

The Duke 501

Chapter 501 - Already Realized It Before She Did

"Hell is a good liar, but he can't hide this from Lilou or from Law forever. If he put down his guard even just for a second, he'll lose his wife and son. I'll kill him if that happens."

Claude rocked his head, as this wasn't a secret among them. Lilou was the person who kept them united, not Samael. Although they respected and supported Samael as the emperor, the primary reason they were doing it was all for Lilou and Law. To them, it was only just that Samael carry the weight of the empire and their expectations.

They exceeded Samael's expectations, so it was only logical they would expect Samael to do the same. For Lilou, for Law, for the peace in the empire, Samael had to keep his eyes open at all times.

"Will you fight us if that happens, Fabian?" asked Klaus in a dead tone, staring at him with eyes glinting.

Fabian's eyes droop as a sinister smirk resurfaced on his face. "No, because that will never happen. You love Her Majesty, but His Majesty sees his family as his life. Please refrain from speaking as if you don't know the emperor."

"Just in case, Fabian." Klaus shrugged. "Lilou was in slumber for five years and she barely made it out alive."

"That was five years ago. Certainly, not only that incident taught you a lesson, but everyone else, including the emperor," Fabian reassured with a smile before gazing down.

"Anyway, if you need my help, I can teach you ways to make this man happier. He'll be so happy he will remember the memories from his previous life as well."

"I will not refuse, Mister Fabian. The savages from the north need to improve their ways, after all." Claude smiled back while his foot swung back and forth over the body on the floor. "I'll make sure to sign them up in this class."

"Maniacs!" Klaus spat out in dismay.

Meanwhile, inside Rufus and Kristina's carriage. The two kept quiet as the latter stared at him for a long time. They barely talked ever since they got inside the carriage, and all they spoke about was the matters in the capital.

"Our small troop will march back to the capital with His Majesty. I'll be the one escorting him back." Rufus spoke calmly, staring out at the window.

Kristina rocked her head, staring at his unmoving countenance. "Captain, we already know that's the main purpose of why you're here; that is, to escort His Majesty back to the capital. But, how about Charlotte and Ramin? Will they stay in the south with her Majesty and the prince?"

"No. They were his right and left hands. He needs their presence for important affairs, especially when he is making public appearances," Rufus explained without casting her a look. His fingers tapped his bicep while deep in thought.

Rufus, although his position as the military general was important, his primary job was to mobilize the imperial knightage and assist the right and left hands of the emperor. His position was something Samael came up with, so to balance the power between Charlotte, Ramin, and Rufus.

Moreover, since Charlotte was a woman, many women looked up to her and pursued careers on their own. And Ramin, as a nobleman and a bearer, showed the unity of the sovereign and the bearers of the divine order. If they didn't appear alongside the emperor, it would raise suspicion and questions that would eventually lead to rumors.

Once people started talking and taking notice, it wouldn't be impossible if someone uncovered the emperor's life in the south with his wife and son. That was why this was a tricky situation.

Kristina pressed her lips into a thin line. She already knew Charlotte and Ramin's importance, but she was worried.

"Shall I stay behind?" she asked, but her tone sounded more like she was suggesting. "You won't die without me in the war, right? Captain?"

"Kristina, what do you take me for?"

A weak chuckle slipped past her lips. "The Duke, the Marchioness, and the Earl cannot stay behind because of their duties. His Majesty had to return to the capital to appease everyone's worry and to settle the matters with the Spade Kingdom. If all of us left, no one will stay behind with the empress and the prince."

"Fabian will stay."

"We all know Fabian goes crazy if he sees too much blood, Captain." She let out a sigh, shaking her head as her anxiousness grew worse.

"Don't think about it too much, Kristina. Even if you say you want to stay with Her Majesty, the emperor has the final say in it. He hadn't given out his decision regarding this, so all we can do is to wait."

"But... alright." She wanted to argue as Samael had been delaying this matter for a while now. However, she couldn't really blame him. This was a tough decision, as his wife and son were involved. It would take time for the emperor to decide and choose a wise move.

Once again, the two of them shared a long silence. Rufus never left his eyes on the window, so it piqued her curiosity.

"Captain, why are you staring at so..." she trailed off as they were making a turn. Their carriage was in the last among everyone and making a turn granted them the view of the carriage ahead of them. What made her pause was she saw one carriage slide its curtain open.

Her eyes dilated as Kristina caught Yul inside it with Silvia on his... lap! For a moment, her mind went blank, as this was something she never expected. Yulis and Silvia? She blinked twice and then, when Yulis and Silvia kissed, she looked away on instinct.

"What the..." she muttered in horror, shifting her eyes to Rufus, who suddenly closed the curtain.

"Captain..."

Rufus didn't look at her but gazed down, smiling bitterly. "He brought back the young lady in her."

"Ca — Captain... are you...?"

"I'm alright, Kristina." He raised his head and offered a weak smile. "I already realized it long before she did." — because he knew Silvia, and he was always watching her from afar.

With his answer, Kristina finally realized why Rufus was calm about men desiring Silvia's affection. It was neither he still had a hold of her heart nor he was confident Silvia still love him.. It was because Rufus already knew that someone else already had a hold of her heart and it was not him anymore.

Chapter 502 - Happy Birthday, Law!

We finally arrived at the venue. Even when we already traveled earlier, the carriages from the local guests were already arriving one after another. Many told me that tonight's banquet was just as grand as the one held in the royal palace. I often laughed it off, knowing that those comments came from nobles who never even attended any party from the royal palace.

Not that they were wrong, though. I used all the knowledge I learned from the capital and used my experience as a former duchess to this event, after all.

"Hand." Sam offered me his hand as he stood outside the carriage. A large smile appeared on my lips as I clasped his hand and he assisted me out. We both helped Law right after.

"Father, don't let me go," said Law when Sam was about to release his hand. Sam's brows rose as he narrowed his eyes suspiciously, finding our son's request strange.

"My son, is the world finally ending?" Sam inquired, making Law frown.

"Sam, today is Law's birthday. So of course, our son wants his father's affection," I explained softly while gazing down at Law. I smiled gently at him, squeezing his little hand lightly.

"Well, since our son begged, no problem." The side of Sam's lips stretched into a taunting grin, making Law pull his hand away but to no avail. "Oh, come one, son. There's nothing to be embarrassed that you are now being a son to your detestable father."

"That sounds so wrong. Shouldn't it be the opposite?" I replied internally, but at this point, I already knew it was pointless. "Sam, Law, you two will behave, alright?"

"Mother, it's not me that you should..."

"Wife, tell your son..."

"Behave." I cut them off before they could point fingers at each other, widening my eyes for them to understand my point. "Understood?"

"Yes, wife."

"Yes, Mother."

A sigh slipped past my lips as they both frowned and hung their head low. My husband and son surely each other's version.

"My. What is this? The party hadn't started yet, but my uncle and my little cousin are already getting scolded?" Suddenly, Claude came from behind us. Before I looked back at him, my husband and son already glared daggers at him.

"Claude, please don't tease them," I said along with my breath, seeing him raise both his hands. Behind him were Klaus and Fabian; they waved at us. All I could do was smile at them, hearing the cracking of invisible fire from my husband and my son's spot.

"Please go in," I told them and gestured my hand. "I'll just have a talk with these two."

"We'll see you inside." Claude winked as a charming smile resurfaced on his face. Goodness, this kid. I could already tell he would catch every young lady's heart.

"Be kind to them," Klaus advised, as he followed Claude. Meanwhile, Fabian stayed on that spot as he would assist us. I didn't know why he was with Claude and Klaus, but I knew there must be a good reason for that. So, I didn't dwell on it as I faced my husband and son again.

Sam and Law were digging a hole in Claude's back, making me let out another sigh. "Sam, Law, please."

"That nephew of mine surely knows how to get on my nerves now," Sam spat out as he clicked his tongue, peeling his eyes away from him to me.

"Agree." Law nodded. Surely, these two only agree on people to dislike.

"I want you two to loosen up a bit, alright?" I frowned as I was now unsure if they would enjoy this if they kept hating on anyone who approach me. I don't need to be guarded.

"Mother, I am already enjoying it," Law coaxed as he smiled sweetly while Sam brushed my cheek with his thumb.

"You're the one who is worrying too much, wife. Loosen up."

"Maybe," I muttered, letting out another sigh while casting them a look. "Let's go inside?"

"Sure." Sam nodded, and we headed inside, holding Law's hand; I was on my son's right and Sam on his left. With us together, it was obvious that the color of our clothes complimented each other. Fabian walked behind us, but he kept a safe distance.

I didn't know how many people were already inside the venue until we entered. The three of us stopped momentarily, gazing at the crowd inside. There wasn't anyone announcing our arrival, but the light chattering filling the air gradually subsided as they shifted their attention to us.

"Uh..." My hands and feet went cold at the attention I thought I was prepared. I snapped my eyes when Law squeezed my hand lightly, making me gaze down at him.

"Mother, you look beautiful," he said as if telling me to be confident enough.

"Thank you," I whispered with a smile, lifting my gaze to Sam and catching his smile.

"Very stunning," he added while nodding encouragingly.

"You two..." I chuckled as we headed in with everyone's eyes still on us. My nervousness soon disappeared when I saw Adam not far away from us.

"Law!" he called and was about to jog when he stopped. I secretly chuckled as Adam waited for us to approach instead. Gosh... this other son of mine had learned to keep his image in the eyes of the public.

"Greetings, my lord," we greeted. I performed a small curtsy while Law and Sam beckoned a neck bow. "Thank you for gracing us with your presence and for offering us this place to celebrate this auspicious occasion."

"The pleasure is mine, Madam Roux."

I nearly squealed at Adam's formal reply. I stared at him and studied his demeanor. Adam now carried himself with confidence and his eyes were clear. I gazed up at the person behind him and my eyes drooped.

"We are also honored that you accepted our humble invitation, Count Malum."

Jaime forced an awkward smile as he laughed awkwardly. "Of — of course, Madam Roux! The young master Roux and the Earl are great friends, after all!"

"That's right, Count Malum. They are great friends and more like brothers," Sam chimed in, but his tone instantly sent a chill down my spine. Others might not feel it, but Jaime and I, who were close to him, felt that.

"Ha... ha ha, yes!"

A shallow breath slipped past my lips while staring at Jaime Malum. He was already breaking out in sweats. It must be very difficult for him to carry our secret on his own. But this had helped Adam have a normal life in the Crowell estate. I would kill him myself if they maltreated Adam.

"By the way, Law, I have a lot of things to tell you." Adam hopped a step, grinning as if to invite him to play. Law gazed up at us and we released his hand.

"Don't go too far," I whispered, seeing them nod. "We will still greet our guest later."

"Yes, Mother!"

With that, Law and Adam snuck away from the adults. I watched them go to one table so they could chat. I was certain they had many things to talk about.

"You — your Maje --" I shifted my eyes at Jaime Malum as he stuttered.

"Yes?" Sam cocked his head to the side, fluttering his eyelashes. "Count, there were many people around. It'll be suspicious if you look so scared."

Sam smiled brightly while I shook my head. How could Jaime Malum calm down if he kept teasing the count? Surely, my husband held a deep grudge against this man for what he had done to Adam.

"If I am not mistaken, is this the Madam Roux everyone is talking about?"

Suddenly, my eyes dilated as I heard a familiar voice from our side. I instantly turned my head in his direction and my face brightened up.

"Noah!"

Chapter 503 - Happy Birthday, Law! II

"Noah!"

Noah smiled at me politely as he stopped several steps away from us. He glanced at Sam and beckoned a neck bow before glancing at Jaime Malum. The latter hung his head low, knowing Noah

was a duke as well. Even though Silvia, Claude, Klaus, and Yul were popular across the empire, Noah and Cameron were also known for their contribution to the continent.

"The Count Malum and the Earl invited me to this celebration, so if you do not mind," he explained, knowing it was just a facade since it would be too obvious if these people would attend a commoner's banquet.

I greeted Noah back before I gazed at Jaime Malum and smiled. "Count, how can I thank you for bringing such an important person to our son's banquet?"

"Madam Roux, it is really nothing," Jaime replied, lying through the skin of his teeth. "His Grace is a guest of the south, and I thought he would enjoy tonight's banquet."

Poor Jaime, I thought. Sam used him as the shield on how this banquet became this grand. Through shared business and interest, everyone knew that the Count and Sam had formed a good relationship. Hence, with his attendance in this place, it would only make sense.

"Since I am very interested in Madam Roux's choice of flowers, is it alright to have a private talk with her?" Noah inquired, setting his eyes towards Sam. "As you can see, I've been very fond of flowers and tonight's event was filled with flowers I had never seen in the capital and Whistlebird."

"How dare I refuse, Your Grace? However, that decision is for my wife to make." Sam smiled politely. Unlike the hostility he had at Claude, Sam sounded approving. Well, this man was Noah, and we both trusted him with all our hearts.

"I see. Madam, will you spare me a moment of your time? I would also like to introduce you to my friend Marquess Cameron."

I bit my lower lip to suppress myself from laughing. "It's my honor, Your Grace."

"Then, we'll excuse ourselves first, Count, Sir Roux." I glanced back at Sam and he waved lightly before I followed Noah.

Samael stared at Lilou's back as she followed Noah. The side of his eyes squinted, sensing the excitement in Lilou's eyes when she heard about Cameron. They were her kin, after all. And surely, she had a lot to talk about with them.

Jaime Malum gulped, taking little steps next to Samael so others won't hear him. "Your Majesty, about the border..."

"Count, can't you see I am indulging at the sight of my wife's happiness?" he questioned, peeling his eyes away when Lilou was out of his sight to Jaime. "While you are beating yourself whether or not you think this information is valuable, Noah already told me about it. You are so vicious and yet, you are too afraid to die, Count. Are you dumb?"

"Your Majesty, please forgive me," came out a muffled apology. Samael killed people who dared waste his precious time. Hence, Jaime Malum started questioning himself if these sorts of things would be worth the emperor's time.

"Count, loosen up, will you?" Samael quirked a brow for a second before glancing at the guest around the hall. "People are looking and it will look strange if the vicious Jaime Malum keeps looking down. They might think you want to rot underneath."

Jaime's back instantly stiffened as he gazed ahead, wide-eyed. "Ye — ye — yes..."

"Damn," Samael cursed under his breath as it seemed no matter what he would say, Jaime wouldn't recover so easily. Suddenly, he raised a brow when Baroness Talia Fletcher approached them.

"Greetings to you Count Malum." She curtsied modestly before greeting Samael. "Greetings, Sir Roux."

"I am pleased to see you here, Baroness." The smile on Samael's face didn't reach his eyes, sensing that this woman had planned something.

"I am honored that I am invited to the young master's banquet, Sir Roux." She kept her demeanor amiable and gentle, catching a lot of nobleman's attention. Well, Lady Talia was beautiful and elegant, after all. Just not in Samael's eyes.

"I know this is not the right time, but..." she trailed off when someone joined them, making her eyes shift on him.

"Uncle, have you seen..." Claude paused as he glanced at Lady Talia. The side of his lips curled up into a charming smirk, adding a different allure to his youthful appearance.

"My. What a beautiful lady, Uncle." He pointed out, noticing Lady Talia blush with the attention of this bewitching man. "I didn't know you talk to women now aside from your wife."

Samael narrowed his eyes, getting the gist of Claude's insinuation. "Lady Talia, let me introduce you to my nephew. This is Lucas. Just like I am, he also had many... business — mainly, in the north and east. Lucas, this is Lady Talia. She had helped me a lot in establishing my businesses in Minowa. Now, even the Count acknowledged our business' vision."

"Oh?" Claude raised his brows, rocking his head in awe while staring at Lady Talia. "So beautiful and yet so capable."

He took a step forward and offered Lady Talia a hand. "Will you allow me to greet you, my lady?"

Lady Talia smiled and cleared her throat, keeping her composure despite the attention she was getting from Claude. She smiled and clasped his hand, watching him kiss the back of it while keeping his eyes on her.

"It's an honor to meet such a beautiful flower like you, Lady Talia," he expressed with eyes glinting with interest. He squeezed her hand slightly before releasing it.

"You flatter me, Sir Lucas." Her kind smile remained, glancing at Samael, then back to Claude. Although the latter was younger, he was surely charming and undoubtedly appealing. She knew the meaning behind his eyes and she was willing to bask in the attention this youth was giving her.

"Lady Talia, this might be too soon, but I am mustering my courage to ask you for a dance." Claude smiled, bending down a little, waiting for her to take his hand.

"How dare I refuse such an invitation?" Lady Talia chuckled, taking Claude's hand, and the latter guided her with him. As they walked away, Claude glanced at Samael as if telling him he owed him one.

"Such a brat," Samael muttered while watching the two leave. He then tilted his head closer to Jaime Malum, who kept his silence.

"I'm sure you already know who that person is, Count." Jaime gulped upon hearing Samael's voice. Of course, he already guessed who that Lucas was! If Samael was the emperor, and that guy called him uncle, it was obvious that young man was none other than the cruel Earl of Monarey!

'Just how many more important individuals are here in this place?!' Jaime panicked, realizing that Noah and Cameron weren't the only important guest in this event. 'I can't offend anyone in here or I might find myself and my House ruined.'

His thought stopped and his mind when blank went, Samael spoke in a quiet voice. Still, he heard him loud and clear.

"Count, if I were you, think of a good story just in case the Baroness goes missing."

Chapter 504 - [Bonus]Happy Birthday, Law! III

Claude's eyes never left Lady Talia as they danced. The eyes that were cast on them, staring at this undeniably dashing young man and Lady Talia, surely boosted the latter's confidence. She liked the extra attention from the crowd and from this young man. In her mind, although Samael had a special place in her heart, it wasn't bad to play with this young man.

"You leave me speechless, Baroness Fletcher." Claude smiled, tightening his grip around her waist to pull her closer. "I am one lucky man."

"Sir Lucas, you're such a smooth talker," came out a delighted chuckle while shaking her head. At this point, she already knew Claude was very interested in her.

"Apparently, I am not, my lady. I am simply telling the truth."

"Well, that is very flattering."

Claude's smile stretched even wider, but it didn't reach his eyes. He stared down at her for a minute, studying the lady's demeanor, as if contemplating what to do or say to her. He wasn't lying when he said Lady Talia left him speechless, as he could guess what was inside her mind, and it disgusted him.

"My lady, if I may ask, were you already interested in a man?" he asked with brows raised, tilting his head to the side.

Lady Talia's lips parted while staring at him. She didn't answer immediately, increasing his suspense.

"I am now," she answered playfully, casting Claude a knowing look.

"Oh?" His lips stretched into a smug grin, taking a step until his body was against hers. Claude bent over and whispered in her ear. "My. It seems my uncle will have to drown himself with alcohol tonight to wash down the void you will leave in his heart."

Lady Talia's brows rose, grasping the hint Claude gave her. Out of instinct, she turned her head to where Samael stood. To her surprise, he was staring in their direction, making her assume silly things. Although Claude was a dashing, fine young man, there was something in Samael that made her drawn to him.

'Is he jealous?' she wondered, pressing her lips as her heart warmed up at the sight of Samael. Little did she know, Claude, who was scrutinizing her countenance, had to bite his tongue to suppress himself from bursting out in laughter.

Just how the hell did she jump to such a silly assumption? Claude was interested to know! After all, Samael was staring in their direction, but not at her! There wasn't even a trace of emotion in Samael's eyes.

"Sir Lucas." Lady Talia cleared her throat and faced the young man, sporting a reserved smile. "Thank you for asking me for a dance. But I have to cut it short for I have to greet some people."

Just when she placed her hand on his chest to push him lightly, Claude tugged her waist even tighter. Her brows creased instantly, thinking he didn't mean it. But when she attempted to take a step back, Claude pulled her closer once again, making her eyes expand.

"My lady, greeting the guests is Madam Roux's duty, not yours." Claude's eyes grew sinister, chuffed seeing the confusion flickering across her eyes. "So, you don't worry about that. Why don't you listen to my story instead? Will you listen to me?"

"Sir Luc --"

"Come on, Lady Talia. I just want someone to talk to." He cut her off, and he leaned forward, eyes flickering with malice as he simpered. Sensing the danger crawling down her spine, Lady Talia held her breath while keeping her eyes locked with him.

Pleased that she finally understood he wouldn't let her go so easily, Claude rocked his head. "You see, I also like someone. I met her somewhere in the street. She thought I was lost and abandoned, so she approached me with a kind smile and an open heart. At first, I thought, this woman is strangely dumb. She has no sense of danger, but I found myself liking the warmth of her hand when she offered it to me." He paused as a subtle smile dominated his countenance.

"It's the first time in my life that someone held my hand so tenderly, but... it will be perfect if it was just the two of us back then. Unfortunately, she held me in her left hand while she held another man's hand on her right. I should've disliked her then and there, but no." Claude's smile remained as he set his eyes on Lady Talia. "As much as I hate that her attention was split, I will hate it more if I see her sad."

Lady Talia forced a smile and chuckled awkwardly. "It's her loss for not seeing your feelings, Sir Lucas."

"Ha ha... you think so?" he chortled in a low tone as his eyes droop half-open. "But I disagree, my lady. She is content with her life now with her husband and son; she's more beautiful than ever and I want her to stay happy and in peace for as long as I live."

"Aren't you commendable?"

"Commendable?" this time, Claude burst out in laughter while tightening his grip around Lady Talia's waist. "I guess I am. After all, I am unlike you who will stop at nothing to get what you want."

"Pardon?"

His delighted countenance remained, leaning forward to her side, and dawdled. "My lady, I am not blind or stupid not to see how you leer at her husband. Normally, I wouldn't care since I know someone will put you in your place. However, I suddenly thought after being in this banquet that I can't turn a blind eye to it."

Claude slowly drew his head back with his grin persisting. Lady Talia wasn't dumb to grasp who was the woman he was talking about. He made it very clear and obvious, so a smart lady like her would understand.

"My lady, Auntie Lilove is already living a peaceful life, don't make it so hard on her. She is like a mother to me, and I never thought of coveting her from her husband or from her son. If you love someone, their happiness should be your priority, right? Even if you are not the reason for it, you shouldn't interfere." His hand squeezed her hip as his smile receded, replaced with a sinister smirk. She tried to push him away as she knew this young man was... crazy but to no avail. Claude held her securely and she couldn't make huge movements to garner unwanted attention.

"You are pretty, but it pales in comparison to her." He laughed in ridicule, leaning closer to her side once again. "Baroness, when I first laid my eyes on you, do you know what came into my mind first? I wondered what sound your head will make if I bash it in?"

This time, she froze on the spot as her mind entered a blank state. Did she hear him correctly? Lady Talia shifted her shaking eyes at him and caught the glint in his eyes when he cast her a side-eye.

"Right now, the reason your head is still intact is that Auntie Lilove put her heart and soul on this auspicious occasion. I don't want to ruin it, but... let me give you a word of advice. You don't mess with her or my uncle. They might keep a low profile, but don't mess with quiet people. You won't like it when they raise their volume."

Claude finally loosened his grip as the orchestra playing in the background came to an end. As if nothing happened, he took a step back and held her hand. Slowly, he bent over to kiss the back of her hand, eyes still on her.

"It's a pleasant chat, Baroness.. I'll see you around."

Chapter 505 - Happy Birthday, Law! IV

Meanwhile, from the upper floor of the banquet, Klaus cringed when he saw Claude going to the dance floor with a woman. He darted his eyes from Samael, where Claude and the woman came from to the dance floor. It wasn't that hard to get the gist of what happened.

"I'm not really sure if he wants to save that lady or kill her himself," he mumbled, clicking his tongue continuously.

The banquet was packed and along with the orchestra was the lovely chattering from the guests. They weren't new to these types of banquets, but this was the only banquet they actually wanted to end with no bloodshed. So, Klaus wasn't really worried about Claude suddenly snapping that woman's neck. His nephew wouldn't do it publicly, at least.

"I wonder where that damn Fabian went." Klaus looked around at the people below him, but even Fabian's shadow couldn't even be seen. He only saw Charlotte standing near Law and the young Earl of Minowa. Ramin was somewhere hiding on this floor. Rufus and Kristina were with Samael now as they talked with a few local noblemen.

Klaus didn't wonder where Lilou was at as he saw her with Noah earlier. She surely went to see Cameron. Samael told them to memorize everyone on the guest list, just in case someone infiltrated his son's banquet. So, Klaus, although attended as a guest, still needed to do his job as the knight to ensure that this banquet would end in peace.

"Klaus, you should loosen up a bit. That is the purpose of this banquet."

Suddenly, Silvia's voice came from his side, making him turn his head to the voice's source. Silvia winked, standing next to him with a wineglass in her hand.

"This is how I loosen up, my sister." He shrugged, setting his eyes back on the floor below them. "Why are you alone? Did Yul finally realize the trap he stepped into and run away?"

Silvia quirked a brow, casting him a side-eye. But Klaus, even though he didn't glance at her, already knew the surprised look on her face.

"Silvia, don't act as if you don't make it so obvious. You and Yul kept in touch during these five years. Whenever I visit the east, you will always have this huge smile on your face whenever his letters arrive." He rolled his eyes, as they already knew something was up with her. "Also, even if the north and the east aren't connected in trades, I always kept an eye on my siblings. Even in the south, I had planted people to make sure they can assist His Majesty if something happened."

"That is scary of you, Chief Knight. Are you sure you should tell me this?" Silvia chuckled, peeling her eyes away from him, then at the crowd below. "I might ask my people to track down all your little spies and tie them in the middle of the desert, where they will starve and die, eventually."

"Come on, my lady. I am simply trying to protect my family."

A playful chuckle slipped past her lips as she glanced at him once again. The north was known for their horrific means with a cruel earl and a brutal chief knight. But what everyone didn't know was the Marchioness of La Lona March and the Duke of Grimsbanne were just as cruel behind their covers.

Or rather, among them all, Silvia was the cruelest.

The Northerners were just a front so to cover the cruelty of Yulis and Silvia to those who opposed the monarchy. Although Grimsbanne was more accepting of the new duke since those in the duchy trusted the previous duke's decision and loved the empress with all their hearts. Silvia, on the other hand, was new to the east. So there was a lot of opposition. To prove herself, wits and kindness weren't the answer to all.

When it comes to power and politics, a woman had to face such discrimination and prejudices. So, she had to be more cruel than anyone, or they would deem her weak and a pushover. Moreover, she didn't want to be used as an excuse for those who were waiting for Samael to make a mistake. Silvia had gone through all that and taken more lives than when she was in the palace, but she regretted nothing in the slightest.

Now, Silvia became this powerful marchioness whose opinion was heard even in a quiet voice.

"Yul went to find Lilou." She broke her silence, took a deep breath, and released it slowly. "Does this mean you approve of us? Me and Yul, what do you think about this combination, Klaus?"

"Odd." His answer was quick, but she only chuckled in response. "But well, it's not like having an affair within our kin is new to us. Although it is still a shock that Yul is a Bloodfang all along, he still grew up with us. I didn't think you two will eventually click after all these years."

"Me too, Klaus. I never thought I will ever love Yul as a man." She planted her palm on the railings, smiling modestly at her confession. "Even in my wildest imagination, I didn't think I will ever feel this way. But... the more I spend time with him, the more I realize how important he is in my life."

Klaus cast her a side-eye, shrugging nonchalantly. "I'm glad that you're happy, Silvia. Although..."

He trailed off when he caught a familiar figure in the crowd. As soon as he set his eyes on her, his eyes narrowed.

"Although Silvia, I think you will be tangled in a problematic love drama." Her brows elevated upon his remarks as her gaze followed where he was staring at. As soon as she saw a stunning beauty in the crowd, her eyes sharpened while her jaw tightened.

"What is Beatrice doing here? If I remembered correctly, she wasn't on the guest list." Came out a cold voice, making Klaus glance at her once again.

"There is this thing called a party crasher, sister." Klaus tapped her shoulder and squeezed it lightly. "Loosen up, Silvia.. That is the purpose of this party."

Chapter 506 - Happy Birthday, Law! V

In the garden outside the banquet hall, Yulis wiped his mouth with a cloth. He cleared his throat before gazing at the handkerchief, seeing blood on it that made him clench his teeth.

'She will really hate me,' he thought, thinking about Silvia and his little secret from her. 'I shouldn't have given in to her.'

His eyes softened with bitterness, feeling sorry for having these thoughts right now. Deep down, he didn't regret being selfish now despite knowing his circumstance. That night, when Silvia kissed him, his mind automatically erased the reasons he shouldn't be with her.

Obviously, Yulis knew Silvia's feelings long ago. He simply pretended not to notice and acted like usual because he knew he would hurt her, eventually. But when she confessed and saw the look in her eyes, his defenses broke as if they were glass. And when they kissed... it felt right.

Yulis crumpled the handkerchief while clenching his teeth. "You always come when people want to be alone, Fabian."

Fabian stopped two meters away from behind him. The side of his lips curled up into a polite smile, looking around only to see no one but Yulis.

"Your Grace, I am simply taking a walk to make sure no suspicious individual is lurking in the dark," he explained, but Yulis knew that wasn't all. Fabian purposely let his presence known to him just to... tease him.

"Drop the pretense, Fabian. Just say what you want to say." Yulis sighed, turning around to face the diabolical butler.

Fabian pressed his lips together, glancing at the handkerchief in Yulis's hand and caught the blood on it. He slowly raised his gaze back at him, smiling, closed-lipped.

"Your Grace, I just want to say I tried helping you by telling her ladyship you to love Her Majesty. Why did you sabotage yourself?" he cocked his head to the side with a misplaced cluelessness in his eyes. "I always admired your determination and devotion, but this thing called love somehow made you stupid, Your Grace."

"So, you came here because you felt cheated? That your uncalled help went to waste?"

"I came here because I was taking a night walk and I care about you, Your Grace. You are an important piece in this empire and Her Majesty's brother."

Yulis let out a dry chuckle, sizing him up before shaking his head. "If I don't know what kind of person you are, I will surely consider you are trying to upset me for your brother's stead. But I bet you are also having fun seeing Rufus secretly agonize about this."

"That's right. I am having fun in seeing all of you agonize even though I am not trying."

"Fabian, is this because you feel wronged at how my nephew sees you as a pushover?" Yulis inquired. Fabian's silence was enough for him to understand Fabian's petty reasoning. Since Fabian was suffering, he wanted everyone to join the 'fun.' Yulis wasn't even surprised by this anymore because Fabian was always like this.

Fabian took a deep breath as he sauntered towards Yulis. He stood beside him, gazing at the garden without a change of reaction.

"Her Majesty will be saddened if she hears that you are dying, Your Grace," he said in a solemn voice, not casting Yulis a glance. "Even His Majesty is starting to take notice. I'm sure he is just waiting for you to confess your circumstance. If I were you, you should come clean to His and Her Majesty and tell the marchioness that you do not have a long life to live."

Yul gaze down and smiled bitterly. "That is easier said than done, Fabian. I still hadn't come to terms with my death yet. And I don't want to see them looking at me with sadness, nor I can bear to see them all trying to find a solution to keep me alive. I can't."

"Is that so?" Fabian rocked his head lightly while casting him a look. There wasn't pity in his eyes, nor there was happiness. If anything, Fabian only thought of this situation as... complicated.

"People, be it humans or vampires, are all complicated beings,' he remarked, gazing up at the dark, starless sky. "I am starting to think I am the only normal in this world for not being too complicated."

Yulis let out a chuckle, pivoting his heel as he also faced the same direction as Fabian was facing. "Maybe you are, Fabian. I don't even know what normal is, but what I know is I wished I was as simple as you."

Fabian raised his brows and glanced at Yulis, smirking. People might assume Fabian was complicated. But, among all of them, he was the simplest person. His mindset was always straight. This was probably because he doesn't have those complicated emotions within him.

Love? He had a different meaning to that. Hate? Fabian never dwelled on hating someone. He disliked the feeling of hatred, so he would always dispose of the source. To him, anything that disrupted his nirvana deserved his undivided attention, and act accordingly. And then, goes back to his usual life.

Life and death, Fabian saw them the same. If he lived, he lived. If he died, then that's that.

Easy. At least for someone like Fabian.

"By the way, Fabian." Yulis broke the serenity between them as he cocked his head to him. "Why hadn't you said a word to Hell about this?"

"He didn't ask." Yulis chortled as he actually believed his answer. There was a moment of silence between them once again before he spoke.

"I'm certain you didn't approach for the sole reason of upsetting me. What is the other reason for this company?" Yulis batted his eyes lazily, setting Fabian shrugged indifferently.

"No other reason."

"Should I assume it is to comfort me?"

Fabian slowly averted his eyes back to Yulis. "Suit yourself, Your Grace."

"Alright, then." Yulis rocked his head, closed-lipped. "Strangely enough, I felt comforted. But I won't thank you."

"Thank you's are just another meaning for 'I won't reward you.' I'd rather hear you want my help in something else."

"Help? What kind of help would I need from you?" Yulis remarked sarcastically, recalling he didn't need Fabian's help in anything.

Slowly, Fabian set his eyes on him. He turned to face the duke squarely, peering at him from head to toe.

"Once you go to the mainland, of course." Yulis' brows furrowed, as he didn't remember thinking of going to that place. No, it never even crossed him. So, where did Fabian get that assumption?

Fabian just smiled at him before looking up at the balcony above them. "Her Majesty seemed to be having fun with Marquess Cameron and Duke Noah. I always find her laughter pleasing in the ear and her cries as painful as a nail scratching a plate. She will cry a river if you die, Your Grace. And that would hurt my ears."

"Huh?" Yulis furrowed his brows even more while staring at Fabian, hearing the faint voices of the three individuals on the balcony above them. "Fabian, are you saying..."

"I'm saying I am disappointed that a genius duke such as yourself had to take a minute to understand my words." Fabian set his eyes back to Yulis and smiled until his eyes squinted. "We will go to the mainland once the world summit ends, Your Grace.. I won't let you die — not under my watch."

Chapter 507 - Happy Birthday, Law! VI

Noah led me to the balcony where he left Marquess Cameron alone. As soon as we entered the said area, my face brightened up at the man standing with his back facing us.

"Cameron!" I called excitedly, watching him turn around. "Oh, god... I'm so glad to see you again!"

I rushed towards him and before he could bow to greet me, I leaped and wrapped my limbs around him. Cameron had been my support from the very beginning. Although he stayed behind the scenes, there were so many things I wanted to thank him for.

"Your — Your Majesty," Cameron called awkwardly before I let him go and took a step back.

"Marquess Cameron, you don't have to act so distant, right? Noah?" I cast Noah a knowing look as he sauntered towards us, stopping at arm's length.

"That's right, Marquess. Even though she is now an empress, she hasn't changed a bit." Noah grinned, wiggling his brows at me, which made me giggle.

"See? That new title is just a title. I'm not even doing my duty."

"Even so..." Cameron trailed off helplessly when Noah and I tilted our heads, blinking cluelessly. "... may I, at least, greet you formally, Your Majesty?"

"Of course." I extended my arm, giving him my hand, which he clasped gently.

Cameron offered me a kind smile as he bent over. "I am honored to be in your presence, Your Majesty. Thank you for inviting this humble man to the prince's special day," he said, as he planted a peck on the back of my hand.

"The pleasure is mine," I replied as I drew my hand back.

"You're too humble, Your Majesty."

"Marquess Cameron, I'm certain you know our circumstances. My son doesn't know about his father or our real status in this empire. This may burden you, but call me by my name just in case someone overhears us." I smiled and requested kindly, but this was just an excuse so Cameron would loosen up. He had always been formal, but after five years, Cameron thickened the line between us.

Be it because he was always the person who was cautious of status differences or he was afraid that of crossing the line, I wanted Cameron to treat me the same. Because I would treat him the same, duchess or an empress, Cameron was my family.

"Addressing you by your name will burden me indeed, but if it's alright with you, may I call you Madam Roux, instead?" He suggested with a kind smile.

"Burdening you is the least I want. Madam Roux it is, then."

I glanced at Noah and caught the huge smile on his face. With that, we chatted and reminiscence our time together in the past over some glass of wine. They also shared their stories during the five years of my slumber. Apparently, the Remington's had to surrender their wealth when Sam ascended the throne. This was to clear Noah's name to the public and to show their sincerity to the new monarch.

The Remington was one of Stefan's biggest supporters after all. So, of course, they should stand as an example to other Stefan's supporters not to resist the new dynasty. Good thing, Noah had foreseen this before, so he made some investment, using the money he earned from working under me.

In other words, all the Remington's fortune was surrendered, but their house didn't fall because of Noah's broad mind. Also, by this, all the wealth in their house came from good sources. This made me smile and left me in awe.

Meanwhile, Cunningham was still... well, a peaceful dwelling of their cult. Right now, he told me some of them still had my portraits and prayed to me — not for me. But because of that, the people in Cunningham became the empress's biggest supporters. In case the emperor and the empress clashed for power, he told me I had some cards on my sleeve.

I appreciated Cameron's gestures, though. Although he reassured me he was just letting his people cling to their beliefs since it was already deep-rooted in them. And there was no way he was hoping that Sam and I would fight for authority.

"I'm glad that you..." I trailed off when I saw a figure from down the balcony, landing on the railing smoothly. "Fabian? Is there something wrong?"

At this point, Fabian's sudden entrance from down the balcony did not shock us. He jumped from the railings, smiling at us as if nothing happened.

"I'm sorry for the surprise. I was with the duke of Grimsbanne below this balcony, so I thought of jumping to save time," Fabian explained and I nodded in understanding. Although it was unusual that Yul and Fabian were together, it wasn't that surprising. Fabian was a friendly individual, after all.

"Is that so? Are you going back to the banquet hall?"

"Yes." He bowed slightly. "Also, madam, I'm sorry to interrupt your time with Marquess Cameron and Duke Noah, but you need to go back to greet the other guests."

"Ah, right?" The side of my lips stretched into a smile, glancing at Cameron and Noah. "Shall we head back inside?"

"Yes." The two of them answered in unison, returning my smile with a gentle one.

"This way, please." Fabian motion his arm and the three of us followed him inside the banquet hall to join everyone.

My chat with these two was cut short. Even so, I was glad to catch up with them. Cameron and Noah changed, but not too much.

Once we returned to the event hall, Cameron, Noah, and I had to go on separate ways. The two mingled with people they know — that was Klaus and Claude — while I returned to where my husband was. He was already with Law along with some men I have never seen.

As I approached them, my steps grew slower until I halted. Sam seemed he was already accommodating the guest and Law as well. I wasn't surprised at how welcoming my son looked, but Sam surely surprised me. He was smiling and engaging with people, making him look very approachable.

"Oh! There's my wife!" Sam snapped me out of my thoughts as he grinned while the people around him also set their eyes on me. I sported a kind smile, about to walk forward, when I stopped and looked around.

'Huh?' I looked back at Sam and he raised his brows while tilting his head. 'Maybe... it's nothing..' I mentally shook my head, tossing the sudden sense of dread that crept down my spine for a split second.

Chapter 508 - Happy Birthday, Law! VII

Sam introduced me to the local noblemen who were associated in the fort and Sam's business in the south. Of course, I had to smile throughout. They were kind people — not pure, but at least amiable. They mostly spoke about how my husband bragged about his wife and his genius son, which made me giggle.

Since they were all spewing the same thing, I couldn't help but believe them. Not that I didn't. I knew Sam, and how he would brag to the point he sounded like selling something.

Either way, Sam handpicked these people who would be associated with him, so I was certain they were individuals who had a clean record. They even gave the young earl, who was also listening to them with Jaime Malum, equal respect towards a man — not a child.

"Oh, my!" Suddenly, our discussion was interrupted by yet another familiar voice. Even before I could see who it was, I already cast Sam a look while he shrugged.

"If it's not rude of me, I would like to greet His Maj — Sir Roux and Madam Roux for the success of the young master's birthday banquet." I took a deep breath, sporting a smile as I faced the woman who wasn't invited to this event.

Beatrice.

"Although I am heartbroken that Madam Roux seemed to forget our friendship."

"Lady Beatrice, how can that be?" my smile remained, noticing how some young noblemen leer at her.

With her dazzling beauty and lavish dress in a light shade of yellow, Beatrice looked like a shining star for the night. If I was being honest, she was the prettiest lady at this banquet. So, it wasn't a surprise she was garnering a lot of attention. Her mysterious identity was just a bonus for their interest.

"Is that so? Perhaps, I was just reading into it too much." Beatrice smiled beautifully, gazing down at Law, who was staring at her blankly. "Greetings, young master Roux. I am pleased to finally meet my best friend's beloved son. Oh, how time flies so fast. I can still remember how Sir Roux wept when he first carry you in his embrace. Now, you are a fine young boy. I am sincerely delighted that you finally celebrated your birthday with Lilou."

"Thank you, Lady Beatrice," Law replied in a polite tone, making me exhale a shallow breath. Beatrice sounded utterly sincere with her remarks, and I knew she wasn't faking.

"My... so polite... unlike someone I know." She glanced at Sam and then at me, hinting to us that we were the rude people she was talking about. Well, not inviting her to our son's birthday was discourteous, but well, she was already here anyway.

"Lady Beatrice, surely, there were a lot of rude people in this world. But I'm glad my son is not one of them," Sam replied with a bright smile, winking at Law, who gazed at him. "Anyway, since you are already here, I would like to introduce you to these gentlemen."

Anticipation instantly dominated the noblemen's faces as soon as Sam said that. However, Beatrice chuckled, and she moved her gaze in a certain direction.

"Sir Roux, as much as I appreciate your courtesy, I had to excuse myself first. Something important arose which I needed to settle." She curtsied, offering a bright smile at the noblemen. "I hope you don't find this rude. "

"Haha! Of course, my lady! How dare we interrupt a beautiful maiden such as yourself to settle important matters?" one man answered heartily, attempting to leave a good impression on her.

Beatrice exchanged flatteries briefly so she could get away without troubling us with this discourtesy.

Surely, Beatrice was a professional in flattering people, especially men. She knew what they wanted to hear and calculated every movement she does. From how her eyes fluttered to how wide her smile should be. With that, she finally excused herself and rushed in a certain direction.

Out of curiosity, my eyes followed where she was heading. As soon as I did, I secretly winced. Where she was heading was in Yulis's direction, and when the latter noticed, he cringed and tried to run away.

'Gosh, Yulis. I'm so sorry,' I apologized internally, watching how Yulis fade away in the crowd while Beatrice still followed him. 'I tried, Yul, but... she still came. Good thing she is not someone who holds grudges in these petty things.'

I tossed Yulis's problems at the back of my head and focused on the people around us as the host of the party. Shortly after, we had to greet other guests as a family, thanking them for attending and receiving their wishes and greetings and their gifts for our son.

Meanwhile, Yulis stopped in the corridor away from the banquet hall. But alas, he winced when he felt Beatrice's presence from his back.

'Damn it,' he grumbled internally, closing his eyes as he took a deep breath. When he opened his eyes, he pivoted on his heel to face her.

"Your highness," he called, closed-lipped. Beatrice was only three meters away from him, narrowing her eyes as she scrutinized him from head to toe.

"Your Grace, I mustered my courage to attend a banquet I wasn't invited for you. How can you be so heartless as to avoid me?" she sighed, batting her eyes coquettishly. "Didn't you miss me? You always visit the east and now the south, but you don't visit me when the capital is closer in Grimsbanne."

"Beatrice, just how many times will I have to tell you to stop until you understand its meaning?" Yulis breathed out, quirking a brow as she took slow steps towards him. She stopped a step away from him, tilting her head while clipping her fingers on his buttons.

"Until when?" she repeated, gazing up at him mischievously. "Until you understand I won't, Your Grace."

"If not for Hell, I would've slit your throat myself." His tone lowered as his eyes sharpened, gazing down at this fearless lady. Yulis held her wrist before pulling her hand away from him, making his jaw tighten as he did so.

"Beatrice, I don't understand why you are so persistent in upsetting me, but there's a limit to my patience, and it's already running thin."

"Haha! Really? Now that is even more appealing, Your Grace." He held her wrist still, knowing she would just cling to him once he let her go. "It makes me want to see it, Your Grace. I mean, you, losing your patience."

The corner of her lips curled up, unfazed by his piercing gaze.. Suddenly, Beatrice suddenly stood on her toes, tilted her head, and claimed his lips.

Chapter 509 - Happy Birthday, Law! VIII

"It makes me want to see it, Your Grace. I mean, you, losing your patience."

Yulis' eyes nearly popped out from his socket when she stood on her toes and claimed his lips. Only after a few seconds, he managed to step back, staring back at her in dismay. Yet, the side of Beatrice's lips had this lopsided smirk while she wiped it with her fingers.

"Taste like..." Beatrice paused with her eyes glimmering with different emotions. "... someone else."

"Beatrice..." he called under his breath, balling his hand into a fist as he felt... violated. Even so, he didn't want to ruin the party by fighting Beatrice. Knowing her, giving in to rage was what she wanted. Yulis will never give that to her.

The latter arched her brows as she stepped up, chin up, and unaffected. "My god, my duke! Just how important is this banquet to you to suppress yourself from slitting my throat when it is already ruined?"

"Ruined? Tch. Beatrice, whatever you are planning..."

"I'm not planning anything, my love. By now, the emperor must've heard about it already." She cut him off as her tone grew solemn, dropping her mischievous act as she locked eyes with him. "I wouldn't go to a place I wasn't invited or needed for no reason, darling. I came here because I care about you, Yulis, and the last thing I want is for everything you built to go down the drain."

"To go down the drain..." Yulis ground his teeth and before he could think, he already leapt forward, grabbed her by the neck, and pinned her against the wall. "Beatrice, I care about myself enough and I don't need yours. Do you want to see me lose it? Sure."

His grip around her neck tightened, hitting the last straw of his patience. And yet, Beatrice, although gasping for air, still managed to let a weak laugh.

"Shut up," he warned under his breath, eyes coloring in dark red as he wanted to see her bleed.

"Grimsbanne... is... in dan... ger." Yulis brows furrowed, staring at her beet-red face before loosening his grip. As soon as he did, Beatrice collapsed to the floor, groping her neck while gasping for air.

"Beatrice, what did you mean by that?" he asked, squatting down in front of her. "What did you mean by Grimsbanne is in danger?"

Beatrice didn't answer immediately as she tried to settle her breathing. When she did, she gaze up at him and simpered.

"Ask Rufus. I'm sure he already heard about it too." She slapped his shoulder, clutching her skirt as assisted herself up. "I already fulfill my goal, so I'm leaving."

Beatrice let out a sharp breath as she held her chin up, jaw tightening. "You're welcome."

As soon as those words left her lips, she marched away with a dead expression. But just when she was at a good distance from him, Beatrice halted and turned around to face him.

"Anyway, if I were you, ask Fabian's help to solve your problem. This may sound ridiculous, but he is the best person in this situation. Or if you want to stay stubborn, you can always come to me. I'll solve it for you."

After Beatrice spewed all that, she resumed her steps, only to stop once again when he asked.

"Just what did you see in me, Beatrice? What did you see in me you're doing all this?" Yulis stared at her back while clutching his fist tightly. He always wanted to ask her why she kept bothering him, upsetting him, but sometimes, she would also sound like she genuinely cared. He just couldn't understand what was on this woman's mind, the reasons behind her actions, and her drive.

Surely, this had nothing to do with love. She wasn't that type of person, or at least what he believed.

"What did I see in you?" she repeated in a quiet voice, smiling subtly as she refrained herself from looking back. "Nothing, Yul. That's what I saw in you, nothing."

Beatrice resumed in her steps, eyes glimmering with longing. 'Nothing to like, nothing to admire, boring, and yet... I like this nothing.'

Little did the two know Silvia was just hiding around the corner, listening in silence. She glanced at where Yul was standing, pressing her lips into a thin line before she walked away on her own. As she did, her eyes sharpened as they glinted.

"I thank you all for coming in to celebrate my son's special day with us and made it memorable. I hope you are all enjoying tonight as much as we enjoyed your presence on this auspicious occasion." Sam raised his glass of wine, a gesture for a toast to everyone who was listening to his brief speech. "Our family will remember all of you."

A round of applause resonated across the entire banquet hall after Sam's brief speech. I smiled brightly when he looked in our direction. Sam shrugged, and we got down on the small podium. Since we already greeted everyone and Law accepted all the gifts from different houses, the orchestra played a merry tune to liven up the mood even more.

"Mother."

Just as we got down, Law tugged my hand, which made me gaze down. My brows elevated while keeping the smile on my face.

"Can we dance?" he asked in anticipation with eyes flickering with innocence. My eyes softened seeing how adorable he was, but before I could answer, I shifted my eyes to Sam.

"We will dance first," I said, knowing Sam would protest as this would be my first dance tonight. To my surprise, Sam smiled, closed-lipped, and nodded.

"Sure, my love." Sam squatted down to meet Law's eyes level. "My son, take care of your mother, alright."

"I know..." Law frowned, but he was rather obedient to his father. Well, there were times that Law would listen to his father. I still hadn't grasped Law and Sam's pattern, but their relationship was always like this. Unpredictable.

"Then, off you go!" Sam grinned before he gazed up at me, springing back up with his eyes on me. "I will join you later, alright?"

"Alright." I smiled, refraining from asking what was the matter. I was married to Sam for a long time that I somehow felt that something came up. Whatever it was, I was certain Sam would rather deal with it himself instead of making me worry. So I pretended not to notice as I headed to the dance area with Law.

As Lilou and Law walked away, the smile on Samael's face faded before he marched to the corner. With a glass of wine in his hand, he leaned his back on one of the pillars. His eyes remained on the crowd, arms-cross, twirling the wine elegantly.

"Dominique, I don't like how you turned up in the middle of my son's birthday," he muttered menacingly as the corner of his eyes sharpened. "Since you are here... tell me, how bad is it?"

Behind the pillar was a man in a cloak with his back leaning against it.

"Terrible."

Chapter 510 - Happy Birthday, Law! IX

"Since you are here... tell me, how bad is it?"

Samael's tone dropped as his aura thickened. For Dominique, his chief shadow knight, to be in this place himself, only meant something went terribly wrong. Whatever it was, he knew the emperor needed to settle it. His mind already considered the worst while Dominique kept his silence.

"Terrible, Your Majesty," Dominique replied in a quiet tone. "The Spade Kingdom finally made their move and were marching to the empire. Just a few days ago, a terror attack happened in Grimsbanne. Fortunately, Princess Le Blac had her people securing the west, so the casualties were minimum. Meanwhile, the north had sent troops to help the east defend its borders."

"So, they are attacking from every side?"

Dominique gazed down. "The east and west will soon become a battlefield, Your Majesty. We are facing two opponents at once."

"Two?" Samael's brow quirked.

"Quentin's troops will reach the west in no time."

"And in the east?"

"The troop marching towards the east raised a flag of the previous emperor. It seemed Stefan and Quentin joined hands, after all."

"Did you confirm if Stefan was leading the soldier marching towards La Lona?"

"Jayden did, and I received his letter today telling me Stefan was leading the troops in the east. I also received a confirmation that Quentin was marching with his undeads. The wolves in the west and the Princess's chief knight can only minimize the casualties."

"How many?"

"About two hundred thousand in the west and over a hundred thousand in the east."

Samael went silent after hearing Dominique's reports, rubbing his chin. Stefan and Quentin wanted to split the military forces of the emperor, putting them at a disadvantage. Quentin's troops were

already a headache, as he had already built the Spade Kingdom with undeads. Now, Stefan also joined at the same time.

Five years ago, Samael discovered many people deserted their houses and tons of missing people — mostly human nobles, commoners, and peasants. It was easy to conclude that those people weren't casualties of the series of chaos in the capital. But they were people Stefan hid along with all the people that went missing throughout his reign.

Meaning, turned vampires were marching towards the east and undeads on the west. Even with everyone's knightage combined to defend those borders, they would never be enough.

'What do you think, Alex?' Samael inquired internally, as the voices in his head had been so quiet ever since Lilou woke up.

'What do you mean, what do we think?'

'I am asking Alex, not you, Jin.' Samael's inner voice was cold, not a bit amused at Jin's sassiness right now. 'I already had an idea, but I am asking Alex since this requires all risk.'

'Just do whatever you think is best for everyone. You're the emperor,' Alexander replied in a solemn tone. 'Not that I trust you, I just know that you will not let her and her child die.'

Samael rocked his head. He knew the people in his head already figured out what he was planning, so he didn't spell it out for them.

"Dominique, send a letter to Karo and everyone to send reinforcement as soon as possible. If any of them dared to delay the royal decree, burn their kingdom to ashes," he ordered solemnly, eyes glinting as he stared at his wife and son dancing. "I'm sure Rufus already got a wind of this."

Suddenly, Ramin appeared on Samael's side and pretended not to notice the shadow night behind the pillar. His expression was solemn, making the former know his left hand already heard the important matter. Well, he was Samael's left hand who carried Samael's voice inside his head.

"Ramin, mobilize your people and tell them to march to Grimsbanne. Make sure that those will land on the battleground Yul prepared. Charlie, I know you can hear me. Rush to the east with the marchioness tonight. Heliot will aid you." Samael didn't cast Ramin a look as he spoke.

"Dominique, tell Fabian to gather everyone to hear my plans — including Noah, Cameron, and Jaime Malum."

"Yes, Your Majesty." Ramin and Dominique bowed, knowing the emperor had more things in mind.

"For now, make sure none in the south will hear about this. If the news already reached anyone's ears, silence them. I need Minowa to not know about this for now."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

As soon as Samael gave out his orders, Dominique disappeared from behind the pillar, while Ramin also walked away. He stayed leaning against the pillar, keeping his silence with a dead expression.

"Of all the days they picked, they coincidentally chose my son's birthday," he whispered, staring at his son, who never ceased to upset him. But Samael loved that boy more than his own life.

"But I guess... I can't keep this secret for as long as I wanted to." His eyes softened, letting out a shallow breath. "I will never forgive them for forcing me to take such measures."

I carried Law on our second dance, giggling as he looked at me in worry.

"Mother, am I not heavy? I can dance even if you don't carry me," he said worriedly, but I just smiled while staring at him.

"My son, I can do this much," I replied in a soothing tone. "You don't know yet, but I used to carry heavy things before I met your father."

Not just heavy things, but I did hard labor back when I was a peasant. Moreover, I missed carrying Law for five years. So, this wasn't much. I had my strength perfectly stored from my five-year slumber.

"How sweet!" I turned my head to my side, giggling when my eyes landed on Kristina and Noah dancing near us.

"I'm always the sweet type," I humored as the corner of my lips stretched, casting Law a knowing look. He nodded as he averted his eyes towards the two.

"My mother is the sweetest!"

"Oh my! My lord, why don't we have a child too to resuscitate the softness in my heart that my unfair circumstance killed?" Kristina jest, teasing Noah, who let out a helpless sigh. I knew these two were close and Kristina was always comfortable around Noah — more comfortable than when she was with me.

"Lady Monroe, please don't say such an ominous thing," Noah remarked, inciting evil laughter from her. I stared at them for a moment and shook my head. For some reason, I knew something was wrong with Kristina, and she was simply hiding it by teasing Noah.

I wanted to ask her, but I knew this wasn't the right place for that. Also, Sam was heading this way.. My brows furrowed, noticing the fading killing intent in his eyes.