

The Duke 141

Chapter 141 - First Attempt: Failed.

"My sister-in-law?"

Words immediately clogged in my throat. Did he call me sister-in-law? Did that mean...

"I hope you find the Capital to your liking, my dear sister-in-law." He smirked before turning his back against me.

His footsteps clip clopped against the marbled floor, sounding overly loud in my ears. The sound faded until there's only silence.

Capital... sister-in-law... coffin...

For a moment, I couldn't move a muscle. I stared at the high ceiling blankly.

"Just what happened?" I muttered under my breath, recalling my last memory.

All I could remember was buying some sweets for Claude. But then, I found myself in an alley and then nothing more.

A scoff slipped past my lips. I bit my lower lip as hard as I could, hoping this was a terrible nightmare.

Alas, it wasn't.

This was reality. And I got myself abducted to the Capital. My jaw tightened as I clenched my teeth.

'How can you be so pathetic, Lilou?' I asked internally, blaming myself for everything.

How could I walk on my own and step into an enemy's trap? I promised Sam it would never happen again. However... those were empty words now.

"Sam..." I whispered through my gritted teeth. My eyes stung, closing them as tears pooled behind my eyelids.

"I'm sorry."

I stayed like that for as long as I could remember. To hold my funeral as a welcome, that guy was surely giving me a warning. Who was he? The king? The sixth prince? But that didn't matter for now.

Keeping my life until Sam could find me was my priority. I would apologize to him directly. So, I had to live until then.

I'm unsure what they wanted, but I believed they wouldn't kill me now because of Sam. It might be a foolish conclusion, but they wouldn't anger him to that extent, right?

Right...? Obviously, I'm being foolish right now.

They would kill me if they deem it right.

"Sam... what should I do?" I whispered under my breath, pursing my lips in a thin line.

But no answer came, only silence. The silence was too loud I could hear my deep breaths.

Should I try escaping? But what if I got caught?

Well, I had lakresha, don't I? I should do something.

I pondered about my survival plans for a long time. In the end, I wanted to escape first.

Slowly, I raised my head and peeked around. However, the light only granted me to see a considerable space around my vicinity. Ahead was just darkness.

'Nevertheless... I should try.' I convinced myself, determined to escape this hell hole by myself.

Thus, with that thought in mind, I carefully got out of the coffin. Alas, no matter how discreet I was, I ended up tumbling down along with the coffin.

"Ah —" I winced in pain, but gritted my teeth to avoid making more unnecessary noises.

Again, I raised my head and looked around. I heaved a sigh of relief that no one came to me after that sudden noise.

My body felt beat and heavy. The air in this place was too thick to bear. I had to get out of here as soon as possible.

I dragged myself up, enduring the pain from tumbling down. As I gritted my teeth, I dragged my feet towards the candelabra not far away from the coffin.

There were four; two on both near end of the coffin. It was fortunate that I didn't hit any of them. It'd create fire and attention for sure.

As I took one candelabra, I turned around. I extended my arms forward, giving light to my path.

'Where should I go, though? I don't know the exit.' My face scrunched up in distress as I clicked my tongue.

Deep down, I knew I'd fail. I didn't know this palace. This would be a mission impossible, but I had to try.

If I got caught, I'd just confront them? No. I'd hide or just figure it out.

This was stressing me more than I thought. It was upsetting.

Still, I treaded carefully, following the carpet's path. Why was it so dark in here? Sam's mansion and even the Remington's and Crawford's weren't as stingy in using candles at night.

For such an enormous place, the king surely like the dark, huh? I knew darkness didn't matter to them since vampires could see clearly in darkness.

But still, there's no harm in using more candles. Having an enormous castle with barely having lights just gave a more eerie atmosphere.

Suddenly, I heard a man's voice behind me, startling me out of my wits.

"My lady."

My hand trembled. Had he been here all this time? I didn't even hear his footsteps when he approached me. The thought sent a shiver down my spine.

"I'll escort you back to your quarters. Please follow me." He added.

Slowly, I turned around. I waited until the faint light of the candelabra hit his figure.

It was a tall middle-aged man wearing a butler suit. It was different from Fabian's uniform, but I could tell he's a butler in one glance by his demeanor.

"Quarters?" I asked, almost whispering.

"Yes. Since you're a guest of the king, we are told to take care of you until the third prince arrives." He explained in the same calm tone.

My breath hitched upon hearing his last remarks. If I remembered correctly, he was talking about Sam. Still, I remained vigilant.

Who knew if that quarter he was talking about was actually a prison dungeon? Also, did he mean take care of me as in silencing me?

I couldn't trust anyone here.

"Fret not, my lady. This is the palace. No one can harm you here." He reassured, offering a subtle smile.

That's why I'm even more concerned. This was the palace. No one could harm me here aside from the people in here. And that was far dreading than living in the streets!

First attempt of escaping failed, miserably. I had to know this place more to find the safe route.

However, I didn't know if I could even see dawn once again. Should I follow him? Or should I take out lakresha and force myself out of this place?

Either way, I'd die, right? I should at least fight and be wise until the bitter end.

I took a deep breath and nodded. "Lead the way."

"Yes." With that being said, he bowed lightly. He stared at me for a moment before snapping his fingers.

As soon as he did, the light came in. One after another, the candles on the ceiling fixtures and on the walls lightened up.

My mouth fell as my surrounding shrouded in darkness came clear to me. A lavishly ornate interior of gold and jewelry with a stately baroque style hall.

"Please, my lady. I will hold the candle for you." He said, snapping me back to the current lapse.

I shifted my eyes to his hand and then to the candelabra. "Oh, alright."

With that, I handed the candle holder to him. Since the initially dark hall brightened up, I had no reason to hold the candle.

"Follow me." He beckoned. I only nodded in silence and followed him.

My plan remained the same. If I sensed danger, I'd call out lakresha and march my way out of here. There's no reason to do it in reverse since there's a slim chance that they wouldn't harm because of Sam.

On our way, the butler paused. I halted several steps away from him.

Instinctively, I tilted my head and tiptoed to see what made him stop. My brows furrowed upon seeing a beautiful woman with long ebony locks and sharp, deep azure eyes standing before us.

Just then, our eyes met. Out of instinct, I avoided her gaze and stood properly.

"Is that Hell's bride?" She asked. Her voice was pristine and soothing, but a little intimidating.

"Yes, your royal highness." The butler answered politely.

Royal highness? My brows furrowed. I see... she's Sam's sister? But was she also the queen? I heard the king married two of his sisters.

I cringed at the thought. However, I couldn't really judge knowing the reason.

"Move aside." She ordered, and the butler did.

My instinct told me I should move, too. Thus, I moved aside, making a way for her, standing next to the butler, mimicking him as I bowed.

"..."

Huh? Why were they too silent, and why was she not walking away? I wondered internally, raising my gaze a little to peek. To my surprise, both the butler and the royal highness were staring at me.

'Uhm... what now? Why are they staring at me? Didn't she ask us to move aside and make way?' I wondered internally.

Chapter 142 - I Miss Him... So Much.

I pursed my lips in a thin line as I hung my head low. I'll just bow like this until she walked away.

Survive. That was my motto from then on and now! Offending a royalty, although I'm marrying one, would just give me more headache. They might put me in the scaffold if I made the wrong move.

Until Sam arrived, I would have to walk as if I'm treading on eggshells.

"Hah..." Her royal highness scoffed under her breath.

After that, I heard her soft footsteps coming near. Soon, I saw the end of her skirt as she stood before me. I didn't dare raise my head as I gritted my teeth.

"You..." she muttered, caressing my jaw with the back of her hand.

A shiver immediately ran down my spine upon the sensual touch. She guided my chin up, locking her gaze with me.

Her noble beauty stunned me momentarily. Lara's beauty was akin to the first day of spring, warm and refreshing. It could make one happy just staring at her.

But her royal highness' beauty was akin to autumn. A mature beauty; although beautiful, one could not help but feel a little sentimental.

Unknowingly, I stared at her without blinking or fear in my eyes. The side of her lips curled subtly.

"Beautiful..." I muttered, mesmerized by her faint smile.

I snapped back to reality when she smoothly cupped my jaw. Her eyes glinting in interest.

"Then, would you like to sleep with me?"

I froze. What?

"If you find me beautiful, do you want to share warmth tonight?" She inquired, sounding dead serious about it!

Was she seducing me?

I gasped as I held my breath for a long time. When my brain suffocated from the lack of air, I breathed out and bowed my head abruptly.

"I dare not, your royal highness!" I exclaimed in panic. Still, my cheeks heated, flustered at her sensual touches and vulgar words.

What was she thinking? Did she want to drive me to my death faster by asking me to sleep with the king's woman?

Even so, why did she think I'd even consider of sleeping with her? Ah... goodness! Sam's family... they're even stranger than what he said.

"Pfft—!" She chuckled. "What an adorable and interesting child."

She commented before she walked away. As her footsteps faded away, I peeked at her back.

A sigh of relief slipped past my lips as I straightened my back. Shaking my head lightly.

'When will Sam arrive? I better not bump into her again.' I sighed in distress.

"It seems her royal highness had taken a liking to you, my lady." Suddenly, the butler commented, snapping me back from my thoughts.

"Heh..." I awkwardly breathed out. Taken a liking, meaning finding me worthy to kill me with her own hands? Was that what he meant?

With that, the butler walked me to the guest quarters. So far, it didn't seem we're heading to a suspicious place.

Ironic, I thought. This entire palace was already suspicious and dangerous. What else am I fretting about?

"By the way," While following him in silence, my curiosity reached its peak. "You addressed her as her royal highness. Is she, I mean, is the royal highness the Queen?"

"Hmm..." He glanced back briefly and answered. "Her royal highness is the first wife of His Majesty. But she is not legally the Queen."

"Pardon?"

"You might've heard it already from the third prince; that his majesty married two of his sister. However, both royal princesses are the king's consort but not the Queen." He explained, summarizing the situation of the king's complicated romance.

My face scrunched up secretly. Fabian and I had tackled the law of the palace. However, I never heard they had changed it.

I wondered if the king could change their laws on his whim. Just what sort of kingdom was I even born to? It was disappointing to an extent.

"Why, though?" I blurted out.

Yet he didn't answer me anymore. I didn't probe about it since it seemed he didn't want to talk anymore.

Soon, we arrived at the guest quarters. We stopped in front of a large door. He stopped before me, opening the door for me politely.

"Please rest well tonight, my lady." He said.

I glanced at him suspiciously. But I marched in regardless. The room was just as grandiose as the interior design of the hall. It surprised me that the lights in here were generously lit.

Once I entered, I turned around as the door creaked closed. I didn't expect that they would really send me to a decent bedchamber.

As I sigh, I looked around. This room was twice larger than our room in the ducal residence. It was fancier; an opulent comfort of the room fitting for a royalty.

Alas, despite how dreamy and lavish this room was, it felt cold. Not literally, but this coldness seeped deep into my bones.

I felt empty.

It was too big for someone like me. I dragged my feet forward and stood at the center.

Several months ago, I was just teaching the kids and helping in the field. That time, my entire being was covered with mud.

Eating once a day was already a miracle. I couldn't even think of experiencing comfort.

Then Sam came into my life, shaking it, turning it upside down. Overnight, I was treated like a noble lady. Cleansed, fed, taught, and loved.

It felt like a dream. A real-life story fitting for those novels.

"It would have been nice if our story ended with us getting married in the first volume." I muttered as I trudged towards the bed.

I crashed on it face first. It was soft; I was expecting it had some spikes that could pierce through me. So, everything would just be over.

'That's silly.' I thought, shaking my depressing thoughts away.

Lying down on this enormous bed, my body felt even colder. Slowly, I rolled to my side, curling like a ball.

I embraced my knees, staring at nothingness. This room, luxury, comfort, special treatment. I desired none of them.

"All I want is for the king's approval for our marriage. So, Sam and I could live in peace." I mumbled, chewing my lower lip as tears broke free from my eyes.

"I miss him... so much."

Chapter 143 - Ugly Little Thing

I didn't get a wink of sleep until morning came and servants arrived. They treated me like an actual royalty.

Dresses were much fancier and flashy in colors. The servants even put light powder and colors on my eyes and lips.

I stared at myself in front of the mirror. My gaze stared at the pair of olive eyes staring back at me. Chestnut brown hairs rolled into huge curls, falling to my back; some hair accessories crested with real gems clipped on the side of my hair.

My lips painted in deep red, matching my black and red dress. The dress colors complimented my warm, undertone complexion to an unbelievable extent.

"I look pretty..." I whispered, but not in awe.

Although I looked different, dressed differently, making me look refined and expensive. I could barely recognize myself. I felt like a doll, dressing up to the master's liking.

Back in Grimsbanne, although the servants took care of me, I looked more simple. The changes as a peasant to a proper lady were drastic, but I looked more like myself.

This current change was a bit more surprising for me.

"Because you're already gorgeous, your highness." The servant smiled, pleased at my remarks.

I did not mean it as a compliment. But, I held back on saying those.

"I — I'm not a royalty." I gazed down, biting my inner lip.

The maid servant didn't reply anymore. Instead, she took a step back quietly.

"Your schedule for today is to be toured around in the palace, your highness."

How stubborn. I'm not staying here for a long time. Why should I? Was that what I wanted to say. However, if I wanted to escape, I should know every turn of the way in this place.

"Lead the way." I nodded.

With that being said, the servant escorted out of the bedchambers. As she guided me around, I glanced back. More maids were following us at a safe distance.

I'm still unsure of what the royal family wanted from me. If they abducted me, they were surely treating me as one of them. Perhaps they're afraid of the disaster Sam might cause?

Nevertheless, I just had to go along with the flow. I listened carefully to the maid touring me around.

She pointed out the prince's and princess quarters, other palace wings where the king resides, and even the minor details.

I felt some *deja vu* with this. Fabian also toured me around in the Duke's mansion. Unlike back then, I wasn't in awe of the places I've seen.

After long hours of the tour, we finally arrived in the garden. I didn't get surprised to see an enormous garden. It's the palace, after all. It was expected.

Even so, it was beautiful. Only gardens could put this anxiety creeping in me at rest.

A subtle smile turned up on my lips. The voice of the maid faded into the background as I looked around. There were a variety of flowers, bushes that were formed with different shapes, and a fountain.

"... the palace has 12 gardens in total. But the garden in the Avolire Palace said to be the best among the 12."

"Can I rest here?" I muttered, shifting my gaze to the maidservant.

"Yes, your highness. I will escort you to the gazebo near the lake." She said. I nodded, and she led the way.

It took quite a walk to reach the place she mentioned. But, I couldn't deny that the long walk was worthy.

Soon we reached a gazebo situated to the nearby lake. Surprising how a lake, sparkling magically under the bright rays of sunlight, existed in a vast garden. Well, it's the palace, after all.

"I will get you some tea and snacks, your highness."

As I perched on the empty seat, I gazed up at the maid. I only nodded before glancing at the other servants outside the gazebo, bowing.

"Will they stay like that the entire time?" I asked, curious.

Back in the ducal residence, the servants were more free. Although they used to act like this at first, they changed overtime.

They still bow and were polite to me, but they're more relaxed around me. But these servants just had this impregnable wall between me and them.

"Yes."

"Can I have a time alone?" I inquired, shifting my eyes back to the head maid — I assumed she was.

"They are here to serve you, your highness. We can't leave you all alone, but they can keep a distance." She explained, leaving me helpless with this situation.

"I can't be alone?"

"Yes." she answered with a bow.

"Ask them to leave." I sighed, seeing her raising her head as she cast me a look. Before she could speak, I intervened.

"You stay. I'm not alone in that case, correct?"

She remained silent for a while. When she concluded silently, she bowed. Slowly, she walked back and ordered to get some tea and snacks. The head maid then stayed outside the gazebo while the rest resigned.

'I can't breathe in here freely.' I muttered internally, leaning on the table, resting my jaw on my knuckles.

Another sigh slipped past my lips. My eyes on the still, sparkling lake with some lotus floating, which gave it more life.

I got all the luxury in here, honestly. I could only dream about it before.

However, I felt more down than ever. I couldn't understand everything.

What I only knew was that I shouldn't be in this place alone. How could I arrive here before my groom?

"Ughh..." I let out a frustrated grunt as I closed my eyes. "This is upsetting."

I mumbled in distress. I miss Sam, and I just wanted to melt into his embrace. I felt tired and suffocated in the air around this palace. Not to mention this tight corset.

This was not the time to idle, Lilou! You're a hostage here! They abducted you, remember?

Slowly, I opened my eyes and sighed at my own scolding. What else could I do? If I wanted to escape, I still need more time to study this place. Also, what if I successfully escaped, then Sam arrived?

"Her royal highness is here to see you, your highness." The maid servant approached me, startling me back to my senses.

"Ah?" I moved my gaze at the woman making her way inside the gazebo. My brows furrowed.

Dark plum hair flowing along with the soft blows of the wind. She's not the first wife I encountered last night.

"Please pay your respect to her royal highness, your highness."

Did she say her royal highness? Did that mean it's the second wife? I glanced at the head maid. She seemed a little alarmed, confusing me even more. Still, if she's one of the king's wives, I guess I had to give her my greetings.

With that thought in mind, I slowly got up from my seat. When she arrived at the gazebo, I made a small curtsy.

"Greetings, your royal highness." I greeted just like how Fabian taught me.

I didn't look her in the eye. But I could feel her eyes drilling into me.

"So, you're Hell's bride?" She scoffed in ridicule.

Yes, I am. Why do they ask that if they already knew? I replied internally. Unlike the woman last night, this second wife — which I assumed? — certainly had a more arrogant tone.

"Your highness, her royal highness is asking you." The head maid whispered in my side.

Ahh... I need to answer?

"Yes, your royal highness." I nearly rolled my eyes as I replied, keeping my head hung low.

"Hah! Raise your head." She ordered, and I did as I was told.

Once our eyes met, she smirked. Her eyes establishing superiority between us. Well, she's superior and I'm aware of that.

However, why was she staring at me as if I snatched her husband away?

"Ugly." she commented coldly. "What a waste of time. I can't believe I had wasted my precious time to confirm the hearsay. Let's go."

She peered at me from head to toe and scoffed in disdain. Immediately, she turned around as if she merely turned in the wrong direction.

'Ah????' I blinked, confused at her sudden shift of mood. Tilting my head to the side as I gazed at her back.

'What childish things to say, but it seems it made her happy?' I wondered. Was insulting me made her happy? She obviously came with bearing that malicious aura, but was now walking back in high-spirits.

'Well, if that made her happy and left me alone, I guess that's alright?'

Chapter 144 - Cheap Mercy

"Your highness, are you alright?" The head maid inquired worriedly. "Her royal highness didn't mean it."

She consoled. I furrowed my brows as I glanced at her.

Didn't she know my origins? That didn't even prick my heart. I lived my life living humbly. Insults like that? I'm immune. It was honestly cute of her.

"It's alright." I waved and shifted my gaze back to the wife number two's back. "Do you know her name?"

I inquired mindlessly. I already knew their status, but not their name. Although I had no problem naming them by numbers.

"How dare I speak the name of her royal highness?"

"Oh..." I nodded in understanding. "Nevermind then." I would just call them wife number one and two.

But honestly, her hair color was very pleasant in the eye. Every time she took a step, her rich, dark plum hair bounced, waving from side to side along with the wind.

Aside from her oozing, arrogant attitude, she's truly a beauty. What a waste... I didn't know why I thought so, but that's what my instincts told me.

Before I retract my gaze away from the retreating second wife, something caught my interest. Just as wife number two turned to leave, wife number one appeared!

'Ohho... I wonder how they will act in front of each other?' I wondered, paying attention to their gestures.

From a bystander's point of view, they didn't seem to have a good relationship. Although they were sisters, they're both married to the same man. What did I expect?

Wife number two seemed a little agitated, while wife number one was just chuckling. Although, the latter's cunning smirk was would easily put someone in a foul mood.

I watched the two of them exchange 'pleasant' greetings until wife number two stormed away. I wondered what they talked about?

Before I could feign ignorant, wife number one caught my gaze.

"Ahem!" I cleared my throat, avoiding her cunning gaze immediately.

Why were they here one after another? Were they that excited to see the mortal who bewitched their brother?

I dragged my feet back to the sit. Wife number one was walking at a snail's pace. I would just stand when she came in.

Soon, I sensed wife number one trudged inside the gazebo. When she did, I turned my head in her direction and stood up. The maids who were bringing tea and snacks were standing behind her.

"Greetings, your royal highness." I greeted, doing a small curtsy.

"Raise your head." She ordered in the same pristine tone.

As instructed, I raised my head and faced her. She gazed at me from head to toe. Unlike how number two gazed at me, number one smiled and nodding in satisfaction.

"Serve us tea." She waved and walked towards the seat across from the spot where I perched.

I remained standing on my spot. Upon noticing I wasn't moving, she chuckled.

"Sit, my sister-in-law." She beckoned, extending her arm towards the seat across from her.

"Yes." Again, I followed her instruction and sat down.

With both of us seated, the maids prepared the table. Setting up sweets and tea in silence.

The air between us felt awkward and nerve-wracking. I was fortunate that wife number two only said a few snide comments and left.

But a tea with the first wife? Who also asked me to sleep with her last night? I didn't know what to feel or her intentions.

Once the maid was done, her royal highness across from me offered a smile. I smiled back, albeit awkwardly.

"Be at ease. I do bite, but not to others prey." She humored, chuckling as she picked up the cup of tea.

"Heh... that's very reassuring, your royal highness."

"Haha!"

I'm not lying, though. For some reason, I found her words a little more reassuring. Perhaps because I felt she meant it?

"I only came here because I know my sister will come see you. I'm worried." She said, after taking a sip.

"Thank you...?" I didn't know how to respond to her. Hence, I expressed my little appreciation.

To ease myself, I picked up my cup of tea. Slowly, I moved it in front of my lips.

But I stopped as I raised my gaze at her. Why was she staring at me like that?

Despite my suspicious gaze, she only smiled until her eyes squinted in a curve line. Her smile was beautiful, but somehow it made me feel restless.

I glanced at the tea on my cup, sniffing its aroma discreetly. It exuded a unique aroma, but still smelled pleasant.

'Is this poisoned? But this tea came from the same teapot.' I wondered.

Still, I shrugged my thoughts. I didn't think I'd die in poison here. That's not their style. It'd be more realistic to say they'd rather cut me limb by limb.

Hence, with that thought in mind, I took a sip. Just a paltry amount of it caused my entire face to distort.

Bitter. Too bitter.

"This tea is diluted blood processed meticulously so it can be drunk as a tea. It seems it's not to your liking." She giggled.

I immediately placed the cup back on the saucer. Did she say it was blood? Even if it was diluted, it turned my stomach upside down.

"Who served her this tea knowing this child is a mortal?" As I swallowed down the bitter aftertaste, wife number one inquired.

Her sudden, cold, intimidating tone sent a shiver down my spine. Slowly, I raised my gaze and set it on her.

She's scanning everyone. In my eyes, she seemed displeased. And yet, she made me drink it despite knowing what kind of tea it was.

"If no one confessed, bite all your tongues off right now."

"What --!" I froze and gasped.

My eyes slowly widened as I shifted it to the maids bowing outside the gazebo. Did I really hear her correctly?

The maids outside gazed at each other. To my surprise, they all pushed the maid who served the tea.

"Your royal highness! I'm innocent! I merely served the tea!"

"Hmmm." Number one twirled her hair with her forefinger. "What punishment should we give on this maid?"

She asked, casting me a look. I flinched upon catching her gaze.

"Pardon?"

"My sister sent you this tea to tease you. However, it's your lady-in-waiting and servant's duty to check everything before it goes to you. Since this tea is not for a mortal that can enjoy, punishment should be done, right?" She explained with a smile.

"Wha..."

"My sister-in-law, don't even consider on bringing up any cheap mercy. That is, if you want to survive this place until your groom arrives."

Chapter 145 - Mercy Is Free, But Never Cheap.

Cheap mercy? The knot in my stomach tightened. Hah...

"Bring her to my garden." She sighed and waved her hand. "And leave us."

"Your royal highness! I swear I —" For reasons unknown, the servant who merely served us tea cried for mercy. Alas, the other maid servants dragged her away.

I watched how they dragged her as she struggled, crying her royal highness' name as if asking her to let her live.

My complexion grew paler. It seemed her royal highness garden wasn't the garden I was thinking of.

When we're the only ones left in the gazebo, her royal highness let out a deep sigh. She shook her head lightly, setting her crimson eyes on me.

"It seems you have something to say." She said calmly. "You don't have to hold it in."

"I dare no —"

"That's an order." She smiled as she held her cup of tea. "You don't have to worry about offending me. I'm not as shallow as Cassara."

Cassara? So, that's the name of the second wife.

"Uhm..." I briefly glanced at the lake to ease my heart. I'm conflicted whether wife number one was a friend or a foe.

Cassara had revealed her disliking towards me. Hence, it was easier to know she just hated my existence. But with this woman before me, I didn't know her intentions.

"Hmm?" she hummed, raising her brows as she gulped down the tea.

"I just... I may sound rude, but I beg to disagree with your royal highness." I gazed down, almost bowing.

"Oh? About?" Her brows arched, intrigue on what I was talking about.

Since she ordered me to speak my mind, I had to. I just had to be careful not to offend her too much.

"Mercy is never cheap, your royal highness. It is free, but never cheap."

"Oh?"

"I think mercy is costly to the giver. Just like love and forgiveness, they are free, but I don't think they are cheap. After all, love comes with pain; forgiveness might come with betrayal disappointment. I may be wrong on this, but I want to believe mercy can uproot evil." I explained.

It surprised me how I expressed my thoughts calmly. But perhaps it was because I didn't feel danger from her? Or maybe it was because I had always believed in it?

Either way, that was my opinion. I raised my gaze to her.

Wife number one was staring at me, barely blinking. I wondered what she was thinking. Did she find my words offensive? Well, I sounded like I was... lecturing her.

Oh... my goodness!

"I didn't mean to sound rude, your royal highness." I bowed, wide eyes upon my realization.

"Silvia." she said in the same calm tone. "You can call me Silvia, my sister-in-law, and raise your head. I told you, didn't I? I'm not as shallow as Cassara."

Slowly, I raised my head. As soon as my eyes landed on her, she offered a subtle smile before sipping on her tea.

I pursed my lips in a thin line. Part of me was a little confused by her kindness, honestly. Moments ago, she punished a servant whose only fault was serving me the wrong tea.

But now, she was acting magnanimous and immaculate. Just which side was the real Silvia?

"How foolish." Silvia whispered, shaking her head while sighing. "You remind me of her."

"Pardon?"

"My big sister. Your words somehow reminded me of her." A bitter glint flickered across her crimson eyes.

It was brief, but I caught it. Her big sister?

"Your royal highness, who..." I trailed off as she corrected.

"Silvia."

My goodness wife number one. Was it really alright to call you by your name?

"Uhm..." I cleared my throat, forcing myself to utter her name with great difficulty.

"Si — si... vi...a"

"Pfft—!"

'I'm trying, even though I'm not mentally prepared. Please don't make fun of me.' My face blank as I watched her laugh.

But seeing her laugh, although it was a little repressed, softened my heart. For me, Silvia always had her guard up. So, seeing her smile was akin to a breath of fresh air.

Now that I thought about it, I remembered Sam's words: multiple truths. I had asked myself previously, which side of Silvia was the real her?

My answer was both. Both sides were her. I still don't trust her, though. But somehow, I sort of like her too.

"Just call me Silvia once you're ready." She cleared her throat as she smiled at me.

"Yes, your royal highness."

"*sigh* what will you do if I'm not here?" Again, Silvia sighed as she looked at me in pity.

Mind my own business, I guess? She'd get mad if I said that, right?

"Aside from my primary reason, I really came here because you worry me. I could instantly tell how naive and foolish you are last night. Someone like you won't survive this hell if you remain the same."

I pursed my lips in a thin line. Am I foolish and naive? I'm aware of the truth; no matter how I thought I changed after Sam came into my life, it was not enough.

Back in Grimsbanne, I kept the compassionate Lilou despite living differently. Sam never wanted to change me, which I'm always thankful for.

But in here, everything was just different. It felt like the air I breathed in was a constant reminder for me to be careful.

At the back of my head, I'm also uncertain how long I would last. No one had mentioned Sam, and I didn't know what he was doing.

"My big sister... she is just like you. Compassionate and merciful, but she's dead now."

I froze as soon as I heard her last remarks. Her older sister? For a princess to die... what were the chances I would survive?

My eagerness to escape suddenly soared.

"That's why I'm telling you, set aside or hide your beliefs, morals, compassion, and human decency. Those don't work here. Think about this: would you rather be tormented in hell, or the other way around?"

Chapter 146 - The Uncrowned King

Suffer or be the one who'd cause someone's suffering. My heart instantly fell to my stomach.

"If you want to survive in here, you have to be... wise. Since you're already here, think like one of us. If you do, there is a higher chance you'd do well."

Ridiculous. Was what I wanted to say. However, deep down, I knew I was the one being ridiculous. No matter how difficult it was for me to comprehend her intention, she was helping me.

"I don't know what Hell is thinking for not preparing you for this. He's not always as impulsive as this, but I can't believe he didn't thoroughly explain what kind of hell this place is." Silvia snapped her tongue as she shook her head lightly.

"He should've known that the second he took you in, all eyes are diverted to you. Unless he didn't really love you and merely using you for a diversion, then, it makes more sense."

I hung my head low, staring at my hands. What was she rambling about? Diversion? What did she know?

But despite the heaviness in my heart, I kept my mouth shut. If her plan was to put a wedge between me and Sam, she would fail.

Everything between Sam and I were genuine. His loving gaze, his affectionate touches, those sweet words, and his heart-warming presence... they're all real.

Silvia didn't know that.

Still, the thought of it still lingered in my head. I knew I shouldn't be listening to her words. But... I could not help it.

"Sister-in-law."

"Why?" I asked, as I slowly raised my gaze at her. "Why are you telling me this?"

Every breath I took suffocated my lungs. I concealed the pain of having such thoughts, but struggled.

"Why... Sam... he wants nothing from here. We just want peace. He didn't intend on doing anything. We just want to get married and yet, everyone hates him." Before I knew it, words recklessly slipped past my lips.

It was too late when I realized it. "Just... why?"

Silence enveloped us. Silvia studied my expression for a long time, tapping her finger against the table.

"Why?" A faint scoff escaped her lips. "This is ridiculous to the extent I want to laugh out loud. Didn't he tell you? That in this kingdom, there are two kings." Her expression solemn and so were her words.

The whistle of the wind caressed my ears. What did she say?

"My brother who is also my husband is one who had the title. I don't know if you already heard how he ascended the throne — hearing your lack of information. But to keep it short, he coveted a seat that wasn't his." Silvia's eyes glinted, drawing me in a discussion which forced my emotions out of it.

For a moment, I instinctively set aside my emotions. Furrowing my brows as I listened to her. My hands on my skirt tightened.

"Our kind has surrounded you for months. Did you think vampires just mindlessly follow orders like mortals do? It is possible in another kingdom reigned by humans. But the Heart's Kingdom is different."

Silvia paused as she leaned back. Her eyes fixed on me, never leaving my gaze.

"We might've followed the norms from other kingdoms; tea parties, banquets, land titles... but that was all for entertainment. They don't matter if we follow the hierarchy of blood for the throne. Nobles and inferior vampires might've followed the law and the will of the current king until now. But, Hell's awakening and recent actions incited hope for those who advocate to follow tradition."

I listened to her words carefully, afraid I would miss the slightest details. However, it just confused me even more.

"Right now, you might think there's only one ruler of this kingdom. You're wrong." Silvia carefully raised her hand as she propped her jaw.

"From hundreds of years ago until now, there were already two kings in this land. One is seated on the throne, while the other... was asleep."

I froze as her words registered inside my head. Two kings...? One was sitting on the throne. While the other was sleeping.

My lips parted, but words clogged in my throat. Sam mentioned nothing about this.

"You're right. That other one is the uncrowned king, your groom, Samael Vaughnn Caecilius La Crox."

"..." My ears flapped. I blinked many times, tilting my head to the side.

Was she referring to someone else? Were my first thoughts. If she didn't mention Samael, I would've assumed it was someone else.

"Pfft—! Hell doesn't like his name. He always uses his first name and takes out the rest. So, only a few really know his full name." Silvia explained, taking notice of my abrupt bafflement.

"Back to what I am saying, you're in a very dangerous position. People who think the current king should remain on the throne will use you against Hell. Those who were eager to make Hell King, regardless if you want it or not, will kill you first if they see your existence a nuisance."

My heart instantly pounded against my chest. Even my breath hitched.

These people... they wouldn't leave us alone, would they? Those who see Sam's existence as a threat and those people who wanted to sit him on the throne.

Did they ever consider Sam's opinion? It was not their life. So, how could they...

I gritted my teeth as my heart clenched. My hands clasping my skirt trembled.

No wonder Sam left this kingdom. This place was suffocatingly annoying.

Deep within, I think I understood the reason Sam slept for hundreds of years. He was not only running away from this place. Sam... he was running away from himself.

My blood boiled with everything Silvia spoke. I flinched as I snapped back to my senses when she added.

"Hold it in." She said. I slowly shot my gaze at her.

Silvia was staring at me intensely. Her eyes exuded encouragement as she nodded ever so slowly.

"Whatever you see and hear in here, hold it in if necessary. Be the most heartless villain if necessary. Be smart deciding when and when not to look away. If you want to live and be help of my brother, I ask you; live, survive, and win."

Her eyes glistened with determination. Seeing the flickering emotions in her eyes somehow made my shoulders eased.

"Why, Sivi?" I pursed my lips for naturally cutting her name. But I resumed. "Why do you sound like you're on Sam's side?"

Silvia just faintly smiled as her eyes softened. Slowly, she shifted her gaze away and set them on the still lake.

"Because he... Hell is my king."

Chapter 147 - Banquet In Four Days

"Because, he... Hell is my king."

Again, a soft swoosh of wind whispered in my ears. Silence.

For reasons unknown, I couldn't bring myself to speak. Sam? Her king?

What none sense.

"Don't misunderstand. I see Hell as my big brother, but also my king. My blood chose him and I like someone else. It just so happens that we favor the same man."

"How can you say that when you're married to the king?" I blurted out in disbelief.

I didn't think. It was just as if right now, I couldn't control my tongue from what and what not to say.

It may sound strange, but how could she say that? I would understand if she would tell me we'd end up as enemies in the end. However, she was openly saying she'd betray her other brother, who was also her husband?

Did she think I would applaud? How could I trust someone who could do that?

"I'm married to my brother, yes. However, do you think there's love in this marriage? How naive." Silvia snorted as she gazed back at me.

"My brother married me and Cassara because we didn't want to get married off. The Heart's Kingdom might be different; it may be our little playground, but we still need diplomatic relation from other reliable kingdoms."

Then, the more reason I shouldn't trust you... were the words I held back to speak. If Silvia and Cassara only married the king to avoid such situation, shouldn't they feel a little grateful?

But that was not for me to judge. I knew that.

It was just that, if they could do this to someone they should be grateful for, they could do worse. They could do worse to Sam, who was being forced to take the throne.

I'm glad she told me to hold it in. Because right now, that's what I am doing. But this awful and upsetting feeling stuck in my throat won't go down easily.

Nevertheless, I would hold it in until I get the hell out of here. This place... these people... they were all sick.

They turned my stomach upside down. I felt sorry for Sam to be born in this kind of environment.

It was worse than I thought. With people thinking, Sam's life was theirs to operate. It made my blood boil.

"You might not trust me, but I'm doing this because of Hell. I want him to be happy and put things back to their rightful place." Silvia let out a deep exhale.

I remained quiet. All the information she told, I'm grateful for it. I think it was enough motivation for me to survive in this damn place.

For now, I had to set aside this fury within me. I had to survive this place. Hence, even though I didn't trust Silvia, it seemed she wouldn't harm me... just yet.

"Anyway, this is an invitation to you." Silvia slid an envelope towards me. "Countess Thornhart is holding a banquet for her daughter's coming of age. It will be good for you to come."

I gazed at the invitation without saying a word. Pursing my lips as I looked up.

Silvia furrowed her brows before narrowing her eyes. After a minute of silence, a brief chuckle left her lips.

"Really..." she muttered, massaging her temples. "... you're never been into one?"

I shook my head. Was attending to such was a necessity? Sam was never invited into one. Well, even when he was, he wouldn't go.

"Hell..." Silvia let out a frustrated sigh. "... what was he thinking? Did he think monopolizing you is enough?"

"Pardon?"

Silvia placed her curled finger before her lips; the back of her thumb against her chin. She gazed at me solemnly, as if thinking deeply.

What did she mean by Sam monopolizing me? She should know her brother more. Sam was not the person who enjoyed those banquets.

Even when Sam awoke from his long slumber, he said it was too loud. There was a banquet for him at that time.

"I've decided, I'll go."

"What?"

"I'll accompany you to the banquet. Although I already planned to come." She paused and pointed at me. I flinched when her finger pointed at me.

"But now, I planned to come as your partner."

"Partner...?" I mumbled, furrowing my brows.

"The banquet is in four days. I will send you someone who will teach you how to dance and things you should know." Silvia informed me.

Yet, I barely understood her determination. I knew banquets, but I've been never into one. Thus, the lack of information about things I needed to know.

Silvia then went on and on about what to expect. She gleefully told me bits and pieces of everything; from who to be wary about and individuals who I should impress.

I just hoped my memory could remember all of it.

When Silvia was about to leave, I perked up and blurted out. "Sivi."

She stopped and turned her head to me. Silvia said nothing, but smiled kindly.

"Uhm... is the banquet... a banquet for vampires only?" I asked out of curiosity.

"Oh..." Her eyes briefly dilated. The side of her lips slowly curled into a smirk.

"Yes."

Was she planning to serve me as the main course? I'm glad I didn't forget to ask.

"Haha! Oh dear. Fret not. They won't dare sink their fangs into my partner." Silvia reassured with a subtle smile.

"I see..." I gazed down. Somehow, I felt Silvia had another plan.

"Sister-in-law." To my surprise, Silvia was already standing beside me. I nearly flinched before I looked up at her.

Silvia was smiling. She slowly raised her hand and caressed my cheek.

I gulped down a mouthful of saliva. This was the second time she looked at me as if she was staring at her child. Still, her loving touch sent a shiver down my spine.

"Your words remind me of my big sister. But your face..." she trailed off as her eyes softened.

Again, what was that bitterness in her eyes? I ended up staring back at her, barely blinking.

"Sivi..." I whispered unknowingly.

"How adorable." She smiled, pleased at how I addressed her. "I'll see you in four days. Avoid Cassara at all costs. If she came to see you, tell me, alright?"

I only pursed my lips and nodded. Her smile grew brighter.

"Good girl." And off she goes.

Chapter 148 - Ninth Prince

When I was left alone in the gazebo, a sigh slipped past my lips. I didn't expect Silvia to say all that.

It was too abrupt that it I didn't get the luxury to gather my thoughts. All I did was to hold it in.

Fortunately, I had felt this same anger before, back in Cunningham. Hence, I didn't explode from it.

"How can a big place feel so suffocating?" I murmured, propping my jaw against the bottom of my palm, staring at the lake.

Slowly, I gazed down on my other hand, which was holding the invitation for the banquet. It was my first time to receive such an invitation, I should feel honored.

However, I felt more restless, bothered. Something inside me was telling me not to go.

'Do I have a choice, though?' I wondered internally. Obviously, Silvia didn't give me a room to refuse.

Instead, she proposed she would be my partner. Perhaps it wouldn't be that bad if she's with me.

"Four days..." I whispered, shifting my gaze back to the still lake.

From Cunningham to the Capital, if I remembered correctly, that was enough for Sam to arrive here. I wanted to see him so badly.

But now that I thought about it, how come I arrived here so fast? Did it even take a day? Or... was I asleep for days before I woke up?

If it's the former, I could just think they used a special trick or a secret route. If it was the latter... why was Sam not here yet?

My heart throbbed anxiously just thinking about it. I had too much to think about, on top of the words that Silvia told me.

I still had a myriad of questions in my head. Things escalated too quickly that my thoughts were all over the place. Not to mention my emotions.

I wanted to ask if a war about to break out soon? Why was Silvia so calm, despite knowing Sam and the king were about to face an inevitable power struggle? Did she hear anything from Sam? Who was the man last night? Why were their hair had different colors?

Above all, why Sam? Of all the royalty, why Sam?

So many questions but very little answer. The only consolation in here was, some answers were given.

Such as, this entire ordeal from hundreds of years was not entirely because of hatred. It was all about greed and obsession: they would use anything at their disposal.

I wondered if the king knew about this? If so, shouldn't he see those who wanted to depose him a threat instead of Sam?

"Sivi said something about her blood choosing Sam..." I murmured, frowning.

Vampires were different. My opinions differed from them. Because the blood running through their veins was different from mine.

It was hard to relate to them because of it. No matter how I tried to see their perspective in their shoes, it made little sense to me.

"Didn't I really know about this?" I wondered as my eyes drooped. "At the back of my head, I already expected it."

That was right. From the very beginning, Sam always hinted me that accepting him would put me in constant danger.

At that time, I didn't really think about it. I didn't know the extent of danger as I lived my life surviving day by day.

Yet, I've lived peacefully until now. Despite what happened in Cunningham months ago, I still considered my days peaceful.

But now that I'm on my own, I realized how naive I was.

"Be it in Grimsbanne, Whistlebird, and Cunningham, I had nothing to worry about that much because Sam dealt with it. Without telling me, he had shielded the innocence and my slight positive outlook in life." I murmured, along with a deep sigh.

Sam barely informed me what he had done in Grimsbanne after he woke up. In Whistlebird, I witnessed that gruesome massacre in the Remington.

Did Sam had done the same in Grimsbanne while I was peacefully sleeping at night?

My jaw tightened as I clenched my teeth. My shoulders tensed as the knot in my stomach contracted.

The only reason I had that peace was because Sam dirtied his hands with their blood. Even when I wanted to blame him for doing so, I couldn't bring myself to.

Sam didn't tell me about it for my own good. I should be grateful.

'So, I will protect what you had protected as well.' I whispered internally. 'To do that, I had to change to survive in this place.'

Just like what Silvia told me, if I wanted to survive, I had to think like one of them. Know when and when not to look away.

Could I do it?

I sighed at the thought. Initially, I didn't think I could. But after gathering my thoughts, I didn't have a choice.

It's not a matter of whether I could do it. I just had to.

Sam had protected me. So, I had to protect what he had protected. Let that naive and simple-minded Lilou to sleep peacefully.

I nodded encouragingly. That was right. I had to decide now and act accordingly. This time, I had to apply everything that Fabian and Rufus taught me.

"I wonder what Sam is doing, though?" I murmured as the mild breeze brushed past me.

*

I spent a very long time in the garden before I returned to my chambers. The servants had assisted me back in silence.

As we marched through the hallway, I halted. My gaze landed on a man's figure leaning against the wall ahead.

'Who is he?' I wondered, studying his side profile.

His dark and long plum hair tied down, fleek brows, straight nose, and naturally contoured cheek. I would mistake him as a lady if he was in his dress.

He's gorgeous.

'But... he looks like...' I trailed off as I pondered who it reminded me. 'Plum hair... ohh! The wife number two!'

Right. Cassara and that man over there resembled each other. The only difference was the aura they exuded. Cassara had this arrogant air around her, but that man had a more repressed aura.

'But what was he doing there?' I wondered. He wasn't there to see me, right? Did Cassara tell him I bullied her?

Just then, the man moved his head in my direction. As soon as he did, our eyes met. I flinched that instant. Deep azure eyes.

"Let's go back to the garden." I muttered immediately and turned around.

My time with Silvia was enough for today. No more royalty, please! Can they introduce themselves one at a time?

"Wait." When I heard him, I gritted my teeth in distress.

I let out a faint sigh as I turned around. The maidservants immediately bowed and greeted.

"Greetings to the ninth prince."

"Greetings, your highness." I greeted with a curtsy. Just how many brothers and sisters Sam had?

When I raised my head, the ninth prince was staring at me from head to toe. What did he want?

"Your highness?" I called out, raising my brows as he just remained silent.

He blinked upon hearing me. He then glanced at the maidservants.

"Leave us for a moment. I want to talk to her." He ordered.

Yet, the servants didn't move a muscle. I glanced at them.

Were they waiting for my approval? The head maid glanced up, and I nodded lightly.

Upon doing so, they walked back in a distance. Their distance wasn't far, nor they were near.

I then moved my gaze to the ninth prince, who was staring at the servants. Momentarily, I noticed the murderous glint flickered across his eyes.

"You're fast to take them in your side." He muttered, staring at the servants.

Huh? What did I do?

Slowly, he set his eyes on me. I linked my hands in front of my abdomen, biting my tongue as I stared back.

Although I could feel his enmity towards me, I didn't it was to the extent he wanted me dead. Just what does this ninth prince want?

"Later..." He muttered, making me raise my brows.

What about later? I tilted my head to the side.

"You will dine with us." He informed me, staring at me straight in the eyes. "Kill yourself before supper."

With that being said, the ninth prince turned around and walked away.

Wow... what a jerk. A male version of Cassara, indeed. I wanted to clap with amusement.

Chapter 149 - Get Lost

Once I returned to my quarters, my nose scrunched up. Only the head maid came in with me.

Silvia only told me to avoid Cassara. She didn't mention there was a male version of her!

I stomped my way to the settee and plopped down. Crossing my arms as I scoffed.

How could he casually ask someone to do suicide? It was as if he was merely asking someone to sleep!

Goodness... he somehow aggravated me. A deep sigh slipped past my lips. If he asked me that before, I would probably just ask him to kill me.

However, those silly thoughts had long left my system. I asked Sam many times to kill me in the past, that even I gave up on the thought.

"Do you want me to bring you tea, Miss?" The head maid inquired, standing not far away from the side of the settee.

Slowly, I gazed at her. "What is your name?"

"Countess Mildred of the house of Soulton, your high — Miss. I'm your head lady-in-waiting."

A noble woman? Right... Fabian told me about it before. However, why would I need one if I'm not a royalty? Did she come to watch my every movement?

"Lady Soulton,"

"Mildred, Miss." She corrected, just before I could even start speaking. "Her royal highness had requested me to look after you."

Even though she only said those words, I grasped her other intentions. Silvia sent her to me as a reminder of all her advice to me.

"Alright, Mildred. Please bring me some tea. You know my preferences." I nodded and waved.

"Yes." With that being said, Mildred left almost soundlessly.

In this place, I had to see myself above others. It disgusts me, honestly.

I massaged my temple as I closed my eyes. How could a lowborn like me talk down to people?

My lady-in-waiting was a countess. And yet, she was receiving orders from me. Silvia was treating me kindly because of Sam. The question was, until when?

If she was a member of a faction who supported Sam, then that only meant she would kill me once she found my existence a nuisance. That was why she had told me all that, right?

Not to mention Cassara and the ninth prince. Their attitude towards me was because they obviously dislike me.

I wonder how many more of them I would have to meet? They're all unreasonable in their unique ways. Twisted, if I may add.

"But perhaps, I am managing because Sam was more or less like that at first." I sighed once again. "I will have to dine with them later, right?"

I wondered what kind of dinner would it be? Slowly, I opened my eyes as I imagined how the dinner would look like.

My face twitched. They wouldn't serve raw meats, right?

Just the thought of it sent a shiver down my spine. Was that the reason the ninth prince told me to kill myself before then?

"How I wish Sam will just barge in here." I murmured, gazing at the window with that wishful thinking.

But nothing.

"Do I really want him to come right now, though?" I whispered, without looking away.

Of course, I'd be happy if Sam suddenly barged in that window. I'd probably cry in happiness.

However, deep within, I actually believed it was better that he wasn't here. Why? After knowing his real ground in the capital, I wanted him to prepare.

'I can survive here... I have to. So, Sam, I hope you wouldn't do something so reckless.' I prayed internally, hoping for his safety.

Knowing Sam, he had a tendency to act out of impulse. But there were times he would take a step back to see the bigger picture.

Right now, I was hoping he was doing the latter. I could wait for him whilst treading carefully for my survival.

"I can wait." I whispered. "My love."

*

Soon, Mildred came in and served me tea. Since I didn't have any scheduled activity for today, I stayed in my quarters until it was time for supper.

Just as the ninth prince said, a word came to me, inviting me to dinner. Mildred assisted me to the grand dining hall. I merely glanced at the beauty of the palace.

When we arrived, there were already a few people present. The ninth prince was already in here as well — and a few unfamiliar faces.

"Take a seat, Miss." Mildred beckoned, dragging an empty chair.

I perched down without a word. Right now, there were only six people around the long table. My seat was three chairs away from the head seat on its right.

Across from me, there were three empty seats. The ninth prince was sitting on the fourth seat. I said nothing as I scanned the rest. All of them were staring at me with different emotions in their eyes: some bore contempt, others in amusement.

Our distance was three or four empty seats. So it was easier to count. Right now, there were four princes and two princess. If I included myself, there would be seven of us in total.

I gazed down, letting them drill a hole in my head with just their gazes. I wondered where was Silvia? Would she join here?

It would be better if she'd be here. I didn't care about Cassara. Her male version is already here. And his gaze already made a hole from my forehead to the back of my head.

This was the best time to eat a lot to ease my stress. But I don't think it was possible in here. I didn't even have any idea what they would serve us.

"I told you, didn't I?" Suddenly, I heard the ninth prince spew nonsense. "Why are you here?"

'Hold it in, Lilou. Hold it in.' I advised internally as I raised my head.

The side of my lips turned up into a smile, mimicking Fabian's bright smile. Am I doing it correct? I didn't know.

I thought if I mimicked Fabian's expression, I'd last long. Before I knew it, I overdid it and spoke my thoughts aloud.

"Get lost."

"..."

Chapter 150 - Yulis And Dominique

"Get lost." I blurted out with a smile.

When I realized what I said, it was already too late. However, I had to keep this smile until the end, right?

My teacher, my butler, why must you teach me such impudence? Your student needed lashes for using your teaching and wisdom so thoughtlessly.

I wept internally, bidding my farewell in the world. Silence dawned in the entire dining hall.

The ninth prince's expression grew more glum. Just by his gaze, I could feel his desire to strangle me. I wondered how many times he had murdered me in his head.

"Pfft—! Wahaha!" A loud laugh resonated across the entire dining hall, followed by clapping.

"Yulis, she told you to get lost! Ahah! Ahhh..."

To my surprised, that man who was laughing suddenly appeared to my side. I nearly jolted, but my reaction lagged.

"... that's funny."

For a moment, my breath hitched. I've told myself many times to survive. But my action and words were driving me to my death.

"Sister-in-law, how can you be so heartless to our little brother? Since you're marrying Hell and we'll be family, can't you be gentle?" He said as he took the seat next to me.

Slowly, I moved my gaze at him. Up close, he had this natural ruffian vibe with his unruly turfs of black ebony hair that faded in color at its tip. Eyes of bright jade met mine without shying away.

The corner of his lips hooked into a mischievous smirk. Unexpectedly, he stretched his arms towards me, offering his hand.

"Seventh prince, Dominique Zayn La Crox."

"Oh..." I darted my gaze to his hand to him. He wiggled his fingers, pointing it by his chin, gesturing me to take it.

Without thinking twice, I took his hand tightly. He grinned upon my grip.

"Please don't break my fingers, sister."

"My apologies." My shoulders tensed as I loosened my grip. Forgetting to introduce my name — a habit of being an insignificant peasant.

Not long after, I attempted to withdraw my hand. Alas, Dominique tightened his grip, but not tight enough to bring pain.

My ears perked up as I gazed at him. Why wouldn't he let go? Just that alone alarmed me. I tried to pull my hand away, but to no avail.

"Please to meet you, sister." Dominique smirked, holding my hand, guiding it to his lips. His gaze remained on me.

Before his lips could land on the back of my hand, something flew towards Dominique. In an instant, Dominique drew his head back.

Everything happened in a blink of an eye. I didn't even know what happened. Blinking, turning my head in the direction where that object went.

There, on the wall, a silver knife embedded in the wall. My eyes slowly went wide in shock.

That knife wasn't aimed at me, but at Dominique. Was it to stop him? But who would dare...?

"Now, now, Yul." Dominique's voice snapped me back to the current lapse.

I pulled my hand away, taking advantage of his loosened grip. I felt Dominique's glance, but he said nothing about it. Instead, he leaned in, his eyes fixed on Yulis, the ninth prince.

"Aren't you a little rude, my little brother?"

Suddenly, the atmosphere thickened as Yulis and Dominique glared daggers at each other. I glanced at the rest around the table. They had this amused smirk on their faces, as if they were looking forward to the outcome.

'They don't plan to stop them?' I gulped at the thought.

Well, if they fought, I'll just sneak out, right? I'll just eat in my room in peace — I would eat twice as much as I could. Just in case it would be my last meal.

"You're welcome, Dom." Yulis sneered, his eyes glinting dangerously. "Hell will, no. You will... break your own fingers just to appease him. You know he hates when others touch what's his."

"Ohh... Yul. Hell hasn't come. And yet, you're already showing favors? Aren't you afraid of His Majesty?"

"Hah..." Yulis chuckled. The sneer on his lips grew more wicked.

So this was what it looked for having two kings. How tricky and dangerous. It felt like they could kill each other right here and then.

'Where's the food?' This was too stressful.

"Family dinners are always so lively, isn't it?" Suddenly, I heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing Silvia.

Instinctively, I turned my head in her direction. As soon as I did, I met her gaze, and she offered me a brief smile.

Silvia gracefully pranced her way to the first seat on the left of the empty head seat. All her movements exuded elegance and grace. She's truly beautiful.

Once she was seated, she darted her eyes from Yulis to Dominique.

"Although I am eager to see Dom and Yul fight, mind your manners. It's Lilou's first attendance at our family dinner. I don't want her to have a poor impression of our family." Silvia smiled.

She's sparkling.

But, what was she talking about? Poor impression? Wasn't that a bit late to consider?

But Silvia's words were effective enough. The two said nothing anymore, and silence ensued once again.

How long would we wait? There were still many empty seats around the table. Were we going to wait until everyone would come?

"Please serve the dinner. The king will not attend." Silvia lifted her hand as she ordered.

My brows raised, blinking. I moved my eyes around. So, we're only waiting for Silvia? Well, it was better to have fewer people around.

It would be too overwhelming if all the seats were filled. Without Sam, I didn't think I am mentally prepared to meet everyone in one go.

Soon, the servants served all the foods prepared. A total banquet! Although I had been eating a lot, the food served in here looked more elegant and generous. Also, they were not raw!

'I think the royal family eats a lot, huh?' I nodded in understanding.

Once everything was served, I reached for the cutlery. However, I stopped as I raised my gaze. All of them were staring at me.

'What?' My brows twitched.

"Don't mind us, my little sister. We just want to see you eat." Silvia smiled, nodding reassuringly.

How could I not? You're all staring at me as if I'm the dinner all along?

"Sivi..." I murmured, pursing my lips. "Do you plan to fatten me so you can eat me?"

"Sivi?" Dominique raised a brow.

"What a dumb girl." Yulis commented as he clicked his tongue.

What was dumb about asking honestly? It reminded me of Sam's words in the past.

"Isn't she adorable, Yul?" Silvia chuckled. "No. You're my baby sister. We're just curious to see how you eat! The House of Remington told us you have a big appetite!"

"..." Upon hearing her last remarks, my memory took me back to that meal with the Remington.

"Heh..." they stressed me that time. Although the level of stress I'm experiencing was too much to express by words.