

The Duke 21

Chapter 21 - You Are My Human

The maidservants escorted me to the study where Samael was waiting for me. On our way, I could not help but fiddle my fingers against each other.

Every step we took, it produced a distinct sound. A sound that jeopardized the rhythm of my pulse. Each step meant I'm coming close to the uncertainty of what's ahead.

I clenched my teeth, tightening my jaw. I glanced at the maidservant's back, who's walking before me.

"We're here, My Lady." Soon, the maidservant halted and faced me.

"His Lordship is inside."

She added politely. I nodded as I watched her make a way for me.

Standing in front of the door, I took a deep breath and breathed out through my mouth. For a moment, I closed my eyes as I prepared my heart.

When I opened my eyes, I unhesitatingly pushed the door open and went in.

To my surprised, unlike the brightly lit surroundings around the mansion, this room only had four candelabra around. It was not enough to bring colors to the room, but it was enough for anyone to see things around.

My eyes caught the familiar figure standing in front of the window. His back was facing me as I approached him.

"Milord?" I called out, catching his attention.

Slowly, Samael turned around and face me. His crimson eyes glinted, causing me to flinch as soon as he set them on me.

He didn't speak as I watched him travel his fascinated gaze from my head to toe. Under his piercing eyes, I wanted to shrink to the marbled floor.

"You look gorgeous." He commented, nodding in satisfaction. I raised my head in surprised as I've glimpsed upon his charming smile.

I bit my lower lip to restrain the smile tempting to take over my lips. I shouldn't be happy knowing he was the person who claimed my life.

As I broke my gaze away from his eyes, I unconsciously noticed something he was holding. Due to the lack of light, I squinted my eyes.

Something was dripping from his hand. The sound of the liquid hitting the marbled floor grew distinct in my ears.

"Milord, what is..." Out of curiosity, I blurted out my query.

"Oh? This?" Samael raised his hand a little higher as he walked out of the shade and into the faint light.

I still had my eyes on his hand. As light shone upon him, my eyes grew wider as I distinguished what was it: a beating heart!

I gasped as I raised my gaze back to his charming smile.

"Mi — milord," I muttered in horror.

My eyes brood with utter fear, staring at the still beating heart in his hand.

"Milord, pardon me, but... is this the blood proof you wanted to show me?"

I asked, my voice shook as I gulped down whilst struggling my trembling knees from giving away.

"Mhm... do you now believe I'm good at capturing hearts?" Samael bearing those menacing pair of deep crimson eyes stared proudly at me after a nod.

The next moment, I gasped and bit my bottom lip. Samael clenched his hand and squeezed the fresh heart to smithereens.

No... this was not what I meant, milord! No wonder it felt like we were not on the same page earlier this day.

No wonder his reaction earlier was strange. I never meant it literally!

I felt like crying and running away at this point. My heart had leapt to my throat, my hands and body shaking as his fiery gaze never left me.

"Hmm?" He hummed, tilting his head as he waited for my reply.

"Y — yes, milord. You're good at it, literally."

My tone gave away my horror at the situation. I've grown more mortified as I watched the heart reach the floor and his feet approached me.

Instinctively, each time he took a step forward, I would step back. He didn't say a word, intensifying the fear creeping up inside me.

Soon, my back reached the solid door where I came from. I tried to take another step back, but to no avail.

I could only watch him approach, closer and closer. I held my breath, clasp my hands into a fist.

When he was one step away from me, Samael finally stopped.

"Huh," He chuckled briefly, sounding more like a scoff.

Slowly, his pointy nails that were covered with fresh blood traced my elbow down to my hand. His fingers weren't as sharp as this earlier today.

With a gentle tug, he clipped my forefinger in between his fingers as he slowly guided it in front of his lips.

"Did I pass your test, though?" He asked, the sharp tip of his nail played over the tip of my finger.

What test? He didn't mean...

I stared at his penetrating gaze and I reluctantly answered, "Barely."

I would've said no. But I was too scared to give him that direct answer.

He smirked, nodding in satisfaction at the neutral answer I gave him.

I forced a smile on my lips, thinking I'm pardoned from trouble. However, as I smiled, he smiled back charmingly before pressing the tip of his sharp nail against the tip of my finger.

I winced at the slight pain. Immediately, I've seen my finger produce a drop of blood.

"Such sweet aroma." He whispered, inhaling deeply while I gulped.

Slowly, he guided my bleeding finger to his lips and licked the blood gently. The second his tongue touched my skin, my breath hitched, and I shivered.

The slight pain of when he prick my finger was being comforted by his tongue. It was insane; I even forgot the fear within me for a moment.

His menacing crimson orbs never left me as he sucked my finger. I wonder what he was thinking.

"Does that mean you're accepting my invitation?"

Keeping my finger in between his sharp fangs, he inquired. If I said no, he might break my finger, which was placed in between his fangs.

The strange sensation I've felt from his licking subsided as fear enveloped my heart at once. I bit my lower lip, hearing my heart drum against my chest as sweats broke out from my back and forehead.

"But, I'm just..." I paused, hoping my wise answer would put an end to this. "... I'm just a human."

My answer came out almost like a whisper. Samael clicked his tongue, displeased at my response as he let my finger go.

"No," he whispered, shifting his gaze to my side as he tucked a few strands of hair behind my ear.

I gulped as I prepared myself for the worse.

Slowly, he inched closer, causing my entire body to stiffen. He traced my neck by the apex of his nose and I didn't dare move an inch.

Instinctively, I stretched my neck to give him easy access. I didn't realize that my hands were on his chest, clasping his clothes tightly.

"You're not just a mere human... you are my human." He stressed each word as I felt his lips parted and his fangs on my neck.

Chapter 22 - Dinner With The Duke

I shut my eyes, waiting for the pain of having a hole in my neck. However, instead of pain, the fangs I've felt against my skin disappeared as I felt the softness of his lips on it.

"Perhaps, next time." Was what he said, leaving a small trail of kisses on my neck.

His lips felt soft, albeit a little cold. Still, my spine shivered with either fear or excitement with every contact of his lips to my skin.

After that, Samael took a step back and created a distance between us. I looked at him, flabbergasted at the myriads of emotions surging inside me.

What did just happen?

"Your expression tells me you're relieved, but your blood tells me otherwise." With a playful smirk, Samael lifted my chin by his finger.

His thumb gently caressed my lips. I fought the urge to bite my lip as I stared at him bravely.

"Your blood tastes exceptional and it never lie." He said, raising his gaze from my lips and locked with my eyes. "I wonder if the taste would be more... phenomenal if I taste it through here."

He added. I gulped as I instinctively pursed my lips.

"Should I?" He asked once again.

His tone sounded more airy as he inched closer to me. The apex of his nose brushed mine, and I heard myself swallow.

"Per — perhaps..." I stammered, halting him from his plans. "Perhaps, next time."

Through my shaking lips, I repeated his previous remarks.

The next second, Samael laughed, and I smiled awkwardly. He laughed and laughed, walking away and creating a distance between us.

What's so funny?

He was shaking his head and then nodded as he raised his finger. After smacking his lips, Samael beamed at me with a grin.

"I didn't expect that," He chuckled, pleased at my indirect refusal.

"Anyway, shall we continue our date as promised?"

Samael added as he stretched his arm and offered his hand for me to grasp. Still pursing my lips, I nodded awkwardly and took his hand.

I didn't dare retaliate about our small misunderstanding. There's no point. I'm just glad I'm still breathing right now.

Pleased, he held my hand and smiled. Slowly, with his eyes still locked with mine, he inched closer and left a peck on my knuckles.

"It's an honor to be your date." He uttered and my heart skipped a beat for no reason.

He didn't have to make it sound like it was a proper date. My stupid heart might assume fantasy I shouldn't even dream of.

Samael led me along the way with him holding my hand. I didn't have the leisure to map my way as I constantly gaze at our hands.

He was a little cold. Yet, my hands were sweating. Ironic how his cold touches could make cheek heat up.

"You are my human..." Suddenly, his previous remarks flashed across my head.

I gulped as I bit my lower lip once again. Despite the laced dangers in his tone, I hate to admit that it honestly sounded pleasant to my ears.

I could feel my temperature rising just the thought of it. Wake up, Lilou. Get your silly thoughts out of your head.

Without me realizing it, we arrived at the lavish dinner hall. The table was long; they organized candelabra with perfect spacing in between the sumptuous meals served on the table.

I immediately gulped as the appetizing aroma wafted my nose. Samael glanced at me and I offered him a timid smile.

The appetizing sight of the food and the generous variety served on the table was a dream for me. This was akin to a banquet.

Does the duke always have such food on the table? Should I ask him to take my portion to the children in the field? I would love to share this with them.

As I pictured myself eating meat with the children, my stomach suddenly growl. My pulse momentarily stopped as all eyes were on me.

Fabian was standing on the side along with the maidservant. They must be waiting for the duke before they take their seat.

"Hungry, are you?" Obviously, Samael wouldn't miss the chance to tease.

However, I felt no shame at the honest reaction of my stomach. I'm hungry.

"Hah, come." He chuckled briefly, pulling my hand, and led me to the first seat on the right.

Samael dragged the chair over and beckoned me to the seat. I nodded without a word and sat. He adjusted the chair closer to the table before taking the seat at the end of the table.

"Fabian, does a date starts with talking or eating?"

When we're both seated, Samael inquired as he glanced at Fabian. I followed his gaze, glancing at the servants who were still standing.

Why aren't they taking a seat? I wondered.

After a second, realization struck me. Right, servants shouldn't share a table with nobles. How ironic that a peasant like me was sitting at the same table with the duke.

"I believed his lordship shall eat first, so he could discussed important matters with her ladyship." Fabian advised, sounding as if this dinner had something to do with politics.

"I see," Samael nodded in understanding before casting his eyes back to me.

"Let's eat." He said, gesturing me to eat.

I awkwardly cast him a glance before I gazed down. My plate had a chunk of meat and a good portion of vegetable. My mouth watered just staring at it.

Before I could pick the piece of meat by my hand, I unconsciously glanced at Samael. He was holding the fine golden cutlery and sliced the turkey in great precision.

Seeing that, I glanced at the cutlery placed beside my plate. I awkwardly picked them up, the knife on my right hand and the fork on my left; just like how Samael was holding his.

I wanted to mimic how he was slicing the meat, but when I tried, I found it was far more difficult than I thought. Once again, I glanced at Samael and then moved my gaze to Fabian.

Fabian was still smiling, feigning ignorant on seeing my struggles just slicing. Should I just pick it up with my hand?

"Here," Amidst my thoughts, Samael snapped me back to the current lapse.

When I blinked, he swiftly took my plate away and exchanged it with his. "You can fork it out easily, right?"

He asked, sporting his charming smile. I looked down, breaking my gaze away from him.

Deep down, I was glad he understood my dilemma. He sliced everything in small cuts, enough for me not to use the knife.

"T — thank you," In a low tone, I expressed my appreciation and glanced at him.

Samael just smiled, "Dig in!" and then followed by a wink.

With a subtle smile on my lips, I forked a piece of meat and shoved it inside my mouth. Immediately, its flavors burst on my tongue, leaving me astounded momentarily.

"Heh, it's good, right?" Samael chuckled, pleased at my reaction.

Unbeknownst to Lilou, as they eat, Fabian was staring at Samael for a long time. He looked at his lordship with bafflement and intrigued.

'Is this the Duke I've known before his slumber?' Fabian wondered, furrowing his brows mildly.

'This girl... I'm surprised His Lordship has been very kind and considerate towards her. What did the duke see in her?'

He added inside his head. Not just Fabian, but everyone who witnessed Samael's actions around Lilou raised the same question.

After all, the Samael La Crox before he went into a slumber was a vile, selfish, and akin to a devil incarnate vampire.

Chapter 23 - Walk With Me

Throughout the dinner, I resisted from moaning and rolling on the ground at how delicious the food was. I felt like I'm ready to die right now — that's how good it was.

Yet, unlike my appreciation, Samael seemed he barely enjoyed it. His attention never left me, teaching me how to use the cutlery properly.

I didn't understand the importance of it, but I listened and tried to apply this newfound knowledge. I loved learning; it excites me every time I get to learn new things.

Now, not only I had a full stomach, I get to learn a skill I could use in the future. IF I have a future.

Soon, the supper ended. We barely talked, I was busy eating while Samael kept his comments moderate.

But now that it finished, I wonder what would happen. Just thinking about what I should anticipate caused my hand to ball into a fist.

"Did you enjoy yourself, Lil?" He asked, wiping the corner of his lips by a small cloth.

"Yes, milord." I nodded, expressing my appreciation for the mouth-watering meal.

"I'm glad to hear that." Pleased, Samael smiled. I smiled back.

What now?

From the corner of my eyes, I glimpsed at his hands tapping on the table. His nails produced this light, consistent sound which only heightened my anxiousness.

I gulped, holding my hand in my lap. Samael was staring at me; his jaw resting on his knuckles.

I felt a bit self-conscious of his flaming gaze. The longer he stayed silent, the more I felt my pulse flick.

"I honestly don't know what to do or say."

Before the silence completely envelope us, he spoke. I raised my gaze back to him, blinking as I unconsciously tilted my head to the side.

"Come on, Lil. Walk with me."

Upon saying so, Samael placed his hands on the edge of the table, pushing himself away, and stood.

"Ye — yes, milord." Seeing him move, I stammered and clumsily stood.

I nearly fell back as I didn't realize how heavy my tummy could be after having a sumptuous meal. Fortunately, aside from the annoying clattering sound I've caused on the table, I stood without tripping.

"Haha. Careful." He chuckled, and I hung my head low out of embarrassment.

I heard him smack his lips before saying, "Follow me. I want to show you something."

"Yes, milord." I timidly replied, glancing at his back, and followed his tracks.

I kept a safe distance as he led the way. I wonder what he wanted to show me this time or what he was thinking.

I didn't want to conclude. I refrained myself from thinking about my depressing reality. I don't want to feel sick after a heavy meal.

"They said it was good for humans to take a walk after a sumptuous meal."

Suddenly, Samael broke the silence once again. I heard about that as well. But I didn't truly know because I had never eaten until my stomach couldn't take it anymore.

"Is that so, milord?" I replied under my breath.

"I don't know, but you'll know." He shrugged, still not looking back at me.

I wonder what kind of expression he had upon his last remarks. I glanced at his broad back, biting my lips as I fiddled my fingers against each other.

Soon, we reached the vast garden. Since it was night, I can barely see how beautiful the greenery was since the lights were limited. But it didn't fail to give off a serene atmosphere.

I kept a safe distance as I followed him. He was holding his hand behind him.

Aside from the soft whistle of the night breeze, only silence enveloped the two of us. Neither of us spoke: I was busy wondering what he was thinking.

"To be honest, I envy humans."

After a while, Samael finally broke the silence.

"Huh?" I raised my brows.

What was there for him to envy humans? Vampires were far superior to us. Their lifespan was longer too!

"You humans' lives are too short and you're too fragile. If you lost a limb, you'll be handicapped forever. But if vampires or werewolves lost a limb, it'll just regenerate."

He explained in a nonchalant tone. Yet, I could not help but raised my brows higher as I tilted my head to the side.

What's there to envy for not having regeneration abilities?

"Yet, despite how short your lives were, humans subconsciously value their lives more than us. They do their utmost best to survive, appreciating the smallest things as if they were gifts, and struggle to the bitter end."

Samael continued while I stared at his back. Slowly, he turned and raised his head to the moon.

I stared at his side profile. Despite how naturally dangerous the color of his eyes emitted, there was a mixed of softness in them.

Seeing how gentle and melancholic those eyes were, a subtle smile resurfaced on my lips. Ever since I've met him, I only have nothing but fear to him.

But the more I spend time with him, the more I realized Samael was more than just a terrifying individual.

He was unpredictable; sometimes, I consider him as shallow person. Sometimes, like this one, I think he was actually sentimental.

Samael then cocked his head and gazed at me.

"Did you enjoy the meal?" He asked out of context.

"Hmm?"

"I am asking if you enjoy the meal." Samael chuckled.

I stared at him and it momentarily mesmerized me by how charming he appeared under the light of the moon.

"Yes, milord." I whispered and looked away. "Did you?"

I added without daring to return my gaze back at him. He was too charming for me to look at.

"It's bland. But I enjoyed sharing supper with you."

Samael chuckled, and I unconsciously looked up at him. My brows furrowed, curious how he called the sumptuous meal bland.

"Human food is nonessential for my kind." Guessing the curiosity I had in mind, he explained in a mirthful tone.

"Ah..." I nodded awkwardly.

Obviously, vampires only needed blood to survive. How am I surprised?

"That's why I envy humans." He smiled as he slowly faced me. "Anyway, come with me. I want to show you a very sentimental place."

With that being said, Samael beckoned me to follow, which I did.

A sentimental place? I wonder what kind of place it was.

Chapter 24 - His Dwelling For Hundreds Of Years

As I followed the Duke, he led me back to the mansion and into the long hall. Soon, we reached a door which path was only a stair going down. Upon seeing the darkness lie ahead, I instinctively stepped back.

Meanwhile, Samael turned around and faced me. Unconsciously, I glanced up at him.

He was smiling gently as he extended his arm and offered his hand for me to grasp.

"It'll be a long way, I can't lose you."

He mused. I darted my eyes from his crimson eyes to his hand. Reluctantly, I reached for his hand while biting my lips.

Samael smiled as he cradled my hand. Seeing his smile, my heart skipped a beat upon his gentle hold.

This strong security enveloped my heart. I felt safe even if we're about to take a dark path that could lead me to what's unknown.

With his hand holding mine, Samael escorted me down the stairs. As soon as I stepped my foot in, the door behind me slammed closed.

"Ah!"

Instinctively, I shrieked as I jolted closer to his back. I could see nothing but darkness.

It was just pitch black. My hand clenching his hand tightened as my heart pounded.

Although I'm used to darkness, not this kind of darkness. Back in my shack, the moon had been my light during starless nights.

So, even if it was dim, the light was not completely absent. But now...

"Milord?" I called out softly to reassure myself he was still there.

"I'm here," he replied in a low tune, squeezing my hand gently, which to my relief.

After his remarks, I heard a soft snap of fingers and a wall of torches lit up. I flinched at the sudden light appearing out of nowhere.

Like a ripple-effect, one after another, torches attached from the walls lit up. The dark path had eventually brightened up.

"Come," he beckoned, and began walking down the stairs.

Still holding my hand, I followed him. I kept close to him, afraid someone would grab my feet and pull me down.

Because of the utter silence, our footsteps echoed. The path going down felt longer, as I couldn't see the end of this stair. I wonder what the Duke was thinking?

"Milord?" I called out, looking at his broad back.

"Hmm?"

"Where are we going?" I asked, curious about what lies at the end of this long stairs.

"To my dwelling for hundreds of years." Samael was quick to answer, bearing the same nonchalant tone.

Upon hearing his response, I furrowed my brows. To his dwelling for hundreds of years?

Once again, I glanced back at the long path we had taken. The darkness before the light also resurfaced in my head.

"Where you've slept during your slumber?"

"Mhm," again, Samael replied with a lazy hum.

I bit my lips, gazing down to his hand, which was holding mine. This reminded me of his previous story about being trapped in a long and dark tunnel.

Who would have thought the Duke wasn't just sleeping in a comfortable bed and friendly environment? Instead, he was kept in this desolate underground room.

I wouldn't even think this place existed in this grand, elegant mansion. Compare to the mansion's elegance, this route going down felt like the road to hell.

Unconsciously, my hand trembled with just the thought. I glanced at his back again, and my gaze softened.

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For what it felt like an eternity, the Duke finally halted, and so I did. Slowly, he faced me and grinned.

"We're here!" He announced.

Out of curiosity, I peeked to his side. However, the light stopped from where we stood. I see nothing behind him but darkness.

"We are?" I blurted out with my brows creased.

I heard him let out a brief chuckle before I retracted my gaze from behind him. I looked up, blinking my eyes, waiting for his confirmation.

"Come." He beckoned and pulled me with him.

Scared at the pitch black darkness, I gripped his hand. Even if I look around, I felt like I had my eyes closed.

Again, I heard a snap of a finger and the light instantly engulfed the darkness. Out of instinct, I shut my eyes at the sudden light.

Slowly, I peaked through my eye as I opened my them again. When I got a hold of my vision, I furrowed my brows.

At the end of the stairs was a large space. There was a coffin in the middle, but aside from that, there was nothing in this area.

Only concrete walls with no windows or doors. How was this a sentimental place?

Unknowingly, Samael let my hand go while I traveled my gaze around.

"There's nothing here, milord." I whispered, but it sounded loud and clear because of the absence of unnecessary noise.

"What do you mean, it's empty? There's my coffin." He said.

I returned my gaze back to him. As soon as I did, Samael led me and we walked towards the coffin in the middle of this empty room.

When he let my hand go, I glanced at the coffin and back to him.

"You... you're here for hundred of years?" I stammered while looking at his carefree expression.

Samael nodded as he leaned on the edge of the coffin. He then crossed his arms under his chest and rested his foot over the other.

Upon seeing him nod, my lips parted, but no words came out. His lordship had spent hundreds of years in here.

Slowly, I cast my gaze to the coffin. I reached for it, the tip of my fingers caressed its smooth edges.

It was like they buried him, but with more room for people to get in.

As I retracted my fingers from the coffin, I held onto my arm as I stood facing him. How could he be so untroubled after spending centuries in here?

"Why... why are you showing me this sacred place, milord?" I asked.

The corner of his lips slowly tilted into a subtle smile.

"Aren't we on the getting to know stage? I've known almost everything about you, but you don't. That's why you're scared."

In a knowing tone, Samael explained. Getting to know? What was the need to get to know him?

I was merely his reserved meal. He should stop giving me unnecessary ideas.

I hang my head low; I looked at my shadow and bit my lips hard to wake myself up.

"From hundreds of years, in this very place, there's nothing but darkness and silence during my slumber. If the sudden light in here gave you relief..."

Samael paused as I heard him smack his lips. After a moment, I've seen his feet approach, and I unconsciously looked up and immediately caught his gaze.

"It's the same when I heard you the first time."

He added and smiled.

Chapter 25 - Will You, Silly Girl, Marry Me?

My heart instantly leapt to my throat as his way of showing and explaining things I failed to understand completely was unique.

Earlier, the darkness scared me. But when the torches lit up, I felt less scared, especially knowing he was with me.

Does he mean he had felt the same when he heard my cries as a child? Did I truly gave him such relief and comfort all these years?

The thought of it moved my immovable heart.

"Milord, why did you force yourself to sleep?" Before I knew it, my question already escaped my lips.

As soon as I realized I'm prying way too far, I pressed my lips together. There was no confirmed reason his lordship went into his slumber.

There were rumors of different versions. Some were for the goodness of Grimsbanne. Some said the duke to enter his slumber after fighting a formidable opponent and protected his people. While some version said, they forced the duke to sleep because he lost control of himself.

But I want to hear it from the duke himself.

I looked at him, waiting patiently for his reply. He had the liberty to answer, but I hoped he would tell me.

"Because..." When the duke's lips parted, I perked up as I focused my hearing on every word he would say.

"Because I was tired."

Unlike what I expected, his simple answer, which I didn't expect to hear, disappointed me.

"Tired?" I repeated in a questioning tone. "You were tired, so you abandoned your people?"

Before I knew it, I blurted out. Immediately, I covered my lips with my palm, my eyes wide as I realized I went over the line.

Fortunately, Samael didn't seem to take it personally and chuckled in return.

"Heh. Sometimes, no matter how powerful someone is, there is always a breaking point, Lil. Be it vampires or humans, we always break at one point."

Samael explained. I held his gaze for a long time without feeling intimidated or horrified.

"But you had responsibilities. The people of Grimsbanne had their lives in your hands, including a peasant like me. Was it easy for vampires to let their responsibility and obligation go when things get rough for them?"

Again, I argued without thinking. Yet, this time, I didn't regret voicing out my uncalled opinion.

The rules of this kingdom had favored vampires. No vampires were a peasant, nor they were commoner. Nobles mostly consisted of vampires, and only a few nobles were lucky humans.

Yet, every single one of them was the same. And peasants like me were just here to balance the wealth and poverty of this world.

An insignificant person like me was alive to make these noble appear strong and powerful. It was an insult that Grimsbanne was in the hands of a fickle-hearted duke like him.

Upon hearing my argument, Samael's eyes fastened with fascination. After a moment of silence, Samael smiled as he reached for my head to pat it.

"I'm glad," he mused under his breath.

Huh?

"I'm glad that someone like you still exists in this kingdom. Your love for the people of Grimsbanne is far more noble than us."

He added. I felt my cheek and ear heated up as this praise was too much for a peasant like me.

"You understand the sufferings of my people, but I can't sympathize. Not that I can't; I would rather take action to repay my people's losses."

While patting my head, Samael explained as he leaned down with his face a palm-length away from mine.

Instinctively, I drew back a bit.

"But my credence in my methods drove me to the point I've become a threat to the people I'm fighting for."

He added, a subtle smile resurfaced on his lips. His hand has stopped patting my head, but remained still.

But his hand or his closeness didn't matter at this point. I focused my mind on his argument.

"Milord, you sound like you're in a war." I muttered under my breath. "Who are you against with?"

From his explanation, he sounded as if he had fought and lost. I never heard the Duke waging a war against anyone, nor have I heard the real history of this world hundreds years back.

Hundreds years was a long time. I had limited knowledge of history and many things. Hence, I could only ask and judge the monarchy from the present.

Samael pressed his lips together and the corner of his lips stretched wider.

"The King."

With a smile, he answered. I gasped, as his answer was the least I expected.

I didn't know whether he was joking or saying the truth; his tone wouldn't let anyone to guess.

"The — the — the King?" I stuttered, my lower lip trembled.

"Why are you stuttering, silly? My brother is not as terrifying as you think he is. He still gets scolded by me, if I want to."

Samael chuckled, shaking his head lightly. I could feel the blood gradually leave my lips with the thought.

Even if the duke and the king were brothers, the King holds the absolute power. I don't hear many stories about the royal family. But what I do know was they were the oldest and the most powerful lineage of vampires in this kingdom.

"I'm not afraid of the King, milord." Mustering my courage, I corrected.

"Huh? You're not?" He furrowed his brows, tilting his head to the side.

"I'm afraid what the King would do if he heard that his lordship is now awake after hundreds of years."

Without looking away from him, I expressed and paused.

"I'm terrified of the fate of the people of Grimsbanne." I added for clarification.

I felt proud of myself for keeping my composure and successfully expressing my thoughts.

I've never had this liberty in my entire life. Deep down, I appreciated Samael for listening to the voice of someone as significant as I am.

When I uttered my last remarks, Samael smiled and ruffled my hair. I lowered my head a bit, surprised and puzzled at his reaction.

"Silly, that's why we're here!" He exclaimed.

The sparkle in his crimson orbs brimmed with ideas I have yet to know. I raised my brows, blinking my eyes as my mind wondered what was he up to.

Finally, Samael retracted his hand from my head. Taking a step back, Samael cleared his throat with his fist before his lips.

"Silly girl," he called out, raising his chin before he smiled.

Slowly, he reached his hand to me. From my elbow, his fingers gently traced my elbow down to my hand.

When he was holding both my hands, he looked into my confused eyes. With a smirk, he once again repeated the very words he told me a few nights ago.

"Will you, silly girl, marry me?"

Chapter 26 - I'm In Your Care, Milord.

"Will you, silly girl, marry me?"

As soon as I heard his proposal, I gasped. How did our conversation escalated to marriage again?

Sure, I finally realized now that his lordship had a different meaning of romance. He wanted to have a romance with his food, which I tried to forget about.

But why must he mention it right now? As if we would truly get married.

"Huh?"

Unlike my rapid trains of thoughts, that questioning hum was the only sound I did.

"Although I like you and want this marriage out of pure romance, there's something else I'll have to add to it."

Samael explained, still holding my hand.

"Something to add?" I asked under my breath. He nodded.

"The reason the King is wary about me is that my existence is a threat to him. Therefore, if I marry a peasant like you, he knew I won't make unnecessary move that could harm you. In other words, I'm parading my weakness."

Samael explained with a smile. He sounded and appeared as if he was just playing. But I wondered if that would work.

"Marrying me might put you in a tight predicament, but it would buy us time to do three things."

He added. Momentarily, I was rendered speechless. Samael let my hand go gently, and took a step back.

Raising his three fingers up, from his thumb to the middle finger, he began explaining,

"First. It will buy us enough time to fall in love based on the research I did last night."

Upon saying the first reason, Samael put down his thumb.

Research? That's what he had done last night?

"Second. Grimsbanne will finally enter the era of having the duchess."

Again, he put down his middle finger and continued.

"Last but not the least, you can actually make changes. I'm not saying you can do it overnight; it's harder than that. Alas, with someone like you in power, do you believe you can do better than those nobles?"

"..."

I stared at Samael in silence, my mind traveling elsewhere. Although I heard the three reasons I should marry him, my train of thoughts was in complete chaos.

Who wouldn't be in such a situation?

I was born and lived as a peasant. Therefore, the thought of suddenly becoming the duchess sounded more like a far-fetched dream.

"Will you assist me put things back in their rightful place?"

Again, Samael inquired. I only stared at him like a fool.

Blinking my eyes ever so slowly, my mind rewind the three reasons. Alas, no matter how many times I repeated it, it made little sense.

"What?" He cocked his head, blinking his eyes in puzzlement.

Without thinking twice, I took a step forward. I watched as he knitted his brows together while I extended my arm up.

When my palm reached his forehead while tiptoeing, I tilted my head to the side.

"Milord, are you gravely ill?" I asked.

His forehead felt cold — colder than his hands. Perhaps, since he just woke up from his hundred years of slumber, he wasn't thinking straight?

The three reasons were all utter nonsense. Even a peasant found it outrageous.

Holding his twinkling gaze, I slowly retracted my hand. However, Samael caught my wrist midair.

"Huh?"

"That's not how you check someone whose ill, right?" He smirked, and I didn't know what he meant.

Unconsciously, I stopped my feet from tiptoeing. Simultaneously, he slowly guided my hand down before his hands cupped my cheek.

Before I could take action, Samael slowly placed his forehead against mine. My breath instantly hitched and my entire body froze.

My shaking gaze glimpsed at his closed eyes. His breaths wafting my nose, slow and steady. My pulse flicked against my skin harder. And my heart... I could hear it pounding right in my ear.

What's going on?

"Your silliness is aggravating... and at the same time, rewarding." His tone solemn and warm.

My mind blank. This stance was how my father checked my temperature as a child. I picked this habit since then and used it to check the children's temperature.

However, I've only done this to those children. That's why...

That's why it felt weird that he had mimicked it with me. Samael was too close, I might choke to death or my heart would explode if its rhythm didn't stabilize.

With our foreheads against each other and the apex of our nose kissing, I remained silent. Fighting this silly heart of mine for beating for the wrong reason.

He should stop... I don't want to...

As if he had read my mind, Samael slowly retracted his head away. However, he didn't step back and kept his close distance. His hands still cupping my jaw, guiding me to look at him straight in the eye.

"Yes, I think I was gravely ill called insecurity. But now, I'm cured." He smiled subtly, his eyes brimmed with gentleness.

"Thank you, My Lady."

He added. I tried to force a smile on my lips, but as if my face was paralyzed, I couldn't.

I could only stare at him, being drawn by the irony and contrast flickering in his crimson orbs. Was he a kid to think he got cure just by that?

Don't be silly.

"So!" Whilst my silence, Samael smacked his lips and grinned.

"Did we agree to the same conclusion?"

He queried, but my mind couldn't process what he was pertaining to. Before I know it, I nodded.

Upon seeing my unconscious response, his smile grew even brighter than the torches. It still appeared as wicked as the first time I've seen him, but it wasn't as terrifying as I thought it was.

"Great! We're getting married!" He excitedly withdrew his hand from me and clapped his hands, nodding encouragingly at me.

Huh... we're getting married.

We're getting married...

We're getting...!

As soon as my mind processed those words, I snapped back from my trance. My eyes instantly widened as I blinked them countless times.

"What?"

"Let's tell everyone about it. Fabian will arrange our engagement! Come!" Elated, Samael grabbed my wrist and dragged me with him out of his underground dwelling.

Part of me wanted to pull my hand away. But I ended up being dragged by him, and I ended up not protesting.

"Milord," On the stairs going up, I called out softly.

He was holding me, leading the way. I glanced at his shoulder and noticed the side of his lips curved up.

It was not the usual smirk, nor it was a smile. It was something else. The next second, I heard him mutter,

"If you're going to change your mind, do it now, Lil." Without looking back, Samael muttered.

We didn't halt in our tracks. And I didn't look away from him.

"You're with a selfish man, Lil. Once we exit this long stairs, you'll be trapped with me... forever."

He added. My lips parted, yet no words came out. I should change my mind... but deep down, part of me looked forward if his first reason was possible.

Unconsciously, I balled my hands into a fist as I clench my teeth. Soon, the door came to my sight, but my initial urgency faded away.

"We're close." He announced under his breath.

He sounded like he wanted me to struggle and protest. His steps slowed-down, giving me more time to change my mind.

Alas, I had already decided.

"Mhm," I let out a low hum. "I'm in your care, milord."

Soon enough, we reached the end of this long stair and we're welcomed by the blinding lights in the mansion. Just like the end of the long tunnel, we came out together, leaving our sorrow, sufferings, and grievances along with the darkness.

When we're out, Samael cast me a broad grin while I looked at him silently.

"You're mine now." He announced happily.

If this was a dream... someone want to wake up.

Chapter 27 - Fear No One For I Have Returned

If I knew what would be the consequences of my abrupt decision, I would've made a different choice. If only... would things have changed?

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Samael and I stood on the central plane of the bifurcated stairs of the mansion's great hall. From the floor below the stairs, Mister Fabian, the butler, the acting duke, Rufus, and all other important individuals in this manor stared at the duke with utter horror.

Seeing their reaction, I secretly curled my hands into a fist. I clenched on the rear of my dress, glancing at Samael's side profile every so often.

"Pardon me, My Lord. But, I believed my ears had been deceiving me." Said Rufus sternly.

His brows furrowed together. Rufus glanced at everyone who was standing with him, noticing the exact shock expression plastered on their faces.

"No, you heard me right. I'm getting married." Calm like usual, Samael waved as he chuckled. He added;

"Grimsbanne will have to welcome the first and the only duchess it will ever have."

"But, My Lord! You can't just marry without the blessing of the King. Even if we overlook the difference of your status, please consider your racial difference as well, My Lord."

Rufus exclaimed, brave enough to voice out his opinion. His voice thundered, resonating across the vast great hall of the mansion.

"I agree with Sir Rufus, My Lord. Not only this marriage will affect your status as the Lord of Grimsbanne, but it will incite different opinions from the nobles and the royal palace."

Fabian was quick to back Rufus' argument. After the two voiced out their opinions, one after another, some knights also spoke and stood on Rufus' side.

Meanwhile, I could only watch how this argument unfolds. Obviously, even if the duke wanted this ridiculous marriage with a peasant, it wouldn't be that easy.

Samael's people were right. Even if they agreed to overlook my status as a peasant, Samael was a royal-blooded vampire. I am a human.

Not only we would have problems with having an heir, it was impossible. I never heard about a success story between vampires and human.

Therefore, I had no hopes of this arrangement. Although deep down, I was conflicted whether to feel relieved they were against it; or feel ashamed that I agreed with Samael on the spur of the moment.

Am I just deluding myself with the title of the duchess? No. I never wanted to be a duchess. I already knew the answer, and it was far from that.

After a while, Rufus spoke once again.

"My Lord, please reconsider your decision."

Upon stating so, Rufus directly stared at Samael with unbending resolve without looking away.

My fist trembled as I watched them unite. Part of me wanted to plead with them, but I already gave Samael my word.

He had given me the liberty to change my mind earlier, but I carelessly told him I was in his care now. Even a peasant knows how to keep their word.

Unconsciously, I snuck a glance at Samael and caught him looking at me. The second our eyes met, he smiled brightly as if the situation at hand unfazed him.

"I'm glad you're not protesting with them." Samael whispered, and I immediately dropped my gaze to the floor.

Don't make it sound like my silence was something amusing. I'm merely keeping my word.

I heard Samael let out a faint and brief chuckle before he cleared his throat.

"If you worry about the nobles' opinion that much, why don't you serve them instead? Did my long slumber wane your loyalty and beliefs?"

When Samael spoke, I couldn't trace the slightest resentment in his voice. Instead, he sounded like someone who's giving them an option before anything else.

"I would understand and give you freedom to leave this mansion. However, if you choose to stay, you must know I might hear your voices and opinion, but I could never guarantee to abide them."

Samael bluntly uttered. I glanced at him again and his expression stern while his eyes were sharper than ever.

However, the next moment, Samael stretched his neck in a circular motion with his hand on his nape. It produced a faint, soothing crack.

"Grimsbanne had stood from hundred of years without those nobles. I don't recall having such people in my fief. Alas, now I, Samael La Crox, had to listen to them?"

Unlike his calm tone previously, this time, his mien sent a chill running down my spine. I sensed danger, death, and bloodlust.

Watching him, I gulped. He looked totally disgruntled, and this side of him scared me on a different level.

"Gentlemen, I am aware you mean well. However, I have no tolerance for traitors. Leave now and I won't deem you as one." Samael paused, his gaze slowly traveled across the knights.

"But if you stay, it must be clear that I, the Duke of Grimsbanne, am your lord. And as the Duke, I have only one duty to fulfill; that is to return the peace that was robbed from them."

Upon hearing his remarks, I blinked my eyes in awe. He was radiating as a gentleman of character and integrity.

His words brought a tremendous impact on me. My heart felt moved. His tone full of conviction could make anyone submit in obedience.

Where did that irrational, nonchalant duke go? I could barely recognize this Samael right now.

If I was in a different situation, I would instantly swear my fealty and serve this incomparable man.

"No matter how this marriage appears to you, have faith in your lord, just like how you strongly believed in my return! Grimsbanne is not what it used to be, and I'm ashamed to face my people for their sufferings."

Again, Samael paused as he raised his hand and slowly curled his fingers into a tight fist.

"Alas, there is no need to dwell in the past. What matters the most is the present and the future of this land and its people! I promised you, I won't make the same mistake and fall for the enemy's trap just like hundred years ago."

My breath hitched as I could not look away from Samael. His words and conviction were slowly giving my heart the sliver of hope. Watching and feeling his firm sense of justice was something I never thought I would witness.

"Gentlemen, fear no one, for I have returned. I would let no one trample your spirits of valor unjustly again. Help me cure the disease that caused Grimsbanne nothing suffering."

Slowly, Samael's fist loosened as he extended his arms in his people's direction.

So, this was what the duke was truly like... his words and unbending mien brought me courage and more willingness to fight for everything I had believed in.

It was inspiring.

Rufus bent his knee on the floor as he bowed with his fist on his chest. Just like him, the knights did the same stance.

"We welcome your return, My Lord. We are at your lordship's service!" In unison, they exclaimed with resolved.

I've never witnessed something so incredible and remarkable. It felt amazing that this side of him etched deep in my mind along with his words.

"I'm at your service, milord." I whispered as a subtle smile resurfaced on my lips.

Chapter 28 - A Happy Accident

Even when Samael gave them freedom to leave as they please, no one did. After his moving speech, he told me to take a rest.

So, with the help of Fabian, he escorted me to a bedchamber where I could rest. Looking around, I bit my lower lip as I've been standing behind the door ever since Fabian left.

I didn't move a muscle. My eyes scanned the entire bedchamber with mixed emotions.

This bedchamber was twice... no, ten times more spacious than my shack. With proper bed in sight, windows for ventilation, antiques, chandelier and candelabras, and a fireplace!

My skin could absorb the relieving warmth from the fireplace, bringing a tingling sensation in my heart. How nice...

"Is it... alright for me to sleep in such a grand place?" I murmured, unconsciously taking a step back.

Never in my life I had to live such a luxurious life. But now, like a blink of an eye, I was being addressed as milady and being treated akin to a noble.

It felt... surreal. Perhaps I was still dreaming?

Upon the thought crossing my mind, the previous scene of Samael's speech made my breath hitch. Was that remarkable man also part of my dream?

Slowly, my lips curled into a bitter smile. This time, I dug my nail into my palms and closed my eyes.

Taking a deep breath, I carefully opened my eyes. Yet, I was still in the same bedchamber and still standing from where I've been standing for a long time.

"Duchess... the king... make changes..." I whispered under my breath.

Everything about tonight was too much for someone like me to handle. It was too much information and too sudden.

I'm barely keeping myself together. And for the last time, I'm asking someone to wake me up if this was a dream.

Alas, no one would wake me up.

I let out a deep sigh, biting my lower lip lightly.

"Father, what is going on?" I mumbled as the corner of my eyes started welling up.

I didn't know the accurate reason my eyes sting. Am I scared of what kind of tomorrow that would welcome me?

Or... am I subconsciously happy?

Perhaps both.

In retrospect, even before the day ends, I already knew I would repeat what I did the entire day the next day. But now, I do not know.

Forcing my feet to move, I dragged them towards the enormous bed that could accommodate at least four or more people. I stared down at it, my finger caressing the pillar on the corner.

Unconsciously, I looked around. When I was certain no eyes were watching me, I timidly walked closer to the bed and sat on the edge.

Upon feeling the softness of the mattress, I felt butterflies in my stomach. To test how soft it was, I jumped and bounced slightly.

"Haha," I giggled, as this simple thing brought me joy.

Yet, even when I realized my giggles, it didn't hinder me from bouncing on the bed. It's so soft, like the clouds in the sky.

As if all the problems and worries I had were washed away, I immediately removed the flat footwear I was wearing and crawled into the middle of the bed.

With my knees on the mattress, I jumped slightly enough for me to bounce. I could not help the side of my lips to stretch in glee.

"This is fun." I giggled, placing my palm on the mattress. I continued on jumping.

I wonder if I jump with my feet, will I bounce off much higher?

Upon the thought, I looked up at the high-ceiling. I wouldn't bump my head, right?

To make sure, I raised my hand up, and the ceiling was far beyond my reach. It would be impossible for me to reach that high.

Elated, I cupped my flushed cheek in mirth. No one was around and perhaps, there's no harm to try?

I bit my lip once again, clearing my throat as I exhaled sharply. I would do it.

I would jump as high as I could!

With that thought in mind, it set my excited heart ablaze. But to be sure, I jumped an inch to test if I wouldn't get hurt once I bounced off.

As soon as I did, the creaking sound in my every bounce heightened. Yet, the bed remained steady and firm.

This brought me enough courage as my eyes lit up. It's safe!

A grin resurfaced on my face as I looked up at the ceiling once again. With another deep exhale, I nodded earnestly.

"I will..." Determined, I mustered all my energy, bending my knees as my toes curled on the sheet.

The next moment, I jumped. However, subconsciously, I'm still scared of falling. Hence, I leapt at the safe height.

When my feet landed on the soft surface again, I nearly lost my balance. But I managed not to fall.

My first successful attempt gave me more courage to leap higher. Again, I jumped higher and landed on the bed safely.

"Hihi," I giggled, covering my lips with my palm.

Who would have thought such bed existed? Was it made of clouds? I wondered.

Regardless, my goal was to jump as high as I could. I've never felt this free in my life.

Again, I stabilized my breathing and gazed down on my feet. This time, however, I only tiptoed before jumping an inch.

The constant jumps I've done caused consistent and steady waves on the mattress. And my body waved, bounced along, granting me proper rhythm when to take that high jump.

When I was confident enough, I had finally bent down to make that record-breaking high jump.

And I did!

However, just as I jumped, the door suddenly creaked open, followed by Samael's voice.

"By the way, my fiancée —"

Midair, I turned my head in his direction. Once our eyes met, both wide in surprise.

Time ticked slower than ever as I felt my body falling back on the mattress. Instantly, my mind regretted jumping that high, realizing it would be a crash landing instead.

With my ankle hitting the frame of the bed, I grit my teeth at the sudden pain. But I knew that wouldn't end there.

I braced myself for falling out of the bed. If Samael didn't arrive at the wrong time, I wouldn't fall out of the bed.

Knowing what was bound to happen, I shut my eyes closed and waited for the pain to strike me.

However, just before I crash on the floor, I heard the inbound breeze produce a swift sound. And... the pain I was expecting didn't come.

"What are you doing, silly?"

The next moment, I heard him speak as his breathing brushed my forehead. Slowly, I opened my eyes, and he was looking at me worriedly.

Instinctively, I looked around. I fell out of the bed, but Samael caught me.

I heaved a sigh of relief, feeling my heart pounding against my chest. Yet, it was beating in a happy motion.

When Samael spoke again, he brought me back to the current lapse. I instantly froze.

"What would happen if I didn't come? You can hit your head and die, silly."

His tone firmed with a mix of worry. Slowly, I moved my gaze and met his.

I wouldn't crash if you didn't suddenly arrive, was what I wanted to reply. But all I did was gulp a mouthful of saliva and purse my lips.

"I... I'm sorry,"

Like a child being scolded by her parents, I expressed and looked away. I heard him let out a sigh before assisting me back to my feet.

However, as soon as I stood, I nearly lost balance as I winced. Fortunately, I caught his arm and used it as my pillar of support. I strained my ankle upon hitting the bed frame.

Looking at my ankle, my skin had a visible red as it instantly swelled a bit.

"You're such a klutz." Samael sighed.

I glanced at him, and he was staring at my ankle.

"Sit down. I'll help you reduce the pain and swelling."

He added as he assisted me to sit on the edge of the bed.

As soon as I sat down, Samael didn't waste a second as he hurriedly fled out of the room.

"Why does he look so worried? He's not angry?" I wondered under my breath, tilting my head to the side.

Chapter 29 - Don't, Lilou. Don't Even Think About It.

Samael returned with Fabian and a few servants carrying towels and bowl of water. After putting everything in place, Samael ordered them to leave.

He then started wiping my ankle with a damp and cold small cloth. The light touches made me wince in pain, and I instinctively withdrew my foot, but he held on it.

"Stay still. It'll hurt a little, but it'll relieve the pain, eventually." Without glancing at me, Samael uttered.

I pursed my lips in a thin line, watching him damp my ankle gently. I darted my gaze from his hands on my ankle to his solemn countenance.

"I'm sorry I got carried away and led to this."

I expressed, believing I was giving him unnecessary worries and chore. Although he volunteered to tend to my sprained ankle, I still felt shamed.

I couldn't truly blame him. He didn't ask me to jump on the bed, nor I should have done it since I was merely a guest.

I failed to conduct myself properly and got excited like a kid.

After dropping my apologies, Samael didn't reply. He kept silent, so I shut my mouth as well.

Was he mad? Obviously, he would be. Was he regretting his decisions now?

Not that it would change anything whether he changed his mind. Still, a part of me felt disappointed at myself.

I had all reasons to fear him. He's not just a vampire, but a pure-blooded one. But he never truly harmed me since day one.

Now that I was thinking thoroughly about it, I realized he was more lenient than Rufus. Samael never truly looked down on me, although he was way too blunt.

I bit my lower lip again. My hands on my lap clasped my dress tightly.

"Are you angry, milord?"

I asked, peeking at him who was still occupied relieving the pain in my ankle. He was successful as the pain subsided and my ankle felt numb.

His caring and gentle hands did magic. I never thought he could relieve the pain of a sprained ankle in a brief span of time.

"Yes," Still had his attention on my ankle, he answered.

"I won't do it again." I replied under my breath.

I was used to seeing him do whatever he wanted. And I've also witnessed how he carried himself with dignity in front of his people.

But I've never seen him this mad. Although it was not like what I had expected, his silence was enough for me to reflect on my action.

"I'm not mad that you jumped on the bed and sprained your ankle. Knowing you, it would be more odd if you didn't do what you did."

Suddenly, Samael spoke again and clarified. I raised my gaze to him, furrowing my brows.

He's not angry because of that?

Samael slowly raised his head, and his gaze immediately locked with mine. With his arm over his knee, he sighed.

"I'm just worried what could have happened if I didn't come and check on you." He explained with a sigh.

I kept silent, dropping my gaze to my knuckles.

"Also, you're on a vampire's turf, Lil. If I didn't catch you and you bled, that is akin to inciting their hunger."

He added, enlightening me of the fact I have forgotten to consider.

"Will they kill me?" Before I knew it, I already asked as I raised my gaze again.

"No?" Samael arched his right brow. "But I don't like them lusting over you."

"Huh?"

Upon hearing his last remarks, I blinked my eyes as if it would help my hearing. Did I hear him correct or my ears were deceiving me?

"People here don't drink human blood. But, the scent of something spectacular is hard to resist." Samael uttered, shaking his head lightly.

"You don't know how refreshing and inciting your blood smells like, Lil."

"But, you don't..." I cleared my throat as I pursed my lips. "You had a taste of it, but still alright."

I expressed. My eyes skimmed through his countenance.

Not that I didn't believe his claims per se. It was just that I've inflicted countless of minor injuries in the past.

However, I was never targeted by a vampire. I often thought how miraculous it was to survive at this age without encountering those monsters.

"That's because I chose you over blood." Samael shrugged. He was staring dead in the eye.

Chose me over blood...?

After uttering his last remarks, Samael shook his head once again. He then continued on tending on my ankle while neither of us spoke again.

When Samael finished bandaging my ankle, he told me to take a rest, and he left. Upon opening the door, two maidservants was already standing outside.

I heard him instruct them to change my clothes before he left. Just like they were told, the maidservants helped me change my attire to a comfortable night dress.

The maidservants then told me if I needed help, they were just outside before they left me alone. Laying on the bed, I stared at the ceiling with myriads of thoughts in my mind.

"Chose me over blood?" I whispered.

Was it truly hard to understand a sentence? Obviously, it was not.

But... I didn't want to have a misconception of everything. While I was aware of Samael's plan, my heart was slowly beating in the wrong rhythm.

I didn't want to take everything to the heart. I've been doing a good job of denying what my heart was telling me.

However, the more he showed me kindness... the more it was getting harder to keep myself clear-headed.

"Don't, Lilou. Don't even think about it." I whispered, slapping my cheek lightly to get a hold of myself.

I did everything I could to throw all the thoughts in the back of my head. Tossing my body from side to side until I eventually fell asleep.

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Hours after Lilou fell asleep, Samael was back at the bedchambers. He perched on the edge of the mattress, his palm on the soft surface of the bed.

Staring at Lilou's sleeping visage, Samael chuckled as she was sleeping like a log. His hand brushed the strand of hair falling on her face, smiling subtly.

"You worry me too much, silly."

Chapter 30 - A Glimpse Of Her Marriage

That night, I had a dream. A dream which I didn't want to wake up to. A dream I wished it was reality as the man smiling back at me was my father.

I slowly reached out to him and cupped his jaw. He felt real and alive.

"Father," I called out softly.

I missed him. Even if this was just a dream, I was glad to see his smile once again.

"Are you happy with mother now?" I asked, but he was just smiling.

He sure was. I'm relieved.

As I was staring at him, his lips parted and mouthed something I failed to hear.

"What, Father?" I asked, but he just smiled and slowly faded.

"No..." I called out, trying to hold on to him, but to no avail.

Slowly, I opened my eyes while panting. Yet, I reckoned I'm still in a dream, as what graced my eyes was a beautiful sight to behold.

Long eyelashes, narrow pointy nose, delicate lips. With the argent hair falling freely on his forehead, covering his brows.

How dazzling.

Samael was the most beautiful man I've laid my eyes on. He looked harmless and delicate.

He may be a vampire. But he's different.

That's right. Samael was...

Sam—!

As soon as realization struck me, my eyes slowly widened. My body froze as I blinked my eyes.

Samael! What was the duke doing here? Sleeping beside me?

My breath hitched, terrified what happened when I fell asleep. Instinctively, I looked down and lifted the hem of the quilt.

To my relief, I still had my nightdress. It calmed me a little, but not enough to make me feel at ease with him on the same bed as I was.

"Morning," Amid my surprised, I heard him speak languidly.

Just then, he wrapped his arm around the quilt covering me as he moved closer while pulling me closer. This was mind-boggling!

We haven't got married but we're already sleeping in the same bed! Not that I had an option, but still!

"Let me sleep a little. Its night time for me."

He muttered without opening his eyes. I held my breath, limiting my breathing as I dare not move the slightest.

I could feel my chest moving heavily. What a situation to wake up to.

I grit my teeth. Since I dare not disturb him, all I could do was stare at his enchanting facial structure.

The longer I stare, the more my breathing ease down. He seemed at peace, bearing no malice.

Unconsciously, I picked my bottom lip. Soon, our breathing synchronized in perfect harmony as my muscles relaxed.

Do I have to watch him sleep all day? If morning was night for him, how would everything work?

I spent almost the entire day in the field. Hence, I didn't know what he was doing alone in the shack.

How foolish of me to forget that they were the creatures of the night.

"Mi — milord?" I whispered, but it seemed he was fast asleep.

I gulped, taking the courage to poke him. The second the tip of my finger touched his lean cheek, I retracted it right away like I got scalded.

Yet, he didn't bulge. He was sleeping like a log.

How ironic to sleep deeply after sleeping for a hundred of years. Right... how silly of me. His mind was conscious despite being in a slumber.

"Um..." Adding some faint noise before the silence deafen me, I cleared my throat.

Should I just let him sleep and wait until he wakes up? Wait, what if he wakes up at dusk? Does that mean I have to lie here all day?

Thinking on how to slip away from his embrace, Samael suddenly pulled me closer until the apex of his nose was on my upper chest.

His breaths brushing my collarbones tickled me. I attempted to create some distance, but that slight movement caused his embrace to tighten.

The next second, I gasped upon feeling an unknown damp textured like a tongue glided smoothly on my collarbone. That alone provided a slow flick to my lower region.

I didn't understand this foreign sensation.

Adding to his consistent breaths brushing my skin, it stimulated something within me. A sensation of wanting and needing something I wasn't aware I needed in my life.

It slowly traveled further up to my neck. I held my breath as he slowly set my body ablaze.

"Mi — milord," Under my breath, I softly called out.

Alas, I didn't sound protesting. Until I heard a soft smooch which snapped me awake from the spell that was clouding my thoughts.

"Milord!" I snapped, pushing him away as I immediately jumped back to the edge of the bed.

Instinctively, I covered my chest with my arms, terrified. What had gotten into me enjoying his invasion?

Samael dragged himself to sit up. His eyes were half-opened, confused as he scratched the back of his head.

When he turned his head in my direction, he tilted his head to the side.

"Morning, My Lady." He grinned until his eyes closed. "I mean, my fiancée."

He corrected, before he collapsed on the bed once again.

"Ahh... just when I was having a beautiful dream of making babies."

He mumbled lazily, rolling on the bed until his back laid flat on it. I watched in hostile as he slowly opened his eyes and he spread his arms.

"Well, reality is better, anyway."

He chuckled before he yawned. Meanwhile, I scrutinized his indifferent mien.

He didn't know? I wondered, squinting my eyes suspiciously.

"What are you doing there, my little fuzzy bunny?"

After he stretched his arm, he looked at me and furrowed his brows.

"Don't worry. I'm marrying you, anyway. So, we should practice sleeping in the same room and sharing the same bed." He said.

His last remarks rendered me speechless. Practice? I am aware of our arrangement, but sharing on the same bed before marriage was a different case!

Samael licked his lower lip and his brows creased even more. He smacked his lips as if tasting something on his tongue.

The next moment, he grinned and glanced back at me. Again, he sat upright.

With his fingers on his lips, he kissed it and said, "Delicious breakfast. Thank you very much!"

I gasped, holding my hands closer to my chest, and looked at him in dismay.

Suddenly, Samael furrowed his brows and squinted his eyes.

"What are you doing, milord?" I asked.

He was just staring at me. Why?

"I'm trying to see if I can see anything beyond that underwear, obviously." He answered in a knowing tone.

Upon hearing his daring response, I gasped in horror as I pulled the quilt from him and covered everything I could. What kind of abomination I woke up to?

"Haha! I'm kidding!" Satisfied, Samael laughed heartily before he dragged himself out of the bed.

My gaze fell from his head in which he ran his fingers through his unruly argent hair. Slowly, my eyes traveled down to his sharp jaw, then to his neck, and to his luscious collarbones that were simply enticing.

Momentarily, the sight of him dazzled me as my eyes shoot down to his bare chest. Then... down to those perfectly honed muscles in his abdomen.

I was aware he wasn't wearing anything to cover his top. However, now that he was standing, exhibiting what he could offer, I sat here slacked-jaw.

"You should be as generous as I am, Lil. You don't have to struggle to see what you desire to look at."

He teased, smirking as he spread his arms before slowly turning around.

Was he enjoying showcasing himself more than his audience?

"Haha!" After making one turn, Samael laughed and shook his head lightly.

Resting his hands on his lean waist, he grinned and winked.

"You know you only need to say it to have a taste." Like a devil, he teased before laughing evilly.

He then started walking towards the other door, which I haven't got the chance to see yet.

When he was at the door, a sudden urge to defend myself overflowed.

"Wear something, milord! No one wants to see you naked!" I urged before he could close the door completely.

As soon as I did, Samael peek his head back.

"What? You want to see more?"

I coughed, casting him an eye full of disdain.

"Well, I'm sorry to burst your bubble but, no..."

I heaved a sigh of relief as he trailed off. I thought he would tease me even further and who knows he might give me a heart attack this time.

However, the way the side of his lips curled mischievously made me feel restless. At the back of my head, he was planning something.

"... no, I'm not sorry!"

"Stop!"

Just as I thought, Samael suddenly jumped back to our room with his hands held high. Instantly, I covered my eyes as his bare top had the power to make someone commit moral sins.

With my eyes covered, I heard him chuckle and exclaim, "Haha! Kidding. What a fun morning!", before I heard the door closing.

Slowly, I anxiously peeked through the gaps between my fingers. I heaved a sigh of relief seeing he was gone.

Patting my chest to calm my violent heart, I whispered — horrified.

"What kind of devil are you marrying, Lil?"