

The Duke 331

Chapter 331 - Warning Shot

"How can I fucking calm down if Grimsbanne... reeks of Lilou's blood?"

Samael's pupils constricted as his entire body trembled in anger. The three of them could discern the scent of her blood because her blood had this distinct scent, and they could smell that even from their vantage point.

"Even so, we had reached this far, Your Grace. We can't recklessly take unnecessary actions." Rufus held his breath as Samael grabbed him by the collar. "My apologies. I simply didn't want to ruin everything that is left."

"Unnecessary?"

"Lord Noah is also here.." Fabian chimed in, staring at Grimsbanne and the almost faint barrier around it. "I've been familiar with his ability and I know he monitors all entry in Grimsbanne. Although his ability can detect threats that enter Grimsbanne, he wouldn't be able to discern who exactly it is."

Fabian slowly peeled his eyes away from Grimsbanne and set them to Samael. "If you enter Grimsbanne, I'm certain everyone will be on their guards and approaching Her Grace — if what Rufus said that Klaus became her chief knight — it will be more impossible to approach her without being found out."

"Your Grace, we also don't know who is inside Grimsbanne. I heard prominent individuals had been coming in and out of Grimsbanne. Shall we take the risk?" asked Rufus, who was still being held by the collar.

Samael let out a shallow scoff, letting Rufus go. He took a step back, rocking his head as he diverted his focus back to Grimsbanne. The more he thought about it, the more his heart raged.

"What is she thinking?" he ran his fingers through his argent hair, laughing as choler preside. "For Grimsbanne to reek of her blood, just who are the people she was feeding?"

"I presumed she had bigger plans." Rufus guessed, tugging his cloak and cleared his throat.

"Vengeance." Fabian crooned, eyes dropping. "Her Grace is not the person who will sulk in the corner after losing a battle. She will get back on her feet with her head held high — that is what her ladyship is like."

"Her motives are clear, but what comes afterward is what's concerning," Rufus spoke this time as they could not think what were Lilou's plans. "Your Grace, do you think Her Grace wants the throne for herself?"

Fabian and Rufus shifted their attention to Samael, furrowing their brows as the latter wore the hood of his cloak. It seemed to them that their lord had already decided while they conversed.

"My lord?" Rufus called, and Samael turned his head back to them. What they first noticed was Samael's dark hair. It had been centuries since Samael bothered with his hair.

"My lord, you don't mean to tell us..." Fabian trailed off as it seemed what they thought was Samael's plans were their lord's plans.

"There, Fabian." Samael erected a finger, pointing a certain direction. "Throw a pebble over there."

"I will go visit my wife." He turned as he had decided. "Don't worry. I won't cause trouble."

'You are the trouble yourself!' was what they wanted to tell him, but knowing Samael, no one could stop him. They might as well just start accepting that all these planning and dying would be all for naught once Samael announced he was alive.

"See ya!" With that being said, Samael jumped from the hill without a second hesitation while the two left, standing on their spot.

"Shall we assist him?" Fabian turned to ask Rufus. "You believe he won't cause trouble?"

"Shoot the pebble. His Grace had chosen this game. I don't think he will act recklessly since he had reached this far." Rufus took a deep breath, bending over to pick up a pebble, and tossed it to Fabian. "If the three of us enter Grimsbanne, Klaus will mobilize more men. But if it's just one person, it will be alright. Let's just keep those people distracted."

He jerked his chin towards the guard towers. Fabian nodded in understanding.

"Alright." Fabian picked up a handful of pebble, tossing a piece and catching it midair. After catching the pebble for the third time, Fabian flick it in a certain direction.

My brow quirked as I sensed something that was coming in our direction. I glanced at Heliot calmly while we stood on the side of the training grounds while the knights trained.

"Move closer to me," I said, catching his attention as he turned to me. "I will hate it if you die before I do."

Heliot smiled, taking a step closer to me. Three seconds later, the wall behind him exploded from the impact. Every knight stopped from shock, as I could feel a lot of eyes on us. I ignored them.

"Did you plan on catching it?" I asked, shifting my gaze at the hole as if someone strong punched it with all their might. "It will leave a hole in your palms. That's quite a powerful throw, after all."

"Am I getting targeted because I was on a date with you?"

"Maybe?" I pursed my lips, eyes still on the hole left on the stone wall. "I had a few crazy suitors, you know?"

"Then that narrows down the people who threw a..." He trailed off, turning his head to where the thing landed. "... pebble at me."

"I wonder who had the audacity," I smirked, staring at the pebble that wasn't the same materials as the rumble from the wall. "Funny thing is, whoever it is, they are outside Grimsbanne. How scary."

"You're rather calm." He pointed out, and I set my eyes back to him. "Is it because the target is me and not you?"

"Who knows? But if something like this kills you, that saves me some time to find and replace your role."

"You hurt my feelings."

"People are easy to replace, Your Highness." I shrugged nonchalantly, turning my gaze to Klaus, who was rushing in my direction.

"But not him?"

"Except him." I smiled as Klaus approached and I faced Heliot. "Sam is irreplaceable."

"Your Grace, are you alright?" Klaus inquired in worry, bobbing his face to inspect me.

"I'm not the target, Klaus, it's His Highness," I explained, nodding in reassurance. "Anyway, since this happened, please ask someone to escort his highness back to the mansion."

"You're leaving?" Heliot asked, tilting his head to the side.

"Your safety is my priority. While you are in my territory, I care about your safety. I will excuse myself first." My smile remained and curtsied. My eyes then sharpened as I met Klaus's eyes and started walking away.

"It feels nice to be protected," Heliot murmured as another knight approached us.

I looked back, smirking. "We will still have dinner later," and then laid my palms open. "Bow and arrow, and a letter telling them not to mess with me."

My eyes narrowed into slits as I looked in the direction where that pebble came from. Shortly after, Klaus handed me a bow and arrow, which I gripped tightly.

"If I was correct, this direction..." I trailed off, pricking my thumb with the tip of the arrow, and smeared my blood from its tip to end while pulling the string, and took a stance. I had my one eye closed, smirking.

"... this is a warning," I whisper and let go of the arrow. A deep exhale escaped my nose, shading my eyes from the sun.

"Wow..." I heard some knights awed while I handed the bow and arrow to the knight who was standing right beside Klaus.

"Prepare my steed. I gave them a warning shot, but I think they are the type of people who likes this kind of game." My order snapped them back to reality. "I will deal with them myself."

"Yes, Your Grace."

Meanwhile, Fabian snapped his eyes and tilted his head to the side. He slowly turned his head back. His eyes landed on the tree behind him that had an arrow and a letter wrapped around it.

"That arrow smells like the Duchess... oh, it had her blood on it." Rufus chuckled in amusement, a bit shocked at how fast her response was. "... she had truly changed. That's a warning."

"Amazing..." Fabian's eyes glistened with admiration as the corner of his lips stretched into a smirk. "Such courtesy... it will be impolite if we don't respond!"

"Fabian..." Rufus let out a deep exhale as it seemed this tickled Fabian's violent tendency.

Chapter 332 - An Intruder In Grimsbanne

"She smeared her blood on it so we know where she is." Rufus cast Fabian a look while crumpling the piece of paper attached to the arrow. "She's basically telling us to target her instead. Do you have any idea who is the person you shot the pebble to?"

Fabian shrugged indifferently. "I'm simply following His Grace's orders."

"There must be someone inside Grimsbanne with Her Grace." Rufus took a deep breath, throwing a pebble towards the guard towers. Unlike Fabian, Rufus' throws weren't as destructive. They were only enough to distract the people so Samael could enter Grimsbanne without a problem.

"Whatever. I'll just taunt Her Grace." Fabian tossed and caught a pebbled midair, closing his eyes as he tried to detect where Lilou was.. "Maybe if we do this, we don't need to approach her. She will go to us, instead."

"His Grace will kill you this time, Fabian."

"Or he will forgive me."

Rufus let out a deep sigh. "I don't think she will go to us herself. She is not the person who will play along and follow what her enemy wants. She is like how His Grace back then."

"You think so?" Fabian slowly opened his eyes, smirking as he finally detected Lilou's location.

"From what I see things, playing along with her enemy is just what she will do and defeat them on the game her enemy chose."

Fabian blew at the pebble, pulling his arm back, and then threw it. His smirk stretched even wider.

"Please tell me no one will die in that throw."

"Brother, Sir Knight, do you only see me as a violent person? I care for His Grace's people as much as you do!" Fabian exclaimed, a bit offended at the doubt in Rufus' voice. "I am simply giving out our location!"

"Stop playing around." Rufus cast him a look of disinterest and continued on throwing pebbles as if he was merely throwing rocks in a lake.

Meanwhile, in the third squadron's hideout, Noah, who was busy mapping out the Capital, snapped his eyes when he heard Kristina's voice. He turned his head towards the door to see Kristina entering the room.

"You're back?" he asked, checking if Charlotte and Ramin were with her. "Where are Ra and Charlie?"

"Charlie went to the city to buy some chicken skewers and Ra is just somewhere training." Kristina shrugged as she walked towards the table, gazing down at the maps and plans scattered around the table.

"So, where do you think is the best place to stay in the Capital?" she asked, as they had been trying to figure out the best location they could stay once Lilou returns to the Capital. Although Lilou and Noah had a few places in mind, they still need to choose another place to be safe.

Noah let out a deep sigh. "The capital is now filled with turned vampires, so it is safe to say that the king had his eyes on every corner of the Capital."

"That's why we're planning ahead of time, isn't it?"

"Apparently, that is easier said than done." Noah raised his brows briefly, shifting his focus on the map. "After all, it's not just us who will infiltrate the Capital, but her entire troop."

Kristina didn't speak anymore because that made sense. If it was just the four of them, Noah wouldn't have this headache. However, Lilou planned on bringing half of her army to the Capital in secret, while the other half will march to the said place.

"Do you think Her Grace would let us talk to Baron Martin?" Noah asked after a long silence, raising his head back to her. "The aristocratic faction had been resisting the king's madness."

"I will pretend I didn't hear that." She shook her head, rolling her eyes. "The Duchess gave us a list of the people we should be wary about, and that Baron is one of them. He is an ally of the king of Spade kingdom, after all."

"I'm sorry. I might've lost my mind for a second."

"You don't have to apologize. I know you've been trying." Kristina chuckled, winking at him.

Noah let out another deep sigh, staring at Kristina. He was relieved that Kristina had recovered from Rufus' death and managed to continue without rushing to her own death.

"Don't look at me like that, my lord." She clicked her tongue, knowing that look Noah was giving her. "Living and getting stronger is the third squadron's way of honoring our captain's death."

Her eyes softened, gazing down with a bitter smile on her lips. "His wisdom and guidance will always be with us. Please don't mention him to Ramin and Charlotte for the time being, they were still healing until now."

"How about you?" asked Noah, arching his brow. "Are you done healing?"

Kristina smiled weakly, taking a deep inhale, and then exhaled it sharply. "Do you think Her Grace's heart is healed, my lord?"

"She had been doing great until now, but..." Noah trailed off, leaning back as he let out a heavy sigh. "We all know how Her Grace loved His Grace. She trusted him and his people, but their plan failed. Her Grace still blames herself for that."

"We all trusted them, my lord." Kristina corrected. "Just like what you said, her grace had been doing great until now, just like us. We'd been doing great so far, but aren't we all moving tirelessly because just like her, we blame ourselves for their deaths?"

"The series of What Ifs had been killing us all thinking we could've done better than that." She added, tapping her fingers against the table. "It's just... unacceptable."

"I understand your point..." Noah trailed off as he abruptly sprung up to his feet, slamming his palms against the table, wide-eyed.

"My lord? Is there something wrong?"

"Such strong and alarming presence..." Noah exclaimed, ignoring Kristina. "Someone... a monster entered Grimsbanne!"

"What...!" Kristina also stood up, alarmed, as she studied Noah's pale expression.

Noah's eyes sharpened, casting them to her. "Kristina, go with Ramin and see what is going on. There's an intruder... I never felt such intense aura cross my barrier before."

Chapter 333 - [Bonus]Just Ten Deaths

After shooting that warning shot, Klaus and I galloped our way to the borders of Grimsbanne. On the way, I instinctively increased the grip on the reins to halt my horse and have a shift of pace.

"Your Grace!" Klaus yelled as he trotted in my direction. I ignored him as my eyes landed on the small hollow caused by another pebble not far away from me.

"Does this mean this is not the way?" I murmured, raising a brow as a pebble would land on the way, as if the person who was throwing them was telling me it was the wrong way.

"Your Grace, are you alright?" Klaus asked as soon as he reached me.

"I think the person is telling us this is not the right way if we want to see him." A smirk appeared on my lips as I looked up ahead. "How interesting, indeed."

"Your Grace, must you go yourself? Whoever this person obviously wanted to get your attention.."

"Yes, Klaus. You've seen the first throw he did." My eyes glistened with malice, taking a deep breath. "Even if I go in hiding inside the mansion, he will just have to throw another pebble directly into my office."

"Damn!" a loud curse slipped past through his gritted teeth as he already knew that. "I will fucking kill him... whoever it is."

"But it's interesting, don't you think?" I glanced at him, smirking, eyebrow raised. "It's been a while since we've met such a carefree person... or people."

Klaus cast me a look as he sighed. "The only crazy people I know who would do this without a care in the world are that damn butler and Hell."

"That's why it's interesting," I said, chuckling at his guess. "It makes me look forward to how strong these people are to do such a thing in my place."

"Your Grace... please tell me the truth. Are you just going yourself because you don't want to deal with the political affairs in your office?"

I pursed my lips, clearing my throat while averting my gaze. "Of course not. I really care about my people and I don't want them to get hurt."

"You're a terrible liar."

"Come on, Klaus. Yul is..." I trailed off as I raised a brow. Klaus also furrowed his brows upon seeing my change of expression.

"Your Grace!" I heard Noah's voice inside my head, making me gaze at Klaus' baffled face. "There's an intruder! I sent Kristina and Ramin to take a look at it and figure out who it is."

By the sound of Noah's voice, the intruder was someone not to be taken lightly. It was rare for Noah to lose his composure.

'How many?' I inquired internally, squinting my eyes into slits.

"Just... one, Your Grace. Even so, I think it'll be difficult to seize him or her."

"I see..." I murmured, taking another deep breath as I gazed at the direction ahead. I heard Klaus call me "your Grace?" but I ignored him.

Of course, I didn't expect that the people who were suddenly disrupting the peace in Grimsbanne were just one person. There should be more people involved... those who were outside Grimsbanne, and that one who entered.

"Hmmm..."

"Your Grace, are you alright? You suddenly went silent," asked Klaus, gazing at me worriedly.

"Klaus, an intruder appeared. Mobilize your best men and do a search. Seize everyone you think suspicious." I ordered without casting him a look.

"An intruder... hah." Klaus scoffed as his tone was laced with malice. "Yes, Your Grace."

"Ten deaths, Klaus. I will only allow ten deaths in this plight. If the numbers go over that, seize whoever it is and bring him to me."

"Yes, Your Grace." His tone grew solemn, hanging his head low. "About you..."

"I will follow where these pebbles will take me." My eyes landed on the pebble once again. "Don't worry about me."

"I'm not worried." Klaus corrected, maneuvering his steed as they turned. "Even so, I will come to you once I give out your orders."

"Alright then." I glanced at him, smiling. "I'll see you later."

With that being said, Klaus and the knights headed in the opposite direction while I took the other way. Strangely, despite knowing how alarming this situation was that suddenly befell Grimsbanne, I felt rather calm.

"Who... just who is it?" I whispered, eyes glinting.

Meanwhile, Heliot gazed outside through the window of the moving carriage. Lilou's knights were escorting him back to the estate, and it felt very reassuring to him.

"It is surely a shame," He murmured, recalling how amazing she was for being able to detect that incoming pebble and then shot an arrow in the same direction where the pebble came from. Heliot was certain the arrow landed to where it was supposed to land.

"Stop the carriage." He ordered, upon knocking on the driver's box.

A knight then appeared on the side of the carriage. "But your highness, Her Grace told us to escort you back without fail."

Heliot remained silent, staring at the knight who was trotting beside the carriage. The knight swallowed down a mouthful of saliva, clearing his throat, and then ordered the coachman to stop. Once they halted, Heliot wordlessly hitched outside and looked around.

"Your Highness, is there's something wrong?" asked a knight, trying not to offend the man the duchess favored.

Heliot raised his finger, placing it in front of his smirking lips. The knight furrowed his brows before the life in his eyes dimmed and he collapsed to the concrete ground. Shortly after, everyone around his vicinity collapsed, one after another.

"My apologies, but I will borrow this one," he muttered, strutting towards the horse while its rider fell on the ground. "I appreciate Her Grace's effort and your genuine courtesy to the man she favored."

He mounted the horse as it trotted to a direction he wanted to go. "So, you don't have to worry about facing Her Grace's wrath once you all wake up. I'll take responsibility," and then Heliot galloped his way to somewhere... or rather, to someone.

Chapter 334 - [Bonus]I Missed You, Love.

As I've planned, I followed the direction where the pebble directed me to go. It stopped me from going on a different path and it led me to this place. The hill where I used to live.

"Whoever it is, he surely knows where to press a nerve." A ridiculing chuckle escaped my mouth as I gazed up at the path going up the hill. "Now I'm a bit pissed."

Regardless, I still trekked my way up and the pebble already stopped coming. I didn't know why he would lead me to this place, but it left a bitter taste in my mouth.

The reason I avoided going to this place was that... it was the place where my father rest and also the very place which reminded me of Sam.. It was funny that I lived in the mansion where Sam and I stayed and built our memories together.

However, this place hits differently. It made me want to think that Sam was just out there, listening to me from somewhere. It was giving me false hope... despite knowing that wasn't the case anymore. And now that I'm walking in this very path — I had walked on almost all my life — the emptiness in me was widening its range.

"Bastards..." I scoffed, thinking of the best tortures once I got my hands on whoever these people were. "... I will never let you get away from this, for sure."

After a long trek, I finally reached the top of the hill. My eyes instantly landed on the bungalow.

"I'm..." I choked, clasp my hand into a tight fist as I bit my tongue. "... back, Father."

It hurts.

To do the habit, I used to do hurts very much. After eight months, I finally step my foot in this place, and just as I expected, it hurt me like hell.

'It's alright, Lilou,' my mind comforted me. 'Your Father and your husband are in a better place now. Don't you want to visit your Father at least once before you head to the Capital?'

I hung my head low, hearing the melancholic song of the wind. "I came here to have fun..."

'But you are just avoiding your father all this time. Now, your enemies use this opportunity to hurt you. Will you just let them do as they please?' My subconscious mind commented, giving me rational arguments instead of sassing.

"That's right," I whispered, raising my head as I took a deep breath. "Maybe, this will turn out good."

I recomposed myself and gathered my thoughts. For a moment there, I nearly forgot about the intruder and the person who led me to this place. I should stop avoiding visiting my father's grave and face him.

"I may not be proud of what his daughter had become, but..." I paused deliberately as I marched my way towards the back of the house. "I will accept his silent scolding."

A weak smile appeared on my lips as I walked silently, taking my precious time. Just then, I halted as I heard a noise inside the bungalow.

'Someone is inside?' I wondered, taking a few steps back as I gazed at the entrance of the bungalow. 'But I couldn't feel someone's presence.'

If there was a person inside, I would've felt it. However, the second I came in here, there was nothing. If there was, I wouldn't even have the time to absorb the sadness this place offered me.

I bit my lower lip, walking towards the door, and stopped in front of it. The last time I was here, Sam and I shared our first kiss. It was lovely.

'I should check...' Just as I was about to open it, my brows furrowed. It was opened. That alone made me raise my guard up, looking around to see if someone was watching me. There was none.

There was a part of me that wanted to bring forth Lakresha, but that would startle whoever was inside. I couldn't assume it was an enemy, after all. If it was the enemy, I would have felt it. So, there was a possibility that it was just a cat... or someone who snuck inside to do whatever.

It suddenly reminded me how Sam and I snuck inside this place back then.

With extra caution, I pushed the door slightly open and peeked inside. It was dark and I could only see where the light from the gap of the door reached. To see better, I carefully opened the door and stealthily intruded inside.

However, just as I took a step inside, someone suddenly grabbed my wrist in, pulling me inside, and slammed the door shut. He pinned my wrist against the door, face first, while he stood behind me.

Everything happened so fast and I didn't even feel his presence until he grabbed me inside. Once realization struck me, my eyes dilated as I ground my teeth.

"The audacity..." I scoffed under my breath, my front fusing against the door as I felt him go closer. My eyes sharpened, letting him grip my wrist tightly against the door while I spread my fingers.

I smirked, breathing in and out, gazing at the hand who held me. "You are not them... who are you?"

Suddenly, I felt him go closer and my back against his body. That instant, I froze. As soon as I felt his body against my back, that faint warmth... and this scent that wafted through my nostrils, my heart suddenly pounded against my chest. It made my mind buzz as I felt all my senses suddenly failing one after another.

'No, Lilou,' I told myself, almost choking, as it felt so real. 'You shouldn't fall for such a cheap trick! Don't let them used your husband and insult him further!' That was what I screamed inside my head immediately. But when I was almost, ALMOST convinced that was the case, I felt the apex of his nose brush my nape, making me shiver.

His breath caressed my nape, sliding his hand from my wrist to the gaps of my fingers. His palm felt gentle... and very familiar.

"I missed you," he spoke, and I felt the entire world stopped that very moment. "Love."

Chapter 335 - [Bonus]Don't Hurt Yourself Like This, Silly.

Meanwhile, in Fabian and Rufus's location, Fabian raised a pebble with both his hands as if worshipping it.

"This is the last one," he announced, before throwing it to Lilou's location. "There! She will find His Grace."

A large grin appeared on Fabian's face, nodding in satisfaction as this idea of his would surely make Samael forgive him. If not, he'd just have to start practicing breathing underground to last longer.

"Sir Knight, brother, you..." He trailed off, furrowing his brows as soon as he set his eyes to Rufus. Just then, Fabian felt the presence of some familiar people and knew the reason his brother suddenly paused.

"It seems the third squadron was also here.. Didn't you say there was a manhunt for them?" Fabian inquired, tilting his head to the side.

"It seems Her Grace kept those people hidden," he smiled, thinking that just like Noah, Lilou kept them safe. "She is truly amazing... just what scheme is her grace planning?"

"In any case, shall we make a run for it?" Fabian shrugged, as he didn't have the energy to keep guessing. Samael had already entered Grimsbanne, and who knows what would be the outcome.

"Since we don't know if His Grace plans to break the news that he is alive, it is best for us to follow our initial plan." That was to go incognito and keep being dead.

"Well, if that's settled, we should..." Suddenly, Fabian wielded Maleficent and swung it down to stop an arrow coming at his head. "Goodness! Who the hell shot that arrow? He made me yield my partner!"

Rufus gazed at the broken arrow. "It's a she, Fabian. Her name is Charlotte, and it seemed she got stronger as well."

The reason Fabian had wielded Maleficent to stop the arrow instead of dodging it was because it wasn't just any simple arrow. It would follow its target until it would hit him.

"Seems so." Fabian nodded, raising his brows as he didn't expect such troublesome people would be here as well.

Rufus smiled, feeling proud of how Lilou honed them. "Fabian, we had been asleep for eight months. Don't die."

"Am I allowed to retaliate, though?" Fabian inquired as both of them disappeared from their spot, making a run for it as soon as they felt that Lilou's people approached. "I won't kill them, I'm just wondering if there's fairness left in this world."

"Even if you retaliate, I'm confident they will be troublesome for you to deal with." The corner of Rufus' lips stretched even wider. "We'll part here. Don't get caught, Fabian."

"I never thought a rest for a straight eight months is all you need to recharge, Sir knight. You sound young again."

Rufus chuckled as he turned his head to Fabian. "Don't enter the Labyrinth." and the two of them parted ways to split their pursuers.

"I missed you... love."

I had imagined hearing his voice every single day. Those words 'I missed you', that I had whispered countless times in my sleep and hope he would say the same. I fantasized about hearing them.

To know that he longed for me just as much, just as intensely, as devotedly, and as ardently. I yearned to hear those words coming from his lips many, many, and many more times. But now that I heard them... it only brought pain and unspeakable rage within.

"How dare you..." My voice shook, inflamed by this despicable illusion. "... show him to me? You just won your ticket to hell."

My eyes blurred as they darkened with rage. I would kill this person who had insulted me and my husband. This act... was not something I would ever forgive, ever.

"Lakresha," I whispered, and a dark mist slowly enveloped me. "Darkfield."

I felt the person behind me flinch upon hearing my remarks. And yet, he didn't let me go as the dark mist enveloped us.

"You will die if you don't let me go," came out a distant murmur, as this close contact would surely hurt him. Just like what I said, blood started trickling down on him as I gaze at the back of his hand that was holding mine against the door.

I felt nothing, even though those hands looked like Sam's. "Even if you wear his face and body, I will kill you."

Despite the wounds that kept appearing on his skin, he didn't speak. Instead, he placed a peck on my nape, increasing the fury that was building up inside me.

"If it's from you, I will gladly accept death, my wife," He answered, making me grind my teeth as my pupils constricted.

"Lakresha... disintegrate him." No mercy and the small dark field that engulfed us, inflicting bigger and deeper wounds on him. He still didn't let me go, nor I had the energy to face him.

Cruel. This entire illusion was just cruel. For me to kill someone who wore the face of my husband... did they want me to experience killing him myself? Hah... those bastards. I won't let them get away from this.

"I'm sorry, Lilou. I fucked up and I know I should just drop dead for putting you in this situation," he voiced out his sentiments, resting his forehead on my shoulder. "However, dying right now won't help. Living while being hated by you is the worst punishment you can ever give me."

"Stop!" I yelled at the top of my lungs. "Don't speak his words using his voice! I will cut your tongue if you ever speak a word again!"

This time, even my darkfield started inflicting wounds on my skin, but I felt numb in the pain. I didn't care anymore who would get hurt or which blood trickled down to our feet.

"Die... just die... let's just die, shall we...?" my voice trembled, blinded by rage as I lost my composure, hence, losing control on the darkfield.

"How silly," he commented in a calm voice. "I would've let you disintegrate me, but your darkfield will also kill you."

"Go," he whispered and my darkfield suddenly cleared up. He then held my hand away from the door as he placed a soft kiss on the back of my wounded hand.

"Don't hurt yourself like this, silly."

I turned my head slowly to him, gazing at his side, but couldn't fully see his face with the hood over his head. While he trailed soft kisses on my hand and arms, my other hand reached for his hood and hooked it down.

"Sam..."

Chapter 336 - [Bonus]I'm Not Over You, But I'm Over It.

"Sam..."

He snapped his head, drawing his lips away from my hands, and faced me. The side of his lips curled up into a gentle smile as his eyes softened.

"Did you miss me?" he asked in a low tone, guiding my hand to his lips with his eyes on me.

"Because I do, and words aren't enough to describe how I longed for you."

His voice went past my ears, as I could only stare at him like a fool. He truly looked like Sam, speak like Sam, and felt like Sam.

"Wake up, Lilou," I whispered, laughing under my breath as I grip his hand tightly. His brows arched briefly as I smirked..

"Your ability... it's great," I commended, and he frowned. "It is so great that it shouldn't have existed."

"Love, it's -- "

"Lakresha." I closed my eyes so as not to see his face while I rip him apart. A large scythe formed under my hand. "Be thankful. Your death will be quick and relatively painless."

My eyes remained closed as I swung my weapon down to his arm. I would chop him limb by limb — I didn't need to open my eyes, as I could feel his presence to do all that.

"Ah, wait —!" he yelled, pulling his hand away from me to avoid my attack. "Goodness, my love! If you cut my arm, I can't even sew it back!"

"You don't need to sew it back since I will chop your fingers," I replied coldly, launching another attack, but it landed on the nearby shelf instead.

"Lilove!"

I ground my teeth and continuously attacked him. This time, I went fiercer and faster, not caring if this small bungalow would be nothing but rumbles. As I did, his complaints went shorter until he was too busy dodging instead of speaking.

If I knew it was an illusion, I wouldn't feel too mad about it. Perhaps I would let him live for a little while and interrogate him to death. However, his abilities felt too real that I thought killing him now was better than giving him an opportunity in the future.

'It felt so real that I nearly believed it.' I thought, hearing the desk split in half as Lakresha landed on it, eyes still closed. 'I will kill him for sure. I'm glad to hear Sam's voice again, but before I waver and get trapped by someone's else ability... before he drags me to death... I will end him.'

My resolve to end this person grew stronger by the second. I slowly opened my eyes and my gaze immediately caught him from the corner of the room.

"Is that all you can do? Just dodge?" I asked, followed by a ridiculing chuckle. "I know someone who had a strong illusion ability, but that's all he can do. His head rolls to the ground when faced with someone who wouldn't fall to that illusion."

"My wife, let me exp --"

Before he could finish his sentence, I flashed towards him and unhesitatingly swung Lakresha down to him. His eyes widened upon sensing that I was coming to kill him.

"Holy fuck!" He cursed, gritting his teeth as he slammed his elbow against the wall which immediately shatters and he leaped away. I missed him by a second, but that only made me smirk.

"Stop running, you fool." I held the upper part of the hole, tilting my head as I walked outside languidly.

"Wife! Please, hear me out!" My eyes glinted as I charged towards him, swinging Lakresha from left to right, then up to down, and he dodged them all.

"My wife, my darling, my love!" He called while dodging my attacks. "I know you're angry and you want to kill me. I will gladly offer my neck and sharpen the butchering knife for you, but you see --"

"Stop." I halted, gazing at him with no emotions in my eyes. "You had avoided all my attacks, which means you are more skilled than you actually look like."

"But I look like your husband! What do you mean I look more skilled than I actually look like?" His nose scrunched up, not even bothered by the wounds I had already inflicted on him. "I look strong!"

"Hah... you copied even his arrogance that is frustrating to the core," I muttered, gripping the scythe tighter.

"What? I never thought you think my arrogance is frustrating to the core."

I ignored his remarks, taking deep breaths. "Say, you foolish man, what is it you want from me?"

"Uhm... you?"

"And what will you offer me?" I asked, and he furrowed his brows. "Do you think you're the only person who wants me? I'm asking, what kind of benefit will you offer me to have me?"

This time, he went into silence as we gazed at each other. It felt strange to look at my husband's face as my enemy. However, I convinced myself this was not my husband. This was not Sam.

"If you think this ability of yours is enough, you're more foolish than I thought." I chuckled, shaking my head lightly. "You can copy my husband's face, mannerism, and everything, but you will never be him, and you showing yourself with that face is simply an insult that is punishable by death."

My eyes glinted as my aura thickened. For reasons unknown, since he bore the face of my husband, I felt like saying things I wanted to tell him.

"I'm not over you, Sam. I will never be." I paused, raising Lakresha as the ground I stood cracked. "However, I am over it."

In a beat, I disappeared from my spot and appeared in front of him. "I'm done playing with you," came out a bitter remark as I thrust Lakresha that shifted into a sword to his chest.

The only reason I hadn't killed him was that I had to take some time to convince myself killing this person didn't mean killing my husband. But now that I was fully convinced this person wasn't my Sam, I felt no mercy to him.

"See? You're strong." I smirked, gazing at the sword as he stopped it by a hand. Blood trickled down the blades of my sword, making me lock eyes with him.

His eyes grew solemn, narrowing them into slits. "But I'm not done playing, Lilove. Please forgive me, but I think I can only talk to you once you've calmed down."

To my surprised, he pulled my sword to him. Since I was holding my sword tightly, his force swept me towards him. Before I knew it, he had snatched my Lakresha while he carried me on his shoulder like a sack of wheat!

"What are you -- "

"Your Grace!" Suddenly, I heard Klaus's voice, making me raise my head. Once our eyes met, I saw his eyes dilated.

"I told you before, remember? I will abduct you." The man who was carrying me muttered, and before I could react, he dashed towards the cliff and jumped.

"Your Grace!!"

Chapter 337 - Have A Good Night, Grimsbanne.

All I could do was watch Klaus yell as he dash towards us. I held my hand out, but this man jumped off the hill. My breath hitched as we fell down and at that moment, the world felt like it revolved slower. I couldn't act or retaliate for a second as I tried to absorb everything that had happened.

"Hold tight, my wife." The impostor's voice snapped me out of my trance and the world returned to its normal pace. "We will have a long... ah! Wait! Stop biting me!"

His feet crashed on the slope, but I kept biting his shoulder as hard as I could. My eyes glistened with intense rage, biting him, but that only made him tighten his grip around my legs.

"Ah, crap!" he struggled, and I let him go upon realizing he wouldn't let me go even if I bit off his shoulder. Instead, I gazed up to where he jumped off.

"Follow me," I whispered, reaching everyone who had a link with me.. To give them more clues, I bit my hand until it bled, leaving a trail of blood.

"I said, stop hurting yourself!" the man grumbled while sliding down the slope.

I cast him a glare, grinding my teeth. "You are so dead."

"Cool! Kill me, but let's talk first!"

My eyes constricted as I struggled under his grip. He had Lakresha, and I couldn't deny that he was strong. If he wasn't strong and fast, I wouldn't be in this ordeal. I played too much, and I regretted it. Although my regret was not because I was afraid he would kill me. What terrified me the most was I would start believing that he was my Sam.

'I couldn't let that happen.' I thought, alarmed as I started pounding my fist against his back. "Let me go! Let me go! I will kill you!" I kept yelling the same thing over and over and over, going hysterical to buy my people some time.

"Love, stop! Calm down!"

I didn't listen to him and continued on struggling. If he tossed me away, that would be my perfect opportunity to end him.

"Ahh..." Finally, he seemed he had enough as he planted his hand on my hips and threw me away like a doll. As I flew down, watching him hovering over me with his cloak flowing behind, he ruffled his dark hair. I just noticed the color of his hair... he looked like Sam, but his hair color was different. It was also longer.

"Lexx..." my voice shook, seeing him reach his hand towards me once again. However, I wouldn't let him get his hands on me again. So, I looked down to where we were falling.

Once I looked back at him, I was within his reach. The side of my lips curled into a smirk, planting my palm on his chest and pushed him back.

"Not a chance." I clicked my tongue as pushing him also gave me a boost to land earlier than him.

"Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Ah, shiii!"

I turned around midair so I could choose where to land. My eyes searched for a tree for a better landing. It was foolish of me to underestimate that person, but once we landed, no more playing.

'Stop thinking he is your husband. No matter how he resembled him, he is not Sam! You saw him die that day!' My mind reminded me, making me grit my teeth.

"He is not Sam. No matter how he acts and looks like him..." and that made me recall when Stefan imposed as Sam back in Cunningham. That memory only solidified my resolution that that man was not Sam.

Soon, a tree was within my reach, so I held my hand out to avoid landing in the wrong foot. I'd surely get bruises and maybe, have some minor injuries and broken bones —? not that I had no injuries, to begin with. Using darkfield and lose control over it had already taken a toll on my body.

"Just for now," I told myself. "I can still shrug him o..."

"Caught you!" My mind buzzed, feeling his firm arm around my waist as he pulled me against his body. "It's a mistake to let you go."

And in a blink of an eye, we crashed on some trees while some small branches grazed me. After our crash, we were both hanging on a tree branch with his hand holding the branch while the other carrying me.

"How did he..." I slowly turned my head back to him only to see the aggravating smug grin on his face. Only then I realized his cloak was gone and his upper shirt, revealing his muscular and a top full of wounds.

Without notice, he loosened his grip on the branch and landed on the ground. "I'm sorry, my love. You can punish me all you want later, but your people are too fast. I won't hand you over to anyone." That was what he said before he unhesitatingly knocked me unconscious.

Samael smacked his lips as he bent over, checking Lilou to see if she was unconscious. A deep sigh slipped past his lips, realizing he was making bad decisions one after another.

"I forgot she had evolved to a tigress and not just an angry cat anymore." He clicked his tongue, recalling he had tossed her previously so as to divert her attention. But instead of getting scared, she saw it as an opportunity.

"Anyway, we have to get moving, my wife." He pulled her up, carrying her in a bridal style while he jogged. "I will apologize later, heh."

With a big smile on his face, Samael's jogs grew faster like a wind. He could feel that people — a lot of people — were coming after him to kill him. This amused him as it seemed Lilou's people would slaughter anyone who would touch her.

"You really did it, wife... Grimsbanne is no longer mine." His smile grew gentler as this place felt unfamiliar to him. "You had unified this place... you made me so proud of you, wife."

When he blinked ever so slowly, his eyes glinted menacingly as he increased his speed out of Grimsbanne.

"Rufus, Fabian, retreat." Samael suddenly halted, turning around as he narrowed his eyes. "They are so annoying." He remained silent for a moment, taking a deep breath as he closed his eyes.

"Have an early good night, Grimsbanne," he murmured before a largely invisible barrier expanded across the entire Grimsbanne.

Chapter 338 - This Is Your Plan?

Meanwhile, Klaus suddenly paused in pursuing Lilou's scent when he noticed that some knights with him collapsed one after another. His brows furrowed, looking back before gazing up at the sky.

"Damn it!" he ground his teeth as his hand clenched. The naked eye couldn't see it, but he knew someone had unleashed a powerful ability across Grimsbanne.

His mind then went back to the memory of the person who abducted Lilou. All he had seen was his back, and even with the blood dripping from Lilou and the man, he couldn't discern the scent of the man's blood.

"Klaus!" suddenly, Silvia's voice reached his ear before appearing beside him. "The people in Banse are collapsing one after another — even some new knights. Where is Lilou?"

"Someone abducted her."

"That's impossible.. She won't let someone do that to her unless she is planning something."

Klaus's eyes glinted, recalling Lilou's shocked reaction. "Silvia, take Yul and everyone who is strong enough to resist this power to take care of the town's folk. I and her shadow knights will track her."

Silvia studied Klaus' solemn expression, pursing her lips, and nodded. Seeing Klaus take this as his priority only meant Lilou's safety was compromised.

"Bring her back." She remarked before disappearing from her spot to execute the order from the chief knight.

His eyes sharpened, staring in the direction he could smell Lilou's scent. "I will bring my queen back, for sure."

Night came and Rufus, Fabian, and Samael managed to return to one of the secret estates in Whistlebird, situated far away from the main city. Samael gazed at Lilou, who was lying on the bed.

"This is your plan, Your Grace?" asked Rufus, who stood from the other side of the bed. "To abduct Her Grace and have an entire garrison coming after us?"

"We'll deal with them later."

"My lord..." Rufus let out a deep sigh, pinching the bridge of his nose in distress.

"What happened to Fabian?" Samael queried without taking his eyes off of Lilou.

"We faced the former members of the third squadron. Fabian inflicted grave injuries, but he is alright."

"I always thought Fabian is a sadist, but it seems he's a masochist."

"That aside, we have way bigger issues than Fabian's perverseness, Your Grace." Rufus let out another heavy exhale as he stared at Samael and then at Lilou. "She will go wild once she regains consciousness."

"That's why I tied her up." Samael sprawled his hand towards her, brushing the strands of her hair. "Give us a moment, Rufus. I haven't seen her for a while and I will appreciate it if you give us some quality time."

"Quality time... I don't think she will simply smile like she used to and celebrate once she knows we're all alive. Her Grace might as well bury us all herself." Upon stating his piece, Rufus turned around and marched towards the door.

"Bring Fabian here later and some tools for skinning someone." Samael's request made Rufus turn his head back, nodding before leaving.

As soon as the door shut closed, a deafening silence struck Samael's ears. Rufus didn't need to tell him that because Samael was aware that Lilou wouldn't simply welcome them back with open arms.

"You were right when you say I was foolish," came out a muffled acknowledgment. "I really missed you."

Silence enveloped the two of them as Samael just etched her beauty deep in his mind. It reminded him of her expression while she charged at him. Those millions of unspoken words pooling in her eyes were akin to stakes stabbing him right through his chest.

"I'm not over you, Sam. But I'm over it." were the words she had uttered with deep sorrow in her voice.

He had no idea how she had lived for the past eight months. Of course, he knew she changed, but it was too drastic to the point he could immediately tell her plans.

"I was wrong," a whisper slipped past his lips, feeling this inexplicable pain that brought tears to his soul. "I really am sorry."

Samael cut the rope that tied her wrist and held her hand with both his hands. He rested his forehead against their hands, breathing in and out as he reflected on his actions. It didn't occur to him how bad things turned until he faced her, and witnessed how she recklessly used an unstable darkfield just so she could kill an enemy whom she thought imposing as him.

"I was selfish and I will continue on doing so, Lilou. I will not hand you over to anyone... unless you tell me to."

My head hurts just as much as my body ached. I weakly opened my eyes and saw an unfamiliar ceiling. Just then, all the memories that happened before I fell unconscious surged inside my head unannounced.

My eyes dilated, attempting to move, only to realize my wrist and feet were bound by a rope. I jolted when I heard Sam's voice inside this very room, shifting my eyes to him.

"You're awake?" he inquired, sitting on the divan with two more people inside.

'Fabian? Rufus?' I held my breath upon seeing these two, who simply offered me a smile and then back on what they were doing.

The three of them were staring at the table between them. There were different weapons laid on it, small and big, all deadly.

'Are those the weapons they will use to torture me?' a scoff escaped from my mouth as I chuckled in ridicule.

"My wife, which one would you like?" the man who wore my husband's face turned his head to me, pointing at the table.

"I'm not your wife," I replied coldly, taking a deep breath as I diverted my focus on the rope that bound me. It was a surprise that not only they copied Sam's face, Rufus and Fabian as well. Surely, their shamelessness knows no bounds.

'What the hell is wrong with these ropes?' I ground my teeth as the rope wouldn't budge no matter how I struggled.

"Oh, Fabian tied that one, so it won't come off." My husband's impostor uttered in a light tone, causing me to glare daggers at him.

"My lady, we had prepared all weapons we can gather in a short time." The next second, Fabian's impostor chimed in, moving his hand towards the table. "Please pick one that you like."

"You want me to pick which weapon you will use on me?" I chortled loudly, shaking my head. "It's amazing how you three manage to copy those three — I applaud you for that."

I saw them let out a deep sigh as they looked at me apologetically. I felt nothing but rage in return.

"I am not afraid of death. You can torture me, violate me, or butcher me, I don't fucking care." I leaned my head forward, casting them a fearless smirk before lying comfortably on the bed.

"However, if I came out here alive, you better start looking over your shoulder because I will make sure you will regret using their faces and insulting them like that."

Chapter 339 - Everything

"However, if I came out here alive, you better start looking over your shoulder because I will make sure you will regret using their faces and insulting them like that."

There was a long moment of silence as the three of them stared at me. Strange, I thought. I could see neither abhorrence nor displeasure in their eyes. If anything, there was this strange remorse and worry flickering across their eye.

Why? Was what I wanted to ask, but I decided to ignore it.

"We don't plan to torture, violate, or butcher you, my lady," said Fabian.. He sounded just like him and spoke just like him.

"That is very convincing, especially since I'm tied up in here." A sarcastic chuckle slipped past my lips, shaking my head.

"It may sound strange to you, but we didn't want to tie you up, my lady," he added politely. "We can always untie the rope if you promised to hear us out."

"I promise." My reply was quick, not taking them seriously, as I knew they didn't mean that. I was correct as the three of them went silent, so I raised my brows and turned my head in their direction.

"If you don't start now, my people will arrive before you can kill me."

"Then let them come, for all I care." Suddenly, the person who wore Sam's face chimed in, making me furrow my brows. "These weapons are meant for us. You can choose and check if they are real because I asked Fabian to skin my face to prove I'm not an impostor."

"And you think I will believe that? How silly." A ridiculing chuckle escaped my mouth as I gazed at them. "If this is the game you three want, sure, go ahead. Let Fabian choose since he is an expert in this type of things."

We stared at each other in silence. The three of them had managed to copy those three as if they were real. It was unforgivable, but I should play along. I wanted to see how far would they take this.

Sam's impostor cleared his throat and turned to Fabian. He waved and took a deep breath.

"Fabian, start peeling my face off." He ordered, closing his eyes as he perked his head up. I only watched this Fabian pick up a random dagger and stood on the side of my husband's impostor.

"Please forgive me, my lord. I will surely peel mine after yours." The person who was playing as Fabian let out a deep sigh, casting me one last look. But before he started doing this 'ridiculous' procedure, my husband's impostor peeked through one of his eyes.

"You will have a faceless husband after this," He muttered, indirectly asking me if I was certain if I would let this happen.

"Mhmm."

"Fabian will really peel my face off!"

"Uh huh."

He sighed, realizing getting my sympathy was pointless. "Alright, start."

Fabian glanced at me for the last time but said nothing as he began. He guided that impostor's face to the side, slicing from his jaw and blood immediately oozed from it.

"Shit. This is not the shaving I need." That person grumbled through his gritted teeth, and it seemed that Fabian's impostor wasn't joking as well.

"Alright, stop."? A deep exhale escaped my nostrils as I rolled my eyes. Knowing my enemies was better than having a faceless one.

"Are you sure, my lady?" Rufus — I mean his impostor — queried, as if he wanted me to reconsider. Had he been looking forward to this?

"I don't know why you will go to such an extent just to deceive me. It's not happening," I muttered with disinterest. "Just tell me what you want. An alliance? Money? Power? Perhaps, a marriage?"

"Why would I want a marriage when I'm already married?"

"Then, that's better." I nodded approvingly, staring at the ceiling while feeling their gaze on my side. "Now, cut to the chase and tell me what you want by abducting me. If an alliance is what you want, I might extend my arm and shake hands with you. You were capable of abducting me and proved that you can be beneficial."

Silence followed my remarks, urging me to cock my head to them once again. They were just staring at me and my brows furrowed.

"What? Too straightforward?" I inquired, as it seemed that was what surprised them. "I hate people wasting my time, speak."

Sam's impostor opened and closed his mouth like a fish. "Give us a moment."

"Yes, my lord." and the two cast me a brief look before they left. Did they call him 'my lord?', I was still suspicious if this was Stefan's doings or what, regardless, I remained calm.

The person who was left in the room with me trudged towards the bed. He plopped his butt down on the edge of the mattress. The blood dripping from his jaw instantly stained the sheet, but I ignored it.

"What? Do you think forcing yourself on me will..." I trailed off abruptly as he bent over and the rope that was binding my wrist came loose. He didn't stop there as he loosened the other one.

As he undid the rope around my wrist, he went over to my feet and spoke. "An alliance... I guess."

"An alliance is what you want?" I quirked a brow, pushing myself up by my elbow, and watched him undo the last rope that bound my foot.

"I don't need power or wealth."

"Then what is this alliance for?"

He raised his gaze at me. "I want you to protect someone."

The longer I stare at his pair of burning eyes, the more it reminded me of how Sam look at me with such intensity. I averted my eyes away, taking deep breaths and reminding myself that he was not Sam.

"That is not what I expect from you," I replied, clearing my throat. "And what will I get in return for protecting this one?"

"Everything."

Chapter 340 - A Punishment That Is Honestly Devastating

"Everything." He answered, eyes on me. "I think you're not dumb enough to think you can beat me if we butted heads right now."

"Take that face off and see what I will do." I leaned forward, taunting him.

"Unfortunately, I can't. Why don't you just accept that this face is my face?"

"Hah... bold." I chuckled, rocking my head as my eyes fell on my unbound feet. "I like your attitude, can't expect anything less from someone who disrupts the peace of my land and abducted me here.."

I bent my knees closer to me, stretching my ankle in a circular motion. There was this part of me that wanted to reconsider his offer. However, with someone who used my husband and his trusted men's faces, how the hell did he think I would forgive them?

"This person I was talking about... is very important to me. Much more important than this world." He spoke, breaking the silence between us. "If peeling my face off will make you agree with this, or even if I had to offer my arm or leg, I will. Just say it."

My eyes veered back to him, staring at him and seeing the sincerity in his eyes. "It seems this person is truly important to you, but why do you think I will protect him or her?"

"If you agree with it, I will let you go."

A brief chuckle came from me. "Does this mean I have no choice but to agree?"

"You always have a choice, Lilou."

"Don't call my name with that face." My voice pitched as my eyes widened slightly. "Just don't or I will cut your tongue and make you eat it."

His expression was solemn, as his eyes never left mine. He parted his lips, but no words came out.

"You are asking the wrong person's help." I diverted the subject as I looked around this room and noticed how old and dusty it appeared. "It's foolish for you to think that I will accept this offer after using my husband's face. And even if I agree with an alliance with you, do you truly believe I won't betray you?"

"You don't tell people you will betray them if you plan to do so."

"Fool." My eyes were on him, feeling a little calmer the more I talked to him... or a lot more furious. "You look like you trust me too much... that is very unlikely to the person whom you're copying so hard. That person never trusts me and now he's dead."

Silence ensued as I flung my legs out of the other side of the bed. For reasons unknown, I knew he wouldn't hurt me, but even if I thought wrong, I could escape from here this time for sure.

"Do you hate him?" I stopped at his question, feeling his gaze on my back. "If he, your husband, comes back alive..."

"He won't." I cut him off before he could continue with a seemingly ridiculous idea. "He will never come back to me. The dead will always be dead. Stop feeding me ideas because you're wasting your time."

"Time... I have a lot of time to waste."

I looked back. "I don't."

"You don't have time to waste, or were you running out of time?"

"Think whatever you like, but I'm leaving." This time, I stood out of the bed and faced him, who remained on the other side of the mattress. "If I were you, be on your guard and leave this place before I slit your throat."

Giving out a warning for someone I wanted to kill was unordinary for me. However, he had undone the rope and let me go. I didn't want to feel indebted to him, even though they were the ones who tied me up in the first place.

"I was wrong," came out a murmur, catching my attention while I massaged my wrist. "This punishment is honestly devastating, but... just."

I pursed my lips as I couldn't take my eyes off of him the second I laid them again on him. He hung his head low and just staring at him brought this tension to my throat.

Was it rage? Sympathy? Hope? I had no idea. But seeing him act so melancholic brought pain to me.

"Just how will I make you believe me?" he raised his head, storming over the bed while I instinctively took several steps back until my back hit against the wall.

He planted his palms on either side of me, eyes glistened with... tears. "It's me, love. I'm here, I'm real, I said, I'm back, and I'm sorry. Just what kind of language should I speak for you to understand that, Lilou?"

My breath hitched as my heart suddenly pounded against my chest; it beat so loudly it rang in my ears. Those words he had uttered... those were the words Sam told me when he first confessed.

I'm here, I'm real, I said I like you, and I want you. Just what kind of language should I speak for you to understand that, Lilou?

Those were his words before, and hearing him say almost similar words broke the last straw of rational reasoning in my head. And yet, the emotion that dominated my heart was hate; I detest this person even more for showing me a sliver of hope. For reminding me of a wish buried deep in my heart. That was... Sam was alive, and he finally returned to me.

"Cruel." Tears came as if at last long, my accumulated ocean of brine trickled through. "I hate you, Sam."

"I'm sorry if your husband is neither good nor bad," he leaned in, whispering in my lips. "I'm just... selfish."

And I closed my eyes, melting in the warmth of his lips that I longed for so long. Before I knew it, my arms slid over his shoulder, standing on my toes as I pressed my lips against his, deepening our kiss.

My mind told me this was wrong; that I was stepping into a trap.

But my heart said: "If this was a dream, I'm begging you, please don't wake me up."