

# The Duke 281

## Chapter 281 - A Heart To Heart Talk Between Brothers

Meanwhile, in the king's office, the guarding knights outside the office blocked the door with their spear, making a cross sign. Samael cocked his head to one and then to the other, smiling brightly until his eyes squinted into mere slits.

"If I were you, don't do that." Samael shook his head, closed-lipped. "You know I will enter even if there's ten of you here."

The guarding knights quivered under their armor but still didn't budge. Stefan had ordered not to let anyone in, so they were merely following the orders. Now, they just had to hope the defiant third prince, who was daring enough to walk around without a shirt on, wouldn't snap their necks.

"Hmmm..." Samael rubbed his chin as he glanced up the door, having an idea in mind. He placed his hand on the side of his lips and took a deep breath.

"Your Majesty, I will kick the door open, alright?!" he yelled while his eyes darted from the two guarding knights standing on either side of the door. "I'll give you ten seconds, bid your love one's farewell."

His smiling expression, by saying such alarming words, sent a chill down the guard's spine. Just like what Samael said, he started counting down, "ten, five, two..." skipping numbers, not giving them time to reconsider.

"... on —" before Samael could finish his messed-up countdown, the door creaked open. He quirked a brow as he shifted his eyes to the person who opened the door.

"Your temper is getting better, Hell." Beatrice smiled sweetly as she closed her hand fan. "You do countdowns now."

"I discovered the joy of suspense and thrill during my long stay in here." Samael grinned as the knights withdrew their spears to make way for Beatrice. "Although, I must say, your taste in men never changes."

"Why? Are you jealous that I never come to you? I might reconsider if you keep walking around half-naked."

"Oh, princess." the corner of his lips curled up devilishly. "My wife is quite the jealous type. I'll be in trouble if you say it like that."

"Now, that's interesting, Your Grace. I never thought there will be a person who will tame someone such as yourself."

"Tame? I will take that as a compliment. My wife is quite a character, you see." His smile stretched even wider as he was the proudest of Lilou. He doesn't mind shocking everyone for being tamed by his wife.

"I know, Your Grace." Beatrice chuckled softly, hiding her lips behind her hand fan. "It makes me want to see it for myself."

"Well, if you have a chance, but I'll tell you, she is quite busy with her... character development." His grin remained as he took a step to the side, making way for her.

Beatrice chuckled even more at his misplaced gentleman act. "This kingdom never ceased to amaze me every visit," she muttered, stopping in front of Samael as she cast him a mischievous look. "I'm looking forward to what kind of surprise you'd do this time, Your Grace."

"Don't make it sound like my only purpose is your entertainment. I'm hurt!"

"Forgive me if that is how it sounds." Beatrice raised a brow as a cunning glint flickered across her eyes. "But your long slumber had bored me. I nearly died. Things are so uneventful without you in this world."

Beatrice patted one of the knight's chest, batting her eyes coquettishly. "His Majesty approved the Duke's audience."

"You now sound like the mistress of the house, Princess."

"Is the thought of being your sister-in-law a bad idea, Your Grace?" she smiled sweetly at him, making him smile even more.

"I never said that." Samael stood in front of the door, raising his chin up without looking back at Beatrice. "I hope you find your stay here comfortable."

"Comfort is not a problem, but I hope it'll be an enjoyable one as well."

His smile grew into a smirk as his eyes glinted dangerously. "Then, look forward to it." Samael then moved forth.

"I am looking forward to it," Beatrice whispered before she headed on her way with a cunning smirk on her lips.

'I wonder what sort of surprise you had prepared, Hell. Although... I don't think the sky will clear up so easily because people back home had their eyes on the outside world now.'

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"Hello, my dear brother! It seems you've been busy playing around with the Princess of Cross Kingdom." Samael greeted gleefully with his arms spread wide while marching his way towards the desk.

Stefan slowly raised his head, sitting behind the desk while his eyes scanned Samael's bare top. "It also seemed you had a busy morning, brother."

"I was busy making a mess with my wife, yes!" Samael grinned as he perched on the edge of the desk, his palm on the surface of the desk.

"I don't like where you're sitting." Stefan pointed out as he narrowed his eyes.

"But I like the view of here," Samael smirked as he arched a brow playfully. "I enjoy looking down on you. You look quite pitiful, which reminds me of that whore of a mother of yours, back when she pleaded for mercy."

Stefan's hand balled into a fist as rage flickered across his eyes, but he managed to suppress his anger. "Did you visit just so you can aggravate me?"

"Oh my, of course, not! How can I do something as childish as that?!" He dramatically gasped as he frowned, before chuckling at his own actions. "I came here because I need to think about what I should do with you."

"So, you heard my visit last night?"

"An affair, bearing an heir... yes." Samael nodded languidly. "My wife is very transparent with me, although I sometimes hope she keeps those pieces of information to herself sometimes since it pisses me off."

"But it didn't piss you enough to run rampant? You've built quite the tolerance." Stefan smirked as he leaned back against the chair, resting his arms over the armrest. "I applaud you for that."

"My brother, running amok is what you want from me — why would I give you what you want?"

Stefan let out a low chuckle, smiling that didn't reach his ear. "So, you came here for?"

"I came here to fulfill my duties as your older brother." This time, Samael's eyes sharpened, tapping his sharp fingernails that were akin to a claw against the desk.

"Stop it, Stefan. Don't follow in your father's footsteps."

Chapter 282 - A Heart To Heart Talk Between Brothers II

"Stop it, Stefan. Don't follow in your father's footsteps."

A faint exhale slipped past Stefan's nose as he found Samael's words ridiculous. He thought it was actually important, but it seemed he was wrong.

"I am not following our father's footsteps, Hell. Please don't insult me like that. It is actually hurtful," Stefan expressed heartlessly, as if the thought of being compared to their damned father was more infuriating than any insult.

"My brother, as I've said, I am here to fulfill my duties as your caring older brother. Don't push your luck too far." Samael's tone was firm and sincere, staring deep into his eyes in hopes to touch Stefan's rotten heart. "Knocking on death's door is easy, but what lies further behind that door is something you and I don't know."

"You and I?" Stefan snickered as he shook his head. "I assumed you are already aware of what lies behind that door, but alas, it seemed I am the only one who had been there."

Samael chortled in a low tone. "Do you know why I passed the throne to you as soon as I succeeded it?"

"Because you don't want it... or rather, you can't carry the weight of the crown."

"You're right. I can't and don't want to carry the weight of the throne." Samael nodded in agreement, tilting his head back as he didn't feel the need to conceal that fact. "And also, I am not suited for it."

"Regardless of what you want and don't want, I don't see the point of this conversation. If being grateful is what you seek from me, you're wasting your time, Your Grace."

"Gratefulness is the least I expect from you, Your Majesty. The point here is, I based my decision in the past on what I see right." Samael slowly stood on his feet, placing both his palm against the desk and bent over.

"I could've given it to Dominique or Alistair, or just some random house to spite Father. However, I chose you because I know you can do better than the late king; better than me, and Dyrroth." Samael added while his aura thickened. "Don't be greedy, Stefan. Alphonse is the last person you want on your side, trust me."

"And here I thought I am the only hypocrite in here, but it seemed you are not any different from me, Hell." Stefan chuckled in ridicule as these were the last words he wanted to hear from him. "You allied with the Bloodfang and delivered their last descendant in here to fight for the throne to save your own skin. Don't speak such words thoughtlessly, or I will have your head."

Samael let out a shallow breath as he pushed himself away from the desk. "Your big brother is wrong, Stefan. I made the wrong judgment and allied with the Bloodfang, thinking you can defend your position and take all those nobles under your reign completely."

"You are, indeed, wrong, because things had made an enormous turn and now, you can't side with me because that person you delivered in here is your wife. If you are really sorry, why don't you sacrifice for once, Hell?" Stefan seethed, grinding his teeth as the conversation was just getting more upsetting.

"Die for me." His eyes sharpened as they darkened, leaning forward with his hand clenched tightly. "If you have a shred of conscience just as you speak, just die, my big brother. I had sacrificed everything for this damn crown and family... why am I the only one who had to be in despair when all I did was for everyone's sake?"

Stefan took a deep breath, as he had bottled his emotions for far too long. Samael's words were like a corkscrew, opening up an aged wine and all compressed pressure, anger, frustration, disappointments and everything just popped out uncontrollably.

"For you who is just pure evil and capricious and selfish, a person whose only interest was for his own sake, why you?" Stefan scorned in dismay, shaking his head in disappointment. "Why did she choose you? Why did it have to be you? Why is it always you?"

His voice echoed across the room, and Samael just stared down at him in silence. Samael studied the rage behind Stefan's pair of fiery eyes, and he could tell no words could get to him anymore.

"Dying... I can do that. I would do it without a second hesitation." Samael rocked his head as he inhaled and exhaled deeply, taking a step back.

"You will do it if I asked you before meeting her, I know." Stefan chuckled in ridicule, as he was very much aware of that. Samael agreed to be in a long slumber, after all.

"But in the end, you still failed me, big brother." He continued as he smiled bitterly. "Until the bitter end, you and Lilou will never understand."

No matter what Stefan does, even stooping so low to have a little bit of her, he couldn't. At least, not the way he wanted him to.

"It is such a shame that we came into this, Hell. I respected you and looked up to you... at some point." Stefan chuckled weakly, thinking of those peaceful times when they just all hate the king. "I had those thoughts to be just like you... to be someone who will protect our little brothers and sisters."

Although Stefan's ways differed from Samael, one fact that no one could deny was he had protected his siblings. Even becoming evil in the eyes of the many, he had done so, so he could be the shield of the La Crox family.

"But alas, you and I had decided." Stefan raised his head, and all the lingering bitterness in his eyes eventually faded. "It is either you or I will have to die. We can't live in the same time and world anymore, Hell."

"I have been hesitant, but now I don't anymore." Samael closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened his eyes, the way he looked at Stefan was not like his brother anymore.

"I'm doing you this favor, Hell," Stefan uttered as Samael turned around to leave. "If love and appreciation is something I can't get from her or from this world, I will gladly receive their hatred."

Samael paused in his tracks as his eyes glinted menacingly. "May peace be with you, brother." Before he continued.

When Samael left, Stefan fixed his eyes on the door and whispered, "and also with you. I hope your soul will find peace, my brother."

If this conversation happened in the past, it would be dealt with differently. However, the scar in the king's heart was far too deep and the will to keep the only resident in the duke's heart was far too strong.

So, maybe, just maybe, in another life, if they were not born as victims of their blood, they could smile at each other without contempt in their eyes. Just... maybe.

Chapter 283 - Your Smile Is Deadly, Captain. ;)

Kristina knocked on the office of the captain of the third squadron and entered almost immediately. Her eyes instantly caught Rufus' figure sitting behind his desk. His elbow on the surface of the desk, chin on his knuckles, and just distracted by his own thoughts.

She raised a brow, marching towards the desk, and knocked on it to snap him out of his trance. "It's too early to be zoning out, Sir."

Rufus raised his eyes to her, seeing the slight smile on her face. He slowly leaned back, hands on the armrest, as he sighed.

"Why are you here?" he asked, eyebrow raised while Kristina propped against the desk.

"Checking on you, obviously?" she shrugged and sported a playful smile. "I'm still concerned about you, Sir. Although you tricked me into going in the west garden."

"Do you hate me for that?"

Kristina let out a soft chuckle, shaking her head. "Of course, not. Although I can say that's cheap. How can you play with a maiden's heart? I had expectations."

"I didn't mean to play with a maiden's heart." A low and short chuckle slipped past his lips as he tilted his head a little, resting his jaw on his knuckles. "And about the seeds?"

"I'm trying to charm you, but your mind is all about the seeds? Am I ugly?"

"Miss Monroe, stop playing around." His eyes narrowed as Kristina was being especially playful. Although she always had this sense of humor in the beginning, she was getting bolder.

"I'm not playing around, Captain. I am really trying to charm you."

"And what will you get by doing that?" Rufus raised a brow, genuinely appalled by her actions and words.

"You? Are you dense, Captain? Don't you know you're attractive, strong, and a gentleman, just my type! After meeting Mister Fabian, I thought of living without regrets.... just in case." Kristina exclaimed in a matter-of-fact tone.

He nodded in understanding. "I see. So you want my protection so my brother doesn't skin you alive, is that it?"

Kristina pursed her lips in a thin line. Rufus just worded her intention accurately, although she wasn't lying when she said she was trying to seduce him with her charm. He was almost perfect, after all.

"Fabian is not the type of person who just kills anyone..." Rufus coughed and cleared his throat as he nearly bit his tongue off by saying that. "... I mean, sure, he is unreasonable sometimes, but he won't kill you, at least."

"He won't kill me, I know, sir." Kristina nodded, casting him a look full of disbelief, before she argued, "But he can make me want to just die."

"Fear him if you did him wrong, or betrayed His Grace. I mean, not only Fabian, but I can make you wish you were never born in the first place if you betrayed His Grace." His eyes sharpened with resolve, staring straight into her eyes. "But, I know you're wise enough to know that, Miss Monroe."

A shallow breath slipped past Kristina's lip. "I came here with a good intention. You don't have to threaten this young maiden. No wonder you've yet to tie the knot."

"I am not the type to marry," he affirmed with a slight smile.

"You're not the type to marry, or you just haven't found one yet?" Her brow arched suspiciously. "Or maybe, you found one already but you can't have her?"

"Don't pry too much at other people's private affairs, Miss Monroe."

"I'm not the type to put my nose where it doesn't belong, but I'm always curious about you, Captain." Kristina wiggled her brows as she smiled brightly. "Please, this young maiden will stop once she gets heartbroken too many times."

"You're getting quite a lot to handle." Rufus sighed as he leaned back comfortably. "What is really bothering you for you to bother me so much?"

His last remarks took her aback. But then, her surprise turned into amusement as Rufus just felt like she knew her far too well.

"I will tell you if you tell me who is this lucky woman who occupies that untouchable heart?" she negotiated playfully, knowing he wouldn't ride along.

Rufus narrowed his eyes briefly before the side of his lips curled up. "I don't find the need to negotiate, but I will give you a hint. She's just around, close by."

"Oh?"

"She is strong and lovely, bold but not brass. Hmm. She always had this playful smirk on her lips, and her eyes spoke a thousand unspoken words." Rufus described that person without looking away from her, brushing his lower lip with the side of his forefinger.

"Goodness, Captain! Don't say all that while looking at me! This young maiden might get the wrong idea," she humored as that was what his eyes made her feel, but she knew for a fact it wasn't her.

He chuckled. "You can get the wrong idea. I don't mind a visit from such a lovely lady whose smile is as cunning as a fox, and eyes as bright as rubies."

"Gracious! You're terrible! How can you play with my heart so much?" she chuckled, waving as she didn't know he could be playful sometimes. "Oh, I heard my heart crack."

Rufus chuckled at her playful and free-spirited remarks. Kristina raised her brows as it was her first time hearing him chuckle candidly.

"Your smile is deadly, Captain." She smiled at him, eyes gentle, which caught his attention. "Mister Fabian smiles all the time. I know it's deadly too, literally. But you Sir Knight, I never saw you smile until now. I will be in trouble if you smile like that in front of me."

"You are quite dramatic, and it makes me want to smile for you." Rufus breathed out his low chuckle before cocking his head.

Kristina gasped dramatically. "Did you just indirectly say you want me dead?"

"Haha. Think whatever you like." He waved, enjoying his little company. "Kidding aside, will you now tell me what is the purpose of your visit? I'm certain it's not just to humor this old knight."

Her tongue poked her inner cheek, rocking her head as she did promise to tell him. "Well," she deliberately paused, staring at him solemnly.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked as the light atmosphere between them gradually turned heavy. "Isn't there another way, Captain?"

#### Chapter 284 - Kristina's Heart

"Isn't there another way, Captain?"

Rufus stared at her in silence. Of course, he knew what she was talking about. He had already guessed this was one of the many other reasons.

"Miss Monroe," he called in a low tone, pushing his chair back with his feet before standing up on his feet. Rufus walked around the chair, trudging towards the window, and stood in front of it.

"Do you know what the Duchess told the Duke after their marriage?" asked Rufus, his eyes softening while staring outside where he could see the training ground where Charlotte and Ramin were sparring.

"The Duchess asked His Grace for a painless death," Rufus remarked while Kristina pressed her lips with her eyes on him. "She had accepted him despite knowing that His Grace married her only for formality. I had told her before that this place will take away her smile... but she didn't listen."

"It is such a shame that we all came to this, but losing her is the last thing we all want." Rufus continued, holding his hand behind him. "Losing the duchess also means resurrecting the devils that

were clad in human skins. Her death would surely piss a certain butler, a duke, a prince, and just a lot of people that will bring ruin not just to their enemies but to this kingdom."

Rufus paused as he turned and faced her. "After all... she is their light. So, there is no other way but to keep her alive regardless of any means possible, Miss Monroe."

"I understand." Kristina nodded weakly as she took a deep breath. "Thank you for enlightening me."

And by enlightening her, she meant that if all those people went against the kingdom, even the Divine Orders who swore to keep the downfall of this kingdom wouldn't be able to defend it. Samael's capabilities remained unknown to them. What more if Fabian, Yul, and many people who prowled in the dark backed him up?

"I will go now." Kristina placed her fist across her chest, bowing before turning around and walk away.

As he watched her back, Rufus uttered, "Please take care, Kristina. It will be such a shame to lose a talent like you."

"I will ignore the latter part of the sentence, Captain." Kristina cocked her head back, chuckling. "But if you tell me to take care, I will. I still have a lot of ways to test and charm you."

Rufus chortled, shaking his head while she resumed in her stride. Kristina also smiled, as she didn't want to leave with a heavy heart. Teasing him was putting her in a good mood, so she'd rather be in a good mood despite the stifling air in the palace.

Just as Kristina opened the door to leave, she stopped upon seeing the person standing outside. She was a bit taken aback for a moment, before snapping to her senses and bowed.

"Greetings to your Royal Highness." Kristina greeted politely while Silvia gazed down at her.

Silvia noticed the smile on Kristina when she opened the door but didn't point it out. "Is Sir Barrett inside?"

"Yes, Your Royal Highness."

Silvia nodded while Kristina took a step to the side, making way for her. She held her skirt up, walking towards the office but stopped in front of Kristina as she studied her.

"You..." Silvia's grip on her skirt tightened, same with her jaw. "You are quite lovely."

That was all Silvia could say before heading inside. When the door shut closed, Kristina gazed at the door with a furrowed brow.

She's just around, close by. She is strong and lovely, bold but not brass. Hmm. She always had this playful smirk on her lips, and her eyes spoke a thousand unspoken words.

Rufus' words suddenly hovered in Kristina's mind, as those descriptions somehow suited Silvia. A weak smile resurfaced on her lips as she immediately grasped the situation.

"Ah..." Kristina chuckled lightly as she walked away, placing her palm across her chest. "... those two suit each other quite perfectly and that's another crack in my heart."

It was not like Kristina had deep, romantic feelings for Rufus. She respected him and being able to tease such an immovable man gave her a thrill. Still, she was not so selfish as to stand in between



them. If anything, Kristina just felt bad that Rufus loved a royal who was also married to the current king.

'And that makes me wish... he will heal the wounds in his heart that no one knew about.' She hummed and tried to stay positive.

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Silvia froze as she caught the smile on Rufus' lips the second she laid her eyes on him. That smile, though, was immediately replaced with coldness in his eyes as soon as he recognized her presence.

"Ruru," she called softly, forcing a smile, but failed miserably. "That dame is quite... no, she is lovely. I think she will suit you."

"To what do I owe this honor, your royal highness?" His tone was icy as his eyes glinted, showing no sign of any other emotion aside from that. "It's not just to matchmake me with Dame Kristina, is it?"

When Silvia remained silent, Rufus narrowed his eyes, chin up. "It won't be good for you if His Majesty get the wind of your visit in here, Your Royal Highness."

"Are you worried?"

"Of course. It is my duty as one of your people."

Silvia pursed her lips and swallowed down the tension in her throat. His cold treatment was like a stake stabbing her right through her chest.

"Can I..." she gazed down, mustering her courage before she raised her head once again. "... can you share a tea with me? I want to discuss an important matter with you regarding Stefan."

Rufus squinted his eyes into slits. "Whatever it is, I don't want to hear it."

"Ruru! Even with your lives at stake, you will deny my help?"

"Your help is the last thing I want, Via." He growled, eyes glinting. "Get out of here."

"No."

Rufus fumed as he stomped his way towards her, grabbing her shoulder, and dragged her towards the door.

"Get the hell out of here..." Rufus froze abruptly as Silvia suddenly clung onto him, hugging him tightly despite the pain in her shoulder.

"I was wrong, Ruru." She whimpered, clutching his back tightly. "Kill me if that will make you feel better, but please... listen to me for once."

When he didn't reply, she added, "you can't die, Ruru. I won't let that happen, even if it means sacrificing your people the second time. So, give me a chance... please."

Chapter 285 - Unnatural Calm Morning

Meanwhile, in the west garden, Claude and Klaus were just idling around the fountain. They were both seated on the concrete fountain basin while eating lollipops, eyes on Fabian, who was cutting roses to make a bouquet.

"Uncle," called Claude without casting a look at Klaus while the latter hummed and glanced at him. "Your fangs do not sting anymore, right?"

"Hmm. Why?" Klaus quirked a brow, gazing at his little ancestor, who just knew how to be a child in front of Lilou.

"Nothing." Claude shook his head before looking up at him. "It's just I suddenly think you are quite useless."

His blunt remark made Klaus scrunch his nose. "Little ancestor, you've spent too much time with that lunatic." pointing in Fabian's direction.

"Being with Mister Fabian for over half a year is more productive than being with you for many years, Uncle." Claude voiced out with all honesty, hurting his uncle's pride. "But this is not about me, Uncle. It's about you."

"What about me? Hell said just stay the way I am, so that's what I am doing."

Claude let out a deep sigh and shook his head once again. He couldn't believe his uncle's ignorance.

"Uncle, I don't know how you survived until now if you can't even read the change of air in the palace," he murmured with genuine wonder in his eyes.

"Because I'm strong?" Klaus replied as a matter of fact. "I'm not as smart as everyone else nor do I indulge in such schemes, but your uncle is pretty strong."

"But you can't even retaliate against Mister Fabian."

"That guy is a lunatic, my adorable nephew." Klaus clicked his tongue in annoyance, resting his palm on the rim of the concrete basin they were sitting on. "No matter how I hate to admit it, that damn lunatic is on a different caliber."

"I suffered for centuries because he played dentist and extracted my fangs." Klaus continued but only felt a little fury unlike usual. "But then, just like him, I don't really want him to die."

"Just like him... you mean, Mister Fabian doesn't want you dead as well?" Claude cocked his head to the side, a little doubtful at his uncle's claims.

Klaus cocked his head to Claude, sporting a nonchalant look. "If he wants me dead, you wouldn't even meet me."

"Make sense." Claude nodded before shifting his eyes towards Fabian. "I guess I should thank Mister Fabian for that."

"Haha!" Klaus chortled with delight as he raised his hand, ruffling his nephew's soft hairs.

His action brought a frown on Claude's lip. "Uncle, what are you doing?"

"Let me tell you, my beloved nephew, you shouldn't thank Fabian for that. You should thank that your uncle, although not gifted with high intelligence, in terms of strength, I'm the strongest among my brothers." The side of Klaus' lips stretched into a grin, holding Claude's little head with no force. "So, you don't have to worry because this wonderful uncle of yours will protect you."

"Uncle, I hope you can say that you're the strongest in front of Uncle Hell."

Klaus' grin died down. "Of course, I can tell that to his face. He was the one who told me that."

"Uncle Hell is the greatest liar I had ever met in my life."

"Hey, kid. Why don't you just tell me you can't or don't want to rely on me?" Klaus frowned as this nephew was his was too judgmental. How could Claude not trust him when Klaus had been protecting him?

Claude just stare at him in silence before averting his eyes. His lack of response and expression made Klaus' face twitch. He was truly cruel to the only uncle who genuinely cared for him. But alas, although Claude's lips weren't smiling, his eyes were.

"Huh?" Klaus's brows suddenly quirked as he gazed up. "The weather is getting colder day by day. I think the snow will come earlier this year."

"It's been winter for a long time, Uncle," Claude murmured as he fixed his eyes on Fabian's back, before glimpsing at the sinister smirk on the latter's lips when he slightly turned his head. "And it will only get colder from today onwards."

"I wonder how is Alistair doing in the north. I hope he won't freeze to death so I can come and kill him myself." Klaus peeled his eyes away from the sky and he just spent the morning idling with his nephew and watching Fabian arrange the flower he had grown himself.

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Meanwhile, in the palace's guest chambers where Zero was being accommodated, Zero stared at the ceiling while laying on the carpeted floor.

"Your Majesty, please lie on the bed instead. The floor is rather cold." Tristan uttered politely, staring at his king who hadn't been himself for a while... or rather, Zero acting like his usual self before he became the king.

"Today, I got a whiff of my fiance's scent." Zero raised his hand, placing it on his right eye with gaps in between his finger. "She has a lovely scent, suitable in creating a bloodline comparable to those purebloods back in the mainland."

Tristan pressed his lips into a thin line, as he couldn't deny that. Lilou's scent was so strong that they all knew she had fed someone, and that someone was her husband, obviously.

"At the same time, I got a whiff of Beatrice's blood as well." The corner of Zero's lips curled up into a smirk. "Things that happen in this country never cease to amaze me. It makes me want to own it."

"Your Majesty, there are a lot of ears around. We don't know if there are more ears listening."

"Let them listen, Tristan." His eyes glinted as his smile brightened up even more. "Prepare the gift that I asked for. We can't let someone else get ahead of us."

"Yes, Your Majesty. The gift will be ready soon. We'll just have to wrap it tonight."

"Good," Zero cackled as his eyes drooped and his aura grew sinister. "Ahh... what a good day to wake up in such an unnatural calm morning."

Chapter 286 - The Start Of The Long Winter

"Your Grace, Lena had returned, but I told her to rest for today," Mildred informed me as she stood behind me.

I looked outside the window, placing my hand on the glass. "Winter seems it will start earlier than expected, Mildred."

"It happens, Your Grace."

"I hate winters," I whispered, as winters often turn my life upside down. I didn't want to anticipate another disaster, but I couldn't help it.

"The cold is not everyone's favorite."

After Mildred voiced out her thoughts, silence enveloped the two of us. Sam was just here this morning, but my heart felt restless. Although it was peaceful... it was unnaturally peaceful.

"A lull before the storm..." I whispered as my eyes narrowed, taking a deep breath as I closed my eyes briefly. When I opened them, I stared at my reflection only to see the color of my eyes having a different color: one was red and the other was olive — the original color of my eyes.

"Mildred, will you die for me?" I asked, sensing her flinch at my question.

I glanced at her reflection in the window, seeing her bow her head. "Yes, Your Grace. I will die and live for you."

"Don't die on me," I muttered, knowing the sincerity of her words.

"As long as you do not wish for my death, I shall remain by your grace's side."

Again, silence came afterward. I didn't know why this sounded so heavy in my heart. Although I would never fully trust her, I had to do my own preparations as well. The restlessness in my heart was not to be taken lightly, and it would only be calmed if Sam and I successfully fled this place.

"Why am I hesitating now?" I whispered along with a faint scoff.

"Your Grace?"

A weak smile resurfaced on my lips as I blinked, and the color of my eyes returned to normal.

"Nothing, Mildred. Can you send a word to Yul and tell him to come and find me?"

"Yes, Your Grace." Mildred bowed politely and immediately left to execute the order.

I didn't have any plans for today so I idled in my room, organizing my thoughts as I need some peace. Last night, I met with Lara and figured out a thing or two. She told me a hint that was passed down from generation to generation.

"If Father got it, that means he had told me even if it's vague," I muttered, recalling all my father's teaching. A smile resurfaced on my lips the more I thought about Father.

"I tried recalling whatever important details I missed, but all I can remember was our wonderful memories together." The times that I was just a clumsy, curious little girl.

Those times we would run around the shack, walking in the field, and his warm smiles, especially during tough seasons. His kindness shielded me from the ugly reality.

"I'm glad he figured out this scheme a little late." I breathed out with a weak smile, gazing down with my eyes softened. "This place doesn't deserve Father. He had already had a hard life... and I'm glad I got to deal with this instead of him."

This could be considered selfishness, or selflessness — depends on the angle. But that was what I felt. Part of me felt relieved that I was the one who had to bear this curse, and not my father or my children.

Silence enveloped me as I waited for Yul to arrive. I wanted to spend some time with Yul, just in case, things went on our way. While I waited patiently, a sudden memory flashed in my head. Maybe it was because I was unconsciously diving into the deepest part of my mind that I was reminded of this vague memory.

"What..." my brows furrowed as I squinted my eyes into slits.

My father had always believed in the Duke of Grimsbanne. There were multiple occasions we would stand on the spot where I buried him, and he would point out at the duke's mansion. I couldn't remember everything he had said, but what etched in my mind was what he would repeatedly tell me.

"Lilou, things will return to their rightful place in the future. Live as quietly as a mouse until the right one arrives."

"Ah... now that reminds me." I chuckled, recalling that time in Whistlebird where Sam said the same thing. Those words... were the last words of the Bloodfang to my husband. No wonder when I heard it from him, I felt this strange familiarity which I ignored and forgot.

"Live as quietly as a mouse until the rightful ruler arrives... I see." I repeated under my breath, rocking my head as I parsed the words of my father. "Things will return..."

Back then, Sam said so himself that the Bloodfang were fitted to be rulers. I didn't know why he would say such a thing when he knew this curse on me from the very beginning, but... my eyes narrowed as I rewind everything in my memory.

"If Father had this unquestionable faith in Sam, does that mean Sam's relationship with the Bloodfang wasn't as simple as what it looks like?" It reminded me of how Sam and I were too close, but still, move on our own. Despite that, I had complete trust in him.

"Which makes me wonder... do I trust him because I love him? Or it is because the blood that is running through my veins is silently telling me to trust and love him?" I shut my eyes closed and shook my head, erasing that damn thought that suddenly intruded into my mind. "That's the last thing you should question, Lilou."

Although I tried not to think about it, that thought remained at the back of my head. Questioning my heart right now of all times would be the last thing I need to do. What I need to do was to prepare myself for later.

"Later... that's right." A shallow breath slipped past my lips while gazing down.

Unbeknownst to me, this day would be a very long one.

## Chapter 287 - The Cursed Prince

When Yul and I arrived, we just stayed idle and accompanied me around. We only did a brief patrolling, if that was what even considered patrolling as we didn't pay attention that much.

"You are leaving in the worst season," Yul said as soon as we headed back into my chambers. He took a seat on the chair across from me.

"Mildred. Tea, please."

Mildred bowed her head and left without a sound. Once she closed the door, I set my eyes back to Yul.

"Can you look after her?" I asked, a bit worried about what would happen to her once we leave. "I don't worry about Lena, but Mildred will surely be in trouble. She's my lady-in-waiting, after all."

Yul stared at me before he smacked his lips. "All I can do is get a lesser punishment for her, but if the king orders her death, I can't step in."

I pursed my lips in a thin line. I understood his point as stepping in to save Mildred would raise suspicion. Yul interfering with the outcome was already risky for him.

"Should I tell her to run?" I inquired, as I never had this idea before. "I don't completely trust her, but I can feel her sincerity to redeem herself. Having more hands and feet and eyes is never a bad idea, Yul."

"You're right. I'll see what I can do." Yul nodded, closed-lipped.

I stared at him and felt sorry for him. We always bantered at first and we still, sometimes, but he was my family. This story wasn't normal at all, but this relationship with Yul was one of what I was thankful for in this twisted story.

"I will excuse myself first, sister." Yul took a deep breath and assisted himself up.

"You're not going to have some tea before you leave?"

He shook his head and smiled. "I can't be complacent and I had to keep my eyes and ears open, just in case."

"Sorry. You have a stubborn and selfish sister," came out a weak apology as I smiled gently at him.

"Lump of meat, cheer up. You should get as much rest as you can since getting out of here is the easiest part." Yul chuckled as he teased, cocking his head to the side. "You will be running for the rest of your life, so I don't think you should be the one feeling sorry in here."

"Haha, pretend to be a little sweet sometimes, Yul," I chuckled, shaking my head as he barely changed whenever he wanted to change the mood. I assisted myself up to send him off.

Just when we were by the door, Yul faced me and stared at me in silence. "I will miss you, sis."

"The hair on my body can't help but raise, don't joke like that." I humored and snapped my tongue, making him chuckle.

"See? This is why I don't even try."

My tongue snapped. "Give me a heads-up, at least. Now, go."

"I will." The side of his lips stretched wider as he turned and left.

I looked at him through the gap of the door until it shut in front of me. A deep sigh slipped past my lips as my anxiousness increased every passing second.

"I haven't seen Sam, but he told me to meet him in the west wing later." I dragged my feet back to the divan but didn't sit on it as I looked around the large room.

It wasn't strange that I didn't feel any sort of attachment in this place. If this was the duchy, I would probably cry or feel a little reluctant to leave. But all I want while looking at this room was... I wanted to get the hell out of here.

"Your Grace, here is the tea that..." Mildred trailed off upon seeing that Yul was gone and I was just standing.

"Mildred, you're dismissed for today." I turned my head in her direction, offering a weak smile. "I want to rest early. But before you go, please bring me water so I wouldn't need to fetch one later."

"Yes, Your Grace." There was confusion in her eyes, but she didn't pry and just accepted the orders.

As she turned around to leave, I called her name, which made her pause and look back. "I've forgiven you, Mildred."

"Your Grace..." her voice cracked as if that alone could make her cry.

"I hope you will get a good sleep tonight." I waved to avoid her seeing being emotional. Mildred sniffed and nodded before resuming in her strides.

Just as she was told, Mildred fetched me water and run a bath for me before she resigned to bed. I, on the other hand, didn't act out of the ordinary and only when I was alone I prepared a few men's clothes to bring with me.

After that... it was the waiting game.

Sam didn't return while I laid on the bed and stared at the ceiling. Time passed by slower, seconds felt like minutes, and minutes felt like hours. The anxiousness in my heart also increased as my breathing grew slower.

"I can't sleep now," I told myself, turning my head towards the window that filtered the illuminating light from the bright moon. "Just a few more hours, Lilou... just a few more hours."

My jaw tightened as I clenched my teeth, stabilizing my breathing as I nodded in resolution. I couldn't turn my back now. This would be a now or never thing... and it made me a little scared.

"It'll be alright, Lilou. Everything will be alright." I chanted under my breath, eyes closed as I attempted to calm my heart; I failed.

When my eyes slowly opened, another heavy sigh slipped past my lips. "This feeling... felt so familiar."

It was the same as that time. That time I prayed so hard, but to no avail.

"It couldn't be..." I trailed off as I jolted up to sit, alarmed by the sudden presence that entered my radar. "Who —"

"It's alright." My breath hitched when I heard an unfamiliar voice of a man inside this room. Because I barely lit a few candelabra, the corner of the room was dark, and he had camouflaged himself in the dark.

"Who are you?" my eyes glinted as I stared in the voice's direction.

All I heard as a response was a low chuckle before he slowly slinked out of the dark. He had this cloak, pulling his hood down ever so slowly to reveal his argent hair and a pair of deep crimson eyes.

"Alphonse, is the name, my dear sister," Alphonse stated while the side of his lips curled up into a smirk.

## Chapter 288 - The First Snowfall

"Alphonse, is the name, my dear sister."

My eyes sharpened as I felt Lakresha react to him the first time I sensed his presence. His aura just reeked of pure evilness. Of all days, this man showing up tonight added to my anxiety.

"Alphonse? So my husband is right, after all." I calmed myself, as I knew attacking him thoughtlessly was simply stupid. "You're alive. How the hell did you get inside here?"

"Haha, don't worry. This is not my physical body, dear sister-in-law."

This was not his physical body, but his aura was already this strong? Just how strong was this man?

"That is not what you want to ask me, though." He spoke while the side of his lips hooked up.

"Won't you ask me the reason I came here to see you?"

"Will you tell me in all honesty that you will answer it?"

He chortled and clapped. "Maybe? Why don't you try?"

"Get out. This room is not a public place for everyone to come and go as they pleased." My voice thundered as I didn't want to hear a word from him.

As a Bearer of the Divine Order, I was supposed to subdue him. However, there was no need to subdue a substantial body. Also, I couldn't trust anything that would come out of his mouth — I'd rather save myself from being played with words.

"You have quite the determined mind, sister-in-law." He chuckled, pleased by the reaction he was getting from me. "But let me state the purpose of my visit."

I don't want to hear it, were the words that failed to escape my throat. Instead, I kept quiet and stared at him.

"I've been waiting for this day, sister-in-law." My brows quirked as the first thing that came up to my mind was he allied with the Bloodfang, but that was very unlikely the more I studied his expression. "A day that someone will share the same interest as I do."

"Same interest? And what interest is this?"

He didn't answer immediately and smiled. "You will understand soon, my sister-in-law. And when that time comes, I will come to you and we'll talk."

"You people just come in here and say everything you want. But, what I can tell you is, there's no need for that." I smirked, squashing down all the other worries I had in my heart. "I will come and find you, Alphonse. You people won't like it if I do."

"Bold, I must say, but I'm sure you will."

I took a deep breath and shared a few seconds of silence with him. There wasn't an obvious intention in his eyes, but one thing that he didn't hide was his amusement.

"Anyway, tonight will be colder," he said as he took a step back in the dark. "May the heat of your blood protect you from the cold."



And then he disappeared, just like that. He came like a ghost and left just like one.

"Did he know about our plans tonight...?" This ominous feeling slowly enveloped my heart, making my fist tremble as this plan was starting to feel wrong.

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Meanwhile, in the west wing garden, Samael laid in the middle of the garden, staring at the night sky. Thick clouds started to reign over the sky, making him narrow his eyes.

"My lord, the preparations are complete," said Fabian as soon as he stood by his side.

"Is that so?" Samael hummed a low tune as he forced himself to sit upright. "Ahh... this is exhausting."

"Lord Remington had prepared the steeds you asked for. Rufus had already changed the knights guarding the exit in the east gates."

Samael looked up at him, nonchalance plastered on his face. "Bring only the necessary things, Fabian."

"Of course, my lord." Fabian smiled as he had already packed his own luggage with only the necessary equipment he would need to use. "It is such a shame that we came to this decision."

"Did Rufus say he will come?"

"He will, but he said he would like to stay in Grimsbanne. He can't turn his back on it." Fabian reported which they already expected, knowing Rufus' strong sense of responsibility. "I'm certain my brother will be fine."

"Of course, he will be fine." Samael nodded and smacked his lips, peeling his eyes away from his butler. "Rufus is stronger when he has motives, although, this is saddening."

Fabian pressed his lips together and forced a smile on his lips. He could understand Samael, but this was the best they could do to keep Lilou safe.

"Oh, damn." Samael frowned as he felt a liquid coming out of his nose. He raised a hand and wiped it with his finger, withdrawing it only to see blood on it.

"Your Grace." Fabian's eyes dilated, alarmed by Samael's condition. "Are you alright?"

"Of course I am." Samael waved nonchalantly as he wiped the blood on his upper lip.

"You haven't recovered your strength and had been straining yourself throughout your entire stay here." Fabian's eyes glinted as this wasn't the first time Samael's nose bled or coughed out blood.

It all started back in Whistlebird, and it was getting worse. The reason Samael wouldn't go see Lilou for days was because of this.

"Fabian." Samael gazed up with eyes flickering dangerously. "I've gone this far. I can't turn back now."

Fabian hung his head low, his jaw clenched. "I will protect you, My Lord."

"I trust you in that." Samael smiled brightly and wiped off all the blood when Fabian offered him a handkerchief. "Oh... it snowing now."

Both of them looked up as snow started falling from the sky. Samael opened his palm and gazed at it, his eyes gentle as a bitter smile resurfaced on his lips.

"This will be a very long night," he muttered as blood continuously dripped from his nose, before he coughed out blood, but ignored it as he stood. "Fabian, get Lilou for me. I'll meet you at the border."

Fabian exhaled sharply and bowed. "Yes, Your Grace." He trudged away but looked back once again, seeing that Samael raised and spread his arms.

"My lord," he breathed out before resuming in his strides. Once Fabian blinked, his eyes sharpened as they glinted.

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A mist of red and black filled the air as the ground beneath Samael's feet cracked. His argent hair raised at the force coming from beneath the ground.

"Rise," he whispered, and the ground started shaking as hands from underneath the ground crawled their way up.

#### Chapter 289 - A Royal Order

Meanwhile, in one of the castle towers, Claude was sitting on the window, his feet swaying, hanging outside the window. He hugged his stuffed toy while chewing a piece of gum before he blow a bubble. Once the bubble was big enough, it popped around his lips. Claude didn't remove it as he bats his eyes ever so slowly.

"It had started," he whispered and gazed up at the bleak sky. "This will be a long winter."

"There you are!" Klaus' voice reached him from behind as his uncle approached him. "Hell threw a banquet for everyone. Aren't you going to join?"

Klaus leaned on his side against the concrete wall, arms crossed. "Stefan gave out a royal order. Did you hear about it?"

"No, but it's expected."

"You, did you know about this?" Klaus scrunched his nose up as it seemed he was the only one that was left in the dark about this.

Claude slowly turned his head in Klaus' direction. "It is just the beginning, Uncle. I will stay here, but you have to see things for yourself."

"Are you ordering your uncle?"

"I always order you around." Claude's response brought a frown to Klaus's lips. "Take care, Uncle. I will be safe in here."

Klaus stared at his little nephew before he sighed and ruffled his hair. "Aish! I will come back a little later."

Claude smiled and nodded without saying a word. Klaus glanced at him and let out another sigh before turning around to leave.

'He always acts like a fool, but I'm certain he is worried about Uncle Hell.' Claude uttered internally, shifting his eyes outside. "A royal order for Uncle Hell's head... he surely enjoys doing things grandly."

Claude gazed down and lifted his teddy bear up. He looked at it for a long time before he leaned forward, immediately falling from the tower's window.

"Auron."

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In the palace where the delegation of the princess of the Cross Kingdom stayed, Beatrice paused in sipping the tea. She turned her head in the window's direction, while the corner of her lips curled into a smirk.

"I knew he would surprise me," Beatrice whispered, and someone suddenly barged into her room. She turned her head and her eyes immediately landed on her knight's figure, catching the mask that covered the right half of the knight's face.

"The third prince had declared a war against the king. We should leave, Your Highness," said the knight in a solemn and deep voice.

Beatrice chuckled as she leaned back comfortably. "Oh no, I want to see how this will turn out."

"Your Highness."

"What do you think, Zarros?" her smirk remained, with eyes glinting with amusement. "Who will take the seat of the La Crox at the start of the founding celebration? Will it be Hell? Or Stefan?"

"Your Highness." Zarros let out a deep sigh. "This is not something to look forward to. The third prince brought a cursed army with him."

Despite Zarros's remarks, Beatrice chuckled as she peeled her eyes away from him. She didn't show any sign of wanting to leave.

"Hell is very strong but...." She trailed off, and her cunning smirk remained. "... he is not the same as before, Zarros. To mobilize such an army without completely regaining all his strength, do you think he can last that long?"

"Are you saying..."

"Hell will die." Beatrice gazed back at Zarros once again and smiled. "That's why I didn't put my bets on him."

"You sided with the king?"

As soon as Beatrice heard that, a loud laugh escaped her mouth. Zarros furrowed his brows, confused as it seemed that wasn't the case as well.

"Oh, Zarros." She shook her head, recovering from the joke she just heard. "Just guard this palace and don't let a single fly in here. Be it Hell or Stefan's men, don't let them in."

"Your Highness..." Zarros sighed for the nth time as it seemed he couldn't change Beatrice's mind. As he turned around, he halted upon hearing Beatrice's next words.

"Your Highness?" he turned his head back, appalled at what he just heard.

"If Quentin came here, just send him in." She smiled cunningly. "Don't worry about him, Zarros. I think, for the first time in our lives, Quentin and I will have to agree with something."

Zarros's expression turned grim, deadly, but said nothing and left. Seeing his reaction was normal, as Beatrice and Zero had a long and dark history.

"I can forget the scores I have to settle with Quentin for now, Zarros," Beatrice whispered as she looked at the tea, seeing her vicious reflection on it. "This is merely the beginning. I will have his head later."

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It wasn't the time yet, but when I felt this strong sense of danger that suddenly enveloped the entire palace, I knew I had to move. Fortunately, after Alphonse's visit, I changed into men's clothing so I could move better and faster.

"I don't know what is going on, but it is coming from the west wing," I muttered, kicking the door open, as I could use this excuse of checking the situation as a Bearer.

Was this the preparation Sam was talking about? A distraction? It could be. In the end, I only brought myself and Lakresha with me. Having a gut feeling bringing more would only be a hindrance.

"Lilou!" As I marched through the hallway, Yul suddenly appeared from who knows where.

"Yul, what is..." I trailed off and drew back because he suddenly grabbed my shoulders, scanning me from head to toe. "Don't go to the west wing."

"Yul, Why? What is going on?" My brows furrowed as my heart suddenly pounded against my chest.

"He had lost his mind, Lilou." Yul ground his teeth as he tightened his grip. "The undeads are inside the palace, and it was Hell and Fabian who had kept them hidden in the west wing."

What? I fixed my eyes on him, attempting to speak, but I couldn't.

"I don't know why Hell would do something as grand as this, but this is his declaration of war against Stefan." Yul's eyes darkened as he bent over and stressed each word. "You have to go."

"What? No." a scoffed slipped past my lips. "If my husband had declared a war, I will fight alongside him. Why do I have to go?"

"Lilou!" His voice thundered as it echoed, but that didn't shake me.

"Yul, will you stop me once again?!" I hissed, as my eyes glinted menacingly. "Again?!" this time, my voice hitched as my body trembled in rage.

Yul looked down momentarily as if he didn't want to do it as well. "I don't want to, but Hell told me I need to get you out of here, sis."

"And why would he tell you that? Hah!" I held Yul's arms tightly. "Does he really see me as a burden? Someone he needs to protect and not someone he could trust his life with?"

"Sis, that is not it. It's —"

"Move," I ordered coldly. No one would change my mind about this. "If that is not the case, move aside and I will be the one who will drag my husband out of this place."

"You don't understand, sis. The king had passed an order for his head and to capture you."

"Then, the more reason I had to take up my weapon." I stared straight into his eyes and brushed his hands away. "This time, I won't let it slide if you stop me once again. Know your place."

"I'm afraid it is not the ninth prince who will stop you tonight, my lady." Suddenly, a voice reached my ear, along with his approaching footsteps.

Fabian.

Chapter 290 - Throwing You In Fire

"I'm afraid it is not the ninth prince who will stop you tonight, My Lady."

"Fabian." I ground my teeth as I shifted my eyes to him. "What is the meaning of this?"

The light from the sconce hit his face, revealing the bloodstain all over him. He was wiping his hand covered in blood with a handkerchief, his eyes on me.

"My lady, you need to come with me. I had cleared the way on the way here, but the royal knights will soon come and drag you with them." Fabian informed me calmly. "I know you can fight them on your own, but His Grace said he will meet you on the east border. It will be more troublesome to get rid of them."

Silence enveloped us as neither of us talked. Fabian only stared back at me without emotions in his eyes.

"If you truly trust His Grace, you should come with me, my lady," Fabian uttered solemnly. "Please, Your Grace."

My breathing constricted as this felt like an indirect way of telling me to run to save my own skin. "I... trust Sam, Fabi." My voice shook as I took a deep breath, my heart heavy. "But don't you all trust me?"

Silence was their answer. Leaving without Sam was the hardest decision they had asked me to do.

"I am his ride or die and I won't forgive you two... no, I won't forgive this world if something happened to him." I stared at Fabian and then at Yul. "If something happened to Sam, there is no way I can trust any of you anymore."

"Nothing will happen, Your Grace. I assure you that." He looked at me, nodding reassuringly. "His death also means my death."

That was right. Fabian only lived this long because Sam's blood was sustaining his life — the complicated bond of human and vampire blood.

"Lead the way." I jerked my chin up, swallowing as hard as I could as I balled my hand into a fist.

Fabian bowed and then shifted his attention to Yul. "How about you, ninth prince?"

"I will... assist Hell." Yul only cast Fabian a brief look before he set his eyes on me. "I will make sure he will come to you no matter what."

He reached his hand to mine, squeezing it as his eyes spoke a thousand words. "Now go."

"Follow me, my lady." Fabian beckoned and started walking. I followed him and glanced back at Yul.

He offered me a weak smile and waved. I knew Yul would lay his life to fulfill his words. Maybe this request from Sam pained him just the way it hurt me. Yul trusted me and my capabilities, after all.

"Just so you know, Fabian. I never ask to be protected." I uttered coldly, eyes glinting as I hastened my pace. "I can fight on my own."

Fabian glanced at me as I walked to his side. "I know, my lady, that's why I am not doing it."

"You're not doing it?" I scoffed. "If you're not protecting me, then what do you call this?"

He didn't speak anymore, and I assumed it was because he couldn't argue with me. However, after a minute of silence, Fabian spoke under his breath.

"It might be the opposite, my lady." He cast me a side-eye, nonchalant. "Instead of shielding you, have you ever thought I might be throwing you on fire?"

My eyes studied his solemn expression before setting my eyes ahead. "Throw me anywhere and I'll be alright."

"I figured... we all know that, my lady."

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On the other side of the palace, Samael was humming a tune, waltzing through the hallway while his finger compassed each note. The scream and yell, blood splatting and hisses, echoed faintly in his ear as he strutted his way towards the inner palace.

"Hell."

Samael stopped upon hearing the voice behind him. The corner of his lips curled up into a smirk as he turned around, facing his brother squarely.

"Hanzel." His eyes drooped with amusement as their eyes met. "I didn't expect you will be the first person to show up."

"You've finally done it, Hell." Hanz hissed as his fangs let themselves known. "Now, there is no reason not to kill you."

"Kill me?" Samael cackled, rocking his finger up. "You talk big, my little brother."

\*BOOM!\*

Samael raised a brow upon hearing a loud explosion not far away. Hanz didn't falter as he narrowed his eyes, knowing that a fire broke out somewhere in the palace.

"Do you think you can get away from this, Hell? This act of treason... oh boy, I am looking forward to seeing how you will look like while being hanged and burned alive in the gates of the palace." Hanz sneered as his eyes glinted with malice.

"You sound confident, I like it, Hanzel." Samael nodded in satisfaction, and then raised his eyes and fixed them on Hanz. "But alas, you are not the person who will kill me."

"I, alone, can't kill you, but even so, your end had been set on stone."

"My death... a weak person like you will never understand." Samael let out a shallow breath as he gazed at him in pity. "How I will die and when I will die, or who will kill me is my choice, but you, Hanzel... you can never negotiate on those terms because you are so weak it breaks my heart."

"Tch. That tongue of yours is surely an expert in agitating people." Hanz scorned as he snapped his tongue. "As I've said, I can't kill you, but I will surely cut that venomous tongue of yours."

Suddenly, their surroundings shut into silence, making Samael arch a brow. It was as if they had entered a different realm, but still looked like the same place.

"You can create illusion domains now?" Samael mused, a little surprised at this level up in Hanz's ability. A few clones of Hanz appeared one after another, surrounding him.

"Oh, no. One Hanzel is already annoying. What more if there are ten of you? Is this your tactic? To annoy me to death? That's smart, I must say!"

"Hah! I wonder for how long will you stay arrogant?" Hanz and his clones uttered in chorus, making Samael sigh dejectedly.

"Oh, Hanzel. I give up." Samael raised both his hands as a gesture of surrender. "I can't humor you tonight as this brother of yours had better things to do."

Upon saying his piece, Samael pivoted on his heel, turning around as he marched away. This made Hanz cackle in disdain, eyes glinting before one of his clones bolted towards Samael.

A smirk appeared on Samael's lips as he felt the clone coming close to him. However, that didn't faze him as he continued in his stride calmly.

"Die, Hell, die!" the clone yelled through his gritted teeth, revealing two anelaces as he thrust it towards him.

"Keep your fucking voice down." A voice came in, blocking the attack as he stood behind Samael. "It's past your bedtime, Hanz, just sleep."

"Tch. What the fuck are you doing here?"

Samael chuckled as he continued to walk away, waving. "A battle of who is more annoying... good luck, Klaus."

"I'm not doing this for you, Hell." Klaus grinned as his crimson eyes burned with thrill, as if an opportunity finally opened up for him to do this.. "This is for Lucia, Hanzel."