

The Duke 591

Chapter 591 - Men And Women Alike

"Fabian, this is all your fault! If not because of you, I will not have to bear with my sister flirting with her husband in broad daylight!"

Yulis grumbled like a storm berating Fabian, who was watering the flowers in the garden. The latter just glanced at him with the usual smile on his face before refocusing his attention on the flowers.

"Your Grace, how was it my fault that you are dying, and I simply gave you an option to have a longer life?" Fabian mused, raising the watering can to water the rest of the flowers. As he sauntered to the next flowerbeds, Yulis followed behind.

"How was it your fault? Right. You just invited me out of the goodness of your heart." Yulis remarked sarcastically, clicking his tongue in irritation while watching Fabian do his chores. He pinched the space between his brows.

Fabian chuckled. "Were you bitter that you've been single for the last three years?" he glanced at Yulis only to see the latter's distorted face. "You weren't like this back when you were in the imperial palace and in Grimsbanne. Does this have something to do with your separation with the Marchioness?"

"Good lord, Fabian. How was this connected to Silvia?" Yulis clicked his tongue, walking to the flowers behind Fabian to take a look at it. "I'm just annoyed that Hell thinks he is the only person in this house. Don't you feel aggravated when you were just walking in peace and see two people making out in the middle of the hallway? I wouldn't care if it's someone else, but Lilou is my sister."

"I am already used to my master's hobby and I understand they needed sex to keep a healthy marriage."

Yulis scrunched his nose as he looked back, facing Fabian's back. "As if you know anything about sex. Much more, marriage."

"You will be surprised, Your Grace. I had my own little research in the past out of curiosity."

"Out of curiosity?" Yulis chuckled, a little interested in the matters of Fabian's heart. If it was out of curiosity, he would believe Fabian, since there was no other reason for Fabian to indulge in debauchery.

"The conclusion I had is, sex is not for me. Men and women alike didn't give me the pleasure that humans and vampires enjoy."

"Haha. That is... what?" Yulis gasped as he looked at Fabian's back in dismay.

"Men and women alike?"

Fabian snapped his eyes and turned around to face him. "Yes. Men and women alike. I tried with both genders and my experience is not something that left a satisfactory impression on me. It's not better as to hear the frantic screams every time I peel off a fingernail of someone."

"Good lord..." Fabian shrugged at Yulis's judgemental look. "Just to be clear, you're not naturally attracted to men, are you? You just did it out of plain curiosity, correct?"

Yulis stressed his words as he took a careful step back. Fabian didn't answer him and just smiled, making his spine shudder.

"This house isn't just haunted and strange, but the people who live here as well," he mumbled, rubbing his shoulders as he walked away. After hearing Fabian's confession, Yulis was certain he would stay out of this man's way for a long time. But just as Yulis was from a good distance, he paused when Fabian spoke.

"Your Grace, if you want to return to the empire, you should send a letter to the Marchioness. After all, you left without saying a word to her, nor did you disclose your condition. Most people who I witness do this always returns to no one."

Yulis looked back and Fabian was also staring back at him. "Don't forget. You left the Marchioness within her previous lover's reach. I wouldn't be surprised if Rufus and the Marchioness of La Lona will reconcile."

Yulis's jaw tightened before he huffed, resuming in his strides. "That's none of your business."

"I'm just saying, Your Grace," Fabian mumbled and shrugged, continuing to water his beloved flowers. "I'm certain he will not bother me for some time."

The side of Fabian's lips stretched into an evil grin as he found Yulis's expression quite amusing. The latter was fun to tease, but also annoying since he was usually bored with nothing else to do when the children were taking their afternoon nap. Yulis was stuck with them in this haunted mansion, after all.

After Fabian watered the plants, he looked up. He raised his hand, shading his eyes from the blinding sun.

"Today's weather is wonderful." He smiled, inhaling the fresh air. "It's so peaceful, don't you think, Lady Tilly?"

When Fabian opened his eyes, his gaze veered to one of the open windows. There, Tilly was sitting on the windowsill while gazing down at him. She didn't speak as she jumped from the height, landing safely meters away from him.

"Lady Tilly, aren't you afraid that you will disappear if the sun hits you?" he asked with the same smile, staring at the sunlight hitting Tilly's pale face.

Tilly just looked up. "I am under the shade," she argued, when, in fact, she was basking in the sun's light.

"I can see that." Fabian didn't point it out, though. He was already used to Tilly's ridiculous argument, so his eyes gloss over the garden to see if he missed a spot. When he was certain everything was tended, Fabian nodded in satisfaction.

"Was it true?" she asked out of the blue, making him gaze back at her with furrowed brows. "The one that you told Yulis."

"Men and women alike?" Fabian raised a brow, and she nodded. A smile resurfaced on his face until his eyes squinted. "Well, yes, of course. Why are you interested, my lady? Do you want to have sex with me?"

Tilly blinked twice as her expression didn't change with his abrupt and blunt question. "No. I was interested because I also thought the same. Men and women alike didn't leave an unforgettable impression on me as well. Why? Do you?"

"Well, can I?" His smile remained.

She shrugged. "Only if you are willing to risk your life. Anyway, we will have a new tenant as well. Samael will probably forget about them since he is with Lilou, so you better go to them before they get executed," she added in the same nonchalant tone. "It's the one you're with when you first came to this place and another man."

"The one who's with me and another one?" Fabian furrowed his brows before he recalled the letters he sent out to two lost lambs. "Ah... I should tell His Grace to fetch Chalie and Ramin since my hands were full at the moment."

"They will get executed."

Fabian's smile grew brighter. "Not my problem. Lady Tilly, will you take part in the experiment I would like to conduct?"

"Will I die?"

"Maybe."

"Alright." Tilly agreed almost instantly, even without hearing whatever it was, but this made him somehow pleased.

"Then we should head in." He beckoned his arm towards the door back to the mansion.

Tilly studied him for a second before she turned around. The bell tied around her white long hair rang as she walked. As she did, Fabian watched her back with eyes glinting.

"Hmm..." He let out a low chuckle, rocking his head with closed lips. "I wonder why I thought of her at death's door? Would she like to dissect my brain first to see the problem?"

EXTRA:

Yulis clicked his tongue, exiting the prison with Ramin and Charlotte behind him. He massaged his neck while stretching it from one side to the other.

"This reminds me of when I first came in here as well," he mumbled, looking back at the two whom he bailed out from death row. "Fabian invited you here?"

"Well, he said His and Her Majesty are looking for trusted maids and another butler," Charlotte explained in a knowing tone. "Ra and I applied since were bored."

Actually, after the incident in Minowa and Samael's retirement, the two of them also retired. Although they liked Rufus and the latter offered them a position, they refused. To them, they would only serve Samael as their emperor, and Rufus respected that without taking it to the heart.

Yulis let out a brief chuckle. "Hah... well, I guess the more the merrier. I don't want to deal with Fabian in the meantime. Anyway, come. Follow me."

Ramin and Charlotte looked at each other when Yulis turned around. They both shrugged as Yulis' tone was a bit strange, but well, he was stuck with Samael, Lilou, and Fabian for years. It was a miracle he was still sane.

"By the way, Your Grace, before we left, the Marchioness send a word..." Charlotte trailed off when Yulis paused and looked back.

"Whatever she wants to say, I don't want to hear it." She frowned at Yulis' response. "I will appreciate it if you refrain from speaking her name in front of me. Thank you."

Ramin shrugged. "Well, if that is what you want."

"That's unfair, Your Grace.." Charlotte pouted but still followed Yulis to his carriage.

Chapter 592 - We're Getting Married Again

When Yulis, Charlotte, and Ramin arrived at the Grimsbanne mansion, Lilou and Samael, along with their children, welcomed them home. Tilly was also there, having tea and Fabian as well. It was quite an occasion with Charlotte and Ramin in this place to help, since they didn't have servants and they simply split the housework — except Tilly, since she was clumsy. So most of the time, she would watch over the children when Lilou was busy being a housewife with Fabian.

Yulis didn't join their warm welcome party for Charlotte and Ramin as he headed straight to his room. He felt especially tired today.

A shallow sigh slipped past his lips as he plopped down on the bed, his feet hanging out of the mattress. He rested his back against the headboard, looking around the room he had been staying in ever since coming to this place.

"Silvia," he whispered, setting his eyes on the window where the moonlight was entering. "Your name came up today more than the past three years."

In the past three years, Lilou only mentioned Silvia to him once. Samael also inquired about Silvia to him, but Yulis only gave out a quick answer. After that, those two didn't mention her again, and they all continued with their life. Samael got busy looking for a source of income and strived to give his family a good life, while Lilou recovered and tended to her children's needs.

At the same time, Yulis was just as busy as he was trying to extend his life with Tilly's help. Since he had offered most of his life energy to Silvia, Yulis' condition was worse than he expected. That was why there was tons of uncertainty about whether Tilly's experiments would work or he would just die in one of them.

"It's been almost three years since then," he mumbled, revisiting the time he first came into this place. That was the time after he led his people to defend Grimsbanne.

At that time in Minowa, Yulis was also busy leading his people to victory. The numbers Zero and Stefan sent to Grimsbanne and La Lona march were all true. The only detail that didn't match was someone else was leading the soldiers marching towards Grimsbanne and La Lona.

So, Yulis, with Claude and Klaus's assistance, stood victorious in that war that lasted for three months. Even when they received the news of Lilou's death, all they could do was grit their teeth and win their own war. Dominique came along with the royal knights, but the war in Grimsbanne was already concluded. Only then did the angry Claude and Klaus calmed down when Dominique relayed the news of Lilou's actual situation.

Along with the news of Lilou's real situation, Dominique also handed Yulis a letter from Samael. In that letter was an invitation to Yulis as Fabian finally rattled about Yulis' condition.

'I knew I was already at my limit back then,' he thought, recalling that he could feel that he would die sooner than he expected. Hence, he accepted the invitation because he wanted to see Lilou for the last time.

Yulis also didn't have the heart to see Silvia and confess about his impending doom. That was why... he ended things with her through a letter. In that case, whether or not he would return, Silvia wouldn't wait for him. It was better to break her heart sooner so she could heal faster than let her wait for years, only to get her heart broken if he died.

"That's right." He rocked his head, tilting it back and breathing out through his mouth. "It's better if she reconciles with Rufus. He still loves her, anyway."

His eyes slowly closed to rest. "I should've refused her in the first place." — but he was selfish. Despite knowing he was dying, he still played with fire and indulged in the temporary pleasure of being with her.

Now, not only was he hurting, but he hurt her too. Yulis considered this as one of the worst mistakes he did in his long life. Therefore, he didn't want to make the same mistake ever again. If he recovered and could continue his life, he didn't plan to come back to Silvia. He didn't have the right to ask for a second chance. That didn't even cross his mind.

"Tutoring Law is enough... although it's annoying to see Lilou and Hell together." He chuckled, shaking his head as he slid to the side until he was lying down. "At least... their little family is happier by the day. I'm happy for them."

Just as Yul planned to sleep early, he slowly opened his eyes when a knock from outside reached his ear. Lilou's voice followed as Yul propped his elbow against the mattress, saying, "come in."

"Yulis..." Lilou paused while holding the door, setting her eyes on Yulis. He was reclining on the bed, staring at her with lazy eyes.

"What?" he asked.

Lilou let out a sigh as she walked in. "Yul... are you alright?" she asked, sitting on the edge of the mattress.

"Well, of course. Why won't I?" he raised a brow before collapsing on his back, staring at the ceiling. "I was just... just... thinking."

"Missing someone?"

"I shouldn't miss her..." he breathed out. "... but I still do. I can't help it."

"Yul, Sam and I agreed to not mention Silvia since you're uncomfortable every time we mention her. But... you really need to apologize to her." Lilou sighed as she gazed at Yulis with eyes full of worry. "You left just like that. I know you just don't have the heart to see her while thinking it's probably the last, but... if you already decided, you should at least end it properly."

Yulis knew that. Even before Lilou spell it out to him, he already knew he should've ended it with Silvia properly. But... no matter what excuse he would use, he couldn't deny he was a coward to face Silvia.

"Don't stress yourself in my matters, Lil." He peeled his eyes away from the ceiling, cocking his head in her direction. "Why are you here? I'm sure that is not because you're worried about me."

"Yul, I'm always worried about you."

"But you don't go to my room unless it is something even more important."

Lilou bit her tongue. "Well." She cleared her throat. "I proposed to Sam and we're getting married again."

"Ah... what?"

"I will be inviting the people who are important to this family. So..." She raised both her brows and sported an awkward smile. "You might see Silvia again."

"..."

Seeing Yulis' blank reaction, Lilou carefully slipped out of the bed and tiptoed away. But she paused when Yulis called her name in a dead tone.

Lilou looked back with a forced smile. "I love you too, Yul. Have a good night." and then she sprinted away.

"Lilou!!" came out an angry voice, but she already shut the door behind her with an aghast expression. Knowing Yulis, Lilou was a bit scared for her life. Hence, the second she heard footsteps from inside the room, Lilou took a deep breath.

"Sam!!! Yulis is going to kill me!" she yelled before dashing through the hallway to search for her husband, her shield.

EXTRA:

"As you all don't know, Lilou asked for my hand in marriage." Samael boasted to Ramin, Charlotte, Law, Sunny in the bassinet, Fabian, and Tilly, who were in the same drawing room as him. "Can you believe it? How my wife is so in love with me, she proposed! It will be our late 1st decadesary."

"Is that even a word?" Law muttered while staring at his father with little expression. He already learned not to fight Samael and tried not to argue, but he couldn't always agree with Samael, especially whenever he was being ridiculous.

"Wedding... Tilly likes." Tilly nodded while holding a teacup to her lips.

Fabian also smiled brightly. "Well, I guess we will have more work since we would be expecting more guests."

"Your Majesty — I mean, Master, can I attend as a guest too?" Charlotte clasped her hands together, eyes sparkling in anticipation.

"If you attend, who will serve the guest?" Ramin looked at her in dismay.

"You!"

"Oh, don't fight. It will be a simple one with only a few close people to our little family." Samael raised his hand before Charlotte and Ramin take this conversation outside with their weapons. "So..."

"Sam...! Yulis will kill me...!"

"Lilou! Come back here and I will talk to you! How can you propose and hold a wedding without consulting your big brother first?!"

Lilou and Yulis' voices outside reached the drawing room they were in. The people inside looked at each other in silence, listening to the sound of yelling and hasty footsteps.

Samael cleared his throat. "As I was saying..."

"Father, won't you help Mother?" asked Law as he expected Samael to run to Lilou's rescue.

"Well, my son, this is what your mother must conquer herself since she proposed to me. I am not that easy too." Samael grinned until his eyes squinted.

"Master, I'm very sure His Grace is only chasing after the madam to change her mind," Charlotte mumbled as this was Samael's new way of gloating.

"I agree with you." Ramin nodded.

Meanwhile, Law shook his head lightly.. "I hope Uncle Ran can't change Mother's mind."

Chapter 593 - The South

Three months later...

"Once I am old enough, I will surely go and see you, Mother."

Adam smiled, holding the letter in his hand. Today, he received Lilou's long letter. They had been exchanging letters ever since Lilou woke up from her slumber. He could still remember how shocked he was the first time he received Lilou's first letter after months of not hearing any news from them.

"My lord, about the House Fletcher..." an old man from across the earl's desk trailed off as Adam raised his gaze over the parliament.

"What about the House Fletcher?"

"Baron Fletcher is requesting a private audience with you."

Adam let out a shallow breath as he put down the letter. "Another request for a private audience?" he frowned as the House Fletcher had been too persistent recently.

After the war in Minowa three years ago, a lot of things changed. Many officials and noble houses were stripped off of their titles with their long list of crimes. There were a few good officials who supported and had been loyal to the earl but were hindered by Jaime. They were only reinstated after Jaime faced serious consequences.

In other words, everyone who was working under Adam's orders was a loyal supporter of the Crowell. While the others were simply devoted to the 'late' empress and emperor, so they served Adam since he was also the previous monarch's son. Not biologically, but Adam was considered as their son.

"Glory, can you see Baron Fletcher?" he glanced at his chief knight standing on the side of his desk. Glory was holding his hand behind him, wearing a knight suit with a poker face.

"Tell the Baron I already decided. If he bothers me one more time, tell him he will not hear a word from me anymore." Young, but Adam could now carry himself as a man with power. "How dare he think of only himself instead of the people's safety?"

"I will surely relay your word, my lord." Glory placed a fist across his chest, bowing without a second hesitation.

Adam only nodded as he dismissed his advisor and chief knight. His eyes lingered on Glory's broad back and smiled.

"Glory," he called, stopping Glory when he was by the door. "You may go if you want to. I know you also received her letter."

Glory smiled subtly as he looked back. "There were more opportunities to see her, my lord. The madam will be livid if I attended and you're not there."

"Well then, I guess you will not have to see her for a few more years."

"Hearing that she is doing well is good enough for me, my lord."

Adam nodded while Glory finally left. As soon as the door was shut closed, Adam leaned back against the chair. Glory took care of him after Lilou's death. He was aware it was just Glory's way to repay the empress's sacrifice for them. But even after they heard Lilou returned to life, Glory remained on his side.

"Thanks to you, Mother and Father, Minowa is better than before." He carefully stood up, revealing that he significantly grew taller through the years. Adam walked towards the window and stood in front of it because he could see the downtown from this vantage point.

Although Adam still loved his biological parents, he already treated Samael and Lilou as his parents. It was not like he wanted to compare, but Samael left Adam in Minowa with something. Those two, Samael and Lilou, left Adam with people he could trust. Because of their kindness, there was unity in the south.

That was their gift to him. They didn't leave him with nothing, but they left him with more than just a title.

"I will surely attend on their second decadesary." He chuckled as that was added in the letter with Samael's handwriting, meaning Samael was there while Lilou was preparing her letters and invitations. He could imagine Lilou scolding Sam, and Law being forced to watch that.

"I can imagine Law's face when he heard that decadesary."

"My lord, the envoy from the north arrived." Adam raised his brows as he turned around towards the door. "The chief knight of the earl of Monarey is with them."

Adam smiled as he was aware of Klaus' visit. "Please assist Sir Klaus in the drawing room. I will see him myself."

"Wow... you've grown taller!" Klaus mused as he bobbed his head to examine Adam. The latter greeted him politely, walking towards the chair across from Klaus.

"It's been a while, Sir Klaus. Apologies to keep you waiting."

Klaus waved, eyes still fixed on Adam. "God... I feel like crying." He sighed.

Klaus had been in contact with the south, even though the north and south were poles apart. That was because Grimsbanne and La Lona were quite preoccupied with recovering from the war.

Also, since the north produced elite knights while the south had an unbreakable defense system, both earls from the said territories exchanged information for mutual gain. Three years later, the north and the south were still allies and would constantly send envoys and exchange knights.

The most that benefit from the strengthening of the north and south was the empire. The emperor, Rufus.

"Adam, you're always this polite and amicable the first time we met until now after many years." Klaus sighed dejectedly as he leaned back in distress. "But that Earl in the north is just getting worse by the day."

Adam chuckled as he had also become acquainted with Claude. He must admit that Claude's ways were truly different from Adam's and yet, they somehow found the same equilibrium. Adam was akin to a tiger clad in sheep's clothing because he learned the art of dealing with soft people with the same softness, and knew when to be firm.

Meanwhile, Claude was a fox through and through. He was a La Crox, after all. So, Adam wasn't surprised that Claude was a combination of being smart and cunning.

"By the way, Sir Klaus. My mother sent a letter that is addressed to you." Adam slid the letter towards Klaus. "I mentioned to her from my previous letter that you've been here quite frequently and are planning to visit again. Maybe that's the reason she sent her letters to you in the south."

Klaus's eyes lit up as he hurriedly picked up the letter. "Good Lord... can I apply as your knight's instructor permanently?" he inquired with enthusiasm, rendering the confused Adam speechless.

"This is the only time I received Lilou's letter in one piece!" he explained while holding the letter to his chest as if it was that precious. "I don't want to go back to that damn cold north. Claude works me to the bone and always tears Lilou's letters for me. My lord, you understand my angst, right? I usually have to spend a full day putting her letters together before I can read it!"

"..." Adam pressed his lips and smiled awkwardly. "I guess... the Earl of the north is a bit..."

"A bit, what?" Klaus gasped, readying the list of insults he had in store for Claude. "He is not just a bit, but he is too much! He thinks Lilou only needs to think of him if she thought of winter! Isn't it too much that all her letters addressed to me are already shredded to pieces before it arrives in my hand?! I bet he is only waiting for Hell to die so he can seduce my sister-in-law."

Adam bit her tongue as he listened to Klaus release his pent-up anger to his lord. *'I didn't know Sir Klaus is this stressed.'* That was all Adam could say in his head. Klaus was like a stressed father who didn't know how to discipline his rebellious son anymore.

"Hang in there, Sir Klaus." He awkwardly cheered while Klaus was fuming.

EXTRA:

One hour later...

"Can you believe it? He even hosted a banquet where he invited all the daughters of noble houses and some princesses from neighboring kingdoms?" Klaus was still badmouthing Claude, while Adam already drank three teacups consecutively. "He didn't plan to marry! And yet, he exploited all those people who want to get tied with him through marriage!"

"It's not the best method, but it will help the people in Monarey with all those added funds in the earl's treasury." Adam voiced out helplessly, seeing the good part of Claude's action.

"God... you, my child, don't understand this old knight here." Klaus sighed and shook his head. "I thought you were on my side."

"I am on your side, Sir Klaus. But I am also pointing out the Earl's intention." Adam smiled kindly, hoping Klaus would stop since he had heard too much already.

"He is acting like a princess — that damn brat!" Klaus' frown grew worse. "Using that face of his to seduce women. He should just get married and stop fantasizing Lilou."

"I agree with that."

Klaus let out a deep sigh, holding his hand behind his head. "Anyway, I will be going to the mainland to attend their wedding. Aren't you coming?"

"Apparently, the current state of affairs in Minowa needs my undivided attention. I couldn't leave Minowa yet even though it is stable now. I don't want to be complacent. Also, I want to meet Father when I can proudly say he didn't need to worry about me and Minowa."

"Sucks." Klaus rolled his eyes. "Just tell me if you're coming. I will stay in the south for a week."

"Thank you for the offer.." Adam smiled, appreciating Klaus' offer.

Chapter 594 - The North

Meanwhile, in the cold north called Monarey, Claude was lying on his bed with his arms covering his eyes. His room was dark with all the curtains closed, but not too dark, as the fireplace gave the room some light.

"Lilove is getting married the second time," he mumbled, peeling his arms away to look at the ceiling. "She sounded so happy in her letter, although she scolded me for tearing Uncle Klaus' letters."

In the past three years, unlike the South that went through a lot of changes, Monarey had been the same. It wasn't an exaggeration to say Monarey was the only place across the empire that didn't have much to do in the past three years. Although the development in the said earldom was progressing, there weren't many events that were worthy of his attention.

Claude only sent reinforcement and relief to Grimsbanne and La Lona as those two needed help after the war three years ago. Rufus helped once he succeeded in the throne. The new emperor had been helping all the lands as much as he could, so Claude was able to focus on the earldom.

But... there was missing. Claude was already in his twenties — around the age where he should marry. But he didn't fancy anyone, although he had tried to play around.

"I wanted to be happy for her and Uncle Hell, but I don't..." he whispered, raising his hands up with the letter. "Actually, I don't know, Auntie Lilove. I am neither happy nor sad... just empty. Knowing you are within the empire is better than knowing you are somewhere far."

Samael truly took Lilou away from the land that nearly took her life. The news of Lilou's death nearly caused Claude to start an uprising against Samael. Fortunately, he was in the middle of the war where he could release his frustration and stress to his enemies.

It was the first war Claude took part in personally, but he had been battling ever since he was young. Claude didn't have a peaceful life that long since Stefan killed his parents, Lucia and Dyrroth. Also, he was a child who had to live with his parent's murderer and call that man his father.

So Lilou was the warmth Claude had yearned. She was the first person who gave him warmth in his cold life. So, Claude could understand why Samael was head over heels to Lilou. Unlike them who lived within the cold palace as royalties, Lilou was warm and shone just as beautiful as the break of dawn.

Claude could also understand Stefan's obsession with her. Actually, he couldn't blame Stefan for that since Lilou was that magnetizing.

A shallow breath slipped past his lips while gazing at the letter he read multiple times already. "I'm so envious of Uncle Hell and Law. I wished I was also born as her son so she wouldn't leave me alone too." He tossed the letter to the side, covering his eyes with his arms once again.

"My lord, the carriage you asked is already prepared. You are ready to set off anytime." A voice from outside his room reached his ear. Claude carefully peeled his arms away from his eyes and gazed at the ceiling once again.

"Ahh... I forgot I need to do an inspection in the territory," he muttered as he simply resigned to his room to read Lilou's letter. "What a bother."

Claude dragged his body to sit up and out of the bed to do his duties as the earl. It was still early outside, so Claude planned to finish his duties early before he set off to the mainland to see Lilou.

That day, Claude set off to inspect the earldom he would do twice a year at random times. Usually, Klaus would do it, but since he was in the south, Claude had no option but to face the cold weather himself. It had been three days since he left his estate and Claude was still half off his route.

"We'll take a break here," Claude uttered to the knight riding outside his carriage.

"Yes, my lord." The knight picked up his pace to inform the coachman to take a break. When they stopped, Claude went out of the carriage.

As a pureblood, Claude stood out among everyone, even though he was covered by a thick winter cloak. A charming face that wasn't easily forgotten.

"I will take a look in this town. You two will come with me. Don't bring your horses," he ordered, glancing at two knights who bowed at his orders. Claude only wanted to walk around and breathe some fresh air in a town that he only set foot in once a year. Well, he was always cooped up in his office, so a little walk in a place that had fewer chances of people recognizing him was what he needed.

"What a town," he mumbled, holding his hand behind him as he looked around at the small plaza of the town. What he liked about these surprise inspections was, aside from the murders he would commit to those corrupt people they would catch red-handed, was the joy of seeing the result of his governance.

To see that his people were at peace and had enough, despite the cold weather, felt rewarding in a way. He smiled subtly, watching some townsfolk in the plaza.

"Out of the way!"

Claude quirked a brow as he turned his head in the voice direction on instinct. He narrowed his eyes upon seeing a woman sprint in his direction from an alley, waving to get out of the way. Since the knights he brought kept a respectful distance, Claude was the only one standing on this spot in the plaza. Knowing his knights, Claude raised his hand to keep them on standby.

"Out — Aish!" the woman ground her teeth as she picked up her pace, adjusting so she wouldn't have to crash into Claude. The latter's gaze veered towards the very few people chasing after her.

"A thief?" he wondered, as that was what the three men chasing after the woman were saying. Just as he was pondering whether to resolve this matter out of the goodness of his heart, he froze.

Long hazel hair.

Chapter 595 - [Bonus] The North II

The second the woman ran past him, her long hazel hair that was tied into a ponytail flowed back. Time seemed to stop for a second as Claude just stood there frozen. When he blinked, time resumed as he turned his head back, only to see the woman's back.

"Hey, out of our way!" one of her pursuers hollered, but Claude kept his eyes on the woman's back. "I said, out of —"

Before the three ruffians could step foot in Claude's vicinity, the corner of his lips curled up into a smirk. He didn't even bother looking back, as his knights had already blocked the three men from approaching.

"A thief, huh?" he mumbled, glancing over his shoulders with the devious smirk plastered on his lips. "I will catch the thief myself. Don't follow me."

Claude didn't wait for his knights' reply as he had already chased after that woman who caught his eyes.

"Oh, goodness!" the woman panted for air, sliding down her back into one of the narrow alleys as her knees wobbled. She looked from the path she went from, heaving a sigh of relief seeing that no one seem to have followed her.

"Thank God," she muttered along with her ragged breaths, patting her chest lightly. "How dare they call me a thief? Those old goons. Trying to trick me when they lost the bet," came out a grumble while shaking her head, giggling right after as she took out a pouch that had her gambling winning.

"Gosh... I earned a —" she jumped when she suddenly heard a chuckle right in her ear. The woman looked back, holding the pouch close to her chest securely. Her eyes scrutinized the man squatting just right beside her with a bright smile that made his eyes squint into mere slits.

"Who - who are you?" she asked warily.

Claude didn't answer but kept his smile, studying her from head to toe. "Why are you dressed like that in this cold weather? Are you perhaps a whore?"

"What —" the woman's eyes dilated as she gazed down, realizing she was still wearing her costume from last night.

"I'm interested how much." Claude cupped his cheeks innocently as if he was simply asking for candy.

"Pardon?"

"How much are you worth? I want to take you to bed tonight..."

SLAP!

Claude raised a brow as his face was tossed to the side upon that resounding slap. He wiped the area she slapped, glancing back at her. She was staring at him as if he had disgraced her; he wondered, why? She appeared to be someone who worked in a whorehouse, especially the revealing clothes under her coat.

"I am not like that," she affirmed with a shaking voice.

"Well, you could've said it was a misunderstanding. Why would you resort to violence?" he asked and tilted his head as if he was a saint who couldn't hurt a fly. His rational argument rendered her speechless, mouth opening and closing, but no words came out.

"This is the problem with people." Claude pointed out as his eyes sharpened. "They resort to violence before the proper talk. Hah... I thought you were a bit special since you have the same hazel hair."

His eyelids drooped dangerously. He disliked it; people touching him, much more hurt him. The last time someone tried to assassinate him was years ago, and Klaus made sure that person begged to get executed instead.

But this woman just slapped him. Just how would he let her get away from that? There was only a limit to his patience and interest. Men and women alike deserved equal punishment, just like how Lilou gave equal opportunities and equality when she was the tigress in Grimsbanne.

Claude stopped the time so no one would be able to see what he would do to her. But alas, even after he cast his ability, the woman blinked.

"I'm — I'm sorry. I didn't mean to slap you, and I know it will only sound an excuse if I said it was the lack of sleep or just the stress. But I'm really sorry." She apologized while rubbing her palms against each other, not a bit affected by his ability. "Here. See a physician."

She dropped a few pennies near him and awkwardly smile. She perked her neck to see if anyone was behind him, but even though no one was there, she couldn't be complacent.

"I'm really sorry," she repeated and hastily picked herself up. As soon as she stood, she cast Claude a quick, apologetic look.

"Sorry..." she lowered her head before jogging away, turning to the right of the alley.

Meanwhile, Claude could only stare at her as he undid his ability. "That is strange," he mumbled, gazing down to pick up the pennies she left him. No one in this empire aside from a few strong individuals that weren't affected by his ability.

She didn't seem that strong, although she ran quite fast since she outran those who were chasing after her. Still, that was strange. He was a pureblood, so it was easy for him to tell if she was someone whom he needed to be wary of in the blood hierarchy.

He could even tell the abnormalities in Lilou's blood the first time he met her. In other words, Claude would know if that woman was someone who could threaten his life. The problem was, there was nothing special he felt from her.

His only reason for chasing after her was because of her hazel hair that reminded him of Lilou's hair.

Claude knew he needed to address this matter and get to the bottom of why that woman wasn't affected by the time.

"Hah..." he chuckled, playing the coin in his hand as he gazed to where she left. "I guess she's special in a way."

Claude slowly got up to his feet and tossed the coin in the air, catching it midair. "If it's head, I will see her again. But if it's tails, I'll kill her." He gazed at his fist for a while before he slowly opened them. The corner of his lips stretched into a grin as soon as he saw the coin.

"Head. I guess I don't also need to resort to violence first." He glanced in the direction she left and smirked. "Hmm... how interesting."

Chapter 596 - World Summit

Meanwhile, far away from the empire, Rufus leaned his side against the tree in a vast garden. Right now, he was attending the world summit — a gathering of sovereigns from empires to the king of smaller kingdoms. It was his first time attending such a gathering since Samael retired earlier than they calculated.

"Your Majesty, your people will look for you if you stay outside for too long." Rufus glanced over his shoulder after hearing Dominique's voice from behind the tree. "I'm just concerned since you nearly went head to head with the emperor of Haimirich Empire."

"That man's virulent tongue deserves to be cut," Rufus stressed, eyes glinting as he recalled what happened earlier today.

During the meeting, the emperor of Haimirich kept pressing Rufus' nerves just because they sat beside each other. Rufus tried to keep their conversation civil and revolve around politics, but that said emperor kept teasing him. In a way, he reminded him of Samael — just the worst version.

"Even so, I appreciate that my lord isn't a terrible person like that man." he nodded, appreciating Samael even more, meeting more people after becoming

an emperor himself. "Surely, this position is more suffocating than what it sounds like."

"Of all people, you should understand the other sovereign if they had a few loose screws in the head."

Rufus rocked his head as Dominique had some point. After meeting different kinds of kings and emperors from across the world, and after witnessing how the meetings always played out, Rufus' horizon surely broadened. Part of him was glad to attend this gathering instead of Samael.

The latter didn't have that long of patience to indulge in other people's bullshits. Samael would certainly return to the Great Heart Empire to prepare for a war that started with diplomatic discourtesy.

"Dominique, I heard someone sent an assassin to the representative of the Maganti Empire?" Rufus raised a brow while crossing his arms, breathing in the fresh night breeze in this vast garden where the world summit was being held.

"Well, only our Heart Empire hadn't had a dispute with any of the attendees. The Maganti Empire had its own way of conquering the lands that caught their interest.." Dominique, Rufus's right-hand man, shrugged. "So, it is no surprise that someone will try to take out such vicious people. Well, it will also not be a surprise if someone dies in here. So far, even if people will go missing in every gathering, all the sovereigns will leave the place in one piece."

"This place is an eye-opening experience for sure." Rufus nodded in agreement. "I realized this place had only two types of people: one is the person who does the talking and the other one just observes."

During every meeting, those sovereigns whose lands were prospering would usually keep quiet. Meanwhile, those lower kings would usually speak and banter, standing as a proxy for those wealthy emperors and kings. It was a vicious game of words, as one wrong word could lead to war.

By this, it came clear to Rufus who held the most power amongst everyone: some of them were to be wary of and some who could be a potential ally in the future. At this time, Rufus was one of the emperors that fit the category of those

big shots. He adapted well because, on the second day, he met a king from some land who would do his bidding for him.

The main reason why this emperor from Haimirich kept bothering him, because of how quickly Rufus adapted to the circumstances.

"After this gathering, I will drop by to the mainland to attend their wedding." Rufus broke their silence with something that was out of the topic. "I'm certain His Lordship chose this date since he knows very well I will be away from the empire for a while."

A subtle smile appeared on Rufus' unchanging countenance as he shook his head. It wouldn't hurt if he had to come to another place before returning to the empire. Actually, after just three years of being the emperor, Rufus already craved some time to breathe and relax.

This job was far more draining than being a knight.

"I knew you'd say that. I already told everyone." Dominique chuckled, gazing up at the starless night sky. "I'm certain everyone will be there."

"Not everyone. Jayden will not be there."

Dominique chuckled as his eyes softened. "Well, that brother of mine is living the best of his life. He's young, so traveling the world will help him."

"Was he sending you a letter?" Rufus raised a brow as he glanced over his shoulder.

"Apparently, sending letters is not a La Crox style."

"So he didn't?"

"He is sending me letters, Your Majesty." Dominique chuckled as he cocked his head back to shake it lightly. "I mean, we... are all trying to erase the remnants of being a La Crox. Strange, isn't it? The blood that is running through our veins will never change who we are and yet, we kept trying."

There was a slight mockery in Dominique's tone, but Rufus could understand his vassal all too well. They've been together for the past three years as Dominique along with Kristina swore his loyalty to Rufus. Hence, his right and left hands.

"Our past is simply a lesson for our growth, Dom." Rufus' tone grew solemn as he looked ahead. "It will not determine who we are — neither the blood that is pumping into our hearts that keeps us all alive. Only our actions today and tomorrow matter and determine who we are."

Dominique smirked at Rufus' words, gazing up in silence. "I wish... you're right."

"When I became the emperor, although my merits as the military general helped me ascend the throne, it doesn't determine my ruling. My past achievements were simply a preview, and all that hard work will go down the drain if I failed my people."

"But the Heart's Empire is stronger and in much peace than before. Those noble vampires and purebloods such as myself bowed our heads to you." Dominique let out a snicker as he rocked his head.

"That is why our past isn't what determines us, Dom," Rufus repeated in a firmer tone. "Who you think you were and what you did doesn't matter once you decided to change. Some might still see you for the person who they knew you, but even the wariest person would accept the changes if it's sincere."

EXTRA:

"By the way, do you think Kristina also received a letter from Lilou?" asked Dominique after some time before Rufus would leave for his quarters.

Rufus pressed his lips together and shrugged. "I'm certain she did since she was friends with her ladyship. Even so, I don't think she will attend since she was still on her leave for her honeymoon."

"How weird." Dominique scratched the back of his head. Kristina didn't come with them to the world summit because she got married and was still on a honeymoon. Although the left and right hands of the emperor always bantered

as Kristina always nitpick on Dominique, he was somehow used to her presence.

"What do you mean, weird? Kristina is beautiful. Hence, many men will want to take her as their wife."

"Only a man who doesn't know her will think she is a lady who cannot hurt a fly." Dominique clicked his tongue.

Rufus chuckled as he looked back. "But the man she married knew her very well."

"Noah had lost his mind for breaking his engagement to marry that crazy woman." Dominique shook his head and sighed. "I really hope she wouldn't attend Lilou and Hell's wedding so she can give me some break."

Rufus chuckled as he walked forth, pausing in his steps as he caught two figures not far away from his vantage point. Dominique also turned his head in the same direction, sensing this powerful presence from someone.

"Is that the emperor of Haimirich?" Dominique inquired with an arched brow. "He's... strange. He reeks with the pungent smell of death. Now I understand why you let his legal advisor talk you out of your threats of war. He's no joke."

"Mhm." Rufus' eyes veered towards the other person. It was a woman kneeling in front of the man he nearly wages a war to earlier. "And that woman..."

"The soldiers from the Maganti are scattered." Dominique pointed out as he caught more people searching the dark.

Rufus darted his eyes from the two figures before he shrugged. "Whatever trouble that man is trying to cause, our empire will not get caught up with that," he remarked before resuming in his strides, turning a blind eye to what he just saw.

Chapter 597 - The Little Reunion

Another month had gone by...

"You've been detained here for three weeks?" Claude inquired at the distressed Klaus inside the prison they were in. Unlike usual, Klaus was only in his inner blouse, with his coat crumpled in his hands.

Klaus clicked his tongue as he glared at Claude. "My nephew, that smirk of yours will disappear once days go by and you will be shocked. It's already been a month since you're stuck here."

"Apparently, the wedding is already a week. So, staying in prison for a week is not a problem."

"Claude, stop teasing Klaus. He's been here the longest." Claude raised his gaze at the person leaning near the bars. It was Dominique. The person sitting near him was Rufus — the emperor of the Great Heart Empire. Claude couldn't help but chuckle as those two surely looked tired.

"Uncle — I mean, Sir Dom and Your Majesty, just how long have you been detailed here?" he inquired playfully, making their already dead expressions die the second time. "May I ask what crime did you do outside?"

"God... you should've arrived a week later." Klaus took a deep breath, barely keeping his sanity. It was better when it was just him inside this prison; he had some peace. Dominique's and Rufus's arrival a week later was still bearable. But to think he would be stuck with the devious Claude, Klaus would definitely lose it on the second day.

Claude bit his tongue to suppress his laughs. "Uncle, I was worried about you. That's why I arrived a day earlier than planned." He sighed. "The earldom just feels empty without you."

"Really?" Klaus raised his brows, moved by his nephew's words. But just as his heart began to melt, it froze instantly when the corner of Claude's lips hooked up.

"You devil," he spat out, clicking his tongue in irritation. He should've known Claude wouldn't speak such blasphemy. This child was just getting more evil with every passing second.

"Uncle, I wasn't joking, though. I was really worried about you because you traveled alone. You could've waited for me."

"Shut up." Klaus rolled his eyes, so Claude elbowed him slightly. "That will not work, my nephew. I'm numb."

"Forgive me, will you?"

"What a bunch of clowns," Dominique mumbled, but his voice was heard loud and clear. Claude and Klaus raised their glinting eyes, making Dominique shiver.

"I'm sorry, alright?" He raised his hands before these rascals bite him. "I was just stressed."

"Dom, I didn't know the man who killed me once is this pathetic." Rufus sighed while shaking his head. "If the person in charge of fetching us in the fort is Fabian, we'll get executed before he comes."

"Fucking Fabian." Klaus rolled his eyes, not surprised at this.

"Damn that lunatic." Dominique ground his teeth, trying to contain his irritation.

"As expected of Mister Fabian, he wants us to break out instead." Claude nodded, translating Rufus' conclusion the way he wanted to.

"Are you his child?" asked Klaus helplessly. His hope for Claude to be better just went down to negative zero.

Dominique also let out a deep breath as he shook his head. "Silvia should've raised you."

"Claude had a point." Meanwhile, Rufus rocked his head in understanding. "If it's Fabian and my lord, considering it was also a busy time because of the wedding, they might have thought we would break out."

"Your Majesty, have your senses grew dull because you've been stuck here without a shower for two weeks?" Dominique queried, as it seemed Rufus had forgotten his principles.

"Wow... the emperor is planning to commit a crime." Klaus clapped in disbelief.

"Watch your tongue, Sir Klaus." Dominique suddenly faced him and cast a solemn look at Klaus.

The latter smirked in mockery. "Sir Dominique, being stuck together for quite some time surely put a lot of stress on all of us. I guess if your sword is with you, you would've withdrawn it." Klaus slowly stood up, as he also wanted to let off some steam.

"We're all equal in this untouchable land." Rufus glanced at the both of them and sighed. "Once we stepped foot in here, our titles outside the land mean nothing. Dom, don't taunt Klaus. And Sir Klaus, even though that is the case in this land, do not forget I am also capable of breaking all your teeth."

"That's Your Majesty." Claude whistled as the tension in this cell increases by the minute.

"Damn, this is the worse," Klaus mumbled while Dominique simply clicked his tongue.

There was a five-minute silence in their cell before they heard footsteps approaching. Dominique tried to peek and both their brows furrowed upon catching the people approaching. When the people stood in front of their cells, Rufus and Klaus also turned their head, wide-eyed.

"Get in." A guard wearing a strange uniform pushed Silvia's shoulder.

"Aw." Silvia glanced at him sharply as she entered the cell with her hand bound behind her.

"You two. Inside!" the other guard pointed at the other two: Noah and Kristina.

"Tsk." Kristina clicked her tongue while Noah glanced at them as if to remember their face. Even so, they still went inside the small cell, smiling awkwardly at the people already inside.

"Your Majesty." Kristina and Noah greeted Rufus formally, although their voice sounded awkward.

Meanwhile, Silvia just glanced at them and momentarily had an eye contact with Rufus. Her beautiful ebony hair was shorter as it only reached her armpit. Yet, she still looked more stunning than ever.

A shallow breath slipped past her lips. "It's a good thing Kristina and I planned to travel together. Thus, our late arrival."

"Auntie, how come you look prettier as you grow older?" asked Claude while looking up at Silvia. Now, he wouldn't survive if he had to stay in this crowded yet small space overnight.

"Claude, I am also glad to see your handsome face. No wonder even some people bother me about your marriage.." Silvia smiled subtly before turning around to face the bars. "So, how do we get out?"

Chapter 598 - The Little Reunion II

"How do we get out?"

"My lady, I don't think that is the plan." Kristina voiced out awkwardly.

"Hey, you two. I heard you got married, but why are you here?" Klaus followed, darting his eyes between Kristina and Noah with an arched brow. "You didn't accompany His Majesty to the devil's den, but here you are!"

"Klaus, where we spend our honeymoon is ours to decide." Noah frowned as he glanced at Klaus, the person who never changed.

"They are correct, Klaus." Rufus shook his head as he ran his fingers through his hair. This was awkward, he thought.

Silence. After Rufus spoke, none of them made a sound as if an angel just walked by. Claude's eyes glossed over their gloomy expression. It was all obvious this wasn't just uncomfortable; it was suffocating and draining.

"Awkward..." he muttered only to raise a brow as he heard light footsteps.

Soon, the sound of footsteps caressed everyone's ears as they gazed at the bars to see who it was. Their thoughts at this point leaned closer to a more negative one; there was another prisoner, or they probably wanted to kill them by stuffing everyone in this particular cell.

They all sighed in relieved when they saw the familiar butler standing across from them. Although there were hidden grudges against him before Fabian came.

"My. What a lovely sight to behold. I hope you bond well." As usual, Fabian's smile made his eyes squint into mere slits.

"I'll kill him," Klaus grumbled while Claude tried to stop him.

"Uncle, calm down. He might change his mind," came out a quiet and careful voice.

"I'll dismember him," Dominique mumbled in irritation, but Rufus slapped his chest with the back of his hand.

"Don't taunt him," Rufus remarked under his breath, knowing Fabian's personality.

"Mister Fabian, will you let us out?" Noah inquired helplessly, holding onto the bars.

Fabian's countenance stayed the same before he raised a key. "My. Please don't kill me as soon as I unlock the gate. We were told we could only make one trip.

Thus, we cannot go back and forth. That is why I waited for everyone to arrive to make it one trip without breaking a royal decree."

"Of course, we understand, Fabian." this time, Rufus sported a kind smile.

"Huh..." Fabian averted his eyes, dropping the key in his hand. "I will wait for you outside."

With that being said, he kicked the key closer to the cell before he walked away. Rufus rarely smiled at Fabian, but everytime he did, that only meant he truly meant to kill Fabian.

"God damn — Fabian!!"

When they all reached the mansion by chasing after Fabian, Lilou welcomed them all. She was gorgeous as ever, with that lovely smile plastered on her face.

"Goodness! Did you all travel together?" she asked in excitement, watching them drag their feet towards the stairs. Her question made everyone stop, raising her brows as her beloved guests just looked at her.

"Lilou, what do you mean by did we all travel together?" Klaus inquired in a dead tone, cocking his head to the side.

"Well, because you all came together?"

"What about the one trip bullshit Fabian was talking about?" asked Dominique, although he already had an idea it was a lie. All of them just needed to hear Lilou say it.

Lilou furrowed her brows as she chuckled in confusion. "What one trip?" to her surprise, they all laughed in mockery. Rufus even loosened his cravat while Dominique cracked her knuckles. Klaus even revealed his fangs, which he licked.

"We'll come back later, my lady." Rufus smiled at her before he vanished from his spot, as if he wasn't dragging his feet moments ago. Klaus and Dominique also disappeared, following Rufus. The three of them were the longest stuck in the prison, so the rest didn't bother hunting down Fabian.

"Uhm... what just happened?" Lilou darted her eyes at Silvia, then at Claude, before setting them to Noah and Kristina.

"Oh, dear. Let's just say they miss each other." Silvia took the last step and opened her arms to embrace Lilou. "I miss you, sister."

Lilou smiled as she hugged her back. "It's good to see you too, Sivi."

After that, Lilou also greeted Claude, Kristina, and Noah before accompanying them inside.

EXTRA:

"They're having fun." Tilly gazed down, sighting Dominique, running around searching for Fabian. "How lively. I like weddings."

"My lady, I'm certain they will really kill Mister Fabian this time." Charlotte, who also grown close to Tilly, stood beside her in the balcony. She cupped her cheeks, leaning against the railings.

"If Master gave this order to us, we would've fetched them when they came," she added, shaking her head. "But I can't blame Master. We were all busy preparing and helping the madam."

"Samael probably knew Fabian will do this. That's why he gave this order to him." Charlotte glanced at Tilly's pale face and sighed. "If Samael told him to receive the guests properly, Fabian will not dare."

"My lady, can it be master simply forgot?"

"Hmm... perhaps you are right."

Charlotte pouted as she stare at her for more. "My lady, you're always so negative and dark. Sometimes, I understand why you and Mister Fabian get along very well."

"You get along as well."

"And we get along too!" Charlotte's smile brightened. In her mind, the only people that she get along with were strange people.

"But you don't get along with Ramin. You two always fight." Tilly pointed out.

"We do, I think? Since we haven't killed each other."

"Charlie, why did you become a maid?" Tilly inquired out of nowhere, catching her off guard. "You were talented and strong; I see you spar with Ramin and Lilou. Samael also told me you refused his adoptive son's offer. I don't understand. Was being a maid better than having an authority?"

Charlotte chuckled as her eyes softened, gazing at the dark forest ahead.

"Honestly, I don't know. It sounds good to have a title and wealth, but when I'm here, even though it's tiring, I don't hate it. Instead, I wake up with a smile and still looked forward to the day even though I knew it would be the same as yesterday."

"I don't know the right words for it, but I never regret coming in here," she added with a smile, glancing at Tilly. "Maybe I was born to be a maid.." She grinned.

Chapter 599 - I'm Pregnant

"I love you."

Silence. I raised my brows and glanced at everyone who attended our small wedding held in the mansion's garden. The wedding was simple as we preferred one that only the important people to our family to witness. Also, even though Sam could afford a grand wedding, the mainland wasn't a safe place for our guests.

"Hell, is that your marriage vow?" Klaus voiced out from his seat behind us. "Is that even a vow? I love you?"

"I can do better than that.." Claude chimed in.

"Wasn't he an artist? Can't he express himself even more than just those overused love confessions?" Silvia cast Rufus and Dominique a look while carrying Sunny. Law was holding Rufus' hands. Meanwhile, Kristina and Noah just looked at each other. Yulis, who was with them, remained silent in the corner as if he didn't want to be noticed.

"My mother deserves more promises than that." Law nodded.

"Maybe the person who is facilitating this wedding is at fault." Rufus rubbed his chin while gazing at Fabian. Yes. Fabian was the person we asked to facilitate this wedding. We didn't have a choice.

"Your Majesty, you're very smart! This is why you are in charge!" Klaus clapped, agreeing with Rufus' ridiculous conclusion.

It seemed they still held a grudge against him after Fabian let them all stay in the prison for weeks. If only I knew about it, I would've fetched them myself. But Sam also forgot about it because we had been busy.

Fabian still had his usual smile. "You're already husband and wife, but I still pronounce you as one. You may now kiss the bride." He darted his eyes between Sam and me while rubbing his ring.

"Fabian, I just want a nice wedding. Stop touching your ring." Sam, whose expression was already dead, sighed. "My Lilou, my love, my sun and moon, my world, we should have held this wedding with just the two of us. Our guest kept pressing my nerves and the person who facilitated our wedding was crazy. I am utterly disheartened... I wanted to fucking cut their tongues for good."

I chuckled as I held Sam's hands while he ground his teeth. My eyes softened as a faint sigh slipped past my lips.

"I love you too, Sam." I stepped forward, standing on my toes, and planted a peck on his lips. "Have more patience, hmm?"

Sam clicked his tongue, but after I kissed him a second time, he just frowned. As I hooked my arms around him, we faced our guests. They clapped and smiled genuinely, shouting congratulations. It was just us, but honestly, my heart felt full.

'It was perfect.' My smile remained as my eyes gloss over at everyone's faces. *'Not everyone is here, but I am still glad that they came.'*

My first wedding was held in the middle of the night and looked more like a funeral. But my second wedding, a decade later, was... also not the dream wedding the young version of Lilou dreamt about. Although the weather was nice

and clean, it wasn't held in the church and our guests weren't all the people I knew back in Grimsbanne.

Even so, this was the dream wedding of the current Lilou.

Simple, but was spent with the people who were close to our hearts.

"I feel exhausted," Sam grumbled as he leaned his head closer, resting it on my shoulder. "My love, shall we skip the afternoon banquet and proceed to our honeymoon?"

I laughed. "Sam, I might think you simply want this wedding for the honeymoon."

"Obviously," he mumbled, but I pretended I didn't hear him.

"What?"

"Nothing, my love. I love you, so I will wait patiently." A forced grin plastered across his face before facing our guest. Sam then invited everyone to the greenhouse we built last year. The greenhouse, Fabian, Sam, Tilly, Law, and I built together.

In the greenhouse, there was a long table where we all prepared the food since dawn. Since we were short of hands, Silvia, Kristina, Noah, and Claude lent us help. Although Claude just ate the entire time since he didn't have a knack for preparing foods.

"Our dearest guest, I hope you enjoy the food we prepared together." Sam gestured for everyone to eat as soon as the last person took a seat. But just as everyone excitedly picked up their cutleries, we all stopped.

"I'm pregnant," Silvia spoke loudly, causing silence in the greenhouse. Even I was confused. She was pregnant all along? Sam and I looked at each other, just like everyone else. My husband shrugged as he was equally shocked at this bomb Silvia just dropped.

Out of instinct, I turned my attention to Yul. He was sitting at the far end of the table, sitting beside Ramin. I could understand the shock plastered on his face, as it seemed his entire world just stopped.

"My lady, you are... pregnant?" Kristina inquired, breaking the silence that was beginning to thicken. "You?"

"Yes. I am."

"I'm having a cousin?" Law gasped excitedly. My son was the only person who didn't have a question mark hovering over his head.

Noah knitted his brows as well. "Who... is the father?"

"Your Majesty, is it you?" Klaus gasped, and we all shifted our eyes to Rufus. However, the man in question also seemed confused.

"My lady, please clarify this misunderstand." Rufus raised his brows briefly.

"I'm pregnant with Yul's child."

"..." There was a long silence in the room as we tried to analyze her clarification. Was that even called an explanation? When it only added another question mark in our head? Yul's child? Did she mean she gave birth to Yul's child? But her words were clear. She was pregnant with Yul's child. But how was that possible? Yul had been here with us for years!

The silence broke when Sam suddenly clapped. "Via, are you keeping your child for three years now? I'm surprised your belly didn't grow big! Can you tell Lilou the secret so she won't hurt her back every time her belly gets big? We planned to have sextuplets."

"Hell, I understand your intention. But are you not concerned for your wife's well-being?" asked Klaus in dismay, scrunching his nose. I ignored my husband's nonsense and set my eyes on Silvia, just like the rest.

She slowly turned her head and faced Yulis. "Beatrice told me to keep a man, tie him with a child. Take responsibility, Yulis Kieran Bloodfang."

"Uhm.... you should be pregnant for that, though?" this time, Tilly finally spoke, but her voice soon faded into the thick silence in the air.

Chapter 600 - Reconcile Or Not?

When Silvia arrived a week ago, Yulis was nowhere to be seen. Although Silvia tried to search for him first thing in the morning the next day, she didn't see him. It was obvious Yulis was avoiding her at all costs. So, today was their first meeting.

Still, they behaved, and Silvia pretended not to notice him throughout the entire wedding ceremony. She also didn't act out of the ordinary. So, I didn't expect that she was simply waiting for the wedding to end to execute the unhelpful guide Beatrice whispered in her ears.

Right. How did those two end up having a complicated love and hate friendship? Let me explain.

Based on Silvia's letters, it all started during the war three years ago. Since Klaus and Claude were tasked to help Grimsbanne at Sam's behest, Beatrice was also tasked to assist Silvia. To make the story shorter, Silvia and Beatrice were forced to talk to each other and had some moments where they talk woman to woman.

Silvia doesn't consider her relationship with Beatrice as friendship, though. She called it a rivalry. Even so, they stayed in contact, even though Beatrice returned home with Zero's head. Apparently, Zero had a lot of problems with the Cross

Kingdom. So, for Beatrice to return with his head was an achievement for their country.

That was the short summary of Silvia and Beatrice's rivalry.

"How will I take responsibility when you're not even pregnant?" Yulis finally spoke, lowering his head to massage his temple. "Silvia, you know too well that Beatrice's advice isn't really reliable."

"I was desperate, alright?" Her expression remained stoic, eyes on Yulis. "You are avoiding me. How can I get your attention if I don't take it this far?"

"God... I just want to eat," Klaus mumbled while pinching the space between his brows.

Silvia let out a deep sigh, casting me and Sam a look. "I'm sorry for interrupting your big day, but I was quite sure that after this banquet, this man will disappear again."

"Silvia... actually, just go on." To my surprise, Sam was more understanding as he waved. "I'm also looking forward to enjoying how you two will reconcile... or not! Hah! Whatever, this is embarrassing. But I understand since I'm also head over heels to a Bloodfang."

Sam winked at me while I smiled. "Anyway, to my other beloved guests who are hungry, place your bets. We shall enjoy this meal while watching some drama."

"I am not Silvia or Yul, but I am embarrassed!" Klaus shoved his spoon inside his mouth grumpily.

"Come on, Uncle. You might find this educational once you get married." Claude bumped his shoulder against Klaus. "Anyway, what do you think? Will they reconcile or not? Let's bet."

"They won't!" Sam raised a finger and Claude grinned.

"Uncle Hell, please bet your life on that."

"Why? So you can seduce my wife?"

Claude shrugged playfully before shifting his attention to Law, who was sitting across from him. "How about you, Law? What do you think?"

"I want a cousin."

"You already have one. Me."

"A cousin who doesn't think of marrying my mother if my father somehow died."

"That's my boy!" Sam pointed at Law and the two of them nodded at each other.

"Son, use that sharp tongue of yours to put that Claude in his place."

"Yes, Father."

"I am betting they will reconcile." This time, Charlotte, who was sitting beside Tilly, raised her hand. "Lady Tilly, what do you think?"

Tilly pondered for a moment. "They won't. If I am Silvia, I will rather marry Soran."

Rufus coughed, nearly choking on his food. "Please don't involve me in this," he remarked while grabbing a glass of wine.

"Captain, are you betting?" Ramin inquired, arm on the edge of the table. "I am betting they will not reconcile. How about you? Kristina? Lord Noah?"

Kristina frowned. "This is not a betting matter." She rolled her eyes and cast Noah a look.

The latter cleared his throat and nodded. "My wife is correct."

"Noah! Welcome to the club! Now you understand that once you're married, your wife's words should stand as your bible!" Sam clapped, proud of Noah. I chuckled while darting my eyes between Noah and Kristina. I was also surprised when I read Kristina's letter about her engagement with Noah.

It was quite a story of how those two ended up together. But that complicated story was not mine to tell.

One after another, everyone placed their bets, and they continued to eat. Meanwhile, Silvia and Yulis, the main attraction for this banquet, were having a staring competition. It didn't take long when only the soft clicks of cutlery

against the plates resonated, holding our breaths while waiting for either of them to break their silence.

"Is that it?" Silvia broke the ice when she couldn't take it anymore. "Don't you have anything to tell me?"

"Via, this is embarrassing."

"I know!" I flinched when she suddenly raised her voice. The tension increased as well. "But as I've said, I am desperate, so I am swallowing my pride. You left me with a single and short letter. If you want to end us, then say it now. Say it to my face, Yul. That kind of respect is what I deserve."

Yulis sighed as he scratched his temple. For a very obvious reason, everyone held their breaths. Even Kristina and Noah, who didn't want to bet, ended up joining since Claude persuaded them. That nephew of ours had his way of making other people agree with him.

In other words, Yulis's answer would determine who won the bet and who lost. I felt bad for Yulis and Silvia as their problem was being used as entertainment, but... I couldn't really blame them. Silvia already knew what was coming, but Yulis left her with no choice.

Just as Yulis' lips parted, Fabian clapped. "I am still available to facilitate a wedding. If His Grace and her ladyship want to get married, today is a good day," he suggested, looking at us as if to get our permission.

Sam and I looked at each other before setting our eyes back to Fabian. "That's not a bad idea, Fabi." I rocked my head, glancing at Sam once again, and he nodded.

"Right. Yulis, answer Silvia now. Since we're all gathered here, it's also good for Lilou and the kids to witness your wedding. We can't go back to the empire." Sam advised in a knowing tone.

"So, are you getting married or breaking up for good?" Fabian kept his smile until his eyes curved into a line. "We're all waiting, Your Grace."

Yulis glanced at Fabian and sighed. "Via, should we... talk? Just the two of us."

"What?! How will we know if you just —"

"Shut up, Klaus." Silvia glanced at Klaus with sharp eyes before looking back at Yulis. "Don't think you can escape this time, Yulis. I will not be kind if you do."

"Don't worry. Let's just settle this once and for all."

In the end, we could only watch those two walk away in silence.

"Love is a strange emotion," Tilly commented in her usual soft tone.

Fabian chuckled as he nodded.. "I agree."