

# The Duke 341

Chapter 341 - Pain, Pain, Go Away.\*\*\*

[WARNING: MATURE CONTENT AHEAD. NOT ADVISABLE TO AGES 17 AND BELOW. PROCEED WITH CAUTION.]

As soon as our lips met, I finally felt my heart... beat for the first time in eight months. The same heart that had died, frozen in time in his last moments. Should I be happy? Relieved? No. I knew this man I was kissing passionately was someone else.

However, I couldn't stop myself. The tenderness of his lips and how his firm arm gripped around my waist as he carried me to the bed just melted the ice around my heart. I missed him, and even those words were an understatement of how I longed for him..

'Just this moment... I want to believe he is Sam.' was the voice in my head said, feeling the soft mattress on my back. I opened my eyes, watching him draw away and his eyes hovered over me.

A subtle smile resurfaced on my lips, reaching for his face as I cupped the wound on his jaw. "You win... congratulations for breaking me, again."

A shallow breath slipped past his lips. Seeing pain flicker across his eyes made me wonder why he looked more hurt than I do? I'm unsure, but what I knew was that we're both in pain.

He leaned his cheek against my palm. "It's me, love... it's me," he repeated under his breath, and each time, they sounded more desperate and full of agony.

So my other hand reached and cupped his other cheek. I don't know what to say as I just stared at him.

"You said... you missed me," I whispered, smiling bitterly. "Do you know how much I missed you, too? For eight months, Sam, I was a walking corpse... and today, I died for the second time." Because he successfully deceived me, making me believe that the person I was staring at the moment was my husband.

It hurts, especially that I knew I was clinging to false hope. Despite knowing the consequences that might follow this night, I was willing to spend a night with Sam.

"Just one night with you... no, even just one second. I'm willing to spend just another second with my husband," I said, staring at him in desperation. "You can kill me after... just let me be with him for the last time."

"Love..." his voice shook as it cracked. "I will give you a lifetime with me, I promised."

He bent over, planting a kiss on my lips, and I smiled against his lips. A tear trickled down on my side as I closed my eyes. I wrapped my arms around his neck, feeling his weight on me.

'A lifetime... that's all I want and I'm aware I will never have it. But for tonight, I will believe those words. A lifetime. Yes, a lifetime with you is all I need.'

His fingertips stroke the side of my neck before his lips parted from mine, planting slow and ardent kisses on my jaw down to my neck. His hand started pulling the straps of my clothes, taking his precious time as if we have all the time in the world.

"Sam..." I moaned, my chest moving in and out heavily. I followed his lead and all I could remember was lying under him with all my clothes missing.

I stretched my arm to him, spreading it as I welcomed him into my embrace. "Come," I said, as he took off his undershirt and bent over to me.

"You are driving me crazy," his voice was low, snaking his arms around my waist as he tugged me down. "I've never felt so jealous, I can kill."

I giggled, stretching my neck as he placed soft kisses on my shoulder. "Why would you get jealous? I was a good wife."

"So good you're making out with your husband while thinking about your husband." He sucked air through his gritted teeth, frustrated at this situation.

I slapped his shoulder lightly, pushing his head away so I could see his face. "You are my husband," I affirmed with a nod.

"At least for tonight?"

His question brought this subtle smile to my lips. "For a lifetime. You said that, right?"

"A lifetime living under your dead husband's shadow..." He clenched his teeth, cocking his head from side to side in irritation. "... fuck!"

The more I talked to him, the more I believed he was truly Sam. Only Sam would be this ungrateful for receiving crumbs from others. He was selfish and greedy; a man who would have it all or not at all.

"Stop complaining, you." I chuckled, poking the apex of his nose with my finger. "Among all other men who..."

"Sam." I trailed off as he suddenly cut me off, making me raise my brows. "Don't think of other men aside from Samael, Lilou."

His voice volumed down as he bent down for a kiss, whispering, "Just me, Lilou," and continued to shower me with brief kisses across my face. "I'm already pissed enough to compete against myself, so don't speak another man's name."

A giggle slipped past my lips as he kissed my eye. He paused upon tasting the salty liquid that lingered around my eyes. Sam then drew his head back a little, his thumb wiping my tears.

"I'm sorry for making you cry." His eyes softened, warming up my heart and then he kissed my eye once again. "I'm sorry for putting you through all this, and even when I'm frustrated that you won't believe a word I say, I don't have the right to get mad."

"You know what to say, I might just forgive Sam because of you."

My response induced a bitter chuckle from him. "Your husband... he is the one who hurt you the most, didn't he?"

"Mhm." I cupped his jaw.

"You loved the wrong man. Have you ever thought it was a mistake to love him?"

His response made me chuckle as I shook my head. "It's never a mistake to have loved. His only sin is he died... right before my eyes." My eyes remained on him, smiling subtly. "You were my world and that day, my world crumble down."

The moment he died, my world shattered into a million pieces. I knew at that second I would never recover, and I was correct. Until now, it was still Sam and this world I lived in now was just simply grey. I've never seen the colors of this world ever since.

"Do you know what's more terrifying than death?" I queried, batting my eyes languidly. "For me, the scariest thing is living."

I looked at him straight in the eye only to repeat, "I'm more afraid of living than dying, Sam."

He was silent as his gaze seemed he could see my hollow soul. I couldn't make up for what he could be thinking right now, but it didn't matter.

"Where does it hurt?" he inquired after his long silence.

"Hmm?"

"Where does it hurt?" he repeated, not that I didn't hear him the first time.

I didn't know what to answer, so I just blurted out. "Everywhere," not that I was lying.

"Okay," he hummed, planting a kiss from my forehead and then across my face. His lips' last destination was my lips before going down to continue kissing my neck, shoulder blades, arms, and hand.

As he did so, he chanted repeatedly under his breath, "Pain, pain, go away."

I smiled as he shifted from my other hand, kissing his way up. "Pain, pain, go away..." and those words started to sound like a spell, clearing up the dark shroud around my heart.

Chapter 342 - Tonight, I Am All Yours.\*\*\*

[WARNING: MATURE CONTENT AHEAD. NOT ADVISABLE TO AGES 17 AND BELOW. PROCEED WITH CAUTION.]

I knew he wasn't Sam, but his actions, his every kiss, it didn't even feel sensual, more like heartwarming. He also knew what to say and do things in perfect time. Like magic, all the rage I felt for him for using my husband's face vanished.

I was grateful, but as well... pathetic.

For breaking my own rules, for falling for someone who resembled my husband's soul, and just for simply letting him do whatever he wanted to do with me, I condemned myself. But I had sinned enough, so sinning once more wouldn't matter..

'I'll deal with the guilt later,' I told myself, watching him hold my foot as he leaned to his side. He planted a kiss on my instep, eyes burning on me.

"Done," he announced, as he had kissed me all over my body.

"Thank you," I expressed with a smile, but just then, he kissed my instep once again, going up to my shin. It was hot as the sound of his kisses echoed in my ears like a lullaby.

Sam lifted my foot and placed it on his shoulder, tracing my inner thigh with the apex of his nose. Even after all that, his eyes rarely left my gaze, as if observing every little change in my reaction.

"Ah --" I snapped as he suddenly bit me lightly.

"Did that hurt?" he inquired, placating the area he bit with a soft kiss.

"I was just... surprised." I pursed my lips, biting my lower lip. Sam would occasionally bite me whenever sadness tried to join the party — it was already sad, though. Still, his constant bites diverted my attention, as I felt like weeping at some point.

"You should be on your guard, Your Grace." He reminded me, making me chuckle, but was short-lived as he squeezed my thigh. "Because if you don't, I'll take advantage of your vulnerability and capture your heart."

"Pfft--!" Capture my heart? He didn't mean it literally, right?

"Well, I might as well give it to --" I gasped, mouth wide open as he suddenly placed a thumb on my nub. He carefully pressed a bit, moving it in a slow, circular motion.

"Don't give it so easily," he muttered, kissing my inner thigh whilst working on my nub. "Let me work hard for it."

"Then... you will have to work hard all your life and the only consolation you will get is my body." I cleared my throat, toes curling as I hissed when he slowly slid his thumb down to my entrance.

"Hmm, no." He withdrew his thumb to his lips, licking it while staring at me. His action forced me to focus on him, gulping down while biting my inner lip.

"Taste just as sweet as ever." He smirked, eyes glinting. I'm bewitched. He then swiftly held both my thighs and pulled me down a little. He shot me a sharp look, smiling slightly.

"I am a man who takes all, Love." Slowly, he guided my knees up, spreading them as his eyes landed on my beaver. "And all means your body, your mind, your heart, your soul, your life, and your death — your all."

"That... is a long list."

"It is, indeed." He nodded, bending over leisurely. "I'll start with your body and I will make sure that what I will do to your body will never leave your mind."

"Wai — " My breath instantly hitched as I instinctively closed my knees. However, His other hand blocked my other leg as he licked my nub. A reckless 'ah,' escaped my mouth as I arched my back, toes curling.

His tongue flicked against my bud, causing me to shiver each time. He didn't give me time to use my head as my mind gradually focused on how he twirled and swam in this pool of moisture.

It was amazing.

"Sam..." I called softly, running my fingers through his dark hair. "I --" and as if he didn't like me talking, I gasped once again as he slid a finger inside. Was he insane? How could he... I bit my lower lip as hard as I could, wrapping my legs around him while his tongue and finger did their work.

Sam... oh, Sam.

My grip on his hair tightened, tugging it as I closed my eyes and arched my back. He was driving me crazy as his other hand reached for my bosom, clipping my teat in between his thumb and forefinger.

Even though all I did was lie down, I was panting and sweating, basking in his scalding flames. My head felt light as a feather, intoxicated and slowly getting hooked on this type of ecstasy I had nearly forgotten.

"Sam, no, wait..." My breath hitched as he quickened his pace, hastening me to release everything — to give him my all. Just one last thrust and my mouth fell open, arching my back as my toes clasped the sheet, feeling the heart of my femininity pulsate.

I panted for air, feeling my knees tremble as they went weak. My grip on his hair loosened as my body relaxed, twitching every few heartbeats, and he pulled his finger out. Standing on his knees, he gazed down at me, tilting his head to one side and then slowly to the other.

"How lovely," he muttered, licking his finger sensually as if he still hadn't had his fill. I could feel all the heat traveling to my face, staring back at him.

"Your face still makes that reaction every time." He pointed out, making me raised my brows, closed-lipped. "You're driving me crazy."

Sam bent over once again as his hand landed on my palm, sliding his fingers in between mine. His weight covered my body; his chest against mine, inhaling my deep breaths. I could feel the heat of his budge under his pants in between the junction of my legs.

"How can I control myself...?" he whispered, brushing his nose against mine as if he was suppressing his intense hunger, his thirst. He was akin to a depraved beast that didn't want to end feasting after so long.

I mustered all my strength to lean forward, planting a peck on his lips. "Don't control." His eyes that were burning passionately raised to meet mine.

"Tonight, I'm all yours." I smiled subtly, and his eyes immediately darkened with desire, with need, with longing. The consent I gave him, he surely didn't disappoint because he had taken everything — everything I had forfeited and didn't.

Chapter 343 - Don't You Have Enough Stamina?\*\*\*

[WARNING: MATURE CONTENT AHEAD. NOT ADVISABLE FOR AGES 17 AND BELOW. PLEASE PROCEED WITH CAUTION.]

"Tonight, I'm all yours."

"Not just tonight." He brushed the tip of his nose against mine, tilting his head. "You are trapped with me... forever."

His words cut me through me like a knife, but I still smiled, accepting his lips with eyes closed. I guessed he was right.. Letting go of this delusion would kill me. I barely survived his death and knew that this person was simply giving me a taste of Sam. I couldn't just go back again.

"I love you, Lilou. More than my own, I love you," he whispered into my mouth, resting his forehead against mine. "So live for me, will you?"

Tears pooled behind my eyelids, clutching his shoulder until my hand trembled. How could he speak the same words Sam had uttered that were exclusively for my ears to hear?

"Please tell me you are Sam. That everything was just a bad dream and I'm finally back to reality." Slowly, I opened my eyes, but I could barely see through the tears that were spilling from my eyes.

"I am, Love. I am your husband." He stroked my hair, planting desperate kisses on my lips. "I am back. It's really me... please believe me. It's me, Lilou."

He kept planting kisses on my lips until drops of liquid dripped on me. He was crying? Sam would never cry... but maybe there was more I hadn't seen from him.

"Yes, you are." Those were a spell that bound me to believe he was Sam. "You are you." He should be Sam and keep being Sam until I was six feet underneath his feet.

Our brief kisses slowly deepened as he cradled me in his firm arms while I wrapped my arms around him. The thought of 'delusion' slowly disappeared from my head, as I completely believed this would be my reality from now on.

A reality that only I need to believe. Sam was alive and back to me. That was right.

His palm outlined my body down to my hips and thigh, squeezing it as he lifted my thigh. He didn't break his kiss from me, but instead, deepened it.

"Mine," he whispered in between the breaks of our lips, feeling his bulge against my entrance.? A soft hum slipped past my lips and closed one of my eyes as he planted a kiss on it.

"Don't cry. I won't hurt you again," he said, stroking his erection against the heart of my core. "I'll be gentle."

"Mhm, please." I smiled, pulling him tighter into my embrace until I could feel more of his weight.

Slowly and carefully, he slid in while I stretched for his girth. A hiss of satisfaction escaped our lips as he dived deeper until he was fully inside.

"Does it hurt?" he inquired, staring down at me with worry. The anxiety in his eyes caused me to smile as I shook my head as an answer.

"No. It's alright, you worry too much."

"That is because I might lose control, silly." He kissed my lips once again before he started moving, slowly and carefully. "I want to please you, and not hurt you. So, tell me if you feel any discomfort, hmm?"

"Too gentle." I giggled, leaning forward to kiss him. "I will, then."

"Good girl."

Sam started thrusting in and out slowly until I was fully adjusted to his girth. He hastened his pace just a tiny bit, while I felt his shoulders trembled.

"Don't you have enough stamina?" I blurted out, making him freeze instantly. He drew away, looking at me in dismay.

I pursed my lips. "I — I didn't mean it that way like that. I'm not trying to insult you, I'm just worried."

"Do you have any idea how I am trying to stay sane while I can feel you tighten around me?" his voice was deep, breathing through his mouth. "I'm taking it slow because if I don't, I might just..."

My breath instantly hitched as he nudged in without notice. I panted for air, staring at those pair of deep crimson eyes that were hovering over me. He was studying my reaction and when he noticed I didn't dislike his rough action, he did it again.

"Ah, Sam --" I instinctively clasped his shoulder blades, but he bent over, thrusting the rest of my words back in my throat.

A protesting moan slipped past my lips and into his mouth, but he didn't stop. Instead, he continued to pick up his pace. The sheet underneath me rubbed against my back as our skin slapped against each other.

Sweat dripping, heat arising, and mind buzzing. We kissed as if we were sucking each other's soul and united as if his body were mine, and mine was his. Even when he went a little rough and aggressive, holding me tightly as if he was afraid that I would go somewhere, I let him.

His passion and desperation condensed into one left a memory in my soul. I didn't feel like he was fucking me. Surprisingly, I felt loved... beautiful, complete.

"I love you," I claimed under my breath, staring deep into his eyes and watched him bent over.

"More than the world, I love you." He asserted, claiming my lips once again. "I love you, Lilou, I love you."

Those words he had repeated like a broken record sounded more like music to my ears. His hot, heavy breaths caressed my ears, while I arched my back, squirming underneath him.

"Oh, Sam..." and just a few more thrusts, all that I had accumulated for eight months, gushed out like a river. I throb around him, shivering under his firm body. He didn't stop, though.

Instead, I heard him hiss as he seemingly lost control, and pounded even more intensely until he let out a grunt. He held me closer as I felt him pulsate, jerking inside while biting my shoulder.

"You are amazing," he whispered, kissing my shoulder as if to placate me.

"No, you are." I giggled, turning my head to him as we kissed ardently while he didn't pull out.

We kissed for as long as I could remember until I snapped my eyes upon feeling his hips move again. Instinctively, I pushed his shoulder away and broke away from his kiss.

"Excuse me?" My brows raised, but that didn't faze him as he continued.

A devious smirk plastered on his lips. "I'm sorry, but that didn't even hurt my stamina."

And I knew at that moment, no one could stop him.

#### Chapter 344 - What's On Your Mind?

I don't know how many times we did it. If I didn't ask him for mercy, he would continue this for an entire month. That was what he said; a month of doing nothing but that.

"Are you hurt anywhere?" he asked, snapping me out of my trance.

"No." I shook my head, resting my head on his chest, and I moved closer to him. My leg rested over him while his hand caressed my back gently.

"What are you thinking?"

I didn't reply immediately, biting my lower lip and drew circles on his chest. "You."

"What about me?"

My eyes softened as I smiled. What about him? Well, there was a lot to think about him, so where should I start?

"Your fingertip," I whispered, feeling his fingertips trace my spine; a habit of his. "I like how your fingertip feels against my skin. I also wonder how you have such a strong shoulder, yet my head feels more comfortable lying on it than a cushion."

"Your body too. It barely has heat, but it burns so intensely, though the irony is I only felt warm." I continued, assisting myself up by an elbow to look at him. "And when I look at those pair of crimson eyes that shine brighter than a ruby, I feel the most beautiful. It's funny when I think about how those lips spew poisons, but taste so sweet and had such a soft texture."

I studied his expression as he peered back at me, tucking the strands of my hair behind my ear. My words didn't seem to affect him, but the way the corner of his eyes moved up and how his temple wrinkled told me he was smiling inside.

"Should I continue?" I inquired, raising my brows as the side of my lips curled up into a smile. "I have a long list."

"Let's hear it, then."

I cleared my throat, lifting a finger, and traced his face, starting from his brows. "You know? The softest thing that I had ever seen was how your eyebrows move down when I say something so simple? It makes me think you are very easy to please. Just a few simple words and you're already happy."

"Whenever you scrunch up your nose, it's funny. But how unfair it was that you are not any less breathtaking despite that. I was always in awe whenever your jaw tightens. It means you know you wanted to say something bullshit but decided not to." A chuckle slipped past his lips as a charming smile slowly let itself known.

"You are the most charming when you smile, but also the scariest. Sometimes, I wonder how those same lips could smile so beautifully but can also give such an alarming feeling."

"Are you alarmed now?"

I shook my head, gazing down as I reached for his hand, guiding it up. My palm carefully settled on his palm, sliding my fingers in between the gaps of his finger.

"I had a rough hand, but it's hilarious when compared to yours. My hands feel so soft." My smile remained.

"Are the calluses on my palms bother you?"

Again, I shook my head and set my eyes on him. "Because you have rough hands, I don't feel shame holding them."



He smiled, wrapping his fingers around mine. For a long time, I was stuck in the frigid winter. But right now, I felt warm... very warm. We went silent for the time being, just smiling at each other while our fingers play against each other.

"Lilou," he called, and I set my eyes back on him, eyebrows raised. He didn't speak immediately, peering at me.

"What?"

"You... don't believe that I am your husband."

My breath hitched for a second before forcing a chuckle out of me. "Of course, I do. You are Sam... you should be."

"You're crazy." I frowned upon hearing that blunt remark. He didn't need to tell me. I already knew something was wrong with my head.

"And you're driving me crazy." He let out a deep exhale. "I can't blame you. I put you through all this, and I don't have the right to complain. I'm sorry."

"You returned, so I've forgiven you." I smiled sweetly. "Just don't die again because if you do, I will look for ways to revive you so I can kill you the third time."

"Bad." He clicked his tongue, lifting his head, and planted a brief kiss on my lips.

"I won't die, never again." He asserted, staring straight into my eyes as if to reassure me.

The determined glints that were flickering across his eyes felt very reassuring. So I nodded, closed-lipped.

"So." I cleared my throat. "What are you planning now?"

"What do you mean?"

"My people were looking for me and I could feel they would reach this place soon. They will kill you if they see you."

"Why would they kill me? I am your husband." His brow arched as his eyes glistened with doubt.

I smiled, crawling up to him. "Silly. I know you are my husband. I believe you are, but they won't."

"And you will let them?"

"Why won't I? I might need their help to stop this madness... or not." I shrugged nonchalantly.

"That's why I'm telling you this. You should go and come see me at least once or twice a month."

"How frustrating... the great me, now a paramour of the Duchess of Grimsbanne, will have to die after sharing a passionate night with her. Cruel, oh, cruel love, what must I do to overcome this intolerable agony?"

I chuckled as he sang his woe, slapping his chest lightly. "Silly. I will look forward to your visits." upon saying my piece, I shook my head, clasping the sheet as I sat upright.

The second I did, his voice sounded lower and solemn. "No fucking way."

"Sam!" I turned around, displeased that he was being stubborn. That didn't faze him, raising his hand and put them under his head, eyes glued on the ceiling.

"I was wrong to keep you in the dark, just because I always believe that to fool my enemies, I have to fool the closest people around me. I realized that too late; the damages had been made and even if I try to mend it, the wounds had been too deep that it had already left a scar." He paused while I stared at him in shock, holding my breath.

"Rufus tells me I already made it this far and I should continue. However, how can I continue if my wife suffers more than a second ago? I might as well just burn the entire kingdom and forget about scheming. It's easier that way, anyway."

"You... what are you talking about?"

His languid eyes slowly drifted to me. "My death is all part of the plan. Didn't I tell you? Keep your eyes closed and mind open and don't trust me so blindly. I know you will get hurt once you figure out the entire plan Fabian and I cooked up behind everyone's back."

Chapter 345 - Will You Court Me?

Meanwhile, Heliot galloped his way through the rocky path in one town in Whistlebird. The night breeze grew harsher as his eyes glinted sharply. While he was staring ahead, his mind traced back to the first time he had a conversation with Lilou. That time he had visited Grimsbanne for the first time before he left the Capital after the founding celebration.

"Prince Heliot, I believed you have a motive in requesting me to lead this negotiation," she said as soon as she sat down across from him. He gazed at her, studying her expression that baffled him quite a bit.

"Are you planning to just look at me?" she inquired, receiving no answer from him. "This negotiation wouldn't proceed if you keep silent."

Heliot bat his eyes languidly. "What is your motive in approaching me?" his question didn't take her by surprise but instead made her smile.

"Depends on your answer.."

"That doesn't make sense."

"I like you, Prince Heliot. You don't seem the type to go around in circles." Lilou took a deep breath, leaning back while tilting her head. "That is why I don't find the need to mind my words."

"You like me?"

She chuckled. "Yes. Flattered?"

"I am." He nodded approvingly, but his expression remained stoic. "But yes, I do have my reasons I requested you take over this negotiation. I want to get to know you."

"To get to know me?"

"Hmm. I was curious why the King of Heart and Spade was smitten with you." He expressed in full honesty. "Of course, with the blood you are carrying, a human who stood the same ground as purebloods is one thing. Reproducing will create a new powerful bloodline is another. But it seems His Majesty La Crox just wants you for something more personal. I'm curious."

"Curious? What is there to be curious about?" she chuckled, shaking her head sideways. "He wants me to bear his heir, that's all. A beauty on his side is a plus."

Heliot peered at her eyes; he couldn't read her. It had only been two weeks since Samael's death, and yet, he couldn't detect grief in her eyes. There was just... nothing. It was strange for him, as he had heard Lilou and Samael had loved each other dearly. Heliot doesn't know love, so he couldn't understand it.

"Is love so easy to throw away?" his question this time made her brows furrow. "I heard tales of the Duke and Duchess of Grimsbanne and how they would die for each other. So, it baffles me why you don't look sad. Did you love His Grace?"

Lilou chuckled, closed-lipped. She studied his face and could tell he was simply being honest with his thoughts.

"My husband and I loved each other. However, our kind of love is not something for us to die for each other." She explained with a subtle smile, peeling her eyes away from him. "Dying is so much easier than how it sounds."

There was a long pause before Lilou continued. "We love each other so much so that we would live, breath, survive for each other, not die."

"I see. That makes sense." Heliot nodded in understanding. "Living is more challenging than dying. How noble. Is that the reason you're done grieving?"

"I didn't grieve." Her eyes veered back to him. "If crying can bring him back, I wouldn't be with you in here. However, no amount of tears, no matter how loud I scream, and abhor this world, he wouldn't come back to me. So, why would I waste my time on something unnecessary?"

Heliot's lips parted, but he pressed them together again. He didn't expect to hear such remarks from her.

"I don't like people seeing me," He remarked, making her brow raised. "I do not understand why emotions were so important to share. I don't like people reading my emotions because they're mine. Your grief is yours, and I respect that. However, that is not what I came here for. I wanted to ask you which will you choose: doing the right thing? Or doing what makes you happy?"

There was a long silence between them as they stared at each other. Although they couldn't read each other's eyes, they could read the emptiness circulating in the room.

"Should I... choose between what makes me happy and what is right?" she queried, breaking the prolonged silence.

Heliot let out a shallow breath, expression still the same. "I don't know what makes you happy, nor what is right. But what I know is my reasons."

"Reasons... and they are?"

"Your life, Your Grace." He didn't beat around the bush as he answered almost instantly. "Will you offer me your life?"

"My life?" Lilou chuckled, studying his solemn expression, and could tell he wasn't joking. "And what will I get in return?"

"My support. On the way here, I could tell Grimsbanne is in a terrible crisis, especially now that it's winter, I could already see the pile of corpses that will loiter the street."

Lilou let out another soft chuckle once again. "You're funny, your highness. You want me to trade my life to develop Grimsbanne?"

"I am giving you an option to choose what will make you happy, Your Grace."

"And you think offering my life to a man I just met will make me happy?"

"The man you just met is someone capable of fulfilling your wish. You are not afraid of death, Your Grace. What terrifies you right now is living. You had lived for his Grace. Aren't you thinking of dying for yourself now that he is gone? But you don't want to die just like that, isn't it?" Heliot cocked his head to the side, eyes glistened with genuine wonder.

"As I mentioned, a human who can stand on the same ground as purebloods is amusing. However, vampires have more pride, ambition, and bigger egos than a person could imagine. They don't accept you."

"They? And who are they?"

"They... those from the mainland. If they get their hands on you, your death is impossible, Your Grace. They will use every drop of your blood for their own benefit. I am simply trying to avoid that from happening." Heliot explained calmly. "We, the Von Stein, don't care if a war between the Heart and Spade will break out. We prefer our peace and you have the ability to disrupt that."

"Hah..." Lilou took a deep breath, keeping her silence for a long time. When she opened her mouth, a kind smile resurface on her lips.

"Will you court me?"

#### Chapter 346 - Those Three Are So Dead

Heliot snapped his eyes as he slowed down. What was ahead of him was a derelict mansion that seemed no one had visited for years. He trotted his way through the broken, rusting gates. Looking around, withered leaves from all the passing season crisped under the steed's sole. Yet, that didn't bother him as he set his eyes on the grey and gloomy old mansion.

"Thank you," He said, petting the horse as he dismounted it. Heliot tied the horse to one pillar of the mansion's porch. There wasn't a sense of dread in his eyes as he entered the seemingly hunted place calmly.

'How quiet,' he thought, glancing back at the opened door as he felt that Lilou's people were already near. 'Her people are truly amazing, in a way.'

Heliot didn't idle anymore as he resumed his steps. Even though it was his first time walking through the mansion, he didn't look around to search.. He walked straight to where he could feel her presence and soon arrived in front of the door.

"Can I come in?" he knocked once, but he received no answer. "I'm coming in."

The door creaked loudly as it open as if, if pushed without care, it would break anytime. As Heliot walked inside, his eyes immediately caught the woman sitting on the bed. Lilou was just there, her arms hugging her knees, staring at the broken window with her back exposed.

"It's cold," he said, marching to where she was and sat down on the edge of the mattress. Up close, he had noticed that the red marks across her arms and everywhere he could see.

"You found me," Lilou spoke, turning her head to him as she rested the side of her head over her arms. "Eli."

"I was simply following where I can feel you."

"You found me faster than Klaus."

Heliot let out a shallow breath, taking off his coat, and draped it over her shoulder. "It's cold."

"Are you not going to ask me why I am here naked?" she asked as he drew back after lending his coat. "Why aren't you asking me, Eli?"

"Does it matter?" his brow quirked, but his tone was deep. The two of them stare at each other in silence until they heard loud and hurried footsteps that grew louder by the second.

"I am not strong enough, Eli," Lilou whispered, peeling her eyes away from him. "In the end, I am still that weak girl acting tough."

"You are strong." As soon as those words escaped Heliot's lips, Klaus barged in a hurry.

"Your Grace!" his voice echoed across the four corners of the room, followed by several knights. Klaus' eyes dilated upon seeing Lilou's current state, making his entire body trembled in fury.

"Get out, all of you!" Klaus ordered, and the knights with him bowed, not daring to even glance at Lilou. "You too, Your Highness. Get out of here."

"It's alright, Klaus. He had seen it already, so there's no need to tell him to go away." Lilou brushed Heliot's coat away, clasping the sheet to cover her body.

"Your Grace..." Klaus hung his head low, clenching his fist until it shook. He had promised to keep Lilou's strong front and stand as a towering wall so not a single soul would ever see her weak. He failed.

Lilou glanced at Heliot as she flung her legs out of the bed. She tied the sheet over her chest and then brushed her tousled hair back.

"He was good in bed." she stretched her neck in a circular motion, revealing more hickeys. "It's not that bad."

"Not bad?" Klaus scoffed as he raised his gaze, only to see her exposed skin almost covered with skin lesions.

"This will come off in a few days." Lilou ignored the rage that was clouding Klaus' eyes, setting her gaze at Heliot. "I'm sorry this happened while you're in Grimsbanne."

"Certain things happen." Heliot shrugged, not a bit bothered seeing her standing with only a thin sheet covering her. "There are situations we cannot control, so there's nothing to apologize for."

Lilou smiled at his response, nodding in satisfaction. "Thank you. I appreciate your understanding." She then took a deep breath, eyes glinting as she shifted them back to Klaus.

"Can you pick up clothes, Klaus?" she requested, which Klaus did whilst suppressing his anger. Once he had picked up all her clothes lying on the floor and placed them on the bed, Lilou spoke.

"Did you bring Bella?" Lilou picked up her clothes, started wearing the top without taking off the sheet tied around her.

"Yes, Your Grace."

"Good," she intoned, dressing as she fixed her eyes on Klaus. Feeling her gaze, Klaus raised his head to meet her eyes.

"Three people. There are three of them, all formidable. Mobilize more men who can differentiate one's aura and kill them on sight. I will join the manhunt." Lilou ordered solemnly, noticing Klaus swallow down the tension in his throat.

"Yes, Your Grace." Klaus bowed before he left to execute the order. Even without her order, he had planned to slaughter the person who took advantage of Lilou.

When Klaus left the room, Lilou turned her head to Heliot. "Are you joining me?" she studied Heliot's expression, just like how he had studied hers.

"Do you want me to?"

"If you're here, that means you were feeling a little bored without my company. So, I guess, you should." Lilou proposed with a shrug, making him stare at her for a little longer before he nodded and stood up.

"Alright." That was what Heliot just said as he walked away and left the room.

As soon as the door creaked closed, a deep exhale slipped past Lilou's lips. She massaged her temple in distress, staring at the shut door.

'Those three are so dead.' she thought, grinding her teeth as she seethed.

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Meanwhile, just somewhere around the old mansion, Samael sucked air through his gritted teeth, eyes on the mansion.

"Damn... we are so dead for sure," He muttered, ruffling his hair in irritation.

Chapter 347 - Sunrise

[Minute before Heliot arrived in the old mansion]

"My death is all part of the plan. Didn't I tell you? Keep your eyes closed and mind open and don't trust me so blindly. I know you will get hurt once you figure out the entire plan Fabian and I cooked up behind everyone's back."

There was a long moment of silence between us. All I could do was stare at him, barely blinking as he planted his palm on the mattress, sitting up lazily.

"I had set up the stage for a beautiful theater act; poured out my artistic passion into the script and its noble ending. The death of mine will end those monstrous Barrett Brother. My wife would have to see it and weep, unleashing some sort of power that will also kill her. A night of terror caused by Samael; his last fight for freedom... he would finally attain it.. Death." My lower lips trembled as I listened to him, lungs contracting as my chest moved in and out heavily.

"It was perfect until the mishap. The wife who had witnessed it was my actual wife. My actual wife is smarter than what she thinks she is. So, instead of falling into a swamp of raging emotions, she bottled it and changed her ending." Sam ruffled his hair in irritation. "Because of that development

in the fucking story, I awoke without her by my side. Instead, I awoke to see that she is plotting to kill everyone, including herself!"

His eyes shifted on me, glinting menacingly. I held my breath, biting my lower lip as I couldn't look away from those pair of fiery eyes.

"Lilou, you should've listened to Fabian and head to the eastern borders. If you did, you will meet five dwarfs and they will take you to my body. I already apologized knowing you will have to wait for me for a little while." Sam's voice shook and I couldn't trace the slightest insincerity in his voice. How could I? Fabian's last words to me back then were about 'those five dwarfs.'

It was impossible for others to know that detail. I balled my hand into a fist as my jaw tightened.

"Get out of here," I ordered coldly, making him frown. "Heliot will be here any moment — Klaus too."

"So, what? Why would I leave you again? I need to ask for your forgiveness and --"

"Out." I cut him off. This time, my tone was more stern.

"Oh, come on, Love! You can't do this to me! I will kill that Von Stein guy and Klaus if that means staying here!"

"Sam!" my voice thundered, stomping my way to him as I clutched his shoulder. "We will talk about this next time. I will listen until the end. But for now, you have to listen to me. In a week, go back to Grimsbanne. I'll meet you at that place."

I looked at him straight in the eye, nodding encouragingly. If what he was saying was true, I couldn't let him reveal he was alive. If I had a plan, I'm certain he had his reasons to fake his death. However, this wasn't a good time to talk about this.

"Fuck..." He ground his teeth as he nodded reluctantly.

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Sam complained, but I chased him out and warned Rufus to drag him and Fabian away. They didn't listen immediately, though, so I had to threaten them. Only after I did, they listened and went away until Heliot came, followed by Klaus.

After giving out my order, I and my people went high and low, searching for the three of them. We sighted the three of them and we had a long chase, shooting arrows and weapons. However, those three were strong enough to escape — that was child's play for them.

In the end, we returned empty-handed.

"Your Grace," Klaus came up to me as I stared at the cliff where we cornered one of the 'felons', and where he had jumped off. "I will look for them. You should return to Grimsbanne and rest."

I remained silent, staring down coldly. "No need," raising my head to see the sun peeking through the horizon. "We will retreat."

"But Your Grace! I can't let them drag your honor --"

"They will come back, Klaus," I cut him off, facing him squarely. "The next time they return to Grimsbanne, make sure they will never leave."

Klaus stared at my eyes before hanging his head low, "Yes, Your Grace."

"It's alright, Klaus. You know I use everything at my disposal, giving my body to have an advantage is nothing." I planted my hand on his shoulder, tapping it lightly. "Tell our people we will return."

"Yes, Your Grace." Klaus left while my eyes shifted to Heliot.

Throughout our search, Heliot's eyes never left me. He was an intuitive person, so lying thoughtlessly wouldn't help. To deceive him, I must throw a bit of some truth. Sam surely had the perfect time to show up... it made my blood boil.

"You're retreating?" Heliot tilted his head to the side, brows furrowed. "That is unlike you."

"I don't think you know me so well, Your Highness." I took a deep breath, turning around to face the horizon. "I had faced many mishaps and failed multiple times in the past eight months. However, I didn't let that become the face of my rule. No matter what, I will always pick myself up to finish what I had started."

There was a moment of silence between us as Heliot stood on my side. We both watched the sunrise, announcing that another day had come.

"I wanted peace for my people even if I will have to die receiving the world's hate," I remarked, casting him a side-eye and smiled. "Until then, no matter how life fuck me, I'll just moan."

"Strange word of choice." He cast me a brief look. "It confuses me if you're doing this because you have something to hide, or you were simply being your usual self."

"Think whatever you like." I chuckled, relishing the fresh air blowing past us. "Sunrise... it's been a while since I've seen it."

"It's beautiful, isn't it?"

"It is." The world felt a little warmer today as a subtle smile resurfaced on my lips. "It's been a while since I've seen the sunrise."

"It's my first," Heliot uttered, making me look at him in surprise.

Chapter 348 - Is It Really Him?

"Goodness!"

"Your Grace..."

Gasped and worry welcomed me as soon as I returned to the duchy. Silvia and Yul gazed at me from head to toe, pupils constricting while some servants covered their gaped mouths with their palms.

A sigh slipped past my lips, strutting inside the foyer. "Don't mind me. Run me a bath. Yul, Sivi, follow me." My tone was cold as I didn't falter in my steps.

"Oh, right!" I halted, pivoting my heel to face Heliot.. "Rest first, Your Highness. I will see you later."

Heliot slightly nodded before following the servant to his room. My eyes remained on him for a few seconds before jogging my way back to my quarters. Once I reached my destination, I let out a sharp exhale. My palms were on my hips, taking deep breaths as Silvia and Yul arrived seconds later. When they closed the door, Yul's voice immediately echoed across the room.



"What happened, Lilou?" I turned around upon his question. "How can... this happen?"

Yul gazed at me once again. My brow raised as I looked down, experiencing face spasm as I only noticed that even my arms had hickeys. Did Sam want to refrain me from going out? As if this was enough to keep me locked in this mansion. However, I was certain people would start thinking Heliot did this to me.

'Hmm... Heliot.'

"Lilou, are you... alright?" Silvia's voice snapped me out of my trance as I lifted my chin up.

"Don't worry about me, I'm alright. Anyway, how was Grimsbanne yesterday?" I inquired, diverting the subject from me. This was important, though. I had to make sure about something.

"Yesterday, the townsfolk all fell unconscious. Fortunately, no one was hurt, and it seemed whoever cast that ability didn't mean harm... to the people, at least." Yul reported sternly, but his expression made me squint my eyes.

"Say it, Yul," I urged suspiciously. "I know you more than anyone. What are you so hesitant to say?"

Yul let out a sigh, casting me a reluctant look. "While I was investigating the matter, I stumble into the carriage used by the Prince of Karo Kingdom. All the knights that were escorting him were capable knights, Your Grace."

"Your point?"

"I am not completely confident, so I don't want to make assumptions."

"Say it."

He took a deep breath and mustered his courage. "I think the knights that escorted His Highness passed out from a different ability. That power that was cast across the duchy can only knock out people who were weak-willed or simply weak. That is why knights who received training only feel slight dizziness."

"That's right. Those knights who assisted His Highness were capable knights hand-picked by Klaus." My eyes narrowed as my brows knitted.

"That power yesterday is strong, but since it covered the entire duchy, it wasn't harmful. But if it was cast directly to a person, even trained knights will become powerless." Yul summarized with confidence.

"I see." I nodded in understanding, massaging my temple. "We'll have this conversation later, Yul. I will wash up first and rest a little so I can think."

Yul pressed his lips together, reluctant to abide, but still hung his head low. "Yes, Your Grace."

"You did well. You and Sivi." I smiled at them, but their response was just eyes full of worry. I ignored it.

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The duchy was chaotic for what happened. Thanks to Silvia, who was like a mother to all, the townsfolk calmed down while I was away. Still, this thing should be addressed.

"Heliot..." I whispered, staring at my distorted reflection in the tub. "Now that I think about it, how did Heliot find me before Klaus did?"

At first, I simply believed it was because he was capable and skilled. However, Klaus wasn't any less capable. He had his advantages as well, and he would surely know where I was. We had a blood link.

'That Sam I made out with... I don't think he is part of an illusion. These damn hickeys are proof that it was a person.' I slid back until my entire body was underwater so to clear my head. 'I don't know why, but I'm certain Heliot had nothing to do with it either. Still, why would he refuse to return to the estate and come to me instead?'

It was strange. Not that I was important to Heliot. My death was what he wanted, and he simply chose a peaceful way to make me accept my death. Even so, dying right now would not be a big deal for him; it would even make things easy for him.

So, why did he go to me? And how did he find me?

When I couldn't hold my breath anymore, I lifted my head out of the tub. I gasped for air, holding on to the rims of the tub.

"Again," I whispered, going back underwater. This had been quite a habit I picked when I became the duchess, as it was rather quiet. Being underwater helped me think and clear my chaotic thoughts.

'I can just ask Heliot. I will know if he is lying,' I mentally nodded, knowing Heliot wasn't the type to lie. 'As for what that Sam said...'

Again, I resurfaced from the water and gasped for air. This time I didn't plan on going underwater. What that person told me, can I believe it? Should I believe it? The possibilities were tearing my internals apart. He had said things that only Sam and I knew.

Imitating Sam and his personality was one thing. However, can an impostor steal a person's secret as well? Being familiar with different types of vampire abilities, it came to my understanding that each ability had its own set of rules and limitations; there were also strengths and weaknesses.

Take illusions, for example. If one was aware they were in an illusion, the illusion would be less effective.

"Is it... really him?" I whispered, my entire body trembling from the unknown fear creeping into my heart. "Did he... really...?"

I choked as I bit my lower lip as hard as I could. There was this fear of uncertainty and false hope that I would like to cling to.

"One week... I will know if I meet him again." My hand balled into a fist, clenching my teeth as I steeled my heart. "Just one week." A subtle smile resurfaced on my lips as there was this tiny flame within me that was sincerely hoping that this wasn't just a joke.

Silently and sincerely, I prayed that this little hope wouldn't shatter.

Chapter 349 - Dear, Heliot.

Five days had passed by in a blur. As expected, the chaos that transpired gave me a headache and more work until it was resolved and everyone had calmed down. Not that I was complaining about the added work, as slaving away to kill time was just what I needed. Still, one week felt rather long.

"Ughh..." I pinched the bridge of my nose, leaning back, eyes closed.

"You're strangely welcoming with all this," Yul commented on the side. Even without seeing his face, I knew he was staring at me with doubt in his eyes.

"I'm killing time, Yul," came out a lazy voice as I opened my eyes. "This won't finish itself, would they?"

"Even so, after that incident, it's strange."

"Why is it strange?"

Yul pursed his lips, looking at me with conflict. "You're like... just like how you started."

"How I started, huh?" A shallow breath escaped my mouth, resting my back comfortably against the chair.

"Can you tell me what happened?" he inquired, propping his side against the desk while I gazed up at him. "Don't you trust me anymore? I feel you've been more secretive."

"Secretive?"

"About Prince Heliot, about your constant disappearance, and now this. Will it hurt if you tell me what are you truly planning?" Pain flickered across his eyes, staring at me straight in the eye. "Do you really have to keep me in the dark, sis? If you keep doing this, how am I supposed to protect you?"

"I don't need..."

"I know." I trailed off as he spoke once again. "You don't need protection, I know that. But what do you expect from me if my sister came back here full of bruises and hickeys after getting abducted? I understand you will use everything at your disposal, but did you really think I will just watch you ruin yourself?"

Yul paused deliberately as he let out a low chuckle. "I tried to understand you, Lilou. But, have you ever tried to understand me too?"

I wanted to tell him to be patient, but my tongue kept rolling back. Not that I didn't understand Yul, or I didn't trust him. What I was afraid of was that he was too smart and he would surely figure out what was my deal with Heliot if I gave him the slightest hint.

"How can I talk about it to my brother?" I turned my head away. "You've already exposed yourself to danger by becoming the duchess's favorite 'plaything'."

"You think I care about that?"

"You don't, but I do." I set my eyes back to him.

"Now?" Yul chuckled, pushing himself away from the desk as he staggered back. "You care about that now? Do you think I will buy such a half-baked lie? You better say you just don't trust me any more than lying to me."

"No, it's not like..."

"I hope you have a good day, Your Grace."

"Yul." I sighed, but Yul didn't listen as he departed my office. As soon as the door shut closed, I pounded the bottom of my fist against the surface of the desk. I didn't intend to lie to him, and I knew it was stupid.

However, how could I tell him I had planned to die all along? And now, someone just popped out of nowhere like a mushroom, claiming he was Sam? That he was alive all along? And that all my plans were getting tangled up because of it?

Yul wouldn't let me die or watch me cling onto false hope. He loved me and he cared for me... a little bit too much.

"I'm a piece of work." I closed my eyes, rubbing my palms against my face. "Damn it!"

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Because of Yul, I couldn't focus on these damn documents. So, I decided to retire and visit Heliot. He would leave the duchy in two days' time, so I had to make sure he wasn't suspicious or anything of the sort. The chaos made me so busy that I didn't get to see him for the past couple of days and he didn't bother me. His quietness still bothered me even more, though.

"Your Highness," I called softly, treading carefully towards the parasol in the garden. "Can I join you?"

Heliot just looked at me and nodded. So, I smiled, closed-lipped, and perched on the intricate chair across from him.

"I thought I wouldn't be able to see you until my departure." Heliot leaned back, stiff and straightforward as usual. I chuckled at his remarks along with a sigh, which he noticed.

"Terrible day?" he asked, raising both his brows to show interest.

"You can say that." I shrugged, reaching for the decanter to pour myself a drink. "Wine before nightfall and in the garden at that."

"It helps."

"It's not blood, right?" I glanced at him briefly and he chuckled.

"It's not. I respect the art of wine and its difference in the taste of blood."

"That sounds like you." I heaved a sigh of relief, picking up the glass of wine, and raised it to him. Heliot raised his glass a little before guiding it to our lips for a drink.

"So, why have wine? Why do you need its help?" I winced slightly as I felt the heat of the wine travel down through my throat, enveloping me with its warmth.

Heliot smacked his lips, looking away as he stared at the flowers around. "More like I need its company."

"Are you sad?" I blurted out and bit my tongue upon realization.

"Sad... how strange."

My brow arched, studying his side profile, and could not help but wonder what he was thinking. Honestly, now that I thought about it, I never got to dwell on what was Heliot was thinking because he would rather say it.

"Sadness, happiness, fear, anger, disgust, compassion... they all sound unfamiliar to me, Your Grace," Heliot uttered without taking his eyes off of the flowers. "Back in our Karo Kingdom, these emotions aren't a necessity. If one did a good deed, then he shall be rewarded, and if he had done wrong, he will be punished accordingly. I'm saying it is all about how a person decides which path to take. What comes right after is just the result."

"You're saying if someone did an evil deed, he shouldn't feel fear of the punishments that will ensue?" I inquired for clarification, and he nodded. "And if someone receives a reward for doing a good deed, he shouldn't feel that happy since it is to be expected?"

Heliot slowly retracted his eyes away from where he was looking at and set them to me. "Yes."

"How boring." I scoffed, rolling my eyes as I shook my head, sipping an ample amount of wine.

"I call it peace and organized."

"It's boring." I clicked my tongue, twirling the wine while staring at it. "To be in a place where good deeds were rewarded but not acknowledged, for being punished without being heard or a chance to reflect or regret, to feel that whatever you do it's not enough to feel like celebrating or crying about — that's sad."

"And why is it sad? You've never been to Karo."

My eyes raised at him, chuckling upon seeing the genuine wonder in his eyes. "I don't need to be there to feel sad. You're here, are you not?" his brows furrowed upon my remarks.

I leaned in, cupping my jaw while staring at him. "Heliot, do you know why I like thunderstorms?"

"No, I do not."

"Because it reminds me that even nature had to scream sometimes." I smiled while he just furrowed his brows, pondering over my words. "Heliot, I wish that there will be a day when you smile for no reason, feel sad for an unknown reason, get angry in someone else stead, and feel fear with just a mere thought of losing something important. I hope there will be a day you feel alive."

Chapter 350 - I Promise, My Friend.

"Heliot, I wish that there will be a day when you smile for no reason, feel sad for an unknown reason, get angry in someone else stead, and feel fear with just a mere thought of losing something important. I hope there will be a day you feel alive."

For the past eight months, Heliot had been an excellent ally and a friend. I knew Heliot would kill me, not because he hated me. He would kill me because it was necessary — no more, no less.? There was no reason for me to live that long without Sam. That was why I agreed. Now, it made me wonder if I tell Heliot I changed my mind, would he let me go?

"Feel alive...?" Heliot let out a low chuckle as if he found my words silly. I couldn't blame him if that was what he thought; my words being silly because they were silly.

"You always say unexpected things," he said, letting out a sharp exhale before sipping from his wine. "But it feels... nice, strangely."

"It's not strange. We're friends, aren't we?"

"Friends?" his brow raised, making me chuckle seeing the brief bafflement in his eyes.

"Yes, I think we are."

"But I didn't acknowledge you as one."

"It doesn't matter. If I think you are my friend, then that's just that." I shrugged nonchalantly before drinking my wine.

"That is just selfishness." Heliot gazed at me for a moment before looking away. However, I noticed his temple wrinkle, along with a subtle smile on his lips.

Didn't he have friends before? It would not surprise me if that was the case. Heliot was too stiff and too honest that it made him look arrogant. However, he was rational and simply judged people by their actions.

"Will there be a day that we will become enemies?" my question slipped past my lips without my permission, making me snap my eyes.

"I don't think so." He tilted his head to the side. "I don't have a grudge against you, nor do you have a grudge against me. We simply share the common goal."

"What if we don't share the same goal anymore?" since I had already asked about this, I might as well continue asking.

"We will always share the same goal, Your Grace."

"You can't say that." I chuckled as he sounded certain of his claims. "You don't know what tomorrow holds. Especially, in this world we walked in, anything can happen in a blink of an eye."

"I just know."

I gazed at Heliot as he pour himself another glass. If Sam was alive, I wouldn't want to die, obviously. What would Heliot do, then? Worst-case scenario, he would kill me by force and I would fight him with all my might; we would fight each other to death. Just thinking about it brought this bitterness into my heart.

'This world we walk in is truly cruel,' I thought, letting out a weak, ridiculing chuckle. "Things like this make me wonder if this world was a little less cruel, would Sam and Lexx choose to be brothers instead of enemies?"

"You live in a sad, complicated world, Your Grace." I snapped out of my trance when I heard Heliot's sentiments. "Chaotic too, if I may add."

"I think I am very much aware of that, that's why I'm doing all this, isn't it?"

"Doing like complicate more things?" he tilted his head to the side, causing my brows to knit.

"Aren't you here because you are frustrated about something... personal?"

"I'm here because I think I want a drink."

"You can deny it all you want. However, during my stay here, I had noticed how everyone here cared a little too much." He explained in a matter-of-fact tone. "Even when you acted cold and untouchable, you can never fake that you care for your people — especially those around you."

He was truly intuitive and noticed things others couldn't. His personality made me sigh heavily, sliding my empty glass to him.

"Can you pour this poor soul a drink?" I requested, and he smiled and nodded.

"You're right," I uttered, watching him fill my glass. "People in here care a little too much — maybe, due to heightened emotions? I don't know, but that's just how it is."

"Because that is what you are."

"Huh? Are you saying they care because I do?"

Heliot hummed a tune as he closed the decanter and slid the glass of wine to me. "I'm not saying it is bad or good. I'm simply saying the land and its people will always reflect what kind of person rules them. You're not as terrible as you believe you are, Your Grace."

"You flatter me."

"Believe me. If you die, this entire duchy will mourn just like how a mother will mourn for her child's death."

"It's nice to hear that, but don't exaggerate." I shook my head and then quirked a brow upon sensing his intent stare. "What?"

"I don't lie for a reason."

"And that reason is that there's no reason for you to lie."

"Well, that's correct. Same with exaggeration, I don't exaggerate because there's no need for me to do so. I am saying what I had seen and noticed, no more no less."

"Fine. I am great. Happy now?"

"Were you being sarcastic?"

"Can't you tell?"

"You are annoying." His last argument made me laugh loudly. That was hilarious, especially coming from him.

"And I don't think you should laugh about it." And that just made me laugh even louder. "This is aggravating."

I enjoyed how he looked at me with disdain, as I've never seen him sport a fresh look other than his practiced smile and laugh. Heliot... was a good friend and an excellent company. Even though there was a high possibility that Heliot and I could be enemies in the end. I still hoped I could share a drink with him again.

"Stop running away, Your Grace." Heliot tapped the table lightly. "Secrets are corrosive. Although I understand your reasons, your death will break their hearts already. Are you planning to break their hearts before that?"

"That's even more cruel."

Heliot placed his hand on the armrest, pushing himself up. He walked over to my seat, standing behind my chair before lifting me up by my shoulder.

"Hey, what are you doing?" I snapped my eyes, appalled as I stood.

"Go," He said, pushing my back lightly. I turned my head back to him, eyebrow furrowed.

"Settle your matters and stop inhaling my breathing space."

"How audacious to chase me out in my own garden." I clicked my tongue, lifting my skirt as I stormed away from him. As I walked away, I halted and smile.

"Thanks," I huffed before resuming in my stride.

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"Thanks."

Heliot smiled, staring at her back. His eyes softened before he turned around and looked at the flowers.

"We will always share the same goal." His subtle smile remained. "I promised, my friend."