

# The Duke 201

Chapter 201 - Wife, Don't Sleep On Me.\*\*

[WARNING: MATURE CONTENT. PLEASE PROCEED WITH CAUTION.]

"A match made in hell, indeed."

Something in his sinister tone made me shudder, but I stomped the sense of dread that crawled up my spine. Just a little pain, I told myself. His gaze alarming me.

'But not too much, alright?' I added hastily as I bit my lower lip. Sam didn't answer and only smiled.

My heart sank as I felt that smiled looked so ominous. But when he started moving, I was surprised. Gentle. Not disconcerting. I felt my nipples rise, knowing what he was doing.

He was slowly, gently, and considerably thrusting it in. First, shallow, and it slowly went further in. He hissed as he gripped my waist.

There was a slight pain at first, but pleasure soon came after. It washed down everything as my mind focused solely on our entwined body; our flesh came into one. The wall stroked my back. I nearly fused with it as he picked up his rhythm, and the faint sound of the back of my head hitting the wall drifted in my ears.

I felt no discomfort as he pressed his body against mine, sinking deeper. All I could feel was how he continued to grow bigger and harder inside me... even so, my greediness wanted more of him.

I tugged him closer, wrapping my legs even tighter. "Sam, I'm —" I couldn't finish my sentence as I gritted my teeth, sweet spasm. It felt incredible, twitching around him as I embraced him. But he only slowed down.

My body felt weak at the incredible release I hadn't felt in a while. "Sam," I whispered in relief and blinked.

When I opened my eyes, I felt the softness of the bed on my back. His eyes hovering menacingly over me, tilting his head with a face of misplaced wonder. I reached my hand to him, smiling at his dangerous allure.

'That felt great,' I said internally, satisfied.

The smile on his face didn't reach his eyes. I jerked slightly when he suddenly moved his hips, making me realized he hadn't pulled out.

"My wife, you don't sleep on me," he warned in a low tone. "The night is still young." and the sense of dread suddenly came back, creeping up in my spine as his grin grew sinister.

"The night is still..." the rest of my words disappeared into my mouth as he bent over, his weight over mine. His firm chest against mine, moving his hips as his hand squeezed my thigh up.

With us laying down, the bed started creaking along with our constant moans and grunts. I never understood a vampire's lust until this night. Sam didn't let me sleep, although we took constant breaks.

He would constantly flash me a sly and unyielding smile. My heart warmed up when he was being considerate. My heart fluttered whenever his fingers slipping through the gaps of mine, and how he whispered my name.

But there was a secret I didn't tell him. I couldn't get enough of him to the point I didn't want to sleep. I didn't want it to end. Even when I felt sore and tired, I loved the ache. I didn't tell him I wanted him in me all the time.

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"Mhm," I moaned as I opened my eyes, attempting to stretch my sore arms. A frown immediately took over my face as I groggily looked to my side.

Sam was lying on his side, his knuckles propped his temple, smiling. "Good morning," he greeted, making me chuckle as I pulled up the sheet.

"Good evening, love," I corrected, closing my eyes and opening them languidly. My body felt sore, but thanks to my training, I could move. Who would've thought it'd help me in this area as well?

"Damn it... I don't want to go see those fools and just stay with you tonight again." He clicked his tongue, annoyed, but it made me giggle. "You understand, correct? The thirst and hunger."

"What time are we going to the gathering?" I asked, ignoring his question. I'm certain he asked that question just to have a reason we skip tonight. It was my first appearance in the 'gatherings' he had been attending since the case about the undead was passed to him.

The expression on his face instantly died down. "The sun just set, so you can rest more," still, he answered with disinterest.

I stared at him and smiled. He and I slept hours before noon. Now that I thought about it, Lena didn't come this morning. Sam must've instructed her not to come.

"So," I snapped back from my trance when he spoke. "How was your first night with your husband?" he inquired, with eyes glinting with pride.

Should I tease him? I wondered, just so I could see how his smug grin disappears from his face. However, if I did, he surely wouldn't let me rest again. We might end up not going, so I sigh inwardly.

'Opportunity, I bid you farewell,' I said internally before I said, "Incredible." His expression looked strange as he narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "What sort of opportunity did you just bid farewell?" he asked, and I froze.

Right. He could hear my thoughts now since he drank my blood a couple of times last night. Now, I truly need to commend my body for surviving all that.

"Lilou."

"Husband." I crawled over to his side, squeezing myself into him. "My body aches everywhere, I think I need a hug," I said, melting into his firm chest as his warmth, although faint, was good enough for me to get by. Also, to dodge his question.

"My wife, you learn too quickly. However," he paused as he held my shoulder and pushed me a little. I instinctively averted my eyes to avoid his gaze. "It seems you don't want to leave this bed anymore."

The smile on his face sent a chill down my spine. I shuddered and panicked.

"My husband, quick! Morning — evening kiss!" I exclaimed with an awkward grin. I could tell he wasn't particularly pleased, but he still yielded. Bending down, and planted a kiss on my forehead.

## Chapter 202 - Hold Your Tongue

After an hour, Lena and Mildred came in and helped me get dressed not as the duchess of Grimsbanne, but as a member of the Divine Order. I was surprised at how prepared they were while Sam went out for some 'trivial' (his words) matters.

I glanced at Mildred, who was standing on the side, keeping herself silent while Lena tied my hair up. I didn't expect to see Mildred in here tonight, after what happened last night. Vampire genes were surely amazing, as they could recover from that overnight.

"Your highness, do you really have to join the Divine Order?" Lena inquired, pouting as she tied my hair. "I know the palace can be lonely, but it's much safer here."

The corner of my lips subtly hooked up. Lena's honesty was truly something else, but I felt sorry that I couldn't trust her completely as well. Although I didn't plan to harm her, as long as she didn't give me a reason, she'll be fine.

"Lena, do you have that little faith in me?" I frowned and glanced up to see her reflection in the mirror. "It's not like I'm joining the front line in a war. It's just a meeting."

"But, your highness, will you really be alright?" she asked worriedly, making me furrow my brows.

"Is there a reason I shouldn't?" Lena was a handwringer, but she wasn't particularly this worried. Now, it made me wonder where was her anxiousness coming from?

Lena only gazed down and shook her head dejectedly. This child... I knew she was hundred times older than me, but I could not help but think she was just a young girl.

"Don't worry," I said, turning around when she finished tying my hair. "My husband will be with me," but my reassurance seemed it didn't matter to her.

"Yes, your highness," she replied reluctantly, sporting a forced smile as she knew I wouldn't change my mind. I gazed at the door and cocked my head when I heard a knock and Fabian's voice.

"Your Grace, his grace asked me to fetch you," Fabian informed me after performing a bow. It had been a while since I've seen Fabian, so I felt relieved to see him back to his normal state again.

"I will be done shortly," I replied as I stood up. Fabian nodded with his usual smile plastered on his face. I didn't look at myself in the mirror anymore, but only checked Lakresha around my neck.

When I raised my gaze, I saw Fabian glanced in Mildred's direction and noticed how the latter stiffened. If this was before, I wouldn't understand that subtle gesture, but after staying here, I got accustomed to things, especially those silent threats. Still, I feigned ignorance as I cleared my throat.

"Done!" I grinned as I dusted off my legs. "Shall we?"

Fabian only smiled and bowed before he escorted me out. On our way, I glanced at Mildred and our eyes met. I didn't need words for her to understand my warning.

"Mister Fabian, have you cooled down now?" I asked, linking my hands behind me as I jogged closer to catch up to him.

He glanced back with a smile. "Yes, my lady. The gardening and the mountain of tasks left to me helped me to find inner peace."

"That's good, then." I nodded, gazing at his side profile. Although he seemed fine, I couldn't shrug my gut feeling that Fabian wasn't fully well, but I didn't want to pry. So, I followed him in silence until we arrived at the room where the gathering was being held.

Standing in front of the door, Fabian reached for the door handle but didn't open it as he gazed back at me. "My lady."

"Yes?" I raised my brows, forcing a smile as I tried to keep my racing heart at bay. Fabian just gazed at me, and the more we wait, the more my anxiety increased.

"Please, breathe, or you will suffocate." He advised, and I instinctively breathed out as I held my breath for far too long. "You don't have to be afraid, his grace and Sir Rufus will be inside with you."

"How about you?" I blurted out before biting my tongue. How could I forget? Fabian was a butler, although very capable!

Fabian let out a chuckle, it was cold, chilled to the bone. My eyes dilated as I instinctively gazed down.

"I will also be inside, Your Grace," he said, but it didn't feel reassuring. "Don't worry, it is just a simple gathering. We only discussed the important state of affairs, which always ends up without a proper conclusion. So, no pressure."

No pressure, but it sounded as if I should feel pressured. But instead of worrying, I mentally shook my head as I steeled my heart. Fabian waited for me to get a grip before he opened the door.

The chatterings immediately died down as Fabian and I entered the room. My eyes did a quick scan around the baroque style large meeting room; there wasn't any notable to see, with shelves filled with books, maps laid in the of the long table, and some documents.

"Your grace." I nearly jumped when Rufus approached from my side. I was too focused on keeping my exterior calm that his sudden approach shocked me.

"Sir Rufus," I called as I faced him with a subtle smile. "How are you?"

"I am alright," he answered, making my under eyes twitched. By his tone, he was definitely not alright! "His grace will arrive soon. He said you should feel comfortable, he is just dealing with impor — trivial matters and would soon come."

"We both know it's not trivial," I clicked his tongue and let out a deep sigh.

Rufus smiled and beckoned, "You should take a seat, your grace. They will be here soon."

"They?" I arched my brow as we walked towards a certain seat.

"His Grace and His Majesty," he answered, and I froze, and then he leaned in, whispering, "My lady, forgive me for I have to tell you this; hold your tongue once the meeting started."

I kept thinking about Rufus' advice, especially with the air of hostility I felt in other's gazes. However, I didn't expect that advice to also apply to everyone. Once the king and Sam arrived, everyone had taken their respected seats, and the meeting had started. No one spoke aside from the person who was briefing us on what matters we should discuss tonight.

My eyes kept scanning everyone. There were a few people I knew or was familiar with, aside from Sam, the other familiar faces around the table were Stefan, Dominique, and Wendell the twelfth prince from the La Crox family; Lord Noah Remington was also present. Rufus and Fabian weren't seated, but they were present and stood in the corner, along with other knights.

The atmosphere felt more stifling and different, as if a new side of what's truly going on within the palace walls forced its existence on me. I couldn't think that this place was just a luxurious asylum anymore, but more than that.

I glanced at Sam, who was beside me. He looked bored, as always. He was the only person who couldn't sit still. It didn't seem he was even listening, but who am I to talk. I could barely understand their arguments.

"If that is settled, let's hear Lord Samael's reports regarding the case of the Undead in Mithava," Stefan spoke and gestured his hand in Sam's direction. Naturally, everyone's attention would shift to my husband.

Sam arched his brow before he slowly leaned forward, resting his arms on the edge of the table. No one talked as we waited for what he had to say, while the person in question languidly drew circles on the table with his finger.

What was he doing? I wondered. Everyone was waiting for him to talk. I glanced at the people around the table, and it somehow made me proud. Although they all seemed hostile and distant towards Sam, I could see in their eyes that Sam's words were highly valued.

'Come to think of it, when Sam announced about our engagement, he carried himself with dignity.' I reminded myself, as that memory etched in the back of my head. Whenever I recalled it, I even wondered if I wasn't mistaken at that time, as Sam had always acted carefree.

After a long, dreading silence, Sam's languid voice shattered it. "Mithava," he said as he slowly raised his gaze and scanned everyone, "I was thinking about it, but then it occurred to me I'm not obliged to tell others." A smirk turned up on the corner of his lips.

I'm not even surprised to hear that from him. That was typical of him, although there's a little side of me, hoping he'd seriously take part in this gathering.

"I figured you'd say that," Stefan replied calmly. "That's why I sent everyone the reports given by Sir Rufus to them to review it. However, we should at least hear your opinion about the situation."

"You burned down Mithaya, leaving no evidence for others to investigate. We respect His Majesty's decision for entrusting this case to you and also out of respect. However, your actions until now..." One expressed their dismay, but I didn't want to hear the rest as they were all indirect slander towards my husband.

But did he say Sam burned down Mithaya? I pursed my lips in a thin line and glanced at Sam. Although it shouldn't be surprising, knowing my husband's character, there should be a reason.

"You've been abusing the excuse of following His Majesty's orders, but at the same time, your extreme measures only slower our investigation," another one commented in a much calmer tone, but I could tell he disliked Sam.

After that, one after another voice out their opinions, verbally attacking Sam. I remained silent and bit my tongue, having a feeling that keeping my silence was the best decision. Not just me, but Stefan kept silent as well. Meanwhile, their words didn't seem to faze him, as Sam's expression was dull.

"Enough," Stefan ordered when the tension in the air gradually grew heated. "Lord Samael is an important piece to solve this problem. His extreme measures are expected, but we can overlook them, as I'm certain he had reasons for that. I let you know about this matter not to chastise the Duke, but because I trust you and begged for your cooperation so we can send aid to His lordship in this matter."

My mouth nearly fell open as I stared at the king and his demeanor. He had always acted as a righteous man, but right now, he sounded more like a king. His words alone calmed the mood down as those who were complaining earlier only cleared their throat but said nothing further.

Stefan spoke again. "So, Lord Samael, will you share your opinion regarding the situation?" his eyes suddenly darkened as he added, "have they declared a war?" Stefan's tone was low and solemn, suspending the air momentarily.

A war? I froze as my heart dropped to my stomach. Was this case so serious it could lead to a war? I turned to Sam, holding my breath as his words could change everything from now on. Just how little did I know about the kingdom's current state of affairs?

Silence befell the entire room, but no one rushed Sam. He wouldn't be able to take his words back, that's why everyone just kept silent and patiently waited for some answers.

Sam hummed, breaking the silence as he leaned his back against the chair. "Here's what I think," he said, cocking his head as he traveled his eyes full of nonchalance around, "a war will be the least of your concern, as --" he was cut off and raised his gaze at the person who suddenly slammed his palm against the table.

"The least of our concern?! How is sending our people to their deaths, not our concern?!"

"Hold your tongue, Irvine, that is, if you value your pathetic life," Sam cautioned menacingly. "The biggest threat in this kingdom is not the ones eyeing to conquer this kingdom, but the one who desires its demise."

"What do you mean by that, Hell?" Stefan inquired with furrowed brows. Sam slowly shifted his gaze to Stefan after casting me a brief glance. He said, "It's not confirmed yet, but there's a high possibility and my gut feeling is saying that Alphonse, the second prince, is involved."

Silence. A dead silence befell the entire room as soon as he mentioned the second prince.

#### Chapter 204 - What Is This?

Alphonse, the second son of the late king. It was said that in terms of skills, strength, and intelligence, Alphonse had excelled among the La Crox brothers, — surpassing even the then-crown prince, Dyrroth. He was a perfect candidate as the heir to the throne with his innate talent.

However, there was only one thing that Alphonse lack, empathy. Although the members of the royal family grew up in a strict and deadly environment, a ruler still had the responsibility and carried the weight of the crown; one of them was to protect the lives of his subjects and this entire kingdom.

Although Alphonse and Sam's existence were an obvious threat in this kingdom, there was a fine difference between them. Sam was capable of bringing hell into this kingdom if so, he pleased, but he never had that intention. Alphonse, however, wanted nothing but this kingdom's downfall.

"Alphonse?" Stefan repeated, leaning in. "What makes you think the dead is involved in this?"

The dead? I bit my lower lip as I already heard about that, along with the brief biography of Alphonse last night. Sam kept speaking strangely formal, after all. So, I had asked him last night. However, Sam never said Alphonse was already dead.

"That is why I said I'm not sure, Stefan." Sam let out a deep exhale as he shrugged. "Alistair is not here, after all. Why don't you visit the north to appreciate its freezing climate? Or just summon him here?"

Again, silence, as if Sam just pressed a nerve. I had no idea what they were talking about, honestly. But what's certain for me was, the situation about the undead was more grave than I thought it was.

"Your Majesty, is Alistair not responding to your summon anymore?" Sam inquired and everything I could remember was the smothering silence until the meeting had ended without reaching a solid conclusion.

"Rufus will take you back." Sam leaned to my side. "I will have to have a private audience with His Majesty." He only needed to roll his eyes to show how reluctant he was to be with Stefan. However, that was to be expected.

"Join me for... lunch?" I said, confused about how I would address lunch because of the time difference. Sam just raised his brows and nodded before we both parted our ways.

I stared at Sam's back, who was talking away with Stefan, worried. "My lady." I jolted when Rufus' voice suddenly came to my side and I faced him. "Are you alright, your grace? You seem a little antsy," he asked.

That was because he was always taking me by surprise! I huffed and cleared my throat. I should keep my mind clear, as things were getting serious. My days of going back to Grimsbanne seemed a little farfetched at the moment with the current matters at hand.

"Don't worry about it," I said, and gave him a subtle smile. "I'm just a little overwhelmed and still in the process of taking everything in, but I'll be alright."

I stared at him for a while before he sighed and nodded in understanding. He said, "Alright, then."

"You're not being yourself, Sir Knight," I teased with a chuckle. "You'll be showing be the training grounds, correct?"

Rufus cleared his throat with his hand before his lips, summoning winter to take over him. "Yes, Your Grace. Since you're officially a part of this case, I have to show you around and brief you about our work."

"Lead the way, then."

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Rufus and I headed to the training grounds to show me around. Unlike the Avolire Palace, which had been peaceful especially during this time of the night, the main palace was rather... busy. Rufus showed me around, reminding me of which wing I should refrain from going to and the safe zones.

After going from different offices, with Rufus introducing me to certain individuals, we finally reached the training grounds. As expected, the training grounds weren't empty with knights' training and sparring.

"I didn't know vampires require training," I whispered as we stood from a distance, watching two knights sparring in the middle while others watched and cheered.

"An experienced human on the battlefield can defeat a vampire, your grace." I turned to Rufus when he answered, and then he added, "Vampires are born with extraordinary strength, but that didn't mean they were invincible."

I pursed my lips and fixed my eyes on the knights. "I always thought it's impossible for a human to overrun or overpower a vampire." My eyes softened as I recalled my mentality before. "But the more I spend time with Sam and the people around him, it only makes me realize how little I know in this world."

The corner of my lips curled into a subtle smile. Never in my life I had imagined myself standing here right now, watching the knights train and become a part of something important for the country. I was just a peasant who couldn't even dream, as I was busy just by surviving on a daily basis. Part of me felt this fear crawl up my spine, but it couldn't overwhelm the content in my heart.

"But that's just how it is, is it not, your grace?"

I faced Rufus and tilted my head to the side. "Huh?"

"No matter how long you live or try to figure the truth behind life, it will always make you feel how little we know about this world," he explained, and cast me a side glance. "Although I don't think it is a valid reason to just give up."

Rufus said those words with a straight face, but I couldn't help but think he was trying to comfort me. Did he think I was sad because of my remarks? I let out a chuckle, thinking he had misunderstood but I didn't want to point it out.

Instead, I decided to divert the subject and returned my gaze towards the knight. "By the way, Sir Knight, are you comfortable with your stay here?"

"I'm always with His Grace's side, but my brief stay in here is alright."

"I see." I nodded, biting my tongue. I wanted to ask him if he received prejudices from the knights as they were vampires and he was a human. Wait. I furrowed my brows as I turned to face him squarely once again.

"Sir knight, how did you become a knight if you're human?"

Rufus arched his brow as he gazed at me. He was staring at me with a poker face, but I could absolutely guess his dismay at my question. Did I really sound that stupid?

"Your grace, not all knights are vampires," he answered and my mouth fell open. I already guessed that, but all the knights I had encountered so far were vampires. "Although the majority of the



palace officers and knights are vampires, humans can also..." he trailed off as we both turned our attention to the voice, who suddenly chimed in.

"Exceptional, Sir Knight," Silvia smirked as she glanced at me. "Exceptional and talented humans who can par vampire's strength are always welcome to serve the monarch."

"Sivi!" I exclaimed, excited to see her. However, before I could rush to her, my brows furrowed while darting my eyes between Rufus and Sivi.

'What is this?' I wondered, as the air between them was a little odd.

## Chapter 205 - Invite You To My Bed

I was startled back to reality when Silvia suddenly came to my side. "Sister." I gazed up and smiled. "Sivi, why are you here?" I asked and my eyes fell on her armor attire, leaving me in awe.

"I came here to train," she answered with a light chuckle. "I heard you'll be joining the case about the undead, so I thought of visiting you."

"Sivi, is this why you've been busy?" I inquired, a little taken aback as I blinked cluelessly. That was quite surprising. Silvia had a fierce aura, but I didn't think I'd ever see her wearing light armor. She looked great!

Silvia chuckled once again, nodding. "I hope you understand I didn't mean to keep it from you."

"No, it's fine! I understand." My hand raised and shook, gesturing to her it wasn't a big deal. "I know there must be a reason, but Sivi, you look great even in armor!" I'm not lying. Silvia looked sophisticated in anything!

She chuckled before she raised a brow and set her eyes on Rufus. "Do you think so too, Sir Knight?"

My eyes went wide as my breath hitched. I slowly moved my eyes towards Rufus, but there was nothing in his eyes, the same straight expression as usual.

"Greetings to your royal highness." Rufus beckoned a neck bow, obviously dodging the question, but knowing Silvia, she wouldn't let him off. The memory of my first meeting with Silvia suddenly flashed across my mind, and I shivered.

"Please raise your head, Sir Knight." Silvia chuckled while Rufus raised his head, keeping his face emotionless. "If you want to formally greet me, I can invite you to my bed. I'll happily accept you," she added, teasing him, but to no avail.

"I do not dare, your royal highness. Please, refrain from speaking ambiguous words, people might misunderstand."

"But I don't mind if they misunderstand. Who would go against Sir Rufus, after all?" Silvia's lips stretched from ear to ear, forming into a sly smirk. "Isn't that right?"

Her teasing even made me a little flustered, but Rufus' face remained expressionless. Just what could faze this man? Rufus didn't answer anymore as he bowed.

"I will have to introduce the duchess to the members of the Order. I'm afraid we will have to excuse ourselves first, your royal highness," He said as he shifted his eyes on me and started walking past Silvia without looking back.

"Oh." I turned to Silvia and noticed the wrinkle of her smirk slightly faded. "Sivi, I'll see you later!" I said, reluctant to leave her, but she faced me and smiled. "See you," she said, and I nodded before jogging my way to catch up to Rufus.

Did I just imagine it? I looked back at Silvia, and she had already turned around. Why did I feel that, for a moment, Silvia looked so sad? It looked familiar... just like how she looked so sad the night of the banquet in the House of Thornhart. I shook my head and set my eyes ahead. I should ask her next time.

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"Sir Knight, what kind of people are the Bearers of the Divine Order?" I asked as we headed to another training ground for the bearers like me.

Rufus didn't cast me a glance as he answered, "Each bearer had a unique personality, your grace. Some may like or dislike you, but they won't hurt you."

"I know that, but I just thought of making a good impression." I frowned, sighing faintly. I'm not expecting everyone to like me, but I just thought leaving a good impression would be better.

"You married His lordship, your grace," Rufus said. "By now, after training with Lakresha, you should've understood that the Bearers will have this natural hostility towards His Grace."

I didn't respond anymore, as what he said was the truth. Lakresha had reacted strongly against Sam the first time, and I only tamed it recently. The weapons we carry would always react to individuals who could potentially harm the kingdom.

"I see." I nodded and let a sharp exhale. "It can't be helped, then. It's not that I'm taking part to make friends, I just want to help Sam, that's all." Also, I didn't want to part with him for too long.

Rufus glanced at me and smiled faintly. "You're stronger than before, your grace. You'll do just fine."

"Of course!" I confidently answer, but inside was a different story.

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In the king's office, Samael propped his side against the desk and crossed his arms. "Tell me, Your Majesty." His eyes fixed on Stefan's figure, who stood in front of the window with a silver cup full of wine in his hand.

"Your foresight is failing, isn't it?"

Stefan remained silent momentarily before his lips parted. "What will you gain if I tell you or not?"

"Don't use it if it's useless now." Samael shrugged nonchalantly. Vampire abilities often came in handy for them. However, the repercussions could also be dire. Wielding a failing ability would only put Stefan in danger and be a nuisance.

"Are you concerned?" Stefan snickered as he cocked his head in Samael's direction. The latter chuckled and shrugged.

"Maybe?"

Stefan shook his head and slowly faced him. "If you didn't deny it, it only means you're not." He nodded, walking towards the armchair and plopped down languidly. "So, do you think Alistair lied about Alphonse's death?" he asked, and glanced at Samael only to see him nodding.

"You can take my words with a grain of salt, but it's not impossible." Samael smacked his lips as he pulled away from the desk. "We all know Alphonse and what he is capable of. Anyway, I had to see my wife. She had probably met the other members of the Order."

Samael trudged towards the door as he already said everything he had to say to Stefan. When he reached the door, he halted upon hearing Stefan.

"I smelled her blood last night..." Slowly, Stefan set his eyes on Samael as the latter turned and faced him. "... will you really forget about her origins and our past?"

"I don't see any reason I shouldn't." Samael shrugged. "Her past doesn't matter to me, brother. And as long as you don't use the power of sire on her, I don't plan on breaking the truce."

"Do you love her?"

Samael didn't answer, unlike how quickly he replied in the first question. He knew the answer, but somehow, he couldn't say it with confidence.

"That's none of your concern, my brother." In the end, that's only the reply Samael could give him before leaving.

## Chapter 206 - Third Squadron

Time surely flies so fast and another month had passed since I became a member of the Divine Order. I could still remember the thick atmosphere filled with hostility from them during our first encounter, but it wasn't that bad now. I even made a few friends.

"Those damn bastards had been a pain in the neck!" Ramin croaked, slamming his palms on his desk, which startled me back to reality.

I raised my gaze and set them on the other desk across from me. Ramin seemed he woke up on the wrong side of the bed again, ruffling his hair that had a soft tone of copper in annoyance. He's not an early type of person, so I knew why he was throwing a huge fit the second he came.

As if he had noticed my dull gaze, he turned in my direction and stomped his way towards me. I drew away when he slammed his hand against my desk.

"You," he grumbled through his gritted teeth, and his barely trimmed side whiskers caught my eyes. "Can you control your husband?"

"He is only my husband when I'm home," I replied in a dull tone, blinking languidly. Did he think he's the only person who was tired from juggling between the desk and the fieldwork?

I thought being a member of the Divine Order was all about fighting, but I was wrong. On top of our intense training, we had to investigate some towns and areas and do the paper works and reports ourselves. We didn't need to do that if Rufus, who was leading this temporary third squadron, wasn't a sadist. Ramin should complain to Rufus and not to me! Even if he complained at Sam, I wouldn't say a word; I'd even root for him and reassure his survival.

"Tsk! What is the point of being a duchess if you can't even scold your people?" Ramin clicked his tongue in annoyance.

A sigh slipped past my lips as I shook my head. "Sir Rufus is our current commander, and as a member of the Order, how can I scold him? Aren't you a noble? Why don't you scold him yourself?"

"Ugh!" he grunted and ground his teeth. "Why am I being tortured in this place?" he grumbled dramatically as he walked back to his desk. All I could do was stare at his broad back and sigh.

Ramin was the type of person who was best at fieldwork. He stood out among us in terms of strength, so he tends to stay outdoors. Being assigned to the office tonight would make him feel a little stuffy, but there wasn't anyone who would stay behind as the other member of the Order were tasked to fieldwork this time.

"You should go to the training grounds to let off some steam," I advised, as my eyes fell on the stack of documents. I felt this faint helplessness in my heart, as it seemed there would be no end to this work. I raised my gaze when I heard the door suddenly being bust open and a cheeky voice of a woman came in.

"Lilou!" I sighed and glanced under the desk. Should I hide? I didn't have the energy to play with her.

"There you are!" she exclaimed after slamming my desk, making the documents flutter slightly. I lifted my eyes, seeing her bright grin, then to her pair of sparkling black eyes.

The corner of my lips curled into a weak smile. "Charlotte," I said as I dragged myself up. "You're early."

Charlotte, the bearer of Ursula, a wielder of the divine bow and arrow. With hair as dark as chocolate that fell short to her shoulder, she looked at me with those dark eyes brimming in excitement. She was the first person to approach me when I joined the Order, with the same genuine smile on her face.

A lively girl who seemed who got lost and got herself mixed in the chaos. However, one must not be deceived by her carefree appearance, as there was also a fierce side of her.

"Lilo —" Charlotte was abruptly cut off when another voice from behind hear resonated across the room. I moved my gaze, tilting my upper body to the side, and saw Kristina.

"Charlotte, it's too early for you to bother Lilou." Kristina placed her arm over Charlotte's shoulder, smiling at me.

In contrast to Charlotte's high energy and reckless nature, Kristina was the complete opposite. She was mature, considerate, and sometimes, frustratingly cunning.

"I just missed her since Ramin had been taking too much of her time!" Charlotte complained as she glared daggers at Ramin.

"You're accusing an innocent! Do you think I want to stay in this stuffy place?" Ramin rebutted, and the two of them engaged in a fierce battle of tongues.

This had been normal in our little squad, Ramin and Charlotte bantering at every turn, Kristina chuckling on the side, while I watched them. I had been seeing this scenario for the past month, but I still couldn't believe how my life changed.

Who would have thought the peasant who works in the field would be sitting in an office, watching my colleagues banter, while wearing a knight suit. It felt so... surreal.

My eyes snapped as Kristina knocked on the desk. I raised my gaze and met her kind crimson orbs. "You look a little tired," she said as her eyes scanned me briefly. "Why don't you take it easy? You just got married... or is His highness not treating you well?" She narrowed her eyes, and I chuckled. "Of course not," I replied, arranging the documents on my desk. "It's just that it's been so quiet these days I feel a little restless." I'm not lying, but that wasn't the real reason.

I had too many to think about, especially Sam. I had this gut feeling Sam knew something, yet he wasn't saying anything. Although our relationship was still a little complicated, I feel dizzy just thinking about it.

"That's right." Kristina nodded in agreement, crossing her arms and as she propped her side against the desk. "Anyway, why don't you take a stroll in the garden?"

I frowned and asked, "Can you see these?" pointing at the stack of documents on my desk.

Kristina smiled, "I'll do it for you." I attempted to refuse, but Kristina walked behind me, holding my shoulders up as she pushed me out of the office.

"Go now," she said, leaning against the jamb with her arms crossed.

I sighed. I couldn't win against her, could I? "Thank you," I expressed reluctantly and headed towards the garden behind the palace so I could breathe.

As soon as I reached the garden, I took a deep breath and closed my weary eyes. It was as if all the fatigue seeped deep into my bones. When the night breeze whispered in my ear, I carefully opened my eyes, only to see a familiar figure standing before me.

Stefan.

Our eyes met, and my heel instinctively took a turn. I felt like escaping, but I didn't want to meet him alone. It's been a peaceful month. Was this the reason I felt so restless? My breath hitched when he suddenly called my name, "Lilou." And I stopped.

"Will you walk with me for a moment?"

Chapter 207 - If I'm Not The King...

This was awkward. Why did I even agree to his invitation if I knew this would happen? A sigh slipped from my lips. I should excuse myself since he hadn't said a word from the beginning.

"I —"

"How are you faring?" he asked, cutting me off as if he knew what I would say. I glanced at him and my eyes instinctively averted in a different direction when I caught him looking at me.

"Good, Your Majesty." It was actually better until the moment he asked me for a stroll. I've only seen Stefan a few times in the past month, and all that was in the gathering Sam would constantly take me in.

At first, I didn't understand Sam's reasoning why he would take me to that gathering of the most important individuals in this kingdom. But I figured it was because he didn't want to explain it himself, or it was just too complicated if explained by words. Politics was too complex and everyone was ought to have a different opinion.

"Won't you ask me in return?" he asked in a light tone.

I bit my tongue before sporting a forced smile. "How about you, Your Majesty? How have you been?" I cast him a look and then looked ahead.

"If you put it that way, it sounds like I'm forcing you."

'Are you not?' was what I wanted to say, but held back. I remained silent as the rustle of the grass sounded a little crisp under our boots. Even though Sam guaranteed Stefan wouldn't use the power of sire on me again, there's still a lot of reason I'm hostile towards the king.

"Well, I suppose you're not interested," He said, nothing changed in his light tone. Was there something I should be interested in him? I glanced at him, but said nothing.

He then asked once again, "has Hell been good to you?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," I answered, moving my gaze down. "Although we've been both busy with our duties, he always spares some of his time with me." My eyes softened as I smiled subtly.

"I see," He said, nodding. "That's good to hear then."

His tone sounded light and distant, but something pricked my heart lightly. I'm quite familiar with this pain already, as this pain had been striking me ever since that wedding. I had a few conclusions, why, but I couldn't ask anyone aside from him.

Because I was sired to him, I wonder if the pain in my heart was his doing? Or am I just feeling the pain in his heart? Was it mine? Or his?

My steps grew slower until I was walking behind him. "Why?" I whispered, stopping in my tracks as I raised my head.

Stefan also stopped and slowly turned around to face me. He tilted his head, sporting a perplexed look on his face.

"Your Majesty, why does it sound like you care?" I asked, mustering a lifetime of courage to ask him this question. His eyes briefly dilated, stunned, as if he didn't expect such a foolish question.

I knew it was a foolish question. He aggravated me, or rather, his actions, his personality, and how he glossed his words with vagueness, annoyed me. But I couldn't bring myself to hate him completely. After all, there was this little part of me that believed he was doing everything for... me.

Stefan let out a low chuckle. "Do I?"

"Your Majesty, you told me you saved my life three times," I paused, fighting off the urge to tell him the term 'saved' was incorrect, but I had to stick with it. "First is when you abducted, rescued, me in Cunningham, and second is from Hanz. Did you count it incorrectly?"

Silence befell us, and I'm not even surprised. A faint sigh slipped past my lips as the whistle of the night breeze blew past us. This was... disappointing.

I cleared my throat and broke the silence. "It's about time I should return, Your Majesty. I had to excuse myself first," I said and beckoned a bow, turning around to leave.

"Lilou," he called, and I halted. "The ones you mentioned are the second and third."

Then, when was the first? I asked in my head, but words clogged in my throat.

"The first time..." He trailed off and as if he changed his mind, he asked, "Will you walk with me again to hear it?"

I scoffed, rolling my eyes as I faced him squarely. "I'm afraid —"

"Come here." My breath hitched as I gritted my teeth, balling my hand into a fist. This again. My feet moved on their own towards him and stopped three steps away from him.

"Your Majesty, didn't you promise not to use the power sire to my husband?" I queried through my gritted teeth, glaring daggers at him.

Stefan just stared at me, and I couldn't guess what was behind those eyes. "I did and by breaking that promise will render the agreement null and void."

"Why?" My voice shook. "Why would you go this far as to risk the lives of the many just to provoke my husband?" Had he lost his mind?

The only reason for this truce was the possibility of a war breaking out. But if he provoked Sam, not only the truce would be void, but this would also give the perfect chance for the enemies who lurked in the dark to attack. So why? Why would a king jeopardized this temporary peace and risk the kingdom after all the trouble he went through?

He raised his hand. "Why?" he asked. I wanted to take a step back, but couldn't, letting his hand cup my cheek. "Because I've been wondering, sweetheart, if I'm not the king, if I didn't care about the people, and if I live my life solely for myself, would I be happy?"

I felt a hand clench my heart. It was painful, so much so my lungs constricted.

Stefan slowly bent over, tilting his head as he added, "I just had to close this tiny gap, sweetheart, and everything is over."

Chapter 208 - Lexx

"I just had to close this tiny gap, sweetheart, and everything is over."

I held my breath as I watched him inch closer. My heart was thumping so loud it was painful. Why, Stefan? Why would you look at me with such desperation in your eyes? When I got a whiff of his breath, I snapped back to my senses and turned my head to the side.

What the hell was I thinking at that moment? He was too close and we could have... I panted for air in disbelief at myself.

He drew away. "Let's chat again some other time. Thank you for sharing your time with me." I jumped when he suddenly placed his hands on my shoulder, making me faced him.

"I apologize for startling you," He said, smiling weakly. "I had lost my senses in a brief second of fallacy. It won't happen again, I promise." His eyes locked with mine, closed-lipped.

"You also promised not to use the power of sire again," I mumbled sarcastically to myself and backed away. "Don't apologize, Your Majesty. It is I, who should apologize." I bowed lightly, keeping my head clear.

My eyes slowly raised and caught two large shadows approaching. My mind buzzed for a second, thinking what would these people think if they saw me and Stefan alone in the garden.

I snapped to my senses when a hand grabbed my waist and pulled me in a direction. "Light steps," He said, and I instinctively jogged lightly, making less noise as possible.

Wait. Why were we running away? I couldn't ask such a question as he suddenly pushed me behind a thick bush.

"Ah..." I winced, falling onto my knees and palm. If not for my training, I could've fallen face first and broke my nose.

When he said, "Stay there," I shot him a glare before I turned to look at who were the people coming. All I could see was the approaching shadows, but when I heard a familiar voice, I instinctively grabbed Stefan's hand and pulled him to hide.

He looked at me, stunned, but before he could ask what I was doing, I put my finger in front of my lips and shushed him. 'I swear I will snap your neck if you make a noise!' was what I wanted to tell him. Fortunately, Stefan seemed he understood me and just smiled.

'What were Rufus and Silvia doing here?' I wondered, dusting off my palms as I sat down, my back against the thick bush. I moved my gaze to Stefan, and he was just staring at me with a smile. He seemed strangely pleased, but I ignored it.

I didn't want Rufus and Silvia to see me with Stefan... but now that I thought about it, why did I pull Stefan when it was fine if it's just him? I winced once again as I realized I acted without thinking.

Should I tell him he could go now? I pinched the bridge of my nose in distress.

"This is far enough, your royal highness," Rufus uttered and the sounds of their footsteps came to a halt. "May I know what important matters we need to discuss that you led me in here?" His tone was colder than ever. Was he angry?

"Did you..." Silvia trailed off. I fought the urge to take a peek.

"... miss me?"

I gasped and covered my lips with both my palms. I knew it! Something was going on between them. I didn't get the chance to ask Silvia about it with our conflicting schedules, but I noticed it the first time. Silvia's strange gaze and Rufus' extra cold treatment towards her.

"Your royal highness, this is the important..."

"Ruru, did you miss me? That's all I want to know." Silvia cut him off in a stern tone. Even without seeing her, I could tell how fierce she appeared standing before Rufus.

I wondered what Rufus would say? Did he miss Silvia? Silvia seemed she was truly fond of him, but... I gazed at Stefan. Even though Silvia was his sister, he's still his wife.

Stefan didn't seem affected by this conversation, as he was just smiling at me. Why can't he stop smiling? Did he drop his head somewhere?

"I... didn't." It didn't surprise me when I heard Rufus' indifferent response, but my heart ached for Silvia. This situation felt so wrong, but I couldn't tell which was right and wrong anymore.

Silvia was married to the king. Even though there was no love between them, he's still her husband, not just his sister.



"You're a married woman, and the king's wife, your royal highness," Rufus stressed firmly. "Please, think about your honor."

"Ruru, you're aware I married Stefan because if I didn't, he will marry me off somewhere far away. How can I aid my king if that happened?"

"Even so, we will be nothing but allies once the matter about the undead is resolved."

"Ruru!" Silvia yelled. "Why are you so heartless? Why can't you look at me? Am I just foolish to marry the man I detest just so I can help you and Hell when the time comes?"

There was a long silence between them. My jaw tightened as I gazed at Stefan. The smile on his face was gone, but it didn't seem he was surprised or displeased. It was as if he had known all along.

Even though I didn't like him, my heart ached for him. I shouldn't have forced him to hide. If I didn't, he wouldn't be forced to listen to this conversation.

"I will take my leave first, your royal highness. I hope you won't do this again," Rufus uttered, and I heard his armor clicking as he walked away.

"I hate you, Ruru," she spat out. Her voice shook, and the soft clicks of metal stopped. "For letting us go easily, I hate you for that."

"I deserve the hatred and will atone for it, your royal highness." And then Rufus resumed in his steps.

I didn't dare move or peek to see if they're gone. Instead, I stared at Stefan, who bore this air of nonchalance. I didn't know who was in the right or wrong, but no matter how I look at it, I couldn't understand what this man was thinking.

If he knew Silvia was planning to turn her back on him, why did he marry her? No, that's not the point. I had known all along that not a lot of them were loyal to him, but after overhearing this conversation, I understood what kind of situation the king was in.

Surrounded by people he shared a mutual gain, Stefan had to constantly look over his shoulder. He couldn't trust anyone completely, knowing his people could be someone else's people in a blink of an eye. Was that the reason he entrusts the current matter to Sam?

Although Sam was someone he couldn't trust, Sam didn't have the slightest interest in the throne or power.

"Lilou."

I snapped back from my trance when he spoke. "Yes?" My eyes searched for him.

"I'm sorry you have to hear that," He apologized, and it somehow annoyed me. "Don't worry about it, it's..."

"Punch me in the gut, then you have a reason to apologize." I blurted out, and I pursed my lips in a thin line. His eyes slightly widened, before the side of his lips stretched, and he chuckled.

'Really, Lilou?' My mind muttered in disbelief. I ignored my inner thoughts and stared at him. I have never seen him laugh candidly, and I could not help but smile faintly. Right now, the man before me didn't seem that bad, nor he looked like the king.

He... he seemed more normal, and I felt relieved for reasons unknown. "So don't apologize for something you didn't do, Lexx." I muttered unconsciously, without realizing the words I uttered.

## Chapter 209 - The Sinister Smirk Behind The Mask

"Why do you always apologize for something you didn't do, Lexx?"

"What did you say?" he asked, catching my attention as I raised my head. "Just now... what did you...?"

"Your Majesty?" I furrowed my brows, perplexed at what caused him to look at me in surprise. Did I say something offensive?

Stefan let out a weak scoff, shaking his head lightly. "It's... nothing." But I didn't think it was actually nothing, but I ignored it.

"Your Majesty, please forgive my insolence and tactless actions just now." I bowed politely, acknowledging my impudent actions towards him. He was still the king, after all.

"I will make sure it will never happen again. I must take my leave now."

He hummed a low tune, and I assisted myself up. I really needed to return or Ramin would be spitting fires; it'd be a miracle if the entire office wouldn't be set on fire now. But just as I took three hasty steps, I stopped when Stefan called.

"Lilou." My breath hitched, but I didn't turn around. "If by chance..." he trailed, and I heard his footsteps approach until I saw his shadow overlapping mine. "If by chance I saw you first, I met you first, took care and cherished you first, and loved you..."

"Your Majesty!" I exclaimed, turning around and backs away. "Forgive me, for I will have to remind you I am your brother's wife! What you're about to say..." I took a deep breath, calming my heart that was racing painfully. "... I beg you not to mention it, please, Your Majesty. You will gain nothing by using me to hurt my husband." I hung my head low, gritting my teeth as I clenched my hand.

Stefan didn't respond anymore, so I took that to my advantage to escape. For a moment, I thought he was at least normal, but it seemed he had really dropped his head somewhere.

'Saw me first? Met me first? Took care and cherished me first? Loved me first? I felt angry hearing those from him, and it was a source of anger that felt I would have for someone who had abandoned me.

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"... I'm your brother's wife..." All her words after that drifted in his ears before she ran away from him. Stefan raised his hand, trying to reach her, but she just went farther and farther away from him until she was gone.

He closed his eyes, letting out a heavy exhale. "Again, I let her go," He whispered, running his fingers through his hair as he chuckled mockingly.

So, don't apologize for something you didn't do, Lexx. So, don't apologize for something you didn't do, Lexx...

Her words repeated in his mind over and over and over again until all he could hear was her saying, Lexx. That's right, that's how she called him before.

"Lexx..." Stefan whispered with a chuckle, tilting his head back as he stared at the starless sky. "Lu... that's right, Lulu." The corner of his lips curled into a twisted smirk. "Right... Lu." His chuckles grew louder and eerie as he spread his arms wide.

When Stefan pulled his head back, his eyes drooped, and his twisted smirk remained. In his eyes, the image of Lilou, which had been haunting him for seven years, stood in front of him, smiling. He reached his hand towards her, wrapping his long, slender fingers around her neck.

"You do realize I hate liars, right? My little sweetheart?" He tilted his head a little, staring at her illusion as he choked her while she struggled under his grip, just like how she struggled back then. "Lexx... that should be your last words, right? My name... that's the last thing you'll say before life slips away from your eyes and you take your last breath."

Stefan closed his hand and her illusion vanished, just like how she'll vanish that easily. His eyes fell on his fist, smiling in satisfaction.

"Not yet," He muttered as he slowly raised his eyes, glinting maliciously. "I'll kill Hell in front of her, then torture her for life. Hitting two birds in one stone, right?" Stefan smirked as a figure slinked out from the shadows behind him.

"Alphonse?"

"Brother, you shouldn't underestimate Hell." The man, Alphonse, clad in a black cloak, responded. "He already had his suspicion about my involvement earlier than we thought. It wouldn't be surprising if he suspects you, as well."

"He's always dubious, brother." Stefan ran his fingers through his ebony hair, which faded its color into a dull silver. "But he'll never be sure since I'm a broken man obsessed over someone else's wife."

"Aren't you?"

Stefan smirked. "I am, unfortunately. That's why I'll keep her alive... forever." He chortled gleefully, thinking how Lilou could live as a vampire, and he could keep her for as long as he could... to torment, to hurt, to mess up, nothing more, nothing less.

"Don't get too excited, brother. We have plenty of time. Keep your act together."

"Oh, please, you worry too much." Stefan clicked his tongue as his hair returned to its ebony colors. "Just watch, Alphonse. I'll serve Hell's head on a silver platter on your first family."

Stefan started walking away without even glancing at the hooded man behind him. In a blink of an eye, Alphonse vanished while Stefan's smirk slowly faded.

'How dare you deny me again, Lu?' he seethed internally. 'You like Hell that much? If so, I'll definitely make your life a living hell.'

If Lilou had given him the slightest chance, Stefan wouldn't have snapped. However, it was bound to happen in the future because... Lilou was Samael's leash, but she was Stefan's poison. Above all, she was her own shackles.

A century-long plight, premeditated by the blood of those who had fought over the throne.

A story that was bound to recur, repeating the twisted history of everyone.

Fear and blood would wash over the land of the kingdom, and only one shall stand above all.

It was only a matter of time before the gears of the clock start clicking to twist the fate and lives of the many.

-END OF VOLUME 3 -

Chapter 210 - A Travel To The Past

Seven years ago, in the land of Grimsbanne, a procession of carriages made their long, arduous journey towards the Duke's mansion. It was yet another time of the year where nobles made a parade to gather at the esteemed estate of the Duke.

"Woah..." the 17-year-old Lilou awed, watching the lavish carriages crested with the nobility's insignias. She held her dirty hands closer to her chest, tiptoeing, hoping to see the nobles despite the crowd before her.

'It's the time of the year again,' she murmured internally, glimpsing quick at the nobility inside the carriages. 'They really look so... out of reach.' She frowned as she squeezed through the crowd.

She had been busy helping in the field that it was her first time in many years she watched this 'parade'. It was actually nothing, really, but Lilou thought about the children who were left on the farm who believed this was akin to a festival.

'The banquet started early this time, huh?' she mumbled internally, successfully squeezing herself until she reached the front. Her heart skipped a beat as the carriage galloped in front of her.

"That's... too fast!" She yelled, clicking her tongue as she shot glaring daggers at the nobility crest behind the carriage. 'I hope the carriage malfunctions on the way!' She seethed inside, biting her tongue, afraid someone would hear her.

Lilou had grown familiar with the heartlessness and cruelty of the nobility. However, there was still a little part of her that enjoyed this sight of them. They only have time to see this many nobles passing through the little town of Banse of Grimsbanne once a year, after all.

"Really. She sighed, losing her energy the more she watched the carriage passed through. Not a single one of the nobles inside those carriages looked out of the window. Some even had their curtain down while others left it a bit opened, enough to glimpse at their side profile.

"If they only look outside and see the people..." She trailed off, pursing her lips as it couldn't be helped. Her hope that one of them could see and do something about the pitiful lives of the commoners and peasants had decreased even more.

What did she expect? She had been alive for seventeen long years, but she had only seen cruelty from the nobles. Kindness? Did that ever exist? Ever? Were the nobles capable to have the slightest ounce of mercy?

"This is nothing. I should just tell the kids..." Lilou trailed off as she suddenly felt dizzy. At the same time, the crowds pushed her and she lost her footing, being tossed in the middle of the road.

'Huh?' She blinked, trying to absorb what happened. Lilou heard the incoming loud steps of the galloping horse and the wheels the horses were pulling.

"What..." she trailed off, hearing the panic voices telling her to get away mixed with the unaware cheers in the air. Her eyes peeled off the crowd as she shifted it at the incoming horses.

A part of her brain told her to get up, but her body wouldn't move. All she could do was stare at her impending doom.

"I will... die," she whispered under her breath, barely blinking as she welcomed death. "No, I..." Her tongue rolled back as the noises faded. She slowly closed her eyes when suddenly, a large hand grabbed her bicep and pulled her to the side, saving her in the nick of time.

Time resumed in her as she snapped her eyes opened and the cheering of the crowd resonated in her ear. She slowly raised her gaze at the man who saved her, but could barely see the lower part of his face because of the hook of his cloak.

Although she couldn't see his eyes, she felt like he was staring at her. Lilou opened her lips, but he suddenly let her go without a word and squeezed himself out of the crowd.

"What just... happened?" she murmured in a daze, attempting to snap back to her senses. "That's right, I..." her eyes slowly dilated as she nearly choked on her own.

"Did I just saw death's door?!" Lilou gasped in dismay before she winced, glaring daggers at the road behind her. "I'm never coming back here!" she spat out, forcing her way out through the enthusiastic crowd.

When she got out, she cast everyone a glance. She wanted to shout at them, they're all wasting their time. Those nobilities wouldn't even bat an eye at them, nor will they ever help anyone in here. But she didn't say all those. Instead, Lilou kicked a stone in annoyance as she stomped her feet away.

"I'll tell the children..." Lilou trailed off as she turned her head in a certain direction, catching the glimpse of the hooded man who saved her. "Is that him?" she wondered, narrowing her eyes as she studied his stature.

"Oh!" she snapped as she clapped her hands. Her expression brightened up. "Mister!" she yelled, sprinting towards the man to thank him properly. Even though she was a peasant, she wanted to thank him as she could've died back there.

"Mister!" Lilou yelled once again, smiling brightly when she saw him glanced over his shoulder. However, he didn't turn around, nor did he stop in his tracks. Instead, he hastened his pace.

She frowned, but Lilou increased her speed. "Wait!" Should she stop the chase? She wondered, but she already exerted quite an effort so Lilou chased after him until he went inside a narrow alley.

"Mist —" She abruptly halted as soon as she turned to the narrow alley. It was a dead-end, but there was no trace of the man. "Huh? Where did he go?" Lilou cocked her head to the side, and then slowly to the other side.

Suddenly, Lilou heard her stomach let out a small growl, and she frowned. "To think I used up my energy just to lose him."

"Tell me one good reason I should let you live." Lilou stiffened when a man's low and cold voice trickled down her spine. "Why did you follow me here?"

Lilou bit her tongue as she held her hand close to her chest out of fear. One good reason he should let her live? Did she, unfortunately, encounter a thief? Or a loose criminal? Just what was going on

with her life today? Was she supposed to die today? That's why her life had been in constant danger since this morning?

Myriads of questions clouded her mind, and Lilou stood there like a statue. Her mouth opened and closed until a meek reply came out of her lips.? "Because killing is bad?." Lilou winced as she figured that was only a good explanation for the children.

"Mister, I don't have money and even if you plan to kill me, please do it swiftly."

"How pathetic," the man behind her ridiculed under his breath before he turned around. He sensed nothing special in her, so he assumed she was one of those people who would solicit money. But the man stopped when he felt a sudden tug from his cloak. He furrowed his brows and turned his head back.

"It's you!" Lilou's face brightened up. "Good thing I checked..." her words trailed off as a sudden gust of wind blew past them and his hood slowly peeled off from his head, revealing his ebony hair and his breathtaking beauty.

"God..." she whispered in a moment of daze.