

The Duke 271

Chapter 271 - [Bonus]A Talk With The King

"Mhm. I saw his head... served to you on a silver platter."

His words were akin to a loud drum buzzing in my ear. What did he say? I had to repeat his words, uttered with nonchalance in my head to make sense out of it.

"It was just a vague foresight of the future, but that's what I saw," He continued while leaning back, studying my expression.

"Do you think I will believe that?" I scoffed under my breath as my eyes sharpened at him.

"Up to you." He shrugged nonchalantly. "Killing Hell is a challenge, but not impossible."

"You will kill him?" My voice was low as I seethed, barely containing the building up anger in me. "And you're telling me, his wife?"

Stefan let out a ridiculing chuckle. "I would kill you, my dear, but not Hell. I will most likely force him into another slumber. There is no fun if he just dies so easily."

I studied his demeanor. Stefan and I spent a good couple of years together. I would know if he was lying or telling me the truth. Apparently, his words and action seemed to be the latter.

"I thought of looking more into it, but I've been rejecting my gift of foresight after all the flops it showed me. It is a useless ability." Stefan grumbled as he clicked his tongue in irritation.

While he complained about his abilities, I remained silent momentarily and gazed down. My hand clutched my skirt, trembling, as my mind drifted away.

"Why?" I finally mustered my courage to speak after a prolonged silence. "Why are you telling me this right now?"

I raised my head and set my eyes on him. Our eyes instantly met; one bore nonchalance while the other bore killing intent.

"Because I hate you?" he cocked his head to the side, unbothered. "I was curious to see your reaction... and it was quite unexpected."

"What sort of reaction did you expect to see?"

He remained silent for a second before his lips parted and uttered in a low tone, "Doubt. But I don't see that in your eyes, sweetheart." His eyes narrowed as he studied my expression in silence.

"It makes me wonder whether you are a fool of believing just anyone, or because... you just know me." Stefan stressed his words, sounding suspicious about me, and I knew what he was referring to.

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, calming my raging heart. "I believe my husband and his capabilities. Why would anyone dare harm him?"

"I think you're asking the wrong questions, sweetheart. Aside that your husband is the most hated creature in here, he is the biggest threat everyone wants to get rid of. His death will surprise no

one." Stefan chuckled in delight, as if there was something to laugh about this. "Have you been wondering what he was doing all this time?"

Yes, of course, were the words that failed to escape from my throat. All I knew about Sam for the past half a year was he was busy with the undead. That's it. He never told me anything... which I was still bitter about until now.

"Hell had been ambushing all the experiment sites of turning humans to vampires and the study of the undead. He had freed most of the successful ones and tracking down everyone who had gone through the experiments." Stefan explained without a care in the world, as if it was alright to disclose this information to me.

"But today, I received the reports that not only he was tracking them all down, he was injecting his blood into them." He continued with a loud chuckle, while my eyes went wide.

Back then, Kristina did something to that person... was Stefan talking about that? But that man was dead. I confirmed it.

"It made my blood tremble in excitement thinking how Hell never ceased to amaze me!" he continued with his pupils constricting. "There's never a time he bore me!"

"You sound happy about it." Was it his trap? If Stefan knew all these details, why was he here? Idling with his enemy's wife?

"I was amused, not happy." He corrected in a knowing tone. "But alas, aren't your husband foolish? Did he think forcing them in a blood pact and using that much blood won't have repercussions?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Has Hell been drinking, sweetheart?" I froze upon hearing his solemn question. "For us, blood is a necessity, not a luxury. Hell is different since he could quench his hunger, but without proper supply, do you believe he is in his best shape? To be frank, I can challenge Hell right now and gift you the pieces of his remains every day until you can hold a proper funeral for him."

"Really..." I sneered, as his arrogance was just aggravating me even more.

"However, I am not the type of person who gets gratification in underhanded means."

"That is quite a claim, Your Majesty." I mocked. "Didn't you keep your position by using underhanded means? Because of you..." I bit my tongue and held back the words that nearly slipped up from my mouth. I nearly told him about the extermination of my clan.

"Because of me...?" he narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

I gazed down. "Because of you, many had died. Sam told me you exterminated a pureblood clan to keep your position and even killed Claude's parents who had nothing to do with the throne." I hoped I salvaged my disguise with those other facts to hide my truth.

"Do you really think my nephew's parents had nothing to do with the throne? Or those Bloodfangs that Hell helped in the past were all innocents?" His tone was solemn and adamant with his eyes flickering with hatred.

Of course, I didn't think my clan was all innocent. With all the schemes that I had been uncovering, I was starting to believe my clan wasn't all that innocent. In fact, I believed they're far more

ambitious enough to sacrifice their own clan just for one member, me, to fulfill that ambition. But what about Dyrroth and Lucia?

"Lilou, do you really believe I am so heartless as to kill my brothers and sister without reason?" Stefan stared at me, dead in the eye, as if hurt by this 'accusations'.

Did I misunderstand him? I don't know. With all the frustrating problems in this palace and the multiple truths hidden behind the thick mask of lies which everyone wore, I could hardly take everything with a grain of salt.

"All my actions until now are for the goodness of my people. If this land had become a den of vampires, do you think humans will have to live in fear once the daylight dies?" Stefan inquired after a long silence.

"Have you..." my breath hitched as my voice shook. "... have you really done it for the goodness of your people? Or for your own ambition?"

Stefan stared at me in the eyes, and I noticed the glint in his eyes. "Both."

"Again, why?" I inquired because I knew all the information that he had told me was classified information. "Why are you telling me all this? Sam's death, the information of the undead and the experiments, your plans... don't tell me that is because you just hate me?"

"Sadly, that is one of the reason. But..." Stefan paused as he leaned forward. "... I want to give you an offer."

Chapter 272 - The Inevitable Future (Bonus)

"... I want to give you an offer."

"An offer? For me?" his words were equally fascinating and appalling. "How can someone insignificant such as myself deserve this honor?"

"As you know, the feud between Hell and I were put in a truce because of the issues of the undead. It is also true that I was conducting research about the undead and turning humans into vampires. Do you know how I began doing all this?"

Even though Stefan and I spent time with the research of turning humans and vampires, I never asked him about it. I was too blinded by just being with him I didn't care about such details — I was insane; I knew that.

"The success rate of turning humans into vampires had increased by thirty percent. I wouldn't say its successful, but we found more effective ways of doing so. As for the undead, I was studying it as records of them showing up in the kingdom had been increasing annually." Stefan explained in a rather relaxed tone. "Since I had foresight, I knew that one day, the undead would be a problem. Hence, I started conducting research."

"A research to fight them?"

"To fight them or to have them, sweetheart." He erected a finger as he corrected me. "Unfortunately, it is now clear to me that I can only choose the former."

"If that is the case, then why are you suddenly telling me of giving me an offer?" My brows furrowed, as I couldn't think of any relation of this topic to his offer.

This time, Stefan remained silent for a good minute and just stared at me. His silence thickened the atmosphere in the room.

"Sweetheart, are you that dense?" Instead of an answer, Stefan cocking his head to the side and inquired. "If your enemy knows about your plans, do you think your plans will succeed no matter how good it is?"

His remark rendered me into silence. "I had to sit on the throne for a long time, dealt with many humans and vampires, and disregarded even my personal feelings many times. Hell is strong, that is given, and his people were few, but their strength was something not to be underestimated."

"If you know that, why do you keep on dragging them in this political strife?" I inquired with a shaking voice. "You and I know, no, everyone knows my husband didn't want the throne. Why do you keep dragging him back in here? Why can't you just leave him alone?"

Stefan chuckled softly before he assisted himself up. I sprung up on my feet when I saw him approach my seat.

"Stay there. Don't, Stefan." I warned in panic, and he stopped a couple of steps away from me.

He didn't answer and just stared at me from head to toe. "Why do I keep dragging him back in here? Honestly, I didn't plan to do that. If he had taken a different person with him, I would gladly give them my blessing and leave them alone. However..."

However, because it was me, he couldn't just let it go? Wasn't this just a selfish reasoning? It wasn't me who abandoned who.

"Lilou." He raised his hand, catching me off guard as the emotions I thought I had bottled up safely suddenly overflowed inside me. "I told you I hate you. Do you know the reason?"

I didn't answer him as he cupped my cheek, guiding my eyes to look at him. My eyes reflected his image as I struggled to keep the last straw of my sanity from snapping.

"I hate how I appear in you eyes," He whispered as his eyelids drooped. "You never look at me the way you look at Hell. Be it then or now, why had you never looked at me that way?"

We stared at each other for a very long time. Did he ask me why I never look at him the same way I looked at my husband? Hadn't he figured that out yet? That our relationship started as a mistake, and the foundation of our relationship back then was nothing more than between allies, friends, family.

"Please leave." I gazed down, brushing his hand away coldly. "We had talked enough. I need some rest, Your Majesty. You already sobered up, you should return now."

I took a step back and turned around, walking towards the bed as I nearly told him about the pain of being abandoned. That I had loved him, just not the way he wanted me to, but he knew I would die for him.

"Lilou," He called out, and the next second, his arms were already around my waist, stilling me from behind. A chill immediately ran down my spine as soon as his breath touched my nape.

"You haven't heard about my proposal yet," He whispered in my ear as I trembled in anger under his grip. "Let me show you what I've seen."

As soon as Stefan uttered those words in my ear, my eyes dimmed as it took me in a scenario that had yet to happen. In that scene rolling in my head, I was staring lifelessly at the decapitated head presented to me on a silver platter. It was a brief scene, but the silver hair covered with blood and its mangled face still made me recognize who it was.

It was Sam.

"As I've said, Hell is not in his best shape and killing him right now is the best opportunity for all his enemies." Stefan's voice snapped me back to the current lapse while I stood frozen on my spot. "I will keep him safe, if that is what you wish."

My mind took longer to process his words as I stared at nothingness blankly. All I could do at this moment was to listen to his voice.

"Even if you doubt what I've showed you, and his enemies failed, I can reassure you I will personally deliver his head to you." He hissed, making sure that future would happen no matter what.

"What do you want?" My voice shook as I balled my hands into a fist.

Stefan slowly let me go, placing his hands on my shoulder, and spun me around slowly. When I met his pair of crimson eyes, full of determination, he spoke.

"Bear my heir."

Chapter 273 - Deaths Are Guaranteed (bonus)

"Bear my heir."

"Leave." I pointed at the door, grinding my teeth. "Get out and pick up where you left your brain."

Stefan raised his hands up and shrugged. "You asking me to leave my territory, that's new but alright."

"Don't ever come here again, Stefan," I warned with all my heart in it. "I will cut your tongue even before you can speak the next time."

"You talk big, but if that what's makes you feel better." He chuckled as he took a step back before pivoting on his heel to walk away. He halted when his shoulder bumped against mine and cocked his head back as if to mock me.

"Ah, right. My offer is still valid. Please reconsider before it's too late." Stefan clicked his tongue loudly, followed by a low chuckle before he left.

I ground my teeth as I turned my head back, seething in anger as my eyes dimmed. Really... I wanted to keep civil, but he kept testing my patience.

"Bear his heir?" A hysterical chuckle escaped my mouth in utter disbelief at his shameless offer. "Oh, goodness! This place really is a scary place!"

I laughed and laughed as that was the only way I could vent the building up rage inside me. There were things I had let go of despite recovering my memories; things that were not as important as a life with my husband. However...

"Just endure this for a day, Lilou," I told myself as I clutched my chest tightly. "One more day and nothing will happen to Sam. Yes, that ability..."

My eyes closed, and the image of my husband's decapitated head immediately flashed in my head. That wouldn't happen. Sam might not be in his best shape, but he had Fabian and Rufus — even Kristina and possibly Ramin on his side. I was certain there were more people backing him up. He was the uncrowned king, after all.

"That's right, Lilou. There are reliable people on his side." I took a deep breath and nodded, almost, just almost successfully convinced myself. But alas, Fabian's words during our last encounter suddenly hovered in my head.

My mind drifted back to that time...

"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." He deliberately paused as his eyes darkened. "Keep your eyes closed and mind open for everything that will come in your way. Use everything at your disposal, if you want His Grace and you to live."

A gust of soft wind blew past us. It felt colder than ever, as his words felt like giant rocks placed on my shoulders.

"If you're going to play, remember it's not a child's play anymore, because you have to stake your life. Everything is premeditated and deaths are guaranteed. Keep that in mind, Lilou."

And those words were now hovering in my head along with Stefan's words. Everything was premeditated and deaths were guaranteed? Whose death? Ours? Our enemy?

I ran my fingers through my hair in distress as I dragged my feet back onto the bed. "Why can't Sam just tell me what he is planning?"

My eyes closed as my back collapsed on the bed. When my eyes opened, they softened. My heart felt heavy.

"I knew Sam's reason for not telling me, but is this really the only way?" I murmured, thinking of any logical reason why my husband couldn't tell me everything. "It's not because he knew I would force him to drink my blood, right?"

There were more conclusions that went through my head, but I just couldn't pick one. Thinking too much hurt my brain because I couldn't really understand Sam's plans. Stefan knew all his movements, and because of the lack of information from my husband's side, I could not help but worry.

"Did they know Stefan knew their movements?" I asked myself, but obviously, I didn't know the answer. "Even if I rush to Rufus's quarters now, I'm sure he won't tell me anything. If they want to tell me, they would have already done it, after all."

"What should I do if Sam didn't return tonight again? What if he doesn't show up tomorrow too?" Questions like this blew past my lips and I could only huff in disbelief.

How could I stay positive at this moment? All the initial plans were all changed when Sam asked me to run away with him. But what would I do once things went south tomorrow? If Sam died,

Fabian and Rufus would die as well, since they were connected to him. Killing Sam was like hitting three annoying birds in one stone. It would benefit all their enemies.

What would I do if that happened?

"Ughh!" I groaned and clasped my hair, tugging my scalp. "No, you. Don't think like that!"

I forced myself to sit up and then sprung back on my feet like a total lunatic. My hand immediately pulled Lakresha from my neck and called for it through my gritted teeth.

"Lakresha, come out now!" My voice echoed across every corner of the room and watched Lakresha shift into a scythe. "Why! Why, you! I didn't want you! Why would Lara give you to me?! Why?! Why?! Why?! Answer me! Just why, me?!"

I vented my anger at the scythe, screaming my lungs out, but nothing. Lakresha remained as a weapon. Did I expect that a mouth would grow on it and talk back? Of course, I didn't. I just needed to let it all out before I snap.

"You're useless." I tossed it towards the floor, hearing it clack upon its landing. "You're useless... no, I am useless, right?"

My knees felt weak before they gave way, slumping to the floor with my palms on them. Tears started spilling from my eyes, landing on the back of my hand.

"They said wielding a divine weapon is a gift... but you're like a curse to me." My life was a curse.

Calm down, Child.

I raised my head, following the soothing voice, and my eyes landed on Lakresha. Am I hearing things again?

"... Child."

"Lakresha?" I crawled my way to it and held its snath to my lap. "Is that you?"

But again, nothing. I laughed mockingly, as this was ridiculous. Ah... what a dimwit. Just after a few words and I'm already rattled. Really, how could my clan put their bets on someone like me? They could've chosen someone else.

"Someone else... you mean, like your children?"

The second I blinked, I found myself back in that garden of spring. My eyes panned up to see Lara smiling across from me.

"Welcome back, my child."

Chapter 274 - Another Path Created For You (bonus)

"Welcome back, my child."

A sharp scoff slipped past my lips as soon I locked gazed with her beautiful emerald eyes. I was drawn to her the first time I met her, but right now, I didn't have the luxury to get amused by her beauty.

"Will Sam die?" was the first question that escaped my mouth even before I could think.

Lara chuckled as she rested her jaw on her knuckles, smiling. "How will I know that, my child? Don't you have more important questions to ask?"

"That is the most important question for me." I sighed deeply as my shoulders lowered. "My husband's life is the most important thing for me. His death is also my death."

"My child, aren't you too romantic?"

Her response incited a ridiculing chuckle from me as I raised my gaze to her. "What do you know? He is the only person who was there for me ever since. Not the Bloodfang, not the Crawfords, not even you."

"You are correct." Lara nodded in understanding with the same gentle smile on her lips.

"You should argue with me. It's no fun when you just admit it so easily."

This time, my response made her snicker. "My child, how can I blame the child who was abandoned by the world and then suddenly was carrying an immense responsibility? If you are raised as a noble lady, I wouldn't understand, but you weren't."

I pursed my lips into a thin line, keeping my silence but my eyes fixed on her. Hating her was impossible as Lara was an understanding woman, which made me wonder why did she agree on this.

"Why, Lara?" I asked, catching her attention as she cocked her head to the side. "Why did you scheme with the Bloodfang, and what is it that they desire to gain? You and the Bloodfang had sacrificed your lives to concentrate a blood, a core, that can stand on the same ground as the La Crox. Do you really want the throne so badly?"

"The throne... I don't think any bearer had ever considered carrying the weight of the crown."

"Then, why? If the throne is not your goal, what were you thinking?" I asked almost immediately as soon as I heard her response. "Don't you dare tell me it's for my sake or I'll flip this table."

"My sanity is barely hanging on, Lara," I added, staring at her dead in the eye as I leaned forward. "What is it that the Bloodfang and you desire?"

Lara looked at me in silence. Her mouth opened and closed, but no words came out.

"And, why are you inside Lakresha? Are you Lakresha?" I threw another question so that she could think of them all at once. "If so, what is your will? Do you share the same goal as the Bloodfang? Or do you have an ulterior motive?"

Again, silence was her answer, so I urged. "Answer me."

"My child..." She sighed heavily and tapped her fingers against the marbled table. "I know you have a lot of questions —"

"Then give me an answer." I cut her off abruptly, not giving her a chance to change the subject. "If you know I have a lot of questions, it is your responsibility to enlighten me. What is the point of being here if you won't enlighten me."

"You are my child." This time, her response was quick and firm. "I did share the same goal as the Bloodfang, but upon laying my eyes on my child... I knew I made a mistake."

"A mistake?" My eyes narrowed as I didn't feel the shred of pity in her claims.

"I realized I cannot pass this ambition to my child, knowing the path she will have to take," she explained, regret flickering in her eyes as her smile grew bitter. "The Bloodfang's ambition is more than revenge. Eventually, the will of your clan will manifest in you."

"Whether or not I like it?"

Lara nodded with a sigh. "Whether or not you like it."

"What about you?" I scoffed as I wasn't surprised about this information; I half-expected it already. "If you said you shared the same goal as them initially, but changed your mind. What sort of will do you wish for me to take?"

"I do not wish for you to follow my will. However, I created another path for you."

My brows knitted as my eyes squinted. Another path? What was it?

"I gave a part of myself to Lakresha, hence, I am and I am not Lakresha. This weapon will follow any path you choose, my child. That is what I desire; for you to choose your own destiny. The Bloodfang and I were too blinded with retribution. We didn't consider that this will be like a curse in the long run." She offered me a weak smile. "Forgive us, my child."

Silence enveloped the two of us as I gaze down at my hand. "If I choose to run away, will that be alright?"

"This is your life, my child. Don't let us run it for you." My eyes panned up to meet her pair of gentle emeralds. "I realized my mistake a little too late, and giving you your own free will and the Crawford is the only thing I can offer you."

"Huh... you sound very magnanimous." I huffed in disdain, leaning back as I tilted my head back. "Can I just stay here for as long as I can? I don't want to wake up."

"You may, but didn't you say Hell is important to you?"

"Wasn't he important to you as well?" I inquired without casting her a look. "You said 'I want to stay by his side', aren't you talking about my husband? Say, did you like him as well?"

"I liked Hell, he is my king, after all." Lara chuckled. Her tone was rather gentler. "But I loved your father."

"My father, you mean the person who raised me? Also, are you really my mother? Or were you my grandma... my grandmother's grandmother? I mean, my ancestor?" I pulled my head back and faced her squarely.

"Well, it is a little complicated to explain."

"Just start from the beginning. We have time." I beckoned as listening to her to get some enlightenment was what I needed right now.

Lara smiled as she nodded. "Then, this will be a very long story."

"I'm prepared."

Chapter 275 - Once Upon A Time... A History Of Vampire And Humans

Once upon a time, vampires used to live in seclusion, away from human civilization. Back then, vampires never meddled in human affairs, living silently amongst themselves. Until after many years, a wrecked ship drifted into the land of vampires.

With humans in their land, the vampire society had different opinions on whether to silence them or have mercy on their pathetic, fragile life. The Grimsbanne Clan, who was at the time, the leader amongst vampires, had decided to keep the humans as guests.

Of course, since vampires looked more like humans, the guests suspected nothing at first. They merely assumed it was another hidden country that was yet to be discovered by larger countries. Although the hostility was there at first, other vampires started opening up the longer they got to know their human guests.

Until one fateful night, a human had uncovered the secret of the land. Fear enveloped their hearts and branded the land as a den of monsters; a place that never had existed. While vampires had completely put their trust in these guests, the latter schemed behind their backs to set the land on fire and escape, just to return and invade it.

However, neither of those humans and vampires knew what happened next.

Blood reeked in the air, and the ground turned red. A man stood atop the pile of corpses of humans, shocking all the vampires, who rushed to follow the strong scent of blood.

According to Lara, those noble vampires could only stare at the human who slew his fellow humans in cold blood. His words were, "Dead people tell no tales. I, Soran Barrett, offer their bodies for they had wronged your kind."

After saying his piece, Soran Barrett had attempted to slit his throat after killing his people with his own sword. However, the clan leader of the Grimsbanne stopped his madness and kept him locked up in the dungeon, afraid he would do something silly.

When asked why Soran did it, his answer was simple: humans were wrong. Soran had respected and already knew about the secret of the land, but he said nothing about it. Thus, when he heard the other human's plans on escaping the land to return to invade it, he did what he thought was right.

One could assume Soran was kind, but he wasn't. Instead of being kind, Soran was just wise. He didn't protect the vampires, what he protected was the world outside.

Soran knew the difference between human and vampire strength, and the outcome if a vampire and humans started taking each other's lives. Therefore, to prevent such bad blood between two species, he sullied his hands to keep this secret society away from humankind.

He didn't keep his intention a secret, and he was very vocal about it. His character and honesty gained the respect of not just the Grimsbanne Clan, but also the respect of other pureblooded vampire clans.

The clans that Soran got particularly close with were the Grimsbanne Clan, the La Crox's, the Moriarty's, Von Stein, Le Blac, Bloodfang, and the Crawford's. Out of respect to this human, these powerhouse clans blessed his blood with strength comparable to those of vampires.

In return, Soran swore in his blood to keep the secret of their existence.

But all stories had endings. Soran finally decided to return to the outside world.

During his departure, many vampires had sent him off, and he promised to visit once again. Of course, the vampire society reassured him that they would wait for that day.

And off he went with the memories he had built with creatures who had a more humane heart than humans such as himself.

The first human friend the vampires had acknowledged and highly respected kept and broke his promise. He, indeed, didn't say a single word about the vampires, but he also didn't return.

Out of worry and curiosity about the outside world, the youths of each clan had decided to set off and visit Soran.

It was still a wonder if those youths actually got the permission of their clan leaders or they just snuck out. Either way, they went out and blended into human society in search of Soran.

What these youths didn't expect was, Soran Barrett was a king of some land and his return to human society marked the birth of the Divine Weapons. To go against the vampires? No. He just knew that one day, if another shipwreck was washed ashore in that land, and the humans would be shrouded with fear of the vampire's existence; things would just go downhill from there.

Indeed, Soran was a wise man, and his explanation to those youths had soothed their anger. Since Soran acknowledged these youths as his friends, he had protected them in the human world, just like how they protected him back in the vampire society. Alas, even a wise man like him could never keep up to human's fickle hearts.

Once the secret of the youths' identities was exposed to the public by an unknown source, Soran protected the young vampires and... died. Witnessing the death of their dear human friend, the young vampires were blinded with rage.

Soran's death marked the domination of the vampires. After many years, vampires had settled in human society, gaining power and influence, military strength, and wealth.

The Kingdom of Iris was renamed the Heart's Kingdom. That meant the heart and light of Soran.

However, as years go by, the promise made in Soran's dying breath was forgotten with the new generation of vampires.

Greed had monopolized both humans and vampires, and darkness remained, reigning their lives.

"Soran Barrett... is he Fabian and Rufus' ancestor?" I asked in disbelief, as I didn't expect this type of long history of the Barrett's and the vampires.

Lara nodded with a gentle smile on her face. "As you've noticed, the Barrett's bloodline has superhuman strength. Even before Samael's meeting with them, those two brothers were already strong."

"Are you telling me those two were of royal blood? Does everyone know about this?"

"I believed I told you the new generation of vampires had long forgotten the promise. So, no. From our generation to yours, no one knew about the Barrett's... but alas, it seemed even time cannot hide the greatness of Soran's blood."

Chapter 276 - The Story Of The Late Queen

"So, in this kingdom, I am the only one who knew about Soran?" I stared at Lara, and she nodded, smiling brightly. "And the Barrett bloodline... how about Grimsbanne?"

"Grimsbanne Clan is a different case, obviously. The mock town was named after Grimsbanne in honor of Amara." She explained in a knowing tone, but my brows furrowed. "You don't know the name of your mother-in-law? The late Queen?"

My tongue rolled back as I pursed my lips. Sam never mentioned his father or his mother, so I never asked. I wanted him to tell me first, but until now, he hadn't said a word about it.

"Be it in this land or in the vampire's mainland society, there are only two individuals who had the Grimsbanne bloodline." Lara cocked her head to the side, eyebrows raised. "Hell is one, and the other is...?"

"I don't like the suspense, grandma." I mentally rolled my eyes.

Lara let out another wave of chuckles. "The son of Dyrroth and Lucia."

"You mean Claude?" I half-expected that it was someone else, like Stefan or Dominique. But Claude?

"Since Dyrroth, Lucia, and Hell, had the same mother, Amara Cecil Grimsbanne, His Highness, the late crown prince and the first princess' son also kept his blood pure." Lara paused and stared at me. "If you want a better ally, you should consider taking that child by your side. However, you have to keep in mind that he can be your ally and your enemy in the future."

"I would say, 'what can a child do?', but figured fools only uttered those words." I glanced at her when she chortled at my words. "Grandma, continue your story. You only told me the history of vampires' domination, but that is not what I asked."

"My child, didn't you say start from the beginning?"

"Huh..." Lara was quite the chatterbox. I didn't know she would actually start from the beginning, but well, knowing things that the others don't work fine with me.

"Very well then, let's fast forward to some important point of history, shall we?" Lara smiled excitedly as if she couldn't wait to talk nonstop.

"All ears." I raised my brows, arms- crossed, as Lara continued our history lesson. Her smile, though, worried me, as it seemed she wouldn't go straight to the point again.

Fast forward to when humans acknowledged the powers of vampires. The late king, Victor La Crox, had constantly butted heads with the other clan leaders. Since the Moriarty's, Le Blac, and Von Stein were just as proud as the La Crox, they decided to establish their own kingdom where their words held absolute authority.

From another angle, I could say those three clans weren't as proud as the La Crox. If they were proud and just as strong as the La Crox, why hadn't they challenged the La Crox for power instead of choosing the peaceful resolution?

According to Lara, they didn't choose a peaceful resolution. Those three clans merely heed the request of the late Queen, Amara Cecil Grimsbanne. As mentioned, the Grimsbanne was once the

leader among all vampires in the mainlands of the vampires. Therefore, with respect for the last living pureblooded Grimsbanne, the three powerhouse vampires chose to leave.

The pureblooded clans who remained were obviously the Bloodfang and the Crawford. Even those two clans mentioned, they remained only to support the Queen. In other words, the late king's power was sheer brute force, while the late queen had more influence and respect.

Out of jealousy of his Queen's influence, the late king had involved in debauchery and started taking in mistresses from the noble houses from the mainland who could give him absolute control. What the king didn't see in the queen he had feared was she had loved and supported him unconditionally.

While he favored his mistresses, the queen lived quietly. Even with the birth of her husband's children from other women, she had kept her elegance and grace, accepting those children as her own. Although she was aware that the king hoped that his children, from his other mistresses, could have the throne, and not his children with Amara.

The saddest part was, the late king never saw Amara's efforts, even at her last moments. But her children... they had witnessed her silent battles, her sufferings, and the sadness in her eyes whenever she smiled at them gently.

No wonder the king had raised his children with an iron fist and punished Sam severely for challenging his power. The third prince... reminded the late king of the late queen.

"What a piece of trash," I grumbled as I ground my teeth, seething in anger in the late queen's stead. "He did all that, hoping none of his children with the queen will inherit the throne? As if they want it."

"But the Queen's supporters were just as angry as you, my child." Lara chuckled as she watched me in amusement. "Why do you think those noble houses had been pushing Hell to usurp the throne even though he keeps rejecting it?"

Her question shocked me into silence. Ahh... that made sense, huh? He was the uncrowned king because of his bloodline and strength. In addition, Sam had blatantly challenged the king and won, and that only proved he was worthy to take the position.

"My Queen Amara is someone worthy of respect, but among the purebloods, she had chosen the La Crox." Lara smiled bitterly as she peeled her eyes away from me, setting it on the lake.

"Even people like her make bad decisions, huh?"

"My sweet child, once the matters of hearts are involved, we tend to do foolish things." Her eyes shifted back to me as she smiled once again. "Just like you, the thought of Hell dying can make you lose your composure."

I pursed my lips as what she said was correct. How could I argue with that when I was fuming just moments ago?

"It can be a weakness, but also a strength. You just have to choose between the two."

"Lara," I called, scratching the back of my head. "Did anyone tell you that you're quite talkative? I keep asking you what is our relationship, and yet, you just kept telling me things that are far from my question."

Lara just laughed cheerfully before she fixed her attention on me. "You had died and lived many times, Lilou."

"What?" My brows furrowed, staring at her gentle expression.

"Shall we continue the story?"

My expression this time turned grim. "My sly ancestor, I only want to hear if you are my mother and if my father is my actual father, but your words intrigue me." I sighed dejectedly. "Go on."

Chapter 277 - For My Sake

According to Lara, I didn't literally come out of her womb, my ancestor was. What she meant by I lived and died, she was talking about the core that was hidden within me. That core was akin to a bubble and within it was a concentrated power and knowledge of the Bloodfang clan and Lara. It was passed down from generation to generation until it could find a body, a suitable host.

After centuries, the core had finally had found its perfect host, and that was me. If it wasn't for me, my children would have to bear the responsibility. If none of my children could handle the core, then their children would.

A never-ending cycle that would only stop until a suitable host was born. Once this happened, the core would stop in that person, in me. Whether I live or die, my core would stop in this body.

"In other words, the child who will have to carry the core is still my child." Lara smiled as she ended her explanation. "Since he or she will bear my blood and not your biological parents."

"Please, stop." My under eyes twitched as a shallow breath escaped my nose. "It's enough for me to know that my father is actually my father."

"But you don't have a mother."

"I didn't grow up with a mother, but that didn't mean I never had one," I argued, eyebrow raised. "Even if what you're saying about a part of your blood is running through me, that didn't mean you're my mother."

"Blood is thicker than water, my child."

"No." I shook my head, chuckling mockingly at her remarks. "Sharing blood doesn't necessarily mean we're family. Bond is stronger than blood, and family doesn't limit to blood relation."

"But I think we've formed a bond now, don't you think?" she cocked her head to the side, while my expression died.

"Let's not talk about it." I waved as I leaned back comfortably against the chair. "Is that all you can tell me? You really can't tell me your plans and my clan's plans? Won't you give me a hint, at least?"

"My child, what I had told you is a lot already."

"They are, indeed, a lot, but mostly, irrelevant." My eyes rolled as I huffed in dismay.

"I don't think so, my child." Despite my rudeness, Lara kept her kind smile. It even brightened up. "But I can tell you one thing, from the human I had birth, I had passed down a hint that each and every one of them knew."

"A hint that is passed down...?"

"Yes." Lara smiled gently as her eyes softened. "Honestly, because of that, I thought your father was the one we had been waiting for. But alas, he is just as stubborn as you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Logan is a perceptive man, my child. He knew there's something within him just for that hint, but he kept denying its existence." Lara picked up her cup of tea and sipped elegantly before placing it back on the saucer.

She continued, "If he didn't deny it, he could've awakened Hell and that sit will not be yours to sit on." Pointing at the chair I was perching on.

"My father knew about our clan's will?" My brows furrowed as my mouth fell open.

"He knew, but only a little later. As I've said, your father is a perceptive man. I don't know how it happened, but at one point, he started hearing voices and opened a connection with me. But that is right after he had you." She traced the rim of her teacup with her finger as she stared at her reflection.

"Logan only realized his mistake of rejecting the core when the responsibility was passed down to you," Lara added as she raised her eyes to me. "I'm certain he had taught you everything he could. You just have to remember it, my child."

"His teachings...?" My voice came out weak as I gazed down, thinking of all the memories I had with my beloved father.

"Did he blame himself? Thinking he could've ruined his daughter's uneventful life?" I murmured, knowing Father, he would think like that. He was the type of person who would put me first, after all.

Lara remained silent, and we didn't talk for as long as I could remember. Until now, I thought Father was having a blast in heaven, but it seemed I was wrong. He died with a lot of regrets, and one of those was this curse.

"You should return now, my child." Lara finally broke the prolonged silence between us, making me raise my gaze to her. "If you want Logan to rest in peace, don't you think fighting instead of hiding in here is just the right thing to do?"

"I don't want to hear what is right and wrong from someone who chose death to pass their problem to someone else." I blurted out instinctively, but I didn't regret voicing out my thoughts.

Lara smiled bitterly. She couldn't argue with me about that. "Still, waking up is still better than staying in deep slumber. Don't you have a husband to return to?"

"I know. I changed my mind when I realized how talkative you are." I exhaled sharply, placing my palms against the table to push myself up. "Anyway, it was a pleasant talk. Do I have to take the same exit?"

I traveled my gaze around, searching for the exit of this illusion. It didn't take long to find it, as it looked exactly the same the first time I got trapped in this place.

"Bye." I cocked my head back to her before I marched out of the gazebo and towards the exit. Just as I did, I halted when I heard her calling for me.

"I'm sorry you have to go through this, Lilou." There was bitterness and sincerity in her voice, leaving heaviness in my heart. "If I can turn back the time, I would've fought differently... I'm certain the Bloodfang, your father, had realized that as well."

"Tch." All I could do after her remark was to snicker in dismay. Their regrets were futile now, as I was already in this situation of no return.

I continued on my stride without glancing at her until I stood at the exit of the garden. I was not sure if she could hear me from here, but I still whispered.

"All that I will do from this moment on is not for the Bloodfang or for your sake." I took a deep breath and turned my head back to her, seeing the distance between us. "It's for my sake. Let's not meet each other again, Lara."

And then I pivoted on my heel and left the garden of spring, only to wake up with Sam... kissing me?

Chapter 278 - Multitasking

I weakly opened my eyes, furrowing my brows as I realized Sam was kissing me and I was back on the bed. Just then, something small slipped inside my mouth and I instinctively chewed it.

"Hmm?" I watched him draw his head back while this sweet and sour taste of grape filled my mouth. "What is this?"

"Grapes," Sam replied while chewing the other half of it. "If you're wondering what I was doing, I'm multitasking."

His words just confused me even more. I stared at him in silence as he propped his jaw against his knuckles.

"By multitasking, I mean, I'm eating while kissing and waking you up. I was so busy, and I had to use every second." He raised another grape and carefully placed it between my lips.

Sam didn't even waste as a second and leaned in, biting the grape before pushing the other half inside my mouth with his tongue. My eyes dilated as I just instinctively opened my mouth for him and ate it.

He was chewing it as he drew his head back. "Time management. You should learn from me."

"..." I was speechless for a moment. This was not what I expected to wake up in, eating grapes and spending a lazy morning with him.

"It's good right?" Sam smiled as he held another grape in between his fingers and slowly attempted to put it in between my lips. I stopped him by grabbing his wrist, catching his attention as he raised his brows.

"You don't like it?" he asked cluelessly. Of course, I liked it! But this wasn't the time for this! All the memories from last night came surging in my head, and I looked at him intensely.

"Where have you been?" I inquired, without letting him go. "Do you even have an idea what happened while you're away?"

"Uh... I don't, but I was wondering why there's the lingering scent of Stefan in here."

I studied his nonchalant expression. Disappointing, I thought, but keeping his cool was perhaps the best right now.

"He was here last night." I rolled to my tummy, stretching my arms and toe as I arched my back. When I bent my arms, I rested my cheek on them with my eyes on him.

"He wants to start an affair with me..." I told him, trying to see his reaction. "... I was reconsidering just for fun."

"He, what?" Sam narrowed his eyes as he leaned forward. "And what did you say?"

A mischievous giggle slipped past my lips as I bat my eyes coquettishly. I knew teasing him like this was toeing the line, but I had to do it.

"Someone told me that right now, I am the most desirable woman because of my blood." The corner of my lips curled up into a sly smirk. "And yet, my husband couldn't even spare me a second or tell me anything. It makes me wonder if this is all I worth for my husband."

"Ohh... I'm sorry if you feel that way," Sam frowned as he cupped my cheek while his eyelashes fluttered sweetly. "I didn't mean to. But, no, they're wrong. You're the most desirable woman in my eyes, and not just right now. So, please, don't leave me. "

My eyes rolled. "That's not what I want to hear."

"What do you want to hear, then?" he tilted his head to the side, knitting his brows. Did I have to spell it out to him? My husband was not this dense, but if this was what the game he wanted to play, then so be it.

"Your plans, my husband. I want to be in it."

Sam smacked his lips and averted his eyes. "Our plan is to escape. I was busy preparing for our dramatic farewell, my darling."

"You won't tell me anything in the end, huh?" I murmured and my teeth gritted behind my lips, gazing down as the memory of his decapitated head flash in my head.

"Stefan showed me your future, Sam. In it, they will serve your head to me on a silver platter." My eyes panned up to meet his pair of crimson orbs.

"On a silver platter? Not even a golden one? Aren't they a little rude?"

I smacked his chest, glaring daggers at him. "Stop joking, Sam! Stefan knew all your movements and I don't know if this grand escape you're talking about is even right!"

I huffed as he stared at me in silence. He let out a deep sigh after a while and tucked my hair behind my ear.

"They have the advantage as they had prepared during my slumber. I won't lie about that. That's why I figured that to defeat them, I had to play just as sly as them." His eyes glinted and his tone was low. "I did want to run away with you and had been preparing for it. Tomorrow before dawn, meet me in the west wing palace."

I pursed my lips in a thin line and bit my inner lip. "Sam, I have a bad feeling about this."

"Do you want to stay here?"

"No." I shook my head, reaching for his chest, and clutched it. "But is this the only way?"

"There is another way... and that is to commit treason."

"Let's do it." I urged almost immediately. "Don't be a hypocrite, Sam. Stop acting as turning the world against you bothers you the slightest."

"Ahh... how can my wife see me in this light?"

I sighed dejectedly. "I don't need to be protected if that is what you're worried about."

"Huh? What gave you that impression that's my worry?"

"It's not?" I knitted my brows and frowned. "I'm a damsel in distress here!"

"Oh, darling~! You're a holder of Lakresha and my wife. I will have to be a fool to underestimate you!" Sam's eyes darkened as he stared at me dead in the eye. "But despite that, I won't deny that you concern me."

"About?"

"That Quentin." My forehead creased as I attempted to recall who it was, leading me to Zero's first name. "Be it the Stefan or Quentin, there is nothing on them that is worthy to covet. But alas, they won't leave you alone."

"So you planned to escape?" that didn't make sense even more now. His words blinded me at first, and only now I realized how his actions didn't match his character.

Sam smiled and leaned over, brushing the tip of his nose against mine. "Escape? I'm abducting you. Do you trust me?"

Lies. Was the word that my mind whispered upon his remark, but I ignored it and smiled back.

"I do, but not blindly."

Sam grinned as he pinned me down. "Now, we're talking."

I had said this before, that if I knew the consequences of my abrupt decision, I would have made a different choice. If only... would things have changed?

My answer back then and now was different. One harsh truth that reality slapped me during my stay here was that, no, they won't. The situation would be the same... or even worse.

Chapter 279 - This Will Be A Nasty Morning

Sam bent over, but before his lips touched mine, I raised a finger and put it on his lips. His eyes narrowed as he sucked air through his gritted teeth.

"I have a request," I expressed with a sly smirk on my lips.

"My wife, striking a request after teasing me is unfair!" He frowned, making me giggle playfully.

"Drink." I didn't beat around the bush as I cocked my head, highlighting my neck. "You haven't been drinking, Sam. Blood is a necessity for you."

"What gave you the impression I'm not drinking?"

"Whose blood is it?" my brow arched as I studied his mischievous smirk.

"Humans are not the only ones who had blood, my dearest Lilove." Sam carefully held my wrist to the side. "I don't drink human and vampire blood."

"You drink animal blood?"

"It's not as nutritious as humans and vampires, but it is enough to quench my thirst," he explained with a shrug.

I didn't know if that should appease me, but I remained adamant. "Just to be sure, drink my blood. If this blood of mine is so precious that even the king wants me to bear his heir, why don't..."

"He wants, what?" I trailed off as he inquired in the coldest tone I had ever heard. "Bear his heir...? Not only he wants to start an affair with you, but he also wants you to bear his heir?"

"Lexx is a lunatic, Sam."

"Lexx...?" he snickered as his eyes narrowed, making me bite my tongue while staring at his glinting eyes. "... don't call him so sweetly, my wife. I might just really lose it."

"Then... just snap," I taunted as I raised my chin up. "I feel like a devil whispering to you, but your actions so far had been bothering me."

"I want to hear you, Sam," I added in resolve. "I want to hear you in my head... and I want you to hear me. This is the only communication that can reassure me you are safe."

The corner of his lips curled up into a smirk. "You will regret having my voice in your head, my darling."

Sam stood on his knees, licking his canine teeth as his fangs grew with his eyes fixed on me. He crossed his arms, clipping the hem of his linen white undershirt, and pulled it up, revealing his muscular upper body.

"Just to clarify," He deliberately paused as he tossed his shirt out of the bed, bending over as he grabbed my wrist and pinned them above me. "I already planned to have you."

He hissed as his nose brushed against mine, then traced my jaw up to my ear. "That's why I fed you the grapes," he whispered before nibbling my earlobe.

My breath hitched as my chest moved in and out heavily. "You are considerate."

"I am?" His chuckle was low as he continued tracing kisses to my neck. "My wife's only change is she is getting bolder, it concerns me."

"No, your change concerns me," I quivered underneath him as he bit my shoulder lightly.

"Change is a miracle for vampires, love." He paused as he licked my neck, preparing it before sinking his fangs into me. "The only change in me is my play style."

I held my breath when I sensed him open his mouth, and it didn't take long before I felt the sharpness of his fangs against my skin. My fingers curved slowly as my back arch for the slow and painful and arousing sting on my neck.

"Sam..." I moaned, closing my eyes as I felt his fangs in me. His gulping that caressed my ears, somehow, sent a sense of fulfillment into my heart.

Was it because my blood was slowly turning into how it was supposed to be? It felt more sensual than ever before.

His grip around my wrist tightened before he pulled away. "My wife, your response makes it hard to pull away."

"Then, don't." My lower lip trembled as my throat felt parched. "Just stop before you kill me."

"Hmm..." Sam smirked before he bit his lower lip until it bled. "Your husband is considerate and a gentleman, I don't just receive."

He bent over, hovering his lips over my lips. "Have me, my love."

"Who said I won't?" I lifted my head and licked the blood on the corner of his lip.

His lips curled up against mine. "This will be a nasty morning. At this rate, we will bother a lot of noses."

"Let them be bothered." My response was quick as I wrapped my arms around his neck. "Can they blame a newlywed's energy?"

"Your confidence makes you hard to resist, Love." He grinned as he took my lips for a long and deep kiss, snaking his arms around my waist as he bent lower, his weight on me.

Meanwhile, in the inner garden near the main palace of the king, Stefan and Beatrice sat across from each other in the grand pavilion.

"That is quite a pleasant smell, don't you think?" Beatrice sniffed faintly before setting her eyes on the man across from her. "I can discern the one is Hell, but the other? Is it the Duchess? No wonder many are drawn to her; her blood literally attracts purebloods. The Bloodfangs are surely cunning."

Stefan's expression was stoic, but his eyes were blazing. Beatrice chuckled, as she could tell how this displeased the king.

"My, they are newlyweds, after all. So, their cravings are strong." She smirked, assisting herself up, tracing the table with her fingertips while walking over to his side.

Beatrice stood behind his chair, her hand on his shoulder as she massaged him sensually. A playful glint flickered across her eyes as she bent over and whispered in his ear.

"Say, shall I offer my neck to make you feel better, Your Majesty?" she gazed at his side while Stefan turned his head to face her.

He raised his hand and caressed her lips with his thumb. "By offering yourself, what is it that you want?"

"You already know what I want, Your Majesty." Beatrice walked around while Stefan held her wrist, yanking her to his lap. "My! You don't have to show your jealousy in front of another woman. It'll break my heart."

Stefan ignored her nonsense comments. "What you want is difficult, but it's not impossible."

"If it's easy, I wouldn't go to you."

His eyes glinted as the side of both their lips curled into a smirk. "You are quite lovely, Beatrice," he whispered as he bent over, sinking his fangs into her neck while she arched her back against him.

"Quite lovely... it's funny how you men see us as just that."

Chapter 280 - You Curse Like An Angel

"Will I ever become a vampire?" I asked while my forefinger caressed his fang, lying in his embrace.

Sam arched a brow as he cocked his head at me. "Do you want to become a vampire?"

"Don't you want me to?" My lips pursed as I stared straight into his eyes. "If I asked you, won't you do it?"

"Your wish might just be my command, my wife," He stressed, narrowing his eyes as they glinted.

"Don't tempt me as having you forever is my only wish."

A giggle slipped past my lips. "I did want to become a vampire at one point, but now, I want to stay as a human for as long as I can."

"I knew you'd say that." He frowned and sighed, not even concealing the disappointment in his eyes.

"It seems you've been thinking about it. Did you plan to turn me into one without my consent?"

"Well..." Sam averted his eyes, which made mine narrow suspiciously.

I pushed myself up by my elbow, making the quilt fall to my bare chest. "That's rude."

"My wife, I already thought of turning you into a vampire the second I laid my eyes on you," He explained with a deep sigh. "Do you know why it's rare for vampires to fall in love with a human?"

"Because we don't have long life spans?"

"Correct, and also, since vampire's emotions are heightened, the despair of losing someone you hold dear is just like death itself." Sam stroke my hair gently to my back and hummed. "I would mourn for you forever if you died, my wife."

"I won't die... at least, not now."

"Of course, you won't, silly." He smiled brightly, giving me relief and reassurance. "I won't let that happen."

"Don't die on me, as well, my husband." My eyes darkened as I leaned closer to him. "We will die at old age."

"Are you saying we will never die?" He smirked, eyebrow raised as he brushed the apex of his nose against mine. "I don't age, my love."

I pushed his shoulder, wrestling my way on top of him. "Think whatever you like." I bent over, my fingertip trickling across his chest to his shoulder.

"Let's just say, I'm trying to feed you with your own medicine." I continued, teasing him by barely touching my lips against his. "I won't tell you until you tell me your plans."

"I already told you -- "

"Not. that. One." My eyes glinted with our lips just an inch apart.

'The one you can't tell.' I uttered in my head, narrowing my eyes as he smiled.

'Your voice in my head sounds lovely,' he replied telepathically. 'I can listen to you every second, my wife.'

"Be careful of what you wish for. It might not be me, who will regret hearing another voice in here," I hissed, resting my forehead against his. "You don't have any idea what's inside my head right now, Sam."

"Oh my, what could it be? Why don't you tell me?"

I chuckled as I drew my head back, dismounting him as I perched on his side. I offered him a bright smile before flinging my legs out of the bed.

"Where are you going naked, my love?" he asked as I stood bare, combing my hair with my fingers. "Won't you tell me what's in your mind?"

I raised a brow and smirk. "No fucking way."

"Goodness, you curse like an angel!" Sam chuckled as he watched me walk towards the door leading to my closet.

My steps stopped when my palms were against the door, turning my head in his direction. Sam was lying on his side, propping his jaw against his knuckles, while his eyes scanned me from head to toe.

"Mildred surely ran a bath for me." I intoned, eyebrow raised. "Won't you join me?"

"Ah, no." Sam dragged himself to sit up, flinging his legs out of the bed with only his pants on.

"I will take a walk," he said as he marched towards me. "I don't want to clean your scent off of me."

Sam stopped a step away from me, leaning over for a kiss. "I'll see you later, my love."

"You're leaving?"

"I have to see someone who asks someone else's wife to start an affair and to bear his heir." Sam drew back with a smirk on his lips. "Our plan later, don't forget."

After saying his piece, Sam walked away, waving. My eyes narrowed as he directly headed towards the door.

"Won't you get dressed?" my question halted his steps as he cocked his head back to me, revealing his smug grin.

"I reeked of Lilou. Why would I hide it?" he winked mischievously as he held on the door's handle. "Just trust me, my love, but not blindly."

With that being said, Sam opened the door and was about to leave when I called him out of urgency. He cocked his head back once again, furrowing his brows.

"I... I love you." It had been a while since I had spoken those words and heard them from his lips.

Sam froze as his eyes dilated as if that was shocking to him. He didn't have to say it back if he couldn't.

"I just want to say that." A bitter smile resurfaced on my face as I peeled my eyes away from him. "It's not a question, so you don't have to answer me."

I pushed the door and didn't cast him a look, but just as I did, I also paused. I turned my gaze back to him when I heard his voice inside my head.

'I love you... is not enough to describe my love for you.' Sam smiled gently, as I could see the sincerity in his eyes. 'More than my own. I love you. So, live for me.'

"Sam..."

"Later." He winked and left when I nodded at him.

I smiled as I clutched my hand closer to my chest. That was enough for me, and his voice still rang in my head while he was humming a lovely tune until it slowly faded.

"God... I questioned your existence many times, but I still want to believe you will heed my prayers." I breathed and patted my chest lightly. "Please, keep him safe."