

# The Duke 571

## Chapter 571 - Because In Hell Is Where We All Belong

"You did save me the trouble... for once, Hell."

Stefan swung his foot forward and backward at a leisurely pace, as his leg was resting over the other. His eyes studied the pair of crimson eyes that emitted danger. Just moments ago, he felt his connection to his proxy end as Samael beheaded him in one move. So, he anticipated his brother's appearance.

As he waited, he was slightly distracted as he walked down the memory lane. Those days in the past were the days when the emperor was strict, but not to the point he wanted to ruin his children. Sadly, he couldn't remember where everything went downhill. When did things go from those leisurely days to days where waking up felt exhausting and draining?

When?

Stefan was certain if he asked Samael, the latter wouldn't also know. It felt as though everything just happened. Without them knowing, without them noticing. The change only let itself known when they looked back and saw nothing but the blood they left behind. The path where the more they walk forth, the bloodier it would get.

"Stefan." Samael's voice was cold and distant, gazing at the relaxed man sitting on one of the crates in the fort. Stefan was unlike his usual appearance five years ago. He wasn't in a neat uniform adorned with jewels and gold.

Instead, Stefan was just wearing a worn-out cloak. His hair had grown long and was tied up while some silver strands were falling to his side. He had also grown his beard. Aside from those changes, the life in Stefan's eyes was what caught Samael's attention. They didn't hold the same fire as five years ago, nor did they hold his grudges against the world.

They were empty.

A man who saw life and death as nothing would treat it with nonchalance. That was what Samael's initial thought as soon he locked eyes with him.

"You found out about it quite early," Stefan spoke with the same indifferent tone. "I'm impressed. You truly are amazing, Hell."

Samael shrugged nonchalantly. "What can I say? I am born to be amazing."

"And arrogant." Stefan chuckled, as he had grown used by his brother's arrogance by now. "You've been and will always be arrogant and... irresponsible. Just now, I was revisiting the time in the distant past and thought, 'wow... this third brother of mine is surely someone I shouldn't have trusted.'"

He slowly tilted his head back, gazing at the darkfield Samael unleashed. One could tell it was a far stronger darkfield than what Zero and Stefan put up together. To think a single man created this darkfield, Stefan would be foolish not to be amazed by it. Such a feat would only be attained by Samael, for he was born to be uselessly amazing.

"If only I didn't hold on to the words uttered recklessly, I wonder... if the deep traces it left in my soul wouldn't hurt as much as it did?" Stefan carefully pulled his head forth and looked at Samael once again. His lips curled up into an incomprehensible smile.

"If I didn't hold on to those 'you will always be there for me,' and 'you will save me in trouble,' would the betrayal be less painful?"

Samael remained silent as he let his brother talk, for this would be the last they would. As he listened, he couldn't also argue with him since he knew deep down he had committed irreversible mistakes in the past. After all, they didn't have a terrible relationship from the beginning. There were those early days where this young brother of his would seek him as he was... his number one supporter in his work.

The first person who had looked forward to all Samael's creation and would fight to get the first copy of anything he would do. That was Stefan. That was the little brother he knew before everything went south.

"Hell, I gave up everything," Stefan continued while holding his brother's gaze. "Just like what you asked five years ago, I stopped. Hah... that butler of yours had his interesting way of playing with one's mind, for sure."

"Listening to Fabian might break you to insanity or strengthen your mind."

Stefan chuckled while rocking his head. "I won't deny that. He asked me, why did I come back? I also wondered, Hell. Why did I come back in here when I already know what will happen?"

"Because we always do..." this time, Samael had his answers. "... this place is like a curse. No matter where we go, no matter how far, and even if we reach the last island... we always find ourselves stepping foot in this damn hell."

"Because in hell... is where we all belong," Stefan whispered with a bitter smile.

"Because in hell is where we all belong," Samael repeated with a slight nod. "Father's words had instilled deep within us, Stefan."

"It sure did." Stefan slowly lifted his leg away from the other as he slowly got up to his feet. "No matter how we despised him, he lived deep in every La Crox... so deep we loathe ourselves just as much as we loathe him."

This time, Samael couldn't help but chuckle as he nodded in agreement. "You always say the right thing. I'd say you're always as impressive as always."

"I am."

"Arrogant too," He shrugged, uttering the words Stefan spoke previously. When he did, both of them shared a few seconds of chuckles as if they weren't planning to put an end to this long feud.

"Oh, brother..." Stefan took a deep breath after he recovered from laughing. "Just when did it all go wrong? I can't trace where it all began and who to blame for it. Was it truly father? Was it because of the people whispering in his ear? Was it because of his prodigal son, who only knew was to challenge his authority at every turn he gets? Or... was it all of us? Who should we really need to blame?"

"If I know, I would've gossiped about it with my wife."

Stefan clicked his tongue. "Don't brag. She'll be mine if you die in here."

"Oh no. My wife will kill me twice if I die here."

"Aren't you obedient?" Stefan smirked as he gazed at him, "Then, I wish you luck."

"I won't. I will bid you farewell, though." The side of Samael's lips stretched until his fangs were showing. "It was a hell of a life, Stefan."

"It was a hell of a life, Hell."

The two of them remained silent for a few seconds, just staring at each other. They listened to the soundless song of the wind before their lips parted at the same time.

"Lancelot," whispered Stefan while Samael chanted, "blood art," as he sliced across his palm.

In the next beat, a fierce clash ensued with their lives on the line. They knew that to end this, one of them must die to close this long chapter in their long, tragic life.

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Chapter 572 - So That Is The Plan...

As the sun was about to rise, I took part in helping the injured. The sun, the beginning of the new day, gave us all hope despite the heart-wrenching sight of last night. Although a lot of us survived, there were also those people who lost their lives. We couldn't even celebrate as we helped the injured, those who lost a limb, an eye, and those on the verge of death.

Some people from inside the estate also helped carry the injured and retrieved the corpses of their family or friend. It was silent. Although there were constant sniffles and yells to communicate, it was dead silent for me.

While we're all busy... the sun we were all expecting to shine through gradually disappeared once again. Everyone stopped, including me, as we turned our heads to where the sun was rising. I held my breath and gazed up, seeing that we're slowly being caged in another darkness.

This time, I could tell the darkfield shrouding Minowa was darker, sturdier, and more dangerous to be in it. My heart throbbed loudly against my chest until it was painful.

"Why is that up again?" someone asked in a shaking voice.

"Did His Majesty..."

"Don't jump to that ridiculous conclusion!" Jaime yelled in irritation.

"It's darker than the previous one."

"This... when will it stop and end?"

Their confusion and worries filled the silent air before I felt their gazes on me. I ignored them and just stared at the darkfield with closed lips.

'When will this end...?' I repeated the question that lingered in my head. "Soon."

My eyes softened as they flickered with bitterness. A darkfield was always connected to its caster's emotions. The previous darkfield emanated danger and gave off the hint of Stefan and Zero's intention: disaster. But this one... this darkfield that the emperor created spoke... the end.

It wouldn't disappear unless Sam died, or he put it off. That also meant my husband... would take another brother of his. I knew Stefan was someone who must die with everything he had done. However, Sam always had a place in his heart for his siblings.

"Soon... this will all end," I whispered while balling my hand into a fist, taking a deep breath before peeling my eyes away from the darkfield. "Everyone, continue to help the injured and retrieve those honorable men from their families."

I paused and looked around at their faces mixed with all sorts of emotions. "The emperor had joined the battlefield. Rest assured... he will return victorious."

"Yes, Your Majesty!" the first to respond without question was Jaime, followed by Glory, and then the rest.

The emperor would return victorious for sure. I had trust in him. But... Sam... my husband... would return with another piece of his heart missing. That was the weight of the crown and this story. For the people, for our family, for peace... one must carry all the burden to meet that goal.

And the person who was carrying all that was Sam.

'God... please save my husband from falling further into the abyss.'

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Meanwhile, Heliot stood several meters away from Zero. He only glanced up at the darkfield created by Samael before setting his eyes back to his opponent. Around them were vampires from the Karo Kingdom fighting the undead, giving enough space for the two in the middle because none dared take a step in their vicinity unless they wanted to suffocate to death.

"He figured it out sooner than I expected," Zero mused, nodding approvingly. "As expected of the emperor of the Great Heart Empire."

Heliot didn't speak as he blinked calmly. Samael's letters turned out accurately. At first, Heliot was about to march to La Lona March to send a reinforcement as the first half of the letter from the emperor told them about the attacks in the west and east. But in the latter part, Samael requested his presence in the south while demanding reinforcement to the east.

Since Heliot had some level of trust in Samael's judgment, he followed the orders without question. But when they approached Minowa via ship, he finally understood the dangers in this place. If Samael didn't foresee this or they were late for a day, they could only expect the worse.

Although Heliot was certain Samael could reclaim control in Minowa, the latter would lose his mind before that. Zero and Stefan's aim was Lilou and Law, the emperor's son. Only those two individuals kept Samael sane until now; they were his Achilles heel. So, targeting those two and successfully harming them would result in the fall of this empire.

"I always wonder what you are thinking whenever you are deep in your thoughts, Heliot." Heliot snapped his eyes when Zero spoke in the same amused tone.

"It's nothing serious, Quentin, the king of Spade Kingdom. I'm simply relieved that we arrived on time."

"Oh? So you're just relieved, huh?"

Heliot let out a shallow breath as he glanced around. "Yes. I'm relieved to know that there were some from the mainland that are still around."

"Right... do you plan to use them as leverage to get away from disobeying the orders you received about killing Lilou?"

"Indeed. The people they sent on my way had drastically increased." Heliot nodded calmly. From the moment he stepped afoot in the south until now, his expression remained the same. "Thanks to His Majesty, the Emperor, my negotiation with the purebloods in the mainland had changed."

"Oh? Is that why you came here? To help the great emperor of the great empire? Are you perhaps thinking of subduing me?"

This time, the corner of Heliot's lips curled up. "Apparently, I do not have time to deal with you. Although I did come in here to help His Majesty for something else."

"Hah..." Zero frowned as he cocked his head to the side. He was certain Samael would surely go to Stefan first since they were brothers. Considering Samael's personality, he wouldn't allow other people to kill his brother other than himself. So that meant someone who was at the same caliber as Zero should face him, right?

Heliot was the perfect person for that role. In the blood hierarchy, the two of them were equal. In terms of strength, one could also say if they fight against each other, the result would be uncertain.

Noticing Zero's puzzlement, Heliot smiled politely. "It was a pleasant chat, Quentin. I will go collect the traitors of the mainland so they can finally let me go." He pivoted on his heel to walk away, just like that.

Zero frowned as it seemed Heliot was serious about dealing with those vampires instead of him. He rolled his eyes, pondering whether or not to let Heliot go. If he wanted to be smart, he would let go of Heliot, since that would work to his advantage.

"Alright, bye." He waved as if they were not in the middle of the battlefield. "See you around."

Heliot just glanced at him, seeing that Zero also walked the other way. He truly didn't plan to fight Zero for the greater cause of this situation those two had caused. To take advantage of the situation... everyone had expected and waited to happen.

"I don't think I will ever see you again, Quentin," he whispered as he marched away.

As Zero thought of going to Stefan to watch his fight with Samael, he stopped when a sword struck the concrete several meters in front of him. His brow arched, gazing at the figure that came right after to pick up the sword.

"Oh..." his lips formed into an o-shape as soon as his eyes landed on the person before him. "So, that is the plan... Heliot."

"Hello there, Sir Rufus Barrett," Zero added as the side of his lips stretched into an amused smirk.

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Chapter 573 - A Human Against A Pureblood

"Hello there, Sir Rufus Barrett."

Zero scrutinized Rufus from head to toe while the latter pulled out the sword from the concrete. The side of his lips curled up into a smirk, realizing the reason that despite Heliot's presence, he didn't plan on fighting him. It seemed Samael had truly become the cunning man for wanting to take advantage of this situation.

He couldn't help but chuckle loudly, running his hands through his hair. "Oh, Samael La Crox... isn't he amazing? Are you telling me we created this opportunity for him?"

"He is amazing, indeed." Rufus nodded as he swung his sword down. "For you... who wants to become a God to dance at a mortal's tune. Only His Majesty can do that."

"What a virulent tongue you have, Sir Knight."

"Pardon if that offended you, but I only spoke the truth, King of Spade." Rufus let out a deep breath as he scrutinized this man. Right now, Zero was open from all sides and one could attack while thinking they would land a hit. But from his experience, Zero might appear open, but he wasn't. He couldn't approach or attack him without caution because one wrong move and Rufus would die.

"Well, I'm not offended. Just a bit... irked. Very well, since you came in here yourself, it will be better to chat with you before sending your head to your emperor for this insolence." Zero clicked his tongue as he rolled his eyes, planting his fist on his hips. "It's really insulting to send you to fight me to get the recognition and honor you needed. I don't know if Heliot and Samael's brains are working properly or if they were originally numbskulls. How insulting."

"I'm sorry that you have to fight a small fry like me."

"No need to apologize." Zero waved magnanimously. "I just feel bad for you since it is obvious your emperor doesn't care about your life anymore for sending you to me. Poor you."

Rufus smiled, which didn't reach his eyes. He was already used to this kind of discrimination from noble vampires this past five years. So, Zero's words didn't affect him at all. What was important to him was Samael's opinion from then until right in this second and even in the future.

"King of the Spade Kingdom," he spoke in the same cold baritone voice. "I appreciate you are concerned about me. I expected you won't even say a word, considering your greatness and such."

"Heh... the honorable Rufus Barret, the emperor's cherished personal hellhound, is right in front of me. How can I not say a word?"

"Honor... what is honor for you, Your Majesty?" Rufus lowered his eyes before raising them up once again as they glinted. "Could it be called honor when you look back and see a pile of lifeless bodies? Is a man honorable when his hands were sullied by the countless lives he had taken? Honestly, whenever I looked at the debris, this tongue of mine had caused for ordering to burn down an enemy country and taking away another person's home... I always wondered what is the real meaning of honor."

Rufus shut his mouth as he gazed at Zero. He had already lost sight of what honor to him despite the countless victories in the past five years. Not that he blamed Samael for ordering him to do all that, but the battlefield had taught him a lot.

There was no right or wrong in war, nor there was room for mercy. Everyone was equal. Everyone had a reason. A man only needed to have more resolve and a stronger reason. For Rufus, that wasn't for honor, neither it was for glory. It was not also for the people or for the land they called home.

For him, it was for a friend — his one and only friend, whom he looked up, respected, and cherished. His friend who believed in him from day one until now.

So, he wanted to save his friend from that madness.

Selfishness, as it may sound, but that was his sole reason to fight. He didn't have regrets even if he had to take a thousand more lives because humans... were naturally selfish.

"I see..." Zero rocked his head in understanding as his expression died down. "So, you are really here with an intention of killing me?"

"There's no other reason than that."

Zero let out a shallow breath as he shrugged. "Can I ask you one thing, Sir Barrett?"

"Please."

"Are you confident that you can take me on?" he asked with an arched brow, tilting his head to the side. "My willingness to take part in this bigger scheme, as if I didn't know a thing, will depend on your answer. You better think about it carefully."

Rufus chuckled as Zero was quite a surprising character. "No, I am not confident," he answered honestly while gripping his sword.

"To tell you the truth, I know my chances of survival."

"And how high is it?"

"What an odd question. It's supposed to be 'how low it is?' don't you think, Quentin?"

Zero shrugged, closed-lipped. "So, how low is it?"

"A miracle." Zero's brows raised, as he didn't expect Rufus's answer would be actually quite interesting. "In blood hierarchy, you stood on the top of the ladder while I was on the bottom. In terms of strength, I can't even calculate how strong you are, but I am certain you already had a vague idea of my strength. The difference between a pureblooded vampire and a human is akin to heaven and hell. I can only hope for a miracle."

"A miracle, huh?" Zero chuckled as he listened to Rufus's explanation, and yet, despite the odds, here he was. "Do you think a miracle will happen, then?"

"No."

"Then, you must be prepared to die."

"I am, but I don't plan on dying here." Rufus raised his chin as he took a stance to attack him.

"Haha! What a confusing man!" Zero intoned as the side of his lips stretched from ear to ear. "This is interesting. Then come at me with everything you got, Sir Barrett. I will surely give you the highest respect you deserved by fighting you with my all."

There was a stillness in the air for a second before the ground underneath Rufus cracked. In a heartbeat, both disappeared from their standpoint as the battle of a pureblood and a human ensued.

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NOVEL FACT:

Did you know? Beatrice is the other person who knew what Yulis looks like? Yulis is the most handsome of all characters. xD But Yulis didn't know this because Beatrice didn't want the competition. lol.

#### Chapter 574 - What Do You Regret?

"Let me have Stefan's head."

Samael uttered in a quiet voice. Around him were his trusted vassal, who sat around the table days before the attack in Minowa. There was stillness in the air as all eyes were on him.

"If there is someone who will kill him... that should be me." He raised his gaze and scanned their solemn faces. "If my guess is correct, any moment from now, they will surely make a move in Minowa. A lot of people will die, but I believe in the empress and save as many as she can."

"We do not question Her Majesty's capability to reduce the damages that would be made, but... should you join yourself, Your Majesty?" Ramin voiced his concern because Samael was not a duke anymore. He was the Emperor of an Empire and going to the front line himself would make it look like he didn't trust his people on doing the job.

"I agree with Ramin, Your Majesty." Dominique also chimed in, backing up the emperor's left-hand man. "The position you are standing on isn't something to be put in peril."

"Of course His Majesty should stand in the front line." This time, Charlotte spoke and disagreed with the two men. "What I think is his presence will boost the knight's morale."

The three of them argued for quite some time while Samael kept quiet. Meanwhile, Rufus's eyes were fixed on him. The latter only peeled his eyes away after a minute and set them to the people arguing.

"I agree with Charlotte. If there is one person who shall end the previous emperor, that would be the current one. It will not matter anymore since everyone already believed His Majesty killed Stefan all this time. We're just making it come true." All of them turned silent when Rufus finally spoke, gazing at the man with mixed emotions. "Also... this may sound selfish, but it's a family matter of the royal family."

"I am also part of that family, General." Dominique's eyes darkened as his fingers slowly curled. "However, I am not speaking due to personal interest. I am protecting the honor of the emperor and I believed he shouldn't stoop so low as to sully his hands once again."

"Sully..." Charlotte snickered as her eyes glinted. But just as her lips parted and speak the words that would ignite the heated argument, Jayden broke his silence.

"His Majesty should do it." Dominique and everyone set their eyes on Jayden. The latter was gazing at the table before shifting his eyes to Samael. "Whether or not we admit it, this matter is personal for all of us. His Majesty had carried the burden of the crown all this time and this... this added weight and blood that will smear on the throne shall be borne by the person who is sitting on it."

Jayden paused as he peeled his eyes away from Samael to the people around the table. "If we include the plans we have until now, Stefan must end in the hands of the last La Crox that will rule



the empire. It is not a matter of strength or pride or blood hierarchy. As what the General stated, it is a personal matter the Emperor himself shall carry out."

Silence filled the room once again after Jayden spewed facts. For obvious reason, what Jayden uttered was already known to them, but none of them voiced it out directly. Samael glanced at Jayden and smirked wryly.

"Jayden is right." Samael rocked his head lightly, letting out a faint breath. "Stefan must end in the hand of the last La Crox who will reign this empire. His death... will be mine to carry and he shall end in my time. Any more objections?"

His eyes gloss over the faces of his vassals before he nodded approvingly when none of them raised concerns. "Then, that concludes today's meeting."

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'His death will be mine to carry...'

Those words that left Samael's mouth days prior to the present hovered over his head. His eyes drooped slightly as bitterness glinted across his eyes.

"The crown... is heavy," he whispered, holding Stefan's back with his face over his brother's shoulder. "It's heavy, Stef, it is driving me insane."

Stefan simpered as he clutched Samael's shoulder blade. "Do you now understand me, third brother?"

"Yes." Samael breathed out as his eyes lowered, while the space between his brows wrinkled in pain. "It took me a long time, my little brother."

A wry smile appeared on Stefan's lips as blood dripped from the corner of his lips. "Then, that's good enough for me." He swallowed down the blood that was traveling up to his throat, almost choking him.

"My death... will be something that will always haunt you for as long as you lived, Hell." His breathing grew heavier by the second as his grip on Samael's shoulder blade weakened. "That is... your punishment. These very hands that had taken the lives of your brothers and sister will never be clean."

"Mhm." Samael looked up at the darkfield he created while his jaw tightened.

"Do you regret it?" asked Stefan with great difficulty.

"Killing you? No."

"Then what do you regret?"

Samael answered a second later after taking a deep breath. "Loving you."

"Hah..." A weak chuckle slipped past Stefan's lips at the response he received, but his eyes softened as peace dominated his face. It was a long fight — not just tonight, but the fight from centuries ago until now. Both of them did their best, giving each other a hard time, and gaining a step ahead simultaneously.

But it finally came to an end.

With Samael's hands plunged inside his chest and fingers wrapped around Stefan's heart, life was slowly slipping away from his grip. Just like the blood that was oozing from his wound, Stefan couldn't stop it. All he could do was speak a few words before his brother could take out his heart.

"At one point... I did love you too, fourth brother. Somewhere in me, still wished we didn't reach this point." Stefan breathed heavily as his body leaned against Samael's body, losing his footing. "If only... you didn't love her... I might've found my salvation."

Samael clenched his teeth as his eyes sweltered. "I also wished I didn't love her."

"She'll kill you if she hears that," came out a mumble as Stefan fought his eyelids from closing. "But... at least, there is a moment in this story where I loved her more than you do."

"You always loved her more than I do... you always loved us more than I do, Stefan." Samael clutched Stefan's back as he admitted that Stefan's love for Lilou and for his siblings was greater than anyone. The problem was, Stefan had the wrong method of doing things. No, that was not correct. The problem lied in the wrong circumstances Stefan was in that forced him to resort to extreme ways to protect the people he loved.

Even if it meant being the villain of another person's story.

Stefan chuckled weakly as he could feel he was reaching the end. Just as he did, his eyes softened as he had a quick peek at the memory that flashed back before entering the death's door.

"That butler was right..." he whispered as he took his last deep breath. "... haha... what a funny memory to remember at death's door. Hey, Hell... can you tell me what happened to the person you're writing about?"

Samael swallowed down the tension in his throat as Stefan's back that was heaving heavily stopped and the heart under his grip also stopped beating. Stefan died just before he could get the answer to his question. He died with his last words, asking about the book Samael wasn't able to write for him to read.

Now, Samael had another regret on his list.

"What happened to him...?" Samael ground his teeth as he crushed Stefan's heart while his other arm carried the weight of his body. "... Finally, after walking in circles with nothing but his hate in his crippling reality that he cannot break free... he found his peace. It may sound like a sad ending, but actually... it was the peaceful ending he deserved, brother. Only the ones who outlived him were haunted down by the deep traces he left."

A tear leaked from Samael's eyes as Stefan's body felt like it weighed a thousand tons. "May peace be with you, my little brother."

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"As children, we loved heroes. But as adults, we understand the villains."

Novel Fact:

The story of Samael's novel is about a young boy who always seeks justice and righteousness. Growing up, the boy pursued to be a man of valor. However, the reality wasn't all rainbows and butterflies. Faced with the dark and corrupted truth of the world, the young boy, whose pure

intention to be the hero and protect his loved ones, slowly changed to meet the demands of the world to survive.

In the end, he became someone who wasn't able to stop the corruption, nor did he become the person to uproot evil. Instead, he lost sight of what is right and wrong, his heart started vanishing, fought evil with evil, and became the villain who brought terror to the world.

#### Chapter 575 - A Step Before The Finish Line

When Dominique and Jayden finally caught up to where the emperor was, they halted from a distance. The place Samael and Stefan fought was quite far from the ruckus in Minowa. Hence, there weren't people around to witness what happened. Even so, just by the figures they were seeing, the two of them knew it ended.

"We're late," Dominique whispered as he balled his hands into a fist.

"We took quite a while fighting those vampires from the mainland... this is to be expected," Jayden muttered as his eyes were fixed on Samael and Stefan.

It had been around three hours or more since Samael left them to clean up the vampires posing as Stefan and Zero. It didn't take them long since Stefan and Zero didn't have time to control those vampires anymore. But what kept them behind were the purebloods from the mainland.

"This is what I said when he shouldn't do it himself." Dominique's eyes softened as he gazed at Samael's back. Right now, Samael was slumped to the concrete while still holding the kneeling Stefan in his arms. Blood pooled underneath the two of them, but it didn't matter.

"One had lost his life... while the other lost a large piece of his heart," he added while his fist trembled.

Although Dominique had followed Stefan from the beginning, he had always known Samael had loved his siblings. The latter might have his unconventional way of showing it, but that was an unchanging fact. There would always be a place for them in Samael's heart and their deaths... was not something Samael would ever wish for if he had a choice.

After all, Samael went through unimaginable torture just so his siblings could survive those dark days when their father was alive. He went through all that and never once complained, nor did he bring it up to guilt-trip them. Those alone were enough proof for them to know that Samael had tried to be the big brother they could rely on.

But their circumstances slowly went out of hand. With the La Crox children having unique personalities and such, Samael's sacrifices weren't enough anymore.

"That is the weight of the crown." Jayden's jaw tightened as he steeled his heart at the vulnerable side of Samael. None of them had witnessed Samael break down in the lives he had taken. Their third brother, the emperor, was strong enough to squash his enemies like bugs.

So until now, none of them witnessed, nor did they have an idea of how Samael grieved for Alphonse's death. They didn't know how Samael's heart broke apart during Cassara's funeral, and how he held Alistair's cold hands in silence. None of them knew the gravity of the crown that happened during this long story.

Only today, right at this moment, the two realized that Samael wouldn't just laugh after killing his brother, nor did he bear a smug smirk as if he received a badge of honor. Only now do they realize that Samael... in every death of his brothers and sisters, he was the one who was in the most pain.

Just now... did they see Samael would be vulnerable because he promised to protect them. But the circumstances and the life choices they made resulted in Samael having to kill the ones he promised to protect.

"I don't even want to know why Stefan betrayed us." Dominique let out a shallow breath as he looked down. His brows elevated and wrinkled a bit as he forced a smile despite the angst welling up in his chest.

"It's obvious why," he added as seeing this made him realize one more thing. "Because if he didn't, Hell will have to kill us as well."

"In the end, Stefan is the wise one. He didn't want us to die, and he saved Hell the trouble of killing more of his brothers," Jayden whispered with a heavy heart.

Their guess might be incorrect. There were more other reasons why Stefan left these two behind five years ago and connived with Zero. But... they wanted to believe in this reason. After seeing Samael, they wanted to believe that was Stefan's only reason.

"Jayden, you may go and check Rufus and Prince Heliot. I will oversee this area so no one will see His Majesty's current state," Dominique ordered while Jayden tilted his head down.

"Then I supposed I should entrust this to you. It wasn't the end yet, after all." That was all Jayden uttered before glancing back at Samael for the last time.

When Jayden left, Dominique's lips parted. "No, Jay. We are at the step before the finish line. Rufus... will never get defeated by someone like Quentin."

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Rufus covered his right eye as blood dripped down from it. Zero was strong and he could barely keep up with him.

"That's quite a weak reaction considering you just lost an eye," Zero mused with a smirk, nodding approvingly. "Well, considering you only need a miracle in this battle, losing an eye or a limb is actually amazing in a way since you're still alive."

"That is right." Rufus dropped his hand to reveal the slice that came from over his brow, across his cheek. He had his bleeding eye closed, enduring the stinging pain that prickled a part of his brain.

"I am prepared to sacrifice a limb or an eye or even my capabilities to fight again."

"Amusing!" Zero clapped as his smirk cemented on his face. "I like you more and more, General. No wonder you are called the strongest human in the empire."

"I beg to disagree. I am not the strongest human on this continent." Rufus picked up his broken sword ever so slowly. Unlike Zero, who barely had scratches, Rufus's injuries were dire and fatal. But this didn't kill his spirit as he already planned to kill Zero — even if that meant he would also lose his life.

"Right... there is a certain butler who didn't fight for that title." Zero nodded, recalling Fabian, whom he only fought for quite a while. "Honestly, unlike you who needs a miracle, that butler will

have more chances of survival if he fights me. Just the thought of him could sense a chill down my spine. What a lunatic."

Rufus chuckled, not a bit offended at Zero's words. If anything, he was quite proud that Zero recognized his brother's strength. Fabian was, after all, stronger than Rufus. The only issue with Fabian was... he was a lunatic.

"I will surely let your praises..." he trailed off as both of them furrowed their brows.

"Hah... he died before me, huh?" Zero muttered as he looked up, frowning at the life force he felt ended. "What a shame..."

Meanwhile, Rufus ground his teeth and gripped the handle tightly. He also felt Stefan's aura disappear. That only meant Samael had killed him and... that was his cue to end this as well.

"Don't be sad, Quentin," Rufus muttered as he watched Zero return his gaze at him. "I thought you are only working together, but it seemed a surprising friendship was created in the process."

"Well, Stefan was surprisingly a character, you know? He is probably the only person in this world I will never understand, but he is also the only person I can't disagree with."

"Mhm." Rufus nodded as he hummed. "Then... I will send you with him so he wouldn't get sad."

Zero smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. "Let's see it then."

Rufus took a deep breath as he channeled all his remaining strength into his sword, his eye glinting dangerously. For Samael, Rufus promised to end his sufferings. In a second, the two of them leaped forward to meet halfway.

"Heavenly departure," came out of Rufus's mouth as his sword glowed with a blinding light. "Strike."

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Novel Fact:

Did you know? When Heliot returned to the Karo Kingdom five years ago, he was put into torture because he surrendered half of his life to Lilou? Heliot was supposed to kill Lilou, but instead, he gave her a chance to live. He was only saved when Samael marched into the said kingdom and dealt with the Von Stein clan and the purebloods from the mainland, who gave the order for Lilou's death.

Chapter 576 - Rufus

"Your name is Roscoe?"

Rufus stared at the clear blue sky as a man's voice caressed his ears. The weather today was great, he thought. He couldn't help but adore today's weather despite he was littered with bruises after his fistfight with this stranger.

"Robert?" the man, who was lying on the same ground as Rufus, tilted his head to recall his name. Unlike Rufus, who was busy admiring the weather, this person couldn't even bother.

"Ri... Ricardo?"

Rufus took a deep breath and closed his eyes. "Rufus."

"Ahh... right! Rufus! What an odd name, Rufus." The man furrowed his brows as he thought of his name. "Why are you named Rufus?"

"Who knows... I'm not the person who named myself."

"You have weird parents."

Rufus chuckled weakly. "And you?" he inquired, recalling that he didn't ask the person's name even before they fought each other.

"My name?"

"Mhm."

"I'm... I actually don't want to have a name."

"Why?"

"Because I don't want to be remembered?"

Rufus furrowed his brows. He already knew this person was an odd one — just like his missing little brother. But his answer was odd. Who wouldn't want to be remembered? Who wouldn't want their names to be so renowned that they would reach even heaven?

"You're an odd one," he remarked under his breath. "Even felons want their name to be known to others."

"You're right. Even so, I don't like to be remembered. I hate my family name and the name they call me. They're all bullies for giving me a damn nickname," the man grumbled.

After the man released his complaints about his family, silence enveloped the two of them. They just lied there on the ground, both covered with bruises and a bit of blood. Despite how exhausted their bodies were, they couldn't seem to pass out.

"How many days did we fight?" asked the man out of plain curiosity. All he knew was that they fought for a few nights and days without taking a break.

"How many days... I lost count on the third day."

"Man... I'm hungry." The man grumbled as he pulled himself to sit upright. Rufus shifted his eyes when the man turned his head to him. Silver hair and crimson eyes were squinting because he was grinning.

"I lost," Rufus muttered after a few seconds of staring at this stranger.

"Huh?"

"You got up first. I lost." He admitted while seeing the confusion in the man's face. After fighting this man for days without break, Rufus couldn't even lift a finger. He was exhausted and his bones felt wobbly. But this man... although he collapsed at the same time as Rufus, he still had the energy to stand up after hours of lying down.

"It's not like I have a chance if you bare your fangs." Rufus peeled his eyes away from him to the sky. "Why didn't you bare your fangs or use that vampiric ability? If you do, it will not take that long... ah."

Rufus nodded his head in understanding as a sudden thought crossed his head. "So, this is how you toy with people, huh? You will make them fight for days to the point they can't even lift a finger before killing them."

"Hey... you're being too much. Do you think I am someone who has a home to take you home where I can torture you?"

"Who knows what kind of maniac you are?"

The man clicked his tongue in irritation. "I don't have an appetite anymore." He collapsed on his back with a frown.

"They said you are the strongest one in this place. So, of course, I am curious to see how strong a human can be. I will not be able to test that if I used my vampire abilities," he explained after a minute of silence.

"Why do you need to test it?" Rufus inquired out of plain curiosity.

The man remained silent for another minute before his lips curled up into a smirk. "Because... I need someone strong to sit on somewhere."

"Huh?"

"Hey!" the man rolled to his side, propping his temple on his knuckles, eyes on Rufus. He waited for Rufus to look at him with an arched brow. As soon as their eyes met, the side of the man's lips stretched into a grin until his teeth showed.

"Can you help me with something?" Rufus's brows furrowed at the man's request. "Can you be the king?"

Rufus thought he had heard all ridiculous things a person could speak of. But he thought wrong. The man's request was the most ridiculous he had heard. Little did he know that time that he would hear that again several years later from a woman's lips. Neither did Rufus think that someday... he had to decide to give the man's an answer.

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Many, many years later, Rufus stood behind that same man he had a fistfight with until they both dropped many years ago. His hand holding his wrist on his back gripped it tightly as his jaw locked. Right now, Samael was holding a private funeral for his brother, Alphonse, and Alistair.

No one was around the palace's chapel aside from the two of them. No one... was witnessing Samael grieve aside from Rufus. Just like always, Rufus was the only one who was witnessing everything. The only person who was allowed to see this side of this monstrous man.

"Ru, do you remember my question before?" asked Samael while staring at the coffin, hands on top of it.

"Yes."

Samael remained silent as he took a slow breath. "Lilou asked you before, but obviously, our preparation is not enough. But... what is your answer?"

"..." Rufus hung his head low because, until now, he didn't have an answer.

"Don't worry. You have time to answer that because for now..." Samael slowly pivoted on his heel to face Rufus with dead eyes. "For now, I will fill that role to put the people in their rightful place. Ru, while I take this role, I will have to use you at my own disposal. You can presume I will drive you to insanity and create a maniacal beast everyone will fear."

Samael paused as he held his gaze. "You might lose sight of what is right and wrong; what is honorable and abusive, and you might forget who you are and what you are fighting for. If you leave now, I will not seek you or send people to drag you back. You better make your decision now, for I will stop at nothing once I walk out of this door and meet those fools in the throne hall."

Rufus stared at Samael for a long time before he marched towards him. He then knelt on his one knee, reaching for Samael's hand and guiding it until it touched his forehead.

"I, Rufus Barrett, swore my unbending loyalty and life to Samael La Crox. At His Majesty's behest, I shall follow your decree."

"Then, from now on, Rufus Barrett, I expect you to make your name known that even heaven will hear your name and the devils underground will fear." Samael took a deep breath as his eyes glinted.

"Your wish is my command."

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## Chapter 577 - Rufus II

That day, Samael claimed the throne. That was also the day of a promise only the two of them knew. Rufus gave his all to follow his king's command. Samael was correct with his warnings at the madness he had to walk into. The further he delved in, the darker and scarier it became.

Rufus' trail had never become bloodier than ever as he took part in every war and stood at the kingdoms who opposed the new emperor. In the first war, his name was like a bell that only faintly rings when heard. The second one, his name, sounded louder. Third, fourth, until Rufus had lost count at how many kingdoms he marched on the front line to burn, to ruin, to seize.

He didn't realize until kingdoms would automatically raise a white flag, with just the thought of Rufus marching to their place himself. Rufus, the military general, also known as the emperor's hellhound, had become a hero to the people, but also a nightmare to those opposing kingdoms.

He had done all that all for the sake of just one person.

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Rufus collapsed on his knees, looking down as blood dripped down from him. He had done his best until now, took countless lives without batting an eye, and gritting his teeth every time the pang of guilt attack him. He didn't regret anything, though.



"Ah... a miracle," Zero voiced out, standing behind Rufus but not facing him. Their backs were facing each other, standing a few meters apart. One was kneeling on his knees, while the other one was standing leisurely.

The only similarity in their situation was the land they were standing on pooled with blood.

Zero looked up at the darkfield and smiled weakly. "Rufus... meaning, Red. Why are you named like that?"

Rufus didn't answer, as he was barely breathing. His fight with Zero was intense, as the man didn't also hold back. It was a miracle he wasn't losing his consciousness.

"Haha... well, I guess that is the mystery I will have to think about and will keep me busy." Zero nodded weakly, looking up. "Oy, Rufus... you better use my name and use all the compliments you can think of once you spread my name alongside yours."

"By now, I'm certain you already know how to rile up the people's emotions, right? The Military General Rufus Barrett, a person who is a mere human, ended the tyranny of the great king of the spade kingdom, the renowned genius vampire who, unfortunately, succumbed to madness."

Zero chuckled in ridicule as he closed his eyes. "Add something like... the man who never drops on his back even until the end."

Thud!

Rufus gripped his sword handle as his support when he heard Zero collapse. He looked back only to see Zero fall — face first.

"The man, who is, in the very end, arrogant," he muttered with a weak chuckle, feeling his lungs constrict. "But sure... I will surely add something like 'the man who never fell on his back even until the end.'"

Rufus coughed out blood as his fight with Zero lasted longer. The latter was surely powerful and until now, Rufus didn't know how he beat such a monstrous person.

"Captain!"

Suddenly, he heard a familiar voice and raised his gaze at the source. There, he saw Ramin rushing to him. He heaved a sigh of relief, vision zooming in and out as he was on the verge of losing consciousness. Fortunately, Ramin was quick enough to catch him, holding Rufus' shoulder to still him.

"Captain!" Ramin scanned Rufus, making his grip tighten. He had never seen Rufus inflict such wounds; not to mention the deep wound in Rufus' eyes.

"His Majesty?" asked Rufus, along with his ragged breathing. "Have you seen him?"

"Yes. Dominique is with him, so I already came to check on you." Ramin shifted his eyes towards Zero's body.

"He was a tough one," Rufus humored as he clutched his chest. "I thought I will die."

"You are not allowed to die, Captain. The emperor's order." Ramin sighed as he assisted Rufus in getting him out of here. He held Rufus's arms and draped it across his shoulder, carrying the weight of his captain. Ramin then wrapped his arm around Rufus' waist as he stood up.

Rufus chuckled as he felt so weak, letting Ramin support him to stand. As they turned around, his eyes landed on Zero's figure.

"What a man," he muttered with a weak smile. "I wonder if he is disappointed in dying in the hand of a human?"

"I'm sure he didn't." Ramin glanced at him and chuckled faintly. "Fighting you will make even a pureblood feel honored to die in your hands."

"You think so highly of me."

Ramin chuckled once again, dragging Rufus away. "I am just speaking the truth, Captain. You are, after all, an incredible man to fight with."

Rufus just glanced at Ramin and shook his head weakly. Even when he wanted to argue, he thought of using his remaining energy to rest. He was too exhausted to fight, and he didn't plan to die in here as well.

As Ramin dragged him, Rufus looked up and saw the dark field surrounding the south. His eyes instantly narrowed as his brows furrowed.

"Ra, did His Majesty end Stefan?" he asked, making Ramin pause to look at him.

"Yes. Stefan died and Zero too. We'll surely clean things up now since --"

"No," Rufus muttered, which made Ramin knit his brows. "Why is the darkfield still there?" he asked while staring at the darkfield.

"What do you mean? That is so no one will escape..." Ramin trailed off as his eyes slowly dilated. Not just him, but Rufus also froze as soon as he felt the surge of power that forced the two of them onto their knees.

"What... is... His Majesty...?" Ramin felt his chest tighten while clutching it.

For Ramin, this was an unfamiliar power, but for Rufus, he had felt this before. This surge of power that no one, even its source, could control... this force that he had felt from centuries ago.

"His Majesty..." Rufus breathed out as he looked up. "... it's not over yet."

Because this power was what Samael unleashed before he entered his long slumber.

## Chapter 578 - Understanding His Breaking Point

I paced back and forth in front of the door. Inside this room were Law and Fabian. I didn't know what Fabian was doing to my son, but what I knew was Law's life was connected with Stefan. If Stefan and Sam were fighting to the death... No, I didn't want to think about it.

If Stefan died and his life was still connected with my son, then... that only meant I would lose Law. If Sam didn't have a plan, he would die and Law would live. I didn't want to make such sacrifices; I couldn't lose either of them.

"Sam..." I whispered, planting my bloodstained hand on the surface of the door. "Law... please."

Suddenly, I heard Law scream from inside. I wanted to barge inside that second, but I stopped myself as I promised to trust Fabian. He told me if I see what was inside, I might do everything in my power to stop him and it would only endanger Law.

"How can I stay still if my son is screaming in pain?" I muttered, curling my fingers against the door while my eyes sweltered. I felt so helpless, powerless, and pathetic.

Even after battling before Sam's forces arrived, and even after helping everyone back to get treated, I couldn't feel the fatigue of this endless darkness. I couldn't heave a sigh of relief even for once, knowing that I might lose my son or my husband tonight.

Just the thought of it was akin to a dagger stabbing me right through my chest.

My life was falling apart bit by bit, but that didn't matter now.

What I just wanted was for the two of them to be fine; I would do anything, even trade this world if that meant my son and husband would survive this endless night.

"Sam... Law..."

The space between my brows wrinkled as tears spilled from my eyes. I felt my bones wobble before collapsing on my knees, eyes on the door. This door... that separated me from my son, could be broken down with one kick. But right now, it appeared as though no matter what kicking and pounding I would do against it, it wouldn't open up for me.

If this was retribution, I would gladly accept it.

"Just take my life," I whispered to whoever was listening to a sinful creature like me. "Please... just save my son and husband. Not them..."

I hiccuped, succumbing to the powerless little girl deep within my heart. I felt like shrinking to that person I used to be. I was scared of the outcome. After witnessing the weeping families for their loss, I was terrified to be one of them. It was selfish, but I couldn't deny that I didn't want to be one who would also weep at losing a family.

CLANG!

I looked back when I heard a loud shatter from not far away. Standing on the shards of glasses was Charlotte, looking at me with panic.

"Your Majesty!" she hollered, eyes barely blinking. Just the sight of her already told me something incredibly wrong happened.

I felt my heart throb loudly against my chest that second. The hand of the clock was frozen in time as I watched Charlotte's mouth move.

"His Majesty had gone berserk!"

For a moment, I heard this ringing sound piercing my eardrums, as I couldn't understand her words. Although it repeated in my head like a broken record, I knew... my heart knew it was a situation none of us anticipated.

Berserk? Sam had gone berserk? Was that a very bad thing? It must be... considering Charlotte's pale complexion. I looked up when she was squatting in front of me, holding my shoulders as she shook me awake.

"Your Majesty! Please get a hold of yourself!" Her eyes spoke a thousand words of worry, grinding her teeth in desperation. "His Majesty needs you... no, this entire empire needs you. Please stop His Majesty before he wipes out all his people as well!"

"Charlotte...?" I looked up at her and snapped my eyes when a tear rolled down her cheeks.

"Please... save His Majesty..." she pleaded through her gritted teeth, gripping my shoulder even tighter. "... please get him out of the infinite darkness he was trapped with."

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"Milord, why did you force yourself to sleep?"

"Because... I was tired."

I remembered fuming in anger when I heard that silly reason, so I blurted out without thinking.

"Tired? You were tired, so you abandoned your people?"

"Heh. Sometimes, no matter how powerful someone is, there is always a breaking point, Lil. Be it, vampires or humans, we always break at one point."

"But you had responsibilities. The people of Grimsbanne had their lives in your hands, including a peasant like me. Was it easy for vampires to let their responsibility and obligation go when things get rough for them?" I voiced out my dismay, but what I received in return was an explanation I barely understood at that time.

"I'm glad... that someone like you still exists in this kingdom. Your love for the people of Grimsbanne is far more noble than ours. You understand the sufferings of my people, but I can't sympathize. Not that I can't; I would rather take action to repay my people's losses. But my credence and my methods drove me to the point I've become a threat to the people I'm fighting for."

That conversation years ago, when Sam proposed to me, replayed in my head like it was just yesterday. I never understood Sam's words back then, but now... my mind, heart, and soul comprehended that breaking point he was talking about. I now understood his exhaustion, of what drained this man that he slept for thousands of years as I looked at him from a distance.

Sam held Heliot's hair, lifting him up with just one hand. He looked like the devil incarnate — no; he looked as if he was the demon king himself.

"Who are you against with?" I whispered the words I asked him back then, and he answered, "the king."

Who would have thought that from eight years ago until now... he was fighting the same person? Although it was not the king anymore, but the emperor.

'I'm not afraid of the king, milord.' My tiny voice back then echoed in my ear as my eyes softened.

"I'm not afraid of the emperor, my love," I repeated under my breath, taking a step forward in an attempt to stop his madness. Even if it meant I would sacrifice a limb or my life. I would save my husband.

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## Chapter 579 - Was It Worth It?

I wished I could save Sam. I wished I could save Stefan, Hanzel, Alphonse, and Alistair. If I was given the chance to live at the same time as them, the same time where they weren't ruined, I would

break my heart into many pieces to fill theirs. The pitiful La Crox children had loved each other, but their circumstances forced them to eliminate each other.

Greed.

Power.

Glory.

Was the late king happy at the outcome? I wanted to ask that man if he was proud to see his children fight each other to death. Was it worth it? If I could ask their father just one last time — just one — I would ask him if it was worth it.

To sacrifice the happiness of his children, to taint them all black, to instill hatred in their innocent hearts, and to force them to lead a long, tragic life.

To stand above others where no one could reach. To stand at the peak where you won't hear anyone. Was the late king happy that his son reached a height where our voices paled in comparison with the defeating silence up there on the top?

"Is it you?" I heard Sam's low voice ask Heliot while tilting his head to the side. "Are you the person who ruined my Grimsbanne?"

By the looks of it, Heliot and Sam had fought before I arrived. But it was obvious who stood victorious as Sam held Heliot's hair up with one hand.

Heliot snickered as he gazed up at him. "Samael La Crox, so you stepped into a landmine after killing your brother, huh? I should've known Stefan had his last card."

"The hell? Did Stefan order this?" Sam frowned. "That fucker and that fucking Alexander think I'm a pushover, huh?"

My heart clenched as I approached and heard the words that were coming out of his mouth. Was this Stefan's curse before he died? I was uncertain. But what I was certain was... my husband's mind returned to the time everyone was still alive. The time where his brothers were still running amok in the capital. The time where he was still pressured by the Bloodfang.

He was trapped at the time... I wasn't alive yet.

"Sam," I called, clasping my skirt tightly while waiting for him to cock his head in my direction. He quirked a brow as soon as his eyes landed on me.

"Well, who could this be?" he let go of Heliot, pivoting on his heel while gazing at me from head to toe. "I smell a Bloodfang, huh?"

His eyes glinted menacingly. "So, was it you who had caused all this?"

The coldness of his voice and the way he looked at me like I was a stranger were akin to a hand squeezing my heart. He couldn't recognize me. I glanced around and saw a few familiar faces trying to stand up. One of them was Dominique and Ramin. Rufus was also in the distance, wounded, but was still trying to stand up.

I could tell Rufus wasn't hurt by Sam, as he was in a safe area, unlike the others. Right now, Sam only recognized Rufus. Although Dominique was his brother, Sam simply incapacitated him and Jayden. The people who were gravely injured by Sam's hand were Ramin and Heliot.

"I don't want to repeat myself twice, Miss Bloodfang." I snapped my eyes when Sam spoke once again. I froze when he suddenly appeared in front of me and bent his body over.

"But I will make an exception for a gorgeous lady like you. Are you the one who caused this trouble to my Grimsbanne?"

I held my breath as my shoulders trembled, looking back at the maniac that was staring back at me. "Ye — yes."

Just as those words slipped past my lips, I couldn't react quickly when he suddenly grabbed me by the neck without a second hesitation. He would kill me, my mind hollered almost instantly. All I could do was cough and cling to his sleeve while my feet left the ground.

"Your Majesty!"

I heard some voices call for me in panic as soon as Sam acted. The latter frowned as he raised a brow, tilting his head back.

"Your Majesty? Was I that oblivious that my brother took in a woman, huh?" he snickered as the side of his lips curled up evilly. "I wonder how he would react if I send your head to him as a present?"

"Sa -- Sam..."

"Hmm... not bad. Surely, that brother of mine has a good eye. I wonder if I should taste you first to know what he saw in you to make you Her Majesty and not my sisters?"

"Get... away... from her!"

I didn't react quickly, nor did I have the time to recognize the angry voice that suddenly thundered from the distance as Sam tossed me aside. It wasn't just a normal toss because I flew away, landing on the crates that forced me to cough out blood. I groped my neck as I gasped for air, enduring the pain across my body at my harsh landing.

"Your Majesty! Your Majesty!" Charlotte's worried voice came to my side. I glanced up at her to see her eyes well up while looking at me.

"Sam." That was all I said, assisting myself to sit up as my eyes veered to where he stood. To my surprise, the person who came was none other than Fabian.

"Oh, Fabian. Right on time. Rufus is over there. Take him to a safe —" Sam's words were cut short when Fabian raised his spear at him.

"My lord, I promised you I will end you if the last seal in you is broken." Fabian's voice was cold and distant, looking at Sam solemnly. "It seems that time is now, my lord."

"Oh?" Sam sneered as he raised a brow. "Did I go overboard again?"

"Not yet, my lord, but you will be." Fabian let out a shallow breath as he raised the point of his spear up. "Your wish is always my command, my lord. That is why I cannot allow you to hurt the people you cherish even if it means... ending you."

"Maleficent..." A dark shroud formed at Maleficent's tip before I heard Fabian's quiet voice. "... the devil's scream, summon."

"Farewell, my lord," Fabian added in a slightly different tone.

Sam only looked up at the end of Maleficent, understanding something that only the two of them could. Meanwhile, my breath stopped as time slowed down, watching Fabian swing down his spear while my husband just stood still.

"Fabian, stop!" but my voice drifted in the still, quiet night breeze.

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#### Chapter 580 - It Was A Good Life, Sam

It wasn't even a decade yet since I first met my husband. Eight years wasn't the promised forever... that was not what I believed forever was. It was too short. In those eight years, we separated longer than we're together. That wasn't enough. I felt like we were still in the getting to know stage.

I couldn't let him die... not before my eyes — especially not before my eyes.

The hands of the clock trembled as it paused from clicking, freezing in time as I watched the dark glow appear on Maleficent's tip. My husband stayed still, watching that glow of judgment strike him. As I held my breath, our eight years of togetherness rewound before my eyes.

From that night when a stranger whose name I didn't know proposed to me out of the blue, to the time I came home with someone waiting for me home; the time he cooked — reheated the food he stole — for us to share for the first time, how my life spiral around when he came into my life, his voice that would whisper sweet nothing, his kisses, touches that I never knew I would yearn, our shared laughter. Those good days where we laugh until we're in tears... and those bad times where we console each other to stop each other's tears.

All those memories with Sam were akin to a glass, shattering right before me.

If I did nothing... those treasured memories we built together would be forever lost. I can't. I wouldn't lose him. I didn't allow that. That wasn't what he and I promised each other. We had reached this far. So, it was only natural that after all this destruction... we should both heal together.

Like always, we should do it together. I wouldn't heal if he died here; it would forever damage me.

"Fabian, no...!" I yelled but the gust of wind was more powerful than my command. I clasped my hands into a fist, gritting my teeth as I covered my face with my arm. Deep down, I was aware that Fabian's only orders from Sam were to end his lordship if he berserk and became a threat to everyone.

I couldn't understand just how dangerous Sam; even though he nearly snapped my neck. But I didn't judge Fabian because my heart knew ending Sam was something he hoped he wouldn't do in this life.

"Farewell, my Lord."

When I heard that quiet voice, along with the piercing sound of silence, my heart stopped beating altogether. My initial thought was, 'no, Fabian, don't do it,' but his expression told me he must do it. He would do it. He would end my Sam, my husband, my friend, my savior, the father of my son.

"Fabian...!" My voice shook as I ground my teeth, channeling every bit of my strength to get up and leap towards them. I didn't think. All that was in my mind was I couldn't let Sam die.

Maybe it was an adrenaline rush or the fright of losing my husband permanently that I reached him right on time. My limbs wrapped around Sam almost at the same time Fabian swung his spear down. After a second, I felt this sting across my back that made me grit my teeth subconsciously.

But... more than the pain, I was relieved.

"Sam or Hell. You can be God or the devil... the emperor or a peasant." I breathed out, but inhaling right after felt like my lungs constricted. "I will love you the same... my love."

A subtle smile appeared on my face as my eyes softened, looking up at the thinning dark shroud above. Was it over? I wondered. If so, I was relieved. My eyelids felt heavy as they drooped, watching my short life flashback in me.

'Ah... it was a good life, Sam.'

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Samael's eyes dilated as soon as the woman he almost killed secured him in her embrace. He couldn't recognize this woman until now, but somehow, his heart broke when she took that attack for him. Time was frozen in time as he subconsciously settled his palm on her back as her limbs around him loosened.

"Sam or Hell. You can be God or the devil... the emperor or a peasant. I will love you the same, my love."

When she uttered those words, his eyes, which could only see red, slowly showed clarity. He withdrew his hand from her back, gazing at the blood on his palm that made his hand tremble. Before she could collapse, Samael instinctively caught her waist and pressed her body against him.

"Lilou." He choked, placing his palm on her back as a tear rolled down his one eye. "My wife... Lilou."

Samael wrapped his arm around her, pressing his hand on her bleeding back to stop it, but to no avail. The wound was too large for his entire sleeve to cover.

"Lilou, ah..." he clutched her back as he dropped to his knees, not blinking even once as he gasped for air. "Lilou..."

For a long time, her name was the only word he could speak in between his ragged breathing. "My love, hey... wake up." Samael patted her back gently to wake her up, but she wasn't moving anymore.

He tried... and tried and tried and tried. But Lilou didn't respond as her weight in his arms grew heavier.

"Ah..." His breath hitched as he looked up at Fabian. The latter was staring down at Lilou, wide-eyed as if he hadn't grasped the situation yet — just like everybody else.

All eyes were just on the two of them, kneeling on the concrete. Staring at Samael embracing his wife with wide eyes as Lilou took the hit that was meant to subdue Samael — a hit that was meant to end him.

"No, my lady." Fabian dropped Maleficent as he staggered back.



Samael's brows wrinkled as he winced, eyes sweating as he buried his face on her shoulder while clutching her back.

"Why... did you love me?" he asked through his gritted teeth, soaking her shoulder with tears.

"Why... me?"

There were many questions and confessions he wanted to tell her, but those questions just escaped his mouth. Why did Lilou love him that she would exchange her life for him? Sure, that was what he wanted from the very beginning. For her to only love him — all of him. But now... he wished she loved him less.

If so, then... life wouldn't slip away from her grip.

"Lilou, you can't..." Samael trailed off as he froze, seeing her hand drop to his rear.. His eyes fell on her dirty palm, lying motionlessly.