

The Duke 251

Chapter 251 - Collecting The Pieces

The host for tonight's seance was the cheerful platinum-haired guy. Every one of us took a seat with me sitting closest to the host and Yul on my right.

"Before we begin, why don't we start with a brief introduction?" The host suggested with his graceful hand gestures. "My name is Quentin Zero Moriarty."

My brows knitted upon hearing his family name. Moriarty... wasn't that one of the founding clans of the Heart's Kingdom? I gazed at him and he offered a polite smile, as if he had read my mind.

"Yes, I am a Moriarty... the last Moriarty alive." Zero's smile remained, but the aura he exuded was so strong one could feel that his strong hatred was his driving force.

"I had introduced myself, but I will still do so. I'm Baron Mortas Martin. I was one of the supporters of the Bloodfang clans in the aristocratic faction." Mortas introduced, leaving bits and pieces of his connections with our clan and outside this meeting room.

'For a baron to represent the aristocratic faction, he surely disguised himself well.' I thought, nodding as his lower titles granted him more freedom. It seemed I couldn't underestimate everyone here.

The rest also introduced themselves. Around the table, from Mortas Martin, there was this middle-aged man named Theodore Darkbridge, Acheron Roseberg who had a title of a duke and was also a knight, Tristan Willow who seemed to be the youngest, then Yul, me, back to Zero. A total of seven people.

"Now that we had introduced ourselves," Zero paused as his smile faded while his eyes darkened. "Let's get down to business."

'Sounds good,' I thought, and Zero didn't beat around the bush as he addressed about the king's current movements, possible plans in the founding celebrations, and Sam's movements. It surprised me how they knew details, although unsure, they could make logical speculations.

I and Yul remained in silent and listened to everything. While I do so, my brow arched as I noticed more details the more I observed them. Unlike the gatherings the king held where Sam would take me in and where he would aggravate everyone, these people were calmer in their arguments.

However, I was certain now that I've listened enough, these people only shared the common enemy: the La Crox. It was easy to figure out their other agendas as they were very vocal about it. For example, Mortas Martin wanting the aristocratic faction to gain more power. Unlike Mortas Martin, Theodore Darkbridge just pursued a less ambitious goal and that was to stop the king's madness of turning all humans into vampires.

I knew that plan, as I was part of it in the past, but I bit my tongue and let those two argue. Meanwhile, Acheron Roseberg rarely spoke, but whenever he did, he would always hit the bullseye. It made me think every word that left his lips were as precious as gold.

My eyes then studied the other person who hadn't said a word since the beginning. Tristan Willow. I could understand Zero's silence while listening to everything, but this Tristan's silence made me feel a little... leery?

"Now that we've heard enough, I'd like to hear what her highness has to say?" Zero clapped, stopping the argument before cocking his head in my direction. All the other men shifted their eyes on me.

"I would say, 'you don't have to worry too much as we'd only like to hear your thoughts about the matters we've addressed, but I figured you'd find it as an insult.'" His smile didn't reach his eyes, keeping eye contact with me. "With the Duke of Grimsbanne, your husband, as one of our targets, what are your thoughts about it?"

I didn't respond immediately and stared at his taunting smirk. "It's foolish and cowardly."

"Foolish? And cowardly?"

"And predictable, if I may add." I tapped the table with my forefinger. "Your plans, I mean."

"That is not my question, you highness, but let's hear it." The side of Zero's lips stretched broader as he leaned forward, resting his elbows on the surface of the table while linking his hands.

"If your speculations is correct, that His Highness, the third prince will start a revolt on the founding celebration, and we will move once the end of their battle nears its end... it is not a bad idea. However, had any of you thought what if my husband planned something else?"

Zero's eyes narrowed, but his lips stretched even wider. The others clearly showed their puzzlement. I breathed out deeply as I cleared my throat.

"Our clan desired to put things in their rightful place, but attacking and looting while both the king and the duke are exhausted is not just cowardly but also predictable. The king is as cunning as a fox, he could've thought of this possibility — my husband may have considered about it too, but I bet he will shrug it off. However, the people under the third prince, Sir Knight Rufus, Fabian the Butler, and those who are supporting him would've surely prepared for that possibility."

I saw Yul nod his head, but said nothing. I studied everyone who brooded over my words in silence, and once again noticed the nonchalance of Tristan Willow.

"So, you're saying...?" Zero cocked his head, still bearing his smirk.

"You guessed it right, Your Highness," I smirked back, almost smiling brightly as it seemed we thought alike. "Before the founding celebrations, I will announce my candidacy for the throne."

"What?! But that is risky!"

"Are you saying you plan to challenge the king?"

"Your Grace, I knew you are competent enough. However, have you been listening to us? The king had already prepared a militia of human-turned-vampire. Even if you challenged him and miraculously defeat him, his will would remain."

"Silence." Zero raised a hand to stop the continuous complaints from the rest. "Let's hear her highness' explanation first."

"By announcing my right..." I trailed off as I tucked my hair behind my ear as I smirked, setting my eyes on Zero. "And causing all sorts of commotion by dividing the nation in three, is more fun, isn't Your Majesty?"

The corner of his lips curled up as his eyes squinted slightly, leaning over as he cupped his chin. "Fun... I think we will get along well, Duchess."

Chapter 252 - The Halberd

Quentin Zero Moriarty, the last pureblood of the Moriarty Clan. If memory serves, the Moriarty's, Le Blac, and Von Stein clan along with the La Crox, Bloodfang, and Crawford's founded the Heart's Kingdom. Unlike the Bloodfang and Crawford Clans, who had inferior blood, those three clans could par the La Crox. However, instead of fighting for the throne, the three clans went on their separate ways to build their own kingdom.

Those kingdoms were now known as Karo Kingdom, Cross Kingdom, Spade Kingdom. Just like the Heart's Kingdom, those three held the same power and declaring war with any of them would result in unimaginable casualties for both sides.

But time had passed and the previous clan leaders had perished. The newer generations don't seem to think peace was always the perfect resolution. Whether it was their egos or greed for more power, Stefan and Zero from the Spade Kingdom seemed to share the same goal.

That was an Empire.

"Duchess."

My brows quirked as I halted from leaving. The rest of the people I had met tonight glanced at me, but they didn't stop me from leaving the meeting room.

"Yes, Your Majesty?" I turned around and faced Zero.

He glanced at Yul, who was waiting for me for a moment, before setting his eyes on me. "Would you grant this old fellow to share a tea with you?"

Tea? With him? I took a deep breath as I pondered about it momentarily. I glanced at Yul and offered him a smile, before facing Zero once again.

"I would love to," I replied with a smile doesn't reach my eye. "Yul, can you wait for me outside?"

"But..."

"I don't think there's something to be wary about His Majesty." I cut Yul off and cast him a quick look. Yul clenched his teeth before letting out a deep sigh and bowed.

"I'll just be right outside," he said as he gazed at me, and then to Zero who was smiling brightly.

"Forgive my brother's rudeness, Your Majesty. I hope you understand he is quite fond of me." I beckoned a slight bow as soon as Yul left.

"Oh, no offense taken." Zero waved as he turned and walked towards the chairs near the shelves. "I understand the ninth prince since his sister is quite bold yet... endearing."

Zero dragged the chair carefully and then turned his head to my direction. "Please, take a seat."

"Thank you." I nodded and sat on the chair. I watched him walked back and forth as he personally prepared the tea before sitting from across me, with the tray in his hand.

"You're quite skilled at this, Your Majesty." I praised as I watched him pour tea elegantly.

Zero let out a low and soft chuckle. "I like doing everything by myself, Duchess. Hence, I picked up these type of unimportant skills."

A profoundly distrustful person... that was what he meant.

After putting down the tea pot, he carefully served the tea in front of me before gestured to me to take it. "Please."

"Thank you, Your Majesty." I smiled and picked up the cup of tea, sniffing its aroma that made me furrow my brows. My hand unhesitatingly guided the cup to my lips and took a sip.

My eyes dilated a bit and turned to him when he chuckled. "Surprised that it's sweet?"

I pursed my lips and carefully placed the cup down. It was indeed surprisingly that was very unlike the tea I shared with Yul and Silvia.

"It's sweet and refreshing as if soothing my fatigue and my muscle." I expressed honestly as I faced him. Zero was sipping before he placed down his cup on the saucer and smiled at me.

"I'm glad you liked it," He mused and explained the components of the tea which surprised me even more.

"It's blood?" I asked as I glanced at my tea.

"Don't worry. In our Spade Kingdom, we had human blood donors." Zero smirked at me playfully, clarifying his side just in case I would misunderstand. "This tea had been very popular among nobles from our kingdom and to other lands."

It was popular to other land, but not in the Heart's Kingdom? I remembered drinking that bitter tea during my first day in the Avolire Palace. Did they deliver all the bad goods in our kingdom? Or did the kingdom refuse a trade with them?

"Oh, dear! Your expression tells me everything. The Heart's Kingdom is our biggest consumer since there were more vampires in this kingdom." Zero chuckled in amusement, smiling brightly for whatever reason. "If you're a vampire, you will enjoy the natural taste of the tea. However, since you're still human, I added my secret ingredients in it."

"By secret ingredients, you don't mean your blood, right?"

"Haha! How did I not think of that?" he chuckled while shaking his head lightly. "Unfortunately, although the thought of you having me is tempting, I can't attract attention by bleeding. So no, it's not my blood, but my love."

The little expression on my face completely vanished. "I didn't know Your Majesty is quite generous." This guy... was he also a pervert? His words could mislead anyone who was listening.

"Zero. I do not mind being called by my name, Duchess."

"How can I do that, Your Majesty? Please don't put such a burden in me."

Zero's smile slightly faded. "We are allies and just like me, you almost have the same standing being the Bloodfang's clan leader." He rested his leg over the other, propping jaw by the back of his hand with his eyes fixed on me.

"Your Grace, do you know that by having one of the purest blood made you the most desirable woman in this kingdom?" he asked out of nowhere, rendering me in silence. "However, that is not the reason I asked you to stay."

I unconsciously held my breath as I clutched my skirt, but kept my exterior in check. Zero's alliance with my clan must have more than... my eyes dilated as a scoff slipped past my lips upon the sudden realization in my head.

This alliance... hah... fucking —!

"Have you realized it?" Zero smirked as he amused himself watching me.

I cleared my throat and bowed slightly. "Thank you for the tea, Your Majesty. I can't stay out for a long time."

I didn't wait for him to speak as I stood and bowed once again before leaving. When I was by the door, I halted as he spoke.

"This will be a long night, don't you think?"

My head turned back at him as I sported a subtle smile. "I hope it'll be an interesting one as well." And then I left, grinding my teeth with my fist trembling.

"Sis, are you alright?" asked Yul while I stomped my feet away.

"Alright?" I sneered, as my eyes glinted in ridicule. "Yul, my desire for the throne just became stronger than ever."

"How cute," Zero remarked with a smirk while his eyes were still fixed on the door. "No wonder the king and the duke are drawn to her."

"Your Majesty, what do you think about her?" asked Tristan Willow, who suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

"I think..." Zero trailed off as Lilou's smirk and last remarks before she left hovered in his head.

"Just as the Bloodfang said, the long wait will be worthwhile."

"We can't trust her, Your Majesty. That ninth prince is also not to be underestimated."

Zero let out a loud chuckle as he turned his eyes towards Tristan. "The Bloodfangs are meticulous. It's just a matter of time until the will of the Bloodfang will be her own will... although now that I met her, I don't think I still have the patience to let my fiancée be with someone else's wife."

"Your Majesty, are you saying..."

"My fiancée said she hopes tonight will be an interesting night." The corner of Zero's lips stretched wider. "Since the founding celebration is coming, didn't the king send an invitation? It's my duty to respond, right?"

Chapter 253 - Forgive My Old Age

When Zero usurped the throne, he had killed all his kin; even children and women, no exception. He was a real tyrant, feared by many, but also a wise ruler, as the Spade Kingdom flourished than ever before.

"Doesn't he have a Queen?" I asked at Yul as we clashed sword in the training grounds. We had decided to return directly to the training grounds as our alibi if ever someone asked.

"He had, or so what I had heard." Yul hopped back, and so did I. "As far as I know, although he was known to play around with women, he married twice."

"What happened to them?"

Yul swung his sword before leaping towards me. I blocked his attack and our blades trembled between us.

"Dead," he said as his eyes glinted, gliding his blade up before thrusting it to my throat.

Fortunately, my reflexes were fast enough to block his attack by my sword's flat. My palm supporting the other side of my sword.

I tilted my head to the side. "Dead?"

"Both died of an illness." Yul withdrew his sword, swinging it calmly. "Right now, the position of the Queen is vacant. Rumors has it that the reason that person indulged in debauchery is because of his sorrow for his queen's passing."

A light chuckle escaped my lips. "You believed that?"

"No one believes that." Yul chuckled as well while checking his sword's blade. "For his two queens to die in almost the same illness... who would believe that there's nothing more about that story?"

That was correct. After meeting with Zero and interacted with him, I could tell there's more than what meets the eye. He was the type of person who would kill his own kin or anyone who could pose a threat to his power.

'He is more wicked than Sam and more ambitious than Lexx,' I thought. 'At the very least, although Lexx and Sam could kill their own siblings, they didn't. It may not be out of pure mercy, but the ways of the La Crox were keeping their family united.'

"Be on your toes at all times, Lilou." I snapped back from my trance as I held Yul's gaze. "That person... the way he looks at you urges me to gouge out his eyes."

"Are you saying this because I am married?"

Yul shook his head. "I'm saying this as your family. I don't like the way he looks at you, as if he cannot wait to see what kind of face you'll make while you take your last breath."

"That's a very distinct description, Yul." I chuckled at his remarks, but I couldn't disagree with him because I felt it myself. Zero's eyes didn't bore lust, but rather, this twisted unknown desire one couldn't tell what exactly.

"And to think our clan promised a marriage to seal an alliance with them... just what the hell are they really planning, Lilou?" Yul turned to me in distress.

Our clan had prepared their scheme like a puzzle, and only I could tell what it would look like before its completion. However, until now, I hadn't figured it out yet.

"I don't know, Yul." I breathed out in frustration before raising my head to him. "But what I do know is, this alliance will be marked by betrayal."

Yul nodded as a glint of determination flickered across his eyes. Even without spelling it out loud, he was already aware of it.

"Lilou," He called solemnly without gazing away. "You told me to value my life as much as I value yours, and I will do so as promised. But, if worse comes to worst, take my blood."

"Yul, stop saying such ominous..."

"I mean it." He cut me off as he walked in my direction until he was towering over me. "Don't misunderstand. Death is not what I seek, your survival is. Just take —"

"Shhh." I raised a finger and hushed him as soon as I felt someone else's presence enter our vicinity. Yul seemed he had sensed it too, as he pursed his lips and took several steps back.

"I will have to take my leave since you have a guest," He said and bowed slightly. "Don't let yourself get killed."

"You underestimate me too much, Yul."

"I don't. Your visitor is just something, although I don't think he will kill you."

Yul turned around and started walking away, waving. I shook my head as I let out a soft chuckle. I was glad that Yul was with me in all these as I didn't think I would remain sane having to deal with everything on my own.

While I waited for this visitor, I stared at where Yul vanished to. Just as I said, Yul's purpose was to only keep an eye on the palace. However, after our conversation just now, I figured he unconsciously knew his real purpose. That was, he had to be strong so he could give all of his to me.

They wanted me to absorb him, his knowledge, his skills, and his life.

'Our clan is really cruel, don't you think, Yul?' I muttered internally as I gritted my teeth. 'They're selfish and just as evil as everyone else.'

I let out a sigh and gazed up at the sky. "If God exists... please hear me." I closed my eyes and prayed silently. I couldn't remember the last time I had prayed, but I felt like if I prayed hard enough, God would hear me... but nothing.

My eyes opened ever so slowly. "I don't know what the hell you're doing up there and why you never answered my prayers. However, I pray for them... you know 'them', right? Protect them from me... please."

Once I peeled my eyes away from the dark sky, I held onto Lakresha and took a deep breath.

"Lakresha."

My weapon immediately took form and my eyes glinted as I pivoted on my heel, swinging Lakresha to deflect the spear flying towards my direction.

"Aren't you being a little rude, Fabian," I greeted as Fabian slinked out from the dark with a wicked grin on his face.

Fabian raised his hand as his dark spear returned to him. "Please forgive my old age, my lady. I've been having problems holding onto things, so my hand slipped."

Chapter 254 - Their Trust In Fabian

"Please forgive my old age, my lady. I've been having problems holding onto things, so my hand slipped."

His hands slipped so his dark spear flew all the way in my direction with an intention to kill? I often found Fabian's humor terrifying, but now it was quite funny.

"Forgiven." I nodded, closed-lipped as I studied his dark spear, Maleficent.

Just one glance from it prickled my skin. But more than that, Lakresha was reacting differently. It was as if it was excited to meet it. Well, I was excited as well.

"I missed you, Mister Fabian. I heard you've been busy reviving the west garden back to life," I humored while playing the snath in between my fingers. "So, I suppose, for someone busy such as yourself to see me, it must be important."

"The flower I had grown in the west garden had bloomed prematurely. So, I would like to invite you there since it is my apology gift for grazing my lady."

An apology for that time? On the night of my wedding night, only Fabian was able to graze me. Although most of the powerful ones didn't attack me with all their might, Fabian still grazed me easily.

"That's so sweet of you, Mister Fabian."

"My lady, I deeply regret my actions."

Goodness. How could Fabian say such words with a sinister smile?! Did he know his expression and words don't match?

"Very well. Since you went on your way to come here, why don't you spar with me?" I proposed since I've been eager to meet him for the past week, but didn't have the opportunity. "Will you fulfill the request of this young, stubborn one?"

His lips stretched broader. "How can I refuse you, my lady? I've been your instructor for a long time."

"That's right." I nodded in agreement and took a deep breath. "So, just like the good old times? Will you teach me one or two things?"

"It's my honor."

My eyes drooped as I smirked. Fabian was one of the people I had thought about the second I retrieved all my memories. Sam didn't lie when he said Fabian had an exceptional talent. Knowing he was by Sam's side, it felt very reassuring.

"Dagger," Fabian commanded and his Maleficent slowly shrunk in size and became a dagger. "I care for your well-being, my lady."

Care for my well-being? Wasn't he just insulting me?

"Dagger." I grinned, almost giggling as Lakresha also formed into a dagger smaller than his. "I also care for your well-being, Mister Fabian. After all, I had to take into account your old age."

"How moving..." Fabian gasped dramatically with his palm across his chest.

"Well, then." My eyes glinted before I bolted in his direction.

Fabian didn't move as I appeared in front of him in a blink of an eye. I thrust my small dagger towards the side of his neck, only to be caught by the wrist, while his other hand pointed his dagger right in front of my throat.

"Dea... d." He trailed off as soon as he saw me smile. His reaction was fast as he twisted my wrist and tossed it away before hopping back.

The dagger in my hand became a sword and if he was a second late, I had already plunged it into his neck. Everything happened within a fraction of a few seconds, so I could say I did improve.

"That's surprising, my lady." Fabian praised with a nod, but his eyes twinkled in excitement despite almost meeting his end. "I really thought I would die!"

"You flatter me, Mister Fabian. It was me who was at the death's door just moments ago."

"Well, it was safe to say it was a draw, my lady." Fabian chuckled before tossing his black dagger and catching its handle midair.

"Mister Fabian, I am not a fan of draws."

"Neither am I, my lady." Fabian's eyelids drooped halfway as he fixed his eyes on me. "However, aren't we just sparring?"

My eyes shifted towards Lakresha and studied its blade. "I hate it when you hesitate, Fabian. My husband trusts you so much so he wouldn't turn around if a surprise attack came from behind him."

"I never hesitate to slay those who bore ill-intention to my master, my Lady," Fabian explained, and I cast him an indifferent look. "However, my lord cherishes you so dearly I had to think twice."

"Think twice to kill me?"

Fabian let out a low chuckle as he sported his usual kind smile. "No, my lady. Think twice where I can hurt you the most without killing you instantly."

So, he meant he would put me in slow and excruciating torture without an intention to kill me? I chuckled at the thought, as that was just Fabian's style.

"Still, you hesitate, and the moment you hesitate, it can cost you and your master's life."

"You're right, my lady." His narrowed eyes opened once again, and they were sharper than ever. "By saying such, shall I assume we don't share the same goal now?"

A bitter smile resurfaced on my lips as a shallow breath escaped from my nose. By saying such, I was giving him a heads up.

"Fabian, back then, Sam gave you an order to kill him once he woke up as a person he abhors." I stared straight into his eyes without any trace of emotion in my eyes. "My husband trusts you, so I also trust you with all the little conscience I had in me."

"Conscience... huh, that's a strange choice of word, my lady."

"Was it?" I took a deep breath and pursed my lips. There was this little part of me that was telling me I would have to embrace something, even if it was against my will. So, it scared me that by doing so, I might end up killing the person I love the most.

"Can I call your name once?" he requested, catching my attention.

"Sure. I don't see any problem with that."

Fabian nodded before he trudged towards me, making my brows knit. He stopped three steps away from me as he locked eyes with me.

"Lilou."

I snapped my eyes, waiting for the rest of his words. My eyes fell on his mouth and read his lips while the blow of the wind whispered in my ears.

"... Lilou."

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"Lilou."

Charlotte's voice startled me back to the current lapse as I pondered about what happened two nights ago. I blinked my eyes, watching her withdraw her hands away from me.

"Are you alright? You're always zoning out." She pouted while studying my face.

I sported a forced smile and took a deep breath. "I'm sorry. What were you saying?"

"She said a delegation from the Spade Kingdom arrived today." Ramin chimed in as we were resting in one of the restaurants in the Capital.

"Oh?"

"What do you mean, 'oh?' Are you really so clueless not to know the news this morning?" Charlotte's nose scrunched up, gazing at me in dismay.

"What news?" My brows furrowed. If there was any news, Yul would've told me.

Charlotte and Ramin stared at each other before the former let out a deep sigh. She gazed at me in pity, as if she couldn't believe I didn't hear about it.

"The king of the Spade Kingdom will arrive early before the founding celebration. That's why the palace was in chaos. You really didn't know?"

"What..." My eyes dilated as my pupils constricted. 'That Zero!'

Chapter 255 - A Stroll In The Capital

For another king to visit another kingdom, of course, everyone would be busy. After all, this could lead to a war if one offended the other. But more than that, what the fuck is that Zero planning to do?

"Lilou, are you really alright?" Charlotte inquired as I scratched my temple. "Here, try this pudding. You barely had anything."

"You should enjoy this rare opportunity, Lil. We don't get too many day-offs, so use this day to enjoy it." Ramin chimed in a cool manner, making me glance at him and study him.

"What?" he asked with a furrowed brow upon noticing my prolonged stare.

I shook my head. "Nothing." I just noticed that Ramin's temperament had changed gradually. Although he was always energetic in the training grounds and fieldwork, he doesn't complain whenever he was in the office and actually rests on our rest day.

"You, are you going to get married to Kristina or what?" Charlotte suddenly inquired, breaking the ice as she was also staring at Ramin. The latter's face immediately distorted as he shot her a glare.

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

Charlotte just rolled her eyes and shrugged nonchalantly. "Well, I never expect you to say such words. You never enjoy rest days."

"And what's that got to do with Kristina and marriage?"

"Wait, wait, wait!" I snapped in confusion as I caught their attention. "Ramin and Kristina? What is this?"

"Lilou, really? You don't know Ramin and Kristina are lovers?" Charlotte cast me an eye full of disbelief.

Ramin grunted in frustration as he ran a hand through his hair. "We're not, alright?! Kristina is just teasing you! How — ugh! Whatever. Think whatever you like."

Charlotte pouted as she let out a scoff while gazing at him with disdain. Meanwhile, all I could do was dart my eyes from Charlotte to Ramin before narrowing my eyes in suspicion. Ramin and Kristina? I was too preoccupied recently with my own thoughts and everything that had happened, that I didn't notice Kristina and Ramin's sudden closeness.

'Ramin and Kristina, huh? Right after Sam started training us?' I pursed my lips and was occupied with my own thoughts once again. The memory of my last encounter with Fabian hovered over my head once again, which made me unconsciously bit the tip of my thumb.

"Lilou."

I snapped out of my thoughts and gazed up at the two of them. They were staring at me, wide-eyed.

"What?" I asked in puzzlement, only to realize that they were staring at my thumb. I didn't realize I was biting it so hard it bled.

"Lilou, are you really alright?" Charlotte asked in worry as she offered me a handkerchief. "How can you bite your skin so hard it bleeds?"

"It's nothing," I shrugged and pressed my thumb with the handkerchief.

"How can it be nothing? I'm don't want to pry, but aren't we friends? You can always tell us what's bothering you." She let out a deep sigh as she glanced at the handkerchief and then at me. Ramin only stared at me in silence, but his worry was clear in his eyes.

That was the point why I never told them what I had been thinking... they were my friends. Moreover, since they were bearers just like me, there would be a day that they would have to wield their weapons at me.

The thought of it brought this bitterness to my heart. "I'm really fine."

"But —"

"Charlotte, Lilou said it's nothing. It's probably nothing." Ramin cut her off and offered me a meek smile. I could only thank Sam for Ramin's growth; he had truly matured.

His remarks finally pushed her to concede in probing. "Fine. If that's what you say."

"Who knows? Lilou might be pregnant..."

"Ramin!"

"What?!" Charlotte's eyes widened as she immediately cast them on me. "Are you...?"

"No." My answer was just as quick as a bolt of lightning. "Ramin?! Are you kidding me?"

"Well, I'm just saying." Ramin shrugged as he averted his gaze. Thanks to his reckless remark, it diverted Charlotte's focus and the atmosphere between us three grew lighter.

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After our meal, the three of us strolled the busy capital. Because of the upcoming founding celebration, the Capital was busier than ever, even in broad daylight, as guests from all around the land had started arriving in the Capital. Vampires and humans were in peaceful harmony here. It was entirely different in Grimsbanne since the people of Grimsbanne were afraid of vampires.

"Gahh! Those chicken skewer." Charlotte wiped her drool as her eyes follow where that aroma's direction. "Let's buy that!"

"We just ate —" Ramin choked when she smacked his back with a smile.

"What did you say?"

Ramin ground his teeth as his hand tried to reach his back. "How can you raise the hand you used to wield your weapon to a delicate boy like me?"

"Delicate... have some conscience, Ramin." Charlotte rubbed her shoulders as she cringed.

"Whatever, girl. Let's go buy that chicken skewer. Really... does the women in the third squadron gluttons? Where are all the foods you've been eating go?" he grumbled in irritation before Charlotte dragged him with her. She glanced at me momentarily, and I gave her a nod as I followed them from behind.

While Charlotte made her ordered, I looked around at the busy street of the Capital. It was not like it was my first time going out, but there were more carriages passing through today. Such a big occasion and Grimsbanne never celebrated it.

My eyes glanced at the speeding carriage.

"How can the coachman ride so fast in here?" I wondered but paid no attention to it since it was not my business. However, just as I decided to let it be, my eyes narrowed as I noticed a child suddenly crossing the street.

"No, hey, don't! Look!" I hollered and at the same time, the child froze in the middle of the street while the galloping horse came close.

Chapter 256 - A Stroll In The Capital II

"No, hey, don't! Look!"

I hollered, and at the same time, the child froze in the middle of the street while the galloping horse came close. Before I could think, I dashed towards the child as fast as I could and cradled her in my embrace while we rolled to the side.

My heart was pounding so fast and hard I didn't mind the bruises and minor grazes I inflicted. The child trembled under my grip before I let her go and held her small shoulders.

"Are you alright? Are you hurt anywhere?" I asked in worry. A deep sigh slipped past my lips upon seeing her pale complexion. "It's alright now. You're safe, hmm?"

The little girl didn't answer me and just stared at me while she unconsciously clutched my sleeve. Really... be it in Grimsbanne or in the Capital, some people just don't know the proper decorum.

I shot my eyes back and saw Ramin and Charlotte managed to stop the carriage. As a bearer, what they did was justified, even if the person inside that carriage was a nobleman. This was the heart of the Capital and they shouldn't ride like that as if they were in an open field.

'I'll break that one.' I thought before I returned my eyes back to the child. "Can you stand?"

It seemed she already recovered as she nodded. So, I assisted her up and checked if she had inflicted wounds. To my relief, it seemed she didn't.

"Thank you for saving me, my lady," she expressed. Her tone was sweet and muffled, making me smile subtly.

"Just be vigilant next time, alright?" I patted her head as I sighed once again. This reminded me of that same incident years ago.

"Nitri! Let's go!" Suddenly, another child's voice came from the side as she urged the child I saved.

Nitri looked at me while clutching her hand to her chest. She seemed hesitant to go, but I offered her a smile.

"Are you sure you're not hurt anywhere?" I asked for the last time, and she shook her head.

"Thanks to my lady, Nitri is not hurt," she reassured and managed to put up a smile.

I was amazed by her strong character for her to recover so fast. "Alright then."

She gave me a nod before she ran towards the two young children waiting for her. My eyes watched the three children as they skipped their steps, singing something I couldn't hear properly until they were out of my sight.

When I couldn't see them, a glint flickered across my eyes as I walked towards the carriage.

"Why did you stop us? Do you think you can afford to offend the person insi —"

While the coachman argued with Charlotte, I gritted my teeth and kicked the carriage's wheel. Their argument stopped as the carriage rattled and they turned their heads to me, wide-eyed.

"Coachman, please don't misunderstand. We didn't mean to offend anyone. However, we're merely concerned about the bad shape of your carriage." I expressed shamelessly, with a disheartened expression. "How can we turn a blind eye to a carriage that is bound to cause an accident?"

The coachman was rendered speechless, as he didn't think I'd put it that way. There were no witnesses when I kicked the wheel and left cracks in it. All they had seen was me approaching after kicking it.

"That's right!" Ramin was the first one to recover after my remark. "We cannot let a carriage that is in awful shape to continue. You don't want to put your master into an accident, do you?"

"If something happened to your master, it can cause a problem not just to you but also to the country!" Charlotte also chimed in as she raised her chin up arrogantly."

"But —"

"What do you mean, but? We can't let anything bad happened to the guest of the kingdom, or are you telling us you would like to use this carriage despite all the risk? Are you planning to start a war by purposely letting a distinguished guest be in an accident while in the capital?"

If we put it this way, it would be the coachman's fault. Well, it was not like he wasn't at fault in the first place.

The coachman fumbled with his hands as he clutched his hat, glancing at the carriage. Even if he argued now, they still had to rent another carriage as the wheel I kicked would shatter, eventually.

Suddenly, a knock from inside the carriage reached our ear. We unconsciously turned our heads upon hearing a woman's voice.

"What is all this commotion?" Her voice was muffled as she didn't even uncover the curtains.

"My lady, the thing is..." The coachman hesitated as he broke out in cold sweats.

"There seems to be a problem with the wheel of your carriage, my lady. You might be in an accident if the wheels gave in, so we stopped your carriage." Ramin explained the situation calmly, since the coachman was too anxious to churn out words from his throat.

"A problem with the wheel?" the woman inside the carriage repeated. "I see."

"We can assist you in renting one." He offered but received silence for a long time.

"Geez... do they still plan to go on using this piece of trash?" Charlotte grumbled to herself, having a terrible impression of the noble lady inside.

"Charlotte," I whispered, gesturing her to keep her tone down, which made her frown even more.

Shortly after, the door finally opened. As if on cue, the coachman hurriedly went to the carriage door to offer his hand. However, the lady didn't put her hand out and remained inside.

"Get your filthy hands away." The woman coldly turned him down.

The coachman seemed to realize his heedless actions as he bowed and stepped aside. "Ah, yes, my lady. My apologies."

"Then, if you let me —" Ramin was also cut off as the woman spoke.

"I want that dame to assist me." She requested, making us look at each other. Which lady was she talking about? Did she hear Charlotte's previous remarks?

"My lady, are you talking about me?" Charlotte inquired while pointing at herself.

"Are you a lady?"

Chapter 257 - A Stroll In The Capital III

"Are you a lady?"

Charlotte ground her teeth as she balled her hands into a fist. Knowing her short temper, I placed my hand on her shoulder and squeezed it lightly.

"Charlie." I widened my eyes as a hint for her to calm down. Charlotte clicked her tongue in irritation before I trudged towards the door of the carriage.

"My lady, please let this humble one assist you." I offered my hand, still couldn't see her face as she was leaning back.

The first thing I saw was her beautiful slender hand as she placed them on my palm. Her palm was so smooth I felt the calluses on me could scar her! I assisted her out of the carriage with my eyes, gazing down until she was out.

Once I raised my head and saw her ethereal beauty, my heart skipped a beat. She was so beautiful — breathtaking, especially now that she was facing me and I could see how small and pretty her face was.

If only I knew a goddess was riding the carriage, I wouldn't have kicked the carriage. Wait, no! How could I say all that just because she's beautiful.

"I'll be in your care for now," she said with a subtle smile.

I snapped and cleared my throat. "Rest assured we will get you a proper carriage, my lady."

She only nodded and stared at me. There was something in her stare that gave me this strange feeling, but I couldn't tell what exactly. Regardless, we helped her find a new carriage.

When we finally found a good carriage in which she could travel comfortably, she turned and faced me. She had been quiet the entire time, and this mortal didn't dare strike a conversation with a goddess. I wonder what she wanted to say. It couldn't be she wanted to thank us, right?

"Thank you for your help." The three of us were surprised that she actually thanked us after showing her arrogance to the coachman previously. "And I apologize for bothering you. I hope I can repay your kindness someday."

"It's alright, my lady. We're just doing our duties." Ramin humbled with a smile while Charlotte was still not appeased, but she didn't voice out their dissatisfaction. "Please take care on the way."

"I'll keep that in mind." The woman nodded before setting her eyes on me. "I have this feeling we will see each other again soon, dame."

Well, if your destination was the palace, we probably would bump into each other! Was what I wanted to say, but I bit my tongue and only smiled.

"Until then, please take care of yourself," she added before turning around. I instinctively followed her and offered my hand to assist her inside. That made her smile for reasons unknown as she accepted the gesture.

Once she was seated inside and I closed the door, she suddenly hooked the curtains with the back of her fingers. "A flower that blooms in hell is the most beautiful, yet the most dangerous. I wish you good luck, dame."

My brows furrowed. Was she talking about herself? Well, her beauty was, indeed, a dangerous weapon. I hope she could meet Stefan or Zero; if she charmed just either of them, it would bring me great relief.

'You're really cruel, huh?' My mind sassed at me. 'Have you forgotten that those two want you so they can kill you?!

Well, I was not a hero and saving my own skin first was my top priority.

The carriage soon started moving and the three of us watched it sped away. Ramin had secretly instructed the local coachman to drive safely, just in case.

"Lilou, what did that vixen tell you?" Charlotte immediately probed as she hooked her arms around mine.

I sported a smile as I turned my head to her. "She told me about a flower, nothing special."

"What? Why would she tell you that?"

"I don't know. Maybe she likes flowers?" I shrugged nonchalantly and put the woman's remarks at the back of my mind.

"She didn't tell you that as a hint she wanted you to give her one, right?" Her assumptions made me chuckle.

"I highly doubt that," I said while shaking my head sideways. The lady didn't specifically say she liked flowers, it was more like she was describing herself as a flower. But I couldn't tell Charlotte that, could I? She didn't like the lady and Charlotte wasn't even concealing it.

"Some noble women are surely strange." Charlotte murmured, and I merely chuckled as we continued our stroll.

After a while, I glanced at Ramin, who was walking a step behind us. His eyes immediately caught mine, and he raised his brows.

"You're silent." I pointed out. Ramin had been silent after our encounter with the lady. "Did he perhaps know her?"

Ramin came from a noble family and a distant relative of the Remington's, after all. But he shook his head.

"I've never seen her. She is probably a guest from another country." He explained, keeping it short and simple.

"Really? I thought she's a local."

"Well, you can't tell the difference, but we can tell if a person is from this land or not." Ramin shrugged, confusing me a little. For reasons unknown, I felt like his words shouldn't be taken as is.

"Ugh! Enough with that talk about her!" Charlotte grumbled in dismay. "I don't like her! The coachman wouldn't ride that fast in a crowded place if he wasn't threatened for sure! They nearly killed a child in broad daylight!"

"Alright, there, there." I patted her head to calm her down.

She calmed down, but her pout remained. "If you're a second late, that poor child will die. Even if... oh? Isn't that Kristina?"

Ramin and I instinctively followed the direction where Charlotte was looking at. I caught a glimpse of Kristina, who was wearing a cloak while heading into a street.

"What is she doing here? Didn't she say she has other things to do today?" Charlotte murmured.

"Right! Let's follow her!"

"No, I think, wait —" I couldn't refuse her as she dragged me with her almost immediately.

"Charlotte, we shouldn't —!"

"Shh! We'll just check!" Charlotte glared daggers at Ramin as she dragged us to follow Kristina.

'I have a bad feeling about this.' Was what my gut feeling was telling me.

Chapter 258 - A Stroll In The Capital IV

We followed Kristina at full discretion. Both Ramin and I kept glancing at each other, understanding that we were sticking our nose to where it shouldn't belong. However, Charlotte was so into it.

'I didn't want to know what Kristina was up to lately,' I thought as a sigh slipped past my lips. 'And I don't want to know. I'm unsure if she knew something in Sam's plan as she had grown close to Rufus, or she was merely acting because she's a bearer and it was a real mission. Either way, I should distract Charlotte.'

"Charlie," I whispered and tugged her sleeve, but Charlotte only raised her hand without looking back.

"Come on." Her voice was muffled as her steps grew lighter.

Another exhale escaped from my mouth as I gazed at Ramin, who did the same. We couldn't do anything but follow her, waiting for our chance to distract this Charlotte.

"Charlie, can't you —" Ramin halted as we three froze when a blade suddenly appeared on Charlotte's side.

"Why are you... Charlotte?" Kristina's voice came out as low and menacing until it pitched upon recognizing Charlotte.

"Hehe. You found us... surprise?"

"What..." Kristina slinked out from where she hid and cast us a look of disbelief. "You two as well?"

An awkward chuckle was my mere response and a shrug. Ramin, on the other hand, cleared his throat.

"We tried to stop her. We didn't mean to put our nose in your business." Ramin shot Charlotte a look. "It's all her fault." He unhesitatingly pushed all the blame on Charlotte.

"Hey! How can you betray me so fast?"

"Charlie." Kristina frowned as she cocked her eyes to Charlotte. "How can you?"

"I was just curious, alright? You said you have something important to do that's why you refused to join us today, but then you're here acting all suspicious." Charlotte pouted as she sighed.

"Charlie, I am... hide!" Kristina's eyes suddenly sharpened and as if by instinct, we all disappeared from our standpoint to hide. Ramin and Charlotte got into the rooftop while I hid at the narrow gap between houses — Kristina did the same from across me.

"Man... what are those kids singing?"

I heard a man's annoyed voice, along with several more footsteps. Since the alley we had taken was quite desolate, their voices were slightly echoing.

"Don't mind those children. If you did, do we need to kill all the children who started singing that strange song?"

"Did you tell that man about it, though?"

"Agur did."

"Ugh... just when I thought nothing will happen if we sided with that man."

"Those fucking children don't know how dangerous that song they kept singing in the streets."

There were at least six people speaking, and my brows furrowed as I listened to their conversation. I remembered the child I saved and heard the other children singing something as they left, but I couldn't hear the words they sang. Were they talking about the same song?

"Let's just wait for, shhh!"

I held my breath when they suddenly went silent. I gazed at their shadows, and they walked cautiously.

These people were skilled. I'm certain we hid our presence well, but they still noticed our presence. I was uncertain if following Kristina turned out better or it only worsened things. Knowing her character, she wouldn't face them head-on, but if these people found us out, there would be a confrontation.

My eyes searched for Kristina, who was just across from my spot. "What was she doing?"

Kristina was fumbling her hand inside her cloak before I heard one of the men speak.

"Show yourself!"

They actually figured out that they were ears listening. I wanted to come out, but part of me wanted to see everything unfold from the sidelines.

Kristina cast me a look and shook her head lightly, and then she showed herself. I gazed up to see Ramin and Charlotte not moving a muscle, but I could feel they were prepared if things turned from bad to worse. This was Kristina's mission, after all.

"Oh? A woman?" One man intoned. "A beautiful one at that."

"I don't raise my hand to women. Deal with her."

"Let me do it. You people tend to underestimate women."

'I've never seen Kristina fight alone, I wanted to see it.' I jolted with my own thoughts as I found the thrill of seeing her fight. 'Lilou, she is your friend, remember?' my mind reminded me.

Ever since I recovered my stolen memories, I was always in a constant battle with the old and current me. I knew if I embraced what I was before, all the things I cherished now would all go down the drain.

I sighed and shook my head, watching Kristina fight a large man head-on! I merely saw a glimpse of him, but he was taller and bulkier than I thought.

'Why is she not using her Mace?' My brows furrowed as Kristina was fighting with her bare hands. Also, she was merely deflecting and dodging without taking offense.

The man grumbled and spat out curses while his company booed him for being sloppy. The fight didn't last long until the man collapsed face-first as Kristina twisted his arm to his back.

"Ahh!" the man yelled, but no help came from his friends. "You cunt — ah!"

"Yes, this cunt had fucked you up and you finished too early. What a disappointment." Kristina injected something in his back, but the man struggled so much he didn't notice it.

I gazed up at the two who were on the rooftop. From there, they couldn't also see what Kristina did, and I bet the people behind her didn't see it as well.

'What is that?' I narrowed my eyes, but I couldn't see it anymore. I was certain she did something there, but it didn't seem it affect the man.

"Come on, Miss. Just kill him already! He's such an embarrassment!" One man snapped me out of my thoughts as he complained. There was not a trace of pity in his voice as he asked her to kill his comrade.

"These people..."

"Apparently, I didn't plan to kill any of you." Kristina did a chopping assault against the man's nape and he instantly fell unconscious. She then slowly stood on her feet, facing the other men.

A smirk appeared on her lips before she hopped in the opposite direction. The men yelled and followed her, saying they had to kill her. Because of that, the alley soon became empty as they all left the man who was unconscious in the middle.

"What was that?" I muttered as I went out and the other two also hopped down. We all gazed at the unconscious man before I squatted down to check his pulse.

"What..." To my surprised, the man didn't have a pulse. Can Kristina kill someone with that move?!

"What is it, Lilou?" asked Ramin, as I froze momentarily. "He won't die by that move."

But he was dead! Was what I wanted to exclaim, but my tongue rolled back. I looked up at him and offered a weak smile.

"I guess Kristina purposely led them somewhere else," I said as I got up. "Let's head back."

"So she's still doing odd missions until now? Sir Knight Rufus is bullying her." Charlotte complained as she dragged her feet away.

Ramin and Charlotte walked away first. I instinctively studied Ramin. I couldn't tell if his reaction was because he had learned the art of minding his own business, or he had an idea about it beforehand.

'It's possible.' I uttered internally before following the two of them. My head turned back to the dead man for the last time before I heard Ramin and Charlotte call for me.

"Yes, coming!" I yelled and skipped my steps to catch up to them.

"Yes, coming!"

As Lilou turned around and skipped her steps towards Ramin and Charlotte, the fingertip of the 'dead' man suddenly moved. When they left the alley, that dead man slowly dragged his body up to stand.

"The order... must do it." He muttered lifelessly as he dragged his feet in a certain direction.

Chapter 259 - A Myth Created By Children

Meanwhile, in the king's office, Stefan tapped his fingers against his desk. His eyes narrowed as silence embraced him and Dominique, who stood across from him.

"A mere rumor... saying a hero, a legend who will come to collect the debt of the world?" Stefan repeated the rumors that had been going around in the streets sung by children, and now everyone had heard about it. "What a hilarious myth... created by children?"

"Your Majesty, the rumors had spread wide that it is impossible to track its source and... it's impossible to silence now."

The corner of Stefan's lips curled up into a smirk. "The rumors somehow coincide just around the founding celebration, and for reasons unknown, the founding clans sent representatives to attend."

Dominique pressed his lips together as his hands behind him clenched. It had been many years, and they could only count how many times the founding clan attended or sent a representative by the fingers. And then suddenly, everyone answered their letters and sent a representative — even the king of Spade Kingdom would come himself.

"I've invited them so I could get their allegiance for an empire. But alas, I can't shake off this anxiety, Dom." Stefan voiced out in a dangerously low tone, contrasting his claim.

"Do you think they had sided with Hell?"

"Hell? It's not impossible, but it's highly unlikely." He leaned forward, linking his hands before his lips. "There are only two possibilities. One is they knew about Lilou, and the second one is, it is just a mere coincidence. Either way, we had prepared."

Dominique caught the glint that flickered across Stefan's eyes. It wasn't obvious, but the king was surely worried about this.

"You had the allegiance of the Bearers of the Order, Your Majesty. Except for the third squadron who retained the will of their weapons, they are not enough for Lilou to usurp the throne."

Dominique's tone was solemn as he recalled Lilou's potential. "Her strongest support right now is Hell, but I don't think they can pose a threat."

"The problem with everyone is they are complacent. I know Lilou more than anyone, and if by chance she retrieved her memories, no one will know about it until she wanted to let everyone know about it."

"Even so, what can a woman who came from nothing do?"

"She is not someone who came from nothing, nor she had nothing, Dom." Stefan raised his gaze and locked eyes with Dominique. "She had the blood of the Bloodfang and the Crawford. Did you think the Bloodfang had staked their bets solely on Hell?"

"Are you saying the Bloodfang had schemed with another founding clan aside from the Crawford, Your Majesty?"

"If the Bloodfang got Hell on their side, it won't be a surprise if they managed to get another person to agree on this plan from long ago. The Crawford's won't pose a threat even if they supported her, and even if the Remington declared their allegiance with Hell, they can only be an annoyance. My biggest fear is that Hell had finally lost his mind and strike a bargain with the other founding clan."

Silence once again befell the room as neither of them spoke. It was easy to jump to conclusions, but believing one thing and ruling out the others could be a fatal blow to them.

"Hell... I don't think he will ever reach an agreement with any of them." Dominique was the first to break the ice as he gazed down. "I'm not being complacent, Your Majesty. I am merely stating what Hell is like. And even if what I said is wrong, I highly doubt he wanted Lilou to usurp the throne."

That's why Stefan said, 'if Hell finally lost his mind'. Stefan knew a thing or two about Samael's movements, but until now, he didn't know his actual goal.

"Observe the capital and put eyes and ears in every corner of the palace... no, in the Capital," Stefan ordered.

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"You're dismissed." Stefan waved, and Dominique merely bowed before he left.

When Dominique closed the door, Stefan didn't move a muscle from his position. His eyes narrowed as he ruminated about possible scenarios to happen.

"Quentin Zero Moriarty... your personal attendance is the most suspicious of all. Just what kind of promise did the Bloodfang leave?" His expression grew sharper as he had met the man a few times in the past.

Zero was someone who Stefan couldn't truly underestimate. Unlike Stefan, Zero had forcefully usurped the throne by killing everyone who shared the same blood as him. Although Zero's personal attendance could be an opportunity for Stefan, he still had to be careful.

"Lena," called Stefan, and a shadow immediately appeared in the corner of the room. "Did you notice anything different from Lilou?"

"She is still the same... although, she had been sleeping less. Probably because of the recurring nightmares."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. And his highness, the third prince, had been out a lot."

Stefan nodded, as he already knew Samael would be busier the closer the founding week approach. But if Lilou still didn't recover her memories, and Samael had been ambushing the experiment sites one by one, he wondered if Samael would claim the throne himself.

"Lena, tell Alistair to start the awakening."

"But your Majesty —"

Stefan cut her off by raising a hand. "If a war broke out in the heart of the Capital, we have to do any means to push the enemies to retreat. Hell enjoys doing things in the grandest way, making him run rampant along with those monstrous Barrett Brothers had always been our plan."

He paused as he gazed at Lena with his eyes glinting. This was now, or never, and he couldn't tolerate the slightest mishap.

"Alphonse will also start closing all the borders." A smirk appeared on the corner of his lips. "Let's see who will fascinate who."

Lena pursed her lips, hesitant, but still bowed and disappeared from the shade of the corner. There was no turning back now.

When Lena disappeared, Stefan's eyes softened. "Lulu, just wait for a little while for I had prepared your grave myself."

Chapter 260 - The Words Spoken Through Her Kiss

One week before the founding celebration, everyone was twice as busy. Even the third squadron was taking turns in patrolling the Capital and staying in the palace.

"So, the king of the Spade Kingdom had arrived?" I asked as I placed a book on the shelf of the inner library.

"Mhm. He had already had an audience with the king," Yul replied, who was also placing the books on the other shelves. "I heard the two are getting along well."

I snickered at the thought. Those two? Getting along? I could imagine them hitting each other's nerves with a confident smile on their face.

"Lilou, by the start of the founding celebrations, you..."

"I know, Yul," I answered before he could finish his sentence. At the beginning of the founding celebration, the founding clan would gather to 'celebrate' the kingdom's long-lasting success, and to discuss important political matters.

According to Yul, the founding clan would always get invited every ten years. However, it was rare for the founding clan to accept such invitations. This year was different, as each founding clan sent a representative while Zero would be personally attending.

'The vacant seat of the Bloodfang will no longer be vacant this year as well.' I told myself, as my fingertip caressed the books. 'In one week, the game will finally commence.'

"So there you are," I snapped my eyes upon hearing a loud voice from the end of the aisle. I turned my head in his direction and smiled.

Sam.

"I'll leave you two," Yul uttered, and I cast him a look before nodding.

Sam marched towards me while Yul left us alone. "I've been looking for you."

"I was returning the books I've read to accompany me while my husband is missing."

"Oh, dear. Please forgive your husband." Sam stopped a step from me and reached for my hand, slipping his fingers in between mine. "Or you can punish him if that will make you feel better."

"Should I do that?" I arched a brow, watching him chuckle.

Sam inched in as his other arm snaked around my waist, pulling me close with his forehead against mine. I instinctively clutched on his chest and felt the slight warmth of his body.

"If that is what my wife wishes." His voice was husky, inhaling each other's breath as our noses brushed against each other. Before he could lean for a kiss, I looked away.

"Punishment," I muttered indifferently, making him chuckle softly.

He placed his thumb on my chin and guided me to look at him in the eye. "My wife, I'd rather you punish me with a cane than refuse my kiss."

"That is why I am refusing your kiss since it is worse than a cane."

"My wife is so cruel, what should I do with you?" he smirked with his pair of crimson eyes flickering in amusement. "What should I do for you to forgive me?"

"Hmm... love me more?"

His smirk stretched wider as he inched closer. "Say less."

This time, I closed my eyes and hooked my arms around his neck, standing on my toes as I welcomed his soft lips. It felt like forever since the last time I shared an intimate time with him, so I felt this sudden aggression to have him... all for myself.

I felt a light squeeze on my waist before he broke away from our kiss. "My wife, you surprise me."

"And what did I do to surprise you?"

"Didn't you just think you want to monopolize me?" he cocked his head to the side, seemed pleased, while my eyes dilated a little.

"Can you hear my thoughts?" I asked in horror, recalling all the vile thoughts I had in mind just moments ago.

Sam chuckled in a low tone. "So you did think of monopolizing me?"

"Sam, are you testing me?" I slapped his chest, which made him chuckle more.

"I can't read your thoughts right now unless you want my fangs into your neck," He explained in between his waves of chuckles. "But I felt your desire from your kiss. I like it, though."

He bent over once again, trailing kisses on my cheek and jaw, then down to my neck. I stretched my neck to give him easy access, which he accepted with delight.

I ran my fingers through his argent hair, wrapping my legs around his hips as his arms lifted me up. His lips went from my neck to my lips, tilting his head back while I bent over.

'You know, Sam? I've lost my mind long ago... but because of you, I want to get better, be better. You're the only one that kept me sane up until now.' Were the words my lips spoke through my kiss as I indulged in the warmth and pleasure his lips and tongue offered. 'Don't ever leave or turn your back on me or... I'll kill you myself.'

Suddenly, a tang of iron mixed in our mouth, which made him grip my body tighter. My eyes snapped awake, panting for air as I carefully drew back.

"My wife, your way of seduction had gone way up," He commented with a smirk, licking the corner of his lips that was slightly bleeding.

"Is that so?" My eyes fell on the wound I caused by biting a bit too hard. "I'm sorry," I whispered and leaned over, licking the little blood on the corner of his lips.

I felt him stiffen with my action, but I was quite aroused by licking his blood. I didn't waste a second and captured his lips once again. My longing, the urge to monopolize him, and my desire to keep him by my side slowly overtook me.

"Really... I just came to recharge, but you always make me want more, wife," Sam whispered into my mouth as he started walking to a corner.

"Then, have more," I teased, smiling against his lips and felt his playful smile against mine.

"Not more, but I'll have all of you." He raised a hand up my spine as our mouths locked with each other. As the heat of need and desire heightened, we paused upon hearing another person's voice.

"Oh, my apologies. It seems I walked in at the wrong time."

I rolled my eyes as I break away from Sam's lips and tilted my head to the side. My eyes landed on the person standing not far away from us with a bright smile on his face.

'I will peel that smile of yours someday, Zero.'