

The Duke 371

Chapter 371 - Sharing A Husband

I closed my eyes, stabilizing my breathing and feeling the moving carriage. When it stopped, I slowly opened my eyes as they sharpened.

We've finally arrived.

I glanced at Yul only to see his expression changing into a solemn one. We didn't talk anymore as Klaus opened the door for me.

"We're here, Your Grace." He offered me his hand, which I clasped, stepping outside the carriage.

"Thank you," I said as I looked at him with a smile. Klaus tilted his head down before I set my eyes on the entourage at the entrance of the palace.

"You didn't have to personally welcome me, Lord Alistair.." My smile remained, locking gazes with Alistair.

"I was tasked to give Your Grace a warm welcome." Alistair walked towards me, stopping several steps away from me. His eyes shifted to Klaus, who was standing beside me and then to Yul, who just stepped outside the carriage.

"I'm certain it was a long journey. So, His Majesty prepared a small banquet to show his sincerity to Your Grace," he said, pressing his lips as he set his eyes back to me. "Shall we head in?"

"I thought you wouldn't ask." I nodded, following his trail.

The palace was the same, or rather, it looked the same, but it felt more stifling than before. Every step going further inside surely felt heavy, but that didn't show on my face. I made an oath when I left this place a year ago. I didn't plan on backing away.

It didn't take long when we reached the dining hall. Just like how I remembered it, the place looked the same. The only difference was there were new people around the table.

"Greetings to Your Majesty, the Emperor." I stopped in my tracks and curtsied.

"It's nice to see you again, sweetheart," Stefan greeted back as I raised my head, setting my eyes on the host seat where he sat. "Come. Join us."

"Thank you." I nodded, scanning the empty seats. Since Klaus and Yul had severed their ties with him, they stood guard in the corner.

"Here," he said as he pointed at the chair near him. "Let me see your face up close."

I took a shallow breath and just obeyed his orders. I perched on the chair on his right, raising my head only to lock eyes with Beatrice, who was sitting across from me.

"It's nice to see you again, Your Grace," she greeted with a kind smile.

This woman...

I smiled back sweetly. "Congratulation on your marriage, Your Highness. I had prepared a gift for you. It may be late due to the extended voyage, but I hope you will like it."

"Of course. I will like anything from Your Grace."

"Congratulation, Your Majesty." This time, I shifted my eyes to Stefan. The two of them got married, after all. It was only proper to congratulate them.

Stefan didn't respond, propping his jaw against his knuckles, eyes on me. He scanned my face thoroughly as it slowly traveled down to my neck.

"How was the journey here?" he asked, narrowing his eyes as he fixed his gaze on my neck.

I pulled my collar up to hide the mark Sam left me yesterday. I told him to not leave any marks, but he still left a few.

"It's not our first time traveling during winter, so we avoided some problems we encountered the first time," I explained, keeping my calm demeanor and smile. "Because of that, we arrived earlier than expected."

"Is that so?"

I didn't respond immediately, scanning the people around the table. Not all royalty were here, but the people on my list were here: Alistair and Alphonse. The rest didn't matter.

"Did you miss me, Your Majesty?" I inquired after my brief silence, setting my eyes back to Stefan. I could feel everyone paused as they turned their attention to me. Well, I was blatantly flirting with him in front of his new wife.

Stefan tapped his fingers against the surface of the table. He hadn't taken his eyes off of me.

"How strange for you to ask." He let out a low chuckle, eyes still on me. "It's not like that matters."

"It does... to me." I shrugged, picking up my cutlery as I looked away from him. "Since I will become your mistress, you might as well deceive me by making me believe your heart is mine."

"Bold." He intoned.

My brow quirked, casting him a knowing look. "Am I?"

"Pfft--!" Beatrice chuckled while she covered her lips with the back of her hand. "Is this the time the wife should walk away?"

"Please, Your Highness. I hope you don't misunderstand my intention."

"Of course, not. I find this rather... interesting, after all."

"I hope we get along since we'll be sharing a man." I smiled sweetly as I opened my mouth to eat.

Everyone's eyes remained on me for a long time. Understandable, since I was never confident in front of them in the past.

Back then, I would always stress eat whenever they argue during meals. I'm now used to the stifling aura and I could eat with my heart's content, even if they kill each other right now.

"I guess we'll start calling each other sisters from now on," she humored and I let out a muffled chuckle. Beatrice was still someone whom I'm unsure whether to keep an ally or keep a safe distance from.

'She's someone who will sacrifice anything to reach her goal, after all,' I reminded myself, slicing through the meat on my plate. 'One thing is for sure, she's someone I should be wary about.'

"I yearned for you." I stopped momentarily when I heard Stefan's voice. "I'm glad to see you again, Lilou."

I took a deep breath and smiled, turning my head in Stefan's direction. "You melt my heart, Your Majesty."

"How unfair!" Beatrice let out a deep sigh. "I thought I kept you entertained for the past year."

The corner of her lips then curled up into a smirk as her eyes glinted. "But perhaps I could ask the ninth prince for advice since he kept Her Grace busy."

As soon as Beatrice mentioned Yul in an ambiguous tone, the air across the dining hall thickened. I knew deep down she wasn't picking on me, but on the both of us.

"Since His Majesty and Her Grace will spend time more frequently, can you lend me Yulis, sister?" she tilted her head to the side, glancing in Yul's direction.

I kept quiet for a moment, sensing Stefan's intent gaze on me. My answer right now would either put Yul in danger or give him more time to prepare. Personally, I would choose the latter, but Yul would surely abhor me if I did that.

My brother didn't like being underestimated, and even as a joke, I wouldn't let Beatrice taint him.

"Please don't touch Yulis, Your Highness." I smiled as I put down my cutlery. "He is someone I will never share."

Chapter 372 - Welcome Back

"Please don't touch Yulis, Your Highness." I smiled as I put down my cutlery. "He is someone I will never share."

Beatrice smiled coyly as I felt the killing intent from Stefan's gaze. Forgive me, Yul. I would surely protect you in another way.

"Someone you will never share, huh?" Stefan muttered menacingly, chuckling.

I turned and faced Stefan squarely. "I will abide by any of Your Majesty's requests. However, if something happened to Yul, I will not simply sit still and mourn."

"You are threatening me because of him?"

"It's not a threat, Your Majesty, it's my condition." I asserted with my eyes glinting. "Yulis is mine and I hate people touching what's mine."

"Are you his?" Stefan raised a brow as he leaned back with a wine in his hand.

"I'm... forever's Sam." I smiled, watching him nod. Alphonse snickered, enjoying this 'interesting' conversation between a married couple with their mistress, and his mistress protecting her lover.

What a twisted setup, but it wasn't surprising anymore. These people didn't care about relationships or family, after all.

"Yulis understood that my heart will always belong to my late husband. That's why we got along." I explained casually, glancing at Yul as I winked at him. He didn't have a reaction, but getting a reaction from him wasn't the goal.

I returned my attention to Stefan and said, "I hope we will get along too, Your Majesty."

Stefan chortled until all we could hear was his soft, yet eerie laughter. We kept silent until he stopped, raising his chin up with a devious smirk.

"You asked to stay in Grimsbanne for a year. I approved it. And then, another request to keep Klaus, Yulis, and Silvia live. I kept my word with all the conditions you asked me to, Lilou." He slowly leaned forth, arms propping against the edge of the table and eyes glinting on me.

"Do you think that now that you are here, we will still do it your way?" A shallow scoffed slipped past his lips as his eyes assessed me. "I can kill Yul right here and now, and can still keep you if I so wish. Do you want me to prove that?"

"Someone told me that proving yourself to people is an insult itself."

"I think I received enough insults tonight that I do not mind adding another one."

The side of my lips stretched even broader. "It will be a shame if you can't kill Yulis now, just as you claim, Your Majesty."

We stared at each other in silence, pulling an aura as my brow raised briefly.

CLANG!

A high-pitched noise made by metal striking together resonated in the air. My eyes remained at Stefan with a smirk on my lips.

"Don't even think about it, Dominique." Klaus's voice reached my ear, and I knew he had blocked an incoming attack coming at Yul.

Another loud thud followed Klaus' voice, then came Silvia's voice, pinning her saber on the table. "We are already enemies of the empire. We do not mind raising our weapons if you harm Her Grace or her people."

"Do you think, the..." Stefan trailed off as he broke his eye contact with me to count do a headcount. "... the four of you are enough to stop me?"

"Your words, not mine." I shrugged, waving at them as a signal to drop their weapons. "Your Majesty, I don't think killing each other now is necessary. I'm certain you will rather keep me as your ally than have me as an enemy."

"You don't threaten me, Lilou."

"Are you certain?" I tilted my head to the side, raising both my brows innocently. "You love me so dearly, Your Majesty. Which tempts me to see how you will mourn for my death."

"Hah... I thought you can do more than threaten me with your life, sweetheart. I must've overestimated you." Stefan chuckled in ridicule, as my remarks were surely something a fool and a coward would say. It didn't matter, though.

"Let's test it." I reached for my cross earring, rubbing my thumb against it. "Catharsis."

Catharsis immediately took form into a short dagger, and then I thrust it to my neck. My eyes snapped, gazing up at Stefan calmly despite the stinging pain in my jugular.

"Why did you stop me, Your Majesty?" I inquired as his hand dripped with blood, holding the blade with his bare hand. If he didn't stop me, I would've pierced my neck and lost my life.

That wasn't a joke, and I would've literally lost my life. It was a gamble I had taken, and I won.

"Shame. I guess I get to live for another day." My grip relaxed as he let Catharsis go. I slowly stood up, facing him with my chin held high.

My eyes fell on his bleeding hand. So, I reached for it, holding both sides, and I gazed at his palm.

"As long as I mattered to you, I will always threaten you, Your Majesty." I pointed out under my breath, pressing the wound on my neck with my thumb. "Do you know what I realized during the past year I was in Grimsbanne? Your life mattered to me."

When I had enough blood on my thumb, I traced his wound. My blood mixing with his as I gazed up, staring straight into his eyes.

"Just like today, you will end up hurting yourself because of me. Fret not, I will heal you just like today because you can't die before me, Your Majesty." My eyes droop while I guided his hand to my cheek, not caring about the blood on it.

"You're the last person who I allow to die. I had taken a vow that for as long as I live, we will share this cursed fate together. We won't stop until we're both ruined, Your Majesty." My smile grew sweeter as I squeezed his hand lightly.

Stefan's eyes glinted before the side of his lips curled up approvingly. His wound had healed, brushing my cheek with his thumb.

"Welcome back to the Capital, sweetheart." He chortled with a vicious expression on his face.

"I am back, indeed." I nodded approvingly, not caring about the watchful eyes on us.

Karma was back... to give you the taste of your own medicine before taking everything from you. I won't let you die until then.

Chapter 373 - It's Your Fault

Stefan was considerate enough to keep the third prince palace for me and my people to stay at. I was aware of his underlying reason, though. He wanted for everyone to be beyond reach once he claimed me.

So, they could hear, smell, and know I was his.

I scoffed as I sauntered through the hallway of the third prince's palace. They didn't offer me a butler to assist me in these quarters, as I stayed in this place for a long time.

"You can go to your chambers, Klaus. You don't need to walk me in my chambers all the way." I suggested, glancing over my shoulder as Klaus walked behind me.

"Dominique had lost an arm, but it didn't make him lose touch in his grip. It feels like all his strength shifted into that remaining hand of his.." Klaus uttered in a low tone, ignoring my suggestion.

"Well, Dominique is just as proud as you. Losing an arm will not kill his spirit." I shrugged indifferently. "Just like how you noticed his strength, I'm certain he also sized you up."

"You are right when you say they also got stronger. It's a surprise, though."

"What is?" my brows furrowed as I halted in my steps and turned around to face him. Klaus also stopped in his tracks, gazing at me straight in the eye.

"Vampires' progress is often slow because that's just natural for us. But to think they had prepared in a short amount of time, I don't think this will be easy." His tone was solemn, as his eyes darkened with resolve.

"I never said it will be easy." A weak chuckle slipped past my lips. "We came in here thinking we're at the disadvantage. There's no point in fretting. I trust my captain's judgment and skills."

I offered him a gentle smile, nodding encouragingly. He had been with me for the past year, and I trusted Klaus just as much as I trusted Yul, Silvia, and the third squadron. He wasn't a fool anymore, and he had proven that many times throughout his stay in Grimsbanne.

"That's very reassuring, but I still plan on walking you back." He chortled as the corner of his lips curled up into a playful grin.

"Goodness." I rolled my eyes as I shook my head and turned around. "You're just like Yul now. Both stubborn."

"It's my duty, Your Grace."

"Well, I believe your duty is to follow my orders, and I still remember telling you not to walk me all the way to my chambers." I sassed while I resumed in my strides, hearing him chuckle behind me.

"Anyway, plant more shadows in Yul," I ordered a moment later. "Stefan will not let him off easily after what I spout during the welcome banquet. I trust Yul, but he is stubborn."

"Already did."

I raised a brow as the side of my lips curled up. "That's my Captain Knight."

"Silvia will also keep a close watch on Yul. She's just as worried as you." Klaus added, making me nod my head. Having Silvia protect Yul in the shadows felt reassuring.

"Good. Don't let him know about it. I don't want him throwing a tantrum on me."

"Yes, Your Grace."

We didn't speak after that as we soon reached my chambers. I narrowed my eyes as we approach closer, noticing a figure standing in front of the door.

"Your Grace." Klaus walked past me, raising his arm in front of me while I stopped. "What are you doing here?"

I felt the figure standing in the dark, faced us. There was this sudden sense of dread that traveled down my spine. He or she was looking straight at me.

"I asked you, Cassara," Klaus called, while the figure crept out of the dark.

Cassara looked different from the last time I saw her a year ago. She had dark circles around her eyes, tousled hair as if it hadn't met the comb for a while now. Hasn't she been eating? How come she became this gaunt in just one year?

She looked to be in great distress as if she had lost her mind. The evident scars and wounds on her feet and sleeves proved that.

Klaus and I subconsciously looked at each other before setting our eyes back on Cassara. More than what happened to her, what was she doing here?

"Cassara, if you have important matters to discuss with Her Grace, you can always send a request for that." Klaus's voice sounded puzzled, but he still stood defensively before me. "Her Grace needs rest. Come and see me tomorrow. I'll arrange that meeting for you."

"It's your fault..." Cassara unsurprisingly ignored Klaus, as she had her eyes fixated on me. "Hell is dead, and that's your fault."

I pressed my lips together, assessing her from head to toe. Did she lose it because of Sam's death? I truly envied her because she could mourn without a care in the world.

"How can you come back in here when Hell already died for you?" Her voice shook with a strong abhorrence in her tone. Cassara took a step forward, which caused Klaus to wield his sword at his sister.

"Take a step further and I will not hesitate to take your life, Your Royal Highness," He cautioned coldly and Cassara stopped.

She shifted her eyes from me to Klaus, and the corner of her lips curled up into a wicked smile. She had truly lost it. The elegant and beautiful Cassara had met her downfall. How pathetic to lose her stand.

"You shouldn't have let her return, Klaus." Came out a muffled voice along with a scoff. "Hell's death will be in vain."

"Your Royal Highness, you should return to your chambers and rest. Thank you for your reminders, but we didn't have a choice but to return in here," I said sternly, gazing at her with no sympathy in my eyes.

"You don't understand...!" Cassara shook her head, making my brows furrow. "... you can't go back in here, Lilou. They will kill you."

I was very much aware of that, but Cassara didn't know we came prepared this time. Still, the more I looked at her, the more it baffled me.

Was she concerned? No, that was not it. She looked... terrified.

"Your Royal Highness, I will escort you..."

"Step aside, Klaus." I raised a hand, casting Klaus a look as he gazed back at me. There was reluctance in his eyes, but he still withdrew his sword and stepped aside.

I nodded approvingly, setting my eyes back to Cassara. I took a step forward, only to see her stagger back.

"Your Royal Highness?" I called curiously, tilting my head a little. "Shall we head inside to talk?"

"No." Her answer came almost immediately. Cassara clasped her chest tightly, looking around in fear.

Was there someone around? I couldn't feel another person's presence, though. To confirm, I glanced at Klaus, only to see him shake his head.

"Cassara, what do you --" Klaus was cut short when Cassara spoke.

"No, don't come near me!" Her breathing grew ragged as she tugged her hair, covering her ears.

"They're back again. Shut up! I don't want to hear another word! Keep it down!"

Cassara suddenly grew hysterical, shouting as she staggered back. When she locked eyes with me, she shook her head in fear before running away. We couldn't even react on time, as what happened was something we didn't see coming.

"What... the fuck is that?" Klaus muttered in confusion as he gazed at me.

I stared in the direction where Cassara ran away. There was something in her eyes that bothered me. I couldn't tell what it was, but my gut feeling told me she wanted to tell me something.

"Klaus, follow Cassara. I don't know why she was acting like that, but I want you to plant a shadow on her." I ordered and faced Klaus.

He furrowed his brows before tilting his head down. "Yes, Your Grace."

Little did I know that would be the last time I would see Cassara.

Chapter 374 - The News Early In The Morning

The throne is yours to claim, little child. Kill every single La Crox and avenge the Bloodfang. The Moriarty is your only ally, remember that.

My eyes snapped open as I gasped for air. I assisted myself up, wiping the sweats on my forehead.

"What is that?" I murmured as I looked around my chambers. It was winter and freezing, and yet, I was breaking out in sweats because of a vague dream.

I massaged my temple as my head throbbed painfully. There had been voices in my head, but they were more like whispers. But in my dreams, the voices were loud — deafening, even. If I didn't get used to the whispering voices I had been hearing since a year ago, it would be a problem.

"What did they say?" I wondered under my breath, trying to recall the distinct orders in my dreams. Nothing came up, though.

"Ahh, whatever." I tousled my hair as my eyes veered towards the window. It was still dark outside.

"I should get back to sleeping..." My voice trailed off as I turned my head towards the door. Someone was outside. I could feel his presence.

Stefan.

That prick...

I took a deep breath, closing my eyes. When I opened them, a glint of resolve flickered across my eyes. I flung my legs out of the bed, marching towards the door, and opened it unhesitatingly.

There he was.

I raised my gaze up, locking eyes with him. "Can't sleep?"

Stefan just stared at me in silence. He was neither surprised nor had other emotions in his eyes. They were just blank.

"Did you sleepwalk again?" I asked and let out a sigh, recalling he had this habit before. I wanted to keep our memories together buried, but I couldn't.

"I thought you already got over it, but I guess you weren't just sleeping all this time," I murmured, clicking my tongue while I assessed him.

I hated this man for many reasons. He killed Sam, and still couldn't let me go. Stefan was the reason my life was turned upside down.

I blamed him for everything, but surely, that wasn't the case. Stefan wasn't the only person to blame. There were too many people involved and things would still be the same — maybe slightly different if he just didn't love me.

"Come," I said, reaching for his wrist and guided him inside my chambers. "I won't be sleeping, anyway. You should thank me for this kindness."

I glanced back at him, rolling my eyes as I guided him to my bed. Stefan didn't sit, nor did he laid on the bed. He simply stood on the side, gazing down.

"Tsk. You're such a piece of work." I scratched my head in irritation, thinking of what I would need to do next. A sigh slipped past my lips, making a swift chopping move to knock him unconscious.

As soon as the bottom of my hand knocked against his nape, Stefan collapsed on the bed — face first. I planted my hand on my hips, staring at his back.

"You should always stay on your guard in front of your enemies. How dare you sleepwalk in here? Should I kill you now?" I kicked his legs that were outside the bed out of irritation, but he was like a dead person.

Even if I wanted his death, killing him now was a peaceful escape. I pitied him, but pitying him would be an insult for him.

"Rest well, Lexx." I sighed as I marched towards the fireplace to add woods so the fire wouldn't die completely.

Stefan must be exhausted, building an empire and gaining enemies and pretentious allies. This was the reason I didn't want the throne; I'll be a mad queen.

The small fire that was barely holding on in the fireplace slowly spread through after putting more woods on it. I stared at its flames momentarily while I rested my arm over my leg.

"Strange, isn't it, Lexx? You love me so much you want to kill me, while I hate you that I wanted to keep you alive," I muttered, talking to him even though he was already fast asleep. "Our emotions are like a fireplace. If we just let it be, the fire in it will die down, eventually. But we keep putting more woods in it."

I had this mixed emotions about Stefan, to be truthful. There was this part of me that felt sorry for him, but it wasn't enough to change my mind. It was just... tragic.

"If only we can dictate our hearts that easily, we wouldn't be in this situation." A whisper escaped my mouth as I raised my cold hands close to the fireplace. "I hope Mildred will bring me some hot choco later."

Morning came, and I didn't get a wink of sleep after letting Stefan in. Not that I couldn't fall asleep, I just didn't. I'm not Stefan, who would recklessly drop my guard around my enemy.

"Good morning, Your Majesty," I greeted in a light tone as I turned my head towards the bed. I was sitting on the divan, holding a cup of hot chocolate with both my hands.

Stefan massaged his nape, looking around in confusion. When he set his eyes on me, I shrugged nonchalantly.

"I can't let you just standing outside my chambers all night," I explained indifferently. "Although I will appreciate it if you don't do this again."

He cleared his throat, dragging himself out of the bed. I raised a brow as he sauntered in my direction, taking a seat on the armchair close to the divan I sat on.

"Give that to me." He pointed at my cup of hot chocolate.

I instinctively held it close to my chest while gazing at him in dismay. "No way! This is mine."

"Please."

"No! You don't like sweets! What's wrong with you?" I ground my teeth. I wasn't overreacting, as I've been saving every sip because I had been waiting for this. There was no way I would give this up.

"I'm thirsty." His reaction was lazy, wriggling his fingers as if telling me to give it to him right this instant.

"Do you always practice your authority as a morning exercise? What a way to ruin someone's mood." I scoffed, still keeping my mug of hot chocolate.

"You should thank me for ruining your day first thing in the morning. It only means it can never get worse." He shrugged shamelessly, tilting his hand. "Give it to me."

"No."

"Lilou, I have an entire storage of chocolates for you."

"I don't want any other chocolates but this. You should stop thinking you can replace everything just because things are similar." I huffed, rendering him silent at the double meaning behind my words.

"If you're thirsty, why don't you return to your quarters?"

"For a hot chocolate, you're acting like this?"

"I should ask the same. For a mere hot choco which you never enjoyed before, you're acting like this?" I scoffed, gazing at him in dismay.

"Give it to me while I'm asking nicely."

"No way, it's mine and..." I trailed off as we both turned our heads when Klaus suddenly barged inside my chambers.

"Oh, right on time, Klaus. Can you please tell Mildred to prepare another cup of hot chocolate for His Majesty?" I raised both my brows before furrowing them as soon as I noticed Klaus' expression.

"Your Grace." Klaus gulped as he bowed. "Greetings to Your Majesty, the Emperor."

"What is it, Klaus? You seem to be in a hurry?" asked Stefan as I gazed at him, then back at Klaus.

Klaus pressed his lips together as he cast his eyes on me. I nodded approvingly, as it seemed this matter wasn't something Stefan shouldn't hear.

"We found Her Royal Highness Cassara dead in the gates of the palace."

"What?" came out a confused voice, glancing at Stefan, who looked genuinely surprised at the news.

Chapter 375 - Questions

"We found Her Royal Highness dead in the gates of the palace."

The news came as a surprise and too suddenly. Cassara? Of all people? She was the first to die?

I only draped a shawl around my shoulders as we rushed to where Cassara remains lied. Stefan kept quiet the entire time, but I noticed that this news irked and surprised him as well.

'Who did it?' I wondered internally as my last memory of Cassara hovered over my head.

When we reached the gates of the palace, there were already a few familiar faces around. Beatrice, Yul, Silvia, Alistair, Dominique, Jayden, some important figures of the empire, and the knights.

I gazed up, setting my eyes on Cassara, who was hanging at the guard towers. She was hanging with a noose around her neck, but that wasn't the cause of her death.

That stake struck into her chest was what killed her.

"You are next." I read the bloody message written next to her as my eyes glinted.

"Get her down," Stefan commanded with restrained anger in his voice. "Start an investigation regarding this matter. Don't let a word gets out about Cassara's death."

"Yes, Your Majesty," someone replied curtly, and the knights started moving to execute the order.

"My... whoever did this is a savage," Beatrice commented, covering her lips with the back of her hand. "How come this happened right after Her Duchess arrives in the Capital?"

"Hold your tongue, Your Royal Highness," Klaus' voice thundered without a second hesitation. "Her Grace has nothing to do with any of this."

"I'm not saying the Duchess did this herself." Beatrice shrugged indifferently, glancing up at Cassara's corpse. "You are next... I wonder who is next?"

I looked around and noticed the judgmental eyes of Stefan's people. They would obviously think it was my doing, since I had all the reason to do so.

"Beatrice, stop spouting nonsense," Stefan warned menacingly. "I will surely find out who is causing all this ruckus and he or she will pay a hefty price."

"Well, I guess because Your Majesty spent the night in the Duchess chambers that you know it's not her." Beatrice glanced at Yul, which made me instinctively look in the same direction.

"Stop inciting misunderstandings, Your Royal Highness," Yul uttered coldly.

"Goodness! I am a queen, but a mere knight told me to hold my tongue and an advisor blatantly accused me I'm inciting misunderstandings!" she chuckled in amusement before turning around to leave.

"This place surely never ceased to amaze me," Beatrice remarked without looking back.

We remained silent until Beatrice was no longer in the vicinity. My eyes fell onto Stefan and I saw him looking back at me.

"My condolences, Your Majesty. I also have to excuse myself first." I curtsied, and he replied with a nod.

I didn't idle for a second longer and walked away. As I did, I glanced at my people and they all followed me from behind.

"Explain, Klaus," I ordered as soon as the door shut behind us. I turned to my heel, facing the three of them.

Klaus let out a shallow breath as he locked eyes with me. "Last night, when I followed Cassara after she ran off, I can't find her. We searched for her all night, Your Grace, but we couldn't find even her shadow."

"That's impossible," I said with a scoff. "Did you search the entire palace?"

"We searched the entire capital," Silvia chimed in with a stern voice. "I can't sleep last night and joined the search. What Klaus said was true. Even Cassara's scent last night disappeared without a trace. The next thing we know, she's already hanging on the gates of the palace."

There was a moment of silence in the room after Silvia's report. This was not simply baffling, it was alarming.

"Your Grace, you shouldn't worry about her death so much. It was probably someone in here so they can frame you for it." Yul broke the silence with a deep sigh. "It was obvious. Cassara had survived this place for a year alone, and now she's dead. Right after you arrived makes it more obvious someone wanted to frame you."

"No." I shook my head while I massaged my temple. "I think this is something I should be bothered about. My gut feeling is telling me I should be more concerned about this."

Being accused of treason wasn't what terrified me or my people; we had planned to commit treason, anyway. But Cassara's words last night and how she ran off, terrified, etched in my head.

I turned my back against them, eyes glinting menacingly. "Who did it is not the correct question right now. Why they did it and why target Cassara were the questions we needed immediate answers to."

"I think she knows something no one knows about," I added under my breath as I narrowed my eyes suspiciously. "Why she kept it to herself is unknown, but one thing is for sure, we can't trust anything in this place."

"I agree with you on that, Your Grace." Silvia agreed, as her voice had a touch of danger.

Again, I turned around and faced them. We couldn't trust and wait for the result of Stefan's investigation.

"Klaus, start your own investigation regarding this. Take Silvia with you. Do it with no one noticing anything," I ordered, and Klaus bowed his head. "Be as discreetly as possible."

"Yes, Your Grace."

"As for Yul..." I trailed off, staring at him with narrowed eyes.

"You don't have to keep me in here for the sole reason of protection. You and I both know this place is not a safe place." Yul reminded me, as he had already assumed I planned on keeping him cove up in the dark.

"No, Yul. I have something more important for you to do." I shook my head, glancing at the other two before setting my eyes back to him. "Beatrice. I'm not telling you to warm her bed, but observe her closely."

"Do you think she is involved with this?" asked Yul while his brows furrowed.

"No. But I think she will be a pain in the neck in the future." I waved weakly. "You are dismissed."

The three of them bowed to execute the orders I gave them. Just when they were by the door, I called.

"Klaus."

He turned his head back to me.? "The news spreads fast and everyone who has keen eyes and ears would've known about this."

"I see." I nodded before they left.

When I was left alone, I marched towards the window and gazed outside. Since entering the palace, all I would know about what the occurrence inside this place.

Outside? I hoped Sam was getting the bigger picture of what was going on in here.

Chapter 376 - I'm Sorry For Cassara

Three days had passed since Cassara's death. Attending a funeral this soon wasn't what I had expected. Well, not that I didn't expect all the unexpected events that may occur in this place.

"Still no conclusion in your investigation?" I asked without turning my eyes away from the burning casket of Cassara.

"I should ask the same, Lilou," Stefan replied solemnly as he stood motionless beside me. "How was your own investigation faring?"

My brow quirked as I glanced at him. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"You don't have to deny it. This kingdom is mine, and the Capital is my dwelling. Everything that happens here reaches my ears, Lilou."

"But what happened to Cassara hasn't?"

He didn't reply anymore as I set my eyes back to the flames ahead. I ordered Klaus to be as discreet as possible in his investigation. Having Stefan know about this only meant these two things: Klaus failed, or he purposely slipped up. It was more likely the latter.

Klaus didn't have to get my approval if necessary changes were a must, because I was being watched. Everything I do, all my movements, whether it was a simple glance or huge gesture, Stefan would know about it.

Three days and Stefan made sure that I was aware of this invisible leash. I already expected it, though.

"What happened to Cassara bothered me. I don't want people pointing at me for her death," I explained calmly. "She died the next day I arrived, after all. I bet you also think it's my doing."

I turned my head to him with a smile, and he gazed back at me. "Does the thought alarmed you, Your Majesty?"

"No," Stefan answered after a minute of silence. "It will disappoint me if it's you, though."

"Oh? Pray tell, why?"

"It's something unnecessary, lacks art, and simply uninteresting." He shrugged, making me chuckle at the criteria of how to disappoint him. "But that is not your style. You won't do something as disappointing as this."

He cast me a knowing look, making me recall the life of the vigilante in the past. Now that I thought about it, those words he spouted just now were my words in the past.

I used to say: unnecessary, lack of art, and simply uninteresting way to announce 'someone is dead here!' when someone committed a horrible terror crime.

"You still remember." I chortled in a low tone as I bat my eyes slowly.

"I have an excellent memory, sweetheart. Considering your grudges now, you will probably resort to deboning her and display her bones in the heart of the Capital, while planting bits and pieces of her flesh in every garden you passed by."

"I say you have an excellent imagination, Your Majesty." I corrected, suppressing my laughter in the middle of the funeral. "You speak so calmly, knowing what I can do. Aren't you terrified what you said just now might just happen to you? Or are you underestimating me by saying such?"

"Ruminate my humor, whatever you like, sweetheart." He set his sharpened eyes on me once again as the corner of his lips curled up into a smirk. "But that doesn't change the fact that other people other than me want your head."

"Are you saying you are trying to protect me now?"

"I am saying the interest people had on the woman who will bear my children is growing in numbers. You can always rely on me, though." My brow arched as I gazed at him, and he looked away. "Of course, this comes with a price."

A mocking chuckle slipped past my lips. "Back then, I really believed you are my savior."

"I am."

"Yes." I nodded in agreement. "You are the savior who came to ruin me."

"It's safe to say we ruined each other."

"And we will continue ruining each other to death." This time, I turned and faced him squarely.

"Aren't you a masochist, Lexx?"

He shrugged nonchalantly. "Maybe?"

"Poor Cassara. Until the end, her husband doesn't have a shred of love for her." A sigh slipped past my lips. We're still in the funeral ceremony, but he had already focused his mind on how to aggravate me.

"I loved Cassara, Lilou." His answer, uttered by a straight face, caused me to scrunch my nose in disdain. "I won't marry her or keep her alive despite all her intrusions if I don't love her as my sister. But I rarely dwell on the dead. I'd rather put that energy on the living."

"So instead of mourning, you shift all your focus on me? Are you hoping I'd do the same since you already killed my husband?"

"Your words, not mine."

"Hah!" I shook my head as we faced ahead once again. "I bloody hate you."

"I warmly appreciate anything from you."

I ground my teeth as I cast him a glare. Just because my freedom right now was limited — as I was basically a hostage — he never missed a chance to annoy me.

We remained silent as we watched Cassara's remains burn into ashes. Thankfully, Stefan gave me some slack until the ritual ended.

"Right. I heard you called for Yul twice in your bedchambers in the past three days," Stefan opened up as he faced me.

I rolled my eyes as here he was again. Just how long would I have to endure talking to him?

"If you don't want hearing news about your mistress and her lover sneaking behind your back, then..." I trailed off as I caught someone familiar in the corner of my eyes.

Instinctively, I glanced in the direction, wide-eyed. What the hell was Sam doing in here?! Didn't he know everyone was here?

"What made you so distracted —" Before Stefan could turn where I was looking at, I hastily cupped his cheek to look at me. He instantly furrowed his brows as his eyes narrowed.

A wide, awkward grin appeared on my face. "Are you jealous?"

"No."

"Yes. I think you are!" I squeezed his face even more which made him frown. "You know? I didn't think you are quite cute this way."

"What are you trying to hide?"

"Hide? Can't I act a bit sweet for once?" I scoffed in dismay. I didn't know what got into my husband to go in here, but I couldn't let Stefan have this shred of an idea that Sam was alive.

"Lilou." Stefan held my wrist down before he turned his head in the direction I looked in previously. Sam wasn't there anymore, and I heaved a sigh of relief secretly.

"Don't do that again," Stefan warned with his eyes glinting.

I raised my hands with a shrug. "Sure. My sweetness expired already, anyway."

Stefan gazed at me for a minute before walking away. Another sigh escaped my mouth as my eyes lingered on where Sam stood earlier.

'Sam... I'm sorry for Cassara.'

Chapter 377 - He Is Next

Sam had always had a soft spot for his siblings. He must have had taken the risk of coming to the palace to see Cassara for the last time.

My eyes softened while I gazed at the floor and slowed down at my pace. I was already on the way back to my chambers to rest; I still had a gathering to attend to later.

'Sam...' I let out a deep exhale as I bit my lower lips.

The expression Sam had earlier etched into my head. It kept flashing across my mind, causing my heart to tighten. I wanted to console him or just be there for him, but I couldn't. It was not like Sam would sulk in the corner and mourn, but I knew this news had saddened him.

"Why would they kill her first?" A murmur slipped past my lips as I stopped in front of my chambers. My brows furrowed as I recalled Cassara's frightened expression the night before her death.

I placed my palm against the door. 'She said they will kill me. I already know a lot of people were after my head. But why did she look so terrified?'

Cassara and I didn't share a strong bond as we both despised each other's existence. She was not the person to worry about my well-being. If anything, my death would make her happy.

"I shouldn't have let her run off that night," I told myself before grinding my teeth. If I had stopped her before she could run, my head wouldn't throb this painfully right now.

"Whatever." I sighed while pushing the door to open, entering my chambers, and closed it behind.

Mildred wasn't here, as I gave her a task. I wondered what time she would return? I didn't think it will take her this long.

"My head..." I held my head as I squinted my eyes, balancing myself as I nearly collapsed. My head was throbbing more painful every passing second. It was making me dizzy.

I blinked as my vision shook. My blurring sight fell on the bed as I forced my feet to move whilst keeping my balance. I knew I would faint, but I shouldn't faint just anywhere.

If someone found me lying unconscious on the floor, it would alarm many people. Who knows what Stefan would do?

'Just a bit more, Lilou...' My hand reached for the bed. I forced my eyes open until the mattress was beyond my reach. "... damn."

Then nothing.

"Lilou."

"Can you hear us, child?"

"You will do it, right? Kill every living La Crox..."

I gasped for air as I instinctively sat upright. I ran my fingers through my hair, looking around.

"You're awake?" My eyes snapped, veering at the source of the voice.

"Yul." I pressed my lips in a thin line as I stabilized my breathing. "What are you doing in my chambers?"

He was sitting on the divan not far away from the bed. Yul had a cup of tea and a book; his leg resting over the other, looking all laid back.

"I came to check in on you, but I found you lying beside your bed. Are you alright?" he asked calmly.

"Yes." I nodded as I licked my dry lips.

"You don't look like you are." He pointed out, raising his brows. "You don't just faint, Lilou."

"I didn't faint."

"You will lie to me? Of all people?"

A shallow breath slipped past my lips as I rolled my eyes. "My head hurts so badly."

"A headache that caused you to faint? Do you feel other strange things?" he inquired with a furrowed brow, turning his body to face me directly.

"Strange things?" I knitted my brows as I pondered about his question. "No. Just a headache. Perhaps I'm still adjusting to this place."

Aside from the indistinct voices in my head, there wasn't any 'strange' thing that I noticed, honestly. I didn't sense an ability causing me to faint. If I did, it would've alarmed Catharsis and Lakresha.

"Is that all?" he queried once again, which made me raise a brow.

"That's all, Yul," I reassured annoyingly, ruffling my hair. Only then, I noticed that I already had a change of clothes in a nightdress.

"I changed your clothes. Your chamber is like a public spot where everyone comes and goes as they pleased. I'd rather let whoever come in here see you in a nightdress while I'm in my undershirt." Yul explained while I stared at him solemnly. He raised his brow with my intent stare.

"What?" he asked.

A light chuckle slipped past my lips. "Claiming territory? Are you jealous of Stefan, Yul?"

He didn't answer and stared at me with genuine wonder. A shallow breath slipped escaped my mouth, flinging out my legs out of the bed. I sauntered towards him and perched comfortably beside him.

"Yul, you don't have to do that, you know?" I sighed, smacking my lips. My fingertips played with the tip of his hair.

"Even if someone came in here while we're making out, it's doesn't matter, Yul," I continued while staring deep into his eyes. "Everyone knows about us, and that wouldn't change even though Stefan will bed me soon."

I sported a reassuring smile while he looked at me with the same baffled expression. Another faint exhale escaped my mouth as I withdrew my hand away.

"Things had been difficult for me as well." This time, I held his hand and squeeze it lightly. "But it will be alright soon, hmm?"

Yul pulled his hand away from my grip. "Stop teasing me," he uttered while assisting himself up and walked away.

"Yul," I called, but he didn't look back, trudging away until the door closed behind him.

As soon as he was out of sight, my eyes sharpened, and immediately ran towards the window.

'Klaus,' I closed my eyes, connecting my mind to Klaus.

'Your Grace.'

'Find Yul as soon as possible,' I ordered as my eyes slowly opened, seeing two different eye colors through my reflection. 'He is next.'

'What...?'

'Just do it, Klaus! You can't fail me this time.' My voice shook in anger. Klaus replied with urgency before I cut the link I had with him.

"Yul wouldn't change my clothes... never." A ridiculing chuckle escaped my mouth, thinking how Yul threw a huge fit when I started changing in front of him months ago. Also, with everything that I had spouted, Yul wouldn't simply keep that same expression.

He would be disgusted.

Just then, I remembered, Fabian had mentioned seeing two Claude the night they all died, then two Zero. Since he didn't have a sound mind that night, we barely took his words with a grain of salt.

"I won't let anyone touch my brother," I seethed as the voices in my head rang so loud I thought it would deafen me.. "Hah! Ha! Ha! Ahh, goodness... I think I was the one who killed Cassara, after all."

Chapter 378 - Hunt Night

"Hah..." I rocked my head as I kept the voices in my mind at bay. But my eyes remained different in colors. I couldn't change them back with this fury building up inside me.

"They want to size me up?" the side of my lips curled up into a smirk while I planted my palm on the glass window. "Let's show them who is the craziest in this asylum, Catharsis."

A shroud encircled around my shoulder, creeping down to my sleeve and then to my hand. I closed my grip when I felt its handle as Catharsis shifted into a haladie. Its size was enough for my fingers to play with it to kill time.

My eyes glinted as I marched outside my chambers and headed directly to the garden. I looked around, stopping as I faced the direction of the main palace.

"Meet you later," I placed a light peck on Catharsis before pulling my arm back, shifting all my power to my hand. Once I had enough strength, I threw it in the air like a boomerang.

I stretched my neck in a circular motion with my eyes closed.

'To find Yul, I had to mobilize this entire place to search for him.' Once I opened my eyes, it sharpened as a fiery fire blazed beneath them.

Whoever that Yul in my room moments ago, he was strong. I didn't sense his power and almost thought it was Yul. If I didn't know my brother too well, I would've believed it was him.

"They had entered the palace just as expected," I muttered, gazing in the direction where I threw Catharsis. "I had to do this."

I took a deep breath as I put my hand over the other; the back of my hand on my other palm. My eyes remained on the small dark ball appearing on my palm, wincing at the pain and the gravity weighing on my entire body.

'I had to pull this off,' I reminded myself as resolve flickered across my eyes. Shortly, when I was satisfied with the energy of the dark ball, I tossed it up.

The dark ball floated up in slow motion, but its only destination was upward. It took its time to cross the roof of the third prince's palace and it had continued to go up.

BOOM!

From a distance, I heard a loud rumble as Catharsis finally hit something. A second later, the dark circle up above exploded. Like a veil covering the entire imperial palace, swallowing the light; it was just like that night a year ago.

It was as if history had repeated itself. This time, though, it was me who had unleashed a dark field, albeit unstable.

"This is enough for now," I whispered as the side of my lips curled up into a vicious smirk.

At this rate, these people would stop fooling around and shift all their attacks directed at me. This wasn't a gamble, it was the risk of someone who lead.

"It's time to hunt," I uttered as I marched away, withdrawing Lakresha as I held it to my left.

Meanwhile, not far away from the exit of the imperial palace, Fabian and Samael turned their head back. They looked up as something dark slowly draped, covering the entire palace with darkness.

"My lady," Fabian whispered while he furrowed his brow and immediately turned his head to Samael's shoulder. He couldn't see Samael's expression with the hood of his cloak covering his head.

"We can't return, my Lord." He reminded just so Samael knew that.

The latter remained silent and simply watched the dark field swallow the entire palace. Samael was calm, despite knowing the source of the sudden surge of power inside the premises.

"Not bad." He nodded approvingly before he took a step forward when the darkfield was within his reach.

"Your Grace."

"I won't go back, Fabian," Samael reassured, glancing over his shoulders. "Don't worry."

Fabian pressed his lips together and tilted his head down. Although he didn't see Samael's expression, he could tell by his aura and tone the duke was totally pissed.

"She hadn't perfected it, but it's not bad," a murmur slipped past Samael's lips as he touched the darkfield. "Tonight, this place will be a hunting ground, Fabian, and no one shall escape her wrath."

His eyes slowly opened as the darkfield he was touching trembled under his touch. Samael took a deep breath as he withdrew his hand and casually turned his back against it.

"Let's go, Fabian." He glanced at Fabian, who was standing on the side.

"You're really not coming back?" asked Fabian, tilting his head to the side. "I was prepared to stop you, Your Grace."

"No," Samael answered while shaking his head lightly. "Lilou is stronger than a year ago. She will manage."

"If you say so." Fabian nodded as he followed his master's tracks.

"She probably figured out what is going on inside." Samael's crimson orbs darkened as he continued to march away. "Let's handle the bigger picture, shall we?"

"Finally."

There wasn't the usual smirk that appeared on Samael's face. Instead, it remained stoic, cold, with eyes revealing the death's door.

"Fabian," he called, and turned his head to Fabian. "Never mind. I'll just ask Rufus."

"My lord, you can trust me this time." Fabian let out a deep sigh, as it seemed Samael wouldn't trust him for quite some time.

The latter kept quiet for some time before his lips parted. "Sneak inside the palace once the hunting is over. Lilou might lose her mind later."

"I can't let her changing into a full Bloodfang now," Samael added under his breath as his fangs let themselves known.

Meanwhile, Stefan snapped his eyes languidly as he gazed down. His eyes instantly fell on the Haladie that landed in the middle of the long table of the gathering.

"Your Majesty, a darkfield had covered the entire palace!" one knight came rushing to him, reporting dreadful news.

"I can see that." Stefan raised his gaze at the window, only to see darkness. "Deploy all elites knights, Dominique."

Dominique, who was standing at the corner, leaning against the wall, pulled himself away from it.

"Should I order for other knights to retreat, Your Majesty?" he inquired calmly.

"Those who are strong will live and those who aren't are meant to die tonight." Stefan's tone was just as calm as Dominique's. His eyes fixated on the darkfield outside.

"For a second, I thought the darkfield is just for show, but it seemed stable... and strong." He nodded approvingly, placing his palm against the armrest as he stood up. "No one will escape this dark veil. So, we better hunt who killed Cassara."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Chapter 379 - One, Two, Three...

I whistled softly, standing on top of the third prince's tower. From my vantage point, I could see the Avolire Palace and the main palace.

"Your Grace!" Silvia's voice suddenly rang from the other end of the roof, appearing out of nowhere. "What is going on? Why did you...?"

She trailed off as she gazed up at the dark sky covering the entire imperial palace. Silvia was aware that my darkfield had its own downside, but it seemed Sam helped me. The darkfield looked more sturdy, like a cage, trapping everyone inside.

"Have you found Yul?" I asked in a calm tone.

"Klaus is still looking for him. But Lilou, I was just with him hours ago."

"And I was with him just right before I gave out the order." I averted my eyes away from her and set them on the main palace. "His ability is copying a person's appearance and scent. He knew a thing or two... I guess he had sunk his fangs into Yul's."

"What...!"

My eyes zoomed in and out, narrowing them at the main palace. "Focus on finding Yul, Silvia. I won't accept the news of his death."

I shook my head lightly. Until now, I couldn't feel Yul's presence nor I could share a mind link with him. He was probably unconscious.

"Yes, Your Grace." There was a slight hesitation in her voice, but she still followed my will. "About the king, I heard he had mobilized all royal knights. Some of them are heading in here."

"Don't mind them, Silvia."

"Lilou, we --"

"Shh..." I slowly set my eyes back to her. She pressed her lips into a thin line, tilting her head down.

"Are you sure I am Lilou?" I inquired emotionlessly. "Trust your instincts, Silvia, just like how I trust mine. Stefan isn't a fool not to see this darkfield as an opportunity."

I paused while I gazed up at the darkfield. "Mobilizing the royal knights is just what I need to find Yul even faster."

"I know you care about Yul, but is this really necessary?"

"If this happened to you, I will do the same, Silvia." I cast her a side-eye nonchalantly. "My sincerity for my people is equal. Even if I had to devise another plan or put myself in a trickier situation, I would."

Sam had approved and respected my decision. I didn't have to hear it from his lips. His help in stabilizing the darkfield was proof.

"I'll keep that in mind." Silvia bowed, and I gazed at her. Her eyes glowed in crimson as her canine grew longer.

I only saw Silvia bare her fangs once or twice, so doing it right now told me she had understood my point.

"Take care," I reminded her before she vanished from my sight.

I didn't dwell on where Silvia went as I gazed in a certain direction. I took a deep breath, jumping from where I stood, and leaped towards the person I wanted to see.

Once my feet landed on the grass of the vast inner ward close to the main palace, I raised my head and smiled.

"Are you going somewhere? Lexx?" I inquired, locking my eyes with him.

Stefan quirked his brow and cast me a look before facing Alistair, giving out his orders. My brows raised and waited for them to finish.

"And..." He raised his finger and turned his head to me. "What do you need?"

"Yul."

"Is he missing?" he queried without the slightest interest in his voice.

I nodded. "I want you to find him."

"That's not my problem nor my duty." Stefan peeled his eyes away from me and set them back to Alistair. "That's all. You're dismissed."

Alistair bowed and then glanced in my direction with a mocking smirk. When he turned to leave, he stopped as I spoke.

"I want Yul alive, just in case."

"That is not the orders I received, Your Grace." Alistair scoffed, suppressing himself from mocking me blatantly. "My apologies."

"They're now part of your mission." The corner of my lips stretched into a smile as my eyes shifted to Stefan. "I don't intend to resort to unnecessary killings, Your Majesty. Help me find Yul and bring him back alive."

"The audacity." Alistair hissed, as his eyes glistened with murderous intent.

I shrugged indifferently, as I had no energy to agitate him further. Instead, I bat my eyes at Stefan since he called the shots.

"You did all this..." he paused and gazed above. "... because of Yul?"

"Do you have a problem with that?"

"He must be very important to you." Stefan snapped his eyes, looking back at me. His face was devoid of emotion, but his eyes were glinting menacingly.

"He is, Your Majesty." I took several steps forward until I was a step away from him. "Yul is one of the most important people in my life and if something happened to him? I don't know what I will do. Find him for me and I will help you."

Stefan bent over to my side. I could feel his intimidating aura weighing down on my shoulders, but I ignored it.

"No, thank you," he whispered, and he drew his head back, eyes on me. "Alistair, if you see Yul, kill him on the spot."

"Hah! Yes, Your Majesty."

"There is a limit to my patience, sweetheart." Stefan raised his hand and planted his palm on my jaw. His thumb caressed my cheek as the side of his lips curled up subtly.

"I'm not kind enough to save my mistress's lover." He stressed his words through his gritted teeth. "Once I get my hands on Yul, I will hang his head in the gates of the palace as a lesson for those who touch what's mine."

I frowned as I looked at him apathetically. "I am forever Sam's, Lexx, and if you don't want to search for Yul, then so be it. I'll search for him myself."

"Good luck." He withdrew his hand away and turned his back against me.

My lips pressed together, gazing at his back, and waved.

"Just so you know, someone will die every ten seconds without Yul and if he dies, everyone will as well." My voice raised before turning around, walking away from the opposite direction.

"One, two, three..." I counted while I entered the main palace, holding my hand behind. "...eight, nine..."

Lakresha took form in my hand as I stopped treading, gazing at the guarding knight near me.

"Ten." Dark blood spurted on me as I pulled my scythe from his throat. After this action, his body instantly collapsed, and I gazed down.

"They have dark blood just as I thought." I nodded in understanding. "You should have run away when you have the time. Why stay near me?"

I stepped my foot on his back, clicking my tongue. For reasons unknown, I had noticed the difference between auras in this palace. Probably because of the darkfield. That was why I figured they weren't Stefan's people, but he 'probably' didn't know that.

"But, oh well, this will be a win-win for me." Killing the enemy's spies that polluted the palace would act as my front for 'my madness'. It may indirectly help Stefan, but it was not like their presence wouldn't trouble me.

"Tsk. Whatever." I snapped my tongue, resting my scythe over my shoulder. "One, two, three..."

Chapter 380 - A Little Late

"... ten."

THUD!

"Ahh... I already know they are a lot but I didn't expect them to have an entire army in their enemy's territory. Just what the fuck is Lexx doing?!" I ground my teeth as I looked back.

The hallway I passed through was now trashed with piles of dead bodies and blood splattered messily. A sigh slipped past my lips as I turned my head towards the window on my side. It didn't take long when I saw my reflection in the transparent glass.

"It seems they were having fun outside," I mumbled, hearing the faint hissing and growls. "And they haven't found Yul."

I didn't have a certain destination. All I had done was search for Yul in this place and make a mess. My gut feeling told me Yul was just in here. I didn't know where exactly, though.

"There you are again," a whisper slipped past my lips while massaging my temple. "Tone it down, will you? No one is listening. Stop wasting your time and energy."

The voices in my head were getting louder by the second. It made my head throb, but unlike earlier, I didn't feel dizzy.

"Hmm?" my brows furrowed as I set my eyes back on the window. I walked towards it and thrust Lakresha against it, which caused it to shatter. The glass shards that sprinkled down inside didn't bother me as I peeked my upper outside.

"Yul," I muttered.

I didn't hesitate to jump out of the window as I heard Yul's voice from somewhere. Alistair and Stefan finally found him! But alas... they would kill him. I knew that because I was the one who mobilize them to search for him.

It may not be the usual 'search for him and rescue him', but it was still the same. They searched for Yul so they could kill him and they found him; I met the goal.

"Now, the question is... which Yul is it?"

My eyes glinted, barely blinking despite the harsh and freezing breeze blowing past me. Soon, the middle ward came to my sight. I scoffed as I stopped on some random roof, studying the situation in the middle ward.

I narrowed my eyes, darting my gaze from the people standing around the courtyard.

There were knights scattered around, with Stefan, Alistair, and Dominique's back facing my direction. The three of them were gazing at the person standing before them.

Yul.

"They really meant it when they said they will go hunting," I muttered coldly, assessing Yul's figure. There were several arrows plunged in his back and thigh, but that didn't hinder him from standing up against his enemies.

"They treated him as if he was some sort of animal." A deep breath escaped my mouth, stretching my neck from one side to another.

"Really... I shouldn't use my head that much."

As soon as those words left my mouth, I jumped from where I was, landing on the bakehouse before hopping straight to the ground. I winced at the slight pain on my side, but that briefly stopped me from approaching the party.

When I came close, I drew out Lakresha and some knights instinctively backed away from my path. Dominique and Alistair turned their heads on me while Stefan barely glanced at me.

"How dare you treat him like an animal?" I asked in a low tone without stopping in my tracks, heading towards Yul. I stood a step away from Yul, assessing his wounds from head to toe.

"Your Grace, I know you are concerned about Yul, but —" Dominique was cut off when Stefan raised his hand. The latter's eyes fixed on me, keeping his silence.

We stared at each other without a word before I turned to face Yul once again. My eyes softened with regret before he wrapped his arms around me tightly.

"Where is Yul?" I asked in his ear, gripping the arrow on his leg and pressed it deeper. "Tell me now and I will end your sufferings without giving out your real identity."

He grunted and a second later, I felt something sting on my shoulder as he had sunk his fangs into me. That didn't bother me, despite hearing his loud gulps.

"Do you think..." My hand reached for the back of his hand and tugged his head back. His fangs ripped across my flesh as blood dripped down on the side of his lips.

"... you will get anything from my blood?" I smirked as an amused chuckle slipped past my lips. I spun Lakresha with my other hand and then hooked it around his nape, its tip pointing at the side of his neck.

"Sorry, but I had done a lot of experiments to kill boredom."

Blood spurted on my cheek, causing me to shut my one eye. I could feel the intense gaze on my back, but no one broke the silence. It was so quiet that I even heard how many times the severed head bounced as it rolled on the grass.

"Are you crazy? Why did you kill him?!" the enthusiastic Jayden hollered while I pushed the body away from me. "Your Majesty, how are we supposed to track his other accomplices now?"

Jayden continued to berate Stefan as I turned around to face them. I wiped off the blood across my eye with my pinky and then to my lips for a taste.

There was this confusion in their eyes as I licked the blood off of my pinky. The only one who wasn't puzzled was Stefan.

"Bitter?" he asked, and I nodded.

"Bitter."

"You didn't have to kill him to taste, though," He scolded in a low and intimidating tone.

"Well, no matter how you torture him, he won't talk." I shrugged nonchalantly and cast Jayden a look. "And if you sink your fangs into him, prepare to lose your fangs."

Jayden furrowed his brows and glanced at Stefan. Stefan had known this fact for sure since we spent a long time together; dissecting and experimenting with all sorts of vampires and humans.

"You're welcome, Your Majesty." The corner of my lips stretched into a weak smile. "I didn't mean to ruin your hunting game. I'm off to pick up Yul."

I waved them goodbye as I scanned every single one of them. Before they could react, I left since I already figured where was Yul after killing his impostor.

"... I'm off to pick up Yul."

"What —!" Jayden was cut short as his eyes followed Lilou's figure, which was leaping away like a shadow. "Are we going to let her go just like that?"

He turned his gaze to Stefan, furrowing his brows as a smirk appeared on the latter's lips. Stefan snapped his eyes and glanced at where she went off.

"Sadly, you're not the only one who thinks, sweetheart," Stefan whispered, as a devious glint flickered across his eyes.

Meanwhile, in a private residence on the outskirts of the capital, Samael raised his brows and turned around as someone suddenly barged into the room.

"My lord, someone from the Marquess is here to deliver a letter," Noah reported as he trudged towards Samael with a young man beside him.

"A letter?" Samael furrowed his brows, gazing down at the letter with the Crawford Clan seal on it. He accepted it, casting the young messenger a suspicious look.

"Why would he send me a letter all of a sudden?" he inquired while carefully opening the envelope.

"Marquess Cameron just told me to get this letter to you as fast as I can without being noticed, Your Grace."

"Sounds urgent," Samael muttered, and then skimmed its content.

After reading the letter, he crumpled it as the sound of his teeth grinding pierced Noah's ears.

"Barron Martin finally talked..." Samael's fangs grew longer while his eyes glowed in deep crimson. "... albeit a little fucking late!"