

The Duke 301

Chapter 301 - A Purge

Meanwhile, in the throne room where Samael and Stefan engaged in an intense fight, Samael's eyelids fluttered as he gazed up.

"Rufus," he whispered, balling his hand into a fist because the second Rufus' heart stopped, Samael felt it.

"It seemed Sir Barrett died." Samael snapped his eyes upon hearing Stefan's voice. "Don't worry, you will follow him soon so he wouldn't be sad."

"It wasn't you," Samael whispered with narrowed eyes. "The humming... it was the same as that night in the banquet. So, it wasn't yours."

"I will deal with those mice after you."

"Stefan." A smile turned up on Samael's face, running his bloody fingers through his unruly argent hair. "I didn't know how blind and foolish you are. Those rats in hiding... can't you feel their uncalled participation in this?"

"Alphonse, Quentin, Beatrice, and a lot more people, Stefan," Samael continued in an arrogant tone. "You're so fucking dumb not to see the situation you're in."

"You're not in any better situation, Hell."

"Well, I don't think so. I actually think I'm a genius. If I use my head often, I can rule this world!"

A ridiculing scoff slipped past Stefan's lips, sizing him up from head to toe. "You boast despite your current state, it's amazing. Just look at yourself, Hell. Your wounds don't even heal anymore."

Samael quirked his brows as gaze down to see his arms covered with his own blood dripping down the floor. He couldn't feel the pain that much, and because of that, he didn't realize the loss of blood.

"Oh? Do I look pathetic in your eyes?" he asked nonchalantly, raising his head to him. "Losing a bit of blood is not a terrible trade for tonight's agenda, though."

"Tonight's agenda, hah..." Stefan stared at his brother's pathetic state, smirking when blood suddenly dripped from Samael's nose. "And what is tonight's agenda, Hell? To mobilize that number of undead, what is your goal of making such a huge sacrifice? And to top it all off, this darkfield... everything is going in my plan... and that makes it more suspicious."

Silence enveloped the two as they stared at each other. The only sound they could hear was another faint humming from somewhere.

"That humming again." Samael broke the silence as he tugged his earlobe in irritation. "Am I the only one who gets affected by it?"

His eyes scanned Stefan, and it seemed Samael's conclusion was correct. That humming he had been hearing had restricted and weakened him. If Samael wasn't sealed into slumber for a long time, the humming would affect him greatly.

"That humming... whoever is doing that will pay the price for giving me unwanted help. However, that is not my problem now." Stefan's expression turned grim, discerning the reason Samael couldn't fight like he used to. It just confused him whether Samael couldn't go all out because of this unnecessary help, or because mobilizing those undeads had already weakened him.

Either way, one thing was certain. That humming was only restraining the people on Samael's side. Rufus died because of it, and the chances of winning against Samael just skyrocketed, even if Fabian was still alive.

"That makes me proud as your brother, Your Majesty." Samael smiled, finally taking out Catharsis. "We had played enough. Shall we end this now?"

"Finally, it seems you will take me seriously now."

"That humming is out of tune. It's annoying." Samael spun his sword until its tip faced down. "Silence."

A strong swirl of wind circled around him as he thrust his sword into the floor, causing turbulence. The dark field that was around the two of them suddenly widened its range, expanding across the entire palace.

"No rats will leave the palace." A smirk resurfaced on Samael's lips as he raised his eyes towards Stefan. "You asked about tonight's agenda...?"

Stefan narrowed his eyes as he gazed around, seeing that Yul and Silvia, and a lot of knights, came into sight as the dark field expanded. It was twice larger than the darkfield Samael created long ago.

"Tonight's agenda is to see all the rats sneaking around... and kill them all in one place." A sinister grin turned up on Samael's lips, licking his fangs as his eyes glinted in malice.

"Your Majesty!" Jayden, the twelfth prince, called out through his gritted teeth, surrounding them with their weapons up. "Hell, stop this madness now."

"Oh, Jayden? Since when have you been here?" asked Samael, gazing at the shadow knights of Stefan who were surrounding him.

"It doesn't matter. You are surrounded, Your Grace. Please, surrender."

"Jayden," Stefan called, and the young prince clenched his teeth. "This is a battle between Hell and me. If anyone interferes further, I will kill him."

"Hell..." Yul called with a shaking voice, gazing up to see that darkness covered the entire palace. Even the light from the rising sun couldn't penetrate the darkfield.

"Did you plan on killing every La Crox tonight?" came out a question from Yul, as that was the only logical answer to all this.

A purge.

"Well, why not? The La Crox had lived long enough. It's time for everyone to rest, don't you think, Yul?"

"You!" Jayden's eyes darkened, grinding his teeth as he took a step forth. However, he froze when Stefan cast him a look.

"Do not interfere. I won't repeat myself again." Stefan cast everyone a brief look and the ground underneath him cracked. "Lancelot, bloodfield."

"Great!" Samael clapped, gnashing his teeth as he pulled Catharsis from the ground. "The purge will start with you."

In a heartbeat, Stefan and Samael disappeared from their position. Everyone could only see their shadow and loud explosion of auras each time their sword collided against each other. The impact was so strong that some could not help but look at the high ceiling, only to see cracks crawling across it.

Meanwhile, somewhere in the inner palace, Klaus looked up and then shifted his eyes towards the broken window. There was just darkness with no presence of light as if they were inside a void.

"Can you see that, Hanz? It seems Hell literally brought up hell in the world of the living," Klaus uttered calmly, wiping the blood that was covering the right half of his face. "Did you hear me?"

He raised his hands, holding Hanz's severed head, and stared at it with a grin. "Of course you can't. You're dead."

From Klaus' state, Hanz put up a good fight. However, the result was obvious. In the fight between Hanz and Klaus, the latter... undoubtedly won.

"Let's see go, Hanz. Knowing Stefan's people, they're probably ganging up against my king.." Klaus slowly stood up, strutting his way towards the throne room while tossing and catching Hanz's head nonchalantly like a ball.

Chapter 302 - All Of Them

Meanwhile, in the Avolire Palace, Claude walked silently through the hallway with his toy in his hand. This palace was rather quiet, unlike the rest of the palace. Not that the Avolire Palace was deserted, it was just that no one was moving, like statues standing just everywhere in the place.

Claude just walked in a certain direction and soon arrived in front of the door. He placed his hand on it, pushing it open as it creaked.

"Auntie," he called softly, peeking his head in. He then entered the room and his eyes searched for Cassara.

"What are you doing there, Auntie?" Claude asked coldly, despite that Cassara looked pathetic in the corner. A sigh slipped past his lips as he approached her.

Cassara gazed up, hugging her knees in terror. "You... why are you here, Dyrroth?"

Claude's eyes grew colder as soon as he heard that name. He gazed down at her, not a trace of pity in his eyes.

"I was worried about you, Auntie. Everyone is fighting, but here you are... like always." His eyelids drooped, tilting his head to the side. "You hide and tremble in fear when things don't go your way."

"I didn't do it... no, I didn't mean to, Dyrroth." Cassara raised her trembling hand, biting her nails while shaking her head. "That girl... will kill Hell. I should've killed her. No, no... I was going to

kill her... she is a monster. I've seen it... her core — the Bloodfang's will, she has it. That's right, she can't hear them, but I do. But what am I hearing them? No, get out of my head...!"

Claude watched Cassara slowly lose her mind as she mumbled under her breath. This was the effect of her meddling with Lilou's memories.

"If you didn't meddle with Lilou's memories, you wouldn't hear the voices that are solely for her ears, Auntie." He squatted down, eyes on Cassara, and let out a shallow breath. "And for that, you have our gratitude. So, I'll help you."

"Dyrroth, I can hear them!" Cassara clutched the child's sleeve, eyes shaking. "Help me, brother. We should kill her for them to stop. She can't exist, Rothie. That woman's existence shouldn't have existed."

Claude remained silent for a while, studying the state Cassara had fallen. "You look like your mother, Auntie. Poor thing."

"Dyrroth, I..." Her eyes suddenly dilated as realization struck her. "You are not my brother. Who are you?"

"I am his child, Auntie."

"No." Cassara shook her head sideways, staring deep into Claude's eyes. "You're not Claude either."

"Auntie, please don't say such a thing." Claude smiled, letting out a brief chuckle. "It is I, your nephew."

"You... Quentin."

His lips stretched into a smile that didn't reach his eyes. "You might be useless, but it's amazing how you hadn't lost your sanity completely, Auntie."

"Since my cover is blown, there's no need to hide it." Claude's face and physique gradually shifted into a man's form, revealing the cunning face of Zero. "I need you, Cassara."

Cassara shivered, backing away, fusing herself against the wall when he reached his hand towards her. Her heart skipped a beat as she froze when Zero held her hand and pulled her to him.

Zero leaned into her side and whispered, "Stefan had killed Hell, you need to get it together, Cassara."

"What..."

"Your beloved hell... his head rolled." His eyes moved to the side, studying her stunned expression. "Why don't you see it for yourself? They were in the throne room."

A smirk appear on Zero's lips as his eyes glinted with malice. He slowly stood up, hands on his hips.

"I have told you because I owe you one." He shrugged nonchalantly, turning around to leave. "That is my repayment for making her remember everything and for keeping the voices inside your head."

I forced my way inside the palace, slew everyone who stood in my way. It didn't matter if bloodshed trailed me like a shadow as I followed my husband's aura. Fortunately, Fabian didn't seem he catch up.

"Out of my way," I warned the person who suddenly appeared before me. "Lena."

Lena slowly raised her head, removing the hood of her cloak. "Your highness, please turn back. His Majesty will lock you up once —"

I didn't wait for her to finish her sentiments as I dashed forward, swinging Lakresha at her. As expected, Lena was quick to react as she repelled my attack and leaped back.

"Your Highness!"

"Lena!" I growled, my eyes bloodshot. "I won't repeat myself."

Lena's eyes flickered with sorry, but that only made my blood boil. It was clear to me that no matter what, Lena would always side with Stefan. Be it in the past or today, she would choose loyalty over friendship.

'She's not your friend, Lilou.' My mind whispered in my ear, and I didn't feel any remorse in thinking she was my enemy.

"Lakresha." I could feel Lakresha's anger under my hand as if my weapon and I had become one with all this rage building up inside me.

Just when I was about to take her out, someone suddenly crashed towards the window from the outside. My eyes sharpened as a person standing on the shattered glass, faced me.

"Kristina, are you here to stop me as well?" I asked coldly, spinning Lakresha in my hand.

Kristina didn't speak as she slowly turned around and faced Lena. "I will handle her. You go, Your Grace."

My brows quirked, a little surprised by this abrupt help. However, this gesture was not enough to move my frigid heart.

"I will kill them all, Lilou. All of them." Her cold statement caught my attention, as I knew Kristina meant it from the bottom of her heart. I would want to ask her about the source of her fury, but I didn't have the leisure for idle chat.

"So then..." I trailed off as Kristina didn't waste a second, dashing towards Lena and swung her Mace at her. Lena was able to block the attack, but she couldn't stop the impact as Kristina sent her flying through the walls.

"I wonder what angered her," I murmured, but didn't dwell on it. "Sam..."

My eyes glinted as I didn't waste a second and dashed towards the throne room. On my way, Klaus suddenly appeared behind me, speeding his way in the same direction.

"Oh, sister-in-law, you're also late," he said, making me instinctively look back at him and noticed the head in his hand. "Hehe. Happy to see my trophy?"

"You killed Hanz."

"He is a fool for standing up against my king! I taught him a lesson." Klaus exclaimed happily despite that half of his face was covered with thick blood.

"Sadly, he can't apply that lesson you've taught him," I muttered with disinterest. Hanz's life didn't matter to me — just like everyone else.

"Haha! He can apply that in his next life. Right, Hanzel?"

I paid him no attention anymore, as I knew Klaus and I shared the same reason. Even though I disliked him, there was no reason to fight him right now. Little did we know, all we had done would be a futile attempt.

Because, after all, this was just the beginning of the cold winter.

Chapter 303 - The End And The New Beginning

At the same time, in the throne room, Samael gazed down at Stefan. A sinister smirk turned up on his lips, stepping on Stefan's chest with his sword pointing at his throat.

"This is unfair, Stefan." Samael rolled his eyes as he glanced at the shadow knights surrounding him. "How can I kill you if you have this much aid?"

In the inner circle that the knights had formed, Yul and Silvia stood around Samael, drawing their swords to stop the knight's attack. There were only the two of them, but they managed to stand as a wall around the battle between Samael and Stefan.

"This is a duel between our family. How dare you step in?!" Silvia's voice thundered, holding a pair of sabers as she gazed at the knight on her side.

"It is not called treason if a pureblood challenged another. That is our law. Take another step and I won't hesitate to rip your flesh apart." Yul backed up. A warning to those who stood before him. If Yul and Silvia didn't intervene, these people would've helped Stefan, regardless of the king's warnings.

"Haha. How reliable." Samael chuckled, pleased at the outcome. "See, Stefan? The reason I don't keep a lot of people under my wing is that... I have high standards. My people... just one of them is equal to ten thousand men. It cost less too."

"Don't jest, Hell. I am still breathing." Stefan smirked, as he was rather relaxed, even in this current state.

Samael frowned. "Goodness. I just want to chat with you for the last time, but well, what else can I do if you don't want to." He lifted his Catharsis, about to thrust it towards Stefan, but froze midway.

His eyes dilated, feeling the two people's presence who just arrived in the throne hall. "Lilou!" Samael called at the top of his lungs until his voice shook.

"What the hell are you doing here?!"

Using this perfect opportunity, the corner of Stefan's lips curled up into a smirk. He spread his fingers, whispering, "Lancelot," and his sword flew back in his hand. As soon as he gripped his sword, Stefan swiftly swung it on Samael's neck, making a clean cut in a frame of a second.

Time stopped for everyone as this turn of events all happened within a few seconds. Before they know it, Samael dropped to his knees as his head rolled over several steps away from his body.

"Lilou!!!! What the hell are you doing here?!"

My breath hitched, as I didn't expect such an angry tone from him. Not that I expected a welcoming tone, so I didn't take it to the heart.

"Sa —"

Just as I was about to yell back, my heart... no, my entire world stopped. Everything happened slowly in my eyes. Blood suddenly splattered from my husband's throat, and even when I tried to rush to him, I couldn't. The next thing I knew, Sam suddenly dropped to his knees as the sound of his head rolling sounded overly loud in my ears.

"Sam..." My mind went blank as the entire palace had become a soundless place.

"Hell!" Klaus yell and time resumed just at its normal pace.

My eyes fixed on the severed head of my husband... no, that was not him, was what I told myself. That was impossible. I shifted my eyes to Yul and then to Silvia. They looked shocked. Why, though? That was not Sam. Yul gazed at me in panic. Don't look at me like that, Yul.

"Lilou," Stefan called to me, making me look at him. A faint light traveled through the cracks of the ceiling, shining upon him.

"Drop your weapons, Yul, Silvia." He ordered, gazing around. "Everything is over. Hang Samael's head in the gates of the palace."

Whose head would they hang in the gates?

"Stefan!!!" Klaus's voice thundered, seething in anger. "I won't let you drag my brother's honor any further!"

"Stefan!" Silvia's voice also pitched, facing that damn Stefan. Well, he was detestable.

"You two seemed you hadn't grasped the outcome of this battle." Stefan voice out calmly. "Drop your weapons, and your punishment will be light. Especially you, Klaus."

Oh... did they do something to Stefan? I scratched the back of my head, looking around to find my husband. I thought he was here... my eyes dilated as I realized Sam might've gone to the border where we should meet.

"Lilou..." Yul suddenly called for me, and I raised my brows. I couldn't explain his expression, but he looked very sad and scared.

When he called me, everyone's eyes were suddenly on me. So, I gave them a smile and took a step back.

"Is the problem with the undead over?" I asked, trying to conceal the reason I was here was to find my husband. Now that I was certain he wasn't here, I should sneak out and meet Sam at the border.

"You..." Klaus's eyes dilated, staring at me in shock. "... what are you saying?"

"Nothing." I shook my head. "Good thing this is all over. I should help the third squadron clean up."

I didn't want to waste my time here. Hence, as soon as I uttered those words, I turned around to walk away. However, just as I took a step forward, I stopped.

"Hell!" It was Cassara, screaming her heart out, making me turn around only to see her rush to the severed head. "No, no, no!"

She was crying, screaming my husband's name. Why? That was not my husband... My eyes fell on the head she was cradling in her arms. That familiar argent hair was damp with blood.

"Lilou, your husband is dead." Stefan's voice blew past my ear, and I stood motionless on my spot, watching Cassara weep.

"No!" Cassara shouted, shooting glaring daggers at Stefan. "Stefan! I will kill you!" she raised her skirt, marching towards Stefan, but was stopped by the knights present.

"Let me go! I will kill him! I will kill him!" she shouted those words over and over and over, but her voice faded in the background.

I dragged my feet towards Cassara, saying nothing. She kept struggling, yelling she would kill Stefan, so a knight knocked her out. As she lost consciousness, the head she was carrying tumbled down. I tried to catch it but failed. It rolled over towards my feet, and it stopped with its face facing me.

This face... I squatted down and picked it up carefully. "This is not him." I denied, even though I knew whose face was this.

"This is not him," I repeated, shaking my head, hearing Yul and Silvia call my name softly. "Surely, this is not him."

To prove my point, I walked towards the body. Some knights blocked my path, but Stefan gestured them to make way. Without them on the way, I marched towards the body and I squatted down beside it.

"This is not my husband," I affirmed once again, connecting the head to where it should be. My eyes scanned him from head to toe, my hand on his chest.

Before I knew it, tears formed in the corner of my eyes and stained my cheek. This was not my husband, I convinced myself, but no matter how I denied reality, my heart beat slower and slower, dying painfully and slowly.

"Lilou," Stefan called my name once again, placing his thumb on my chin and raised it up. "I killed your husband."

And hearing that.... something within me died.

Chapter 304 - The End And The New Beginning II

"This person is Hell, your husband, and I killed him." He repeated, making sure that I would understand his words. "No matter how you deny the truth, he will never come back to you."

Pain.

I raised my shaking hand, clutching his collar. "What did you..." my voice cracked as his words were like stakes stabbing me right through my chest.

"I killed him, sweetheart." Stefan cupped my jaw, wiping the tears on my cheek with his thumb, his eyes on me. "Can you understand my pain now?"

All kinds of emotions surged in my heart, but neither of them could overwhelm my grief. There was this strong urge to kill every single one of them, but I couldn't move a muscle.

My body, my brain, had gone into shock with the death of my heart.

And everything... just went blank.

Stefan stared at Lilou and how the life in her eyes dimmed. He withdrew his hand, standing up. She was too shocked, so there was no need to talk to her.

"Drag the Duchess to the dungeon and seize the Duke's accomplices for interrogation." He ordered coldly. "We will begin cleaning up this mess."

"You will not touch her." Yul hissed, as there was nothing he could do but to protect her. Samael was dead, and he must take Lilou with him no matter what.

"Yul, your action makes me wonder why are you so overprotective of her." Stefan narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "I'm curious."

"My relationship with Lilou is none of your business, Stefan." Yul's eyes darkened as his fangs grew longer. "I won't let you do what you want with her."

Pain, desperation, rage... were just some of the many other emotions that surged in his heart. Samael's death was painful, but seeing Lilou go into shock amidst the situation they were in, he couldn't grieve.

He had to take her away from here.

"Is that so?" Stefan raised a brow, shifting his eyes to Klaus, who suddenly stood next to Yul. "Are you going against me as well, Klaus?"

"This woman... I won't let you touch her, Stefan. Hell died for her. I won't let his death and that lunatic Fabian's death go in vain." Klaus ground his teeth, eyes bloodshot, as he knew Samael's death also meant Fabian's death.

"Call this treason, but you we will take back Hell's body and Lilou with us." Silvia also chimed in, standing side by side with her brothers. "You are not our king, Stefan. You are never our king nor our brother."

"You three..." Stefan chuckled aloud, not expecting how bold would these three become after Samael's death. "And what can you do?"

He raised his chin up, annoyed at this disobedience. Were they doing this because of Samael? No, Stefan knew the answer. Samael was just one of the reasons. Now that Samael was gone, they had chosen Lilou.

"Of course, you can put up a fight. The La Crox's blood is running in your veins after all." Stefan let out a sigh, stretching his neck in a circular motion. "But at what cost? Hell is dead, and you little children... no one will protect you anymore."

His remarks made them grit their teeth as their weapons trembled under their grip. Stefan just stressed that Samael, their big brother who protected them since birth, had perished.

"Alistair, you're here?" Stefan cocked his head to the side without looking away from the three.

A man suddenly slinked out of the shadows, revealing a tall and lean man with hair that had a streak of black and silver. Yul, Klaus, and Silvia's eyes widened as they set their eyes on the man.

"I've been watching the fight. It was a good one." Alistair smirked as he glanced at the pathetic Lilou, who had her head hang low. "These three, Your Majesty, what are you planning on doing with them?"

"Alistair... you bastard!" Klaus grumbled as he seethed in anger at the sight of him.

"Oh, Klaus, how are you? Too bad Hanz died, but oh well, we can only blame that he is a weak creature." Alistair shrugged, not a bit sorry for Hanz's death.

"These three had declared their defiance against the king and are now the enemy of the state." Stefan ignored their brief reunion as he scanned everyone, but his eyes lingered on Yul longer. "Execute them."

This order did not even surprise the three of them. Samael was dead, and they all had this silent agreement to protect Lilou, the person their brother loved and protected.

"His death and ours... will not be in vain, Stefan." Silvia's expression sharpened as she was prepared to die.

"You guys are always cute." Alistair chuckled, licking his fang as he stretched his neck as a warm-up.

As the atmosphere in the throne room thickened once again, and at any moment, another battle would ensue, they stopped. All eyes slowly drifted to Lilou as she spoke.

"Lilou?" Yul called, creasing his brows together.

Klaus was also in disbelief. "What did you say?"

"Lilou..."

Lilou stared at Samael, her thumb caressing his cheek as a bitter smile resurface on her lips. She bent over, planting a soft kiss on his stiff lips.

"My husband's death will not be in vain," she whispered before she gazed up at Stefan. "Drop your weapon, Yul, Silvia, Klaus."

"Are you out of your mind?!" Klaus grumbled through his gritted teeth, but that didn't faze her.

Lilou didn't take her eyes off of Stefan. "Klaus, it is my husband's duty to ensure that his beloved siblings get to live. Now that he is gone, that responsibility falls on me."

"What nonsense...!" Klaus tried to argue, but she cut her off.

"He had lost the fight, and we must accept and honor his defeat," Lilou stated firmly, clenching her hand tightly as she slowly stood up. Her eyes remained on Stefan with no human emotions.

"You... will touch none of my people anymore, Your Majesty." Lilou raised her chin, pointing her finger, and one knight who was trying to launch a sneak attack on Klaus dropped dead.

"Never again, Lexx."

Chapter 305 - The End And The New Beginning III

"Never again, Lexx."

Stefan's pupils dilated, stunned at my call. I had thrown away my previous desire to settle a score with him after abandoning me. The reason was that Sam was far more important than vengeance.

For my beloved husband, I was willing to forget the past and live in the present, where we would create our future together. But they took away that future by ruining the present in a blink of an eye.

It was supposed to be painful, but strangely, all I felt was numbness. I just... couldn't absorb or accept the spirit of grief right now.

All I'm trying to do was protect the people who stood by my husband's side until now. Sam would be disheartened if this madman would take away these children my husband had protected.

"You've... regain your memories?" he asked after a long silence, eyes squinted into slits.

"Surprise, surprise?" A ridiculing chuckle slipped past my lips, bending over to pick up my husband's earring. "How funny that those were the first words you will tell me."

"Since when?" that was his question as I put on my husband's earring, standing upright, and set my eyes back to him.

"Does it matter now, Lexx?" I quirked a brow, feeling my lungs constricted as this felt suffocating. "When or how I retrieve our bloody time together, are they really important questions right now?"

Stefan stayed quiet and his eyes never left mine. "You're right. It doesn't matter. Actually, this turns out to be more interesting."

"Interesting, huh?" I chortled softly, glancing at everybody around. Oh, dear. Those three seemed flabbergasted. I mean, Yul's expression was more worried than shock.

"We will concede, Your Majesty." I continued, causing an uproar from those three.

"Are you out of your mind?! Are you trying to insult us, and Hell, by doing this?!" Klaus was the first one to bark, followed by Silvia.

"Lilou, we can't back down now. If we concede and play along with him... he will kill us all. How are we supposed to face Hell in the afterlife?"

Yul remained silent and only hung his head low. He knew me and would follow my decision; my brother would die alongside me if that was what I chose.

'How could I choose death if I didn't completely accept my husband's death, though?'

"Hah... interesting, indeed." Stefan chuckled, nodding in approval. "Seize them."

"What —!" Klaus and Silvia raised their guards, but Yul dropped his weapon and raised both his hands.

"I surrender." Yul voiced out.

"Yul!" Klaus grumbled, grinding his teeth as he seethed.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. When I opened them, a glint flickered across my eyes as I locked my gaze with Stefan.

"I said, we will concede, and that means we will retreat, Your Majesty," I said tonelessly. "I warned you not to touch my people because if you do, I will mess with yours."

"Even if you regained your memories, just how are you going to protect your people with mere empty words, sweetheart?"

I heard a snicker from Alistair, so I glanced at him and smiled. Alistair's expression change when he barely dodged Lakresha from attacking him. His eyes dilated as he touched the blood that suddenly appeared on his cheek.

"That was... amusing. Lakresha follows your orders on its own." Stefan mused, but his tone dropped.

"I missed, purposely... I bet you know that, Lexx."

"You baffle me. You concede and yet, raise your weapon the next second." He chuckled, shaking his head. "What is it that you want, sweetheart? You know I can only make an exception for you. Those three... and all the people who allied with Hell will all pay the price."

"Take me." I didn't beat around the bush and took him by surprise. "Let them all go, and just take me."

"Lilou!" This time, Yul couldn't keep his silence anymore.

"Haha. You know I can't do that, my sweet Lulu." Stefan raised a hand, playing with the tip of my hair. "They had committed a grave sin punishable by death."

"Then, imprison them." These three would probably need some rest and time to think, I thought.

"Lexx." I paused, walking over my husband's body and clasped his collar, pulling him down to my eye level.

"You need me, but I don't," I whispered in his ear, tilting my head as my eyes landed on the throne behind him. "If you want me to cooperate, you better start treating my people right."

His low chuckle tickled my ears. "Welcome back, sweetheart."

I let him go and drew away. Stefan and I had made it this far. Hence, acting out of a personal grudge now would benefit no one.

"If you three cooperated, no one will get hurt." Stefan peeled his eyes away from me to the people who stood behind me. "You will undergo trial. Seize them, but don't resort to unnecessary violence."

"No!" Klaus immediately refused, and I spoke.

"Klaus! Concede now and don't get hurt." My voice shook without looking back at them. "Fighting more will result in more casualties, let's not do that."

Strangely, Klaus kept quiet, but I could feel his frustration even without looking at him. They were all upset and I could understand that. However, their brother just died... and I would like to give them the liberty to mourn for their loss.

"Trust me, brother." I turned around and finally faced them. Klaus and Silvia's eyes were bloodshot, reluctant to accept this outcome.

"I will get you all out of here. Use this time to mourn for you had lost a brother whom you respected." I nodded my head encouragingly and watched the tears spill from Silvia's eyes. Klaus ground his teeth before hanging his head low.

As if on cue, the knights carefully seized them without hurting them. They bound their hands and confiscated their weapons before assisting them out of the throne hall.

Jayden, the twelfth prince, Luther, the king's advisor, also stood before me to seize me. I darted my eyes to them before facing Stefan.

"You know what I want, Stefan," I smirked bitterly, licking my chapped lips. "Do not touch my people and a funeral for my husband, my knight, and my butler."

Stefan chuckled as the two started restraining my hands. "I will reconsider."

"No, you will do it," I muttered as Jayden tugged my bound hands with him, and I followed voluntarily. "I will see you... soon, Lexx."

In the palace where the delegation of the Cross Kingdom stayed. Beatrice laid on her side, assisting herself with her elbow as the quilt fell down on her bare bosom.

"The dark field is gone," she muttered, staring at the window as the darkness covering the entire palace cleared up. "How sad."

Beatrice arched her brow, rolling to her other side and set them on the man lying on her side. "You look sad, Al. Should I mount you to make you feel better?"

Alphonse stared at the ceiling in silence, his hand under his head. He kept quiet for a long time, ignoring Beatrice.

"Of course you are." She snickered weakly. "Hell is the only brother who treated you as a family. Now, he is gone and there's no reason for you to keep the sentiments you have in this land."

"Samael... what a pathetic death." Alphonse let out a weak scoff.

"Were you watching? Well, that hurts. I thought I kept you occupied all night."

"He died just because he got distracted for a second. It's pathetic." He clicked his tongue, shaking his head as he dragged himself to sit up. "I can't kill him for centuries, and he died just like that. What a fool."

"Are you disappointed in how he died or were you disappointed that he died before you?" she asked with an arched brow, watching him get out of the bed and wear his trousers.

"Both." Alphonse slid his hand inside his undershirt and then the other. "But more than that, his wife didn't disappoint."

"Well, she is a Bloodfang, after all. A person nurtured by those detestable, but undoubtedly remarkable individuals."

He kept his silence until he was fully dressed up. Alphonse then set his eyes on her, smirking.

"If I were you, stop thinking like that." He hinted, waving as he walked away.. "She is, after all, someone who had nothing to lose anymore."

Chapter 306 - The End And The New Beginning IV

Meanwhile, somewhere in the east wing palace. Zero smiled brightly as he watched the darkness above slowly vanish.

"Oh, my... did she like the gift?" he chuckled in delight. "Of course she did."

"Your Majesty."

Zero peeled his eyes away from the gloomy sky as he turned his head to Tristan. "There you are and you look, oh... that's deep a wound."

He gazed at his right-hand man from head to toe and could instantly tell how intense the battle he got into. Tristan was almost covered in blood, and the most distinct of all was the deep wound across his face.

"He is just as monstrous as they said." Tristan approached Zero, stopping several steps away from him, and planted his fist across his chest. "If the Duke of Grimsbanne didn't die, I am unsure if I will be able to return. My apologies, Your Majesty."

"Why are you apologizing for?"

"I am incompetent, my king." Tristan hung his head low as his battle just now made him realize there were individuals like Fabian who existed.

Zero let out a chuckle, shaking his head sideways. "My, he had died, and you lived, yet he killed your spirit. That butler never ceased to amaze me."

"Anyway, he is dead now," Zero continued, smacking his lips and laid his palms open. "Where is it?"

Tristan glanced at Zero's palm and pursed his lips into a thin line. His action made Zero furrow his brows.

"Maleficent. Where is it?" Zero inquired in a low tone, narrowing his eyes as Tristan raised his head.

"It's gone, Your Majesty."

Zero cocked his head, appalled. "Gone?"

"It turned into dust, just like its owner," Tristan explained, keeping it short. "My apologies, Your Majesty. It seems that Maleficent only exists because of him."

"Haha... hahaha!" Zero laughed, startling the dejected Tristan as the latter gazed up.

"It's gone?" He clapped, running his fingers through his hair. "Just like him? Pfft—!"

"Your Majesty..."

Zero's laughter lasted for a while before he took a deep breath, eyes flickering with malice as he gazed up. "That damn bastard... that thing won't just disappear, Tristan."

"But, Your Majesty. It turned into dust when I touched it." Tristan affirmed, afraid Zero was suspecting him of stealing it.

"Oh, Tristan..." Another brief chuckle escaped Zero and the corner of his lips curled up into a smirk. "Send people and search for them."

"Your Majesty?"

"That thing wouldn't just disappear, Tristan... unless it's not real." The smile on Zero's face disappeared, facing Tristan solemnly. "Conduct a secret search."

Tristan was lost in words momentarily, confused at Zero's words. Find who? Fabian? They already died, though. But knowing Zero, his king could be irrational most of the time, but he wouldn't speak nonsense with such intensity.

Zero peeled his eyes away from his chief shadow knight, gazing at the capital from his high vantage point. "I need to make sure they are truly dead. Because if not... they outsmart everyone, including us, and that... irks me."

In the cold palace, Claude opened his eyes, staring at the gloomy sky as the snow started falling. He raised an arm, wiping the blood on his upper lip.

"It was a long night," he murmured, eyes still on the sky while laying on the grass. "Uncle Klaus."

His eyes softened as the ground underneath him felt colder than ever. He didn't get to see everything unfold, but he was aware of those who had perished. His heart could feel and hear the mourning hearts, the silent cheers of the victors, and the screaming of the dead.

"I hope we can all survive this cold winter," He murmured once again. "Because it's only just the beginning."

Meanwhile, in one of the Remington's estates where Ramin and Charlotte were, the two of them turned their eyes in the palace's direction. Soon, even everyone had set their eyes in the same direction, watching as the darkness that had covered the entire palace slowly dissipate.

"Kristina..." Ramin whispered in worry as his heart just suddenly raced. "Captain..."

"Ramin." He snapped when Charlotte suddenly called him. He turned his head to Charlotte, who was standing a few meters away from him, staring at somewhere.

"We should leave," she said, taking him by surprise as she set her eyes on him. "His Grace... lost. The royal knights are heading this way. We should flee."

"Hah... we did nothing wrong, Charlie," Ramin argued in disbelief. "At least, not yet, so there's no reason for us to flee."

Charlotte was always smiling and expressive, but her expression right now was grim and solemn. "We have to go." She repeated.

"Do you really believe they will not find fault in us? Even if we are proven innocent, we can't let them have their hands on our weapons." Charlotte continued as she gripped her bow tightly. "We did nothing wrong yet, but you and I can agree that we had committed treason in our hearts. I am going against this monarchy, Ramin. His reign... this madness is not what my heart will ever tolerate."

Ramin stayed silent and stared at Charlotte for a very long time. A sigh slipped past his lips and nodded.

"You're right, Charlie. We had already committed treason the second we questioned the monarch." He took a deep breath, glancing at the people who were not paying attention to them. "His madness... is also what my Labyrinth wants to break."

They stared at each other for a minute, sharing a moment of silence, and then, they're gone. Where they went, no one knew. However, people would only notice their disappearance once the people in the palace searched for them.

"He died..." Kristina wept, clenching her teeth as she pressed her dagger into Lena's chest. "She failed."

Lena gnashed her teeth, stopping the dagger from going deeper. However, she had lost too much blood and her life was slowly slipping away from her grasp.

"Hell... is already bound to happen —"

"Shut up." Kristina's eyes sharpened as she planted her other hand over the hilt to put more pressure on it. "Just die you. Your existence doesn't make this world a better place."

The veins in Kristina's eyes reddened as she watched the life in Lena's eyes fade away. It was not her who was dying, but Kristina felt she was in more pain than her dead opponent.

Rufus' death... Samael's... Fabian... she had respected those three. And now, they're all gone and who knew what could've happened after this. She didn't even know if they could hold a funeral those three deserved.

"I won't forgive you... the La Crox. Their existence... doesn't make this world a better place." She mumbled, chuckling as tears spilled from her eyes.

"Kristina." Suddenly, a hand was placed on her shoulder.

Noah stood behind her, squeezing her shoulder lightly. "We should go before the people of the king can find us. They won't surely let us get away from this that easily."

"I don't care. I will fight them all." Kristina stared at Lena's lifeless eyes. "This kingdom will fall if the La Crox's reigns continue, and as a bearer of the Order, I must do my duty."

"Miss Monroe, don't be impulsive. If we all die, their..." Noah choked, as he still couldn't believe the outcome. "... their deaths will be all in vain. Just think of Sir Barrett and His Grace, even Mister Fabian. We can't let their will die on us."

Kristina gnashed her teeth, wanting to argue with him, but she couldn't. No matter how angry she was, Rufus would condemn an impulsive and reckless suicide mission.

"He is the only noble person in this kingdom, Lord Noah..." came out a muffled cry. "Captain... he died honorably."

"Yes, they all did, Kristina." Noah suppressed his emotions, but his eyes also started welling up.

"That's why we have to carry on for their sake."

The two of them stayed in silence, their hearts weeping for their loss. However, no one was able to find their trace.

Chapter 307 - [Bonus]The End And The New Beginning V

Everything was so chaotic that day. That was all I could remember... because that's all I heard while being locked up in this oubliette. I was never in a place like this. A place where there was no light or sound.

It was just darkness, silence, and me. A perfect representation of my heart.

Empty.

Numb.

Nothing.

Despite that, I didn't shed a single tear. I held back. No matter how this deafening silence try to kill my spirit, I didn't succumb. The other half of my brain told me I was in denial, while the other part told me... the same.

'I am going out of my mind.' I told myself, chuckling at the thought. 'But an insane mind... is just what I needed.'

One would condemn me for what sort of wife I had become. A person who barely shed a tear for her husband's death, but that didn't matter to me.

"Sam is not dead." My voice, no matter how low my whisper was, still echoed across this dark and tiny prison. "Right, Sam? My husband?"

A smile appeared on my lips, staring into the darkness. I imagined him sitting in the opposite corner, staring at me suspiciously. Sam would always give me that look whenever I smile out of nowhere. My husband... was that kind of man.

"If you are here, I'm pretty sure you will just sit in silence and just be that silent company," I whispered, talking to the imaginary Sam I was staring at. "But you know, love? I want you to just go crazy and make a fuss right now."

My smile grew bitter, and so was my tone. "Silence... your silence is not what I need right now."

But nothing. Sam didn't break the silence.

I closed my eyes, although there wasn't any difference if I had them open, as there was no light in here. I'm exhausted, physically, emotionally, and mentally. This palace, no. The Capital was just like a large Oubliette. Maybe that was the reason I didn't feel suffocated in this cramp and dark place.

The Capital was just the same. Dark and suffocating.

After who knows how long, I peeked through my one eye as I heard the door creak open. The light from the torch nearly blinded me, so I closed my eyes once again.

"I do not appreciate this intrusion, Lexx," I uttered, eyes closed, hearing his footsteps as he came in.

"It seems you find solace in this place."

"If you don't plan on leaving, take that torch away." I ignored his comment, covering my closed eyes with my arm. Stefan didn't speak for a long time, but I knew he was there. I could hear his breathing.

"You've been here for two days, sweetheart. Don't you want to come out?" he asked, breaking the silence when he couldn't take it anymore.

"Come out?" I slowly lifted my arm away, opening my eyes slightly as light hurts my eyes. Once my eyes adjusted, I turned my head to him. I was lying down, so I had to raise my eyes to see his face.

"Are you sure you want me out?" I asked, eyebrow raised.

"I thought about it, sweetheart." Stefan grazed his chin lightly, eyes on me. "A funeral for those three and immunity for their crimes and those who had allied with them. I will give them to you, and will approve your return to Grimsbanne."

"At what cost?" Of course, I sort of knew what he wanted, but I still wanted to ask. Maybe to make fun of him? Or perhaps, to have something to ponder about.

Stefan stood up from his seat and then squatted down on my side. His fingertip caressed my neck, staring down at me.

"You know what I want, Lu."

"You want my womb?" My brow raised even more. "Why don't you just take it out, then? I mean, what's the point of keeping me alive if you know I am capable of killing you in your sleep?"

"You still have that sharp tongue of yours." He placed a thumb on my lip, but that didn't faze me. If he tried to force himself into me, I would castrate him.

"Does it bother you? Then, why don't you cut it." I stuck my tongue out, watching him stare at me before I put it back in my mouth. "Oh, Lexx, why would you go here if you're well aware I will aggravate you to death?"

"I will execute them all, Lilou. I will start with Yul and then Silvia, Klaus, Claude, the third squadron, the House Soulton, and everyone in Grimsbanne." His expression didn't change, but the weight of his tone grew heavy. "Right now, I haven't passed my verdict, nor does the public know what truly happened. It is your decision if you want Hell to be someone who died in his duty or the mastermind behind the chaos."

"Choose, sweetheart." He added, smiling gently at me. "I always favor you, you know that. I'm giving you the liberty to save the people who had sworn their lives to Hell; an option to let them live or die."

There was a long silence between us, but our eyes never left each other. His thumb on my lips remained there, making me open my mouth and bit it as hard as I could. Sadly, that didn't faze him nor did I cut it. What a shame.

"Well, that's arousing." He smirked as I released his thumb and he withdrew it away. "So, what do you think, sweetheart? Bear my heir... as many as you can and those people get to live."

"Before I answer your question, answer mine." I lifted my chin, raising my hand, and cupped his jaw. "Do you think you love me?"

He didn't answer for a long time, as if taken aback by this sudden question. "Does it matter now?"

"Yes, Lexx. It matters to me."

"Then, yes," He answered right away, without a second hesitation, but that made me chuckle.

"No, you don't. You never loved me, Lexx." I shook my head, patting his cheek as I smiled.

"Do you think you know my heart more than I know it?"

My smile remained, staring into his eyes. "I don't, I just know you never know what love is."

"Hah... is that what you believe?"

"No, that is what I know." A shallow breath slipped past my lips. "If hurting me doesn't hurt you, don't ever tell me you loved or still love me. Don't mistake love for obsession, because even though my husband had a violent way of speaking, he never hurt me purposely."

"And he is dead, sweetheart. Don't compare me to the dead."

"For as long as I live, even if I bear as many children as you want, I will compare you to my husband... and you will never win." My answer was immediate, as my pupils constricted. "I'm warning you. Letting me out of here and giving me this liberty will be the biggest mistake of your life.. I assure you that, Lexx."

Chapter 308 - [Bonus]The End And The New Beginning VI

My husband's death took the kingdom by surprise. Stefan was truly amazing in distorting the truth; I commend him in that aspect. Well, it was not like Sam, Rufus, and Fabian weren't heroes in this kingdom... but Stefan always made sure that he was doing me a favor.

Just like what he had also promised, he let Yul, Silvia, and Klaus out from being locked up in a separate prison. By looking at them, the exposed bruises on them told me they had it rough. Good thing they had survived this far.

No, I'm glad Stefan had kept them alive and used them as his bargaining chip. My husband had loved his siblings. It wasn't obvious to his personality, but he had protected them until the end... so I would continue that duty as his wife.

The decision I made, I would never regret. Everything that my husband left, I would protect them... until he return to me one day.

I snapped my eyes, staring through the black veil at my husband's open casket placed on the stack of woods. Standing in the middle amongst all the few attendees of his funeral, I stayed silent. I could hear Cassara's weeping as if she was the wife; I envy her.

For her to weep, to cry her heart out until she hyperventilated... I envied her for that because I just couldn't shed a single tear. I wanted to, but I couldn't. If I mourned like her, if I accepted my husband's death... how am I supposed to keep going?

"Your Grace, please bid your farewell to His Grace," said someone who was facilitating the funeral. I glanced at him and nodded before I trudged forth to my husband.

My hand rested on the edge of his open casket, staring at him coldly. They had covered the slit in his neck by a high collar, so I reached for it, hooking it down to see his head and neck had this tiny gap between each other.

"You," I whispered, raising my eyes to his shut eyes. "This is not you, right?"

I caressed his cold cheek with the back of my fingers. This was numbing. Even if I denied this person was my husband, the pain was unbearable. I was not good at dealing with a loss, that's why I was in denial about my father's death for a long time.

'Sam, I will keep denying this death and wait for you, hmm?' A weak smile resurfaced on my lips, feeling the coldness of his body seep deep into my bones. "My heart is with you... I will wait for you to return it to me."

I bent over and placed a soft peck on his cold and hard lips. Despite that, I kissed him for as long as I could. When I walked away, I watched them set him on fire. The crackle of the woods drifted into my ears as fire devoured him into ashes.

I remained on my spot even when other attendees left. There were a few people who were left with me: Yul, Silvia, Klaus, Claude, and Zero. Even though my eyes never left the fire, I could discern them just by their auras.

Night came and the fire already subsided. Some people collected my husband's ashes, and I still had my eyes on them.

"Lilou," Yul's melancholic voice came to my side, followed by his hand on my shoulder. "We should head in."

"I want to stay... just a little longer," came out my weak yet cold voice. "Just a bit, Yul... I want to breathe."

Yul didn't argue with me. Instead, he draped a coat over my shoulder. "Then, stay warm at least."

Warm... the second the fire was extinguished, I knew I would never feel what being warm feel like. The only warmth I sought would not be able to give me that for now.

I appreciate Yul's thought, regardless.

Under this frigid winter, Yul stayed on my side in silence. Even when Klaus and Silvia left, then Zero left after another hour. They tried to approach me, but they knew talking right now was pointless.

After my long silence, my lips parted. "Yul, return with me to Grimsbanne."

"Lilou, I..." He cast me a look. I knew he was planning to refuse, but held back and gaze down. "There is no point in staying in this place. Of course, I'd rather be by your side."

Again, silence enveloped the two of us, until I turned and faced him. Yul turned his head to me, eyes flickering with pain and regret.

"Lilou... I'm sorry I couldn't keep my promise." His eyes dropped as he couldn't look me in the eye. Yul had lived as a La Crox and I'm certain he had looked at Sam as his own brother, regardless of his origins.

I raised my hand, cupped his cheek, and offered a weak smile. "How can I blame you, Yulis? Your pain is just as painful as mine."

His eyes welled up, suppressing the pain of this loss. I guessed Yul and I had some similarities. He didn't know how to deal with our loss, so we deny it by sporting a brave front and locking our hearts away.

"Even so, I lost a brother, but I still have you, my sister. But you..." He trailed off, pointing out the obvious — pointing out that his pain was far shallow than mine. "... you lost your husband, and no one can ever replace nor fill that void in your heart, Lilou."

"Even until now, you don't hold back with your words, Yul." A weak and short chuckle slipped past my lips, shaking my head lightly. "You don't worry. My heart... Sam took it away with him."

"Sis..."

My eyes behind the veil sharpened, and Yul noticed it. "Yul, I will put you in danger."

He stayed silent for a long time before hanging his head low, then raising his gaze back up. His eyes glinted with resolve.

"Then, I will face danger bravely." Yul reached his hand over my shoulder, pulling me into his embrace. "I won't fail you this time, sister."

I rested the side of my head on his chest, gazing down. "Our pain... I will make sure to double theirs, Yul. Don't die until then because now... you will be their next target."

"Yes, my Queen," he whispered back, knowing the eyes that were on us.

From a distance, Stefan narrowed his eyes as he watched Yul suddenly pull Lilou into his embrace. His jaw tightened as he slowly curved his hand into a fist.

"Yulis..." he smirked menacingly. "No wonder."

"Your Majesty, what should we do with Yul? It seemed he took advantage of the situation." Alistair inquired, standing behind Stefan.

Stefan stayed quiet before he turned around and walked away, keeping the rage in his heart at bay. "We observe for now."

Meanwhile, Zero chuckled, as he didn't expect the turn of events. Unlike Stefan's reaction, he didn't take what he was watching to the heart that much.

"Well, I don't mind if she kept one or two playthings to keep herself sane." He chortled, eyes on the two.. "Aren't I benevolent? You should appreciate that, my fiance."

Chapter 309 - [Bonus]The End And The New Beginning VII

After Sam's funeral, I didn't get the chance to rest as the founding celebration came right after. Despite the chaos that transpired, everyone still celebrated it by honoring those who had lost their life the other night. Those who had lost a brother, a sister, a child, a spouse, a parent, a friend... wept.

I felt bad for this country.

We were all being deceived, as the culprit from that night still stood mightily, talking to his people, giving his sincerest condolences. Stefan was portraying himself as everyone's savior, giving them empty promises of protecting them.

It made me sick. I wanted to throw up, watching him from this distance as he made a heartfelt speech that moved these pitiful people.

"I heard you are setting off today." Zero's voice came to my side.

I cast him a brief glance. "My purpose in this place is over. I don't see any reason to stay idle in here."

"Cold." He chuckled, tilting his body as he looked at me. "That's right. You came here to get the king's blessing, which you got, and married the love of your life. How sad that you are returning to the duchy alone."

My expression didn't change. What I learned from this place was to keep everything in — just like that man, over there, making a speech. Just grit my teeth... because their time would come.

"Anyway, you, going away from this place, will give us more chances to see each other," he continued in a light tone, peeling his eyes away from me. "It makes me wonder why you don't tell me anything yet. Your fiance is a little heartbroken since you've been playing around with that ninth prince. I even heard you burned the bouquet I sent you."

I remained silent and ignored his warning. Yes, warnings. His words only meant he was keeping a close eye on me, but I wasn't surprised. Ever since Sam died, everyone's eyes were all on me. But since this 'affair' with Yul started spreading in the palace, they shifted half of their attention to him.

'Thanks, Yul.' I expressed in my mind as he was playing the scapegoat role quite perfectly.

"Will you really treat your fiance a cold shoulder?"

"Zero." I slowly set my eyes on him, only to see him raise a brow. "You keep calling me your fiance... but it makes me wonder what can you offer me?"

The corner of his lips curled up. "Are you seriously asking me, what, this sovereign can offer?"

"His Majesty had offered me a tempting deal," I explained, taking my eyes off of him. "Whispering me words of love will not help you, Your Majesty. Lexx needed me, so he offers me things that I need in return."

Again, I cast him a nonchalant look. "How about you? What can you offer me so I keep you by my side?"

"My fiance, you are so tempting." He grinned in delight, eyes glinting in amusement. "What a shame. I was trying to build the foundation of our relationship through love, but it seemed that is out of negotiation anymore."

"How passionate." My response received a soothing chuckle from him.

"I am very passionate, my fiance. However, I like you better now: fierce, cold, dangerous." He leaned into my side, his breaths tickling my ear. "I will write you a letter once you reach Grimsbanne. I will be pleased if I hear from you in return."

Upon saying his piece, Zero didn't stay long and left. He was quite busy as well. He had his own duties, after all. My eyes fell on Stefan as he left the podium.

"I told you letting me leave the Oubliette or keeping me alive will be the biggest and worst mistake you will ever do," I whispered, the side of my lips curling up. "I will take everything from you, Lexx... and Zero. Everything."

After stating those words, I turned around and left the place I was watching him. There would be another gathering after this. A meeting of the representative of the founding clan.

I would never miss it. Especially now that I had this agenda.

"Will you be alright?" Yul asked me as we walked through the hallway leading to the gathering.

I cocked my head back, casting him a puzzled look. Yul let out a sigh as he nodded in understanding.

"It's a stupid question, I know." He rolled his eyes, making me chuckle.

"Yul, I never realize that you're such a worrywart." I humored, shaking my head as I stared ahead.

"I'm only worried because it's you." He sighed, but his tone was laced with sarcasm.

"Oh, Yul." I shook my head, smiling cunningly. "People might misunderstand."

"People's minds are so dirty they misunderstand just everything."

"And that gives us an advantage, isn't it?" I trailed off, stopping in my tracks, and faced him. "My lover?"

Yul gritted his teeth as he cringed. I nearly laughed hysterically, as he would never get used to the title he was known for now. Of course, I felt disgusted with how people looked at us, but not surprised. After all, a twisted relationship was not unordinary in this place.

"Anyway, people are watching you." I patted his chest, turning around as I started walking again.

"They don't just watch. They visit me every night." His response was low and weak, but I heard it. Yul had been in constant danger because some annoying bastards kept sending people to kill him.

"You will have a well-deserved rest once this is all over," I reassured without looking back, eyes glinting with resolve as I approached the venue of our meeting.

When I stood in front of the door, my brow raised. I slowly turned my eyes to someone who was walking from my right.

"Well, what a pleasure to bump into you, Your Grace," she said, holding her fan that was covering her lips. "Greetings."

I squinted my eyes as I recognized this woman. She was the lady we had met in the streets of the capital.

"I knew when I saw you that we will see each other again. Although I didn't expect we'll see each other in here, in this situation." She expressed calmly as she stood in front of me. We locked eyes for a long time, making me smile as I noticed the familiar fire beneath her eyes.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Princess." My smile remained, and her eyes flickered in interest. "It is, indeed, a shame that we met again under such circumstances. However, I hope we can share a cup of tea in the future."

She smiled, pleased at this invitation. "I will look forward to your invitation." And then she faced the door.

"Please, do." A smirk appeared on my lips. Probably, she had experienced the same situation as I did that there was just this instant connection between the two of us. There were no other words that we said, but we already had this mutual understanding with only that brief contact.

'Princess Beatrice... Yul briefed me about the representative of today's gathering. I wonder if her cards would be useful for me.' My eyes sharpened as the door opened. 'But more than that, I am more interested in someone else.'

I walked inside with an intention of winning, and we were welcomed by only a few people inside. The representative of each founding family: Stefan, Zero, Cameron, and that one person... my eyes fell on that sickly-looking man, Heliot Von Stein.

The man who made me look forward to this seance.

Chapter 310 - [Bonus]The End And The New Beginning VIII

The gathering was simple. We sat around a large round table; from the host seat sat Stefan, from his right perched Zero, Cameron, Beatrice, Heliot, then me. Stefan started speaking pleasantries — too much formality for me to even bother.

Instead of listening to him, I just stared at my seatmate, Heliot. I made sure they knew I had my eyes on him, but the man didn't even glance at me.

The man who had my attention had this long, midnight blue hair that strangely matched his tanned skin. His dark navy eyes that were akin to the depths of the ocean deep, looked mysterious and dangerous. But overall, without those little details, he looked sick.

How strange.

'Was Yul mistaken?' I wondered. 'He said this person who kept silent the entire time since he arrived at the Capital was someone who could be an excellent ally. Yul wasn't certain, but he said many 'good' things about him. Well, I couldn't really judge a book by its cover.'

"Pst." I tried to catch his attention, but nothing. 'He didn't seem to care about this at all. It was as if they forced him to attend here, so this seat won't be empty.'

"An empire?" My eyes veered to Zero upon his remarks. "Aren't you a little confident? To suggest that I, the supreme ruler of Spade Kingdom, to submit and bow down to you? Are you perhaps, suggesting you will wage a war with me? That is so formal, though."

Oh, they had started? I smiled, as this was one of the things I was looking for.

Stefan sported a smile that didn't reach his eyes. "I am merely stating the plans for my reign whilst trying to avoid any conflict amongst everyone in here. Of course, I am saying this now not to wage a war, but so we can all resort to a peaceful resolution."

Really. Stefan always had his way in his words.

"Peaceful resolution?" Zero chuckled in a low tone, leaning back comfortably with his eyes on Stefan. "And if we refused?"

"Then, that would be a shame." Stefan shrugged nonchalantly. "Since everyone here came from the founding clans, it would be a shame that we couldn't keep a peaceful diplomatic relation."

"You kept saying peaceful and yet, your action, this diplomatic discourtesy speaks otherwise."

"I didn't mean to, Sir My Brother." Stefan let out a sigh, making me nearly clap at how shameless he was. If my husband was here, he would've surely clapped and showered him with devastating flattery.

"However, do not forget that the land you are stepping on is neither the Spade Kingdom nor a neutral land for peace talks." Stefan leaned in, arms propped against the edge of the table.

"Now you're threatening me. How cute." Zero chuckled once again, cocking his head back. "Let me reconsider, hmmm. Alright."

That was quick, and I gazed at Stefan to see that his expression didn't change. He wouldn't keep his crown if he was easily deceived by others. That would be disappointing.

A smug grin plastered on Zero as he set his eyes on me. "I will agree on this proposition through marriage and the woman of my choosing." He slowly peeled his eyes away from me to Stefan.

"How about that? The Duchess of Grimsbanne... offer her to me as the tribute, and you have my card."

Hah... how cunning. I thought, not even surprised by this because Zero had his other way of refusing by not making himself look bad. It was interesting to see them twist each other's words and fight with just that.

Sam would be bored, though, if he were here.

"The Duchess of Grimsbanne is not part of the royal family. I can give you all the women you'd like, my sisters, for example, but the Duchess is out of my jurisdiction."

"Your sisters? No offense, but I like rare things. For me to submit and offer the land I had built, isn't it just a fair trade if I get the same value in return?" Zero tilted his head to the side, but Stefan wasn't fazed.

I watched them bicker as if they weren't talking about me, like an item they should trade. Strangely, it didn't irk me even the slightest. What was the point?

"Since I merely came as a representative, I cannot agree to this proposition." Beatrice chimed in when Stefan and Zero started pulling an aura at each other. "However, our Cross Kingdom doesn't adhere to unnecessary bloodshed. I will surely relay Your Majesty's plans."

"I will look forward to good news, Princess." Stefan smiled, which Beatrice returned with a polite smile and a bow as well.

"I had said what I said. Unless you have a better idea in mind, we will talk about it again." Zero voiced out his opinion as he didn't have a clear middle ground with Stefan. I bet they would ever reach an agreement.

Stefan shifted his attention to Zero. "That is a shame, then."

His words could be either a threat or just a harmless expression. However, only a fool would believe it was the latter. I wondered if Zero would ever get out of this place.

I didn't have a say in it, nor Cameron had. Just like Heliot, Cameron stayed silent and cast me a look from time to time. Cameron and I had a lot to talk about, but we both silently agreed this was not the right time.

Suddenly, Heliot tapped the surface of the table to catch everyone's attention. We instinctively set our eyes on him, waiting for whatever he wanted to say after his long silence.

"Our Karo Kingdom will submit." His statement made me raise a brow. How could he decide for that if he wasn't the king? "But on one condition."

"And what is it, Prince Heliot?" asked Stefan.

Heliot didn't answer immediately as he slowly turned his head to me. "I want to do all negotiations with the Duchess, your Majesty."

The corner of my lips curled up into a smirk as it seemed Heliot had some business with me. I could tell his interest wasn't the same as Zero and Stefan's, but it was more something... formal.

"All negotiations with the Duchess?" Stefan raised a brow. This guy shouldn't have wasted his time on me to save himself from all this unnecessary jealousy.

"Yes, Your Majesty." Heliot stared at Stefan squarely. "The Karo Kingdom will agree, only if Her Grace will handle this negotiation with us."

There was a long silence in the room, as no one expected his adamant request. This didn't seat well with Stefan and surprisingly, with Zero as well.

Meanwhile, I indulged in the look on their face.

The gathering didn't end as smoothly as we had all expected. The dispute between Stefan and Zero just went from bad to worse. Stefan had given me the liberty to accept Heliot's orders, but to make him happy, I told him I would follow his decision.

In the end, Stefan still agreed with Heliot's request. Heliot didn't show any emotion when Stefan agreed, piquing my interest even more with what kind of person I would have to deal with in the upcoming days.

I didn't waste a second, as I already planned to leave the palace today and return to Grimsbanne. This was a promise made by Stefan.

"Lilou." I stopped in my tracks as I heard Stefan's voice behind me. My eyes scanned the carriage that was outside, seeing Yul standing in front of it.

I turned around and faced Stefan. "You came to stop me? Did you change your mind?"

"I had promised," he said, walking towards me and stopped a step away from me. "I came to send you off, sweetheart."

"How sweet."

"It is winter and the journey back to Grimsbanne will be rough and cold." Stefan draped another coat over my shoulder and tied the strap carefully. "Be careful."

I kept my silence as I gazed down. "Don't forget our agreement, sweetheart," he added in a whisper as he finished tying the strap. "You will return here in a year."

"I won't forget our agreement, Your Majesty," I replied coldly, raising my gaze up to him. "And I planned to honor it once I settle the matters in Grimsbanne. However, do not ever forget your promise as well."

"I won't step foot in Grimsbanne... well, I will try."

"Once I sense your presence in Grimsbanne, I will kill you," I warned, smiling sweetly as I cupped his jaw. "It will break my heart if it ends like that, Your Majesty. We had a long way to go, after all."

Stefan just stared down at me, eyes glinting. If I didn't know his intention, I would truly think he was treating me quite 'remarkably'. However, I was not foolish to fall for such a trick.

"I will write. We can't lose contact, after all." I withdrew my hand away from him, turning as I walked towards the carriage. Yul had his eyes on me, opened the door for me, and even assisted me inside before he hitched in.

"Lilou," Yul called as he perched from across me, and the carriage started moving. "Try to rest. It will be a rough journey."

I ignored him, my eyes on the window where I could see Stefan and the grand palace. There was just this strange heaviness seeping deep into my bones as we get farther and farther away from this hell.

"I arrived in this place without my husband, and I left without him," I murmured, still had my eyes outside as it softened. "The next time I come back here... this hellhole will be on fire, Yul."

"I will take everything from this place... just like how it took everything away from me." My eyes glinted with resolve.

That was my promise, a stake I would claim.

No one would get away from it.

Stefan.

Alistair.

Alphonse.

Dominique.

Jayden.

Zero.

Tristan.

The rest of the Bearer of the Divine Order.

Everyone.

"Slowly and painfully, I would ruin them all," I smirked viciously. "Karma will surely return here... in a year."

— THE END OF VOLUME 4 —