

# The Duke's Passion

## Chapter 16 - Lilou's Bravado

As usual, the day has passed faster than I could grasp the time. I felt that ever since Samael came into my life, fate itself had been toying with me.

In retrospect, I often wished the day would end so I could rest. But now, the world revolved faster than ever before I could realize it; it was time for me to go home.

For two days in a row, I've been finding myself staring at the road going up to the hill. The route leading to the shack I lived.

"Whether or not I would return, nothing will change." I mumbled, clenching my hand tightly.

"I just hope he hasn't returned yet."

I added, letting out a heavy sigh. After that, I forced a step forward and dragged my feet back to my shack.

For two days in a row, I've never returned home feeling this low. I've been used to forcing myself to walk home despite my exhaustion.

But I had a different reason now.

As I made my way back, even I felt the route seemed shorter. Soon, I reached the top of the hill faster than I could.

To my surprised, what welcomed me at the top of the hill was something I didn't expect to see.

Knights with their dignified demeanor, not wearing their heavy armors scattered around the hill. Some were feeding their horses, while others were building a proper stable for them.

There were logs and other materials for creating a proper house. However, I couldn't understand what they were thinking to establish in the location where my shack stood for years.

I watched everyone moved around, doing their duties with little talk. I felt like I went in the wrong way and ended up in construction site.

Alas, my shack was still over there.

Just as I was watching them with discretion, my shoulders instantly froze.

"You," I heard the acting duke's call from behind me.

Slowly, I pivoted on my heel and faced him. Without a second hesitation, I dropped to my knees and my forehead slightly hit the ground.

"Why are you kneeling?" He asked bearing that same flat tone.

"This peasant pays respect to the acting duke." I exclaimed, trying to sound polite despite how I raised my voice to give myself a boost of courage.

"Even if you're a peasant now, you'll be the Duchess of Grimsbanne. Therefore, kneeling before someone could leave a strain to his lordship's position."

Rufus explained flatly, and I felt his words were akin to heavy rocks on my shoulders.

Future Duchess? Even the acting duke fell for that Duke's lies.

"I dare not have such ambition, Sir." I replied through my gritted teeth.

How could the acting duke fall for such lies? Peasant were illiterate. How could he even consider me being a duchess who had proper noble duties to fulfill?

"I am aware. A peasant shan't even dream. Just the thought of coveting something more than you can is punishable by death."

Abiding by his character, Rufus agreed as he slapped me with the reality I've known for a long time.

As I listened to him, I could not help but clasp my hands tightly. Rufus was one of the example of how nobles look down on peasants like me.

"However, once His Lordship set his mind into something... or to someone, it must happen. No matter how ridiculous it was and how it could put his position in peril."

Rufus added, and I remained silent.

If not for the Duke's lies, I'm certain this acting duke wouldn't hold back. I could only think of the worst outcome if it weren't for Samael's indirect protection.

"I'm merely making myself clear. You must conduct yourself as a proper human, at the very least. Rise and never kneel before anyone."

He ordered, and I never felt this fury within me. I'm used to being looked down, receiving harsh criticism from nobles, and being maltreated like an animal.

I've grown numb with the nobles whims.

However, his last remarks truly hit a nerve. Conduct myself as a proper human being?

Hah!

Slowly, as instructed, I raised my head and escorted myself up. When I was back on my feet, I faced Rufus, raising my chin while clenching my fist.

"I may be a peasant, but I've lived my days within humane morals, Sir." Out of overwhelming emotions, I spat my words firmly.

Even I was surprised at my bravery. But I've had enough of people constantly judging us by our upbringing and status.

"If you've constantly gone out and see the world outside, you may have seen the irony of this world, Sir."

Upon saying my piece, I did a neck bow and turned my back against him. My situation had granted me the life of a man ready for an execution.

Hence, I didn't care if defending myself would be punishable by death. Nobles? Huh, don't make me laugh.

Nobles only wanted their best interest. Meanwhile, peasants like me do everything to survive.

But, since our resources were limited, we'd been abiding by those who were in power. Some peasant may be driven mad and committed crimes, but that just spoke volume of how rotten this world had become.

I walked away without looking back. I need to keep this bravado until the end.

"Nobles... they're all the same." I whispered under my breath as I passed by the busy knights and headed straight to my shack.

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"If you've constantly gone out and see the world outside, you may have seen the irony of this world, Sir."

When Lilou spat her words and stormed away, it rendered Rufus speechless. He watched her leave, his eyes fastened with obvious fascination.

"Pfft—! Isn't she a little savage, Rufus?"

Suddenly, Samael's voice reached Rufus. The latter slowly turned his attention to him; raising his head and his eyes immediately spotted Samael sitting on the thick branch of the tree.

"Your Grace, how could you fancy such an ill-mannered peasant? Is this another rebellious act against the monarchy?" Rufus asked.

The fascination in Rufus' eyes immediately faded. His tone remained the same as before.

"Rebellious act?" Samael repeated, chuckling faintly. "You of all people, should know I could tear that man sitting on the throne apart and hang his head in the middle of the Capital if I feel like it."

Samael smirked, his eyes glinting with malice. Rufus remained silent, pressing his lips into a thin line.

"You better be at ease, Rufus. Those nobles whims you've endured during my slumber are over. They've become far too spoiled and abused our people."

"Your Grace, the palace favored those nobles. We can't..."

Rufus' words trailed off as soon as he witnessed Samael's nonchalance. The former's eyes glinted with resolve, doing a neck bow.

"Your brother, the King, favored those nobles. However, Grimsbanne is the land you governed, Your Grace. Tell me which noble shall we start and we'll get them executed immediately."

"Haha! Rufus, you're no fun." Samael chuckled, shaking his head lightly.

Samael then jumped off from the tree branch, landing on the ground safely.

"Where is the Rufus I've known before my sleep?"

Samael smirked, placing his hand over Rufus' stiff shoulder. He cast Rufus a knowing look as his smirk grew wider.

"Putting them in a death row instantly is far too boring, right?"