

The Duke 521

Chapter 521 - This Is What It Takes To Be Me

"Why do I need to carry a weapon when I can crush your head with my bare hand? Tehee?"

The side of my lips curled up as the man shrieked under my grip. I didn't recall being this strong, as I often fight with my Lakresha. But now, I felt this surge of power within and my bloodlust was increasing. It felt like I would lose control if I let this instinct take over me.

'I want to crush his head,' my instinct whispered in my mind, tightening my grip around his head. But I froze when I felt the gazes behind me. I slowly glanced over my shoulder, heart aching as I remembered my son was just behind me.

"Damn..." came out a curse under my breath, tossing the man out of the room until his back crashed against the wall of the corridor.

"Ugh..!" The man quickly grunted while sitting up, touching his face as my sharp nails clawed the side of it. "My beautiful face...!"

I didn't idle as I marched away from the room, stopping when I was by the door. I clenched my teeth before I turned around to see the people inside. My eyes instantly fell on Law's shocked countenance, making me hold my breath. He looked scared and this... felt like a hand gripping my heart, crushing it slowly.

My grip on the door handle tightened. I didn't want Law to see how sick, how tainted, and what I truly am. I didn't want my son to see this side of me.

I swallowed down the frustrating tension in my throat. "Wait for me in here," I said in a quiet voice, closing the door slowly while staring through the gap until it shut closed.

I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath as I calmed my heart. Wallowing in regret wouldn't help us in this situation. If there was someone to taint their hands, it should be me, as I had soiled my hands a long time ago.

A loud gust of wind suddenly blew past behind me as I felt the vampire attempt to catch me off-guard, but no pain came. I let go of the door handle as I calmly turn around, seeing the vampire freeze; his hand trying to grab me but stopped in that stance, wide-eyed.

"As an inferior vampire, you dare approach someone superior to you?" I asked bitterly, slipping my fingers in between his frozen hand. I glanced at our hands intertwined, wrapping my fingers around it.

"I don't know who you are, nor do I care about what you are fighting for. But... you chose the wrong day, wrong time, and targeted the wrong people." I took a deep breath, shifting my eyes back to his dilated eyes. "Do you know what you've just done?"

His lower lips trembled as they parted, but before he could say anything stupid, I pulled his hand down. Before he knew it, he wheezed as my knee landed on his abdomen. With the uncontrollable power coursing through my body, he coughed out blood with that simple attack.

But I wasn't done yet.

I wouldn't let go of this man that easily and planned to use him to release this unquenchable anger building up in my heart. Before he could grasp what was happening, I showered him with multiple attacks without letting go of his hand. He couldn't retaliate as someone as weak as him would do nothing before a pureblood.

When I had enough playing with him, I slammed his body against the wall with all my might. With the power I used, he instantly made a hole in the wall, passed through it, and landed outside. All this happened in a matter of three minutes.

He was still alive as he grunted, coughing blood.

"Annoying vampires," I scoffed in mockery, running my hand through my hair. Although I was now a vampire myself, I still found this race annoying. After shattering his ribcage, this man was still alive. To stop him from getting up, I already knew what to do. But everyone, including my son, would see his corpse.

"What should I do with you...?" I murmured as I trudged towards him. The vampire who was just giggling in excitement moments ago crawled away on instinct as I got close.

"No... no... no --"

"I'll make this quick," I said, taking a large step as I sat down on his back. He wriggled his body and attempted to fight back, but I stepped on his wrist.

"I don't have time with you anymore." I grabbed his hair, pulling it back before I used my claws and unhesitatingly sliced his throat. The laugh, the shrieked, the grunts... were no more. All I heard along with the loud cries from the distance, was the dripping blood from this man's throat.

There was no satisfaction or pity in my eyes as I released his hair. If anything, I felt nothing by killing him. I gazed at my hand, now tainted with blood that took another life. I slowly curled my fingers as bitterness flickered across my eyes.

"This is what it takes to be someone like me," came out a whisper, rising from his back. This man wouldn't get up anymore as I nearly beheaded him. I only left a small portion of his nape intact so it wouldn't look too scary when those people inside the room see him.

I didn't wait for long as I marched back to the shut doors. I took a deep breath as I held on to the handle before pushing it open. As soon as I did, I witnessed them jump from surprise, only to calm down a little when they figured it was me. They looked at me cautiously and in silence.

"Come. Follow me," I said, cocking my head. "If you want to live, that is. I won't wait for anyone."

I didn't even look at Law, too afraid to see what he would look at me. Instead, I turned around and walked away.. It took several seconds before I heard their hurried footsteps following me from behind.

Chapter 522 - Don't Look, Son.

With a group this large, sneaking out with no one noticing was impossible. That was why I led them through the hallway we all had taken before. I wasn't familiar with the estate, so it was better to take the path I was familiar with.

So far, we had encountered no one. But the sound of fighting was growing louder in my ear.

"Walk faster," I ordered, glancing over my shoulder, and the people behind me picked up their pace. None of them spoke, and aside from their clumsy footsteps, they barely made a sound.

I stopped suddenly when we're close at the right turn of the hallway and they too. My eyes fixed ahead, narrowing to count how many footsteps were approaching.

"Ma — Madam Roux...?" a shaking voice of a woman behind me called, but I ignored her. "Ma — Madam..."

"Shh." She shut up upon hearing me. "From front and back..."

A deep sigh slipped past my lips. Being cornered wasn't new to me as I went through this type of scenario before, but with a group of people relying on me, it was a bit tricky. I had to consider their safety first, and I had to refrain from playing with risky plans.

"Hey, stand close to each other." I turned around and informed them. "I mean, compress yourself together so I can see everyone. We will be surrounded in about ten seconds. Cover the eyes of the children and just stay put. Don't go out of my line of sight because if you do, I can't save you."

They only looked at me in panic, trembling in fear.

"Understood?" My brows raised and saw them nod. Just as instructed, they compressed together, and our group looked like it shrunk. The only one who didn't join them was Glory.

"Glory, can you fight?" I asked. "If you can, fight those on the back and I will handle those." I pointed my thumb over my shoulder, sensing that a few people already stepped foot in our vicinity just at the same time the people on the other end of the hallway appeared.

"Yes, Madam." Glory nodded in determination. I rocked my head as I trust Glory. Those other people were just humans, so I knew he could handle them, but on the front were vampires — noble vampires.

"Good." I glanced at the ladies and children as they all stay seated. "Don't cry. I won't let them get any of you."

I offered them a stiff smile as I nodded, turning my back against them as I faced the group of three noble vampires. If I remembered correctly, these people had been opposed to the person in power ever since. Not just against Jaime, but even opposed the previous Earl.

If not Jaime, these people would also try to take control of Adam. That was what Sam meant when he said that killing Jaime would only give a path for more Jaime's to take control of the young Earl. Although it was hard to admit this, Jaime may be cruel and greedy, but he was a little wise and valued his life more than anything. Therefore, he wouldn't scheme on Sam's back by trying to find an ally that would challenge the emperor. If anything, he would rather do everything to be out of the emperor's line of sight.

"If this isn't Madam Roux..." the man in the middle commented, glancing at the ladies behind me before setting his eyes back to me. "Madam Roux, step aside. We will let you go if you give us Lady Hazel."

"No." My answer was quick and cold.

"Tch. Then, we won't apologize if you get hurt," he snickered, sucking air through his gritted teeth. The three of them let their fangs known, swinging their swords leisurely.

I glanced over my shoulder, sensing their fear while looking up at me. A shallow breath slipped past my lips, reminding me I had lives to protect.

"I won't apologize if you get hurt too," I replied as I set my eyes back to the three noble vampires. I took steps forward, wanting to meet them halfway so their blood wouldn't splatter on the ladies.

"Hah! You are one fierce lady! Commendable for a commoner like you," someone within the group commented in glee, but my countenance remained cold. As they held their swords down, underestimating their enemy, I spread my fingers.

"Lakresha," I whispered, feeling this surge of power wrapping around my shoulder and arm. The three stopped momentarily as they gazed at the shroud around my hand until it formed into a gigantic scythe. I played it with my fingers, spinning it thrice before gripping it.

PANG!

A loud noise resonated across the hallway as Lakresha's end hit the marbled floor, producing a gust of wind.

"It's nice to see you too, Lakresha," I greeted without taking my eyes off of the three noblemen. "I always hoped I will never wield you again, but... we're already here."

I could sense the vigilance from the three noblemen as they finally raised their swords. I purposely concealed my aura, but Lakresha was different. Hence, they knew this scythe would slice them apart in a single try.

"So, shall we begin?" my eyes darkened, but my expression remained cold. I wasn't looking forward to seeing them dismembered, nor I was excited about the fight. If anything, it felt like a chore.

The floor I was stepping on cracked at the pressure while I bent my knees slightly. The three also beckoned a fighting stance, putting all their attention on me. They were quick to realize that taking their eyes off of me even for a split second would cost them their life.

"Don't look, son," I whispered, sensing that particular gaze as I had been aware of my son's gaze.

After a beat, I disappeared from my vantage point, and the three as well. The next second, all that was heard was the clashing of metals.

"Don't look, son."

Law stiffened, staring at his mother's back before she disappeared in a blink of an eye. All they saw next was Lilou assaulting the three, all at the same time, while three swords blocked her attack. Even though Law wanted to close his eyes like his mother's wishes, he couldn't.

"Mother..." he whispered, clutching Bey's shoulder.

Not just him, but every single one of them could only watch this Madam blankly. Unlike what Lilou believed, the people she was protecting felt... secure. Her back, although small, felt bigger than a man's. And when she held that scythe, both fear and awe swelled in their hearts.

"Madam Roux..." Lady Hazel whispered, rooting for Lilou, although she could barely see her movements. In silence, they rooted for Lilou and saw her as... their knight in a ripped dress.

It didn't take long when blood splattered on the wall and floor as the sound of metal clashing receded. They held their breath, fixing their eyes on Lilou, who stood above the three noblemen now six on the floor.

Blood dripped from the tip of her scythe, and her dress tainted with red. She slowly turned around, revealing the speck of red liquid on her face. The sight of her as she wiped the blood on her cheek with the back of her fist looked terrifying, but none of them felt so.

What swelled in their hearts was... relief and awe. No one questioned if the Madam Roux they all knew was just a false persona because they were aware of what Lilou was doing.. She was tainting her hands for them, and they would be forever grateful to her.

Chapter 523 - A Portion Of What He Was Carrying

Glory was almost done when I finished the three noblemen. I must admit they were stronger than that one I had faced so far, but I didn't have time to play with them. Their only consolation was that their death was quick and painless. I dragged their body to the side and when I was done, I turned around to see Glory knocking out his last opponent.

We exchanged gazes and nodded before my eyes fell on the group of ladies and children. I weakly smiled while my chest moved in and out heavily.

"Get up. We don't have time to spare to stay here," I said in an authoritative voice, glancing up at Glory. "Glory, stay on the back."

"Yes, Madam Roux." Glory nodded without a second hesitation. I watched the ladies force their trembling knees to move. I knew everything that happened so far had traumatized them, but we had to move. Enemies would surround this place soon. Fighting was the least of my concern, but if a fire broke out or anything of the sort while we're inside here, that would be a problem.

Once they were prepared, I nodded and turned my back against them. "Let's go."

This time, I jogged, and their footsteps also picked up to catch up to me. We couldn't just stay idle. I also had to see Adam, as this situation told me it was bigger than what it seemed. The rebels weren't just people who wanted the Malum's head. The enemies were mixed with those greedy people who wanted to take charge of the north.

'I can't shake off this feeling that tonight wouldn't be as simple as that,' I thought, eyes glinting as I stared through the hallway. 'For this day to come with no one noticing... I can assume the person behind this was someone I shouldn't underestimate. Lakresha and Catharsis felt the same. I need to rescue Adam first.'

I closed my eyes to concentrate on my surroundings whilst running through the hallway to find Adam's presence. With my heightened senses, I focused on the little Earl's aura. It didn't take long when I found the little Earl from the other side of the estate, along with a few figures.

I heaved a sigh of relief when I knew he was safe. Still, while I was searching for his aura, I also figured out that more rebels stepped foot on the estate. Some knights were fighting them, but the problem was, the rebels were just attacking from every direction. It wouldn't take long for them to overwhelm the knights.

A surprise attack always worked the best because the Earl didn't have enough time to prepare. They were still doing a good job of resisting them, though. Those we encountered so far probably snuck inside while the rest were distracting the knights.

'If that is their plan, then I'm pretty sure some will manage to sneak in to abduct Adam.' I slowly opened my eyes as they darkened, gripping Lakresha's scythe tightly. I raised my other hand up while I slowed down on my steps. The people behind me got the meaning of my gesture, so they also slowed down until they stopped.

"Stand back," I said, waving my hand, and they did. "I'm sorry, Lakresha. But we need to reach Adam before them."

As soon as I apologized to my scythe, I used its end and unhesitatingly smashed the concrete wall with it.

BOOOOSH!

I covered my partially closed eyes with my arm as dust and smoke flew up. I spun Lakresha to create wind, so I could see if the hole I created would fit a person. To my relief, it was enough for everyone, including Glory, to fit if he lowered his head.

I turned my head to their shocked countenance, I but didn't have the leisure to dwell in it. "This way. We need to rescue the Earl first."

My voice filled with urgency, snapped them back to the current lapse as they nodded profusely. I didn't stay idle as I went through the wall, taking a gigantic step over the debris on the ground. The wall led to an open space and not far away was a walkway connecting the building we came from to another one. If we took the right way, it would take us a while.

I looked back to see everyone coming out, one after another. I prolonged my patience, waiting until Glory exited. I stretched my neck, checking if someone was left behind.

"Is everyone here?" I asked as I didn't have the time to do a headcount.

"Yes, Madam Roux. I'm the last one," Glory answered, as he was the only person aside from me who was mentally sane in this situation. It was good I brought this person with me today or it would be a lot harder if I were alone.

Now that I thought about it, I wonder where was Fabian. I should've brought him as well, but there was no point in regretting it. Knowing our reliable butler, he would be here soon. Unless... he found out something while in the fort. The last thing I was wishing for all of this was Stefan or Zero's involvement in this uprising.

That would be hell.

I shook my head as I told everyone to follow and stay close. The possibility was small, as they should be busy attacking the east and west. But, as long as that possibility existed that the attack in the east and west was just a distraction, then... that would be a real problem.

"Fighting while having a duty to protect lives is... a heavy task," came out a weak voice, along with my panting from all the running. "I wonder how bad it is outside the estate. This is not enough... I need more arms and feet to protect the south."

Deep down, I already knew that this group wasn't the only one I must protect. I told Sam I would protect the south, so that meant I had to protect not just Adam or this group, but everyone I could.

To fight for these people and not just a personal interest was something I didn't recall doing in the past. Now I understood the weight of what my husband was carrying on his shoulder. If this heaviness in my heart was already this devastating, and to think this was just a portion of what the emperor was carrying. I couldn't imagine how Sam remained sane with the entire empire relying on him.

"Sam..." I whispered as my eyes sharpened, clenching my teeth. ".... I was naive until now, huh?"

Chapter 524 - Whose Son Do You Think You're Pointing That Sword At?

"Ah --!"

I shut one of my eyes, looking away a bit as blood splattered on my face. On our way to the other side of the estate, we had encountered a few vampires sneaking in. Hence, I stopped them even before they could. The number of deaths under my belt tonight was slowly growing, and I knew it would only grow more later.

"Anyone hurt?" I turned my head back to the group of ladies and children behind me in this wide corridor.

"No, Madam Roux. We're all — all fine." I nodded at the woman, who answered with a shaking voice. "We're already close. Hold each other's hands if you can so no one gets left behind."

I nodded as some of them held each other's hands while those who were carrying the children stayed close. On our way here, I told them that those who were carrying children would stay inside the circle and those who weren't would surround them. In this case, the children would be safer.

Fighting and making sure that everyone was safe from time to time was a challenge, but I was slowly getting used to it. Moreover, since I kept asking them, it seemed they all slightly calmed down.

"Alright. Let's --"

"He — help..."

I trailed off as I looked in the voice's direction. I narrowed my eyes, catching a wounded knight crawling under the corpse of another knight. He grunted as he helped himself to sit up, resting his back on the wall.

"Stay here," I said without looking at everyone as I marched towards the knight. I squatted down to his side, checking his wounded leg that was already healing.

My brow quirked when he held my shoulder, making me gaze at him straight in the eye.

"I can't die here," he breathed out, gripping my shoulder tightly. "The Earl is in danger. Please drag me with you. I will heal soon and move."

His fang grew longer, but the other one was missing. By the looks of it, he was fatally wounded, but he was still healing. The source of his pain was that missing fang.

"Did they do this to you?" I asked, pointing my thumb at the people I slew moments ago. This information was needed right now, as I simply assume previously that this mess in this hallway was their doing. But the more I thought about it, the more I questioned if someone else before them did.

The knight glanced at the corpses and shook his head. When he set his eyes on me, he swallowed hard as his expression turned solemn.

"The chief knight... I saw you fight. Please help me, Madam," he begged sincerely, without taking his eyes away from me. Despite his pitiful state, I could see the fire in his eyes was burning than ever. The betrayal of the chief knight, his strong sense of duty, and the honor of the knight on the line were what saved this man.

Letting him die in here would be a waste.

"Do you think you can fight after ten minutes?" I asked in the same serious tone. "If you can, I will take you with us. But if you lagged us behind, I will toss you out and you have to look after yourself. Don't lie to me or I might kill you myself."

"Ten minutes...? I can run by myself after five."

I nodded, pleased at his determination. This type of knight would force himself to run even if he hadn't fully recovered. I needed more people.

"Glory," I called without looking away from this man. "Give him a bit of your blood."

The knight's brows elevated, but this wasn't the time to hesitate. "Only take enough for you to soothe that throat of yours. If you take more, I'll end you."

Glory didn't question me as he already arrived on the other side of the man, offering his arm. I glanced at him and our eyes instantly locked. He nodded, closed-lipped, before shoving his robust arm into the knight's arm.

"We don't have time," he said in a low snarl. "We have to save the Earl and flee from this place."

The knight gulped as he darted his shaking eyes from me to Glory, gulping before sinking one of his fangs into Glory's arm. I could just give him mine, as it was better. However, the smell of my blood would give out my location. Moreover, since this knight was famished and wounded, drinking a pureblood would make him lose his mind and drink more.

I would end up not helping him and hurting myself. Offering my blood to save one would risk all of us.

"That's enough." I grabbed the knight's hair as his eyes started to glow at the blood coursing through his throat. He snapped his eyes and let go of Glory's arm, licking the blood from the corner of his lips.

Good he didn't lose his mind when I stopped him. "Are you alright, Glory?" I asked, shifting my eyes to Glory.

"Yes, Madam. I have thick skin, so this is nothing," he replied as he already ripped the hem of his clothes and wrapped it around his arm.

"Thank you, Glory." He stopped momentarily as he gazed at me, wide-eyed. A subtle smile appeared on his face, followed by a low chuckle while shaking his head lightly.

"You're too humble, Madam. This is nothing compared to what you've been doing for us."

My mouth opened and closed as I wanted to correct him, but I figured this wasn't the time for that. We already stayed idle, so we should get moving. Once Glory was done bandaging his arm, I got up to my feet.

"Please carry him. He said he needs five minutes before he can stand on his own. If he can't after that, toss him away," I ordered as I turned around and walked away. I heard Glory receive my orders before I felt his heavy steps. I glanced at him and he carried the knight on his back with ease.

Meanwhile, in the office where Adam and Jaime, along with the officials of the south, held their breaths at the sudden death of an official. They looked at the person, who slashed the official, wide-eyed.

"What do you think you're doing, chief knight?!" Jaime harrumphed, slamming his palm against the table. The Earl's chief knight just came in to report the situation, but to their surprise, he wielded his sword and assaulted one of them. They tried calling the other knights outside, but no one came. That only meant one thing — their captain wiped them out.

"What I think I am doing?" the chief knight simpered, looking around at the old geezers and that one boy at the end of the table. "Putting an end to this? They want everyone's head, including that boy's head."

The knight swung his sword, staring at Adam straight in the eye. Although the Earl manage to keep a brave front, his hand under the table clenched. The situation was already bad as it was, and this revelation that even their knights were part of this big scheme made it worse.

"Chief knight, is this worth it?" Adam inquired in a shaking yet brave voice. "Is killing us and conspiring with the rebels who are filling Minowa with dread worth it to turn your back on your duty and oath to the people?"

"Tch. Minowa had been filled with dread ever since you became an Earl. You do not understand the pain of the people of Minowa. This was nothing compared to that, my Lord." The Chief Knight snickered, narrowing his eyes as he glanced at everyone. "So, yes. It is worth it."

Just as he dropped that remark, the Chief Knight bolted over the table while thrusting his sword forward. Among every one of them, he was deemed to be the strongest knight in the south. So everyone couldn't react while Adam's breath stopped, unable to look away or even blink at the sword coming at him.

CLANG!

Suddenly, the window shattered from the outside as a figure that looked like a shadow came in. All they saw next was the chief knight's sword piercing the surface of the table as a foot stepped on it. Slowly, all eyes panned up at the figure standing on the table while stepping her foot on the sword, hooking the scythe around the Chief Knight's neck.

Her eyes glowed, unblinking, as she raised her chin while gazing down coldly. "Whose son do you think you're pointing that sword at?"

When Adam heard Lilou's voice, he held his tears back as he cried. "Mother!"

Chapter 525 - Why Are You All So Weak And Stupid?!

On our way to where Adam was, the smell of blood permeated in the air. It was too strong; it prickled my skin. But what alarmed me the most was the aura that was full of killing intent. I looked back at everyone, raising my hand to stop them.

"Glory, Knight, will stay with them," I ordered as we stopped outside the manor. I looked up at the window above, grinding my teeth as I felt that the strong aura was close to Adam.

"Madam Roux..." someone in the group called in a shaking voice, afraid of being left behind.

"Just stay here. We won't reach the Earl in time if we..." I trailed off as my heart suddenly thumped against my chest. I didn't talk anymore as I bent my knees, jumped up towards the window on the second floor and crashed into it. As soon as I had a glimpse of what was happening inside, I acted on instinct and stopped the sword from coming at Adam.

Thanks to my fast reflexes, I managed to step on the end of the sword and hooked Lakresha around the person permeating with killing intent.

"Whose son do you think you're pointing that sword at?" my voice shook as I gazed down while lifting my chin up.

"Mother!"

I glanced at Adam and the second I saw his pale complexion, all I saw was red. I would kill this man. With gritted teeth, I tried hooking his neck to slice it, but he got away by pulling out another sword. Everything happened so fast, but my eyes were fixed on the knight, hopping several steps back.

"Hah... and if I am not wrong, you are Madam Roux?" he snarled, sizing me up warily. "What a surprise that someone like you can stop my sword."

"Jaime, what in the hell?" my eyes didn't leave the man, but I felt Jaime's gaze on my side. "Why are you all so damn weak that you did nothing when this man was trying to kill the earl?"

"Ma -- Ma --"

"The knight in Minowa surely never ceases to amaze me. I've seen more knights in my life and not a single one of them would exchange their honor for this so-called power." — I was a bearer and a knight of the third squadron. Hence, I was with the knights more than I was with my husband back in the palace.

"This, Jaime, is your creation," I remarked, so he was clear about that. "The knights who are supposed to protect the earl and Minowa is your creation."

"Tch." The knight before me snickered, swinging the swords in his hands. "That's right. We are the monsters he created -- "

Before he could finish his sentence, I already appeared in front of him and the crisp sound of metal resonated in my ear. He was quick to block my attack right on time but until when?

"No, Sir Knight. Jaime is a lowlife, so his creations were no monsters," I corrected firmly, staring into his dilated eyes.

PANG!

I didn't let this man rest as I launched attacks one after another, leaving him with no other choice but to block my attacks. At the eighth time he blocked Lakresha, I lifted my knee, and it landed on his abdomen. Without idling, I elbowed the back of his head. I felt a part of his skull crack as he was left with no choice but to slump on the floor.

As soon as his palms touched the floor, I stood behind him and hooked Lakresha near his throat. It was over, I thought. Even though I couldn't see his expression, I knew he was flabbergasted at how things turned out.

I glanced up and my eyes instantly fell on Adam. He was barely blinking, holding his breath with his eyes on me. My heart ached at the thought of doing this in front of him, but letting this man go would only be a problem later. I traveled my gaze to the other people around, making me chuckle at their pathetic front.

"Haha...! I see Madam Roux can't kill --"

His voice was no longer heard, replaced by the sound of his head rolling. I didn't bat an eye in executing him, knowing mercy in this situation was naivety. These people were out to kill Adam. It was a kill or be killed situation and I'd rather kill than let my son I treasured die right in front of me.

"Mo — mother..." Adam called in a shaking voice, making me grit my teeth. Instead of speaking, I stormed in Jaime's direction. He panicked, taking hurried steps back, but to no avail.

I sprawled my arms towards him, grabbing him by the collar as I seethed. "My son is being assaulted in front of you and you were just watching?! Just how pathetic can you be?!" my voice thundered.

Jaime's lips opened and closed like a fish, but no words came out. If I didn't need this person right now, he would be the first person I would kill.

"You all!" I shouted, gazing at everyone with eyes glinting. "Why are you all so weak and stupid?! Your people are dying and your job is to plan on how to stop this madness! And yet, even in here, you will only let yourselves be killed?!"

I panted as I wanted to scold everyone for not keeping it together. If I was a second late, Adam's head was the one that was on the floor, not that chief knight's. Or worst, their blood already flooded this room.

"I can't believe Adam had to deal with clowns like you," I scoffed, pushing Jaime away while I ran my fingers through my loose, tousled hair. Everyone in this room acted dignified and all, but they were just a bunch of cowards and weaklings.

"We'll leave here," I said once I calmed down, letting out a sharp exhale as I scanned them all.

"Right now, this place is being surrounded and their aim is the Earl and the Malum's."

I grabbed Jaime's collar again and dragged him near the table. When I stopped, I let him go and planted my palms on the surface of the table. Underneath my right palm was Lakresha. My sharp eyes scanned every single one of them again before I exchanged looks with the Earl.

Right now, in my mind, Adam wasn't just my son, but he was the Earl. A young man who required equal respect.

"My lord, please allow me to take charge in Minowa," I requested solemnly, staring at him straight in the eyes. "I may be asking for too much, but I need your help to save Minowa and its people."

There was silence. Adam wiped his eyes with his little arm before looking up at me once again.

"Please help us, Madam Roux." My eyes softened for a split second, detecting the desperation in his voice despite maintaining his brave front. This time, I couldn't help but extend my hand and ruffled his hair.

"Thank you for trusting your mother, son."

Chapter 526 - A Score To Settle

"Tell the knights to fall back and prioritize the safety of the people. We will go to our estate," I said, after discussing the plans with them. We didn't have a long time to spare to discuss everything other than important matters at hand.

Currently, the knights who were supposed to guard this place were wiped out by the chief knight. Hence, we were short in hand. But I had the perfect person to send this message to everyone on our side. I marched towards the chief knight, searching his lifeless body until I found what I was looking for. His command insignia.

I stared at it in my hand before clutching it, standing up to face everyone. I took a deep breath and sauntered towards the shattered window, peeking my head out to see everyone looking up. Their faces brightened up as soon as they saw me, but I ignored them.

"You are all capable men on your own. Jumping from here wouldn't be a problem, right?" I looked back at them, pleased when they all nodded. "Since that is the case, take up your weapon and prepare yourself to fight to death. If you wish to flee on your own, suit yourself."

I paused as I looked at each of them coldly. "But engrave these words in your head. If you flee to save your own skins and luckily survived once this is over, I will find you and will make you pay. But if you survived while fighting alongside me, I will give you a lighter sentence."

There was a dead silence momentarily, gravitating their options. These men were wise enough to know which rope to hold on to. And right now, I was their best option for their survival. There were more formidable opponents that prowled the street of Minowa at this time and they would all die on their own.

"If that is clear to you, let's move. Adam, come here." I waved, motioning Adam and he walked towards me. I squatted down, carrying him on my back, before standing up.

I glanced back at them for the last time. "I will not wait for any of you," I said as I stepped on the windowsill, jumping down without a second hesitation. The people outside stepped away on instinct, giving me enough space where I could land.

"Madam Roux, are you alright?" asked Bey, making me turn my head to her and then to Law in her arms. I smiled weakly, nodding.

"I'm alright," putting down Adam as it would be riskier if I carried him myself. "Lady Hazel, please look after the Earl."

I gazed down at Adam and nodded encouragingly before handing him to Lady Hazel. At the same time, Jaime, along with the council of the south already landed around us. I looked at them, seeing them holding swords with their determination flashing across their eyes.

'Good thing they already made up their minds,' I thought because more fighters, even they were weak, was better than having just myself and Glory. I didn't dwell on them anymore as I walked two meters away from them, facing this small group.

My eyes landed on the knight, who healed after five minutes. "You, bring this and tell the knights to fall back. Prioritize the townsfolk and escort them to the Roux estate." I tossed the commanding seal of the chief knight, which the knight caught.

"Madam Roux, about the chief knight..."

"He's dead," I answered him before he could finish his question, causing his eyes to dilate. Well, the chief knight was the strongest one I had faced so far, but considering I used to spar with Rufus, he was like a child. Only then did I appreciate Rufus' heart as a knight and his strength.

"Execute this command discreetly. Can you do that?" I asked, my eyes on the knight we picked up on the way.

He clutched the little seal and nodded. "Yes, Madam."

"Be safe," I said, jerking my chin away. "Go."

"Yes!"

Just as the knight took three steps away, he turned around and faced me. My brows raised when he placed his fist across his chest and bent down on one knee. He didn't say a word as he stood up, raising his chin.

"Take care, Madam Roux." He turned around, walking, then jogging until he disappeared into the dark. If I remembered correctly, that was a stance of the knight in the south to show their acknowledgment, respect, and submission.

My fist tightened as the weight on my back felt heavier. That knight's gesture just reminded me that many lives were on my hands and making a mistake would cost everyone's lives.

I huffed as I faced the people that were left. "Jaime, this is your estate. Lead us to the safest exit you know."

"Yes, Madam Roux. This way." He didn't argue with me or any of the sort as he faced a certain direction.

"All those able will protect these ladies and children. I'll be on the front with Jaime. Glory and the rest on the back and the side. Don't ever dare think of breaking our formation."

"Yes, Madam Roux!"

They all answered in unison, making me flinch a little because even the ladies replied. A stiff smile appeared on my lips as I nodded, glancing at Jaime to lead the way. So he did, and we started following in his tracks.

Meanwhile, somewhere in Minowa, a figure was watching the town burn and fill with terror, cries, screams, and desperation from the roof of the church. His crimson eyes flickered with excitement, pleased at what he was watching.

"Tristan, will you look at that?" said the man, turning his head at the person standing behind him clad in a cloak. "I bet Her Majesty, the Empress is very pleased as blood floods her path once again."

The corner of Zero's lips stretched into a wide grin until his fangs showed. "The people in the south were too dumb. I just told them I will help, and they all danced just as they were told! But who's even stupid was that His Majesty left his wife and son in here! Haha!"

"This is what happens if one is too complacent with their power. Minowa is indeed impregnable from attacks from the outside. But... that's all they are. Thick skins with nothing inside."

Zero nodded at Tristan's remarks. "Anyway, let's go back to the fort. I will meet Lilou later and tear her son apart right in front of her to settle score with her. I can sense a beast coming in this way."

"As expected of that butler. He finished the people you planted in his shadows early."

"Well, he wouldn't gain the title of a devil incarnate in the mainland if he isn't one." Zero waved, putting on his hood as he walked away, jumping from the roof with ease.. Tristan followed behind as they left the scene before the agitated Fabian reach them.

Chapter 527 - Trusting The Madam

Jaime led us to a secret passage that only he in his family knew. Of course, by saying this, he was also admitting that he had more secrets hidden. But that wasn't important to me right now. What was important was that we got out of the estate without encountering enemies on the way.

But just when we exited the secret passage leading to the exit at the back of the estate, I instantly grasp Minowa's situation. Fire and smoke from the heart of Minowa ascended as screams, cries, sword clashing, and everything grew distinct in my ear.

I fixed my eyes on the thick smoke. The peaceful Minowa was no more. It was a tragedy, indeed.

I gripped Lakresha tightly as my jaw tightened. I had to make a choice right now; one was to lead this group to safety while the other was to rescue the children crying for help from a distance, but that would risk these people.

In this group, both my sons were here, but... my heart broke with the voices of the desperate calls of the innocent people.

"Mother." I raised my head at Law, seeing everyone's clear eyes staring back at me.

"Madam Roux, please don't worry about us. Let's save everyone and bring them to the Roux estate." Glory spoke while everyone nodded in agreement.

"We will fight alongside you," Lady Hazel added, making me shift my eyes to her, only to see Adam nod in agreement.

"You are all naive..." I argued, but this time, Jaime also spoke.

"We are not strong, but we can fend off for ourselves. The more this group grows, it may put us at more risk, but having more people who can fight and build sturdy walls is not a bad idea too."

Right now, the people protecting this small circle weren't enough, and if the group grew bigger, it would be riskier. But just as Jaime said, we would also gain more people who could fight. Surely, Jaime was quick to know that sticking with me was safer. Still, I was reluctant to risk that.

"Madam Roux!"

Suddenly, I heard the familiar voice of the knight who I ordered to pass the message to the other knights. To my surprise, it wasn't just him, but he brought abled and injured knights.

"The order is already being done, and the knights were falling back in their own discretion. These were the injured ones, but they can still fight after some time of rest," he said as soon as he stopped two meters away. "I know Madam Roux will not be able to turn a blind eye once she sees the current situation of Minowa. So, I brought them with me."

My mouth opened and closed seeing the large group of determined knights. All I could do was chuckle as I scratched my temple with my index.

"You guys..." I muttered as they amused me in a way.

"Mother, let us help Minowa as well." This time, Law voiced out, catching my attention. "We may not be as strong as you, but we can help the people find refuge."

"Law is right, Mother!" Adam backed up, making me dart my eyes at my sons.

With everyone's unity, I felt helpless as I shook my head. I took a deep breath, scanning their determined countenance. Since we all felt the same, I nodded lightly.

"You might get hurt," I said firmly, treating everyone as soldiers. "Worse, lose your life."

"We had been living a lie and a funny life of knights. Dying while doing our proper duties for once will be our atonement for our sins," the knight replied, glancing at the other knights, and they all nodded.

"Knight, what is your name?" I asked, and he looked at me solemnly.

"Omar, Madam Roux."

"Very well, Omar. I entrust their safety to you, knights. Prepare yourself to die protecting Minowa and its subject." I nodded encouragingly, as I didn't sugarcoat my words. "From now on, every single one of us had our foot in the grave. The women will protect the children, while men will protect them. Rescue everyone who needs help. Jaime, Glory, and the rest of the council will fight while you create a path to the Roux estate."

"Yes, Madam Roux!"

"Then, let's get moving." I turned around, holding Lakresha tightly. "Let's go."

Just as I ordered, we dauntingly went in the heart of the downtown of Minowa, helping the knights, on the verge of death, in the hands of some rebels. Townsfolk trying to flee with their family also joined our group, and we also helped some stray children who were crying in the middle of this chaos.

It was a disaster.

As we did so, our group kept growing with refuge and knights. We couldn't save everyone, but we saved as many as we could while some knights made sure the path going to the Roux's estate would be free of the enemy. So far, we only encountered a few rebels on the way, which the knights were able to defeat.

Thanks to some knights, they prepared a wagon and some steed so we could reach the Roux estate faster. On the way, their yells and invitation for those in need resounded along with the other noises in the air. I looked at the procession of people heading to our house and only then did I realize how our group grew ten... thirtyfold.

All these people were the ones I must protect, I told myself while riding a steed on the back. Good thing our estate had a vast lot and it could occupy half of the town's people.

"Fabian isn't still here. I wonder who was keeping him from going to me," I wondered under my breath. At this point, I already knew there was something wrong. "I hope he is fine... even when he is strong, I can't help but worry."

Soon, our house came into sight. The only good thing about the location of our house was, it was far away from the downtown. Hence, the closer we got to the estate, the lesser the enemies. It didn't take long when we reach the Roux estate, so I rode to reach the front.

"Open the gates!" I yelled and the second the guards saw me, they opened the gates wide without question, letting everyone enter the estate.

At this point, I stopped on the side while still saddling my horse. Everyone's faces felt relief as they stepped foot inside the estate, but I kept my stoic expression while watching the long procession enter.

"Madam Roux!"

Suddenly, the butler of our house approached me, making me gaze down at him. He was wiping his forehead, looking at me with worry.

"Are you and young master alright?" he asked worriedly, gazing at the people entering our estate.

"I'm alright. Law and Adam are within the group. Take them and the children inside. Tell the maids to prepare food and hot drinks for everyone. Also, bandages and medicine for the injured," I ordered in one breath, startling the butler as he looked at me blankly. "Now."

"Ye — yes, Madam Roux." The butler hurriedly walked to the side of the driveway to execute the order while I stayed outside the gates.

"Madam Roux, we can stay behind so you can rest." This time, it was Glory who approached me with Omar. The knights were ensuring everyone would enter the estate safely.

"I can't, Glory." My eyes veered at the end of the long line. "Tell all the knights to gather once everyone was inside. Just leave a few ones who can guard the gates. It's not over yet."

I narrowed my eyes, seeing further than a normal person could. Not that I could see everything clearly, but I could feel some powerful aura heading in this direction. My eyes darkened, discerning the auras I never felt before.

"They will soon ransack this area," I murmured before shifting my eyes to all the knights near me. I took a deep breath and cleared my throat.

"Everyone! Hurry inside. Prioritized the children, the elderly, women, and those injured. My people will help you with everything they could. For those knights and able men who can fight and are willing to die to protect their families..." I paused as the men — commoner or peasants — stopped to look at me.

".... meet me outside the manor."

Chapter 528 - Your Majesty, The Empress

It took a long time for every single one to enter the estate. With almost half of the town with us, it wasn't a surprise. Normally, they would all find refuge in the Earl's estate. But since that place was an easy target and Jaime didn't take care of it, the best option was the Roux estate.

I appreciated Sam's effort in hiring kind and smart people in our house, as they didn't raise a question. They simply did as they were told, helping everyone with everything they could. The elderly, women, children, and injured were welcomed inside.

Since we didn't have time to prepare and it was an emergency, the butlers moved the furniture in the mansion's foyer to accommodate everyone. On the side were wounded soldiers being tended. In the middle were women, the elderly, and children sitting on the floor while drinking the soup to fill their stomachs.

Our house was akin to a labyrinth, so I didn't want them to get lost in it. That would be troublesome. I turned around at the open entrance. Outside were uninjured knights and able men drinking their soup to replenish their strength. That was all our house could offer right now in a hurry.

"Madam Roux, why don't you eat as well?" Bey came to me with a bowl in her hand, but I shook my head lightly.

"I'm alright, Bey." My eyes fell on Law, who was helping the maid with Adam give food to the children. Those two were dirty, so was everybody else, including me. "Eat so you can also help others."

"Yes, Madam."

I watched Bey help the maid since she was also a worker in this place. Some women who were initially in the group also seemed they had recovered, helping in everything they could since the maids alone couldn't help everyone. I was relieved that they were choosing unity right now.

I walked outside the open door. As I did, the men outside raised their heads and set their eyes on me. I scanned everyone from this raised platform, holding Lakresha on my side. They didn't speak a word and even the noises from inside the estate subsided with everyone's attention on me.

"What I am about to say may scare everyone," I spoke sternly, raising my voice so everyone could hear. "Right now, I can feel people marching towards the Roux Estate."

The night breeze blew past me as I sensed their breathing slowed down. But none of them panicked, nor did they make a sound.

"Those who are prepared to lose a limb or... prepared to die, take up your weapons and fight for their survival!" I pointed at the people inside without looking away from the men in front of me. "Take up your weapon, not because of honor or glory, but wield your weapon with a mindset to protect those lives inside this place. For your family, friends, for your colleagues!"

I took a breath, looking at everyone in the eye. "This may sound ridiculous, but allow me to lead you. I may not be able to protect everyone, for I am but one, but I can assure you your death will not be in vain. We will reclaim Minowa and stand victorious!"

There was a brief silence as my chest moved in and out heavily. I could understand if they still questioned me as I was a woman and I was asking them for too much.

"I entrust my life to you, Madam Roux!" someone from the crowd yelled after a brief silence. My eyes searched for the source and caught Omar bending down to his knees with his fist across his chest.

"For my son...! I will fight!"

"My wife and daughter who nearly got burned alive, but because of Madam Roux, they were safe! I will not let those people terrorize my family anymore!"

"My friend is wounded because he saved me... it's my time to protect him."

After Omar spoke, everyone declared their reasons to fight one after another. Even though not everyone was a knight, they also bent down to their knees until every one of them was on their one knee like real soldiers.

I took a deep breath, keeping my chin up as my grip around Lakresha tightened.

I looked back inside, only to see everyone bowing as well. My chest moved in and out heavily as these people didn't hesitate to entrust their lives to me as well. But what caught my eye was Law, smiling weakly at me while he was holding a tray.

The look in his eyes wasn't the same as that shock and terrified earlier. This time, his eyes were soft matched with a kind smile.

'My son...' I whispered in my heart as I wanted to ask for his forgiveness for everything. 'For you... I will fight.'

I peeled my eyes away from Law as I gazed ahead. A sharp breath slipped past my lips as I rocked my head while everyone rose from their knees.

"For our people! For Minowa!" I shouted at the top of my lungs, holding Lakresha up.

"For my mother!"

"For my son!"

"For my family!"

"For my brother and friend!"

"For Madam Roux!"

Everyone also yelled the reason they were fighting as their eyes blazed with determination. I could only offer them some weapons, so others had wooden swords and sticks, some pitchforks, and anything they could use to fight, holding them up.

After my words of encouragement, we all marched outside the estate. I was confident that even when someone snuck inside, they would get lost. So, we all stood outside. I was in the front. Narrowing my eyes, seeing the torches from the distance.

"These rebels aren't just here to kill the Earl and the Malum," Glory muttered from behind me. "I realized that after seeing the plaza."

"Just what are they after?" Omar also wondered under his breath. At this point, everyone was clear about this. That even if we sacrificed the Earl and Jaime, they would kill us all.

"Hmph! It's obvious!" Jaime, who had no option but to stand on the same ground as everybody else, huffed. "Those rebels and those traitorous knights who conspire with them want to make Minowa theirs! A turf of rebels — whatever the reason or the source of their confidence for doing this that can alert the emperor, that is for sure!"

"Jaime is right." I backed him up, slicing a bit of the hem of my ripped skirt, and used it to tie my hair up while keeping Lakresha between my legs. "Their plan is to make this a territory against the empire. For what reason, I sort of had a guess."

"A guess?"

"A not-so-wild guess," I said coldly, holding Lakresha once again as I walked forward. "Minowa is a place with the strongest border — an impregnable fortress if used right. If someone capable and against the emperor took control over it, that would be troublesome for the empire."

"Madam, what are you -- "

"Stand back." I spun Lakresha in between my fingers before swinging it to create a line. "We have a guest."

BOOM!

I squinted my eyes as soon as I uttered those last remarks because someone suddenly landed several meters away from me. As dust and smoke dissipated in the air, a figure rose up.

"Don't cross the line," I said while keeping my eyes on the figure in front of me. "If you do, you will die. Am I correct, Acheron Roseberg?"

"Good to see you again, Your Majesty, the Empress."

Chapter 529 - You'll Regret My Undivided Attention

"Good to see you again, Your Majesty, the Empress."

The expression on my face remained aloof, batting my eyes at the sight of this familiar person. Acheron Roseberg, a former Duke in the east, was said he had died. That was the version other people know, but the truth was, he only fled when Sam ascended the throne.

Acheron knew the emperor would kill him. Death was the easiest part, but what was terrifying was the things he would experience before that. Now, this man was just a traitor — had always been — who connived with a rival country which only made things worst. If he was here, I was certain there were more troublesome people in here.

"It's an honor to be in the presence of the Empress," he added with the same smile.

"Then you shall bow down, don't you think?"

"Hah... you've never changed once, Your Majesty."

My jaw tightened as I gazed at Acheron coldly. I couldn't underestimate this man, but among everyone in here, I was the only capable person who could fight him without being sliced in half within a second. My concern was if another one who was of the same caliber as him would appear.

'Fabian... where the hell are you?' I gripped Lakresha while maintaining my stony countenance. I snapped my eyes when I heard Glory speak from behind me.

"Empress...?" A deep sigh that could shake the ground slipped past my lips as their murmurings volumed up a little. "Madam Roux, you are... the Empress?"

The gaze behind me grew intense. I didn't have the leisure to speak as I glanced over my shoulder, only to catch their surprised countenance as they looked at me, wide-eyed. Some even dropped to their knees. Damn.

"Your Majesty..." Jaime called under his breath, catching everyone's attention. By their expression, Jaime's words were enough for them to put the pieces together. They seemed to finally realize the reason Jaime lie low, why he was so generous with a wealthy commoner family, and so on.

"Oh, right? You are in disguise, my bad. Please pretend you didn't hear that." Acheron smiled, which didn't reach his eyes, glancing at the people behind me. "Although... Your Majesty, your troop looked a little... pathetic. Jaime Malum surely destroyed the south as the knights, who used to be the strongest in the kingdom, became too relaxed. This is the downside of a longtime peace. Knights tend to be lazy with the lack of action."

I ignored the shocked people behind me as I gazed at Acheron from head to toe. He had become stronger, I thought, or he was just finally unleashing his pent-up urges. This man used to be like Rufus, but this was now war.

"I don't disagree that Jaime ruined the knights in the South, but... I am more intrigued about you, Acheron. You attacked Minowa, knowing my husband is away." The corner of my lips turned up into a smirk. "Are you all that scared of him?"

He didn't answer, but his silence tickled me. It was hilarious! Did they think they would get away once Sam heard about the south? That man would teleport if he had to and god knows what he'd do once he sees Minowa. Just what were these people thinking?

"Hmm. Your Majesty, I won't deny that, but this game we've been playing had always been like this, isn't it?" Acheron broke his silence as he tilted his head to the side. "It's not always the strongest who wins. It's always been a matter of who was the greatest schemer."

I chuckled, nodding in agreement. "That is right. It's always been like that but..." I trailed off as my eyes dropped, my smile fading.

"... this scheme of yours... will never succeed for as long as I am alive."

"We know that, Your Excellency. That is why..." Suddenly, Acheron disappeared from his standpoint, taking everyone by surprise... excluding me.

CLANG!

"... I am here." Acheron gazed down coldly as I blocked the attack meant for Jaime. The clash of the underside of my scythe and the blade of his large sword that was like a heap of raw iron, fitting for a huge man like him, produced a strong gust of wind that could blow a child away.

With his sword against my scythe crackling, I glanced at the terrified Jaime. His complexion instantly turned white before he slumped on his butt. He nearly died before knowing it, so it was understandable it rattled him.

"Stay away from the line, folks," I ordered calmly, casting Acheron a smile, chuffed that his sword didn't even go past the line. "Even though I don't plan on letting him go past it."

As soon as I dropped those words, I channeled all my energy into my grip to fight off his sword. Acheron hopped several meters back and blocked off the wind created by Lakresha that could cut a person. His smile remained, pleased by this improvement in my skills.

As a vampire, I could now naturally use the full extent of Lakresha. With everything heightened, I could fight this man — head to head. Unless they were two or more of them, of course. I had to end this battle before Zero himself comes.

'That creature holds a lot of grudge to me after what I've done to his son, Tristan. He wouldn't get Law as long as he was inside the mansion.'

"Don't think anything funny." I glanced over my shoulder to talk to the people behind me. Ah... they were too scared of this strong opponent. This made me miss my people, who didn't need this type of comforting every once in a while. We just all separate and run wild.

I pivoted on my heel, keeping most of my attention to Acheron despite looking away. My eyes scanned everyone's blank faces; fear, shock, and worry were written all over their countenance.

"Just store your energy to fight the rest of the rebels. I'll handle him." I pointed my thumb over my shoulders to where Acheron stood.

"Are you really the... em — empress...?"

"Does it matter, Omar?" my brow quirked as I deemed this information irrelevant. "We're in the middle of the war. And if you want to help me, just do as I say. Stand back and don't go past this line unless I say so. Understood?"

"Ye — Yes, Madam — Your Majesty!"

"Goo — Acheron!" I ground my teeth, disappearing from my standpoint, and a deafening crash of metals resonated seconds later.

"The second you turn your back on me again --" this time, he was the one who couldn't finish his sentence as I kicked his abdomen, which didn't hit him. He swung his sword down to cut my leg, but I withdrew it while hooking up the tip of Lakresha under his jaw, which only grazed him.

"You'll regret wanting my undivided attention, Acheron."

CLANG!

As Lilou and Acheron exchanged blows, everyone couldn't even see their movements. The only indicator that someone was fighting fiercely was the constant sound of metals clashing and the strong gust of wind that comes after.

"A... amazing..." Omar muttered, completely aware that even if he would give his all, he would die against Acheron in a second. Not just him, but everyone, especially knights, held their breaths as they kept their eyes on the fierce battle they had never seen in their entire career as knights.

"This is... without a doubt how a royalty fight."

Chapter 530 - Born To Destroy, Not Protect

One of the things that I was grateful for at our estate's location right now was it was situated in an open space. If there were nearby buildings and houses, I was certain they would be just another piles of rubbles. Also, it gave me a better view of my surrounding. If there was anyone watching, I would surely know if they were just around the area.

CLANG!

Acheron and I had been exchanging blows for a straight ten minutes without a break, draining each other's stamina. I thanked Sam for training mine every single night. Else, I would be out of breath already fighting this man head-on.

After another clash of our weapons, Acheron hopped back, and I also did. His sword swooshed as if it was slicing through the air as he swung it down. Meanwhile, the end of Lakresha hit the concrete, producing a resounding pang.

"Madam — Your Majesty! Are you alright?" asked the people behind me, making me glance at them.

"Are you?" I asked back. Making sure they were alright was slowly becoming a habit now.

"Ye — yes..." I nodded at their response. Acheron tried to play dirty earlier by trying to hurt the people standing behind the line, but I stopped all of them. He was surely upset as he was trying to prove he could let his attacks go past the line.

"You are one amazing lady, Your Highness," he nodded encouragingly, sighing as he did so while he locked eyes with me. "It is such a shame you had chosen to be our enemy. It's not too late, though. His Majesty will accept you if only you humble yourself."

"Haha! Acheron, that is the least I expect to hear from you." I chuckled loudly, as I genuinely found it hilarious. "Me? Humbling myself to Zero? Acheron, I will bow to the Earl of Minowa, but to Zero? Only when I am six feet under, I will."

I snickered just to taunt him, which was effective since his smile faded. I would rather die than conspire with Zero and warm his bed. That man was far wicked than anyone I had encountered, so I knew even five years ago that I would live a hellish life if I agreed to marry him.

"I pity you, Acheron. To serve a man like Zero... so pathetic and stupid." I clicked my tongue continuously as my partially opened eyes glinted. "You remind me of what's his name? Theodore? He kept crying His Majesty's name, praying, begging, and..."

CLANG!

"... pleading, but to no avail," I smirked as I blocked Acheron's attack once again. "Zero never came... or maybe he tried, but where is Theodore now?"

Again, I repelled his sword as he jumped back. But as he did, I leaped towards him. Acheron still managed to block Lakresha while I was in mid-air above him.

"Theodore is now rotting while the rats feed on him!" I stayed in the air for quite some time as I felt light, smashing Lakresha aggressively to break his defenses. Up until now, I was fighting him modestly to size up his strength. I knew he was doing the same, but the rebels were approaching.

I would be at a disadvantage if everyone stayed behind the line. Once those rebels approach, they had to fight eventually. Even if I could handle Acheron on my own, I couldn't let these people fight with just them as they needed me in their fight.

"It seems you are done playing... so am I," he said, repelling Lakresha, which made me jump back to create distance. As soon as my feet landed on the ground, it shook as Acheron pierced the ground with his sword.

This time, my smirk also faded as my eyes narrowed. I could feel his aura growing stronger, making me grip Lakresha tighter.

"Lakresha, let me borrow your strength," I whispered as my eyes glinted, prepared to attack with an intention to kill and not just to observe. He was already strong before unleashing his prowess, so I knew this time around, we wouldn't have a break unless one of us lost our lives.

That would definitely not be me.

My jaw fell slightly open, inhaling through my mouth before clenching it. Acheron held his sword with both his hands, breaking it apart, making it two equally wide yet thinner swords. He held them with both his hands, eyes fixed on me.

"It was a nice fight, Your Majesty," Acheron uttered solemnly while I fluttered my eyelashes ever so slowly.

"It sure was, Acheron."

The strange silence made us hear the soft whistle of the night breeze, silencing all other noises in the background. My senses all became sensitive, so I could even sense that the people behind me held their breaths. Even weaklings like them would know that this battle jumped to a higher level.

A fight for life.

'You people better watch this,' I thought, taking another breath and carefully releasing it through my mouth. 'This is what it means to fight to protect something or someone.'

In a blink of an eye, the silence ended, replaced by the sound of metals clashing every few seconds. Acheron was fast, so I also picked up my pace. He didn't try on playing underhanded means by attempting to hurt the people behind me, so his attacks grew solid and stronger.

But so were my attacks until I could hear the devil within me whisper to mince him alive. I tried resisting it at first, but the more our swords clash, the more... this thrill slowly developed within me. Before I knew it, the corner of my lips stretched into a wicked grin while Acheron's eyes glinted.

"That is who you are, Lilou Bloodfang..." he muttered through his gritted teeth, exchanging blows with me. "... a person born to destroy, not protect."

That second, I finally understood his purpose, and that was to mess up with my head. To awaken the monster living deep within me.

My wicked grin remained. "Too bad, Acheron. You are months late to manipulate me for I..."

CLANG!

One of his swords flew along with his arm as I moved even faster, making his eyes dilate. I indulged in the sight of him as I hooked his other shoulder, then used my other hand to grab his face, pinning the back of his head against the concrete ground.

"... for I had long accepted that monster, Acheron."

SPLASH!

I hooked his entire shoulder off without batting an eye, smirking at this child's play. "I had been drinking my husband's blood for years, Acheron. How the hell --"

My eyes dilated as I felt a sword coming at my back.. I looked back, but it was too late, seeing his sword with his decapitated arm thrusting towards my head.