

The Duke 551

Chapter 551 - Tilly

When morning came, Fabian finally saw the real state of the mansion. Dusty floors and furniture, cobwebs on the wall, and everything to make a butler like him cry in distress. All night, he had been idling while waiting for daytime in the mansion's lobby. However, once the sun rose, he couldn't help but pinch the space between his brows.

Fabian sat on the dusty settee that was covered in a white sheet. His arms rested on his thigh, hands linked, trying to ignore his dirty surroundings. There was this tiny path on the floor that wasn't covered with dust as if it was being swept constantly. But it was obvious that wasn't the case.

That tiny clean path was the cause of that lady's long hair and long dress. Her hair was too long that reached the floor. Hence, whenever she walked, her hair and dress were like sweeping the floor.

'I have no idea why they stop chasing after me after entering this place, but if I stayed here for a long time, they will surround me,' he thought solemnly before he arched a brow, raising his head at the faint presence in the lobby. He raised his head, setting his eyes on the lady, pushing the trolley tray back to the kitchen.

Fabian only watched her in silence, and she didn't even cast him a look. His gaze followed her figure until she was out of sight, entering the way towards the kitchen. His eyes remained there until she returned without the tray. But this time, she was holding a spoon in her hand.

His brows furrowed as she sauntered in silence, walking on the same path while her hair and the hem of her dress swept the floor. She just followed the same path she had taken earlier, as it was clear as day that the rest of the floor was covered with dust.

'This woman...' his thoughts trailed off as the woman halted in front of the stairs. She slowly turned her head in his direction, blinking blankly without saying a word.

Fabian sported a smile as he stood from his seat. "Are you hungry, my lady?" he asked politely, but she only looked at him in silence.

"I will make you..." he trailed off when she suddenly resumed in her strides to go back to her room. This time, he frowned as he cocked his head. His eyes fell on the spoon in her hand, making him wonder what she was planning to do with it.

"Does she even have food to eat?" he wondered before walking towards the kitchen to fill his stomach before leaving. Fortunately, there were some eggs and for him to eat. How there was a limited supply of food was a mystery to him, but probably, the woman had her ways of surviving.

While Fabian cooked and made breakfast for him and that lady, he heard the bell once again. He had been hearing that all night to the point it was annoying, but he was slowly getting used to it by now. Once he was done cooking, Fabian ate and placed the rest of the breakfast on the trolley tray.

Just like last night, Fabian pushed it to the room where he took the tea last night. He knocked on the door, but no one answered. So, he announced he would come in with her breakfast and entered. This time, the lady wasn't on the balcony. But instead, she was sitting on the chair near the window where the sun hits her pale face.

The side of his face twitched when he saw she was using the spoon to ring the bell. He had thought of many things this woman would do with the spoon, but it turned out she simply wanted to ring the bell in another way.

"My lady, I brought you breakfast," he said while serving the food on the small table, ignoring her ringing bell. "There wasn't much in the kitchen, so I only prepared what I can."

Fabian explained in a polite tone, stepping back from her once he was done serving her. She finally stopped ringing the bell, shifting her eyes on the food before her. As usual, she didn't speak as she raised her head towards the balcony. Fabian glanced at the shut balcony and caught a shadow standing outside.

His eyes instantly sharpened as his pursuers seemed they had finally caught up. But instead of fleeing, he glanced at the woman as the latter stood and approached the balcony. She stood in front of the door to the balcony, Fabian took a careful step back. He didn't care if this woman would be in trouble or if she was letting them in to catch him.

He served her tea and breakfast, so they were even for letting him stay for the night. But as soon as she reached for the knob, she stopped and didn't open it.

"There is some intruder in the forbidden land. We believed he went in this place." A voice from outside stated his reasons, making the woman open the door for him.

This time, Fabian took another step while caressing his ring. Running away was futile. He would rather use that balcony to flee. Just as he prepared to slay the man outside, the woman finally spoke.

"He is not here," she denied in a soft voice — it was the softest voice he had ever heard in his life. The man outside, wearing noble clothing — not like the uniforms the vampires Fabian fought last night — peeked his head in and set his sharp eyes on him.

'What a terrible liar,' Fabian thought, thinking that this woman was lying when the evidence was just behind her.

"Tilly," called the nobleman as he gazed at the woman with respect. "My father told me to take this man with me. He is dangerous."

"Tilly's guest made me tea and breakfast."

The man let out a helpless sigh, baffling Fabian. He could sense that this man was strong enough to force his way in, but he was just standing there and talking civilly with that woman, Tilly.

"Fine. Suit yourself." To Fabian's surprise, the man didn't even argue with her as he just agreed — just like that. "You should come out sometime instead of staying in this place."

"I will disappear if sunlight hits me," she replied in the same tone, making Fabian's under-eye twitch.

She would disappear if sunlight hit her face? How could she say that with a straight face when the sunlight was literally beaming at her face?! Surely, she was a terrible liar.

The man raised his hand to shade her face. "You never change, Tilly. I will tell Father that you took the intruder as your guest then." He then glanced at Fabian without saying a word before leaving.

Tilly waved weakly, leaving the door ajar as she walked back to where she sat earlier. Again, she said nothing to Fabian and resumed ringing the bell.

"Why?" he asked after some time, staring at the woman. "Why did you lie? Are you, perhaps, protecting me?"

She stopped, lifting her head up, and stared at him. "I didn't lie, and I'm not protecting you. You can protect yourself."

"Then, if you already know that, why didn't you let that man take me with him?" Fabian's countenance grew cold while holding her gaze.

Tilly didn't answer immediately, and only when she averted her eyes away, her lips parted. "His boots are dirty. If he goes in, he will dirty the floor," picking up the cutlery to eat.

Meanwhile, Fabian chuckled in ridicule, gazing at the already dirty floor.

"What a terrible liar."

Chapter 552 - Tilly II

There weren't many people who existed in the world, or people Fabian met in his life, whom he couldn't read easily. Fabian was perceptive and an observer. He had been observing people, so he could tell if one bore malice or innocent. But Tilly baffled him the more he interacted with her.

He had been in the mansion for four days now, as the forest was still surrounded. So, he thought of treating his wounds in here first before going out to investigate. After all, it seemed no one planned to approach this place.

During his stay, Fabian cleaned the house in his free time. Cleaning and doing house chores had been therapy to keep his head calm and clear. Also, since he was stuck in this place, it would help him kill time.

"I brought you tea," Fabian knocked on Tilly's room. As usual, the ringing of the bell was what answered him as he headed in to serve her some tea. His service was his way of repayment to this woman because she let him stay without bothering him.

When Fabian entered, she was already sitting in the same spot near the window. He didn't speak while serving her tea. The last time the two talked was during his first day in this place. After that, she didn't speak, nor did he try to strike a conversation with her.

Tilly was ringing the bell with a fork this time, and Fabian didn't even bother asking her what was fun in ringing that bell. After serving the tea, he stepped back. This time, Tilly didn't wait for him to leave as she picked up the teacup to her lips.

After sipping, she placed the teacup back and spoke. "One month."

His brows rose as he looked at her in puzzlement, waiting for her explanation. What did she mean by one month?

"They will only be there for one month before they leave and recuperate," she explained vaguely, glancing up at him. "After a month, the security will weaken."

Fabian raised a brow. "Why would they need to recuperate after a month?"

"Sit." She motioned her hand to the chair across from her instead of answering. "My neck hurts."

A shallow breath slipped past his lips and sat down across from her. He looked at her in silence, studying her pale complexion as if she would die soon.

"Will you please tell me why they need to recuperate after a month and why no one is entering this place?" he smiled until his eyes squinted, trying to be nice so she would answer.

"Because they can only stay in the forbidden land for a month, else, they will die."

"Forbidden land?" Fabian furrowed his brows, intrigued by this new information.

"The forbidden forest weakens vampires if they stayed for too long. That is why it's forbidden." Tilly turned her head in the window, staring at it as if she could see further than anyone could. "If you don't go out for a month, they will have to retreat."

Fabian's gaze remained on the side of her face. "If this place is a forbidden land for vampires, why are you here?"

"Because it's my home." She turned her head back to him without a change of her expression.

"Your home, huh?" he rocked his head lightly. "A place that sucks your life and puts your life in danger is not a home."

Tilly blinked twice, staring at him in silence. She didn't smile or frown at his remarks. If anything, it seemed she just didn't hear it — no reaction at all. Instead, she picked up the teacup to her lips, eyes over the teacup as she looked at him.

"So that means I have to stay in here, huh?" he muttered, leaning back against the chair as he looked away. He thought that Charlotte must've heard about him being the forbidden forest through word of mouth.

'I hope she investigates while I'm stuck here,' he thought, thinking that Charlotte was quick to catch on.

After some time, Fabian snapped his eyes and shifted it to Tilly. The latter already stood up from her seat, walking away without a word.

"Where are you going?" he asked with a raised brow, staring at her small back.

She looked back with the same straight expression. "Sweep." That was all she said before she walked away, leaving him alone in her room.

Fabian opened his mouth, but he just watched the door shut behind her. He didn't come after her and stayed seated, propping his jaw against his knuckles while staring at the window.

"A month," he whispered, thinking that living here for a month wasn't a bad trade. Tilly was strange, but living with her wasn't bad. It almost felt like he was living with himself, if not for that ringing bell.

"Did she say she will sweep the floor?" he wondered as he cocked his head in the door's direction. He already cleaned a few areas of the mansion; mostly the way he would take and the lobby. While cleaning the place, Fabian figured Tilly never tended the house.

So, how come she said she would sweep and clean? Fabian furrowed his brows as he planted his palm on the armrest, pushing himself up to see what she was planning to do. He followed where he could feel her presence and soon caught up with her.

'Is this what she thinks sweeping is?' he questioned, watching her just walk while letting her long hair sweep the floor. Tilly just walked around the mansion leisurely while Fabian followed behind her.

Deep down, Fabian was hopeful she would actually get a broom or grab the feather duster to clean. But Tilly didn't. She just walked around at the same pace, heading to an area he was never been to before. He kept a distance from her and stopped when she halted, pivoting on her heel as she looked at the portrait hanging on the wall in the hallway.

Fabian furrowed his brows curiously, stretching his neck to see the portrait she was staring at. From his vantage point, he could barely see a portrait, but it was blank.

'A blank portrait?' he approached her out of plain curiosity to see the portrait up close. He wasn't mistaken when he saw the portrait was a blank canvass.

"That's me," she said, making him glance at her and saw her pointing at the blank canvass. "That's what I look when I wasn't born yet."

"...."

Chapter 553 - Should I Tie Your Hair?

That day, Tilly showed Fabian more blank portraits, claiming that they were her portraits before she was born. For reasons unknown, Fabian just let her point at everything before she returned to her room. That was the first and last time Tilly showed him around and she barely spoke a word after that.

For the past three weeks, their routine revolved around Fabian serving her tea and food. Surprisingly, Tilly's kitchen always had eggs as if they just appeared there magically. He didn't investigate because that wasn't important to him. He didn't plan to stay for a long time, so he also didn't try to build connections with this housemate.

Not that Tilly even tried to befriend him. She was just like the first time he met her: quiet, strange, and still rang the bell.

"Tomorrow marks my one month in here," he muttered, staring at the pot where he planted a seed he saw when he was on his fourth day. He felt nothing special about his departure. Fabian had been investigating every night and, to his dismay, the vampires surrounding the forbidden forest didn't decrease.

The only reason he still stayed despite that was he somehow trusted Tilly's words. She wasn't the type of person to lie... or rather, she was a terrible liar. Even if it turned out to be a lie, his stay here helped him plan his escape, and he recovered very well. Maleficent had been acting out when he stepped foot in the original land of the vampires, so he had to be in his best form once he stepped outside the forbidden forest.

His thoughts trailed off when Fabian sensed Tilly's presence behind him. He turned around to see her by the door. His brows furrowed. This was the first time Tilly came to him in his entire stay here. So, it was actually a surprise that she was by the door leading to the garden.

"Are you here to walk in the garden, my lady?" he asked with a kind smile and a polite tone. But Tilly glanced down. She was only a step away from actually going out of the house, but she didn't.

Not that she showed she was afraid to go out. It was more like she didn't have any interest in stepping out.

Tilly slowly raised her head, and as soon as their eyes met, her lips parted. "Tea."

"You want tea?" he inquired, and she nodded. "Sure. Why don't you have tea in the garden for a change..."

His smile remained, although Tilly didn't wait for him to finish before she turned around and walked back inside. When she was out of his sight, his smile faded as he glanced at the garden. Before, this garden was left unattended, but he already made it look like a proper garden. There weren't flowers or any of the sort, but at least it was clean and the grass was trimmed.

"Until now, I still can't read what's inside that woman's mind," came out a mumble as he headed inside to make her some tea. Since he would depart tomorrow, he thought of being generous.

"Here's your tea." Fabian served her tea in her room and sat down on the chair across from her. His eyes instantly landed on her pale face as she sipped the tea. He had been in this place for almost a month, and this was only the second time Fabian joined her.

"I will set off tomorrow," he said to remind her, but Tilly didn't have a reaction as she placed the teacup back on the saucer. "I can teach you how to make tea so you can do it on your own."

Tilly set her silver eyes on him and said nothing. She didn't have any reaction or showed even the slightest sign of her body language. Nothing. He was like talking to a wall.

A shallow breath slipped past his lips as he gave up. If she didn't want, then there was nothing he could do, he thought.

"Thank you for taking me in, Lady Tilly. I appreciate it." He smiled and tilted his head down to express his gratitude. "I will go tomorrow at dawn. But I will make you breakfast before that, although it might go cold once you wake up."

Her eyelashes just fluttered before she peeled her eyes away from him. Instead of answering, Tilly picked up the bell right next to her and rang it delicately. This was Fabian's cue that he should just leave her alone. It was not like they grew attached to each other as they barely talked.

He planted his hand on the armrest, pushing himself up. As he stepped to the side, he placed his palm across his chest and bowed before turning around to leave. But just as he did, he turned his head back when the bell produced a clumsy ring as its handle broke. His eyes landed on the floor, and he glanced at Tilly, who was also staring at the handle in her hand.

"It broke," she muttered with a slight frown. This was the first time she showed a little emotion, which was a little surprising to Fabian.

'Did she grow attached to the bell?' he wondered as he sighed. "Treat this as my appreciation for letting me have some peace in this place.'

Fabian walked back and picked up the bell. "My lady, don't frown. The handle broke, but the bell didn't." His words made her raise her head to him, seeing that Fabian placed the bell on the table before slipping his hand inside his suit.

When he took out his hand, he was already holding a black handkerchief. She only watched him spread the handkerchief, holding both ends of it until it formed a triangle. Fabian then folded it until it became thin, slipping the end into the loop on top of the bell — like how one put a thread on the needle.

After he successfully pull half of the handkerchief, Fabian was about to tie it but stopped. Instead, he gazed at her to study her momentarily. Tilly was pale and her hair, eyes, and dress were all white. She had no other colors other than white. Also, her hair still bothered her.

The side of his lips stretched into a smile until his eyes squinted. "My lady, should I tie your hair?"

Chapter 554 - Weaken Security

"My lady, should I tie your hair?"

Tilly just tilted her head to the side, blinking ever so tenderly. Since she didn't reject, Fabian thought of tying her hair. So, without a word, he stood behind her chair and gazed at her silky long hair.

"This will be better, my lady," he said, grabbing her white hair and was surprised at how smooth and thin it was momentarily. But he didn't dwell on it as he put all her hair in one hand, before carefully tying it in a ponytail using the handkerchief.

A satisfied smile appeared on his lips as something finally pleased him in this place. That was to see her hair leave the floor. The bell dangled down, and it rang faintly when she cocked her head back to look at him.

"Better." His smile remained, stepping back while Tilly turned her head on the window.

Once she saw her reflected and the bell dangled under her hair, she reached for it. For the first time, her lips stretched into a subtle smile, pleased that the bell was still ringing.

"Tilly likes it," she whispered while poking the bell, still staring at her reflection in the window.

"I'm glad you do." He nodded lightly, gazing down at the tip of her hair. Both of them were a little petty as she was satisfied to ring the bell, while he was satisfied that her hair doesn't sweep the floor now.

After tying Tilly's hair, Fabian cleaned a few spots in the mansion before he prepared himself for his departure at dawn. Since he didn't occupy any room, he stayed in the lobby where he would usually sleep. His priority in life was that it was better to have a good night's sleep than to have money, so Fabian went to sleep early.

Not that he slept like a log, as he was a light sleeper. But surprisingly, in this mansion, he could sleep peacefully at night even though he was sleeping on the settee in the lobby. He had also grown used to the ringing bell, so he didn't mind. But tonight was oddly strange. But that was because Tilly had the bell tied around her hair. It would only ring when she moved.

While Fabian was asleep in the lobby, he finally heard the bell ringing in the middle of the night. But he didn't open his eyes, hearing its sound come closer to where he was.

'What is she doing here?' he wondered but didn't open his eyes despite sensing her presence in the lobby. He didn't need to see to know that she was standing not far away from him, staring at him in silence.

Meanwhile, Tilly just stood there with her eyes fixed on the man lying on the settee. He had his arm covering his eyes, but she knew he was aware of her presence.

"Tea," she whispered softly, eyelashes fluttering ever so tenderly. "Teach me next time."

Those were her only parting words with him as she turned around, walking away at a slow pace. With every step she took, the bell would ring softly.

As the sound of the bell faded, Fabian withdrew his arm away from his eyes and glanced up. When he could barely hear the bell, he fixed his position and stared at the dark ceiling.

"There's no next time, my lady," he uttered under his breath. "My offer already expired."

Tilly stood on the balcony like usual with her hand on the railing. What she said to him about the forbidden forest was a big, fat lie. The knights wouldn't just die if they stayed in the forbidden forest for a long time. But she was telling the truth that the knight would need to recover after a month.

"Soran didn't come back," she muttered, thinking about a particular man who promised her he would visit her again and take her on an adventure. The reason she never left this place, so that Soran would find her easily since he used to stay in this mansion.

"But his kin did," Tilly added with a soft tone, smiling subtly. "Soran fulfilled his promise to Tilly."

To her, she already knew Soran would never come back. But she still waited for him because he promised her. So, Fabian's presence in this mansion already made her happy. She was a simple being and all this time, she was happy. She may not show it because she didn't know how, but she was sincerely happy to have a companion after spending a millennium of living all alone in this mansion.

"Tilly promised one month." Tilly sat on the railings, lifting her legs up, and jumped down. The bell rang as she landed and walked towards the forest leisurely. This was the first time she would go out after centuries and her reason? To make sure Fabian would depart safely.

**

At the entrance of the forbidden forest where knights were camping, everyone heard a distinct sound of a bell coming closer. It didn't take long when everyone's attention turned to the dark forest as the ringing grew louder as it approached.

"Who's that?" the man who came to Tilly's mansion to arrest Fabian stood in the front with furrowed brows. His eyes dilated when a woman slinked out of the darkness.

"Tilly?" he raised his hand to stop anyone from attacking her. "Don't do anything silly to her. She's the one who lives in that mansion."

Shock instantly dominated everyone's faces at their commander's words. Everyone knew Mathilda Grimsbanne, but no one had seen her as she never left her mansion. So, for her to come out after thousands of years... everyone was shocked.

"Tilly, what are you doing here?" asked the nobleman as he took a step forward.

"Weaken security." Tilly's reply made their brows furrow. "Tilly's guest will depart tomorrow, so Tilly wants him to depart safely."

The man knitted his brows, and this time, he took a step forward. Even though Tilly hadn't left her mansion, every noble pureblood knew how dangerous this woman was. That was why no one dared to enter the forbidden forest. It was because Tilly's last words before she lived in seclusion were... she didn't want to be disturbed.

Everyone looked up when Tilly raised a finger. To their surprise, the entire country was now inside the bloodfield, which they called on the mainland as the devil's palm.

"Lady Tilly," the man, who was leading the entire troop, clenched his hand. If Tilly said she would weaken the security, she would surely do it. And that means everyone's safety would be compromised.

"We will retreat."

"Captain!"

"Shut up!" the noble vampire looked at Tilly straight in the eye. "I give you my word. No one will come after that intruder — I mean, your guest. They would depart this land in one piece."

Tilly blinked, as she still had no reaction. "He had a companion."

"Don't worry. We won't interfere with him or his companion."

She didn't speak anymore as she turned around and walked back to her house.. All they heard was the sound of the bell ringing that was tied around her long hair with a black handkerchief that stood out because of the contrasting color.

Chapter 555 - What Kind Of Memory Did You See At Death's Door?

When Tilly returned to the mansion, she stopped at the front door and coughed. She covered her lips with her palm, drawing it away only to see blood on it. For someone as powerful as her, using it would also mean straining her body. But she didn't regret it for good use.

She closed her hand ever so slowly, pushing the door open. As soon as Tilly stepped inside, her eyes landed on Fabian. He was sitting on the settee and raised his head to meet her gaze. Tilly didn't speak as she resumed her steps.

"So it was a lie?" he asked just when she took five steps, knowing she wouldn't say a word if he didn't. "That one month... is a lie?"

Tilly slowly turned her head in his direction but said nothing. He looked a little annoyed as he stood up, cocking his head with his sharp eyes on her.

"Do you see me as someone stupid? Did you think that power just now will go past my radar?" he snickered, shaking his head lightly. "What did I expect? You only talk when you want to."

Fabian scratched his temple as he closed his eyes for a bit. "That blood you cough out, wash it before you go to sleep." He waved, walking towards the door to leave this place.

He wasn't dumb not to realize things and what happened. When she said the security would weaken, she meant to say she would weaken it. Hence, he knew that there was no need to stay since he was certain he would leave this land alive. With or without her help, Fabian didn't plan to die here.

So her help was unnecessary.

"Tilly's guest is angry." He stopped by the door when she spoke. A ridiculing smirk appeared on his face as she turned around to face her.

"I am not angry, my lady. I just disliked the fact that you would so far for a stranger like me."

"Why?"

His lips parted, but no words came out. Did she ask him why? Fabian had many answers to that. For example, he didn't like that it seemed she was underestimating him or he didn't want to be in debt to someone. But was that really the reason? What truly upset the ever-composed butler?

Deep down, Fabian knew his genuine answer. He wasn't someone who disliked being underestimated. If anything, he liked the benefits of being seen as an underdog, since it had its advantages. Nor he was the person who had the conscience to not exploit anyone.

His services to her were only a part of his instincts since he had lived as a butler for a long time. It wasn't from the goodness of his heart or anything of the sort. He simply convinced himself it was repayment, but he wasn't that type of person. He was simply bored and doing butler duties was what he only knew, aside from killing.

"Don't know," Fabian replied and shrugged. "Thank you for everything and goodbye."

Just as he turned around and was about to take a step, Tilly spoke again. "Tea... is bitter."

"Of course it is," Fabian chuckled as he cocked his head back, smirking. "I told you, I only make what's there in your kitchen. Do some groceries and buy some honey or sugar. As for me, I don't think I will ever eat eggs for the next ten years."

Fabian waved as he resumed his strides. Tilly just watched him from that spot until the door closed behind him. Once he was outside, Fabian let out a shallow breath. He glanced back at the door, waiting for the sound of the bell so he would know she was moving.

However, the bell didn't ring for a long time. That only meant she was standing in the same spot for a while.

"Why am I waiting for her to go back to her room?" he murmured and frowned, almost glaring at the door. He nearly busted the door open to tell her to go back to her bed, but the bell suddenly rang. So, Fabian heaved a sigh of relief as that sound gradually faded.

"I won't go back in here," he grumbled, listing this place as his number one place he would never go back, ever.

Present time...

A soft chuckle slipped past Fabian's lips as he watched Stefan swing his sword up and then down. It was surely a strange memory to recall at death's door. It was so strange he couldn't help but chuckle. But that... that memory he already locked away from his head somehow gave him more reason to fight.

Fabian lifted his head to meet the blade, opened his mouth, and bit the sword as hard as he could to stop it. His eyes glinted, holding Stefan's gaze as the latter was a bit taken aback at Fabian's sudden retaliation. After all, just a moment ago, he was accepting his death.

But now, Fabian's eyes told him this wouldn't end easily. Because those eyes glowering at him... were the eyes of that monster who needed to be tamed.

"Now I'm intrigued, Fabian. What kind of memory did you see at death's door?" Stefan inquired and a second later, the upper part of his sword where Fabian was biting cracked until it broke. In a second, Fabian spat out the blade, which he caught and stabbed Stefan's ankle.

Fabian was too quick with his reaction that Stefan slightly lagged behind. All the latter could do was hop back, gazing down at his bleeding ankle. If Fabian was holding a dagger, the cut would be fatal.

"How amusing," mused Stefan, raising his eyes as Fabian helped himself to stand up. He watched him massage his nape, stretching his neck as if he was reborn.

"Now I am even more intrigued at what reason you let the person... the devil you've kept hidden finally take over you, Fabian?"

Fabian slowly raised his head, and a devious smirk appeared on his lips. It wasn't the usual smile he would show, but it was something that gave him a wicked look.

"Your Highness," Fabian took a deep breath as his mouth slightly fell open. "It was a strange memory to recall; something I didn't expect as well. However, it reminds me that... there is a place in this world where I can recuperate after this."

He brushed his hair back before his hand settled on his forehead, gazing at Stefan from head to toe. "Ah, damn.... I should kill her too."

Chapter 556 - Get Your Hands Off Of Him

"Ah, damn... I should kill her too."

Stefan took out the fragment of his sword that was stuck in his ankle without reaction. His eyes studied Fabian as the latter called for his broken sword. The broken part turned into black dust, but the handle returned into a shroud before it formed into a small butcher knife.

"Your highness, thank you for showing me a memory I was curious to see at death's door." Fabian smiled until his eyes squinted, caressing the black butcher's knife delicately. "I had thought a lot of memories I would see. For example, meeting the current emperor for the first time, or the time when Rufus and I nearly killed each other. I even considered that it would be the memory when I extracted Klaus' fangs. Apparently, it was none of those."

"Oh? Pray tell, Fabian. Was there another memory that is even more memorable than those?"

"Memorable..." Fabian snickered in ridicule, letting out a deep breath as he locked eyes with Stefan. "More like it is the least memorable to remember. A memory that had no importance in my life. In front of death, the memory we will see is something simple, and it makes you think how shallow and petty one is."

"I'm intrigued." Stefan nodded with his lips closed. "Will you be able to show what petty memories I treasured at the back of my head, Fabian? I'm curious if it will show me my time with Lilou, or my fantasy of holding my son with her? I wondered, which would it be?"

Fabian's smile remained as he sized his opponent. "You will be surprised once you see it, Your Highness. I bet none of those will matter to you. Because the memory you will see at death's door... is an eye-opener. A realization of what matters and what you should've done."

"And what did you realize of what you should've done?"

"That is..." Fabian's eyelashes fluttered ever so slowly as he spun the butcher's knife in his hand. "... to kill someone."

PANG!

A tipless sword against a black butcher knife clashed in a heartbeat, causing ripples in the Devil's Palm around them. Fabian, who had inflicted multiple injuries, stood his ground. His eyes drooped until it was partially closed, studying Stefan while humming.

"I guess that memory you saw is something precious," Stefan commented, sensing that Fabian hadn't even unleashed his all. "So, this is Fabian the Ripper, huh? Composed yet reeked of bloodlust. For a human to smell like death, you are surely amazing. You make me want to sink my fangs to taste what a person like you tastes like."

"My. You should've asked before, Your Highness. I wouldn't mind spending a night with you since men and women are the same to me."

CLANG!

Fabian and Stefan exchanged blows, unfazed by their injuries, as they dueled fiercely. To wield Maleficent to its original form — the butcher knife — Stefan could feel the gravity of Fabian's every attack. But that didn't stop Stefan from fighting him.

"Haha! I don't feel disgusted by the suggestion." Stefan chuckled, as he knew Fabian truly meant it. He launched another attack, which Fabian blocked easily. "I should've thought about it for a change."

"Exploring is always a good idea, Your Highness."

The sound of metals clashing with such intensity resonated in the air. Until Stefan spread his other hand. The red mist paused in the air and instantly formed into sharp-like needles. In one wave, the blood needles pointed in Fabian's figure and flew towards him.

"Kill." Came out a whisper from Stefan as he also bolted in Fabian's direction to attack him.

But alas, Fabian just smirk wickedly as he didn't dodge the blood needles. Instead, he dashed towards Stefan and clashed with him. The red needles stuck into his body, but he still grinned as if they were nothing.

"Impressive, indeed." Stefan mused as red thread appeared from the end of each needle connecting to the blood surrounding them. "You fight recklessly... very unlike your usual fighting style, Fabian."

"I wouldn't have successfully slaughtered tons of vampires in the past if I was cautious."

The side of Stefan's lips stretched broader. "Control." The red string pulled Fabian to control him like a puppet, but to his surprise, the red string slowly changed into black.

"Haha. Your highness," Fabian chuckled as the red strings burned and everything that was pierced across his body turned into red mist once again. "Thing is, I used to spend so much time with the emperor back when he was a duke. There was a time in the past where it's killed or be killed between us. If my master killed me, I would've died more than a hundred times already."

He paused as he gazed up and smiled. "Those days... he never knows how to hold back." Fabian slowly set his eyes back to Stefan as his face turned expressionless.

"And thus, this feels nothing. His Majesty... such a powerful man... reminds me of another Grimsbanne."

"Grimsbanne..." Stefan smirked, thinking that Samael has the blood of Grimsbanne from her birth mother. A blood that's far superior to Stefan's birth mother.

Unfair.

That word instantly crossed Stefan's head with the thought. The side of his lips curled up into a ridiculing smirk and chuckled. It reminded him that since birth, Samael was born to be above others. After all, he inherited the bloodline of the late queen, while Stefan was simply a son of a concubine.

"Fabian, do you want to see something amusing?" his smile persisted, but it didn't reach his eyes. He snapped his fingers, causing the thick blood mist surrounding them to disperse gradually.

Fabian quirked a brow at what was Stefan trying to do this time. He had a feeling whatever it was, he wouldn't like it. This man was full of schemes and... he surely had something up on his sleeve that could justify this unsettling feeling.

"Lancelot," Stefan whispered, holding Fabian's gaze as it glinted sharply. The side of his lips curled up before he hopped away in a blink of an eye. Fabian, who was fighting him, also jumped on instinct as soon as he realized who was Stefan aiming for.

Law.

"Stefan!" Fabian growled, seeing that Stefan's back was wide open. Before the latter could reach Law, Fabian appeared behind him and swung his butcher's knife without hesitation. What Fabian noticed a bit late was Stefan's smirk.

PANG!

Fabian's eyes dilated as his Maleficent clashed with Lakresha. His eyes fell on the person who suddenly appeared behind Stefan and blocked his attack.

Lilou.

"Fabian, get your hands off of him," came out a cold warning as Lilou swung Lakresha, which pushed him back.

Chapter 557 - What Goes Around Comes Around

[Minutes before Lilou's appearance...]

I had been fighting Zero with everything I could for a long time now. He was strong and I couldn't deny that. If I lowered my guard for even just a split second, it would be over. I would die.

My people were also fighting the remaining rebels with all their might. Loud yells and cries, low snarls and growls, metals clashing, that had been echoing in my ear for a while now, too. I even felt Stefan's powerful presence inside the estate and caught a small bloodfield somewhere outside the mansion.

But Zero... Zero... this man...

"Zero!!!" I bellowed until my voice shook, eyes glinting with killing intent. "I will kill you!"

"Haha! My. Your Majesty, how can you lose your composure?" he chuckled while blocking my attack. "When you took out Acheron's heart, I didn't even flinch. Because..." Zero leaned forward with a wicked smirk plastered on his face.

"... because that is what it means to be the person who should stand at the peak. You will lose people and sacrifices were inevitable."

I gritted my teeth as I repelled his sword away. I didn't idle as I instantly bolted towards him like a maniac, getting impatient to defeat this person. While I was getting worked up with my worries for my son, Zero took the pleasure of seeing me in this state. My hatred towards him just continued to increase, but what was frustrating was that he was strong enough to fight me equally.

'Fabian...' I thought whilst launching a continuous attack towards him. '... please be safe... keep my sons safe...'

Deep down, I was scared. I didn't mind losing my life in this battle, but not my son. He was too young and too precious. This night would be engraved in his mind forever, and I already felt sorry for him. The least I could do was for Law to survive this incident.

"Sad, isn't it?" Zero spoke casually as if my attacks were all childish tantrums. "Once you have a child, it doesn't matter how wicked a person was or how strong they were. That child's life... will become a weakness. One such as yourself, Your Majesty, will use that despicable means to make one grovel on your feet."

Karma.

My mind froze for a split second as I held my breath, recalling the time I used Tristan, Zero's son, to toy with Zero. I already realized that Zero would hold a grudge against me about that, but hearing it from his mouth gave this sense of dread in my heart.

An eye for an eye.

That had always been Zero's rule for vengeance. He wanted me to feel the same agony I had caused him in the past. I had regretted my actions in the past when I first met Law, but this... this... I could feel my heart sinking.

It was my fault. I shouldn't have done that in the past. I shouldn't have played that low-life trick to anger Zero. I was at fault and now... my son would pay for it.

"No," I whispered as I stopped when he blocked my attack again, not blinking while staring blankly into his eyes. "Not my son."

Zero smirked in ridicule. "Why not your son, my former fiance? It's fine if it's my son, but it's not if I dragged yours in it?"

"Zero, Tristan was already involved in this matter. If you didn't want him to --"

"Lilou, my empress, I bet you understand a parent's heart now that you are one." His voice grew cold and distant, just like his glinting eyes. "That child's father is wicked, who slew every Moriarty. Children, women, men, elders... it doesn't matter if they were just born into this world or already on the brink of death. I killed them all. Do you know why?"

I hopped back, standing still while staring at him. Did I know why? Before, it didn't matter to me whatever reason Zero, this wicked man, had in the back of his head to keep his son alive despite killing his kins. But now... I got the gist of it.

"Because if you didn't, your son will share the same fate as his father...?" I guessed with a shaking voice, nearly choking at this realization.

Power and greed had always been one factor that ruined every royalty's childhood and life. I never tried to understand Zero in the past because it didn't matter to me. Not that it would change anything or I could change his mind and make him waver.

But... no one was born evil.

How could I selfishly think that I was the only one who was fighting for something important? It was presumptuous of me that what Zero and Stefan were fighting for didn't have the same importance as mine. Although their methods were wrong and disastrous, they terrified me.

Terrified, not in a way of what they could do. I was scared because I could understand them. That I would also be just like them if I were in the same circumstance. That I... was also capable of being a monster, just like them. It was already proven when I thought Sam died.

God... just what did we all do wrong to deserve this?

"That's right, my queen. If I didn't kill every person who bore the blood of the Moriarty and didn't hide my son as my shadow knight, all the retaliation against me would shift to him. Just like what you did back then, using Tristan to corner me, you're not the only one who would do such a thing." My grip trembled, as I couldn't argue with him. These things he was spewing were nothing but facts.

"That is why..." he paused as he smirk in delight, enjoying the sight of my expression. "... we planned to do the same. I can't kill you, since your life is still connected to my son. Your death also means his death, but isn't it more amusing if you live? Living... takes more courage than dying, after all. Especially, if you have to spend a lifetime with a man you rejected multiple times."

"What do you mean..." I trailed off as my eyes dilated. An eye for an eye; that word suddenly hovered over my head once again.

"It seems you finally realized that now, my queen."

"No." I turned my dilated eyes towards the estate while holding my breath. With a snap of a finger, I bolted towards the mansion and Zero let me be while laughing maniacally. As soon as I came closer, I saw Fabian about to slash Stefan's back while the latter was keeping his back open.

PANG!

Shock instantly dominated Fabian's face as I stopped his attack in the nick of time. An eye of an eye. That meant... just like my circumstance with Tristan, it was the same with Stefan and Law. What happened to Stefan... my son would share the same fate.

"Get your hands off of him, Fabian."

Chapter 558 - What Goes Around Comes Around II

"Get your hands off of him, Fabian."

I swung my Lakresha to make him fall back, which I did easily since it was Fabian. He wouldn't fight me in this.

"Your Majesty, what are you..."

"Fabian, don't." That was all I told him while shaking my head as a warning, pivoting on my heel to face Stefan. This time, I raised Lakresha and hooked it around his neck.

"This person is mine," I announced under my breath, gazing at Stefan's back. My eyes then veered towards Law. My son... was now crouching down while Bey was panicking next to him. I caught Law's ankle, and it was bleeding while my son was pressing it with his little hands.

"Stefan... how dare you..."

"Young Master..." I heard Fabian muttered in shock, realizing that Law was like someone who was tortured with slight cuts across his body. Fabian was smart to realize things quickly, especially since Stefan and Law's ankles were both bleeding.

"Sweetheart." I raised my scythe when Stefan turned around to face squarely. His brow quirked as he smirked, leaning his neck against the blade until it slit the side of it a little.

"Ah...!" Law squealed and touched the side of his neck, making my heart stop.

"Young Master!" Fabian yelled from behind me, but he didn't run past me, as I felt Zero's presence. Even without looking, I knew he stopped Fabian.

"Lexx..." came out a weak voice, withdrawing Lakresha and I dropped my hand.

As soon as our eyes met, a subtle smile appeared on his lips. "It's been a while, sweetheart."

"Stefan, just what do you think you're doing?" my voice shook, suppressing my desire to rush to my son and tend to his wounds. All I could do was stand here, frozen. I couldn't kill Stefan nor retaliate against him. Hurting him also meant hurting my son and killing him also meant killing Law.

I lost, miserably.

The second I realized that Stefan's life was connected to Law, I already knew I couldn't fight them anymore. Whatever they wanted, all I could do was give in as long as they let my son live. I should've done that a long time ago. If I did, it wouldn't be like this. I should've given up my happiness, the peace, a lifetime with Sam.

"Don't make that face, sweetheart." Stefan took a step forward and stopped when we're toe to toe.

"My heart will break if you cry."

It was futile. They had me on the neck. The greatest schemer always wins... Acheron was correct.

"What do you want?" I breathed out, staring at the man who wouldn't let me go. "Lexx, please... not my son."

I looked down and Stefan cupped my jaw before placing a thumb on my chin to lift it up. He didn't speak while studying me in silence.

"How does it feel, sweetheart? Seeing that everything is slowly being taken away from you?" he asked after a while, but he wasn't smiling or showing positive energy. If anything, his eyes were empty and... full of sadness. Those eyes always looked at me with longing instead of desire.

"I wonder what will you feel if I don't listen to your one and only wish, sweetheart. If I killed Law..." he trailed off when I dropped Lakresha and clutched his chest, staring at him while grinding my teeth. "... will you finally understand me?"

"Lexx, let's stop here," I said through my gritted teeth, clasping his chest even tighter. "No more. I lost. Whatever you want... just... not my son."

"Your Majesty..." Fabian called, but I ignored him as I didn't take my eyes off of Stefan.

Stefan let out a shallow breath as he glanced over at me, setting his eyes on the people behind me.

"Shall we stop here, Quentin?"

"Well, we had controlled the entire south and my former fiance finally yielded," Zero crooned. "But Luther and my people haven't returned."

"Well, then. You already know what I want." Stefan set his eyes back to me and smiled subtly.

"Shall we go, sweetheart?"

My heart stopped beating altogether as I nodded with my lips closed. I promised my husband that I would protect our son and Minowa. I failed in protecting Minowa, but I wanted to do everything I could to protect Law and all those who were still alive.

"Mhm." I let out a low hum one could barely hear, gazing down in defeat. "No more, Lexx. No more. I understand now."

I slowly raised my head and smiled subtly. Stefan was someone whose feelings for me were something I couldn't doubt. He wanted me; may it be because of love or something he wanted to prove to himself. That was an unchanging fact. If I yielded now, even after so much struggle, this would stop.

People could call it cowardice and ridiculous, but I knew what it was futile. Fighting would only mean endangering the people I loved — my son. Law's life... this precious life gifted to me was something I couldn't play with or risk.

"Lilou," Stefan called as he cupped my jaw. "We'll stop fighting. So hush now."

"I know."

"Mother...!" I gritted my teeth as I gazed at Law's tearful eyes. Even Bey was tearing up, and all the people behind them. Adam stood by the door, his hand on the jamb and eyes on me.

"Can I embrace him?" I asked in a low tone, but I didn't expect Stefan to be lenient. That was why when he said, 'no need,' I didn't argue.

"Madam... are you... leaving... with them?" asked Bey in a shaking voice, and the sight of her was like stabbing me right through my chest. It hurts... but we're cornered. I understood Stefan's life as being linked with Law and it was something I couldn't fight.

'For Law...' I whispered my reasons I kept yelling in my heart earlier. '... for Law, I will have to yield. No more, Lilou. No more. If Sam arrived here later... I hope he forgives me for my decision.'

In the end... no matter how much I struggled, it was all in vain.

How pathetic.

Chapter 559 - Not All Love Is Right

I turned around after giving Bey and Law a smile, facing Zero and Fabian. The latter was not smiling, but he wasn't retaliating against the sword pointing at his neck. Fabian was just standing there, holding my gaze with those sharp eyes.

"I'm sorry, Fabi," I apologized under my breath.

"It's not your fault. I didn't realize hurting that person also put the young master at risk. I deserve death." The side of Fabian's lips stretched into a smile until his eyes squinted. "It was a long life, but the last months are worthwhile."

"Butler, are you dying?" Zero cocked his head to the side with a playful smirk.

"Well, you wouldn't let me off, will you?" Fabian glanced at him leisurely with the same smile.

My eyes drooped until they were partially closed, staring at Fabian's demeanor. "Can you not kill him?" I asked under my breath.

"He needs to die." Stefan's reply was cold and emotionless, leaving me with no room for negotiation.

Fabian set his eyes back to me. "Lilou, it's not your fault. We both fought until the end, but we didn't see this turn of events. Don't blame yourself and... I won't die."

I choked when Fabian called my name. That was the second time he called me by my name, making me recall his words back when he first asked me if he could call me by my name alone.

If I wanted Sam's safety, I had to take part in these wicked games with a heart of steel; to sacrifice, to move on, and never look back. Those were his words. Was this his way of telling me I shouldn't bat an eye at his death?

"What nice parting words," Zero simpered before his hand went through Fabian's back through his chest. My eyes landed on the hand that was holding Fabian's heart.

Blood instantly dripped from the corner of Fabian's smiling lips while my eyes blurred with tears that instantly rolled down my cheek. 'Fabian...' I whispered before Zero pulled his hand back, and Fabian dropped to his knees with a hole in his chest.

"Mister Fabian!!" Law cried out, and I heard Bey stop him from rushing towards us. "Mister Fabian!! Mister Fabian!!"

"Head Butler!"

Everyone called for Fabian with desperation and sadness in their voice. Law was the loudest I could hear, as my son seemed to throw a huge fit.

"Lakresha," I whispered, and I felt the shroud return to my hand. It didn't return to being a necklace, but it became a pendant. They said that once a bearer of a divine weapon had no will to fight or stopped fighting altogether, the weapon would mean nothing. So this pendant... was what left in Lakresha.

This small pendant was what was left of my fighting spirit.

I felt a finger wipe the tears that were rolling down my cheek, but I ignored it. My eyes were fixed on Fabian's back as he lied down on the concrete.

"How sad," Zero commented as he dropped the heart nonchalantly. "Don't worry. The rebels will retreat soon, so I'm certain a lot of your people are still alive! That's good news!"

I glanced at Zero and caught the devious grin plastered on his face. He was enjoying my sorrow at losing a good friend. No, deep down, I knew the second I yielded, Fabian would die. But I still did because between Law and Fabian, I chose my son.

I was the one who killed Fabian, and he knew that. And yet, he told me not to blame myself.

"Pathetic," I whispered as a ridiculing chuckle slipped past my lips. "I'm pathetic."

Stefan gazed to my side. "Did that make you sad?"

"Yes. I feel like I'm dying."

"That's good," he hummed with disinterest. "Do you hate me?"

"More than anyone in the world."

Stefan chuckled briefly. "Then, that's even better. There's no greater joy for me, knowing you will have to stay beside someone whom you hate the most."

"Hah... so that's what hell is like," I muttered as I just stood there, closing my eyes to take a deep breath. "I'll kill you, Stefan. You will not have a single night or day where you will not have to look over your shoulder."

"I'll be looking forward to it."

I slowly opened my eyes and glanced at him. He cast me a side-eye, still bearing a poker face.

"I love you," he said with a straight face out of nowhere, but that didn't make my heart flutter, nor did it seem he felt abash by saying those words. It was like saying something unimportant, as both of us didn't react to it.

I peeled my eyes away from him. "I know," I replied before turning my head back to see Law weeping while Bey was embracing him to stop him.

"I had always known you love me, Lexx. And it's something I won't doubt. But..." My eyes flickered with bitterness at the sight of my grieving son. "... not all love is right."

"Right... you said in the past, that if hurting you don't hurt me... then it's not love,"

"You remembered..."

"I always remember everything, Lilou." I turned my head to him at his remarks, only to see him looking at me. "It's smart of you to yield. Even if you manage to kill Zero or even if I didn't force a blood contract with your son, it's futile. This empire... will cease to exist."

"Is that a prediction?"

"It's the absolute future."

I gazed at him and chuckled, but didn't respond anymore. Although I didn't deem his claims as delusion, I didn't also doubt it. If Stefan would claim such a thing, then that also meant there were more powerful people involved. Was he talking about the people from the mainland?

Beatrice told me in the past about those vampires on the mainland vying to expand their territories. If five years ago they approached Stefan, then that would make sense that he vanished without a trace.

"I am pathetic and so were you, Lexx," I whispered while staring at him. "Our greed... is why we're both dead inside."

Stefan didn't reply and just gazed at me. He didn't argue, and that meant he accepted this fact. He and I... were just beings who were walking corpses, causing misery to each other. But that was what he wanted. For the two of us to fall in the pits of fiery hell where we both belong.

"Let's go, Lilou."

Chapter 560 - The Imperial Knight's Flag

"Let's go, Lilou."

Stefan didn't look at me as he casually took a step towards the gates. Zero also shrugged as he pivoted on his heel, whistling as he walked away. I fought the urge to look back, gritting my teeth before following them. But just when I took five steps, I paused.

"Father!!!" I snapped my eyes and looked back when Law yelled at the top of his lungs. "You said if I need you, I just have to call your name!! They are taking Mother away! They killed Mister Fabian and now... and now!! They will also take my mother with them!!"

"Law..." I choked, taking an unconscious step towards him, only to stop when Stefan grabbed my wrist. "... my baby."

"Father!!!" Law shouted his lungs out, tears and snot mixing on his face, but he didn't care. "Save my mother!! I will be good from now on!! So please.... someone... save my mother."

"My son... please stop crying..." I balled my hand into a fist, as the tension in my throat was enough to suffocate me. I felt the pieces of my heart slowly fall, like a petal being plucked off one after another. My son cried his heart out while calling for his father, promising to be good from now on. Bey and the rest were also weeping, calling my name, and asking for someone to help.

Any help would do. They even called both the devil and god — anyone they could call out of desperation. But Law only called his father.

I didn't need to be saved. All I needed was for everyone... for those who still had their lives to live on. Even if it means I would have to sacrifice my pathetic life.

"How annoying." I froze when Stefan commented coldly. "Should I kill them?"

I grabbed Stefan's hand, which was holding my wrist on instinct. Slowly, I raised my head and my sharp eyes pierced his eyes.

"Kill them and there's nothing that will hold me back," I warned with a shaking voice, but Stefan suddenly grabbed me by the neck.

"Mother!!"

"Madam Roux!!"

Stefan tightened his grip lightly while gazing at me. "Don't push your luck, sweetheart. Even though I am crazy about you, I can still kill them and have you. What I am showing is leniency and mercy, since I don't like to see you cry. But... stop testing me."

"Are you... perhaps, jealous?" I chuckled with a smirk. "That someone weeps and prays for me, but no one does that for you?"

"My sweetheart..." Stefan let me go while I coughed, as his grip was too rough. Even when I couldn't see my neck, I knew he left marks on it as his claws grazed it. He ran his fingers through his silver hair with his eyes still on me.

"... you always know what to say to aggravate me."

Stefan raised a finger and pointed the tip of his sharp nails at the side of his neck. My eyes dilated and before he could poke his neck, I rushed to him and grabbed his hand with both my hands.

"What the hell are you thinking?" I asked with an aghast expression.

"Killing myself so you don't be sad anymore."

My mind went blank momentarily, seeing how our lives would be once I walked out of this estate with them. Stefan didn't care if he hurts himself, but I do. Because his death... also meant my son's death.

"Do you understand now, Lilou?" he inquired coldly, looking down at me with an arched brow. "Why would I get riled up in something so trivial when I have you, my sweet Lilou, who will treasure this life of mine more than I do?"

My grip around his hand loosened as I staggered back, grinding my teeth secretly. The yells and cries sounded distant in my ear as I hung my head low.

"You're right..." I whispered lifelessly before lifting my head, shutting down the painful noises in the air. "Let's just go to hell, Lexx."

Stefan chuckled, pleased to see my yielding eyes. The last thread that I was holding on finally broke, succumbing to this dark fate that I would lead. My son's life was holding on to Stefan. Even Sam could do nothing to Stefan since hurting him was like hurting Law. My husband loved his son more than he loved himself, so, of course, Stefan truly got us by the neck.

"Come, sweetheart." He offered me the hand that strangled me, and I gazed down at it for a moment. I slowly raised my hand but paused midway when I heard Law shout once again.

"Get your hands off of my mother!" my finger curled as it hovered over Stefan's palm. In my peripheral vision, I could see my son struggling to break free from Bey's embrace. "Mother! Don't leave me! Don't come with him! Father! They're taking my mother away."

"Law," I whispered as I turned my head in his direction, only to have my heart broken once again. "My dear son..."

"Mother! Mother!!! Mother!!!!!! Let me go, Bey!" Law yelled while throwing his arms and feet aggressively. "Father!! Did you lie to me?! Where are you?!"

"My son..." I took a step forward but stopped when Stefan called and grabbed my wrist. "... please, Lexx. Just this once... I'll give you everything you want. Just... let me embrace him."

"Father...!! Someone is snatching your wife! I only want Mother to be your wife!"

Law was still shouting and talking to Sam, who wouldn't hear him, while Stefan and I gazed at each other. His grip around my wrist didn't loosen, but I was hoping he would let me just one more time. I just wanted to calm my son down and after that... I would be anyone Stefan would like.

"Be it an obedient doll or someone who will bear your children... I'll do it, Lexx. Just... let me... this once..." I begged under my breath as my sight blurred. Every time Law called for his father until his voice was coarse was akin to a dagger stabbing right through my chest. My heart sank when his lips parted and uttered a cold, "no," that faded in Law's loudest call for his father.

"Father!!! They are — " Law coughed, and I turned my head in his direction.

"Law!" I wanted to run back, but Stefan suddenly pulled my hand and dragged me with him.

"This is too much drama, sweetheart. It will be only hard for you if you..." he trailed off while my eyes dilated when I felt something... evil creep down my spine. I looked up out of instinct and saw that the dark field covering the sky gradually faded, revealing the dark blue sky, indicating it was nearing dawn.

"Isn't that..." I heard someone speak with the silence in the air, making me gaze in a certain direction. Since the mansion was situated in an elevated area and was overlooking the borders, I could see them. My eyes caught the flag that rose among the knights marching.

"... the imperial knight's flag?!"

"It is the emperor's flag. No question mark.. Haha!" From behind, I heard my husband's carefree voice, along with his gleeful laughter.