, between brothers,” the prince admitted, “but I suppose I just don't want to disappoint him.”

“If this is about-”

“It's not,” Lelouch cut that conversation off at it's roots. “It's about the fact that I haven't seduced the entirety of the student council, let alone the whole of the student body. I also haven't had another lover other than you in over six months.”

Another quiet, slightly awkward silence.

“He can't honestly be that bad...” His lover responded. “I mean, you've told stories before, yes, but, really Lelouch...”

The eleventh prince couldn't help it.

Lelouch burst out in laughter.
“Nunnally!”

“Sister Euphemia!”

I smiled as I listened to the nearly-tearful reunion in the other room, looking at Gino and Anya as they took up positions beside the door even as Liliana and Marika positioned themselves by the windows. “She wasn't any trouble?”

Liliana shook her head, her posture as stiff as ever while on-duty. “Her Highness did not attempt to leave the vehicle at any time, nor did she take any action which might impair our ability to protect her.”

“Excellent,” I turned to Marika, “anything to add?”

Marika, always the more expressive of the two, flushed slightly. “Her Higness...propositioned us, but we felt it was unwise to accept such an offer under the immediate circumstances.”

I smiled, slightly less enthusiastically than normal given the rather...trying ordeal with the Sakuradite Trade Commission. “You have my blessing if you wish to pursue that invitation during your off-hours.”

Both girls shifted slightly, a bit nervous as they nodded respectfully.

I really did have to come up with a plan to get them in bed with me...eventually.

Sighing, I stepped into the next room and watched as Euphemia and Nunnally-

“-you're walking!” I gushed, my tiredness vanishing as I rushed over to the younger princess. “Oh, Nunna, why didn't you tell me? I would have come sooner!” I touched a hand softly to the side of her face as she leaned into my touch.

“Mmm, Brother Gilgamesh,” she whispered, wrapping her arms around me, her cane held in her left hand. “I wanted it to be a surprise.”

“I was certainly surprised,” Euhpie smiled, joining in the hug gently.

We stood there for a moment, quietly taking in each others' presences.

“Kiss,” Nunnally ordered with a faux-childish fit of pique. I sighed the sigh of the put-upon and leaned down to plant a gentle kiss on my half-sister's forehead.

Nunnally made a noise which would put an irritated kitten to shame in terms of raw cuteness. “I want a real kiss, Gil.”
I chuckled lightly as I trailed two fingers down the side of her face, tenderly caressing her cheek as she leaned into me. “Demanding, aren't we, Your Highness?”

As she took a breath to respond, I closed the gap. The kiss I gave her was, in every way, as gentle as I could make it, even as I felt her press against me more urgently, more hungrily. I smiled into the kiss as I felt her tongue probe the junction of our lips. My hands had moved to cradle her face, while at the same time providing just enough resistance that she couldn't further our intimacy as she wanted. As her hands bunched up my overly-elaborate robes, I felt her growl against me.

Pulling free, I chuckled again.

“Tease,” Nunnally pouted, sighing as she leaned against me contentedly. “Where is Zoe?”

“Out with Charlotte,” I dismissed as I maneuvered the three of use towards a large sofa, pulling Nunnally into my lap as Euphemia took the seat immediately to my left. “I picked up another stray and my new secretary needs a few things. Plus, even though she did well on a quiz I gave her, she's in a little bit of trouble. I think having her noble sensibilities stepped on by having to spend the day with a pair of Numbers should be more than punishment enough.”

Nunnally made a vaguely agreeable noise as she drew her hands more carefully over the clothing. “You've been meeting with someone important.”

“Fishing for clues already, little princess?” I teased lightly.

“You did promise,” Nunnally replied primly.

Euphie trailed a hand up one of Nunnally's legs to caress her thigh even as she casually inspected a few of the now-faded scars and more-recent surgical marks along her lower body. “What's this about a promise?”

I rolled my eyes. “I promised Nunnally I'd explain what I was doing today. It's kind of super-secret, and I'm really lazy, so I'd prefer to only do it once. Where's Lelouch, anyway? I'd thought classes would be over for today?”

Nunnally giggled as my hands strayed to more sensitive places. “He's in the basement, working on business with his lover.”

I blinked, cocking my head. “I thought you said the girls at school here were prudes?”

Nunnally, for someone incapable of opening her eyes, could give every indication that she was rolling them. “They're not prudes, big brother, they're just repressed. Honestly, why do they make such a production out of letting a boy know they want him?”

“Mating rituals can be funny things,” I replied airily.

That got a good laugh from both my sisters.

Grinning, I affected an accent. “Crikey! Look at all them teen girly-girls strutin' about! Why, the males of the species has grouped together for self-defense! It appears that a group of females has targeted a lone male for reproduction, that poor blighter!”

“Y-you sound just like Mr. Reid!” Euphie laughed aloud.
As the girls giggled, I smiled and relaxed.

These moments were what I loved.

Quiet, cuddly little moments where I could lean back and breathe in the closeness between myself and others, these were what I treasured. As the conversation dwindled to unimportant topics, I eyed Euphie as she began to slide her fingers higher and higher up Nunnally's thighs.

“Can we have sex now?”

I chuckled, shaking my head at the barely-teen girl in my lap.

“You know,” I sighed as probing fingers began unfastening clothes. “I have to wonder if I made a mistake in introducing you two nymphs to sex so young.”

Nunnally leaned in for another kiss even as Euphie giggled.

“You and Lelouch,” Nunnally breathed as she shifted and began straddling me.

My hands went to her hips automatically as I began grinding her on my exposed erection. Even if I was feeling slightly guilty, I wasn't about to turn down sex so willingly offered.

“Lelouch and I?” I asked quizzically.

“You and he are always taking all the blame. Everything bad that happens, you feel guilty over.” Nunnally chastised. “You act like you don't care, but...um~so good.”

I breathed deeply Nunnally impaled herself on me.

She was warm, tight as someone only her age could be, and felt as if I'd delved into something deliciously forbidden. It felt terrible. It was wonderful. I would never forgive myself. I would love every second of it.

“Cornelia's the same way,” Euphie snickered delightfully as she looked over Nunnally's shoulder. She'd stripped her clothing off with startling quickness as was completely nude. “She writes letters for fallen knights personally. She blames herself for everyone who dies under her command and she gets angry with herself when I make mistakes, or things she thinks are mistakes.”

Euphie's face disappeared and I felt Nunnally gasp and shudder against me as I pulled her dress away. She hadn't quite developed to the point where she really needed a bra and I hadn't been the type to encourage their use while she and Lelouch lived with me. I eyed her taught nipples as I licked my lips, bringing up one hand to massage her chest while the other reached back to help Euphie spread her buttocks.

“I-I was...” Nunnally stuttered, breathing harshly as I set up a slow rhythm. “I had a point~”

Nunnally groaned and uttered a foul swear before I clamped my lips over hers.

“Something about Lelouch and I? Mayhaps you wished for a threesome?” I asked when I pulled back, my tone purposefully light and distracting.
“Fuck yes,” Nunnally whimpered, then came back to herself. “No! Not that!”

“You mean you don't want a threesome?” I asked teasingly. “No, of course. You're right. It would be a foursome. We'd have to include Euphie as well.”

“Gilgamesh eu Britannia,” Nunnally moaned as I drove myself in to the hilt. “You're a cruel man.”

“I am, aren't I?” I asked softly, running my hands along Nunnally's sides.

“Mmmrgh~” Nunnally groaned, a noise of frustration as much as pleasure. “You think no one else has choices, don't you? That when you first explained sex to me your charisma and charm caused me to open my legs for you.”

“You mean it didn't?” I feigned shock even as I began to tickle the teen's exposed body, drawing forth an array of giggles and laughs. I maintained, even sped up slightly, my thrusting as I did so, the sensations likely driving the poor girl to the edge of delirium.

“S-stop! Stop-it!” Nunnally squeaked out even as I took a nipple between my lips. “I'm trying to be cross with you!”

I gave the bud one last lick before allowing it to pop free. “Honesty compels me to admit you're doing a poor job of it, little sister.”

Nunnally growled at me, leaning forward to press her teeth into the muscle of my neck.

I hissed, only partly in pain.

Taking a deep breath, Nunnally pulled back to kiss me again.

I ran my fingers through her hair and watched the light play off her sweat-slicked skin as she rode me. I shivered as I felt Euphie's tongue drop lower and tickle my sack.

“You're beautiful,” I whispered as she pulled back.

Nunnally smiled widely at the compliment, but shook her head. “You're incorrigible.”

I chuckled breathlessly. “Cruel, incorrigible... I'm a terrible person, I suppose.”

“You took Lelouch and I in. You loved us. Anything else you made sure was our choice,” Nunnally stated as she kissed me again. “You know I hate it when you treat me like porcelain. You and Lelouch.”

“Well, I think I'm bored with wallowing in conflicted moral dilemmas,” I admitted airily. “I think we should focus on more important things now. Euphie, how about we move this onto the floor so we can spread out a little?”

“Oh, Sayoko!” Nunnally called, the maid appearing from behind the corner of a doorway, her head bowed demurely. She looked just as I expected, not a single hair out of place and the very picture of professionalism. I'd discreetly looked into her background, of course, and she'd been employed by Milly just as she had been originally. Honestly, I wondered if she had some non-eleven heritage. Her skin was a bit too pale, nearly Caucasian really, for me to believe she was completely native. Perhaps that was why she collaborated so readily? Well, perhaps part of the reason, at least.
Sayoko's background didn't lend itself to a simple, singular, reason.

“Yes, Mistress Nunnally?” She asked submissively, though I caught a glimpse of the steel in her eyes as she briefly looked up.

“Could you please fetch a few comforters? My brother, sister, and I are going to be occupying this room for a bit.” Nunnally explained as Euphie stopped her ministrations and leaned up to capture Nunnaly's breasts from behind.

“...and some refreshment as well?” Euphie asked. “Gil was so busy we skipped lunch, so some sandwiches or finger foods would be appreciated.”

“If Mistress so wishes,” Sayoko nodded. “If I may be so gauche, though, the house has a number of perfectly serviceable beds.”

“Sayoko, we're just going to have some fun. You needn't worry,” Nunnally cajoled as I rolled my hips and she gasped.

Sayoko gave a put-upon sigh, but moved to obey.

*_*_*_*_*_*_*_*_*_*_*_*_*_*_*

Sometime afterward, Anya finally came off-shift and joined in.

Liliana and Marika did not join in, though their vigil was certainly attentive enough even after they no longer had to maintain one. Gino, on the other hand, retired to the kitchen where, during lulls in our activities, I could hear him quietly engaging Sayoko and Yui in conversation. Inwardly, I supposed that Sayoko, though she was perhaps not wholly native, looked enough like one at first glance to pass.

Gino, poor boy, looked to have the yellow fever.

It was sometime after all of that, though, when the startled, feminine, gasp alerted me that someone else had entered the room. Looking up, my tongue still extended into Euphemia li Britannia's vagina, my eyes canted as I tried to make out the woman who'd stepped into the room.

“You know, when I was told you'd arrived early Gilgamesh,” Lelouch's voice rang out, “I really should have known what I'd happen upon.”

Extracting my tongue, I cut off Euphie's moan of disappointment with two fingers, the shock forcing a deliciously arousing squeak from her. Looking up, I cocked my head for a moment and then answered my younger brother. “You really should have. Good afternoon, Lelouch.”

“Good afternoon Gil,” Lelouch greeted pleasantly, if not enthusiastically even as his eyes flickered towards the woman at his side, whom I took in at my leisure.

Both wore the black-and-gold uniform I'd come to expect from this incarnation of the Black Knights. Lelouch was wearing some esoteric cross between a commander's dress uniform and an marginally elaborate suit. It was, I knew, one of Clovis' contributions to Lelouch's attempts to 'play soldier,' in his words. The dark-skinned woman beside him wore a similar suit, likewise adorned with an overlarge greatcoat and thick boots, though the highlights of her uniform were in the sub-commander's shade of silver. Patches, badges, and medals littered both of their uniforms, some more decorative than others, but a few I knew to reflect actual field operations. All in all, they were quite the impressive pair for such young leaders of such an equally young paramilitary company.
“So this is the illusive Villetta Nu,” I noted aloud, continuing to finger my younger half-sister lazily.

“Quite,” Lelouch said shortly, nodding once as he looked back at his second-in-command.

“She looks slightly ill,” I told Lelouch in what could pass for a thoughtful manner.

“You'll have to forgive her,” Lelouch replied, sighing, “she's unfortunately unused to coming up unexpected on a scene of debauchery such as this.”

I blinked, once, as I looked about us. Marika and Liliana, my two off-duty body guards had, at some point, degenerated into a heavy make-out session and, while they hadn't shed any clothes, their hands could no longer be seen. Anya and Nunnally were reacquainting themselves to my right, a variety of toys strewn about them as Nunnally speared the small pinkette from behind. Meanwhile, Euphemia herself-

“Ooooooh!”

-had just orgasmed underneath me.

“You're completely correct,” I decided judiciously, “this is utterly unacceptable, not at all up to my usual standards. Give me just a moment and I'll have at least ten more of the students here lubed up and ready to go.”

Villetta’s mouth opened.

Sound failed to escape.

Then it closed.

Lelouch attempted to look irritated, though the slight twitching of one side of his mouth gave his amusement away. “I'd be loathe to challenge such a claim, so I'll merely say it's unnecessary, brother dear. For now, if you would allow Euphemia to return to her senses, I'd like to introduce my girlfriend.”

There was...something of a hint of challenge in the way he declared the woman at his side and their relation. It was more...daring? Expecting? Hmm...best to handle this-

“-Ah, finally!”

Lelouch and I froze.

“Wouldn't you know it's just like Lelouch to skip out on such an important council meeting!” The woman's voice continued as Marika and Liliana paused in their heated exploration of each others’ bodies.

“He's probably out gambling again! Geez, I wouldn't mind if he'd cut me in on the action, but really! He leaves all the work for us while he's out hob-nobing with the nobility!” A male voice rang out.

By this point Nunnally and Anya had likewise stopped even as Lelouch and I rapidly and quietly
argued over the surrounding scene. Both he and I knew it was too late, but panic had already set in.

“She came in the side door?!” I hissed quietly.

“Security gives them a pass!” Lelouch replied with equal heat and volume. “I usually call her when something's going on and I need privacy!”

I gestured to the room around us.

“I didn't know you were going to stage a fucking orgy!” Lelouch bit out.

“Is there any other kind?!” I replied somewhat hystericly, despite being able to name, offhand, at least a half-dozen other types of non-penetrative orgies.

“I should really get home guys,” another woman chimed in and I twitched.

“She joined the student council?!” I asked desperately. "Why?!"

Really, what had I done to deserve this?

“Of course she did!” Lelouch groaned quietly as he clawed his hands through his hair. “You know Milly! She can't leave good-enough alone!”

I facepalmed.

"Does she know you're...you?" I pressed, gesturing at the outfit he wore.

"Of course not!" Lelouch hissed. "None of them do! I wanted it to stay that way, but not five-goddamn-minutes you're here and my life's imploding around my ears!"

...and then we were out of time.

“One moment. I think I left something in the-eek!” Nina Einstein's voice squeaked, mouse-like, as she rounded the corner. Of course, the remainder of the group stepped in after her. Wide-eyed, Lelouch's school-friends took in the scene. Rivalz and Shirley gaped like fish while Nina turned beet red even as Anya and Nunnally had evidently decided that shielding themselves was a lost cause. Millicent Ashford, though, merely blinked once before allowing her visage to display the terrible glee and mournful sadness she felt. Of course, I was most interested in the final figure, who had taken one sweep of the room and stilled as her eyes landed on me.

Kallen Stadtfeld's pupils shrank as I inwardly winced.

Outwardly, of course, I put on my best and bravest smile as I began to finger Euphie again. The poor girl had just recovered from her previous lingering pleasure, but I felt confident that she wouldn't mind taking one for the team like this.

“Hey there!” I grinned at the shocked teenagers, “you must be the rest of the party guests! Is one of you Millicent Ashford? The rest of the strippers she ordered are on their way, but we came early to get things started.”

Rivalz, Nina, and Shirley twitched as they turned gaping expressions towards their class president. Said blonde, of course, cast me a glance which promised retribution. I gave her a sheepish smile.
Villetta, unhelpfully, continued to gape as well.

Silently, I begged Kallen to play along.

Maybe, just maybe-

“Gilgamesh eu Britannia! You goddamn playboy bastard!” Kallen screeched as she leaped at me.

Nope, not quite that lucky.

Damn. What the hell had I done to deserve this?

...on second thought? I didn't really need an answer.
“Sorry.”

Kallen bit the word off, turning into a curt utterance that didn't imply any apology at all, instead merely admitting some small fault in the speaker's actions, though that fault might not actually be regretted at all.

“It was largely my fault,” I waved her off, instead taking a long, slow sip of my tea.

Honestly, I didn't particularly like the strong, bitter substance that was 'proper' Britannian tea. However, given Britannian society's descent from the Kingdom of England, it wasn't particularly surprising that tea was both popular and pervasive. Despite the fact that I didn't like it, I dealt with it as a courtesy, if only because it was expected of me and I already possessed enough eccentricities on my ledger.

There was a long moment of silence as the rest of the table digested our interaction.

Kallen, in the meantime, took a sip of her own tea.

“So...wait,” Rivalz interjected with a raised finger. “Kallen just...tried to strangle you and you're not going to do anything about it? ...but you're Gilgamesh eu Britannia, right? Isn't that like...treason?”

Kallen deftly hid a wince behind her raised teacup.

Anya, overprotective little nymph that she was, shifted in my lap from where she was glaring at the redhead.

“In her defense, she wasn't successful,” I replied, even as I worked an arm around the pinkette's waist. “Anya, sweetie? If you stab Kallen with that fork, I will be most cross with you.”

“Hmph,” Anya and Kallen grumped at the same time, then began glaring at each other harder.

“Um...Your Highness-es,” Shirley began awkwardly, trying to look anywhere except my side of the table, “don't you...wouldn't you like to...um, clothes?”

Milly was biting her lip towards the end, as Shirley's question deteriorated into a red-faced squeak.

“Well, someone's delightfully adorable,” I granted with a grin. “What might your name be, miss?”

“Her name is Shirley Fenette,” Lelouch replied irritably, sitting cross-legged as he was next to Villetta Nu, who wore her own faint splash of crimson across her cheeks as she quietly nursed her own drink. “-and Gilgamesh, I know your favorite hobby is making people uncomfortable, but would you please put a shirt on?”

I opened my mouth.
“If you start singing, vengeance will be mine,” Lelouch promised with a glare.

I frowned, my bottom lip sticking out in a disappointed pout. “You know, you really take the fun out of things, Lulu.”

“Hey, Lelouch,” Rivalz started, then stopped, “I mean, your-um, your princely-ness, Lord Lelouch-”

“Rivalz,” Lelouch deadpanned, closing his eyes as if in agony, “your attempts at courtly behavior, if they're anything like your impersonations of a woman at the cross-dressers ball, are actually physically painful. My name is Lelouch, just 'Lelouch.'”

Rivalz snorted, then rubbed the back of his head. “Geez, man...all those times I horsed-around with you, I didn't really think princes did normal stuff like that.”

Lelouch snorted.

“Nunnally and I had a somewhat...” he gave me a raised eyebrow, “unusual upbringing, even for our station.”

“Mou~Lulu,” Euphie giggled as she adjusted the sheet she was wearing. “Don't say that like it's a bad thing. Sometimes I think Gilgamesh is the only member of our family who has any common sense.”

Lelouch rolled his eyes as he shook his head. “Euphie, I'm not going to pretend Gilgamesh didn't love Nunnally and I, but I won't say we had anything even remotely approaching a normal childhood. You do know Gilgamesh hired professional prostitutes to serve as live instructional aides when he gave me 'The Talk,' don't you?”

I watched as Rivalz's eyes widened, his gaze shifting from Lelouch to myself with something like hero worship.

Shirley and Nina, though, had turned an interesting shade of pale while still managing to flush with embarrassment.

“Dude, that's-” Rivalz began, only to be cut off by Lelouch's deadpan stare.

“I was eleven.” My half-brother stated pointedly.

Rivalz mouth flapped for a few a long moment as he looked between myself and Lelouch again, taking care to linger on how the mostly-nude Anya was still cuddling with me and glaring at Kallen. By chance, his eyes flitted up to meet my own and I gave him self-confident smile. The look on the blue-haired boy's face was...complicated now.

“You can ask him Rivalz,” I decided to venture, running the fingers of my right hand through Anya's hair as I ran a hand over her exposed stomach, leaving her to sigh in pleasure. “I won't be offended. I'm nineteen years old, after all. I took Lelouch and Nunnally in when they were ten and eight, respectively. I would have been fourteen.”

Rivalz bit his lip, looking to his friend for guidance as he seemed to realize just how large a landmine he was poking with a stick.
“Gilgamesh,” Lelouch sighed, “If you ever wondered why I don’t invite you over, I think this scene is enough of an example.” Massaging his forehead, he sighed again, heavier this time. “Okay, fine. You win Gil. We had sex. When I was eleven. Gilgamesh took my virginity. There, happy?”

“Why Lulu,” I grinned, though it was a fragile thing, “it almost sounds as though you regret the experience. You were surprisingly energetic enough at the time.”

Lelouch narrowed his eyes in my direction, even as Rivalz and Shirley began to look shocked and more than a little appalled. Making an aggravated sound, the dark-haired prince continued begrudgingly. “...I suppose I did. I was the one who asked you to...have sex with me, after all.”

...and now his friends were staring at him.

...and so was Villetta, who was apparently his girlfriend as well as his second-in-command.

Awkward.

“Then...let's see, Lelouch, Euphie and I had that threesome about six months later?” Milly asked, cocking her head and staring into the middle distance. Euphie and Nunnally began giggling even as the staring intensified. Milly gave her best pervy chuckle, “Cornelia demolished the West Wing of your manor, remember? I swear she tried to kill you for arranging for her ten-year-old sister to lose her virginity.”

“That was Lelouch's twelfth birthday, yes,” I nodded, grinning slightly. “And Nelly wasn't trying to kill me. She knew very well I'd be on a different continent when she learned what I'd done. Destroying the West Wing was just her way of letting off steam. Besides, it gave me a chance to remodel.”

“The building was six months old,” Lelouch rolled his eyes. “Besides, that story doesn't work when I remember you busting into my room yelling, ‘Pack your shit! Pack your shit!’”

“Ah-heh,” I grinned awkwardly. “In my defense, Australia was very nice that time of year and there weren't any angry princesses with rocket-equipped mecha.” Frowning, I turned to Rivalz, Nina, and Shirley. “Did you know that, although individuals younger than twelve years old generally can't ejaculate, they can orgasm?”

“I'm not...entirely sure I wanted to know that, your-er, Highness, sir.” Shirley managed, her voice strangled slightly.

Lelouch turned his eyes skyward. “I'd like to apologize in advance for...everything Gilgamesh does. My brother...does not ascribe to many societal norms. Truthfully, I'm just glad he hasn't found a way to go nude in public.”

“Yet,” I stated, then blinked at the duality my voice had taken, turning to Nunnally.

“Gilgamesh, I think I know you well enough by now,” Nunnally smiled.

“Have I mentioned how it's a little creepy that you know when someone is looking at you even if you can't see them?” I asked the little princess idly.

“Well I have to amuse myself sometimes, brother dear,” Nunnally responded with a slightly
imperious tone, tilting her nose upward slightly. “I mean, my private tutor has taken to studying the
Kama Sutra to improve his technique, but he still needs to work on his stamina.”

“Uh-huh,” I nodded, then looked to my dark-haired brother. “Lelouch...I have begun to suspect that
I am a terrible influence on people.”

“You don't say?” Lelouch asked with a cool gaze, the slightest twitch of his lips the only indication
of his amusement.

“This-this...I can't believe this!” Shirley practically yelled, standing violently and scraping the chair
backwards across the room. “Yo-you can't just-! How can you live with yourself?!”

“Quite well, actually,” I admitted brazenly, reaching over to grasp Nunnally's hand as her face
crumpled in worry.

“But...you have sex with kids! With children!” Shirley shouted, jamming a finger towards the girl
on my lap.

“Yes, I do.” I nodded, then sighed. “Miss...Fenette, was it?” She nodded fractionally, her temper
still flaring. “You'll find that I'm generally accommodating towards...pretty much anyone. Except
where it comes to my lifestyle choices. I don't force myself on anyone, and I expect the same from
others. Currently, I'm staying with my brother and sister in their residence. I acknowledge their
right to house guests and friends as they please, but it is their place, not yours, to rebuke me if they
feel my behavior is out of line.”

“Out of line!?” Shirley squawked in disbelief. “It's illegal!”

“And I am a Prince of Britannia; your point?” I asked bluntly, forcing her to verbally stumble.
“Laws generally apply to me only as I choose to let them.”

“You-you...I can't believe you!” Shirley scowled. “What about Lelouch and Nunnally!? You
abused-”

I slammed my fist down on the table, the noise nearly gunshot-loud.

“Mr. Fenette,” I stated with an arctic chill to my tone. “I would very much like you to not speak on
matters about which you know nothing-”

“Gil,” Nunnally spoke quietly, clenching her hand around the fist on the table. “It's okay. You can
tell her.”

Lelouch made some vague noise of agreement. “Sayoko, whiskey please? On the rocks.”

Kallen gave a final look of dissatisfaction to her tea, then favored Lelouch with a very slightly
pleading look. The dark-haired prince rolled his eyes again, but nodded.

The maid gave a slight frown to both teens, but nodded and left the room, only to return with a
capped bottle, a set of glasses, and a bucket of ice a moment later.

Lelouch fervently ignored the scowl Shirley sent his way as he took a swig.

“Nunnally,” I sighed, then scowled at Shirley. “Ms. Fenette...do you have any younger siblings?”
“No, I don't, but I would never-”

I held up a hand to stop her.

“That wasn't the point of my question,” I headed her off. “You've just learned that Lelouch and Nunnally are royalty. What you have not been told yet is that after their mother, a commoner such as yourself by birth, died, they were personae non grata among high society. The Emperor, our father, gave no indication that he cared weather they lived or died. In a world such as ours, where order of birth begets a higher place in inheritance, this meant it would be only a matter of time until they were killed as well.”

Shirley's eyes widened as she immediately turned to Lelouch for confirmation, only to find the older woman Villetta quietly clasping his hand in comfort.

Milly and Euphie, likewise, couldn't meet Shirley's searching gaze.

“I-I don't see what that has anything to do with-” Shirley began again, but I cut her off.

“I'm merely giving you background so you can understand why I was the most reasonable choice to take Lelouch and Nunnally in,” I explained. “Even if I wasn't necessarily the 'best' choice. At this point, our brother Schneizel was in Europe and far too involved in trade negotiations to return home. Our sister Cornelia had been Lelouch and Nunnally's mother's captain of her guard and was been held on suspicion of involvement in the affair. She was cleared of all charges, but at the time, no one had any way of knowing that, nor was she exactly available for aid.”

Here I took my own glass of whiskey, holding it up to the light and watching the ice scatter the beams to distract myself from the overall morbidity of the conversation.

“Euphie...is Nunnally's age. She was eight and, therefore, not able to contribute a significant amount of aid either.” I nodded apologetically to Euphie, who wiped away a tear as Nunnally managed to pry loose my fingers and entwine her hand in mine. Reaching out, she took hold of Euphie's hand as well, the pink-haired princess latching on gratefully.

“Finally, the last relative who might have a friendly disposition to Nunnally and Lelouch was Clovis.” I sighed. “At this point in time, he was rather firmly under his mother's thumb. She was slightly more...mercenary than Clovis' own intentions. With the vi Britannia line falling out of favor, she forced Clovis to have nothing to do with them until I...talked her around.”

The fact that Clovis was an incurable gossip was reason enough for him to know about what I did to that cabal of assassins, but it seemed that if the conversation we'd had a week ago was any indication, he also remembered the package I'd sent his mother.

...and as long as he did remember it, I saw no need to ever broach the subject again.

Clovis might be a fop, but he was a Prince of Britannia, just as much as I was.

Still waters run deep and all that rot.

“So!” I perked up, grinning a false grin. “The only other individuals who might have been predisposed to help Lelouch and Nunnally were the Ashfords, who-”
“I can tell this part, Gil,” Milly interrupted as she looked up from her tea. “Most of you know that my family used to be high nobility. We were responsible for developing some of the first Knightmare Frames. However, a great deal of our...protection came from Lulu and Nunna’s mother, Empress Marianne. When she was...when it happened, Gilgamesh was the only reason we managed to retain our noble title and part of the family business. I don't think I ever-”

“-and you won't need to, ever,” I waved her off. “Loyalty and betrayal, each repaid in kind.”

Milly's eyes glinted as she nodded decisively, I noted. “We...theoretically could have taken Lulu and Nunna in, but...we wouldn't have been able to protect them. At least, not until a year or two later when we got the Academy up and running in Area 11. This is far enough from the Homeland that they can be mostly incognito.”

“I, on the other hand.” My voice picked up again with faux-merriment. “I was uniquely suited to being able to protect Lelouch and Nunnally while also being very much disposed to protect them from whoever might wish them harm. Even at fourteen, I was independently wealthy and had a great many friends and associates who would be inclined to...look the other way in terms of custody if need be. Also, I employed a small army of private security that...”

I blinked, following everyone's sudden stares towards Nunnally, who had released her grip on mine and Euphie's hands, instead looking as though she had wrapped one hand around an invisible tube while cupping something underneath her other hand, moving the first hand up and down as if she was...

“Nunnally! That's obscene!” Shirley squawked, her eyes wide as Rivalz turned a shade of puce trying to strangle his laughter. Nina was blushing again, fiddling with her fingers nervously as she avoided looking anywhere near the littlest princess.

“Sorry, I thought brother might be getting tired, though. He was-just, heh, working the shaft, hah, so-hard,” Nunnally choked out, then nearly doubled-over with laughter. Rivalz and Milly joined her a moment later.

Villetta, on the other hand, looked torn between sharing Shirley’s appalled expression and trying as hard as she could to fade into the background.

Lelouch groaned, even as I could hear Gino's raucous laughter from the kitchen.

“Nunnally?” Lelouch asked. “Darling, beloved little sister? Light of my life and anchor of my heart? I'm revoking your joke privileges.”

“Aww, Lelouch!” Rivalz whined, still laughing. “That was awesome! Nunnally, don't listen to your brother, you can crack jokes like that any time!”

“Rivalz, don't encourage her!” Shirley snapped. “This is all because of her brother, he-”

“Shirley.”

It was quiet, but the kind of quiet that came before a storm. I knew it well, the building column of rage and anger that threatened to carve everything you were out from inside. I knew it very well indeed, because I didn't get 'angry' like other people. I didn't shout or rave or cry out at the unfairness of the world. My rage burned cold, so cold it burned. It was an arctic fire that I had seen in Lelouch's eyes more than once as I taught him exactly how one should hold a grudge.
How close one should cherish a horrible offense...and how terrible vengeance should be when the
time came.

...but either I'd never seen it in Nunnally before...or I just hadn't cared to.

I was, indeed, a terrible influence.

“Shirley. Gilgamesh did teach me jokes like that. He's crass, and crude, and lustful. He's vain and
devious, but...” Nunnally took a breath. “...I know without a doubt he loves me. I know he'd stop at
nothing to protect Lelouch and I. I know he's done so before...even if he doesn't want Lelouch and I
to know.”

I shifted awkwardly and wrapped my arms back around Anya, refusing to meet people's eyes.

Was I proud of how far I'd gone to protect them? Yes.

Was I ashamed of those same deeds? Also yes.

“Gilgamesh was fourteen when he took us in,” Nunnally went on, her voice hitching in places. “I
was...I was eight years old when I woke up one day and Lelouch explained mommy was dead and
the doctors didn't know if I would ever walk again. Then I realized I couldn't open my eyes.”

Nunnally accepted the handkerchief Sayoko handed her, dabbing at the tears flowing from her
closed eyelids.

“Nunna,” Shirley whispered, her own eyes watering.

“Nunnally,” Lelouch echoed, his hands wrapped about his glass so tightly I was surprised it hadn't
shattered. “You don't have to.”

tantrums that would make toddlers green with envy.” Nunnally gave a wet, black, chuckle. “I
couldn't...wouldn't accept it. I wanted my mommy. I wanted her to hug me and tell me everything
was okay. I...was hysterical. I called Lelouch names, called him a liar, said he was a horrible
brother, threw things at him when he wouldn't leave my room.”

The room was silent for a long moment.

Looks of pity and horrified shame present on all of the newcomer's faces. Milly, Euphie, Lelouch,
and I...we wore quiet acceptance like a death shroud. We purposefully didn't speak of those
days...ever. This was the first time they'd been brought up outside of the therapy I'd forced myself
and the two vi Britannia children to attend years ago.

“I...I don't think Gilgamesh knew that...Lelouch and I would fall in love with each other,” Nunnally
explained haltingly. “I just...I needed so much closeness. I got so scared when people left me alone,
when I couldn't feel someone's hand in mine, know that they were there...” She gave a watery
smile. “Gilgamesh likes to pretend he...forced this on us on purpose, that he's some twisted
hedonist that can't help but hump anyone around him.”

Nunnally took a shuddering breath. “I think...he had to show Lelouch how to hold me, how to
reassure me, how to touch me. When you're blind, though...touch becomes so much more
important, so much more powerful. When you can't even take a bath by yourself because your legs
don't work…”

I could imagine their minds filling in the gaps.

“Lelouch walked in on Anya and myself,” I sighed and explained. “...and two of my servants. I
don't ascribe to common theories of monogamy. I don't find the idea that a single man and woman
should limit their sexual needs to each other for their entire lives. It's stupid. Sex feels good. Sex
makes other people feel good. The fact that an average person gets so neurotic over exposed
genitalia is...insane. Children are taught to be ashamed of their own bodies...and I didn't want that
for Lelouch and Nunnally. I wanted Lelouch to be able to kiss Nunnally if he felt like it, to express
his love for his sister as he saw fit. I wanted Nunnally to not be afraid if she felt her brother's dick
poking her in the back while he was helping her bathe.”

Lelouch shrugged as he visibly fought the urge to fidget under several gazes. “I was going through
puberty. Ill-timed erections aren't exactly news. Nunnally was...inquisitive.”

I swallowed the last gulp of whiskey bitterly, closing my eyes and thinking for a moment. “When I
took Nunnally and Lelouch in, I decided I would raise them the only way I knew how. The only
way that made sense to me.” I snorted at Shirley's look of disbelief. "Although it might seem
strange to you, even abhorrent, I won't apologize for how I raised my-my brother and sister."

There was a moment of silence as I refused to meet Lelouch's surprised gaze.

“I enjoy sex,” Nunnally stated bluntly. “I like fucking. I really do. I understand it's a bit shocking
for you...Shirley, Nina, and Rivalz to see me in this light, but it's a part of me that's always existed.
I usually don't let people see it because it upsets them and causes Lelouch and Gilgamesh
unnecessary trouble. Nonetheless, sex is one of the few things I could do even without working
legs or eyes. It brought me closer than I'd ever dreamed to both my brothers and I can't ever think
that's wrong.” Nunnally nodded and stood, Sayoko pressing her walking stick into her palm
wordlessly. “Gilgamesh may not have raised us to be normal, Shirley, but he does love us, in his
own way. We may be broken, twisted people, but we do love each other. If you speak to him again
in such a manner as today, I'll thank you to never speak to me again.”

Her ultimatum said, Nunnally turned and kissed first Euphie, then myself deeply before stepping
around the table to stop before Lelouch.

The Black Prince wore a tired, emotionally-drained smile and looked to Villetta, who was biting
her lip. “I...had wanted to give you some time to adapt. I understand if you feel this constitutes as
being unfaithful, but...”

It was a complex expression that crossed Lelouch's face as he leaned in towards Nunnally and met
her lips in as deep a kiss as I had ever seen, though it lacked the fiery lust I usually saw in such
couplings. Finally, Lelouch broke the liplock and sighed as Nunnally hugged him briefly before
stepping back.

“Goodnight everyone. I hope you don't think it too rude of me, but I'm feeling very tired, so I'll be
retiring early,” Nunnally explained as she turned and left the room.

I sighed and rubbed at my eyes, looking back to the originator of this conversation. Shirley had one
hand outstretched as if to stop Nunnally, and an utterly heartbroken look on her face, tears still in
her eyes as she turned and rushed from the room.
"I should...help her," Milly sighed, rising and going after her friend as the sound of distant crying filled the house.

"...and I'll help, too," Rivalz added on quickly, seeing an opportunity to jump off the ship of awkwardness this little event had become.

"I think I just realized why we never have family reunions," I commented glibly, looking around as the remainder of the group failed to even crack a smile. "Tough crowd. I suppose, this being all my fault-

"You know," Kallen interjected quietly, holding her glass out for Sayoko to refill. "I've known you, Gilgamesh, for almost longer than I can remember. I think today might actually have been more traumatizing than the time when I was seven, when you and Nathan got drunk and let me watch porn with you."

Villetta was the only person to respond to the accusation as she slowly turned to me, then Lelouch. "Your Highness...no, Lelouch. Although I'd like to take a little while to think about what I've learned today...I will admit that you were correct in your assertion that your brother was far, far worse than I could imagine."

"On that note," Lelouch stood, "I think my girlfriend and I should have a talk. Privately."

I frowned worriedly as they moved away from the table. I really hoped I hadn't destroyed Lelouch's relationship.

"I-I, should...be going as w-well, Y-your Hi-Highness," Nina stated, practically quivering as she nearly ran from the room.

"Anyway!" Kallen stated loudly, hiding her blush. "Getting drunk and watching porn with a seven year old girl? That's your fault. As someone who is, more or less, an expert on your fuck-ups, I can say that what happened with Lelouch and Nunnally wasn't...entirely your fault."

I grinned. "Why Kallen, it almost sounds like-"

"-don't," Kallen held up a hand. "Just...don't. I'm still pissed at you for February."

"Would a new Knightmare Frame help?" I asked wonderingly, as if thinking to myself.

Kallen sighed and put her head in her hands. "God damn it...I'm going to end up sleeping with you again, aren't I?"

"Anything's possible," I smiled. "Besides, I like you when you're angry. You're gorgeous when you're pissed to all hell."

Kallen smacked her forehead against the table. "Just...give me a few days, okay? Can I forget that you might not be a complete asshole and get angry at you again, at least?"

"I think that's fair. I've got a new machine, too, so I might even get in the ring and let you kick my ass," I offered. It was as much of an olive branch as I was capable of extending.

The unholy gleam in Kallen's eyes when she looked up made me think that I might have made a
misstep.
“We’re taking a break,” Lelouch informed me, sweeping a hand through his dark hair. "Villetta and I, I mean."

I grimaced, setting the glass stopper down and making ready to pour another glass. Not quite able to look the other young man in the eyes, I passed him the scotch. Lelouch, I had learned, preferred scotch on bad days, whiskey on good. “I’m sorry.”

“Intellectually,” Lelouch commented, “I understand it’s not your fault. This was a long time in coming and, really, she was more upset at the fact that I...well, I didn't try to hide it from her, but I certainly wasn't 'open' about it all, either.”

“Intellectually,” I noted. “Which mean you're pissed at me.”

“Quite,” Lelouch nodded.

We let the admission hang as we sipped at our respective drinks.

All was quiet for a moment, the kind of silent where what was unsaid hung loudly in the air between us.

“I’m angry because this was my first real attempt at a 'normal' relationship,” Lelouch explained, his eyes watching the liquid swirl in his cup.

“I apologize,” I stated, and meant it. “It wasn't my intention to disrupt your life here, and that seems to be all I ever do.” I ran my thumb along the rim of my glass.

“Again; not your fault,” Lelouch replied with a hint of annoyance. “I think I'm mostly angry at myself, really, because if this is anyone's fault, it's mine. You always were insistent about the value of honesty in relationships. I thought I had taken that lesson to heart, but here I am, having lied to most of the people I would consider friends, about virtually my entire life up to this point. I lied about being a prince. I lied about who Nunnally and I were. I'm continuing to lie about where I go on my off days.”

I felt like a priest listening to confession.

I wonder if all priests felt so under-qualified.

“Some things...people are better off not knowing,” I decided aloud. “For a time, at least. I'm not going to tell you, you did the wrong thing, made the wrong choice. I'm sorry it came to light in this manner, though.”

“'The truth cuts both way, make sure it is a weapon in your hands and not your enemy's,'” Lelouch quoted morosely. “It's not your fault, Gil. All the same, I don't think Shirley will ever forgive me.”
“You’d be surprised,” I sighed. “I’d offer to talk to her if I thought it would do any good.”

We sat quietly for a moment, before Lelouch drew a ragged breath.

“Would...would it be okay if I blamed you anyway?” My brother asked quietly.

“Oh Lulu,” I whispered, drawing him into my embrace and pressing my lips to his forehead gently. “You can blame me anytime. It's my fault, anyway. I'm so sorry. So, so sorry.” I set my glass down and drew a hand through his hair as he latched onto me.

“Thank you,” Lelouch breathed, his form shuddering as near-silent sobs wracked his body. I pressed my eyes closed in sympathetic misery “I'm so, so sorry, little brother.”

Between one moment and the next, I felt Lelouch begin to kiss me and I responded thoughtlessly, entangling our tongues as I cradled his head. His own hands began to roam my body, parting my bathrobe and tracing familiar patterns. Breathing hard, he pulled away, his eyes red and wide with surprise.

“I-” His throat hitched, “I didn't mean, I'm just...I'm sor-” He quieted as I pressed a finger to his lip.

“Shush,” I replied, kissing him again briefly. “Nothing to be sorry for, sweet prince. It's all my fault, after all.”

Lelouch ducked his head, an echo of his ten-year-old self, trying not to look pathetically grateful as I dragged him towards his room.

I caught Anya's eye as we rounded a corner and she smiled that enigmatic half-smile before turning off another way. She'd find someone to spend the night with, I was sure, even if it meant crawling into bed with Gino and Yui. The Eleven was surprisingly tolerant of the small rosette.

Lelouch needed me tonight.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

My brother, I had long ago learned, was not the type of person to be assertive in bed.

That wasn't to say Lulu wasn't responsive. If you knew what buttons to press, he could be quite active in his participation.

It probably had something to do with his compulsive need to exercise control in his everyday life. It might also have something to do with his need to fill the void left by Marianne's death by having someone more authoritative see to his needs. There was a part of me that wondered about our father's absence playing a part, too.

Regardless, it meant the fifteen-year-old offered me little resistance as I pulled his clothing away and laid him down on the expansive, silk-covered bed in his room.

Black silks, of course.

The boy had taste, even if it was a bit monochromatic.

I kissed the skin of his neck, drawing my lips and teeth along the flesh even as it grew taught, his head tilting back with a strained hiss of breath.
Drawing one hand down Lelouch's chest, I marveled at his hairless chest. Really, he could likely pass for a child years younger than his true age, if he had a mind to.

“Please,” the black-haired youth gasped.

I chuckled dryly, the noise reverberating within me as I kissed my way down his front. While I dedicated a few fingers to tracing patterns over the flushing expanse of my brother's chest, I allowed the other to drop to my own waist, loosening the knot holding my robe in place.

“Oh Lulu, but we're just getting started,” I chastised, allowing my robe to fall off my shoulders and pool behind me...

...leaving us both nude, erections stiff with need.

“Don't tease me,” he whispered. “Not tonight, please Gil. I need to feel it.” His hands, previously fisted into the sheets below us, twisted into my hair and rest on my shoulder, calling for my attention.

My smile softened against his body, and I regretfully withdrew from where I had been about to claim his stiffening nipple. “Very well, dear heart. If you really do need it that badly.”

Without warning, I nearly tore his hands away from me, catching his wrists and pressing them above his head.

Lelouch's eyes widened, but the way his tongue swept his lips longingly, I knew I was on the right track. While the heat of his own rod pressed against my thigh, I bore down over him, using my greater mass to force myself upon him. As our face closed the distance, my mocking grin captivating his violet eyes, our breath intermingling harshly.

“Just remember, lover, you asked for this,” I murmured with promise as I moved in for the kill, grinding my lips against his own and driving my tongue deep within his mouth.

He gave a few token struggles, even as I switched my grip to hold both of his wrists with a single hand, allowing me free reign to press the free now-free hand against his throat. My grip lacked pressure, lacked threat, but there was some vague sense of what I could do that set fire to a primal instinct within Lelouch, who began to fight in earnest.

Finally, I fell back from our liplock, only to drive two fingers into his mouth in my tongue's place.

“Lick,” I commanded in a tone that brokered no argument.

As Lelouch obediently coated my fingers with copious amounts of saliva, I amused myself by sliding our lengths along each other, the sensations delightfully tempting as my brother's hips rose up to meet mine.

I withdrew my fingers, leaving the brunette panting in anticipation and exertion.

I pressed my lips against his own once again, trusting my hand to know where it's goal lay.

Lulu jerked as I pressed my pointer finger against his rosebud, making close circles as he fought to relax the tight ring of muscle. It took a surprising amount of skill and learning to truly enjoy anal sex, as well as a natural proclivity towards the act. So many pornography films gave the
impression that just shoving something up one's ass was as good as merely shoving something up a woman's vagina with equal crudity.

Well, they used to, at least.

Before I got my hands on the industry.

While I busied myself with loosening up his anus, I withdrew from Lelouch's mouth and gave in to my earlier desire as I pressed my lips into a tight seal around one of his nipples.

...it was interesting, actually, that Lelouch's teats were more sensitive than some women I'd bedded over the years. A testament to the variety humanity came in, I suppose. Women, generally, were more susceptible to teasing their nipples, but I'd met some who had very little sensation at all, but had nearly cum on the spot when I'd licked their armpit.

People were weird.

Peoples' bodies, moreso.

Lelouch groaned aloud, the noise frustration incarnate as his hips trust vainly into the air while he fought the grip I held on him...not too strongly, mind you. He didn't actually want to get away, after all.

I chuckled darkly and threw my head back as I finally removed my two soiled fingers from his ass to clean them absently on my robe. Smirking, I switched my one-handed grip back to two-handed, catching one of Lelouch's wrists in each of my hands as I used those holds to leverage him upright and force him further, even as I sat up in the same motion. The end result was a smooth transition that left both of us on our knees, though I was fully upright whereas Lelouch was bent over, his face next to my crotch.

“Lick Lelouch,” I breath, then hissed pleasurably as he ducked his head and obeyed without comment.

My eyes flicked left, and I grinned. Hmm...

I breathed deeply, steeling myself as I leveraged Lelouch up and off my nob, sighing at the loss of the warm caress of his tongue, but I was close enough already. No need to disappoint my brother, after all. Looking down, I judged the length to be more than lubricated enough and locked eyes with the younger man.

“Relax yourself,” I warned softly, finally releasing his wrists with a push that left him flat on his back. Immediately, I took up a grip on Lelouch's waist, raising it as I bent down over him again.

“Take my dick and put it at your entrance, there's a good boy,” I praised, even as the brunette reached underneath him and took my damp, hot, member in hand to place at his asshole.

“Get on with it already,” Lelouch bit off, urgency lacing his voice.

“If you insist,” I snorted, driving myself in with breathtaking slowness, burrowing inch by inch into the warm cavern beneath me. “Gods, Lulu, you're tighter than I remember.”

Lelouch moaned aloud, “Please! Please Gil!”
I pulled myself back and thrust forward, deeper into the boy, heaving harsh breaths as I restrained myself. I had to be careful. I would have preferred to use lube, but...Lelouch wasn't in the mood for being as careful as I liked. He wanted it to hurt, just a little, to absolve him of some deeper pain that rested in his heart rather than his body.

“I bet this is your first fuck in a while,” I gasped as I worked my hips, my dick sliding outwards before I reversed and that right ring of muscle begrudgingly allowed me back in. “Does Villetta even know you like it up the ass?”

Violet eyes glimmered dangerously as they locked onto mine. “Shut the fuck up, Gil.”

“You're the one who wanted it like this,” I snorted, pushing again as I reached the deepest into my brother's rear I had yet tonight.

Lelouch gasped. “Fuck you, Gil.”

“No, fuck you, foolish little brother,” I thrust, using the motion to bend down and kiss him hotly. “You were afraid. Afraid she'd leave you if you knew the truth. Afraid she wouldn't want you if she knew what you wanted.”

“Goddammit Gil! Shut up and fuck me!” Lelouch growled, his fingers twisting the sheets as I drove myself up to the hilt inside him.

“Then admit it!” I ordered. “Tell me the truth.”

“Fine! I liked her!” Lelouch grunted. “I might have even loved her! I wanted her to lay in bed with Nunnally and me, I wanted to share that part of my life with her, you asshole! I wanted her to like you, too, you bastard!”

Lelouch had nearly choked on the last word, cutting himself off as tears finally emerged.

“Oh, my poor sweetheart,” I sighed, leaning over to kiss him again, tenderly, even as I kept myself buried in him. “Shh-shh, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.”

“J-just,” Lelouch shifted and gasped, “just-finish it, please. I need to feel-something-anything else. Please.”

“Okay,” I agreed, moving my hand down to grasp his still-hard staff and beginning to piston my hand up and down.

I began thrusting again, building back up the tension that had been lost. Thankfully, the mood wasn't truly broken and it was easy enough to bring us both back to a point of gasping breaths and whispered exclamations...as well as not-so-whispered exclamations. I bit back a moan as I drove myself up to the hilt one more time, my seed shooting in thick white ropes up my brother's clenching ass.

We collapsed together into a sweaty heap, chests heaving as my cum leaked out my little brother's ass just as his own drained into his pubic hair.

“Thanks,” Lelouch whispered, his head laying on my shoulder limply.
“Anything and everything, for you I would give, my love,” I breathed, kissing his forehead as I tiredly pulled a sheet across us.

“I love you too, Gil,” Lelouch whispered, already half-asleep.

All was quiet for a long moment, the declining gasps of our exertion settling out to slower, deeper breaths.

“Hey Lulu?” I asked suddenly, not raising my voice overmuch.

“Mmmph?” Lelouch grunted sleepily.

“Wanna’ be my Sub-Viceroy?” I offered, trailing my fingers through his hair.

There was a beat of silence, then my brother released an annoyed grunt and snuggled deeper into me. “Go to sleep Gil.”

I huffed a tired laugh, and tabled the matter for tomorrow. There were other things I’d need to discuss, too, I reminded myself as I let my gaze trail the barely-cracked door.
Breakfast was a casual affair.

Nunnally, Lelouch, Euphemia, Anya, and I were all in various states of half-awake stupor, slowly shoveling the, admittedly delicious, food into our mouths. Fluffy silken bathrobes of various colors clothed our forms as we managed to wake ourselves up through the meal.

“Excellent, Ms. Sayoko. I'm heartened to see my brother has retained the services of such a talented bodyguard-cum-chef,” I complemented as I took another cup of juice from her hand.

“Such effusive praise is unnecessary, Your Highness,” Sayoko replied with a slight bow, though I thought she might have seemed somewhat flattered behind that carefully blank facade. “Lord Weinberg's...female acquaintance proved to be of considerable aid, though she confessed she would prefer to take her meal in private.”

No one commented on Gino's absence at the table.

“I'm glad to see she's keeping herself busy,” I smiled. “Yui is...well, she's very introverted, honestly. I'd like to see her make more friends, though I can't exactly order her to do so...at least, not with any real hope of accomplishing my objective.”

Sayoko cocked her head slightly, a thoughtful sheen entering her eyes as she nodded subtly, once. “Very good, sir. If I may be excused, I do have other duties to see to.”

The last was directed towards Lelouch, who swallowed and snorted. “Sayoko, you practically run this house. You don't need our permission to do anything.”

“Brother is right, Ms. Sayoko,” Nunnally smiled as she carefully sliced a bit of sausage. “You're part of our family...though I don't think Sister Cornelia would particularly agree with the sentiment.”

Euphemia sighed, “Nelly is just...adamant in her beliefs, is all.”

I watched as Sayoko's smile warmed from the cool plastic it had remained while I complemented her, meeting her eyes over my chatting siblings' heads. Her eyes flickered towards Lelouch, then back to me, something careful and probing in them...but not quite insubordinate. No, the maid was too canny for that.

I merely smiled back guilelessly.

Perhaps, here at least, that smile was honest.

The Eleven maid gave me one least measuring look before turning to pick up a tray full of soiled dishes and walking out of the room.

“So, Brother Gilgamesh, you promised to tell us!”
I blinked, turning back to Nunnally, “pardon, my little princess? Tell you what?”

Nunnally pouted at the 'little' part of my pet name and I wondered if she was entering that terrible phase of teen/pre-teen angst and pretentious adulthood. It would be as adorable as it was terrifying, if it were so.

“Yesterday,” Nunnally informed me with a somewhat prim and expecting attitude, “you said you would tell me why you were in the country without telling anyone.”

Lelouch’s eyes sharpened.

“Oh! Do tell, please, Gil!” Euphie grinned as she sipped at her milk, “I was ever so curious when you left me with your bodyguards.”

Speaking of which...

“Are you sure you two don't want any food?” I asked inquiringly, looking toward the doorway.

Marika shook her head, “thank you, Your Highness, but Lilianna and I rose early. Sayoko and Yui were kind enough to fix us something before our shift started.”

“As she says, Your Highness,” Lilianna affirmed, a slight nod barely disrupting her parade-perfect posture.

“Gil!” Nunnally and Euphie whined in unison.

“Oh very well,” I snorted, smiling. “I was paying a visit to the Sakuradite Trade Commission.”

“That...hardly seems very hush-hush,” Nunnally frowned as she sipped at her juice.

Lelouch, though, had the thoughtful and cunning sharpness to his gaze that I’d become familiar with.

“Well, actually, it was in regards to their funding of the insurgency in Area Eleven and how they should stop it,” I explained.

There was a quiet, stunned stillness in the room before Lelouch slowly dropped his face into his left palm.

“Gil,” my half-brother groaned irritably. “We've talked about this before, dammit! You can't just give away a strategic advantage like that level of intelligence just to see the looks on peoples' faces!”

“That's not the-”

Lelouch shot me a glare.

“-only reason I did so,” I amended hastily. “I also wanted to establish myself as both able and willing to work with them for the betterment of the local peoples instead of disregarding them as unimportant.”
Lelouch sighed, shaking his head. “There are literally a dozen other ways you could have accomplished your goals without indulging in your childish desire to shock and awe your victims.”

“I wanted to guarantee I had their attention,” I shrugged off blandly, rolling my eyes.

“I suppose you have done that, at least,” Lelouch growled.

“Wait!” Euphemia nearly shouted, her face becoming progressively more alarmed as she realized the ramifications. “You mean that the people responsible for the Empire's sakuradite supply are traitors!?”

“Oh no,” I shook my head, “They're patriots.” Her alarm subsided slightly. “They're just loyal to the defunct Japanese regime instead of Britannia.”

...and the alarm was back.

“We have to do something! We can call Cornelia, she'll be able to help!” Euphie fussed anxiously, already reaching for her phone.

“Euphie,” I spoke once, firmly and powerfully, putting all the weight of my station into my voice.

She stilled and looked up from the tiny screen.

“This is my responsibility,” I stressed. “I will take care of it. If we handle this publicly, it will be an enormous embarrassment for the Empire, given that we placed these people in charge of the industry seven years ago.”

Euphie swallowed nervously, but nodded.

“I can't have Cornelia swooping in and saving me, for the same reasons. People will think I'm depending on my big sister to fix my own problems. I know Cornelia would happily help if I called,” I held up a hand to forestall her arguments, “and if it becomes necessary, I won't hesitate to ask her for aid. If Lelouch takes me up on being my Sub-Viceroy, then he can help me without it seeming as if I'm an object of his pity. I'll be rewarding him, or someone else, with a position of power in exchange for their service.”

Such was the basis for feudalism, after all, and though Britannia may have modernized and industrialized, the ghosts of our conservative medieval society still lingered, refusing to be exorcised.

The EU called the practice, derogatorily, cronyism, and had passed laws to prevent it.

Britannia, however, had institutionalized the practice.

Our world was a complex mix of modern political parties, ancient family accords, and the looming power of the Emperor casting a shadow over us all.

It was the only life so many of us knew, though.

Even I, who knew a life outside of Britannia, saw its upsides rather than downsides. The Empire had fed us, clothed us, and given us so much. It had taken much from us, too, but that was the way of life. It was neither fair nor gentle.
Breakfast had returned to safer topics after my revelation and, while I hadn't gotten a solid answer from Lelouch on the matter of the Sub-Viceroy position, I got the impression he was thinking the matter over. I wasn't in a particular rush, so I'd give him whatever time I could, most especially because I really did want Lelouch on my side for this particular endeavor, as unplanned as the entire thing was.

I had things to do, at any rate.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

“You're sure?” I asked, for what felt like the tenth time.

“We ran the tests multiple times. Independent, blind, and using separate labs. I wanted them to be sure before I reported to you, sire,” Alex replied from where he had laid his head in my lap as I ran my fingers through his hair. With the other hand, I idly flipped through the file.

“Damn,” I muttered, scowling.

I really had hoped I’d be wrong about this, at least.

Sometimes I really did hate being right all the damn time.

“My lord, what are we to do?” Alex asked, staring up at me.

“I'm not entirely sure,” I sighed and looked towards Zoe. “Ideas?”

Zoe was curled up against her brother's side. Though both remained clothed, it was obviously an intimate embrace. On my other side, Anya leaned against me.

“You should tell them,” Anya spoke up.

The move was so unexpected, even I turned to look at her in surprise. “I...” I swallowed. “I suppose I should, shouldn't I?” I sighed and looked back at the file in my hand. “The question is, how?”

Anya shrugged.

I snorted and rolled my eyes, “fat lot of good you are, then.”

I leaned down and kissed her softly on the lips.

A chirp from my wrist drew my attention away from my pleasurable diversion. “Yo Gil! We're here.”

I depressed a button and replied, “Thank you Gino. I trust all stations are secure and check out?”

“Yes. Got all the confirmations and stuff. You want me parked on duty or ready to take a bullet for you?” The Weinberg heir asked with easy nonchalance.

“I'd prefer you on duty, if possible,” I sighed. “Marika and Liliana will remain with you as well. It should go without saying, but you're in charge for the duration today.”

“Awesome,” Gino groaned playfully. “Why do I put up with your crazy shifts and weird hours again?”
“Probably because my mere presence fills a gaping void within you,” I answered, a hint of amusement shining through my depressed state as Anya reached to open the car door.

“Only when I’m drunk and my girl's in the mood to watch,” Gino riposted.

“Your Highness, there you are!” Charlotte called from the doorway as I stepped from my luxury car. I glanced around the expansive parking garage and nodded in satisfaction as I took in the plain concrete and strategically positioned cameras.

“Charlotte,” I greeted with a smile and a quick kiss to the cheek. Well, really, more like the corner of her mouth. “How's my newest acquisition settling in?”

The poor girl flushed, not quite used to such public displays of affection. Still, she made a noise of aggravation as my question registered. “As well as one could expect, sire. The Number finds the accommodations appealing enough, as she should, though she was quite...unappreciative of your choices of clothing. Especially undergarments.”

I snorted, grinning. “...and what of you, dear Charlotte?” I asked as I traced a finger over the reinforced black silk around her neck. There were sterling silver chains threaded through it, giving the article a very decorative look to it. Of course, the larger ring which rested at the front center of her neck was studded with diamonds, further deceiving any onlooker that it could be anything so gauche as a 'collar.'

The weight of the leash in my back pocket was tempting beyond words.

“I don't have any particular qualms obeying my lord's wishes in this regard,” she smiled pleasantly. “I do wonder if he would be so kind as to grant an exception during the days I bleed?”

I hummed thoughtfully before shaking my head.

“If there's a special occasion that conflicts with your period, I'll consider it,” I granted, “but otherwise I shan't curtail the order further. You are, at all times, to be without panties. If you stain any clothes, feel free to bill me for their launder or replacement.”

“As your highness commands,” Charlotte smiled.

“Still enjoying your reprieve from private school?” I asked curiously, trailing a hand down her back to cup her ass through her pants.

“Your highness,” Charlotte sighed, grinning suddenly through her blush, “I would willingly and happily work nude for you, would it not complicate matters unnecessarily. Your...tastes, to me, are no great burden. They are a true joy to be subject to. If you so wish it, I will burn the remainder of my undergarments.” She added a bit of sway to her hips as she walked through the door.

I smiled.

Ah, it's so hard to find good help...but, so, so rewarding.

The smile was still on my face as I stepped into the elevator. "Now, I suppose I should familiarize myself with the Oberon, if I'm to allow Kallen to make sport of me."
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