

The Duke 391

Chapter 391 - End It Once And For All

"Congratulation on your pregnancy. But alas..."

Beatrice and I failed to react in time, as Alphonse already sent her flying while my back hit the wall. I winced at the pain in my back, gripping Alphonse's arm on instinct.

I gazed down, only to realize half of his finger plunged into my chest. It wasn't that deep yet, so I mustered my remaining energy to stop his hand.

'Sam, I think I'm dead...' I muttered internally while gritting my teeth and glaring at the man before me.

"Duchess, I don't want to kill you, but this child..." Alphonse's eyes drooped as the sinister smirk on his lips sent a shiver down my spine. "... can't live."

As he said so, my feet gradually left the floor as he lifted me up. I clutched his arm even tighter while catching up to my breathing. The thought of being pregnant barely lingered in my head with my current situation. I was not even sure if he was telling me the truth.

"Kill him."

The voice in my head chanted repeatedly. For once, I agreed with them as I needed to kill Alphonse, but how? The voices had been clouding my head, and they were inflicting pain on me until now. My desperation increased every passing second.

"Kill him..."

"Kill... the child..."

I was frozen in place as the voices grew distinct. What did they say? Kill who? My child?

"No," I whispered through my gritted teeth. "Not my child."

"Your Grace, we are saving the child some slack by killing it. You don't want him to shoulder this burden you're carrying, right?" Alphonse crooned with a smirk on his lips. "I am saddened that we came to this point, but I've gone this far. I can't turn my back on my family now."

I felt his fingers going further inside my chest, slowly. If this continued, I would soon see my heart in his hands.

'Help me,' I whispered in my heart, still holding on to his arm. 'Please... someone... Help me...'

"Child... come with us..."

"We are your family... we will take care of you and your child."

"We will protect you, child..."

"Alphonse." I breathed out heavily and my vision blurred. The voices in my head grew louder than before, but this time, I didn't stop them until they're all I could hear.

"You will be the first La Crox I will kill."

His brow rose and saw his mouth move, but I couldn't understand what he was trying to say. I didn't even know what I told him. What I knew was that the voices in my head gave me impossible warmth and the coldness seeping deep into my bones.

BOOGSH!

Suddenly, a loud noise penetrated the voices. Alphonse and I instinctively looked up. All we had seen was a figure falling along with the rubbles of the tile roof. I naturally felt relief in my heart even before my eyes could recognize the person.

"Ah!" I yelped as soon as Alphonse withdrew his hand. I crashed to the floor, catching up to my breathing as the flatline noise in my ear subsided.

"Love! Love! Lilou!"

I raised my head, only to see the pair of worried eyes looking back at me. I reached to him, clutching his chest to see if he was truly my husband.

'I'm saved...' I mentally heaved a sigh of relief as a smile surfaced on my lips.

"Sam," came out a relief whisper before I instinctive gaze down.

Blood was dripping on the floor as the hole in my chest streamed with blood. My feet felt cold while I clutched my chest to stop the bleeding.

"Lilou, I'm sorry I was late." Sam's worried voice made me look up at him.

It was not Sam's fault. We had planned this, didn't we? I was the one who stubbornly wanted us to split the mission. It just so happened Alphonse had also prepared just like us.

"I'm al..." My heart suddenly throbbed strongly as I froze. The next thing I knew was the view of the throne hall tilted, and his voice fading.

'Yes, we are saved, child.' those words were the last thing I had heard before succumbing to the peaceful darkness.

"I'm al... right."

Samael instinctively caught her in his arms as she lost consciousness. His pupils constricting and dilating at the pitiful sight of his wife. Littered with wounds, bruises, and blood, Lilou was strong enough to avoid this.

Just what the hell happened in this place?

"Before you blame me, I didn't do that to her. The only wound I gave her is the one that was on her chest," Alphonse explained while Samael studied his wife's condition. "Blame her for refusing the voices."

He gazed down at his hand, spreading his fingers evenly. If he was a second later, he had already lost a limb.

"Also, welcome back from hell! You never ceased to amaze me with your antics, my brother!"

"Alphonse..." Samael gripped Lilou's shoulder lightly before letting it loose. He carefully put her down and then planted his palm on her chest. With one brief push, the blood stopped dripping from her wound.

"I've seen Dyrroth," He muttered as he slowly stood and faced his brother.

Alphonse raised his brows as the corner of his lips curled up into a smile. "Well, no wonder you look a little sentimental."

"This... is what you want?" Samael ignored his brother's playful remarks with his hand clenched into a fist. "You want her to kill us just so we can all start over?"

"Hell, isn't this what you also hoped for? That we can all start over outside the responsibility of being a La Crox?" Alphonse tilted his head with a misplaced innocence in his eyes. "I told you, Caecilius. If you want to save the children, you have to take out the root of the problem."

"And that root is not just our father, the king, but our blood," Alphonse continued solemnly.. "I am saving my siblings in a way I know and that is to give them salvation."

Chapter 392 - End It Once And For All II

"...Salvation.

"Salvation...? This is not taking out its root, Alphonse. You are trying to flee from it."

"You are so stubborn, but this time, I understand since your wife is involved." Alphonse glanced at Lilou, lying unconscious behind Samael. "I am genuinely saddened about her fate, but if I am going to choose, I will always choose my family."

There was a moment of silence between the two before Alphonse gazed back at Samael. The side of his lips curled up into a subtle smile.

"But you have a different opinion, don't you? Brother?"

"We can never erase the origins of our blood, Alphonse." Samael breathed out as bitterness flickered across his crimson eyes. "No matter how we detest the king and the blood that is running through our veins, we are who we are!"

His voice pitched until it shook in anger. It was easier to fight Alphonse if his reasons were pure destructions. But alas, Samael couldn't deny the slight goodwill behind it. Alphonse was simply doing what he thought best for his siblings, even if it meant being the villain of the story.

"Alphonse... did you destroy all those countries because we can flee in a country that desperately needs salvation? Did you think that if we settle in a country where we can be heroes, they will accept us and we can live in peace?"

Alphonse's expression died down as his aura grew colder. "Caecilius, don't be a hypocrite."

"Your ideals, brother... I appreciate them, but we do not live in the past." Samael gnashed his teeth as he swallowed down the tension in his throat. "That is not what Dyrroth wants, Alphonse."

They looked at each other; one had nothing but coldness in his eyes while the other bore fire. It didn't matter who was in the right because they were fighting for a different thing.

"You do not know what Dyrroth wants, Hell," Alphonse answered in a low tone after the long silence.

"I don't, but I understand his heart. Causing another person's destruction for our sake is something he will never approve of."

Dyrroth, the late crown prince, and Claude's father was a warm and compassionate person. Despite that, the La Crox family was filled with lunatics, everyone, including Samael, respected and listened to their eldest — Alphonse, included. Dyrroth had mentioned the 'what ifs' in passing, but Alphonse had taken those moments in the heart.

"Among your siblings, you are the one that is the closest to Dyrroth." Samael sighed heavily as he studied Alphonse's demeanor. "You have to accept his death, Alphonse."

This was painful for Samael.

"No." Alphonse let out a weak chuckle and shook his head. "It's too late to accept his death." because accepting Dyrroth's death also meant letting go of his purpose.

"Dyrroth..." He paused as he gazed down at his bloodstained palm. "... shouldn't have died. He and Lucia should've lived longer with that little runt. He deserved that life, Hell."

Sadness and bitterness resurfaced in Alphonse's eyes, but they vanished almost immediately. The late king had forced his children to be cruel, to see each other as competition. If only they were raised differently and in a different environment, instead of stifling family dinners, they would be laughing and sharing funny stories.

Others wouldn't understand that, but that was what Alphonse wanted.

To see his siblings smile without malice or worry.

To eat in peace while listening to their blissful laughter and stories.

A life just like a normal family.

A relationship where they had each other's back, not scheme behind each other's back.

A restart.

Their father and this life deprived them of those simple things, so Alphonse planned to give them a second chance in life.

"We all deserve that," Alphonse added after a moment. "You are too blinded to see that now, but once you die, we will all forget this nightmare of a life. You will forget this and I am only the one who will bear all the guilt, Hell."

Samael let out a shallow breath as his lips opened and closed. "Why... are you and Stefan so stubborn?"

If only they had chosen to be on the same side at the very beginning, they could've worked things out. Samael tried to fix it with Stefan, but it was already too late. They already reached this point and the damages to their family were too severe.

"What you want is nothing but a superficial life, Alphonse. You are only doing this for self-satisfaction." Samael bit his tongue and slapped his hand in the air, making his nails look like claws. It was not that his own happiness with Lilou blinded him.

Samael loved the idea, but they had to consider their siblings. Would they want their memory to get wiped just to live a normal life? Was there not a point in their life where they were satisfied being a La Crox?

Both didn't know the answer, nor would they ever hear their deceased siblings' wishes. But what Samael knew was, there was only one way, and that was to move forward.

"I will stop this madness," his tone was solemn with a touch of bitterness. "Big brother."

Alphonse opened his mouth, but no words came out. Instead, he pressed his lips together until the side of his lips curled up into a subtle smile.

'Please, do.'

The aura they emitted grew stronger than anyone who stepped in would instantly suffocate. In a blink of an eye, they both disappeared from their standpoint and clashed mid-air.

No matter how excruciating Samael's heartache, he bore his fangs and didn't hesitate to attack his brother with an intention of killing him. This was the only thing he could do for him.

Alphonse didn't also back down as he blocked and assaulted Samael with all his might. This would be his final fight that would determine whether his plans would proceed or he'd die along with it.

"Caecilius! I will still bring you back to life!" yelled Alphonse while charging towards Samael.

Samael stood at the center of the throne hall, watching Alphonse blink from different areas. The latter's voice and chuckles reeked of madness, but all he could hear was the desperate beating of his heart.

"Thank you, Alphonse," he whispered as a ball of red blood formed under his palm. 'And I'm sorry for failing to see the reason behind your madness until now.'

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, planning to end this once and for all.

"Darkfield."

Chapter 393 - [Bonus]End It Once And For All III

"Darkfield."

Alphonse grinned wickedly as he glanced at the dark shroud surrounding them. But this didn't stop him from attacking Samael as he extended his claws, aiming at his heart.

Before Alphonse could reach Samael, a hand grabbed his arm, which instantly crushed his bone. He could feel that his bone didn't just shatter from the area Samael held, but it continued up to his shoulder.

"Did you know how I defeat father?" Samael inquired, looking down at Alphonse with no emotions in his eyes. "I sold my soul to the devil, Alphonse."

His dark hair slowly changed its color to white, while his one sclera changed into black. Alphonse's eyes dilated at seeing this hideous appearance of his brother.

"I abhor Father for he had been cruel to his children, but I respect his leadership." Samael tore Alphonse's limbs as if he was simply tearing a piece of paper. He tossed it to the side and, in a blink of an eye, grabbed Alphonse by the neck.

Alphonse held on to Samael's arm while digging his nails into it, but that didn't face the latter. His feet left the ground while struggling under his brother's grip.

"You had been putting your life into those twenty bodies all this time, Alphonse. You can't defeat me."

Although Samael's voice was cold, he looked at Alphonse with poignancy. The latter gazed back at him with mockery whilst trying to find a way to survive; like a trapped animal trying to break free, but to no avail. Samael had decided to end his madness, so he would.

"Caecilius, Hell! haha! Ha --!" His waves of laughter faded into a deep gasp for air. Alphonse coughed as Samael tightened his grip around his neck.

"Ah... this is the end, huh?" he uttered in between his heavy panting. "It seems you've fully recovered your strength... no wonder, she..."

Samael's brows creased as his jaw clenched, choking him to death. His gaze never left Alphonse, keeping his resolve firm.

"I'm sorry that I took so long to notice your sufferings, Alphonse," he apologized under his breath, with eyes burning. "Thank you for loving us, brother."

Stunned, Alphonse's eyes dilated momentarily before they relaxed. A subtle smile resurfaced on his lips as he gazed back at Samael, seeing the tears that were rolling down his cheek.

"What... a sight to... behold," came out a whisper along with his last breath.

His eyes slowly closed while his grip on Samael's arm loosened until his hand fell down on his rear. No one could judge if Alphonse's ways were wrong or right in this twisted world they moved in. He did what he did because he was fighting for something.

And for that, Alphonse passed with a subtle and peaceful smile on his face.

He died fighting until the very end, with no regrets.

The irony was, the person who had delivered him to hell wept for his death.

Samael carefully put down Alphonse's body, squatting down beside him while tears dripped on his brother's cheek. Alphonse, although wicked, had loved his siblings in his own way. Even if those same people whom he protected detested his action, his plans for them to have a better life didn't change.

"You always tell me I am the one who is stubborn..." he muttered with a shaking voice, planting his palm on Alphonse's chest. "... I guess you are the most stubborn among us, brother."

If only Alphonse hated them all and simply wanted destruction, this would be way too easy for Samael. But no, Alphonse did every wicked deed, thinking of salvation for his siblings.

"You had fought enough. Rest in peace, Alphonse."

Samael gazed at Alphonse for a moment until his skin wrinkled and dried up. Deep in Samael's heart, he truly wished that Alphonse would find his peace and salvation after death.

The palace wing where Klaus and Alistair fought looked like a storm had taken place. There were cracks and holes in the wall and roof tile, broken furniture, and hallows on the floor. They fought intensely, but the result was obvious.

"Hey, you." Klaus patted the flat point of his sword against Alistair's chin, making the latter look up at him.

Alistair couldn't overpower Klaus, and now he ended up cornered back against the wall while his brother stood in front of him.

"All the nonsense you said just now... it's touching, but you and Alphonse don't get to decide our lives," Klaus expressed with a deep sigh. "We can blame Father for what we are now, but we never truly tried to change the course of our lives. Dyrroth and Lucia did — Hell as well, but us? We accepted this kind of life and this situation is the outcome of that decision."

"Tch. You speak so much, Klaus," Alistair chuckled in mockery, wincing when his lungs constricted. "You are a bunch of fucking ingrates."

Klaus opened his mouth but ended up closing it again. Killing Hanz was easy, as that fellow had no deep reason for his madness but the pleasure of destruction.

"You know... you will regret this." Alistair let out a series of coughs until blood flew out of his mouth. His breathing also grew heavy, gazing up back to Klaus.

"If you think killing us means it is over, you are wrong." He slipped his hand into his waist secretly, smirking weakly at Klaus. "You are so pitiful, so I will give you some slack since you're stalling. You're welcome."

Alistair mustered his remaining strength as he grabbed the knife he kept on his waist. Klaus couldn't react quickly because the second he blinked, Alistair had already pierced his own throat.

"No..." Klaus tossed his sword and bend down, reaching for Alistair but hesitant to touch him. "Hey, shit...! Why would you..."

His breath hitched as his hand mid-air trembled, watching the life in Alistair's eyes slip away. Everything happened so fast, so now that he was looking at Alistair, his mind momentarily malfunctioned.

Klaus had still a lot of things to say. He wasn't done with him just yet. He hadn't cursed him enough and bantered with him for a little longer.

"You..." he balled his hand into a fist, punching the wall where Alistair's body was leaning on. "...are so fucking selfish until the fucking end."

He ground his teeth, hanging his head low. Alistair and Alphonse had schemed for years, and yet, the former would die just like that? It was unfair. They should be restrained first and reflect on their sin, or just stay stubborn and lose their minds in the oubliette.

"You... are..." Klaus froze upon feeling the small hands on his shoulder and followed by Claude's soft voice.

"Uncle..."

His teeth clenched even more, unable to face his nephew right now. Claude frowned and pursed his lips while he gazed down. When Claude raised his head once again, his eyes glinted with determination.

"Uncle!" he called and pounced on Klaus's back, wrapping his little arms around his uncle's neck. "Uncle Alistair chose death over your sympathy. It's not your fault."

Klaus's brows creased, holding his breath while gazing down.

"Claude is safe, thanks to Uncle! So Claude doesn't blame Uncle." Claude's eyes softened, feeling a bit sentimental knowing Klaus's pain and feeling how his back trembled.

Klaus took a deep breath with his eyes closed. He patted Claude's little arms as he opened his eyes.

"Thanks to you, Uncle has a purpose." He didn't waste a second as he carried Claude in a piggyback, gazing at Alistair for the last time.

"Rest in peace, Ali."

Chapter 394 - [Bonus]May We All Find Our Peace

Meanwhile, in the private estate where they had found the coffin for the members of the La Crox family. Noah stood in front of the estate, watching fire devour the place.

"Your Grace," he whispered, recalling Samael's pained expression when he left. "I'm sorry that the Remington's couldn't do anything during the late king's madness."

The children of the late king weren't born wicked. If one looked into them thoroughly, one could see that they were just children, trapped in a cruel place, and desperate to survive. Noah could understand this as the Remington had an almost similar system in raising children.

Their sins in the present were inexcusable, but they were pitiful in a way.

"I wish I could pat your back once, Your Grace." a bitter smile resurfaced on Noah's lips as he was concerned about Samael. The latter always had a soft spot for his family, so he couldn't imagine the pain Samael would be in once he had taken Alphonse's life.

"May this all end tonight." Noah gazed up at the dark sky, taking a deep breath with eyes closed.

"May we all find our peace after this."

On the border of the middle ward of the imperial palace, Dominique ground his teeth as he crawled away. Stefan had poked his heart for a slow and painful death.

He had stopped the bleeding by trying to stop his heart from pulsating than usual. He could still die, though. He was simply trying to prolong his life.

'Stefan...' Dominique panted as his breathing shook, thinking what could've happened to his king. All he knew was that the king who was with him moments ago wasn't the king he served.

"Damn...!" he cursed under his breath as he stopped from crawling on the grass. What a pathetic situation they were in.

Just how did things turn out this way?

His eyes blurred, zooming in and out. Was this his end?

Dominique let out a shallow breath, rolling to his side with great difficulty until he laid on his back. His eyes fixed on the darkfield that swallowed the entire palace.

"It looks like that night," he whispered, recalling the night one year ago. "So pathetic."

He blinked weakly as he stabilized his breathing. Dominique didn't want to accept death, but he wasn't in denial about where this would all lead. Alistair and Alphonse had finally bared their fangs, and who knew what happened to the real Stefan.

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty, my brother..." came out a whisper as Dominique closed his eyes to succumb to his death.

"You can't die, just yet."

Suddenly, a palm pressed on his chest, making Dominique snap his eyes open. He studied the person's face hovering over him and his brows slowly furrowed.

"Rufus?" Dominique called, but Rufus didn't have the time to fill his confusion.

"The man who killed me once isn't this pathetic." Rufus spat out while checking the hole in Dominique's chest.

"Should we really have to save him?" asked Kristina, who stood beside them, gazing down at Dominique coldly. "I think he is better off dead."

"He is not, I'm telling you." Rufus didn't even cast her a look as he took out a knife and sliced his palm. He didn't waste a second as he shoved his wound on Dominique's lips.

"I can give him mine."

"Mine is better," Rufus replied, pressing his wound against Dominique's lips, so his blood could go through the latter's system.

Dominique was confused at first, but with blood dripping down in his mouth, his eyes glowed as his fangs sink into Rufus' palms. The myriads of question didn't matter to him while quenching his hunger.

"That's enough." Rufus pulled his hand, and Dominique's fangs ripped a piece of his flesh. He gazed at Dominique, who was gnashing his teeth for more.

A faint sigh slipped past his lips before knocking Dominique unconscious.

"Fabian will come here at any moment. Take the seventh prince to a safe place. We will still need him." He ordered, gazing up at Kristina.

She pressed her lips together and sighed. "Sure."

"Kristina, no matter how you abhor the La Crox, killing all of them is what the enemies want. Doing what they want is the least we could do for them."

"I know that, Captain. But that doesn't mean I don't see this situation as karma." Kristina shrugged while Rufus stood up. "Don't worry. I will bring him to a 'safe' place... though, not gently."

Rufus let out a sigh while rocking his head. "Just don't kill him."

"Right." She stepped aside to make way for him. Rufus took several steps away, facing the palace solemnly.

"Just what happened to this place in a year?" he mumbled, as this place didn't feel the same even before this ensued. "It looks like a literal hell now... just as what His Grace expected."

Meanwhile, Yul and Silvia sprinted through the empty street of the capital with sharp expressions on their faces. Rufus and the knights had done a great job taking care of the civilians.

After Yul drank Cassara's blood, the memories Samael erased came back to him. Now, they had recalled their own mission.

Find where the other rats were.

"Do you really think he is outside the palace and not inside?" Yul inquired without looking at Silvia, who was sprinting at the same speed as him.

Silvia didn't answer as she had wondered the same. There were just too many questions, but surveying the capital and the outskirts were their orders. Every one of them shouldn't just look in one direction to avoid getting blindsided.

"Yul," she called with furrowed brows, narrowing her eyes at something glinting in a certain direction. "Did you see that?"

Out of instinct, Yul also gazed in the direction where she was gazing. "It's a signal."

"Charlie," Silvia whispered, as they could feel Charlotte's aura from the arrows.

The two of them exchanged gazes and nodded without saying a word. Both of them increased their speed, hopping on the roof tiles as they rushed to where Charlotte was shooting at.

While everyone was busy fulfilling their mission, no one had noticed the person walking through the imperial palace leisurely. Stefan hummed softly, walking over the corpses scattered around the hallways.

He soon stopped in front of a room. The king's room, planting his hand on the door and pushed it lightly.

The door produced a long creaking sound as his eyes landed on the person standing in front of the window inside the unlit room. The corner of his lips curled up into a smile.

"I knew you'd be here," Stefan uttered as his appearance slowly changed, revealing his actual face. "Heliot."

Heliot slowly turned around, studying the other man's face.. "Quentin."

Chapter 395 - [Bonus]Almost Is Never Enough

Back in the throne hall, Samael took out Alphonse's heart just to make sure he was dead. God knows how this pained him that he had to do this just to make sure that his brother was dead.

After doing so, Samael turned his head in Lilou's direction. "Lilou."

He sprung to his feet, rushing to Lilou's side. His bloodstained hand stopped before touching her, gazing at Alphonse's blood on his hand.

"Lilou," he whispered, gazing at her that made his eyes soften. "Whatever..."

Samael exhaled sharply and checked her neck to see if her vein was still pulsating. His brows furrowed as he had to press harder to feel her weak pulse.

"No," he uttered under his breath, bending over and placing the side of his head on her chest.

Her heart was still beating, albeit faint. Was she dying? Samael was not sure as her blood flow was in turmoil, a sign to him that wasn't the case.

"Ugh...!"

Suddenly, Beatrice's grunting reached his ear along with rubbles falling. She dragged herself to sit up, wincing in pain as some of her joints were dislocated from Alphonse's brutal action.

"That fool..." She paused upon noticing the lack of event in her surrounding. Her eyes scanned the throne hall, noticing Alphonse from a distance.

"Alphonse...?" came out a soft call before shifting her gaze to Samael and Lilou. The latter was unconscious, while Samael was picking her up in his arms.

"How sweet," Beatrice mumbled before gritting her teeth, fixing her dislocated shoulder. "So you still ended him, after all that stalling."

She couldn't fix all her broken bones all at once. So she leaned against the wall to rest for a bit. Her eyes fixated on Samael's figure with Lilou in his arms, walking away without saying a word.

"My brother-in-law, won't you help me?" she inquired, making Samael pause in his steps. "The Duchess and I are friends, after all. She will appreciate it if you help me a little."

Samael slowly turned around and his pair of cold eyes fell on her. "Beatrice, stop being so dramatic. I entrust my wife to you, and look at what happened to her."

"Is she dying?"

His grip around Lilou's bicep tightened slightly. The silent answer was enough for Beatrice to nod in understanding.

"You'll turn her?" she inquired without beating around the bush.

"Her heart is faint and it might stop soon." He took a deep breath to calm himself. "You are an expert in this area. If you are sincere in this friendship you speak of, I will need your help."

Beatrice chuckled just by staring at his menacing pair of eyes. "How can these words sounds more like a threat, Your Grace?"

"Because they are, Princess. I will kill you if Lilou's transition kills her."

"What a man, indeed." She let out a short chuckle, glancing at Alphonse. "We might have a problem, Your Grace."

Samael frowned at her last remarks. Wasn't this enough problem? Just how many more problems would arise?

"That guy over there. That selfish man who dies without waiting for me to see it for myself says she is pregnant." Beatrice peeled her eyes away from Alphonse, then back to Samael. "I don't think he is lying."

She had been with Alphonse for a long time. Although their relationship was complicated and too far from being considered lovers. Beatrice had picked up the habit of knowing whether Alphonse was telling her the truth or hiding something.

"Pregnant?" he repeated and gazed down at Lilou. Different emotions pooled in his eyes with this news.

"My... I hate to break your bubble, but it's impossible to turn her if she has a child in her womb," said Beatrice, feeling a bit sorry for Samael. "You will have to choose between the two of them, Your Grace."

What she had said was akin to a powerful slap of reality. He could not move momentarily, thinking how could he choose between his wife and child?

Samael gazed at her blankly. His lips parted, but no words came out.

A sigh slipped past Beatrice's mangled lips before she shook her head. "Don't decide, for now, my brother-in-law. Even if you naturally choose Lilou, I'm afraid you have to reconsider her opinion. It doesn't matter even if your intention is good. There is nothing more painful to a mother to live by sacrificing her child."

Her tone was laced with sincerity and bitterness. He looked back at her, studying her solemn expression.

"Trust me, Your Grace. I've been there, so I know the pain and guilt of losing a child for this pathetic life I have." Beatrice expressed, nodding encouragingly at him.

Samael heard his own swallow as he nodded. He didn't speak anymore as he turned around to leave. Beatrice was right. Lilou loved children, and the face she made every time they spoke about starting a family hovered over his head.

The news that should be celebrated turned into a dreadful nightmare in a blink of an eye. Although he had already decided, he was afraid that this would put a strain on his marriage.

While Samael walked away, Beatrice reached for her ankle. She could not help but wince and grunt in pain as she fixed her broken knees and ankle. She panted for air, tilting her head back to rest for a bit.

"Is this over?" she wondered under her breath before cocking her head in Alphonse's direction.

"Al..."

Beatrice assisted herself up in great difficulty. Although just standing brought her a lot of pain, she still dragged her feet towards Alphonse. Her knees gave way and slumped beside him.

"Al," she called softly, cupping his cheek with a subtle smile on her face. "You look at peace, darling."

There was a hole in Alphonse's chest and his heart was just lying near his body, but the faint smile on Alphonse's lips was evident. They had been together for a long time, and she never once saw him smile candidly.

"I'm sorry for betraying you," she said, but her tone didn't sound alike. "You had been a great companion until the end. You don't blame me, do you?"

Their relationship was complicated, knowing that they had their own hidden agenda. Despite all those dark secrets and schemes, Beatrice never felt more honest with anyone than Alphonse. He expected nothing from her, and she likewise. So, her betrayal was something that would surprise no one. It would be the same if Alphonse betrayed her.

"We were almost there, Al..." Beatrice bent over while closing her eyes, planting a soft peck on his lips for the last time. "... but almost is never enough for us."

She had loved him, but this love was not enough to erase the pain in her heart. She was aware it was the same with Alphonse. They loved each other, but it was not enough to change their view and motives.

"Let me stay with you for a while, darling." Beatrice laid beside him, covering the hole in his chest with her palm. A second later, she started humming a lullaby until she closed her eyes.

"You had lost your war, but mine is just about to start, Al."

Chapter 396 - [Bonus]His Options

Samael sauntered through the palace hallway with Lilou in his arms. He didn't bat an eye at the mess in his surrounding, walking over at the scattered corpses on the floor.

Some fighting from a distance reached his ear, but he didn't care about that. It was simply the last cry and struggle of their enemy.

The outcome had already been decided.

Samael and Lilou won this fight.

The irony, though. He didn't feel like there was something to celebrate about. He had killed his brother and now his wife was in a terrible state. Although they had expected the worst, his heart wasn't as prepared as he thought it should be.

After a long walk, Samael finally reached a quiet place. He gazed at the large old door, which no one bothered to check until now.

"Mother," he whispered as his eyes softened. "My wife needs a room. Can I borrow yours?"

Silence answered him; not that he expected his deceased mother to respond. He took a deep breath and opened the door with his foot, hearing the loud creaking sound coming from it. To his surprise, unlike the dust clinging on the surface of the door, the room was quite tidy.

"Jayden," Samael whispered, thinking that there was only one person in this palace who would care about this place. He didn't dwell on it longer as he trudged towards the bed and laid her down carefully.

"Lilou, my wife," He called under his breath, kneeling on the side of the bed. "What should I do, love?"

His thumb caressed her forehead gently. Lilou was almost covered with blood and wounds, and her lips were dry and pale, just like her complexion. His eyes instinctively moved to her stomach, reaching his hand out to touch it, only to stop midway.

"Do you really bear our child?" he wondered under his breath, having mixed emotions about the news.

They promised to start a family once this was all over. Their wish was now being granted, but another problem arose. Lilou was still human and in no good shape to carry a child.

The sound of teeth grinding against each other resonated across the quiet room. He had been clenching his teeth unconsciously, ruminating on what to do next. With Lilou on a brink of death, Samael was prepared to turn her into a vampire. That was what he had always wanted, and she would surely understand.

But alas, she was now with a child.

When a human was transitioning to a vampire, the chances were low. But since Lilou was originally a Bloodfang, Samael was certain her chances were higher. The problem lay with the process of turning.

Whenever a human had to turn into a vampire, they would go through excruciating pain. It had something to do with the conversion of blood. Samael never experienced it himself, but he had seen a couple of humans going through that process. Most of them were never seen or heard again.

That was only the first problem.

The second was, the child was created while Lilou was still human. Even though the father was a vampire, he or she would still become a half-human half-vampire. Lilou's blood would devour this seed while transitioning.

"I don't want to choose the third option," he murmured in distress, feeling his heart sink just thinking of everything. "I love our child, but... I can't live without you, Lilou."

The third option was, Lilou would endure the pain of carrying a half-vampire in her womb. Birthing it would surely cost her, her life. In other words, keeping the child would kill her, while killing the child would make her live.

He wanted a family with her, but he just couldn't sacrifice his wife for that. Samael didn't mind not having children at all, if that was the only option to keep her alive forever.

"What should I do?" he reached for her hand, holding it with both his hands. "Can I be selfish again?"

This wasn't a simple decision for him, as the seed that would grow in her was his. However, he would always choose Lilou first. Lilou was his everything, and he could never imagine a life without her.

"Sam...?"

Suddenly, he froze upon hearing her soft yet coarse voice. He raised his head to see her blinking weakly.

"Lilou." A sigh of relief slipped past his lips as he immediately jumped closer to her. Lilou let out a weak giggle while he held her head, planting kisses on her forehead.

"I'm so glad you're awake," he muttered with a shaking voice.

"Sam," Lilou's breath was heavy, patting his shoulder lightly. "You came for me."

The gratefulness in her voice was akin to a sharp dagger stabbing his chest. Why did she sound so glad? She wouldn't be in this state if he disagreed with her plan. He should have found a different way.

"I thought I was dead," she whispered as the side of her lips curled up weakly.

Samael swallowed down the frustrating tension in his throat. He let out a deep exhale and drew away from her, cupping her jaw while staring deep into her eyes.

"Lilou, love, I have..." his breath hitched as his tongue kept rolling back. "I... we... about..."

Lilou just blinked weakly, studying the desperation in his eyes. What a sight to behold, she thought. It seemed what he was trying to tell her something that would hurt her. That was why he couldn't tell it directly.

"Sam," she paused as she watched her breathing with her lungs constricting. "Alphonse... he said I was pregnant."

As soon as he heard those words, Samael was frozen in place. He looked at her blankly, seeing how her brows raised with hope in her eyes.

"Was our child safe?" she inquired in a low yet hopeful tone. When Samael didn't respond, she called him once again, "Sam?"

"Ah, yes?"

"Was our child safe?"

'No.' was what his mind answered, but the words that slipped out his mouth were the opposite.

"Yes," he said, sporting a forced smile on his face while stroking her hair. "Our child is safe. You protected him well."

Upon hearing his response, she heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank God. I won't forgive myself if it was harmed because of me."

Those were her last words before closing her eyes to rest once again. What she had said... was enough of an answer to Samael.

Third option.

Chapter 397 - [Bonus]Adventure With Mister Fabian~!

Once morning came, the state of the once glorious imperial palace was overwhelming. The cold palace in the west wing was nothing but rubbles. Some parts of it were still caught on fire, and piles of corpses scattered the silent hallways and outside. It appeared more like a result of a large-scale war.

The scent of blood loomed in the air that could reach even the border of the country. And yet, the casualties in the capital were surprisingly low.

Everyone in the capital walked outside their homes just to gaze upon the imperial palace. It had fallen overnight. Be it commoners or nobles, the fear of uncertainty crept into their hearts. Children who would innocently ask the adults what happened to the palace were silenced and dragged inside their homes.

Some had packed their luggage to flee, while others prayed to whoever they worshiped. They might not know the details of the ruckus that kept them awake last night, but one thing was for sure;

The king had fallen.

Stefan's reign was over.

And a new king shall arise.

Whoever it was, they didn't know. That was the most terrifying of all; no knowing a thing. After all, whoever usurped the throne with such wicked means would leave a good impression on no one.

"Mister Fabian!" Charlotte called in high spirits, leaping from one roof tile to another. She didn't even exert some effort as she rushed to Fabian, who was sitting on a chimney.

Fabian was gazing down at the capital's plaza, resting his leg over the other. He didn't even cast Charlotte a glance as he just observed the capital from the roof of one of the noble estates.

"Mister Fabian, what are you doing here?" asked Charlotte as soon as she stopped beside him.

"Good morning, Charlie. If you can just please lower your voice, I will truly appreciate it."

A pout immediately turned up on her lips. "Mister Fabian, did we lose? You seem to have woken up on the wrong side of the bed."

"I didn't, Charlie. I hadn't had a wink of sleep." Fabian let out a deep sigh as he glanced at her briefly. "And no, we didn't lose nor win."

"Huh? Is it a draw, then?"

His lips parted but decided to shut his mouth. Fabian set his eyes back on the Capital's plaza where a lot of people had gathered.

"What is the purpose of winning, anyway?" he inquired after some time of silence.

"Hmm. Winning is winning? I don't know why you don't know that, Mister Fabian."

'Just how many times would she disappoint me?' he wondered, as it was better talking to himself since he made more sense.

"Winning is reaching the goal, Charlie. However, not all goals are considered winning since our losses are far more severe." Fabian explained in a solemn tone while staring in the same direction.

"That is why there is this thing called a losing victory."

"Ohh." Charlotte's lips formed a circle while nodding.

"Humans and Vampires alike are complicated beings." A shallow breath slipped past his lips. "Or rather, a person's heart is always complicated."

"I guess Mister Fabian doesn't have a heart since you're not that complicated."

Fabian glanced at her with what she had said. Many people had told him he was a complicated lad, so she was the third person to tell him that.

Noticing the doubt in his eyes, Charlotte grinned mischievously. "Mister Fabian kills when he feels like it and not when he doesn't."

"Well, I will take that as a compliment."

"Hehe! So, why are you here?" she inquired, changing the subject while holding her hand behind.

"I am thinking whether I should go back to Grimsbanne alone or stay."

Her brows furrowed at his answer. Charlotte assessed Fabian's side profile, and it seemed he was serious.

"There's nothing to do in here anymore," he explained with the same disinterest in his voice. "Also, I don't feel like helping in cleaning that mess in the palace."

"So, you're just simply running away from cleaning? Mister Fabian, I thought you like cleaning and gardening? What happened to you?"

He had heard her question, but ignored it. Fabian just looked at the Capital's plaza in silence, deep in thought. Fortunately, Charlotte could read his sullen mood, so she went silent and gazed in the same direction.

"Sir Knight will have a lot of explaining to do," she murmured, noticing some noble head clans finally showing up. "I wonder if His Grace and Her Grace were fine. I can't feel the duchess' presence."

"They are not," Fabian whispered, making her look at him. "I've never felt his soul this shaken."

"Huh?"

"Charlie, go help in the palace." Fabian slowly stood from the chimney and dusted off his clothes.

She tilted her head, watching him prepare himself to leave. "You're going back to Grimsbanne? Won't His Grace get mad?"

"No," His answer was quick, setting his pair of sharp eyes on her. "I'm going to borders."

"Border?"

"Yes, so stop asking and do something more productive." Fabian nearly rolled his eyes as he turned, but stopped when she leaped a step closer. He glanced over his shoulder, raising a brow.

"I think what Mister Fabian plans is more productive than cleaning the palace." The side of her lips stretched into a wide grin.

"You just also want to get away."

"Of course not! I'm just into more adventures. What will happen in the palace today and for the next few months is already predictable." She giggled, following Fabian's footsteps. "Also, Mister Fabian does nothing out of the ordinary if it is not important!"

While Charlotte followed him, she kept talking nonstop. Fabian let her and it was surprising how she could be quite accurate at times. The reason Fabian chose to do this 'chore' of going to the borders was that it was more important.

Rufus would be busy for the time being, and Samael didn't seem stable. Those two needed someone who would make sure they could have time to do what they had to do. The last thing they all wanted now was unwanted visitors.

"Adventure with Mister Fabian~!" Charlotte cheered with her hands up in the air. "I finally became his disciple, yeey~!"

Chapter 398 - [Bonus]Keep The Child

The first morning was chaotic. The news spread faster like a wildfire, sending terror to everyone. Some noble head clans had made a scene in the Capital's plaza and encouraged the people for unity. But alas, only a few had the courage to go to the palace and come face to face with those 'rebels' who turned the place upside down.

The outside of the palace was almost similar on the inside.

Rufus and the Duke's knighthood brigade seized the palace. Some royal knights devoted to the king resisted but were subdued and thrown into the dungeon cell. Others chose death for failing to protect their king.

It was chaotic and it didn't settle down even after a week.

Yes. It had been a week since the tragic incident, but the only thing that changed was the bodies weren't inside the palace anymore. They were outside, waiting for their turn to get transported to a certain land where they would get buried.

"Your Majesty, you should rest. You hadn't had enough sleep for a week now." Kristina advised, gazing at Rufus, who sat behind the desk of his previous chief knight office.

"Don't call me that," he muttered, pinching the bridge of his nose as he leaned back. "About the bereaved families of the knights... have you talked to them?"

"Yes. They didn't mind receiving compensation for the deaths of their family member. The only problems were those knights who came from the noble clans."

"What do they want?" asked Rufus, along with a deep sigh.

"Your head."

"I see." Rufus withdrew his hand away and remained in his position for a moment.

"They have the gall to bare their fangs. I would execute them all to show an example to hold their tongue," Kristina mumbled, displeased at how some nobles acted. She knew some of them saw this as an opportunity to feed their greed. She came from a noble clan, so she could tell.

"Kristina, I don't know why you came to hate the world, but we had executed enough violence. Causing more will be problematic and stressful," Rufus replied lazily, sighing for the umpteenth time.

She only gazed down and pursed her lips. She didn't hate the world. What she abhorred were the hypocrites who wouldn't even conceal their greed despite the loss of a family.

Rufus glanced at her while tapping a finger against the armrest. "About His Grace?"

Kristina didn't answer immediately as she raised her head. Her eyes softened with bitterness as she shook her head lightly.

"Still the same."

"I see..." He nodded and kept quiet. Rufus had been too preoccupied with the important state of affairs, and could only ask Kristina about Samael's situation.

"Fabian and Charlotte are still missing," Kristina added, to change the gloomy atmosphere.

"Don't worry about them. They're not missing."

"Right. By the way, Dominique finally woke up from his long slumber."

Rufus raised his brows. "What is he doing?"

"Yelling all day long. I pity the knights who were guarding him."

"Let him be for now. He will cool down his head after a while." Rufus waved nonchalantly before pulling him back from the chair. He gazed down at the documents he needed to work on.

"His siblings will visit him soon, so he'll be less lonely," he muttered before he resumed working in hopes his workload would decrease just a bit.

Meanwhile, in the late queen's quarters, Samael held Lilou's hands. He was sitting on the chair beside the bed.

"My brother-in-law, are you planning on collapsing? I'm afraid you'd die before her." Beatrice intoned, sitting on the divan inside the room, arms crossed. He didn't respond, as usual.

"Lilou's wounds are already healing and she will wake up soon," she added in an attempt to be heard, but to no avail. "She has time, Samael. Don't act like she is dying."

"Because she is," came out a murmur while he stared at Lilou's face. "Back when I died, she had seen it and mourned for me for a long time. This... is karma, isn't it?"

Her lips parted, but no words came out. If Beatrice would be truthfully honest, she would say 'it was'. But she didn't need to voice it out, since he was aware of it.

"I can't lose her," Samael muttered that she barely heard. "No matter how I think about it, I can't."

"I know it's hard, but this is her body and her life. Will you put her in a lifetime of torment just because you don't want to be alone?"

"Yes." He nodded, brushing Lilou's cheek with his thumb.

Samael had thought about it day and night. It was painful for him to choose between his child and his wife. But unlike the child whom he hadn't seen or formed a bond with, Lilou was more important. She might end up hating him, but he couldn't lose her.

"What a selfish bastard," she grumbled with a scoff, shaking her head lightly. "This is disappointing."

Beatrice had enough of Samael's nonsense. So, she assisted herself up to leave him alone. The purpose of her visit was to check on Lilou's condition, and she already confirmed the patient was alright.

"Didn't you say the longer the child remained inside, the more it will be hard to kill it?" she stopped by the door upon Samael's question.

"Samael!" her voice thundered, pivoting her heel, and stomped her way towards him. Beatrice stopped beside him, casting him a look of dismay.

"Have you lost your mind?!"

"Uh, I did, I guess." Samael just cast her a brief look without strong emotion in his eyes. "It's my child, so I'll kill it."

"Hell!"

"Why?" this time, Samael also raised his voice as he glared at her. "Should I let her hate herself? Killing it means it will be my fault, not her. I'd rather receive all her hate instead of letting her live with that guilt."

Beatrice wanted to knock some senses into him, but it was pointless. He wasn't listening.

"I hope you are hearing yourself right now, Hell. You will understand how she will be disappointed..." She was unable to continue her sentence as her eyes veered towards Lilou. "Lilou?"

Out of instinct, Samael turned his attention to Lilou. His pupils dilated as he immediately bent over to her side.

"Lilou," his voice was filled with relief, but it was short-lived as she was just staring into the ceiling blankly. "Love?"

He tried tugging her shoulder, but nothing. There was nothing in her eyes, baffling and worrying him.

"Hey, what is happening?" he asked, turning his head to Beatrice.

"Lilou..." she whispered in worry, balling her hand into a fist.. "Keep the child; That is what's happening."

Chapter 399 - [Bonus]Feels Like Deja Vu

"Keep the child; That is what's happening."

Samael didn't understand her vague explanation. Wouldn't she let go of this conversation? Lilou was awake, albeit unresponsive.

Taking notice of his confusion, Beatrice let out a sigh. "I don't know the reason, but what I knew is she is keeping herself half-awake by instinct."

"Half-awake? Why? Can't she completely wake up?"

"It's not that." She shook her head, gazing at Lilou's eyes. "Maybe there's a reason she doesn't want to wake up just yet. She hurt herself because of the voices, so that's the only logical conclusion I had."

"As for why she was keeping herself half-awake, maybe she had heard you." She continued as she shifted her eyes back to Samael. "She didn't want you to kill your child, Hell. You can take my words with a pinch of salt, but you know her more than I do."

They shared a moment of silence as they stared at each other. Beatrice took a deep breath and curtsied, excusing herself to give him some space.

"I hope you can decide properly, Your Grace," she wished when she was by the door before leaving him alone.

Samael didn't look back at her as he stared at Lilou. She still had her eyes opened, but she was only looking in one direction.

"Why?" he asked under his breath as he hung his head low while holding her hand. "Is he more important than me? Why would you choose someone you hadn't even met yet?"

His questions were stupid, and he was aware of that. Still, he only had more stupid questions to ask her.

"Lilou, my love, why do we have to do this?" a whisper slipped past his lips. "Why do I have to choose which one of you I should kill?"

Others had worded it as saving either of them, but to him, it was killing one of them. He wanted to choose both, but his options had their own limits. With Lilou's current condition, it restricted Samael to choose other options.

Karma. His beloved was now paying for the sins he had committed from the past until now.

Retribution. This was his retribution.

Days had gone by in a blink of an eye and it was already a month since then. Lilou would still open her eyes and stare blankly. Even when she was all healed, she was never fully conscious. Samael had taken care of her from bathing to dressing, combing her hair, and massaging her body to ease the stiffness.

He never left her.

Reading her stories that she liked to read and talking to her all day until the night. The world outside the room they were in didn't matter to him. He just shut the world off and created his own with his wife on it.

and yet, she hadn't woken up.

"And then..." Samael paused as he placed the book down his lap, cocking his head to her. "... this story is bullshit. Why do you like these sorts of stories so much?"

Both of them sat on the bed with their back against the headboard. It was not that Lilou was paralyzed; she was just unresponsive. So he would constantly sit her so she wouldn't just lie on the bed all day long.

He pressed his lips together and sighed, peeling his eyes away from her. "Yul had been throwing a huge fit the other day since he wants to see you. I nearly killed him, if not for Rufus. Won't you get mad about that?"

"Well, let's see. Rufus had been busy settling the matters in here, Fabian went on an adventure with Charlie, Noah finally returned to his estate, Cameron sent me a letter once telling me he would visit." He paused, thinking of the things that would probably pique Lilou's interest. "We still haven't found Stefan — that useless Beatrice didn't know either since all she shared with Alphonse is her body. And..."

Samael gazed back at her. His eyes fell on her growing stomach, which brought a mix of bitterness and joy to his heart.

"Our child is growing." He planted his palm on her stomach, stroking it with his thumb. "His mother is protecting him well, so he is growing healthy."

"You will be a great mother, my wife."

During the past month, Lilou had suffered from pain twice as the child in her womb was feeding on her blood. To ease the pain of his wife and quench the hunger of their child, Samael forced his blood into her system. After two incidents, he dosed her with the right amount of blood daily.

"We're doing a good job... I guess." He smiled, closed-lipped, patting her head lightly. "I will do everything I can to protect you and our child. Just hang in there."

Samael leaned forward and planted a kiss on her temple. "I will not choose between you and our child. I will keep you both safe. That's a promise."

For a long time, I was trapped in a pit of darkness with the company of the voices in my head. Although I couldn't see them, I could hear their murmuring. They were close and I could feel their gazes on me.

"Will you get out of here?" I asked out of annoyance, staring into the darkness. "I'm not waking up."

"This child is so stubborn."

"She is a Bloodfang, after all."

"A Bloodfang prioritizes the clan's will. This is because she has a Crawford in her blood."

"We had died for this child to live, but all she has is a sharp tongue."

"It's because that wench Lara had talked her out of this."

"Leave the child alone!"

"Hello? I can hear you?" I scoffed as their murmuring grew louder, spiting me right in front of my face. "Although I appreciate your honesty, what I had heard until now is there's no unity in this clan."

The voices were even worse than dinners with the La Crox. No wonder I nearly lost my mind, because they kept arguing inside my head! Some supported me, while the others were pressuring me to do what they wanted. Apparently, the latter group seemed to have more control over me.

That was why I didn't want to wake up.

I knew once I regain my consciousness, a different Lilou would take charge. Who knew what she would do once unleashed on the outside world.

"Shut your mouth, child! You should have listened to us! Just how many times will you disappoint us?"

"As long as you meddle with my life?" I cocked my head to the side and shrug.

"Tch! We shouldn't have involved that infuriating Samael into this. That corrupt had only corrupted her!" I smiled at this snide remark, thinking about Sam. My husband would take that as a compliment.

"Now, even their child is meddling with us."

"Huh?" my brows furrowed. "Our child...?"

"Have you forgotten? The child that is growing inside you is killing you."

"Don't listen to them, child. Your child is keeping you alive and sane."

"Keeping her alive? He is devouring her life away!"

Once again, the voices argued with their different opinions. No matter how loud they were, they soon faded into the background as I recalled the moments before losing my consciousness.

Alphonse congratulated me on this news, but I didn't think it was true.

I instinctively touched my stomach, even though I knew this body wasn't real. "I'm pregnant...? With Sam's child?"

There were too many emotions that circled around my heart with this news. It scared me, but at the same time, gave me joy. I wondered what was Sam's reaction? He was probably...

My thoughts trailed off as a sudden realization struck me. Right now, I was unconscious in reality, stuck with these voices in my head. How could a pregnant woman stay on the bed with no one taking care of her? Our child was in danger.

"Sam!" I looked up and yelled, making the voices stop from arguing. "Sam!!!"

"Child, no matter how loud you --"

"Sam, my husband! I'm here! Can you hear me?" I ignored the voices. They had been so loud, so I thought I should add my own noise. Let us see who was the loudest in here.

"Husband! Can you please take care of me and our child?! I can't wake up right now because my clan wanted to spend more time with me!" I kept yelling until the voices stopped speaking and my voice filled this place. "Don't worry! I will return once I deal with them! I love you my husband~!"

"Pfft--!"

A voice burst out in laughter while I rolled my eyes. I couldn't see them, but it was not like I wanted to come face to face with them. Apparently, the more I disliked something to happen, it would happen as if life was playing tricks on me.

A second later, the darkness slowly had light, and I found myself sitting at a long dining table. My brows twitched as soon as I realized I could see them now. What a life!

"Do vampires have this habit of arguing during mealtime? There are so many places you guys can choose, but you showed up during what seemed to be in the middle of a feast," I commented in disbelief, scanning the long table to see that each seat was occupied.. "Feels like Deja Vu."

Chapter 400 - [Bonus]Bloodfang's Family Dinner

"So?"

I raised my brows, helping myself with food, as it seemed this would be a long dinner date with my clan. They just watched me while I shamelessly fill my plate with food like a glutton.

"Oh, don't worry. I tend to stress eat and with the atmosphere here? I'm confident I need food for comfort."

"What a shameless child, indeed.!" A woman with a fan, who had been slandering me since the beginning, remarked. She looked at me with disgust in her eyes, but I didn't care about her. "We should've planned to raise someone with a bit of tact!"

I paused at her last remarks, making me gaze at her coldly. "And how will you raise someone when you're already dead?"

"Hmph! Are the generation of these days don't respect their elders anymore?"

"If you want respect, you should've respected that my mind is my own."

"Child, even though we don't have physical bodies, do you think I can't hurt you?"

"Enough!"

I flinched as someone suddenly slammed his fist against the table, causing the plates and cutlery to clatter. I looked at where the sound came from, setting it on the man sitting at the end of the long table. There, a man had a neat beard from across his jaw matched his long tied hair. Dressed formally as if attending a banquet, and aura befitting of that a noble.

Was he the clan leader? It seemed so.

"Gracia, I had kept an open mind with everyone's opinion. Alas, I do not condone threats on this table." His deep baritone voice was enough to intimidate anyone who was listening. Even I bit my tongue, afraid I would offend him.

"Apologies, Leader." Gracia, the woman who had spouted all that nonsense, back down and bowed.

"We had been at this table for a long time, waiting for the day the next bearer of Lakresha will come," he uttered while everyone kept silent and attentive. "Although we didn't expect she would show up in here, conduct yourself properly. Refrain from spewing snide remarks."

He looked at me and I nearly jumped as soon as our eyes met. Was he siding with me? That was what it sounded like.

"Please, child. Eat to your heart's content." His tone grew gentler, but it somehow made me feel even more cautious.

This wasn't poisoned, was it?

"It isn't poisoned. We're technically all dead." He clarified as if he could hear my thoughts. But then again, they were inside my head, so they could hear my thoughts.

Well, he made a point, though.

"Thank you." I lowered my head slightly as I picked up the cutlery to eat. Just when I thought they would start talking again, they didn't. Instead, everyone's eyes were on me wordlessly.

Surely, this felt like *deja vu*. My first dinner in the palace two years ago, the La Crox's also watched me intently as I ate.

"Err... if you want to say something, say it now," I said, breaking the silence when I couldn't take it anymore. "You've been whispering in my head all this time, so why are you being shy now?"

The silence was the last thing I expected from them. It was better if they tell me everything now since we've already come to this.

"Who is it?" The clan leader asked, causing my brows to furrow as I gazed back at him.

It seemed I wasn't the only one who was puzzled, as everyone turned their attention to him. The clan leader traveled his eyes across the table before fixing them on me once again.

"Who is it?" he repeated in a more stern tone. "The one who had infiltrated this dinner and acted as a Bloodfang."

Again, silence ensued. It took me a minute to understand his query, but at that minute, some of them already raised their complaints. Their voices were louder this time around, not holding back at voicing out their thought. The man was unmoved, though, as his gaze never left me.

"Child, the Bloodfang is your ally, not your enemy. You've been through a lot of pain because of our foolishness and selfishness, but we never intend to hurt you." I heard his voice directly in my head. The side of his lips curled up into a subtle smile, nodding at me encouragingly.

"As you've noticed, there is something wrong with the will we had left. However, I couldn't detect who are the culprits in this table," he added, ignoring the enrage clan members around us. "Lilou, child, let me correct this for you."

I stared at him for a while and noticed the sincerity in his naturally intimidating eyes. I took a deep breath and nodded, putting my trust in him since I had this gut feeling I could trust him. He gave me the same connection I had with Lara, which I couldn't describe with words.

"Uh," I peeled my eyes away from him and looked around the table. How could I know if someone didn't belong here?

I just followed my instinct and studied each one of them.

My brows furrowed upon laying my eyes on the person sitting six seats across from me. I couldn't pinpoint this feeling, but there's just something in him that smelled different. I was uncertain, though, so I planned to study the rest only to get shocked after a second.

The person I looked at suddenly coughed out blood and collapsed on his plate. My pupils instantly dilated, a little confused at what just happened. It was not just me who was surprised as loud gasped resonated in the air.

"Leader! How can you doubt us like this?! We've been with you and followed your decision to die...!"

I looked at the clan leader, ignoring the series of complaints. He looked back at me with calmness in his eyes.

"Why did you..." I couldn't finish my sentence as his eyes already told me the answer.

The clan leader already had suspicions. He simply needed confirmation so he wouldn't eliminate the innocent.

I gulped hard, hearing it in my ear. My hands were unconsciously gripping my skirt while I bit my lower lip under his gaze. After a while, I nodded and took a deep breath.

Just like what I did the first time, I assessed everyone. Bodies started dropping one after another, and the voices slowly subsided until it was only silence. The last person who dropped dead was Gracia. She looked at me with abhorrence and then... she was gone.

"That's..." I looked around, seeing that there were only five people left, including me. "... A lot."