

The Duke 617

Chapter 617 A living burden

'She's that person?' Claude gazed at Penny in disbelief, watching her dust off her hands with a smug grin on her charming face. It didn't take long when Penny single-handedly defeated these robbers, leaving them almost naked in this cold and tied up using their clothes. Currently, this occurrence had also reached his ear. Men recently turned up from across the earldom, tied up and naked. The only difference was that there was no placard hanging on their neck. The Earl investigated this and figured that all the victims were associated with small or big crimes. Thus, the people called this vigilante who was 'hunting' these bad guys down as a hero. It had a good and bad effect on the earl's name since a vigilante would always be a vigilante. Although it was targeting the bad guys, it was challenging his authority. And to think that that infamous vigilante was this young woman... Claude was rendered speechless. He watched Penny scratch her head lightly, looking around. "Well, I don't have a pen with me. Sucks," she mumbled to herself, but he heard her loud and clear. Penny glanced back at him and sighed, eyes full of criticism at this young man who did nothing all throughout. "You." He raised his brows when she called. "You will die early, young man."

"How old are you to keep calling me a young man?" he frowned, sizing her up.

"Definitely older than you."

"A thousand years old?" Penny laughed loudly. "Oy, oy! That is too much. Have you lived that long?"

'Well, that's how old my oldest uncle, though. And he is the only one who thinks I am a little crumb.' He thought, thinking that there were only one or two people in his life who considered him as a boy. "Anyway, these guys will be picked up tomorrow." She kicked the guy's toes and snapped her tongue. "How dare they ambush a young couple who are on their way to their honeymoon? Do you know young love, huh? How dare you take that away from the youngins?"

"..." Claude was aware she didn't mean that and what she meant was 'if' they were a real couple. But... it sounded strange how those embarrassing words leave her lips. He had met a few shameless people in his life — his uncles and aunties were the great examples for that — but it was rare to meet someone who was just as carefree as those people. Penny panted after ranting her heart out. "Ugh... never mind." She turned and faced Claude, blinking twice in silence. Her sudden quietness made him wonder about all sorts of things. 'Don't look at me like that,' he expressed internally, taking a careful step back because Penny was starting to alarm him. He already had an idea that Penny was not an ordinary lady. But the more he spent time with her, he always found himself in shock into silence. And it was just around three hours since they fled the brothel.

"You." He flinched when she pointed in the other direction of this empty street. "You go that way and I go this way. I don't want to babysit someone like you. Man... you're like a living burden."

'A living... burden?'

"What a waste of air and space." She clicked her tongue and shook her head while Claude's mind short-circuited. Penny waved, pivoting on her heel as she strutted in the direction she pointed. "Just live quietly like a dead mouse and you'll be fine," she advised, without looking back. "Gosh... if I keep doing this, everyone will drag my intelligence down."

While Penny walked away, she kept grumbling to herself. Meanwhile, Claude wished his hearing wasn't keen so he couldn't hear her put him in a basket along with all the stupid people in the world. But alas, his sharp senses were a gift he got from birth. He ground his teeth, balling his hand into a fist. 'I should apologize to Uncle for playing too much,' he thought, thinking that he would usually bully Klaus in a roundabout way.

'I guess I make mistakes too.' he let out a deep exhale, turning his head in Penny's back from a distance. 'Why did I think of playing a pushover role instead of a hero again?'

Claude ran his hand through his hair. The answer was obvious. If he acted like he was used to, Penny wouldn't lower her guard. Thanks to the keen senses, he instantly knew Penny wouldn't even trust him even the slightest if he was someone capable. She was the type of person who had a strong sense of justice for the weak. He already proved that theory in his brief time with her. He raised his brows, looking up at the starless night sky. "Monarey is always cold," he whispered, closing his eyes slightly to rest for a bit. His breathing formed smoke because of the chilly night and climate. 'One is a vigilante who turned up when the organization set foot in here. I wonder where they came from, what they want, and their motives.' Claude slowly opened his sharp eyes, clearing his head from Penny's insults. 'Whatever it is, I think sticking with her will somehow lead me to them sooner. With her personality, although she is skilled, she will die if she goes against a group of vicious felons.'

Not that Claude was worried about Penny since he didn't have any strong attachment to her. But... he believed Penny was on a suicide mission. Keeping her alive was his duty as the earl since she wasn't that bad as a person. "Uncle, I will leave the castle for a while," he spoke in a quiet voice, staring at the empty street she had taken without worrying about the figure in the dark. "Proceed with the plan about tonight's transaction and keep the Baron in the dungeon. I'll interrogate him myself later."

As soon as those orders left his lips, Claude jogged to follow Penny. Meanwhile, Klaus, who was watching everything unfold, gazed at the people Penny knocked out. "I should thank that young lady for avenging me. My years of hardship raising that rascal... I live for this day to come. Hah!"

Chapter 618 Owl Guild

"Aish...! Why do you keep on following me?!" Penny clicked her tongue, annoyed at Claude, who was following her like a tail. Although he kept a good distance, he was like a puppy following his new master. "I told you I don't have anywhere to go. I can pay you just to keep me safe." Claude frowned, watching her gaze at him in disdain. "Please. I can adjust. I just need a home."

"Hah...!" Penny scrunched her nose up. She had already sized up this man, and he wasn't the type of person who should be tangled in this type of world. Although she didn't know what sort of story this young man had, this path she was taking was dangerous. If Penny only knew... how great of an actor, this man was in front of her.

"God... I hate myself." She pinched the space in her brows. "Why am I so weak in these kinds of people? No. How can I not say no to handsome men?" she grumbled, hissing, before letting out a deep exhale. "Fine." His face instantly brightened while she sighed for the umpteenth time. Penny pointed at him, eyes solemn.

"But in one condition. Don't expect me to save you every time you get in trouble. I'm no hero."

"You can count on me!" "Ah, God..." Penny looked at him with a poker face before she shook her

head. She smacked her lips, turning around as she continued to enter the narrow alley. This time, Claude hurried and followed closely. "Why are you going to this place?" he asked, looking around at the dark narrow alley he had never gone into before. "Going home." His brows furrowed, gazing to her side. "Stop asking before I totally lose it."

His mouth opened and closed, but decided to keep his thoughts to himself. So, Claude simply looked around, memorizing the route they were taking until they reached a back door. Penny knocked on the door lazily. "It's me." The door took several seconds before it opened from the inside. Claude raised a brow, seeing an eye peeking through the small gap. As soon as the person's eye landed on Penny, it dilated before the door abruptly opened.

"Leader!" Claude's eyes popped open, seeing a buffed man with a thick beard and long hair welcome Penny back. But his expression instantly changed to confusion as soon as his eyes landed on the young man standing next to Penny.

The man's eyes dilated as he gasped. "Leader, did you abduct yet another handsome young man?!" "What?" Claude's face distorted, gazing at Penny in dismay.

"Hey, don't slander me, alright!" Penny winced, glaring at the man holding the door. "Let us in first. God! All people just see my actions as bad!"

"Ah, right..." the man snapped, nodding while opening the door wide. As Penny went in, he leaned to her side and whispered as if gossiping. "But, leader, didn't you say you like handsome men? This man is a good catch."

"Shh!" Claude, who was following them from behind and listening to them, bit his tongue. He was certain Penny didn't lure her because he followed her with an ulterior motive. However, why did he feel a bit cheated? 'Just when will these surprises stop?' he wondered, mentally shaking his head as this was unfolding in a predictable way. But just as he thought that this was the end of the surprise, he was wrong. The next moment, after walking through a cramped and short hallway, what welcomed him was a large pub. Claude froze on the spot, eyes scanning the pub or lobby that looked like a pub. The space was crowded; men and women alike were having a drink, sharing loud laughter; some were bickering to the point it looked like they would fight, while the rest fanned the flames. 'What the...?'

"Everyone! The leader is back!" he turned his head to the buffed man who opened the door for them. The latter clapped and the noises in the air slowly subsided.

"Leader!! Welcome back!" "Hello, Leader!"

"Leader, you're even more beautiful today than the last time I saw you!" Greetings and compliments replaced the arguments and senseless jokes. That second, Claude instantly noticed the respect and admiration of everyone in here for Penny. Some even stood from their seat, approaching Penny.

"Leader~ I missed you!" To Clade's surprise, a girl leaped towards Penny and hugged her thigh.

"Haha! Betty, I missed you too!" Penny squatted down with a large grin on her face, picking up the adorable Betty. When she straightened her back with Betty in her arms, Penny faced a woman.

"Leader, you got us all worried," said the woman with a relieved smile. "Karen, you should make up a better lie than that. How can you say you're worried about me when everyone seems they were having fun without me?" Penny chuckled, teasing Karen, her subordinate.

"Leader, we just know you're capable, but we are all worried deep down." A lean young man chimed in, standing beside the buffed man who welcomed them. He gazed at the man and cast him a knowing look. "Peter and I even planned to look for you if you don't return tonight."

"Tch. Don't drag my kind Peter here, Gai." Penny shook her head, but the smile on her face was genuine. As they conversed, more people approached Penny to welcome her back. Meanwhile, Claude blinked countless times, trying to get a grasp of what was going on. What was this place? How did this group of people didn't reach the earl's ears? And why do they all call Penny their leader?

Myriads of questions hovered over his head on top of the initial questions he had previously. But just then, he snapped his eyes when Penny spoke.

"Ah, right!" Penny cleared her throat as she cast Claude a knowing look. "This is Third, someone I picked up somewhere. You know I have a kind heart, so I can't turn a blind eye to a pitiful and lost soul."

"Leader! How can you say that with a straight face?! You picked him up because he is handsome, did you?!" "It's not that I am doubting your kind heart, but you're not a saint, leader! How can you lure an innocent young man to warm your bed?!"

"Leader, I'm so disappointed in you!" Penny's under eyes twitched, hearing these blatant slanders from everyone. The vein in her temple protruded before she finally lost it and yelled.

"Damn it! I am innocent here, alright?! He is the one who kept following me!" she panted, silencing everyone with her glare. "Anyway, he is now part of this family. Be kind to him. He said he needs a home!"

Slowly, Penny shifted her eyes to the shocked Claude. The latter watched as everyone set their eyes on him, giving him undivided attention. Before he could speak, everyone already sported a large, welcoming grin. "Welcome to the Owl's Guild, Brother!"

Chapter 619 Don't underestimate a housewife

The Owl's Guild.

A group of nomads who sold information for a living. Each of them came from a different country. Due to circumstances, they followed Penny. The current leader of the group. Currently, they were hunting down a crime organization. The reason these people currently live in the earldom. That was all Claude could make up for what they told him. Of course, since the earldom was open, they couldn't monitor each entry and exit across the earldom. The reason these people temporarily settled without being noticed.

They were people the earl should be wary about them. Although they hadn't done nor did they have the intention to cause disharmony in the earldom.

If anything, the Owl's Guild simply wanted to settle scores with the real felons who were causing fear in the shadows. Most members had a personal grudge against the said organization, so they all agreed to take them all down. "Third, you're zoning out again." Claude snapped his eyes, raising his eyes at Peter. He was drying up a glass with a cloth, standing behind the counter of the pub. The latter was the person he first met in this place. Despite his rogue appearance, he was kind. "Sorry. I'm still not used to how empty the pub looks during the day." He chuckled, looking back at the

empty tables and chairs. "It's been a week since Penny took me in, but all I did was help you clean the place. What has she been doing?"

"Leader is always busy," Peter replied in a light tone, shrugging while casting Claude a look. "You know our circumstance. Since this family is big, we need to do a lot of things. Having this pub is not enough to fill all our stomachs."

Claude adjusted to the stool, studying Peter as he placed the glass under the counter to wipe the rest. "Peter... if you are all this determined to hunt down that organization, why don't you ask the Earl's help? I'm a local here. Although his cruelty and ruthlessness are proven, he is rational. He might help you."

"Haha! Of course, he might help us. But... will he even lend us an ear first?"

"You won't know unless you try. Penny is amazing. I'm sure she can make the earl listen."

Peter chuckled, propping his side against the other side of the counter, eyes on Claude. "Third, I know since you're a local here, you have more faith in the young Earl of Monarey. However, not us. Drawing the Earl's attention might make this hunt easier, but then again, what would happen after?"

"Right..." Claude rocked his head, getting a good grasp of what he was saying. "We're a family here, Third. We struggle together, but we don't do anything that will endanger everyone on purpose. Our life is already dangerous enough. Asking a pureblood's help might sound better, but we don't know the Earl." Peter let out a deep breath, batting his eyes ever so slowly. "He is one of the very few purebloods in the empire. We'd rather not get tangled with such a person and stay away from him."

Claude let out a sigh, knocking his knuckles against the counter lightly. "I want to help in here, though. How can I help if I just clean the pub?"

"Man... you make it sound like our task is useless." Peter laughed while Claude looked up at him. "Although this is quite easier than the others, just think what everyone will feel if they come home in a dirty home. You think this is nothing, but to them, that is enough for them to rest after a day's work."

"So, we're like a housewife."

"Don't underestimate a housewife." His laugh grew louder whilst shaking his head. "You're young, Third. But a housewife is one of the toughest jobs. Have some pride in it."

Peter shook his head as he continued to wipe the newly washed glasses for tonight. Meanwhile, Claude just watched him. In his first week in this guild, he didn't hate it, to be honest. Everyone was kind and welcoming; it was strange but Claude got along with them well.

"Peter," he called, waiting for Peter to look in his way. "Why... did you welcome me without question? I mean, considering your line of work, I'm certain you had enemies. Didn't you consider that I am a spy?"

The corner of Peter's lips stretched from ear to ear. "Are you?"

"I'm just asking." Claude frowned, seeing that playful grin plastered on the man. "Although I am grateful for the warm welcome, it just..."

"Strange?" Claude glanced up, nodding. "Yes. It's a bit strange how everyone just welcomed me without prejudice or a shred of doubt. Weren't you afraid that you are welcoming a monster?"

"Haha! Why would we?" Again, Peter leaned his arms against the counter, eyes on Claude squarely. "If Penny took you in herself, then there's nothing to worry about."

"Why do you trust her so much?"

"Because she's our leader. She will never do something that will hurt us." Peter's eyes glinted with admiration. "Also, it's not the first time she took someone in. Gai, for example, had the same circumstance as you. Penny simply took almost everyone who didn't have a home in here because she's that kind. How can we mistreat you if we were in your shoes at one point?" Claude let out a shallow breath, keeping his thought while Peter resumed his work. His eyes lowered to his fist. "These people aren't that strong. Actually, they were, but not as impressive. And yet, look at them.' He snuck a look at Peter. 'They make me feel bad for keeping my identity a secret. Will they hate me if I told them I am the earl?'

Claude was a little torn. Whether or not he admitted it, he was starting to like this group. He knew he shouldn't be too attached since they would leave Monarey once this was settled. But... who would dislike such warm people?

"Peter. I'll take a walk outside for a bit. I will come back." He knocked on the counter, seeing Peter nod before he left.