

# The Duke's Passion

## Chapter 20 - Stranger In The Mirror

We traveled in silence. Neither Rufus nor the knights had spoken a word throughout our journey. Regarding their silence, I stopped asking question and kept my queries to myself.

Soon, we finally made it in the Duke's Mansion. As we came close to the hill where the mansion stood, its glory amazed me.

In my entire life, I've never come close to this mansion. I only looked at it from afar. But now that it's right in front of me, I distinguished how huge and large it was.

Unconsciously, I was gripping my hands tightly. The closer we get to the towering gates, the more my heart pounded.

When we passed by the gates, I heard my heart sinking. Entering this mansion diminish the hope of ever leaving the manor.

I'd be either be dead or live here until his lordship devour me. But that's alright, Lilou. Everyone in the field would be safe.

At the very least, your death had done something good for others. This reasoning had been my comfort, thinking my death would save the lives of my loved ones.

"My Lady," Rufus called sternly, extending his arm as he offered his hand to me.

How he addressed me made me feel awkward. I discerned he was merely trying to be polite. Although he didn't need to speak as if I was a lady with a title.

Hesitant, I reached for his helping hand. However, I noticed how dirty my hands and nails compare to his.

Thus, I retrieved my hand and held it closer to my chest. I glanced at Rufus, whose brows arched upon seeing my retreating hand.

"I've held countless severed heads and slew enemies without a second hesitation. Believe me, if I say my hands were dirtier than yours."

Rufus said, guessing my concern, which was amusing. I pursed my lips in a thin line, taking a breath of courage, and accepted his hand.

Fortunately, he didn't misunderstand my action. It would be a problem if he concluded otherwise.

With the help of Rufus, I dismounted from the horse. After that, Rufus led me towards the front door of the mansion.

Biting my lower lip, I knew I couldn't return. I couldn't look back and change my mind.

I took a deep breath as the two closed door creaked open. My heart instantly enveloped with fear at the creepy sound it produced.

The second it opened, a butler and a few maid servants were lining up from the red carpet. As soon as it opened, they all placed their palms on their chest and bowed.

"Welcome to the Duke's humble abode." The butler who seemed younger than the duke and Rufus welcomed us politely.

Instinctively, I glanced at Rufus. Rufus was staring at the servants ahead. He trudged inside without a word and paid no heed to the butler and maid servant.

What about me? I wondered. Why was Rufus leaving me here?

Conflicted, I hung my head low while holding my hand together.

"I'll be in your care."

I blurted out, believing I'll be a recruit in this mansion. What else could I do in here but be a maidservant and a human meal?

"My Lady, I, Fabian, the head butler of the duke's mansion will be in your service. Our Lordship had instructed us to take care of My Lady. We had prepared everything. If you please, follow me." The young butler beckoned the way.

I furrowed my brows and followed him timidly. I didn't understand the formality of the butler. Perhaps, as a butler, anyone who came here would be treated politely?

I threw my confusion at the back of my head. Instead, I followed him and I could not help but travel my gaze around.

The entrance of the mansion was already too large, with a chandelier sparkling lights; meticulously and well-maintained furnitures, and the generous numbers of candelabra lighting each corner of the mansion.

Was this the palace? I wondered.

I've never been in such a place before. Hence, in my eyes, this mansion was too elegant. I wonder if the palace could top the elegance of the duke's mansion?

If so, the duke was right when he said my imagination was far too limited. I could not imagine how mesmerizing the architecture of the palace.

As Fabian led the way, he continued on speaking. I tried to pay attention, knowing it was crucial for a new servant like me.

However, I was too drawn in looking around and how this mansion appeared like it was still daytime! I only needed and used one lamp to lighten up my shack, and I was already happy.

And yet, this mansion was using more than that? Surely, the nobles lived the life peasants could not even imagine.

Amid my thought, I sensed Fabian stopped in his tracks. Instinctively, I stopped and watched him slowly face me.

I raised my brows, blinking my eyes in puzzlement as he sported a kind smile.

"My Lady, the maidservants had prepared your bath and your attire for tonight's date." Fabian uttered, holding his arm towards the door on our right.

Unknowingly, I tilted my head to the side. A bath and attire?

I could barely recall the last time I bathed in the river. Yet, they wanted me to bathe? Here? In the duke's mansion?

Well, perhaps it was normal for the maids and butlers to keep themselves clean to serve the duke?

I nodded in understanding and waited for Fabian to do the honor of opening the door. I didn't want him to misunderstand, I just felt like tainting everything if I touched anything in this manor.

"This is as far as I can take you, My Lady. The Duke specified to keep my distance or I'll have to dig my own grave tonight." Still with the kind smile, Fabian informed.

"Oh," I nodded slowly, mortified at how Fabian remained calm despite the threats from the duke.

Just how unreasonable could he be?

I took a step forward, glancing at Fabian awkwardly. He beamed at me with a smile upon noticing my constant gazes.

"I will..." I didn't finish what I wanted to say, forgetting what it was initially.

Reluctantly, I placed my hands on the surface of the door. With a nod, I pushed it open.

To my surprised, a bright marbled floor graced my eyes. A tub in the middle, another small chandelier hanging on the high ceiling and candelabras attached on the walls.

There were a two maid servants inside, checking the water temperature and the room. Upon hearing the door opened, the two maidservants halted and faced us with a deep bow.

"My Lady is in your hands. Finish the preparation before the duke arrives." Fabian ordered with the same calm and polite tone.

"Yes, Mister Fabian." The maids answered in unison.

"My Lady, if you may." One maid servant approached me and beckoned me to enter.

Everything had confused me until this point. I glanced at Fabian as I entered, and he just offered me a smile and gestured me to enter.

Soon, the door closed behind me and the maidservant had asked for my permission to take my clothes off.

Surprised, I held my arms in a protective stance in front of my chest.

"I can bath myself!"

I exclaimed, casting them an eye full of suspicion. The more they treated me as if I was a distinguish guest bewildered me.

"But, My Lady, they tasked us to bathe and dress you." One maid explained politely, keeping a safe distance.

I studied the two servants' figure in silence. Did the duke threatened them as well?

"If we failed to service you, we would dig our own graves tonight, My Lady." One of them explained.

I knew it. I ground my teeth before biting my bottom lip.

"Alright," I replied, feeling apologetic, for they could lose their lives if I caused trouble for them.

The maid servants helped me undress. At first, I felt awkward standing bare before these two pairs of eyes. However, they didn't seem they truly care watching my bare body.

Therefore, I started easing up. My dress was mostly loose and could be easily undone.

It only took us a short while until I was fully bare. First, they washed my hands. The water felt warm and refreshing in the skin.

I've watched as the dirt on my hands comes off. I've rarely seen my hands clean before. Unconsciously, a subtle smile resurfaced on my lips.

After cleaning my hands and feet and wiped the dirt on my body, they told me to go inside the tub. I was hesitant, slightly nervous at bathing in the tub.

"Are you sure I can...?" Conflicted as I looked at the clean water in the tub, I glanced at the maid.

"Certainly, My Lady." She answered with a kind smile.

I took a deep breath. These servants must think I was silly to be hesitant to bathe. Well, I've only heard nobles having such luxury.

Do I deserve such luxury?

I bit my lower lip at the question in my head.

"Yes," I whispered under my breath.

Slowly, I tiptoed my way inside the tub. As soon as my toe touched the warm water, my heart pounded with excitement.

I smiled as I dipped my feet in the tub and then the other. Standing in the tub, I glanced at the maids and smiled brightly.

Seeing the smile on my face, they returned it with a kind smile. I felt at peace; not a terrible experience before dying.

I slowly lowered my body until the warmth of the water embrace my bare body. It was relaxing and phenomenal.

My eyes welled up as I laughed briefly. I washed my shoulders, restraining myself from crying and laughing.

The duke... he was a true sadist. He wanted me to experience the best in life, but the consequences of it restrained me from completely feeling the joy in life.

"My Lady, are you alright?" the maid worriedly asked.

"Yes," I replied, staring at the ripples on the water surface. "I should be."

I bitterly added. I splashed water on my face, waking up myself that I should at least enjoy myself before I'd die.

The servants scrubbed every corner of my body. I've never felt this refreshed as the dirt stuck on my skin for a long time came off.

I felt like a new person.

After bathing me, the servant didn't dawdle around and helped me get dressed. Unlike the worn-out clothes I've worn, they dressed me in this lavish dress of red and gold.

With a tight corset, setting my waist smaller and my bosom higher. They moved swiftly and even praised how my figure was too thin that it was easy to tighten the corset.

When they were done dressing me and arranging my hair, I looked at the stranger staring back at me in the mirror.

"Who... is she?" I muttered, blinking ever so slowly as I couldn't recognize myself.

The dirt on my face was gone. My skin looked pale and I've never known I had faint freckles on my face.

Slowly, I reached for my face. My face was small, and I've never realized I had a pointy nose.

It was as if I've met myself for the first time. I've seen myself through the reflection of the water, but never this clear.

With the clothes I'm wearing, I've nearly mistaken myself as one of the noble ladies. How odd.

"His Lordship summons you to his study, My Lady." After a while, the maid servant informed.

"Mhm," I hummed a low tune, still staring at myself for the last time.