

# The Duke's Passion

## Chapter 19 - Off To The Duke's Mansion

"Yes," I said, and the knight nodded before leaving the shack.

Still keeping the forced smile on my lips, I looked around my small shack.

This shack had witnessed the love between my mother and father. It witnessed everything about my life, and thinking of leaving made my heart beat dramatically.

Who knows? I might not come back here again.

As I've said, I was not born stupid. I may not know everything, but going to the Duke's Mansion, I know leaving that place was impossible.

I am not a noble lady who got an invitation in the mansion yearly. Only that time of the year someone could come and leave the mansion freely.

Everyone knew no one could approach the mansion, even nobles during normal days. It was forbidden that even us peasants knew about.

"A proper date?" I muttered, shaking my head as I didn't want to think about it.

His Lordship must have a different meaning. I'm not as innocent as what Samael thought.

I understood some of his remarks. However, I've forbidden myself from hopping into unnecessary conclusion.

Dreaming about something was already being ambitious and greedy for peasants. To keep myself sane until this point, I had to deny what seemed pleasant to avoid clinging to false hope.

You're protecting everyone, Lilou. I convinced myself, comforting the uneasiness in my heart.

After taking deep breaths, I looked outside. I clenched my hands tightly, before loosening my grip.

"I've accepted my fate. There's no going back." I whispered before taking a step forward.

Each time my sole touched the crisp and damp grass, it echoed right in front of my ears. The golden rays from the sunset illuminating straight in this hill brightened as I exited my home.

The knights outside already finished preparing and were ready to set off with their horses. Moving my gaze around, I bit my lower lip as some knights had their eyes on me.

"Peasant, do you know how to ride a horse?" asked Darius, holding the rope attached around the horse's neck.

"No, sir." I respond, shaking my head lightly.

Riding horses in this era was common for only a selected class. It was beyond our reach to ride or learn how to ride one since it was unnecessary.

Not to mention, we had a cart to use whenever we need to deliver and sell goods in the major towns. Hence, it would be more odd if I know how to ride one.

What does the acting duke expect?

Since I had a poor impression on the acting Duke, I could not help but criticize him in my mind. It was quite a stupid question for someone who exalted himself.

"Obviously. Men, some of you return to the manor while some will escort us along the way." Still using his cold and flat tone, Rufus glanced at the few knights and gave out his orders.

"We didn't bring a carriage with us today. Hence, ride on Bella."

Rufus added, tugging the rope around the horse's neck named Bella. What a pretty name for a horse.

"I can just walk, sir." With a polite bow, I stated.

Walking would take me forever to reach the Duke's Mansion. But I'm used to it.

"That's obvious. Don't misunderstand. I'm letting you ride on Bella's back, not because I want to. His Lordship ordered us to escort you to the mansion safely."

Rufus coldly explained, sounding displeased at my indirect rejection. I might have hurt his pride unintentionally.

Since I figured Rufus' mind wouldn't change as he was merely following orders, I did another neck bow. I haven't ridden a horse, but I've been wanting to mount one.

Hence, it wasn't so bad to experience riding a horse for once. They said riding a fast horse was akin to flying in the wind.

I've been wanting to experience that kind of freedom.

"Come," After a moment, Rufus invited as he faced Bella the Horse.

I trudged forward, keeping a safe distance from Bella and Rufus. As I watched Rufus caressed Bella and patted it lightly, he cast me a side eye before arching his brow.

"Can you ride a horse from that distance?" He asked, annoyed as always.

Well, who knows? I haven't ridden one. I answered internally, but from the outside, I just pursed my lips.

"The sun is about to set. Come and I'll help you ride Bella."

With the same attitude, Rufus ordered coldly. I just briefly raised my brows and came closer to him.

"Stand on its left, then place your hands over here." When I got closer, Rufus instructed me while pointing to the area where I should stand and hold.

I listened carefully, following his instruction as I got into the position. As instructed, I placed my left foot on the stirrup.

From the count of three, I stepped up with the help of Rufus. Swinging my right leg over Bella's rump, being careful not to accidentally kick the horse.

Rufus repeatedly told me to be careful and not hurt Bella. Fortunately, I didn't.

Soon, I sat on the saddle. Just mounting the horse was a little hassle. But now that I've already mounted one, there's this sparkle of excitement bubbling in my stomach.

"Stay still no matter what," Rufus ordered, and I nodded.

Rufus then adjusted my foot on the stirrup. I slightly flinched when he held my ankle and adjusted its position in the stirrup.

"You don't have a proper boots for riding," As he adjusted my foot, he spoke.

Unconsciously, I curled my dirty toes upon hearing his remarks.

"Nevermind. Hold still as we're leaving." Rufus said, shifting his attention to the knights.

Rufus then ordered the knights who were left behind with us. After their short briefing, we set off.

I was riding the horse, while Rufus was holding its reins while walking ahead. Not just him, but all knights escorting us weren't riding their horses.

They were walking, holding the reins in silence. I looked around and thought they could've ridden their mounts since the horses' back were vacant.

I understand Rufus wouldn't share a horse with me since I'm a peasant. Coming close to me could already taint his expensive clothes.

"Uhm..." As the sound of the horse and the knight's footsteps mixed in the air, I bit my lower lips while constantly glancing at Rufus' back.

"Sir?" I called out, but Rufus didn't turn around nor halted.

With him feigning deaf, the question lingering at the tip of my tongue rolled back. I didn't need to ask, as it seemed the acting lord wouldn't answer me, anyway.

"The knights weren't riding their horses simply because I'm not riding one. And before you hop into your silly conclusions, I'm not riding with you, not because I didn't want to."

Just when I refrained myself from asking, Rufus suddenly spoke without looking back at me. I pursed my lips tightly, clearing my throat as I felt guilty for hopping into a conclusion.

"His Grace warned me not to ride with you. I'm simply fulfilling my duties."

"His Grace?" I furrowed my brows, tilting my head to the side as I wondered why Samael would order such a thing.