

The Duke 321

Chapter 321 - [Bonus]Can You Reverse The Time?

Zero didn't stay idle in Grimsbanne and left even though he had a long, arduous journey here. It was expected because staying longer just to humor me wouldn't benefit him at all. He wasn't a fool. I might've rattled him, but Zero was someone who would get back on his feet like an undead.

"The undead... that is his cards." My eyes sharpened, caressing a rose petal in the garden. "I heard some neighboring kingdoms agreed to be absorbed by the Great Heart empire. How smooth."

"Zero and his allied kingdoms are still resisting him from moving forth," Klaus added as he stopped several steps away from me. "His Majesty of the Spade Kingdom left Grimsbanne with his remaining knights. We already planted a shadow to keep an eye on him."

I nodded in acknowledgment. "They should be careful. We had lost many people in that foreign land."

"And he had lost a lot of people coming in here." He remarked.

"But that is not enough to honor their deaths, Klaus. If they killed ten of my men, I'll take a hundred."

"Your Grace, we need more manpower. Slaughtering everyone now will only benefit Stefan."

I remained silent, plucking out a petal from the rose. "You're right. It is better to take them all out all at once. Taking them one by one is only fun but exhausting."

There was a moment of silence between Klaus and me. Slowly, I turned and faced him, scanning him in a knight suit. Never in my wildest imagination that Klaus would be someone, I would rely on in important things — I never even imagined that we would have this kind of relationship.

"After Sam's death, you took an oath to live and die for me," I murmured, as I never had this talk with him. "Did you take that oath because I was your beloved brother's wife, or was it because of vengeance?"

Klaus stared at me in the eye. "Both... initially. You are someone whom Hell protected and died for. I didn't want his death to be in vain."

"Initially...?" I cocked my head to the side. "How about now?"

"I will live and die for you, Your Grace." He asserted with determination and sincerity in his eyes. "Vengeance is also something I always seek, but after being at your service, my personal grudge didn't matter. All I seek is your own peace."

"Peace... I am already at peace, Klaus."

"Peace of mind is what I mean, Your Grace."

His answer made me quirk a brow before I nodded in understanding. "I didn't expect that." I continued to walk in the garden while he walked behind me.

Klaus disliked me at first, he made sure I knew that. However, he was also someone who was indebted to Sam. The only reason I took him with me seven months ago was that I knew Sam was fond of him.

Back in Cunningham, Sam fed him and my husband got scolded by me because of the state of his arm. I didn't realize back then that Sam let Klaus feed on him because his brother needed his blood. Of course, there were more reasons behind it, but that was one of them.

Now that everything was said and done, Klaus was now the chief knight of the knight brigade. He had sullied his hands for me, executed all my orders without questions asked, slaughtered those who opposed me, and just became... my personal hellhound.

"My influence wouldn't be this big if not for your help, Klaus." I broke the silence, staring at the beds of flowers surrounding us. "And you hadn't taken a single day off since we arrived in here. Don't you want to rest before our plans start moving?"

"The closer your plans approach, the more we should raise our guards."

"But don't you miss Claude?" Slowly, I turned around to face him. "He had been in the Capital all this time. Knowing that you're the one who stood as a father figure to him, I'm certain you're also worried about the child."

Klaus gazed down with a bitter smile on his lips. Just seeing his reaction was enough for me to know that he had loved Claude as his own. Their relationship might be a little strange, but one thing was for sure. Claude and Klaus respected each other and see each other as family.

"Claude will be alright. He might be a child on the outside, but he is smart — smarter than I am. I can reunite with him next time." He slowly raised his gaze back at me, sporting a weak smile. "Me, worrying about him, will be an insult to a man."

"Haha. Considering him as a man..." I averted my eyes away from him and turned around, resuming in my stride. "... he is the bearer of Auron, after all. He wouldn't refuse my offer on coming in here if he knew he wouldn't survive the palace."

That was correct. I offered Claude to come with me, but alas, he refused. Now that I thought about it, I was uncertain if he refused because he liked the Capital, or because of what I said that time.

As the silence enveloped us, it brought me back to my last memory with Claude...

Before I left the palace, I visited Claude in his chambers. My reason was not because I wanted to take him back with me. It was something else.

"Auntie Lilove, are you really leaving?" he asked, staring at me, who sat from across him. "It is not good to travel during winter."

A weak smile resurfaced on my lips, staring at his adorable face. I raised my hand over the table, extending my arm, and laid my palms open.

"Hold Auntie Lilou, Claude." I requested, which he did without a second hesitation. My fingers wrapped around his small and soft hands while I stared at them.

"You have such soft hands. I feel like the calluses on my palm will hurt you."

"Auntie Lilove's hands are warm. They won't hurt Claude." He offered me an adorable grin, trying to cheer me up as I gazed back up at him.

"Claude, do you love Auntie Lilou?" I asked, getting a nod from him immediately.

My smile remained as another wave of silence ensued. Claude blinked innocently, staring back at me. When I opened my mouth and spoke, his brows furrowed.

"Auntie?"

"I heard you can stop the time, Claude," I repeated and squeezed his hand lightly. "If you can manipulate time, can you reverse time where Sam was alive?"

"Auntie..."

"Can you do that for Auntie Lilou?" I wasn't thinking when I asked him this, but I was desperate. "I can't accept your uncle Sam's death, Claude. So if you can reverse the time where he is still alive, can you do that so we can save him?"

Claude pressed his lips together while staring at me apologetically. "My ability can barely stop the time, Auntie. However, stopping the time also stops my heart."

"How long will it stop if you reverse the time?"

"Auntie... stopping time and reversing it are two different things. Even if I die, I can't bring back the dead." Claude gazed down dejectedly, hurt by my insensitivity. "Will you tell me to die if sacrificing my life can reverse the time?"

"I..." My breath hitched as his question was akin to a slap back to reality. I hung my head low, withdrawing my hand from him.

"I'm sorry," I said under my breath. "Auntie Lilou is not thinking straight."

"Auntie, I'm sorry too because I can't do what you want me to do."

And we spent the remaining time together in silence. After that, I proposed to him to come to Grimsbanne, but he refused.. I respected his decision and never heard a word from him again.

Chapter 322 - [Bonus]Flowers For The Duchess

Another month had passed in a blink of an eye since Zero left Grimsbanne. Like the past eight months, I spent my days repeating the same schedule: working about the state of affairs, granting audience to those who had important business with me, training, and then yearning for Sam during the night.

"When was the last time someone caused trouble?" I asked, staring at a document while I sat on the chair behind my desk.

"Hmm... a week ago, one of your suitors threatened Your Grace to kill himself if you don't marry him," Yul answered, placing down another document I should review. "He had caused a scene and Klaus nearly beheaded him. He didn't, though, but he warned their house not to make the same mistake again."

My eyes narrowed, leaning back while I tapped my fingers against the desk. "Is that all? Things had been going smoothly, and it's been so quiet. It doesn't feel right."

"That is because one must think of death before coming at you." Yul let out a sigh, hinting me that it was my fault that only those lunatic suitors had the audacity to cause a problem.

A shallow breath slipped past my lips as I raised my gaze to him. "It's so boring, Yul."

"If you are that bored, why don't you finish all this?" he gazed at the stack of documents on my desk, making me sigh helplessly.

"This should be your job. What is the point of being my advisor if I do all the work?"

"I already do things I can do without you. So, these documents are already filtered."

"Should I marry you, Yulis?" His expression immediately died. "If you become the Duke, you can do all this and I can focus on other important things."

"Please don't joke like that, sis. It's more scary than funny."

A frown resurfaced on my face as I leaned back. "The only person I proposed marriage doesn't want to marry me. How sad..."

"Even though the people still know that I am a La Crox, we're still blood-related." He reminded me with disinterest.

"So, what? It's not like marrying your kin is unordinary in this place."

"Even so, marrying me so you can escape one of your duties as the lord of Grimsbanne." Yul shook his head, sighing helplessly before taking a step back. "I've already dealt with enough assassination attempts at being known as your plaything. Have mercy on me."

"Yes... I'm sorry. I know I am a horrible sister for putting you in a crappy ordeal."

"You don't have to apologize in such a disappointing manner."

I glanced at him, blowing air through my lips. Only Yul and Silvia could talk to me like they used to. My interaction with Klaus was too formal. Well, not that I was close with Klaus back in the palace.

"Anyway —" I halted when a knock from outside my office reached my ear. The door creaked open, revealing Mildred, who was pushing a trolley tray with her.

"Just about time, Mildred!" the corner of my lips stretched wider before I noticed the bouquet of flowers being held by another maid. "Mildred, I told you to never bring any gifts from my suitors to my office. Take that flower away."

Mildred stopped, holding her hand before her, and bowed. "Your Grace, I might overstep my bounds. But, you might want to receive these flowers and the letter."

"And who sent them for you to think that Her Grace will want to receive it?" Yul inquired, raising a brow with his chin up.

"It was from Prince Heliot." Mildred bowed, taking me and Yul by surprise.

"From Prince Heliot?" as soon as my inquiry slipped past my lips, Yul set his eyes on me, but I ignored it. "Bring it here."

With that being said, the maid passed the bouquet to Mildred, and the latter handed it to me, along with the letter. Upon seeing the seal, I instantly knew it was indeed from Heliot.

"Thank you, Mildred. You may leave." I smiled at her, and she seemed pleased about her decision.

"Yes, Your Grace."

Yul waited for Mildred and the maids to leave before facing me. He looked displeased as I cradled the bouquet with my fingers caressing its petals.

"He gave you flowers? Since when did your relationship develop?" he cocked his head, brows creased. "You can barely finish these documents. When did you have the time to flirt with him?"

"Look at you, Yul. You rejected my proposal, and now you're acting as if I cheated on you." I clicked my tongue, shaking my head as I stared at the flowers. I couldn't help but smile as my eyes softened, seeing how nice the flowers were put together.

"Sis... you're smiling," he murmured, having this mix of relief and bafflement in his voice. "Just what did you see in Prince Heliot that you accepted him so soon?"

"He is... cute." I smiled, closed-lipped. "You can say he is quite good with his words, Yul."

A chuckle escaped my mouth seeing him frown. I sprawled my arms towards the letter, opening it to read it. I never read his letters with anyone's presence, but I knew it would be alright now since it arrived directly here.

"I guess you really like receiving his letters if you're smiling like that." I snapped my eyes towards him upon hearing his remarks. "Do you always smile like that whenever you read his letters?"

Smile like what? I wondered, a bit baffled but didn't dwell on it.

"Anyway, tell everyone to prepare."

He quirked a brow as I spoke. "What?"

"Prince Heliot had arrived in the Capital. He said he will visit me once his business in the Capital is finished." I informed him as my smile stretched into a wide grin. It was about time for Heliot and me to meet again.

"Finally, there is something I will look forward to," I added along with a low chuckle, setting my eyes on the flower the man sent me. Yul gazed at me for a long time before sighing and left to inform everyone.

As soon as he left, my grin turned into a smirk as my eyes glinted. "No wonder it had been peaceful... because things are about to get interesting."

Chapter 323 - Did You Like The Flowers I Sent You?

"This is overkill..." Silvia raised her brows awkwardly, gazing at the horde of maids lined up in front of the mansion with us.

"He is a luxurious man, Sivi." I chuckled seeing her reaction. "I told you, you don't have to welcome him with me. You could use this day to rest."

"Your Grace, you know the reason I had taken a day off. For you to prepare everyone for an entire week to have such a grand welcome to the prince of Karo, I need to see it myself."

"There's nothing to see, Sivi." I shook my head, setting my eyes on the carriage that was heading towards us. "I just want to impress his highness. Prince Heliot gifted me all the rare gems to build

my wealth, after all. How can I show him such discourtesy when, thanks to him, Grimsbanne recovered and is doing better now?"

Silvia cast me a side glance, couldn't conceal the doubt in her eyes. "You're getting better and better at making logical excuses, Your Grace."

"Well, I am not making it up, unfortunately. I only speak the truth." The corner of my lips curled up into a smile. "I simply want to impress him, no more no less."

"It feels weird, Lil. Sometimes, I think you really like Prince Heliot, but there were also times like right now that I don't think you do."

"Well, it's a complicated feeling and also, I don't get ahead of myself. No one will accept a widow like me for someone like the prince, isn't it?" I raised a brow and cast her a knowing look.

"Even if they are a lot of opposition, with your current power, people will die just to get you on their side." Silvia shrugged nonchalantly. "You just didn't master the art of twisting words, but you have also mastered diverting the focus of the subject."

"Someone told me in the past, Sivi." I took a deep breath as the carriage finally reached us, stopping in front of us. "Some answers can be complex and things can have multiple truths. I like Prince Heliot. It doesn't matter if it's romantically or something else because I like him — that is the truth."

Silence followed my last remarks as Silvia only looked at me. Soon, the door of the carriage opened and my eyes caught the familiar midnight blue hair that glowed under the midday sun. His tanned complexion looked darker, but it only added allure to his contrasting cold, deep blue eyes.

"Welcome to my humble home, Your Highness," I greeted with a curtsy. Mildred and Silvia, who stood a step behind me, also curtsied while the servants bowed.

When I raised my head, I saw him just looking at me. "I appreciate your warm welcome, Your Grace."

"I am pleased to hear that. I hope you will find comfort during your stay here."

"I will..." He trailed off, staring at me straight in the eye. "... try."

Heliot and I smiled at each other warmly. With our silence, we understood each other.

After welcoming Heliot in the stronghold in the grandest way I had ever given anyone, I personally escorted him inside. Since he had been traveling even before arriving in Grimsbanne, I emptied our schedule today so we could just sit in the drawing room to chat.

"Mildred, I will call for you if we needed your assistance," I said, casting Mildred and the other maids who were on standby to leave.

"Yes, your Grace. We will be outside if you need us." She bowed and beckoned everyone to leave.

We didn't speak until they shut the door closed while Heliot and I stared at each other. Once I knew there weren't any ears that were listening, my smile disappeared as I leaned back.

"Did you like the flowers I sent you?" he asked unaffectionately, breaking the substantial tranquility between us.

"I liked the colors. Did you arrange it yourself?"

"I thought of exerting an effort as your suitor." He nodded, picking up the cup of tea to his lips. His eyes hovered over the cup as his gaze never left mine.

"That's so sweet." A warm smile appeared on my lips. "I like them even more now."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"They withered, though." My eyes veered towards the window, tapping my finger against the armrest.

"I can always give you new ones," He proposed, making me shift my eyes back on him. "Flowers bloom and wither when their time has come. That is the cycle of life."

He was correct, and I couldn't argue with him with that. I just stared at him, studying his complexion.

"You don't look sick now." I pointed out, nodding approvingly. "I was worried that I will see you in a much worse state, but it seemed you've been doing great."

"Working with you has been a great help. Although I had been busier than ever after negotiating with you."

"Speaking of negotiation, how was your stay in the Capital?" I inquired, not really interested in these unnecessary flatteries.

Heliot remained quiet, planting his hand on the armrest as he pushed his chair away with his feet. He strutted around the table, stopping behind me with his hand on my shoulders.

"See for yourself," he uttered, making me close my eyes as I've seen his memories in his perspective of what happened in the Capital. I gasped for air when he raised his hands, and the memories stopped coming.

"Just like you, your enemy is growing stronger." He commented, offering his hand, which I clasped as he assisted me up. "The king and Princess Beatrice will get married sooner than you expected."

As soon as I stood, Heliot spun me around and then planted his arm around my waist, pulling me closer to him. "A dance for that information."

My expression remained the same, staring at his eyes that were akin to the depth of the ocean. Heliot had been my informant; the person who gave me the information about Zero and Tristan's actual relationship and all other useful information.

"Heliot," I called as we slowed dance without a presence of an orchestra, leaning the side of my head on his chest. "You have a strange way of making your way to my heart."

"I appreciate it... although you don't have a heart, duchess."

A weak smile appeared on my lips. "Just pretend that I do."

"Those flowers I sent you..." he trailed off, resting his chin over my head. "Do you like them in your coffin?"

"Mhm." My eyes softened as I closed my eyes. "They smell just like Sam.. They made me happy, thank you."

Chapter 324 - Get Your Neck In Here

My relationship with Heliot was unlike what everyone thought it was. I liked him, but not as a man. I liked his honesty. He was the type of person who disliked going around in circles. Maybe, that's why we got along easily as we didn't need to hide our hidden agendas and met a middle ground.

I needed his help for building Grimsbanne and he helped me establish the duchy in a brief span of time. Not just that, but his skills in garnering detailed information were a great help for me.

In exchange for all that, Heliot only wanted one thing from me — my life.

Unlike Stefan and Zero, who wanted to use me, Heliot wanted me dead... for good. He had a connection in the mainland of the vampires, and only then I came to know that my existence as a human who stood above the blood hierarchy was something that shouldn't have existed.

"I don't mind dying," I whispered, standing at the balcony of my chambers. "When I accepted Sam will not return to me... death is the only thing I seek in this life."

But before dying, I wanted to clean this place. If I would die, I would take my enemies with me to hell. I will stop their greatness and he will stop my madness.

"That's right... he is the man I had chosen." I picked up the decanter that was on the railing, pouring wine into the empty cup of wine. "He will end it for me."

I picked up the glass of wine to my lips, hissing in satisfaction as the heat course through my throat. It helped me stay warm in this another cold night. My eyes closed, relishing the night breeze as it blew past me.

"The privilege of the strong people..." My eyes slowly opened as the corner of my lips curled up into a smile. "... we can choose our deaths."

A ridiculing chuckle slipped past my lips. The thought of being able to choose who will end me and when and where I would die brought this strange satisfaction within me.

"I will be with you soon, Sam." I shifted my eyes to my side, staring at the illusion of my husband I cooked up in my head. He was sitting on the railing, eyes on me, with the usual smirk plastered on his lips.

"Just wait for me, hmm? I promised to meet you soon." I smiled with my eyes growing gentle. "I will surely find you and be with you again, Sam."

I already said it. I never recovered from the pain of losing my husband. Even when I tried to seek the meaning of life, I just... couldn't. I could delude and tell myself to live for my people, but standing at the top was lonely.

"The will of the Bloodfang... I will surely fulfill it, Sam." I peeled my eyes at the illusion and cast my eyes ahead. "I will put things back in their rightful place. That's right... back to their rightful place."

Thanks to Heliot, I finally understood the will my clan had left me. It was actually funny because their will was far different from what it seemed. I was stupid not to understand Lara's words.

"My clan... they are only cruel to themselves." A faint smile resurfaced on my lips, knowing their Will salvage my opinion towards them. "But they are smart and loyal people and I commend them

for that. They had probably seen things will turn out like this, so they did the sacrifice all for the sake of Amara Cecil Grimsbanne - La Crox."

"Aren't we loyal people?" my mind commented, making me chortle softly.

"They are frustratingly loyal subjects of their Queen." I nodded in agreement. "And people who stick with their words to their precious friend."

It was sometimes entertaining talking to myself. Heliot's presence in the stronghold made me review everything: my clan's will, my purpose, my plans, and even my impending doom.

I was happy, though.

"Soon..." I said, twirling the wine cup in my hand. "Everything will go according to my plan."

Time was fleeting, and I believed before I knew it, the day I had been waiting for would come. Until then, I would have to make sure that the people I will leave behind would have a peaceful and happy life without worrying about tomorrow.

"That is my apology gift for keeping this secret," came out a whisper, feeling sorry for everyone who kept giving me support just so I could live. "I hope they can forgive me someday."

Meanwhile, in a private estate somewhere near the east border, a man grumbled as he dragged himself up to sit. He was stretching his neck, groping his neck and nape in irritation.

"Fucking..." his coarse voice resonated across the four corners of the lightless underground room. "Ugh...!"

The sound of his bones cracking with his stiff muscles filled the air, along with his grunts. Not long after, light from the lamp came from the corner of the room. His crimson eyes narrowed as he set them on the person near the stairs.

"My... lord?" the child who came to check jolted as soon as she locked gaze with him. All she could see was that burning pair of crimson eyes.

"Oh, no... I should tell them!" she exclaimed, snapping to her senses as she rushed back to the steep stairs to inform someone of his awakening.

As the child left saying those, the man scanned around. Even with the absence of light, he could see two empty coffins near him.

"They woke up... great!" he thought, grimacing as he ground his teeth, seething in anger as a certain memory etched in his mind. He took a deep breath before his voice thundered.

"Fabian!!!!!!!!!" he ground his teeth, his fangs growing. "Get your neck in here! I will fucking kill you this time!"

Samael grabbed the rims of the coffin, assisting himself up as he strutted to the direction where the child rushed away.. One could tell that he would kill Fabian... for sure.

Chapter 325 - What Actually Happened

"Get your neck in here! I will fucking kill you this time!"

Samael's voice rang across the entire desolate estate, making someone in the courtyard take a deep breath. The man's pair of fiery eyes landed on the person inside the pit he had dug himself.

"Fabian, choose." Rufus's voice was alarmingly low, eyes glinting mercilessly. "Whose hands do you choose to kill you? Will you want to wait for His Grace or shall I end you now?"

Fabian, who was in the hollow, gazed at Rufus. His brother was holding a shovel, staring at him coldly as if they weren't brothers.

"I... I'm sorry, brother." He let out a deep sigh, getting down and laid down. "Being buried alive is what I deserved. I didn't do the job properly."

"I don't know what is this 'properly' you are talking about. However, you will not get away from doing what you've done to me." Rufus' grip on the shovel tightened, lifting it up as he started shoving soil into the trench.

"Brother, will you really bury me alive?" Fabian frowned as soil rained down on him. "Won't you want to hear any explanation? His Grace will be too lazy to detail everything."

Rufus paused, shifting his eyes to Fabian. "You two schemed behind everyone, including me. Funny thing is, of all people, His Grace trusted a troublesome lad like you."

"I remember mourning for you, Ru."

"And I remembered dying, Fabian. I can still feel how my chest was ripped apart." Rufus gnashed his teeth, eyes bloodshot, seething in anger as he felt betrayed.

His grip on the shovel trembled as his teeth produced a creaking sound as he ground them. Fabian and Samael had schemed with almost everyone. However, those two only gave everyone around them snippets of their entire plan.

Only Samael and Fabian knew the actual plan — the original version.

What happened? Well, a week before they died, Samael had given Rufus a special order to be executed alone. Little did Rufus know he would meet an unexpected company: Fabian. That day, his brother Fabian 'betrayed' him by knocking him unconscious and abducting his body.

Yes, Fabian abducted Rufus to this estate. The latter had been sleeping since then.

For how Rufus still returned to the Capital was part of a larger scheme concocted by the mastermind, Samael. As stated before, Samael had the ability of illusion, just like Hanz and Yul's ability. It was a complicated scheme.

Samael, the man behind this, had discreetly put a large-scale illusion around the entire capital three months prior to the founding week. For him to put up such a large illusion early, it was for it to grow stronger until the illusion became the reality.

Still, his plan could be spoiled during the crucial moment. So, to avoid suspicion and to make his plans work, Samael had needed some help.

To begin with, Samael had needed someone who had the ability of a puppeteer who would make a believable proxy for them and... someone who could manipulate the time to stop it at the most 'critical moment'. With their help, Samael had transferred their consciousness to these 'puppets' a week before their 'deaths', while their actual living bodies were kept in the underground dungeon.

In conclusion, Fabian, Samael, and Rufus, who were walking around the palace one week prior to their deaths, were mere stand-ins, with their consciousness in it. No one suspected them and their plan went smoothly.

Until...

"Fabian...!" Suddenly, Samael's voice finally reached the courtyard. His eyes glowed, burning as the aura he exuded was so thick it could suffocate anyone who came close. He even arrived before the child could inform the two. Well, not that Fabian and Rufus didn't sense the stifling aura the second Samael opened his eyes.

"Brother, please bury me now." Fabian shut his eyes, hoping Rufus could finish burying him alive before Samael could reach him.

Rufus stared at his brother before a smug smirk resurfaced on his lips. He tossed the shovel away before hopping inside the grave hollow. His brother snapped his eyes open upon sensing Rufus' presence over him.

"Ru...?" There was this sudden ominous premonition Fabian felt as soon as he caught the evil smirk plastered on Rufus' lips.

"Brother..." Rufus grabbed Fabian's collar, taking a deep breath. "Why don't you face His Grace and apologize, eh?"

"Ru, I can't —" Before Fabian could finish his words, Rufus lifted him by the collar, and with just one hand, Rufus threw him out of the pit.

Fabian instinctively landed on his feet, but froze the second he felt the terrifying aura before him. Slowly, he raised his head only to see the devil incarnate gaze down at him with eyes glowing in deep red, sending a shiver down his spine.

"My lord, hehe... you know her grace is a bit stubborn and —" Again, Fabian couldn't finish his sentence as Samael suddenly grabbed the lower half of his face.

"Fabian." Samael's tone was low and one could tell he was genuinely pissed. "You only have one job and that is to bring my wife here. I already apologized to her since I know we will be asleep for quite some time."

His grip tightened, about to crush Fabian's jaw with one hand. The latter held onto Samael's arm, but he wouldn't budge.

"She saw my fucking death, Fabian." Samael's voice shook as he recalled Lilou's face during his last moments. "Do you know what that means, Fabian? My wife... seeing my fucking head roll... do you have any idea how that hurt her?"

Samael took a deep breath as his eyes darkened with rage. If Fabian followed the plan, Lilou would also die, as they had placed a figurehead for her as well. They wouldn't be in this predicament and Lilou would only have to wait until they wake up in this place.

Everything would be according to their plan if Fabian didn't stay long in the Capital while the illusion thickened by the darkfield. However, their plan had made an unexpected turn because of Fabian.

"I will fucking end you, Fabian."

Chapter 326 - Who Is The Rat You're Trying To Catch?

"This is why I hate playing their fucking game," Samael grumbled, cracking his fingers as he calmed down slightly. "It's never fun. I should've just piled up their bodies and made a throne out of them with Stefan's head on top of it."

Rufus, who sat on the opposite armrest, rested his jaw on his knuckles. "My lord, please don't forget your reasons you had betrayed your people." Rufus calmly spoke, stressing how he was one of those.

"Come on! I didn't betray you! I simply left out some details, and I already said I'm sorry, alright? We just know you won't like the idea!"

"Of course. Why would I approve of such an idea that involves innocent children?" Rufus' eyes veered to the children, who were serving them some tea they had learned to make. "Of all capable adults you can scheme with, you chose five children and that child in the palace, Your Grace. How unspeakable."

"It's not like they didn't have fun, right, Dao Z?" Samael cocked his head to Dao ZD, who flinched while holding the tray.. She turned her head to him before a huge smile turned up on her adorable face, and then nodded.

"See?" Samael then shifted his gaze back to Rufus. "These children only participated in making the doll and they had fun with this friendly activity!"

"They're useful subject —"

"Fabian, you lived today because I plead for your life." Rufus cut him off, seeing Fabian wipe the remaining blood on the corner of his lips. "We will decide your death once this is all over. We're back to scratch once again, after all."

Silence followed, as what Rufus said was the truth. They were back to scratch, with Lilou not being in here with them. Samael closed his eyes, taking a deep breath as he ran his fingers through his hair. His brows quirked upon sensing someone's gaze, so he opened his eyes only to see two children staring at him worriedly.

"Milord, are we in trouble?" Yasmeen asked weakly, fidgeting her little fingers anxiously.

Samael smiled, sprawling his arms towards her. The little girl shut her eyes, thinking he will slap her, but then flinched at the gentleness of his pats.

"You kids did great. It was that Fabian's fault, not yours." He pointed at Fabian with his thumb, reassuring his trusted and reliable allies no one would suspect. "Thanks. We're alive because of your help."

"But milord, we waited that night and still come to the place you told us to see an angel. No one came." This time, Dao ZD informed him as they still go to the border just in case Lilou would come. She didn't.

His eyes suddenly softened as a bitter smile resurfaced on his lips. "Of course, she won't go there. That's expected."

Rufus and Fabian stared at Samael and could instantly tell the building up rage their lord was currently suppressing. Fabian, who messed up the plan, gazed down, feeling sorry for his clumsiness.

Fabian didn't mean to spoil the plan. It was just that, while he was chasing after Lilou, the illusion that concentrated around the palace got into him as well. In the end, he had fallen into Samael's illusion and believed it was real. Hence, instead of trying to catch up to Lilou, he headed straight to Rufus.

"So, how long had we've been sleeping and when did you two wake up?" Samael broke the stifling silence after telling the children to rest.

"Eight months, My Lord," Rufus answered solemnly. "It's been eight months since we all died. I woke up a week ago and Fabian awoke hours before you, Your Grace."

"Eight months..." Samael ground his teeth, as that was quite a long time. It wouldn't worry him if Lilou was here, as he had been in slumber for centuries in the past. However, Lilou stayed behind.

"What happened to Lilou?" he asked, preparing himself to rush back to the capital once he heard anything wrong. "You've been awake for a week, Rufus. Don't leave any information behind. What happened to Lilou?"

Samael raised his head and set his pair of fiery eyes on him. Rufus stared at him for a moment, before a shallow breath slipped past his lips.

"You don't have to worry about the Duchess, Your Grace. For reasons unknown, they branded us as heroes who died honorably fulfilling our duties. From what I had heard, the royal family even held a funeral for you, and the Duchess returned to Grimsbanne." Rufus summarized everything from what he had heard as he investigated the second he awoke.

"They did?" Samael's eyes narrowed suspiciously, as he didn't have a good feeling about this.

"Her Grace must've struck a deal with the current king. Whatever it was, I don't know, but for the king to do all this, it must be something worthy for a trade." Rufus' tone grew solemn as he studied Samael's expression.

"Also, I went to Grimsbanne," Rufus continued after a moment of silence, catching Samael's attention. "I thought that meeting Her Grace would be the best course of action."

Samael studied Rufus and could tell the latter's plans didn't happen. "Why didn't you do it?"

"It's not that I didn't want to, Your Grace. I just can't." Rufus' answer made Samael and Fabian furrowed their brows, so he continued, "Apparently, Grimsbanne became a fortress; one could enter but can't leave freely. Just looking at it from a distance, I knew meeting Her Grace in secret will be impossible — even approaching her will be impossible."

Since silence followed Rufus' voice, he used this time to speak more of his opinion. He was the only one who was informed, and these two needed to know how the tide had turned.

"Also, I thought that meeting her can spoil whatever plans you had and what pushed you to make such a decision as to deceive everyone." Rufus' eyes darkened, staring at Samael. "Your Grace, I think it's the time that you fill me in with your actual plans."

Again, silence ensued as both Rufus and Samael stared at each other. The atmosphere between them thickened as Rufus' lips parted.

"Who is the rat you're trying to catch?" asked Rufus, as he knew Samael more than anyone. His Lord wouldn't resort to such a meticulous scheme if things would get resolved in Samael's usual ways.

Samael glanced at Fabian and then back at Rufus. "Alphonse... and those bastards from the mainland."

Chapter 327 - A Friend For A Minute

"Alphonse... and those bastards from the mainland."

Samael squinted his eyes, leaning forward with his arms on his legs, hands linked. For someone who had been into the depths of hell and crawled his way back to earth, Samael had seen it all. So, when he started sniffing around the case of the undead, he couldn't help but look at the bigger picture.

What he had uncovered was far more alarming than what he had thought. Stefan was the least of his concerns. If Stefan was the biggest threat, Samael could simply use brute force, since his brother wouldn't be able to defeat him. Hard work and wits, Stefan was far inferior to Samael. Even though Stefan had reached the peak, he was centuries late. Their experience just had a very huge gap..

However, Samael's concerns were the people who were lurking around Stefan. For example, Alphonse. That second prince and was known as the cursed prince was someone who was one of the biggest threats to Samael.

If Samael was known for his brutality for even a petty reason, Alphonse was different. The latter was just pure evil.

"Who fucking knows what that person wants now," Samael muttered as he let out a sharp exhale. "He wouldn't assist Stefan just because of goodwill. He must want something else."

"Something else... or someone else?" asked Rufus, furrowing his brows as he had heard about the second prince. However, he hadn't met him in person all this time.

Samael gazed up at Fabian, who was keeping his silence all this time. "Now that we've confirmed Alphonse is on Stefan's side, what do you think?"

"Destruction?" Fabian cleared his throat as it seemed Samael had finally got into his senses. "Based on Rufus' claims about Grimsbanne, it is not impossible to assume that the second prince and Her Grace had been in contact. Knowing the second prince's nature, he will surely use the Duchess' grudge to use her."

"Make sense." Rufus nodded in agreement. "Still, the current king isn't as foolish as to think that he can trust everyone around him. He must've been keeping an eye on everyone he was scheming with since they could betray him in a snap of a finger."

"But we cannot rule out the possibility that they can be in contact with each other."

"To use Lilou in his scheme... my wife isn't as foolish as that," Samael murmured, breaking his silence, as he knew his wife more than anyone. Lilou was smart and strong — especially now that she had recovered her memories.

"She had proven that when she was able to make Stefan announce we are 'heroes', and held a funeral for us, instead of hanging our heads at the gates of the palace," Samael continued, squinting his eyes into slits. "What her deal with Stefan is obvious, but Alphonse... there's also this cunning Beatrice."

"Poor king. He is surrounded by enemies," Fabian commented, feeling a little sorry that Stefan had to tread on eggshells every second of his life.

"I didn't know you know the second prince." Rufus turned his head in Fabian's direction. "Don't tell me he is your friend?"

"And what gave you the impression I will be friends with such a despicable man?"

Rufus remained silent, blinking, as he found Fabian's question stupid. What gave him the impression? Wasn't the answer too obvious? Fabian clicked his tongue and let out a deep exhale.

"He was a good friend." Fabian's answer brought a frown to Rufus' face. See? Fabian's friends were just as violent and as crazy as him. Just look at the person Fabian was calling his master, he was a monster!

"During the time where I enjoy night walks, I had this fateful encounter with him. We became friends for at least a minute or two before we decided to go our separate ways." Fabian summarized, smiling as blood suddenly dripped from the corner of his lips. "How unsightly."

He took out an already bloodstained handkerchief and wiped the blood off of his chin. Rufus just stared at him, shaking his head, as he couldn't believe this information.

"When you mean for a minute or two, how long is it?"

"Over a minute, but under two minutes, Rufus."

"How did you become friends for a minute? And then decided to go on separate ways?" Rufus' brows knitted. Part of him already guessed what happened, but he needed to make sure.

"I slit his throat." Fabian's tone was calm, as if he was merely telling his brother what he had prepared for breakfast.

"I knew it." Rufus shook his head, sighing heavily as Fabian's relationships in the past were all similar to that. It was just that, unlike Rufus, who had this strong sense of responsibility for the people, Fabian was not even the opposite.

Fabian just indulged in violence... for fun. If Fabian didn't change, it would force Rufus to kill his brother with his own hands.

"If you slit his throat back then, how was he alive now?" another question came out from Rufus' mouth, curious as it would be impossible to live if Alphonse met Fabian even before the latter served Samael.

"I don't know." Fabian shrugged.

"You didn't dissect him?"

"I was not in the mood and he was too pathetic." He sighed, shrugging apathetically. "Also, it is not fun to torture someone whose eyes don't seek life anymore. I take pleasure in my victim's screams, Sir Knight."

A sinister smirk appeared on Fabian, which Rufus noticed. "Do you still take pleasure in them now?"

"Of course... not."

"Fabian..."

"This won't do." Suddenly, Samael, who remained the entire time, clapped and sprung up to his feet.

The Barrett Brothers gazed at him, cocking their head. What won't do was he talking about?

"My lord, are you going somewhere? I don't think letting everyone know that we are alive will be beneficial," said Rufus in a knowing tone. "Isn't the purpose of this death is that so we can move freely with no eyes on us?"

"Yes, and also to reduce the risk since my plans involve my wife. Where's my wife now?" Samael cast him a look of nonchalance. "Fabian spoilt the plans, and my wife is in Grimsbanne — crying, maybe? We won't know if she is in contact with Alphonse unless we ask her, right?"

"My lord, you don't mean..." Rufus' eyes widened, noticing the resolve in Samael's eyes.

"We will set off tonight to Grimsbanne. You two need to prepare." Samael touched his ear as a habit, but his earring was not there. "Right... I put Catharsis to my figurehead to make it look believable. Well, whatever. Let's go."

Fabian and Rufus looked at each other in shock, but they still followed. That night, the three of them headed to Grimsbanne in secret.

Chapter 328 - You Two Look Good Together

"Duchess, why don't you have some apples? They are very sweet and freshly picked!"

One merchant offered me with a bright grin on her face. I smiled, walking towards her stall, and picked one that had a perfect shade of red.

"I'll take this then." My smile remained, casting my eyes on the old merchant. "Take this." tossing a coin to her, which she caught out of instinct.

"Your Grace, you don't have to -- "

"Do you want one, your highness?" I ignored her purposely, diverting my attention to Heliot, who stood beside me.

Heliot gazed down at the apple in my hand and then turned his head to the old lady. A faint smile turned up on his lips, picking up a random apple and handed a coin.

"Your Grace, My Lord, it's really - "

"Just take it." I insisted, shaking my head as I turned around and walked away. I heard the old woman expressed her gratitude as if I saved her life or something.

"How strange," came from my side, making me glance at Heliot. "You walk around the street of Grimsbanne just like the rest. They don't even question the person you are walking with, and just greet you happily."

"Whom I am walking with is none of their business, don't you think?"

"It doesn't make sense, though. You are a lady — the Duchess at that."

A faint chuckle slipped past my lips as I took a bite of the apple. It was, indeed, sweet. I picked a good one.

"You probably heard about me. I wasn't raised as a noble lady, your highness," I uttered after swallowing down the piece of apple. "I've walked in the street of Banse and nearly died in this very street as a peasant."

I paused deliberately and set my eyes on him. "So, why would I have to be cautious walking in the street that is now mine?"

"As expected of you." He laughed, raising the apple in his hand and took a bite.

"The one you picked is not sweet." I pointed out, but he shrugged.

"I don't like sweets."

My brow arched. "So you picked it, knowing it will be a little sour?" he nodded as an answer, continuing in his steps while I halted. Staring at his back, and just studied his stature.

When he noticed I wasn't following him, he stopped and turned around to face me. "What did I deserve to be looked at, Your Grace? Did I do something wrong?"

"Nothing. Do you have to do something wrong for someone to look at you?"

"Not that, but I'm curious about your reason."

"The reason is no reason." I shrugged, closed-lipped. "Do you hate to be looked at?"

"Yes, but not from you." He smiled politely. I studied his expression and eyes, and I couldn't really tell what he was thinking.

"If you're wondering what I am thinking, I am thinking why is this sudden interest." Heliot voiced out, cutting to the chase. I really liked this about him.

"Sudden interest... more like intrigued." I smiled back, turning my head to my left. "If we continue going forth, we will reach the fields. Over this side will lead us to the training center and the Academy. Let's head there, instead."

"I have an interest in your industrial agriculture, but it seemed you don't want to show me." He commented but still turned in the direction I was looking at.

"I can show you next time." I shifted my attention to him, leading the way as we walked through the street of Banse.

Heliot cast me a side-eye. "Are you doing this because you don't trust me, or is it something personal?"

"Your Highness, the last time I trusted someone, I lost my husband." I glanced at him. "You and I are here because of a mutual goal. I hope you don't forget that."

"You are rather cold to the person who will fulfill your wish, Your Grace."

"Karo is a tropical land. I just thought you might find the coldness refreshing."

Heliot chuckled. I wouldn't lie. He had a very charming chuckle and a likable personality. Straightforward, a gentleman, and insightful. I respected him for that, and I knew his respect towards me was genuine as well.

Soon, we reached the newly established Academy, where nobles, commoners, and peasants could attend. For as long as one was willing to learn, no one could stop him. Sam started an education system in Grimsbanne and I simply continued it.

"Your Grace! We didn't know that you will visit today! I'm sorry, we aren't prepared to — " The headmaster of the Academy, who rushed to us in the entrance, abruptly stopped when I raised a hand.

"Please don't mind us. I just want to show His Highness the academy," I explained, waving at him so he would leave us alone. Heliot sponsored this academy, so it was more polite for me to show him around.

"Ye — yes, Your Grace," the headmaster stammered, wiping the sweats on his forehead as he stepped aside while Heliot and I entered the premises.

"Thank you," Heliot expressed, making me gaze at him.

"No need. I also don't like people following me around. It feels suffocating."

This was one more thing that we're similar. Heliot preferred just having one company or being alone completely. He hated dealing with everyone who was simply trying to curry favor with him. I could relate to that part because after becoming a Duchess, I realized people would smile in front of me, but speak ill about me behind my back.

It was unlike when I was a peasant. I didn't have to deal with that since we're all in the same boat, and we're too busy thinking if we get to live for another day or drop dead due to hunger or cold or get preyed on by a vampire.

"Your Grace!" While I showed Heliot around, Silvia's voice reached my ear. I turned in her direction, watching her approach us in a hurry. Silvia was truly graceful, even with a commoner's clothes.

"Sivi." I smiled as she stopped in front of us.

"Greetings, Your Grace, Your Highness." Silvia performed a curtsy before raising her head. "I rushed here when I heard that you're here. Did you not see the headmaster? He rushed to you when he heard you're here."

"I did, but Prince Heliot and I preferred each other's company," I explained, exchanging gaze with Heliot. "But I think His Highness will not mind if you assist us, Sivi."

"I trust the people Her Grace trusts." Heliot backed up with his eyes still on me.

And then, I set my eyes back on Silvia who was darting her eyes from Heliot to me, "You two look good together."

"I bet we are." To my surprise, Heliot's answer was quick, and I raised a brow and looked at him. "Don't look at me as if you're quite surprised, Your Grace. I'm simply stating what I think."

"Sure, your Highness. Sure."

"Well, then, why don't you follow me, Your Grace? Your Highness?"

"Please." I smiled, casting Heliot a look, and he chuckled once again.

As we walked behind Silvia, Heliot suddenly leaned into my side and whispered, "It's what I think, but not what I feel."

"I figured." I cast him a look, standing on my toes as I whispered back. "Don't explain, it makes you look guilty."

Chapter 329 - Like Me More

"What do you think?" I turned to Heliot after Silvia toured us around the Academy.

"It is a surprise how you had truly turned Grimsbanne into a metropolis."

"As much as I'd like to take the credit, I can't." A chuckle escaped my mouth, shaking my head while we sat on the bench in the open garden of the Academy. "Grimsbanne is already prepared to have these advances even before I became its lord."

I smiled, staring at the people walking through the corridor from a distance. Seeing this still gave me this satisfaction.

"It's all thanks to Rufus. Grimsbanne just lacks in the budget since Stefan had been suppressing Rufus when he was taking care of Grimsbanne. But now that you'd been sending me lovely gifts, I simply funded his plans and put some annoying people in their place for this all to happen." Again, I glanced at him, who sat on the other end of the bench..

Heliot glanced back at me, blinking ever so slowly. There was neither awe nor ridicule in his eyes. He doesn't even look surprised, unlike what he had claimed.

"It's such a shame that you chose the path you've chosen," he said, making me arch a brow. "You are a great lord because you understand your people more than anyone."

"I was one of them." Another wave of low chuckle slipped past my lips. "It's funny, isn't it? That someone who came from nothing is now claiming such high stakes."

"Do you condemn it?" he asked, but I didn't bother casting him a look, although I could feel his gaze on him.

"I used to, but then again, thinking that this responsibility will continue... I'm relieved I was the one the core had chosen." A bitter smile appeared on my lips, recalling my last conversation with Lara.

"It's a relief, Heliot."

Silence dawned upon us, but I never felt this tranquility before. Probably because I couldn't talk about this to anyone else aside from Heliot.

"I will end this, Your Highness," I reassured as I slowly turned my head to him and smiled. "That's for sure."

"You are strange, Your Grace," he commented, making me giggle. A second later, his brow raised as his eyes moved over me. Without a word, he lifted his arm, sprawling it towards me. Usually, I would back away, but this time, I only furrowed my brow.

Heliot brushed my hair, barely touching me with his eyes over my head. When he withdrew his hand, I noticed a small leaf clipped in between his fingers.

"I took it out." He showed me the leaf, sporting a nonchalant expression while I studied him. "Don't look at me like that, Your Grace. I'm not trying to charm you."

"Do you like me?" came out a straightforward question despite hearing his last remarks.

He didn't answer. Instead, he locked eyes with me in silence as a soft wind blew past us.

"I do." He nodded lightly, his eyes still on me. "I think you are quite exceptional. No wonder both kings were drawn to you. Aside from the blood that is running through your veins, you, as a person, is someone who could be a threat or a great ally."

"Exceptional, huh?" I murmured, casting him a brief look before setting my eyes back ahead.

"Exceptional, talented, strong, and smart, if I may add," He continued with a smile, peeling his eyes away from me. "It is rare to come across for such a person like you."

"Is that the reason you sent me a letter asking for my hand?"

"It is indeed."

"Why, though?" Slowly, I turned my head to him, tilting my head to the side. "Do you know how baffled I was when I read it? It is ridiculous."

Heliot laughed. His laughter was truly soothing in the ear. He should laugh more.

"Is it?" he quirked a brow, offering me a sly smile. "How can you blame a man who wants to try his chances of having someone like you as his wife?"

The expression on my face died down. How could he utter such ridiculous words to the person he would end?

"I'm serious when I asked for your hand in marriage, Your Grace." He affirmed without a second hesitation.

A shallow breath slipped past my lips. "Even when you know I will refuse?"

"That is the main reason I proposed. I know you will refuse." Heliot caught my attention as I looked at him while he leaned back. His leg rested over the other, arm over the backrest, and his body facing me.

"I do things so I don't regret not doing it. If I get rejected by you, I can tell myself that I tried. It is an excuse, but I do not mind having such a lame excuse because it makes me feel better." He smiled, and I could genuinely tell he was saying the truth.

"You said I was strange, but I can tell you the same, Your Highness." I chortled, shaking my head lightly. "You're strange."

"Vampires need something to look forward to so they could continue living. Having a long lifespan can be a gift to someone but a curse to others."

"So, do you consider it a gift? Or a curse?"

Heliot and I stared at each other in silence, and only the whisper of the wind sang a lullaby in our ears. Even though I had been in contact with him, I don't think I would ever figure Heliot out. He was the person I entrusted my death with, after all.

"I was also wondering." His eyes glinted, staring at me straight in the eye as he rested his jaw against his knuckles. "Maybe it is a gift since I got to meet someone as interesting as you, or a curse because I had to end you. I would think my fate is cruel... but I know that is not the case."

"What is, then?"

"You." His answer was immediate while his hand sprawled towards me and his thumb gently caressed my cheek. "You are the cruel one, Your Grace."

"You have such a warm touch, Your Highness." I smiled weakly, letting his thumb brush my cheek. "However, don't like me in that aspect. I don't want you hesitating last minute."

The corner of his lips stretched wider. "Trust me when I say you would prefer if I like you."

"And why is that?"

"Because my resolve in fulfilling your wish will be stronger." His smile remained and his answer gave me this sense of reassurance.

"Then..." I held the back of his hand, squeezing it lightly. "... like me more."

Chapter 330 - My Lord, Please Calm Down.

Heliot was truly a strange man... or rather, he was a little selfless. As for why I said such things, I just felt he was that kind of man. After meeting Stefan and Zero, I could tell Heliot's difference with them.

I could not help but smile, thinking of how his mind works. If I had met Heliot before Sam, I could say I would like him. He was quite charming in his own ways, like a prince in all those fairytales.

"Then, like me more."

His eyes grew gentle. "Even if you don't say that, I cannot help but be regaled by you.."

"You must've broken too many young ladies' hearts." I humored, chuckling, closed-lipped. "Do you know what everyone had been telling me?"

"I wonder."

"They are basically rooting for you." I smacked my lips as he withdrew his hand, sucking air through my teeth as I inhaled. "They said no one will blame me if I had fallen in love with a prince charming such as yourself."

"Your people are strangely understanding. They truly cared for you."

"Yes, they genuinely care for me." Again, my lips stretched bitterly. "That's why I can't leave just like that. I won't let them inherit this problem."

"How noble."

"Noble... more like 'how selfish'. Just because they think you make me smile and I give you more attention, they already accepted this 'new love'. I know they are doing this because they all wanted me to recover from Sam's death." I took a deep breath, gazing down. "Little did they know, no amount of support can change my mind nor it can revive my husband."

"New love? Don't make me laugh," I continued bitterly. "Sam had been and will be my only love. His death also marked the death of my heart. Even if I wanted to try it with a prince charming, I do not have another heart to give."

"That is quite a shame."

The right side of my lips turned up, setting my eyes back to him. "It is. I really think you are the best among all my friends."

"The best among all your friends... how about among all the men who abhor you? I think your enemies are more capable than your friends."

"They're all my friends, Your Highness." I chuckled and shook my head. "I put them all in a single box. In that box, they either love me or fear me... but that doesn't matter. It is all the same, after all."

"I am offended."

I pursed my lips, still smiling. "I'm sorry if that hurts your ego."

"Forgiven."

"It was fun talking to you, Your Highness."

"I thought I had humored you enough with my letters."

"Much more fun." I winked, making him smile in delight. "Then, shall we head to the training grounds? I think we rested enough."

"Alright. I'm curious how the knight --"

Heliot was abruptly cut off when we heard a man's voice storming in our direction. I cocked my head to the side and stared at this young nobleman as he stopped in front of us.

"What is it that the son of Marquess Davidson wants with me?" I asked as the young nobleman, assisting myself up while Heliot also stood up. "Is your business with me so urgent you're forgetting your manners? In front of my guest?"

"Your Grace! How can you do this to me?" the son of Marquess Davidson's voice shook, patting his chest loudly. "You said if I give you our family's wealth, you will marry me! I did all you ask me to do, but why are you avoiding me now?"

My eyes sharpened, raising my chin up. "I said, I will reconsider."

"What...! No, that's not it!" He fumed, shaking his head in disbelief. "Your Grace, you know my feelings for you! How can you play with my heart?"

"Did you approach me after seeing that I do not have my knights with me?"

"Your Grace!" Suddenly, he went down on his knees. He looked pathetic. "You can't do this to me. You said you love me, right? I can't live without you! I love you, Your Grace!"

As this person professed his love shamelessly, people started gathering around us. Although they didn't have the audacity to gossip with me as the subject, no one dared to help. It was expected. I abhor uncalled help and everyone knew that.

"If you can't live without me, why don't you hang yourself?" I sighed, shaking my head as I felt no remorse at suggesting the idea. "The next time you approach me, I will hang your entire clan as an example for those who attempt to disrupt my peace."

I glanced at Heliot and smiled faintly. "Forgive me for this, Your Highness. Let's head to the training grounds, shall we?"

Heliot glanced at the poor man and then nodded to me. "Alright."

However, just as Heliot and I walked away, a loud yell from behind us — a yell from that same man who kept speaking words of love — resonated in the air.

"I will hunt you even if I am dead, Your Grace! You will pay for humiliating me!" and then, followed by the onlookers' gasp before the air was filled with dead silence.

Slowly, I turned my head back to see him lying down with a slit in his throat. He killed himself, huh? There wasn't a trace of pity in my eyes as I gazed at his dead body.

"Your Grace! I'm sorry if --" the headmaster who approached me from the side in a panic halt in his unnecessary apology when I raised my hand.

"Don't let the children come into this area and throw his body in the gates of the House Davidson. They should be the ones to clean up their mess." I ordered coldly before turning around and walked away.

Heliot, who walked beside me, commented. "The level of stupidity some people hold truly leaves me in awe. You had a mountain of corpses under your belt, adding another one will not make a difference."

"And I was more foolish that I used to admire them from afar. How silly."

"You're not silly." He chuckled in amusement but said nothing for a minute. "They are silly... the joke's on them."

Meanwhile, outside Grimsbanne, three men in cloak stopped from a distant hill. They set their eyes on the land they used to live in, and in one glance, they could tell how Grimsbanne looked formidable from the outside.

Samael's jaw tightened as his eyes glinted menacingly. His hand balled into a tight fist, digging his nails into his palms.

"Lilou..." Bloodthirst laced his shaking voice as the aura he exuded felt stronger and darker.

"My lord, please calm down," Rufus advised, alarmed by the sense of dread crawling down his spine at Samael's aura.

"Calm down?" A ridiculing chuckled escape Samael's lips as he cast his pair of fiery eyes at them. "How can I fucking calm down if Grimsbanne... reeks of Lilou's blood?!"