

The Duke's Passion

Chapter 7 - Welcome Home <3

"Lilou!" As soon as I reached the field where I worked, the children called out to me excitedly. The gloominess I had been feeling instantly faded away as they approached, and I squatted down to greet them.

I used to help full-time in the field but the farmers insisted I focus on teaching the kids, even though education for peasants was unnecessary. Thankfully, the farmers shared my ideals. I knew little, but I kept on learning and sharing that knowledge. Also, my father taught me a lot of things before he passed.

"How are you today?" I asked the kids with a smile.

It was early in the morning but the children were already covered in dirt. Although they were dirty, they were just as brilliant as those middle-class and noble children in the city. It pained me that they didn't have the same privileges and reminded me of how I wanted to attend school, but my father couldn't afford it.

"Lilou, we were all worried that something happened to you!" one child exclaimed, causing my brows to furrow.

"Huh? Why were you worried? Why would something happen to me?" I asked, curious what could have happened to make them worry about me. Well, something did happen to me but I had made it out alive... for now.

A familiar voice chuckled next to me and said, "These children heard about the incident in the neighboring town last night."

Slowly, I turned my attention to old Olly. She was a housewife who used to help her husband in the field and watched the children from time to time.

She had to switch to working in the field full time when her husband died because of a disease and the responsibility of watching the kids was passed to me.

"Old Olly, we always hear such news and it will probably never change." I smiled and stood up upright.

The children held my hand as I faced old Olly. "But, what's important is that everyone in Town is safe," I added, casting my eyes around the vast field. We had lost many people over the years but everyone kept moving forward.

This field was a witness to everyone's time and even knew my father when he used to work here as a farmer.

"Ah, you're right!" Old Olly chuckled heartily. "As long as everyone here is safe, that has nothing to do with us!" Her laughter grew louder as she walked back to the field.

I smiled and felt moved as I watched everyone toiling away in the field. I was never this emotional, however, my life or death experience of encountering a vampire made me appreciate the small things in life more. I was glad that that bloodthirsty, silver-haired vampire found me and not them. I was fond of everyone because they were like family to me. Seeing them safe despite how tough life was? It was good enough for me. I would just treasure these memories while I have time left.

"Lilou? Are you crying?" A child asked as I watched everyone from a distance. I looked down and every one of them was looking up at me, their innocent eyes worried.

"No, I'm not." I shook my head lightly, wiping a tear from the corner of my eye. "Lilou is just... extremely happy that everyone is fine," I explained, patting their heads reassuringly. I kept my smile until the children felt reassured and smiled back.

"Let's go? I have a lot to teach you, alright?" I encouraged, stretching my subtle smile into a grin. The children all cheered at once with my hands holding theirs, we headed to the large oak tree where I taught them how to read and write under its shade.

The day had passed in the blink of an eye and I was thankful that I survived today, just like how I survived all the other days.

After school was done, I helped Old Olly and the farmers in the field. Although they only asked me to help with light tasks, I was happy to help.

Now that it was time to go home, I looked up at the road leading to my shack and I remembered that when my father passed away, the farmers worriedly tried to convince me to live near the field. However, I was stubborn and kept living in the shack my father built. I never thought I would reconsider that decision after so many years.

"I just hope he left," I murmured, smiling bitterly at my hopeless situation. He said it himself. He wouldn't let me go and my days are numbered. "It's fine, Lilou," I whispered, attempting to comfort myself as I dragged my feet back home.

Also, after spending another day in the field it reminded me that I couldn't put them in danger. If I somehow managed to get away, that despicable vampire might divert his attention to them and I wouldn't forgive myself if one of them got hurt because of me.

As I made up the reason I shouldn't run away, I snapped back when I realized I had already reached the top of the hill. I slowly turned my head towards the horizon to see that the sun was about to set, sprinkling the world with golden rays.

A beautiful sight to see that was twinned with terror once it fully set. Sunsets were a beautiful sight to behold, but once it set, fear started creeping into our hearts.

I wondered if the nobility experienced the same fear every sunset. Perhaps they didn't.

"I'm..." When I was about to enter the door, my habit of announcing my arrival struck me and I halted before I could finish, thinking that I should stop these weird habits because no one was at home anymore.

Just as I clenched my teeth, an appetizing aroma wafted my nose. What was that? Hurriedly, I walked through the door and saw the silver-haired man slowly turn to face me. "You're early, but welcome home!" he said, smiling from ear to ear until his eyes narrowed into slits.

"Welcome home...?" I whispered under my breath, as my eyes softened. The man who would take my life uttered the words I've been longing to hear all these years, and yet my heart still fluttered.

I'm home, my heart whispered.