

## The Duke 761

### Chapter 761 The night of the regression V

The Emperor's Palace was no different from the previous ones Florence and Fabian went through. The hallways were filled with servants and knights, but unlike the bloody scene from the previous hallways, there was no blood around. It only meant they were simply unconscious. However, that didn't mean the scent of blood didn't waft into their nostrils. There was this distinct sweet scent of blood and the closer Fabian and Florence were to the Emperor's chambers, the stronger it got. Fabian's expression slowly grew darker, while the fear in her eyes amplified until Fabian kicked the door open. Both of them froze by the door as the aromatic scent of blood wafted in their nose. Florence covered her nose and mouth because the scent left this tingling sensation in her teeth. It smelled delicious. "You..." she snapped her eyes when Fabian spoke. Florence glanced at Fabian's side, seeing him staring in a direction. Her gaze followed where he was staring, only for her pupils to slowly go wide.

There, straddling the emperor's body, was... Silvia. Silvia was holding a knife tainted with blood. When Fabian's voice reached her ears, her trembling hands dropped the knife on top of Rufus's bleeding chest. She slowly raised her head, revealing the tears flooding her face. Fear and confusion filled her eyes as she fixed her gaze on Fabian. "Fabi..." she whispered, her lips trembling. "... I... don't know what happened."

Fabian's eyes darkened as a murderous glint flickered across his eyes. He raised his hand to the side, flexing his fingers as he call forth, "Maleficent."

Florence's breath hitched as Fabian disappeared right in front of her in a blink of an eye, only to see him standing beside the bed. His dark spear was pointing at Silvia's throat while the latter had her chin raised. "You don't know what happened...?" Fabian repeated with bloodlust laced in his dark voice. "Let me tell you what happened, marchioness. You snuck inside the emperor's chambers and stabbed him..."

Silvia's shoulder stiffened, looking back at Fabian slowly. "Forget about everything," he muttered, gripping his dark spear. Fabian raised his blades and placed them on her forehead. He pressed it slightly until blood seeped out of her wound. Yet the blood seemed to be absorbed by his dark spear, producing a dark shroud.

"It is my fault for not dealing with you earlier. But the next time I do... I will definitely end you."

Florence gasped when Fabian suddenly thrust his dark spear into Silvia's head as if her skull were as soft as a watermelon. From her vantage point, she could see Silvia's dilated eyes as she stared at Fabian, and how those eyes slowly dim of life. When Fabian pulled his blade out, Silvia's body collapsed on the bed helplessly. Florence took a careful step back, staring at Fabian's back with utter dread. Emperor was dead, and he died in his sleep. Silvia, the empress' lady-in-waiting and also the Marchioness of La Lona March, killed him, and now she was also dead. There was no reason for Silvia to kill Rufus, and it was strange how Rufus died so easily. Rufus was the strongest knight. Hence, he would've woken up when Silvia came in here. Florence wanted to mistake this scenario for Silvia and Rufus having an affair, and things just went wrong. However, she knew Silvia and Rufus very well. Those two... wouldn't do that.

'Heliot's sister isn't as dumb as she looks.' Florence froze when she heard a devious voice in her head, but before she could even do or speak, she felt her hand twitch. Her vision slowly blurred, and the last thing she saw was Fabian turning in her direction. She stretched her hand to him, but the next thing she knew she was falling to her side. And then there was just darkness. It was sudden. She didn't even feel any pain aside from this distinct tightness in her chest. That was the last thing Florence remembered before she woke up carrying these memories after Fabian abducted her while she was still a princess in Karo.

Chapter 762 Please banish me

[ PRESENT TIME ]

"Why... did you send me to the Heart's Empire, brother? Why did you send me to another land while you... and everyone in Karo, died? I cannot understand."

Florence clutched the quilt that was covering her lap. Her eyes heat up, grinding her teeth, waiting for Heliot's answer. Deep in her heart, she knew Heliot wouldn't know the answer, but lest he already made this ridiculous deal who would betray him and Karo, she was taking the risk. That night of the regression was one of the most traumatizing things Florence had experienced in all her heart. Her heartache in her marriage paled in comparison. The sheer thought of blood right now could turn her stomach.

"You... remember?" Heliot narrowed his eyes as he sized up the princess sitting on the bed. Based on that series of questions, it was obvious Florence seemed to remember her memories before the regression. After all, she did mention 'Heart's Empire' instead of 'kingdom.' "How?" he asked under his breath, intrigued by how his sister suddenly retrieved her memories. Just days ago, there was nothing wrong with Florence, and was acting like usual. How did she change the second she woke up after her abduction? It somehow reminded Heliot of how Lilou also changed overnight.

"Does it matter?" Florence let out a short, ridiculing laugh. "It seemed you still hadn't made the deal... or are you lying?"

"Princess, if my actions before the regression upset you, I would find a satisfactory answer."

Florence shook her head. "This is not about your action... or perhaps, it was. After all, before I died, which I assumed was my end before returning in time, Your Highness specifically ordered me not to return to Karo at all cost. You might not remember it now, but I remember."

"What happened and what will happen had left a deep wound in my heart. However, I might've abhorred you for it, but I cannot deny Your Highness is a wise man and must've had a reason." She raised her chin, determined to follow her gut feeling. "You could've told me to send reinforcement, but instead, told me to even stop His Majesty Rufus if he wants to rescue Karo from the hands of your enemies."

"Please... banish me if sending me to the Heart's Kingdom will put you in a difficult position," she added adamantly. "If you truly feel sorry for me, then let me do what I want, Your Highness." "No." Heliot's eyelids drooped. "You are not going anywhere, sister. Whatever the reason was, I can protect Karo and my people."

Florence's jaw tightened, holding his cold gaze. "If that is already clear, use this time to rest. You do not have to worry about this matter. If what you said was all true, then I promise you it won't

happen again." Heliot remarked as a dangerous glint flickered across his eyes. "No one... will touch my land. Not under my watch."

Chapter 763 A hero in some eyes, a cruel villain in another's perspective.

"No one... will touch my land. Not under my watch."

With that being said, Heliot sauntered off without another word. As he left, Florence's grip on the quilt trembled as tears rolled down her cheek. This time, her tears weren't from fear or confusion, but because of anger and disappointment. That was the Heliot Von Stein she knew. If this was before, Florence would rather feel assured. After all, Heliot was a man of his words. Once Heliot gave his word, he would do it no matter what. But time reversed and there were certain things that left a crack in Florence's trust towards Heliot. "You... changed back then, brother," she whispered after some time, eyes still fixed on the shut door where Heliot left. "How did I not notice that?"

Florence bit her inner lower lip, recalling the time before she was crowned the empress. Back then, when Heliot first attended the founding celebration of the Heart's Kingdom and got acquainted with the Duchess of Grimsbanne, Heliot had changed. They thought Heliot and Lilou, the Duchess of Grimsbanne and also the former Empress before Florence, were developing feelings. Who wouldn't?

Heliot never exchanged letters with anyone in the past just as much as he exchanged letters with Lilou. Not just that, but Heliot had sent many gifts to Lilou, and he had also visited her a couple of times. Just the travel time Heliot spent to meet Lilou was enough to consider it a courtship. However, everyone knew Heliot and Lilou didn't end up exchanging vows since the Duke of Grimsbanne turned up alive. The officials in the land of Karo were worried back then — Florence had remembered that time. The thing was, Heliot's reaction wasn't what everyone had expected. Heliot wasn't broken-hearted or anything of the sort, but instead, he had always been in a great mood. Florence never met Lilou personally, but she knew the things she knew as she watched this side of the story unfold. Still, she couldn't deny that Heliot slowly became less and less insufferable. And because of that... he felt like someone who was within anyone's reach, unlike the untouchable man he used to be.

"Brother... you might not remember, but I do not want you to regret letting me stay," she whispered, loosening her grip on the quilt. "Moreover, that Butler, Fabian... is the only person who knew what happened that night."

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[ HEART'S KINGDOM ]

"Cassara, I am not in the mood to play word games with you. Tell me. Where did Hell go?" Silvia gazed at Cassara across from her. Her eyes were sharp while Cassara was reclining on her side, showing her lack of interest in Silvia's inquiry. Ever since Silvia regained her consciousness, she had been investigating the kingdom. Yulis didn't remember anything; it was the same with Dominique. Her hair would even raise whenever she would bump into Hanzel and the people she knew had died, but now well and just as vicious as before. Silvia had been careful and had acted almost the same as before. However, in front of Cassara, she wasn't. After all, Cassara definitely knew things Silvia didn't. Samael and his people were here months ago, and Silvia was certain they used Cassara's ability to retrieve Fabian's memories. She witnessed all that, which didn't make sense to her until Silvia mysteriously regained her memories. The problem was that Cassara would either

give her a silent treatment or wouldn't meet her at all. If Silvia didn't force her way in, she wouldn't be sitting across from Cassara while the latter was lazing on the settee.

"Cassara!"

"You are so loud, sister." Cassara fluttered her eyelashes ever so tenderly, looking back at Silvia's burning eyes. "I don't know where the hell that man went and even if I know, why would I tell you? It's a good thing you retrieved your memories, but will you not implicate me with your personal dilemma?"

"Cassara, how can you be so relaxed after knowing this reversal of time? You know yourself this was a defiance of the natural order of this world and —"

"And then, what?" Cassara arched a brow. "Sister, aren't you being too much? I know you are surprised by this revelation. However, must you speak this way? Have you forgotten that I... had died?"

Silvia's breath hitched at Cassara's remarks, watching the latter push herself from her reclining position. The latter faced Silvia squarely, bearing a dull expression. "For you, this is a problem. But for me, it's a blessing in disguise. I do not know why I am back here, but what I do know is that all I want right now is to survive." Cassara leaned back, sizing up Silvia from head to toe. She folded her arms under her chest, smirking. "If you want to go and follow Hell, just kill yourself. For sure, you'll go straight to hell."

"Cassara —!"

"Silvia, I will repeat myself. I don't know where Hell went, and I absolutely don't care about him. However, I'll give you a piece of advice. If I were you, leave this place." A glint flickered across Cassara's eyes, keeping her smirk up. "Go somewhere far, far away, sister. Or else someone will come for you and deliver you to hell."

Cassara pushed herself up, walking around the coffee table that was separating the two of them. She then stood beside Silvia, planting a hand on her shoulder.

"Even if that person won't kill you..." she bent over to whisper in Silvia's ear. "... I will. After all, his memories were mine to bear, and if his memories managed to dominate mine, I will kill you for everything you had done the night of the regression."

Cassara scoffed as she straightened her back, looking down at Silvia's side profile. "He might've good control of his memories, but I don't. Remember the time I ventured that peasant's memory? She passed her craziness to me, and I hope that won't happen again."

"This is why I loathed Hell." She retrieved her hand from Silvia as she walked away. "All I want is to survive now, only for him to give me an ultimatum on when that butler's memories reign over me and lead me to my death."

Chapter 764 What are the odds?

Fabian didn't hurt Florence and had only put her to sleep. Hence, she still has all the energy to use and sneak out of the Royal Palace. Fortunately, Heliot didn't think she would sneak out and didn't order an increase in security. Sneaking out for Florence was as easy as slicing a piece of cake. She had done it many times to count growing up since she wasn't that an important princess. Even

though Heliot knew about her mischief, he turned a blind eye to it, since the land of Karo was overall a safe place for his sister. Moreover, it was not like it was doing Florence any harm.

Who would have thought? That after many years of sneaking out, a day would come where Florence would sneak out with no intention of returning? Well, it was not like she didn't attempt to flee home that night Fabian abducted her. It just so happened Heliot didn't know her heart, since he thought Fabian took her against her will. Running through the dark street of a particular district of Karo, Florence looked back. She heaved a sigh of relief when she was certain no one was following her. Still, that didn't stop her feet from moving forth. 'I can't be complacent yet,' she told herself, looking ahead, taking a turn to the alley on her right. 'For as long as I'm in Karo, I can't be complacent yet. I can't stop here.'

A glint of determination flickered across her eyes. There were many unanswered questions in her head, but Florence kept them all in the back of her head. Heliot wouldn't give her an answer simply because he didn't have any satisfactory answer right now. 'That insufferable butler...' Florence gritted her teeth, recalling that annoying smile of that sadistic butler. Be it before the regression or the current timeline, Fabian was just as insufferable. Although there were some things she should thank him for, she couldn't entirely feel indebted to him. Why would she? Each time Fabian helped her, he would claim her lips without her consent. He may feel that wasn't enough, but that was more than enough for her to feel a zero ounce of any gratitude towards him. 'Where should I go?' she wondered, clutching her cloak in the front. 'The Heart's Kingdom? But I don't know anyone in that place and even if I know anyone, I'm certain they wouldn't remember me.' The dilemma of not knowing where to go slowly crawled under her skin, making her heart race slightly. But that didn't deter her from moving forth nor was it enough to slow her down. She didn't mind sleeping in the street... although that scared her witless. 'You're not strong, Florence,' she told herself. 'But you have to go. For Karo... for your brother... for everyone... even though you don't know exactly if you're doing the right thing.'

Florence mentally nodded, steeling her heart, reminding herself of the warning she received the night of the regression. Bitterness swirled in her midnight blue eyes as she thought about the night of the disaster. Back then, Karo had fallen, or so, from what the letter claimed. This Karo... this prosperous and peaceful country had fallen and then the Heart's Empire. If the time didn't reverse, Florence could imagine the worse the day after that night. 'My husband died... and so was Lady Silvia.' Her teeth clenched, exiting the alley only to jump into a darker alley. 'I fainted... wait...'

Florence narrowed her eyes as she recalled something. [ Heliot's sister isn't as dumb as she looks ]

That second, her heart tightened as her breath hitched. Her speed slowed down, remembering that voice, yet the distinct voice in her head before the darkness overtook her. Remembering those words and that voice made the hair behind her neck raise.

'That's right... there's that voice.' Another question mark hovered over her head as she picked up her speed. 'I felt weak when I heard that voice.'

Florence balled her hand into a tight fist as another purpose rose in her head. She needed to find the truth while running away. Her eyes glinted. 'The mainland,' she told herself. 'The people of the mainland. I should start...'

Her eyes went round as she was nearing the end of the dark alley, only to see someone passing by. Florence slowed down, her boots screeching to stop herself from crashing into the person at the end

of the alley. But alas, it was too late. The person passing by the alley slowly turned his head in the alley's direction, only to see someone clumsily speed towards him. Knowing there wasn't much time, he raised his hand to stop Florence, holding her shoulder. However, just as he did, he stepped foot on a small fever. Hence, as he used force to stop her, the pebble rolled, subsequently making them fall. Boogsh!

Thick smoke instantly ascended on the two figures on the sandy ground. Florence clenched her teeth as her knee landed on the ground, although the rest of her body was safe as the person she crashed into was underneath her. "Ah —" Florence ground her teeth, pushing herself to sit upright. She raised her palm and caught a minor scratch, wincing as she closed her fist. "That hurts..."

Florence opened and closed her fist while the smoke thinned out. At this point, she hadn't realized the awkward situation she was in until she noticed a person's gaze under her.

"I didn't think Her Highness is into wild fantasies." She froze upon hearing a familiar voice of a man, setting her eyes down, only for her breath to hitch. Of all people she could've bumped into... why would she bump into this insufferable being? Were the gods playing tricks on her right now? Seriously?

"Karo isn't that big, but it isn't small either. However, it seems we're meant to be... don't you think so, Your Highness?" Fabian smiled until his eyes were squinting, enjoying how the horror resurfaced in those pair of mesmerizing eyes and her mouth falling open from shock.

Chapter 765 Can't you just apologize?

"Karo isn't that big, but it isn't small either. However, it seems we're meant to be... don't you think so, Your Highness?"

When Florence heard those shameless remarks, she was rendered speechless. Now, she was certain, without a shadow of a doubt, that she wasn't seeing things. This man was that insufferable brother-in-law, Fabian.

"I'm not sorry," she breathed out, eyes blazing angrily. "Forgiven."

Florence clutched his chest and spat out through her gritted teeth. "I said, I'm not sorry!" "Oh..." His smile remained, nodding in understanding, raising his hand in surrender. "... but that doesn't mean I will not forgive Your Highness. However, there's a limit to my benevolence. I forgive you for crashing into me, but not if you defiled me."

"What?" Florence gasped in disbelief, a bit surprised at that random remark. Seeing Fabian arch a brow playfully, she froze for a second the moment she realized she was literally sitting on him. A short squeal escaped her mouth, jumping from him in a hurry. Her eyes shook, jumping even further to create a good distance from him. She watched him lazily sit upright, breath hitching as he snapped his eyes at her. "It's alright, Your Highness. At least now, I am certain you do not intend to defile me," he reassured politely as he stood up, brushing off the dust off his clothes.

"Why would I defile — I mean, are you following me?" she asked with a shaking voice. "Why did you suddenly appear out of nowhere? What else do you want from my brother now? Lest you do not know, I don't have anything to do with him now. Thus, whatever business you need to deal with him, go straight to him and don't use me as leverage."

Fabian tilted his head to the side. "Your Highness, our meeting tonight is purely a coincidence."

"Coincidence?" Florence narrowed her eyes suspiciously, looking around to see if there were other people. "Why should I believe you?"

"I didn't see you have to." He shrugged nonchalantly. "Very well. If that is all, I'll be on my way."

Florence took a step back in case he planned to catch her off guard. When she saw Fabian turn on his heel and walked away, she clutched her hand closer to her chest. 'He is really leaving?' she wondered, looking around at the empty and dark alley. She waited for a second if someone would appear, but no one slinked out of the shadow. Not that she felt another presence aside from him, but knowing how capable the people from the Heart's Empire were, she didn't want to lower her guard.

"What did you do to me?" Florence asked, stopping Fabian from walking away. "You did something to me, didn't you?"

"I don't seem to understand what her highness is talking about." He turned around to face her, only to see her raise her chin as she dropped her hand to the side. "I remembered everything," she stressed through her gritted teeth. "After what you did..." her hands balled into a fist as her eyes grew fiery. "... I woke up with my memories intact. Don't lie to me, brother-in-law. What did you do to me to return my memories?" Fabian didn't answer immediately, sizing her up. "An... experiment."

"An experiment?"

"That's interesting. I didn't think it'll work..." his smile stretched until his eyes were squinting, waving her goodbye as he turned his back on her. "I'll gather more data on the road to prove this theory."

"You...!" Florence ground her teeth, remembering how she was also used as some sort of experiment subject in the past. The first time they met, Fabian was also proving something that she didn't fully understand. And then now? Just how much more disrespect should she have to endure from this man?

"Stop!" she yelled, stopping Fabian from his tracks. Florence stomped her feet towards him until she was standing in front of him, blocking his path. "Just what did I do for you to insult me from then and now?"

"I believe you are misunderstanding something, Your Highness."

"I don't!" she harrumphed aggressively, balling her hand into a tight fist. "First, you claimed my lips despite knowing I'm not only the Empress and the mother of the nation but also your brother's wife. You never apologized, and then now... you poisoned me. I might not be relevant in the land of Karo now, and your brother might not have valued me as his wife. But... how dare you?"

Fabian slowly opened his squinting eyes, noticing how the corner of her eyes turned red. "I... simply returned your memories to help you and the land of Karo," he said calmly. "Satiating my curiosity for repayment sounds fair, don't you think?"

"A repayment?" she scoffed, only for her breath to hitch at his response.

"I did save you back then when people should've slaughtered you in your chambers. That's my repayment for my rudeness for forcing you into my experiment for the poll," he explained. "And now, I had returned your memories and taken you out of the dark as a repayment for whatever stupid decision you had made before the regression."

"What..." she let out a dry and short laugh, perplexed at his twisted logic. "... can't you just apologize?"

"Why would I?"

Florence balled her hand into a fist, realizing it was pointless. Asking him for a proper apology for everything wouldn't happen. Fabian was already convinced himself that what happened was a give-and-take situation. Tears pooled in her eyes, keeping her mouth shut, afraid her voice would crack if she speak another word. "If that is all, then I'll be on my way." Fabian tilted his head down slightly, walking past her silently without looking back. However, Fabian stopped once again when she spoke. This time, he didn't look back. "What happened to me when I lost consciousness?" Florence inquired, slowly turning on her heel to face him. She wiped the tear that managed to escape her traitorous eyes with the back of her hand, sporting a brave front, chin raised. "That night of the regression... what happened to us?"

Chapter 766 Tilly likes her

"That night of the regression... what happened to us?" Florence balled her hand into a tight fist, staring intently at Fabian's back. She waited for his reply, but all she heard for the next minute was the silent whisper of the night.

'What happened that night of the regression?' Fabian repeated in his head, and a glint flashed across his sharp eyes. Although Florence couldn't see the solemn expression dominating his face, anyone could tell what happened... was something he didn't want to talk about. "You remembered, did you?" Florence continued when another minute had passed and Fabian didn't answer her. "I heard a voice in my head that night, brother. But after that, I didn't have any control over my body and the darkness devour me completely."

She took a step. "Tell me. What happened that night?"

"Nothing." Fabian snapped his eyes and looked back at her nonchalantly. "Nothing happened. After you collapsed, I also collapsed. When I woke up, I was back in the duchy."

"I don't believe you." Florence stomped her feet towards him and grabbed his coat. "You're lying."

"And why would I lie to you?" he cocked his head to the side. "I don't have a reason to hide the truth, especially to you, Your Highness. You said it yourself, my brother didn't value you as his wife and you are irrelevant to this land right now. I don't mind being called a lunatic, but I'm not a liar."

Her grip on his coat tightened, glaring at him straight in the eye. "That's... why I can't understand," she breathed out. "You don't seem the person who is anything but a liar. That's why I can't understand why... are you lying to me right now?"

"I'm not."

"You are, right now, you are." The tightness in her chest felt inexplicable, shaking her head sideways. "I don't know you that much, but I dislike you to the bone — you and your brother. Your brother torments me for neglecting me for years... but you torment me even more. At the very least, Rufus had always been clear of his feelings and stayed within the line. He never crossed it, unlike how you shamelessly toe the line until it blurs."



Florence slowly let him go but kept her eyes on him. "I don't know why you were there that night and helped me. Nor do I understand why did you return my memories. Lie all you want; I'm tired of everyone thinking they can dictate how I live my life."

"I never lectured you on how to live yours —"

"You don't have to say it to send the message." She took two steps back from him. "Don't show you care for me if you're just going to be a jerk, brother. It turns my stomach."

With that being said, Florence turned her back against him and took a step away. She stopped when she heard him casually say, "don't call me brother."

"Calling you brother is a reminder for me that I shouldn't associate with you or with Rufus," she explained without looking back at him. "And to be independent to avoid being used as a political tool for anyone."

Florence bit her lower lip as her eyes blazed. Her steps didn't falter, wanting to get away from him as fast as she could. That man... only knew how to break her head and leave all these questions in her head. Ever since the first time they met that night, all he did was stir her emotions. Was giving her clarifications? Or answering her serious questions too much to ask? Sure, he saved her back then and even took her out of the dark. However, she didn't know whether to thank him for this gesture since Fabian was doing all this for his own selfish reason.

His help for her was unintentional. "I hate him," she whispered, picking up her pace to get away from the land of Karo with a more determined heart to prove herself. "I hate everyone."

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Meanwhile, Fabian stared at the end of the alley where Florence disappeared to. He stood still, keeping his eyes to where she left, wearing this unusual solemn front. "She's truly beautiful, don't you think?" he snapped his eyes after the prolonged silence, raising his eyes, only to see Tilly standing on the roof of the old building. He took a step to the side when Tilly jumped, landing three steps from him soundlessly. "Rufus' wife is, indeed, beautiful." Tilly nodded, looking at him almost innocently. "Do you like her?"

"No." He smiled. "But I think Lady Tilly likes her."

Tilly blinked twice. "Tilly likes her."

"I figured."

"But you like her too." Tilly peeled her eyes from him to the direction where Florence left. "I wonder... if that has something to do with her beguiling personality."

Fabian chuckled with his lips closed. "She is an unusual one. For a pureblood... she is rather human."

"Humane," Tilly replied without taking her eyes off of the end alley. "Being humane isn't exclusive to humans, Fabian."

"Apologies, my lady. You are right. After all, I am a mere human and yet, I don't have the heart to sympathize with the tragedy of others." He rocked his head in agreement, arching a brow as his eyes fell on her side profile. "Are you sad that I'll be away, my lady?"

"Mhm. Tilly likes Fabian a lot." Tilly slowly returned her gaze to him. "I want to send you off, but I found out something interesting."

The side of his lips curled up into a subtle smile. "Very well. I appreciate your kind gesture."

"Why did you send her away?" she asked just as he turned. "You didn't tell Samael or Rufus about what you remembered. Yet, you took the risk of returning her memories. Heliot's sister will run away... just as you planned."

"Then, that's better." Fabian smiled subtly. "At the very least, I don't have to end everyone the second time. You do not have to double-check, Lady Tilly. I do not plan on returning to the Heart's Kingdom to end Silvia."

Fabian resumed his steps and whispered, "although... I can't guarantee that Cassara won't. After all, she had seen everything I had seen the night of the regression."

Chapter 767 It's impressive -- at least for someone at your caliber

[ The night of the regression ]

Fabian froze, watching Florence collapse to her side. She reached out her hand to him as if asking for help while the life in her eyes dimmed. However, just as he thought she would land on the floor, Florence's foot glided, stopping her body from falling. Her head was still hanging low, just like how her hands and body swayed listlessly.

His eyes glinted menacingly, sensing the evil aura emanating from her back. He gripped his dark spear tightly, jaw tightening.

"So, that is how it happened..." he whispered, breathing out calmly. "Poor Silvia."

He watched Florence raise her head, only to see a wicked smirk that didn't suit her face. He didn't meet Florence until tonight, but he heard a lot about her. The second he laid his eyes on her in that garden, Fabian was certain what he heard about her was correct.

According to Rufus, she was kind and considerate, and she was oddly scared of many things. After interacting with her for the first minute, Fabian was certain Rufus wasn't lying. And then, after seeing her hiding inside that closet, he was certain even though this lady had a lot of potentials, she wouldn't swat a fly. The reason... the wicked sight of her right now was a little insulting. Not only was the person who was possessing or controlling the empress right now disgraced the empress, but he was a coward to use people like Silvia and Florence to commit heinous crimes. "How amusing," Fabian muttered in a dull tone. "I'm intrigued... just how scared you are of us that you'd use such a lame method?"

CLASH!

Fabian blocked Florence's sharp nails as she lurched forward, attacking him unannounced. Her mesmerizing midnight blue eyes glistened with malice, hissing with her fangs growing long. "Ahh... Fabian the Butler... truly, you lived up to your reputation," Florence spat out in mockery. "Was your appearance for tonight simply a coincidence? Or did you sense about your brother's death and wanted to send him off yourself?"

"Perhaps, a miscalculation?" The side of Fabian's lips curled up, but this time, it didn't reach his eyes. "Or that you're simply hapless for having me as your guest tonight."

"I am delighted!" she hissed, putting force on her hands to shove him away. "For your attendance!"

Fabian jumped back, stopping himself from crashing against the wall by putting all his weight on his feet. She swung his dark spear Maleficent to the side, smashing the window behind him using the bottom of his spear. "Quentin Moriarty?" he guessed, narrowing his eyes while sizing Florence up. There was only one person Fabian knew who could use the puppeteer's ability, and that was the king of the Spade Kingdom. However, Zero was dead. Fabian checked it himself and even opened him up out of curiosity. Therefore, he was certain it was almost impossible that the person behind all this was Zero. 'Who?' Fabian wondered while adrenaline prickled under his skin. 'Who could it be...?'

"Haha..." Florence chuckled as her eyes fastened with amusement. "... can't guess?"

She playfully tilted her head to the side and then slowly to the other. She didn't blink — not even once — and her lips were stretched from ear to ear. It looked sinister, but not sinister enough to send the slightest dread onto Fabian's spine. If anything, his curiosity soared. "Not Stefan, not Quentin, not the dead Alphonse..." she continued teasingly, enjoying the sight of Fabian. "... who am I?"

Everyone knew that Fabian rarely gets things wrong. This butler was an animal clad in human skin and could even intimidate a noble or pureblooded vampire. Therefore, seeing him not have clear answers under that sharp facade was undoubtedly satisfying. "Who are you don't really matter." Fabian fluttered his eyelashes ever so slowly. "It's saddening that my dearest brother died in the hands of his beloved, and Silvia had to die because of it."

He glanced at the bed where Rufus' and Silvia's bodies lie lifelessly. "And it disheartens me that I do not have the time to mourn for their deaths. They lived a long life." Fabian slowly set his eyes back at Florence and smiled. "No one had mesmerized me as she did," he continued calmly, staring at Florence's wicked face. "But I'm glad you had possessed her body. If you didn't, I'd kill her myself."

"Interesting, Fabian! Interesting!" Florence laughed, bending her knees, preparing to charge at him. "Who would have thought you'd fancy your brother's wife? Surely, your affection for your brother is far more twisted than I thought!" "You think that is twisted...? How cute." Fabian chuckled, and then, without a moment's notice, he jumped out of the window. His expression remained sharp, landing from the seventh floor safely. Not even a graze, as if the height didn't bother him. As soon as Fabian quickly retrieved the strength of his knees, he looked around at the open landscape he landed on. He then looked up, his expression growing even more solemn. "Amusing," he whispered with a tinge of admiration. "The last time I had seen such a large-scale power was when Master put up a blood and darkfield."

Fabian snapped his eyes when he heard a loud thud from behind him. He looked back ever so slowly, catching the blood dripping from Florence's knees, which she got from her landing. With just one glance, despite the darkness, he was certain she crushed her knees. Yet, she was still standing without a word of complaint. "So, you do not share the pain of your host," Fabian pointed out, snapping his eyes up at her. "That's tragic."

Florence laughed. "What can you say about what you are seeing?"

"I'd say it's impressive." Fabian smiled until his eyes were squinting. "At least for someone at your low caliber."

"Haha —" Florence laughed, only to halt when a figure suddenly hovered over her. When she looked up, her eyes dilated at the bone-chilling glint of the dark spear aiming at her eyes.

Chapter 768 We're in a race

A lot of people may have known or heard stories about Fabian. He was no king nor does he own a title, but everyone, especially those people in the upper echelon or men in power, knew him as the Duke of Grimsbanne's downright demonic butler.

He was not as nonchalant and prideful as Samael was, or as righteous and honorable as Rufus. What made Fabian terrifying was that his emotions... never get in his way. Even when it was no secret that Fabian 'worshipped' Samael, this butler would go against the duke if he must.

So... what made this person, who was possessing Florence, that Fabian would stop his blade just because she intrigued him?

What a ridiculous assumption. THUD!

Fabian held his dark spear to the side with its hilt stretched diagonally behind him. He snapped his eyes ever so slowly, catching a severed arm a meter before him. When he raised his gaze, Florence was standing a meter from the severed arm across from him. "Haha...!" Florence laughed condescendingly, holding her arm to stop its bleeding. "What a monster, indeed. I thought scratching this body is the worst you'd do, but severing her arm... I wonder what she would think if I leave her body? She will probably writhe in pain after getting cut by Maleficent."

Unlike the usual enthusiastic grin that would appear after cutting someone's flesh, Fabian didn't show the slightest amusement or resentment. He looked bored.

"I feel terrible for cutting my sister-in-law's arm," confessed Fabian, albeit his expression said otherwise. "But I feel even more awful that you cannot feel the pain."

Florence chortled. "What a devious man."

"I should've cut her feet instead," Fabian whispered, glancing at her feet momentarily. "Or I should just end her."

"So to end her sufferings quickly?" she let go of her severed arm, only to spread them open. "Cut me up then. Her body is useless... very unlike that of Heliot Von Stein. He put up quite a fight."

"May his soul rest." Fabian nodded, not surprised by her remarks as he had already read the letter Florence had received just an hour ago. "I had thought of His Highness Heliot with the highest regard. It was silly he died because he believes everyone sticks to their words just like him."

Florence grinned, nodding in agreement. "He is foolish."

"I do not think he regrets it." Fabian breathed out faintly. "Prince Heliot died being true to himself. I do not know what sort of deal he made that is worth his life."

"Worth his life...?" Florence laughed, covering her face with her dirty palm. She laughed and laughed until she was hunching in as if she was reminded of a funny joke. Her lips curled into a smirk. "What can make you willingly stake your life?" "I do not know." Fabian shrugged. "I am surrounded by capable people. Hence, my mind is blank."

"How arrogant."

"I am not arrogant. I'm simply stating facts." His eyes glinted, studying Florence across from him. He knew she was stalling, but Fabian was stalling her as well. "But if it is necessary, my master would be very upset if he hears it, but I'd bargain my life in exchange for my master's safety."

Fabian cocked his head to the side. "But I'd only do that to repay his kindness all this time. I didn't hear Prince Heliot had someone important to him more than Karo." He smacked his lips and thought about his remarks even more.

It was, indeed, strange for Heliot to willingly sacrifice his life. Even if it was for his beloved Karo — especially for his beloved Karo. Heliot wouldn't sacrifice his life, but instead, fight his enemies head-on if Karo was ever under siege.

The land of Karo might be a small country, but it was full of strong and persistent soldiers. They wouldn't fall that easily in a war. Hence, that didn't make sense to Fabian. "Hehe..." Florence chuckled, seeing that Fabian was left with even more questions. "Should I give you a hint?"

Fabian snapped his eyes up at him and smiled. "The madam?"

"Hah!" Florence gasped in admiration, assuming Fabian wouldn't be able to guess it but he did. "The Madam and Prince Heliot had a deal back then that associated some people in the mainland." Fabian rocked his head as he raked the archive in his head. "It was strange how Prince Heliot easily agreed with the Madam's request to end their deal without any repercussion. The Madam thought it was because of the friendship they had built during that period, but it seemed there was more into it."

A slight smile appeared on Fabian's face. "She'd be heartbroken to hear this news."

"Oh, Fabian. Do not worry." Florence shook her head and said she didn't plan to hurt Lilou that way. "I'd just kill her right away — just like how she always wanted. I wouldn't say a word to her."

"You sound like someone who knows her very well."

"Of course!" Florence intoned. "Who doesn't know the last pureblooded Bloodfang? Everyone knows her because everyone wants her and that blood running in her veins. Even those from the mainland want a child with her!"

A glint flickered across Fabian's eyes, causing Florence's smile to stretch even wider.

"Haha! That offended you, isn't it?" her eyes twinkled with amusement. "Of course, they were your master. Even I was insulted when I came across this information. That is why... I had decided to kill her so she wouldn't have to go through that pain of being a mother of many children from different men."

"That... sounds a bit of a stretch. Won't that put you in trouble?" Fabian pointed out. His suspicions that whoever was possessing Florence knew them very well soared the more she talked.

Florence smirked. "I... don't work for anyone. You might think I'm acting with a group, but since I liked you, I'll tell you the truth. Your other enemies and me... we're in a race. I won't let them get what they want."

"What is it that they want?"

"To squeeze out every power those on their list have."

"And yours?"

"I just told you." She arched a brow and smirked. "To not give what they want... even if it means killing their targets before they could touch the tip of their hairs. Heliot and Rufus were now crossed out, probably that woman in the north, too. Do you know who is next?"

Florence waited for several seconds before she chuckled. "Those children... left on the mainland."

Chapter 769 I think...

"Those children... left on the mainland."

There was a long silence that followed Florence's confession, staring at Fabian, who didn't react the slightest to all those revelations. Her brows rose when another minute had passed, and still nothing. "I must admit your reaction was anti-climatic, but well, what can I expect from you?" she hissed, cackling wickedly. "The man was Fabian Barrett. Who knows what is going through the wicked head of yours, knowing your little masters were in danger?"

"Bold of you to think you can touch them." Fabian smiled. His tone was still polite. "Why? Because the lady in the forbidden forest is with them?" she laughed hysterically until she was coughing. "Ah, goodness! I would've mistaken that you people didn't live on the mainland for years."

Fabian's eyes narrowed as malice shone in them. "Amazing how you seemed to know about the mainland as if you've lived there."

"Because I did! For a short while." Florence simpered, looking at him mischievously. "But that short time was fruitful. I heard a lot about the Grimsbanne... the Divine Order, the witches, the Zodiacs... it was fascinating."

"Zodiac..."

"There is a more interesting set of people around this world, Fabian." Florence tucked her hair behind her ear coquettishly. "You'd be surprised to hear about them, but perhaps you won't. After all, you're the most interesting one."

Her eyes fell on the dark spear within Fabian's grip, biting a finger mildly. "Maleficent... a weapon so powerful that many people want to wield, but couldn't." She snapped her eyes up at him and smirked. "Isn't that interesting? Your dark spear, if handled carelessly, can kill its holder. And yet, you swing it effortlessly. Amazing!" Florence caressed her severed arm, squeezing the clean cut he made. "Even though I couldn't feel her pain, I can tell this cut is devastating! It tickles my curiosity."

"Then..." Fabian bent his knees and then charged towards her, vanishing into thin air midway only to reappear behind her. "... allow me to serve you how it feels like to be kissed by Maleficent."

Florence's eyes dilated when his voice sounded so close from behind her, ducking and spinning on the ground to kick his feet. However, her action guaranteed a stab on her shin, inducing a shriek from her. "Ahhh!!!!" she screamed, her lungs out, hands trembling as she stared at the dark spear plunged into her shin. Her teeth clenched when he stepped on her other foot, stilling her on the ground. "I thought long and hard about it while you were rumbling on and on." Fabian twisted his spear slowly, ignoring the shriek she was making. "How can I hurt this person? It'll be a shame if I chop this body up, and he or she wouldn't even feel the slightest pain."

He paused to look at her twisting face, smiling in satisfaction. "But then, I remembered the time I opened up my young master's body. There was a severed link I saw within him; it was a connection he had with Stefan. So I thought, perhaps if I can locate your link to this body, I can hurt you."

"I didn't think it would actually work," he added, pressing the blades deeper into her flesh to make her scream louder. "You had said a lot of interesting things, but I'm curious about one thing."

Fabian slowly squatted down, resting an arm over his thigh. "Are you pretty?"

"Ugh..." Florence sucked air through her gritted teeth, glaring daggers at him. "The way you tucked your hair told me you have pretty long hair." Fabian smiled as if he figured her out. "This is the reason people usually die before succeeding. They talk a lot when they think they were untouchable."

He raised his chin, pulling the spear out of her shin. He spun it around his fingers, repositioning it to her stomach. "Your Highness, I apologize we came into this." He held the back of her head while leaning his face closer, staring straight into her eyes so the person controlling Florence's body would see him up close. "If I were you, run as far away and as fast as you can because I will hunt you down."

"Rufus, Silvia, Prince Heliot and the Karo Kingdom, and this princess..." he continued, shaking his head mildly. "I don't think my masters will even stop me from obsessing over you. Look forward to it."

Florence's eyes went round, sensing another stab would impale her flesh. Hence, before the tip of his dark spear plunged into her gut, the person controlling her severed the link. "What —" Fabian froze, unable to stop himself from stabbing her even after seeing that the life and clarity in her eyes returned. Florence instinctively clutched his shoulder, gasping from the cold metal nibbling her skin and flesh like a thousand ants. She hadn't grasped the pain yet as her body went into shock, but her lungs constricted. "Ah..." Florence's mouth fell open while Fabian planted his hand on her back to stop her from falling. She gritted her teeth, gazing down nervously. Her complexion instantly turned paler, seeing a large black material thrust into her stomach. Blood oozed from it at her ragged and heavy breathing, still clutching Fabian as if he was her lifeline. "It's alright," was the first word she managed to force out of her mouth, patting his shoulder mildly. "You... did what you must."

Florence weakly pushed herself from him and smiled. His expression was unlike what she expected because he looked back at her almost blankly with a tinge of surprise. "I... saw... everything," she breathed out. "Thank you... for hurting her."

Her vision shook as coldness began to seep into her bones, coming from the tip of her head through the end of her toes. She wanted to say more, but couldn't, with her life slipping out of her hand like running water. "Did I... tell you?" the side of her lips curled up as she slowly fell forward. "You... were quite cool..."

Fabian caught her body steadily. She wasn't moving anymore, and for the next five minutes, Fabian stayed in that same spot, motionless. He didn't know why he couldn't move immediately at that time, but he clearly remembered carrying her and burying her body in the garden with loads of his favorite flowers. There was just silence after that, cleaning up the enemies within the imperial palace without saying another word to them. He then carried Silvia's body, which he buried in the same garden. Fabian did it with Rufus' body as well, giving them a place to rest despite how dirty and bloody his uniform had become throughout the massacre.

Standing in front of the newly dug grave with the crown on top of it, Fabian's expression remained plain. "Master will not be pleased to meet you like this," he whispered his first words after hours of fighting, only to stay silent again for the next ten minutes. Fabian didn't shed a single tear at the death of his brother, nor did Rufus' death even sink in just yet. A lot had happened tonight, which wasn't what he expected when he came into this place. He snapped his eyes ever so slowly as multiple figures appeared behind him.

"I guess I'll have to reschedule my grief." Fabian slowly turned around to face the figures standing in the shadows. "There were a few who were left behind."

His eyes sharpened, holding Maleficent to his side, ready to attack. This time, he knew these people who came to him were a lot more capable and skilled than those he squashed like bugs previously. But he didn't show the slightest hesitation as he charged at them.

That night, Fabian remembered fighting until he could no longer feel anything. All he could remember was fighting intensely, cutting everything in his vicinity, and getting stabbed a few times because he was fighting multiple people at the same time. There were no word exchanges during the fight, but he didn't feel the need to talk as he lusted for blood for the loss of his brother, a friend, and that strange woman whom he hadn't figured her role in his life. [ Present Time ]

Fabian was lying on top of the hays on the cart he hitched a ride on. Staring at the dark blue-ish sky as the sunrise came close, he let out a shallow breath. "I think..." he whispered, trying to remember the rest of the memories before he woke up in the duchy without them. "... I died then."

Chapter 770 Do our best not to die

Meanwhile...

Lilou was standing in front of the window, but her eyes weren't particularly focused on the darkness outside. She was staring at her faint reflection, planting her hand on the glass. Just days ago, this mansion wasn't as loud and lively as their dwelling on the mainland, but it wasn't this silent as well. Stefan and Klaus's departure and then Fabian's surely left this strange void; it wasn't disheartening, but it wasn't particularly a positive feeling either.

"Tilly, is it possible we died that night?" Lilou asked when she felt Tilly's faint presence on her back. "The night of the regression. The last thing I remember was rolling with Sam on the grass. I fell asleep and then woke up in the middle of my haze while crushing a person's head for the first time."

She slowly turned around to face Tilly. "Did I fall asleep, though? Things like this had been bothering me lately, especially after the possibility that Heliot died was raised."

"I don't know." Tilly's expression didn't change, looking back at Lilou. "But won't you and Samael know you died if you died?"

"That's right." Lilou let out a shallow breath, turning on her heel. She hugged herself, squeezing her bicep mildly. "Sam and I will know if we died. However, since the regression, I felt like there were many things we didn't know about. One thing is, what did Heliot know that he had forgotten?"

Tilly drew her lips into a thin, tight slash. She kept her eyes on Lilou's back for a moment before marching to the armchair nearby. "I put Karo under my protection," she said. "Take shelter in here if something happened to me."



"What do you mean?" Lilou glanced over her shoulder. "Tilly, the last thing we need is you falling."

"Samael said I shouldn't be complacent."

"He should tell that to himself. He is making my anxiety soar." Lilou shook her head mildly, but Tilly's remarks surely left an impression on her. "I know you're simply considering all possibilities, but remember, we are going home, Tilly. Not just me, my husband, and the children. You, Fabian, Charlie, and Ramin will come home with us."

Tilly blinked. "You sound determined."

"Because I am determined." Lilou slowly refocused her eyes on her reflection. "Back then, I refrained from looking at my reflection. The only time I stared at my reflection was in my husband's and my children's eyes."

She paused, recalling a habit she picked up on the mainland. Actually, she didn't pick it up when she was on the mainland, but when she woke up after her five-year slumber.

"Do you know why?" she continued, watching her eyes glint on the reflection. "Because every time I looked at my reflection, there was a part of me who cannot unsee the person I see in my eyes."

"She... is wicked," Lilou added under her breath. "The woman who carried Law, she scares me. I often say that woman isn't me."

"Why are you staring at yourself now?"

Lilou narrowed her eyes. "Because right now, who I need is her. I am searching for her; that woman. Not the carrier of Lakresha or the member of the Divine Order, but that fearless maniac who could hurt anyone except her child and husband."

"I need her strength and resolve because I don't think I am strong enough to carry on as we go through all these deaths again." She let out another shallow breath, gripping her shoulder tightly. "I'm not sure if returning to the original time is a better option. After all, our friends were dead over there."

"Your children aren't alive at this time, Lilou."

"That is why I am conflicted." Lilou looked back at Tilly, revealing the conflicting emotions swirling in her eyes. "My friends got a second chance in life; they were alive, Tilly. But at the same time, our enemies were also breathing and my children had supposedly disappeared because this isn't the time they should have existed."

Her eyes heat up as the luster in her eyes grew clearer. "Fighting our enemies was not the problem, but the fact we have to weigh what is right and what we're supposed to do."

"In a few hours, we'll depart to Spade, and even though we are prepared to sully our hands... I haven't come to terms with inner turmoil." Lilou gulped, holding her fist to the side. "I want to save everyone, Tilly. Not just our family, but our friends and those who want to correct their lives."

Lilou and Tilly held each other's gazes in silence. Tilly could see and feel Lilou's burning heart through her clear emerald eyes. "We... cannot save everyone," Tilly said the truth, despite knowing it would hurt Lilou. She slowly got up to her feet, keeping her chin up. "But I support your wish and where your heart is. May you find enlightenment and acceptance, Lilou."

Tilly studied Lilou's figure, and demeanor for a moment before she turned to leave. She only came because Samael told her to check on his wife, but now that she did, she wanted to rest for a while before they depart. When Tilly crossed the threshold, she stopped as Samael was leaning against the wall in front of the room. He had his arms folded under his chest, looking back at her silently. They didn't speak to each other as Tilly resumed her steps without making a sound. "You didn't have to make such a promise," he said, causing Tilly's steps to slow down for a moment. "It'll break her heart if you do something reckless for wanting to keep a promise. I think that's how Heliot did his promise and hearing you make the same one is concerning."

Tilly didn't react as she resumed sauntering off without saying her own defense. Meanwhile, Samael shook his head while staring at her petite back.

"Let's just do our best not to die, Tilly," he added, raising his voice to make sure it would reach her. Tilly didn't stop anymore until she disappeared into the darkness of the hallway. "She can be stubborn," he muttered, peeling his back from the wall to enter the room after knocking.