

The Duke 771

Chapter 771 This particular night

When Samael entered the room, he caught Lilou marching towards the stand where the decanter of wine and glass were at. She stopped midway, glancing in his direction, and then continued. "Hey," he called, approaching Lilou. "Is everything alright?"

"Is everything alright?" Lilou let out a dry laugh, pouring herself a glass of wine. She unhesitatingly chugged down the beverage, hissing at the heat lining her throat. "Are you asking because you don't know?" she turned to Samael, showing miff in her eyes. "No, Sam. Everything is not alright."

Samael pressed his lips into a thin line. "You misunderstood," he said, taking the empty glass from her hand.

"I am not asking the situation, but you. Are you alright? Can you endure everything for now?" he asked, pouring himself a glass, which he drank in one go.

"Do I have a choice?" she returned after hearing him gulp. "What can you do if I can't endure it?"

"Then stay." Samael poured wine into the glass again, holding the bottom, and offered it to her. "You don't have to go if you don't want to. You and Law and maybe Tilly can stay in here."

"What?" Lilou let out a dry laugh, taking the glass from him. But instead of drinking it, she placed it back on the stand. "That's the best you can tell me?"

"What else do you want me to say, Lilou?" he leaned his face closer, frustrated. "I'm already doing everything I can and have to stitch my heart back over and over just so I don't break. For you, for Law, for Sunny. I can only cut you some slack from wielding your Lakresha if that is what you want, and this still rips my soul — you don't have any idea."

Lilou opened her mouth but ended up shutting them again. She picked up the glass and chugged it down, breathing out a sharp breath through her mouth as she put down the glass.

"I'm sorry," she calmed down, casting him a cursory look. "No matter how pressured and stressed out I've been, I shouldn't have vented my frustration on you. You were right. You're already doing everything with the best you have and the best you can."

"It's fine, love." Samael propped his side against the stand, jerking his chin toward the glass. Seeing this, Lilou cleared her throat and poured wine into the glass again. She slid it to him, which he picked up to his lips. "You don't have to apologize next time. This situation is all because of our blood, after all," he said before drinking the wine. "It's not like you asked to be born with such blood." Lilou took a step forward, reaching for the glass to stop him from pouring another glass. She looked at him up close, fluttering her eyelashes ever so tenderly. "Sam, we'll be fine, right?" she asked softly. "Fabian, Klaus, and Stefan already left. It'll be just us, but I can't help but think of many things. It scares me."

Samael let out a shallow breath, cupping her face. His thumb brushed her lean cheek, staring at her deep in the eyes.

"We'll be fine, Love. I... I'll make sure of that." He nodded encouragingly, while Lilou held his hand that was cupping her face. "We'll figure things out together."

Lilou pursed her lips and slowly closed her eyes. Seeing this, Samael carefully wrapped his other arm around her waist, bending over to press his lips on her. Just like Klaus, Stefan, and Fabian, they would have to depart the land of Karo in a few hours to enter the lion's den. The moment they step out of the Kingdom of Karo, everything would be filled with uncertainty. But just as Lilou said, they had no choice. Therefore, Samael had already pledged to protect her and his son. They would surely emerge from this situation alive and reunite with their youngest, Sunny. Wherever their daughter was, they would surely reunite with her. And for as long as they were together, Samael and Lilou believed they would not only survive, but emerge from this crisis as victors. They would regain their peace... that was for sure. *****

Meanwhile...

"Your Majesty."

Rufus paused from feeding his steed when he heard Claude's voice. He turned his head, seeing Claude march in his direction. "Is there something you need me for?" Rufus asked while Claude stopped a few steps from him. "Yes." Determination flickered across Claude's eyes, placing his hand on the sword's handle that was clinging to his waist. "Since Mister Fabian and my uncle left, can you spar with me?"

Rufus glanced down at where Claude's hands were, before slowly raising his eyes back to his eyes. "Shouldn't you conserve your energy since we might meet enemies before we can even reach the Spade Kingdom?" he blinked. Rufus just had an intense spar with Fabian before his brother left, but he didn't mind. Actually, Rufus and Klaus had been sparring as well before the latter left for the Heart's Kingdom with Stefan. All Rufus did during their stay in the land of Karo was spar with different people nonstop. It was actually him who needed to conserve his energy, but the dominant part of him didn't think that was necessary. "Since Quentin had sent his undead, I'm certain he retained his memories. I heard he nearly succeeded in conquering the South Minowa if not for Uncle Hell arriving on time," Claude said solemnly. The determination in his eyes continuously increased. "Since I wasn't there back then, I don't have any notion how strong our enemies were."

"I do not want to burden everyone anymore. So... I want to keep getting better and for that, I need to keep sparring with only the best," he continued, his gaze at Rufus unfaltering. "Please tell me if you are available."

Rufus studied Claude's demeanor. The latter was a confident young man, and Rufus couldn't blame Claude for being arrogant, as his skills and strength wouldn't pale with anyone. But for Claude to ask Rufus as if this favor would mean the world to him, Rufus was rather in awe. "How can I refuse if you are this determined?" Rufus smiled subtly, nodding in agreement. "I have to warn you, though. I haven't been holding myself back."

"That's better." Claude's eyes lit up as he grinned from ear to ear, making Rufus chuckle. Rufus told Claude to give him a moment as the former fed his beloved horse, Bella. When he finished, the two of them headed to the courtyard, where they had multiple rounds of intense battle as if their life depended on it.

Chapter 772 This particular night II

Meanwhile...

Klaus glanced to his side, catching Stefan bouncing along with his steed as they galloped through the thick forest. They had been rushing back to the Heart's Kingdom without taking a break. Their group had also grown bigger because Stefan's shadow knights had been following their king and just kept themselves hidden all this time.

"Your Majesty!" yelled Klaus to get Stefan's attention. "Did you say we will make a detour?"

"Yes!" Stefan yelled back, casting his brother a sidelong glance before focusing on the road. "I'll have to visit some people."

"Who are they?"

"People..." Stefan's eyes glinted, recalling he had recruited those people around this time in the past. "... members of the Divine Order."

Upon hearing Stefan's remarks, Klaus rocked his head. The latter kept his mouth shut, listening to the loud footsteps of the horses and the constant rustle of the leaves every time a shadow knight land on a branch.

"I think we should separate!" Klaus proposed after several minutes of silence. He looked at Stefan once again, and the latter kept his focus ahead but was listening to his voice.

"Fabian told me to keep an eye on Cassara and Silvia," he continued after pondering for a moment, recalling that Fabian approached him before they left the land of Karo.

The only time Fabian would approach Klaus was usually because that sick butler wanted to kill time by antagonizing Klaus. The reason it was strange was that Fabian asked him for a favor, but kept everything vague. What was only clear to Klaus was Fabian was deeply concerned about Silvia and Cassara.

Therefore, despite the lack of information, Klaus didn't want to disappoint Fabian. This was the first time that the butler asked him for a favor, and Klaus was determined to help Lilou's situation. If any of Lilou's people died in this lifetime, once they returned to the original time, they couldn't bring those who died before. It was a tricky situation.

Meanwhile, Stefan remained silent as he mulled over Klaus's proposal. He cast his brother a look, only to see the solemnity and unbending resolution in the corner of Klaus' eyes.

"The only reason I'm taking you is that I know you don't trust me," said Stefan, peeling his eyes away from Klaus to look at the forest path ahead. "But if you have a more important thing to do that required your presence in the palace, then we can part ways at the end of the forest."

Stefan's eyes fastened with resolve, considering Klaus' proposal wasn't really bad. What he said was nothing but the truth. Since there would always be doubt in their relationship, knowing their relationship wasn't always a relationship with deep trust, Stefan was willing to take Klaus with him while he gather the rest of the divine bearers.

During this time, he knew where were the rest of the divine bearers right now. Some bearers were easier to find, but there were some, like Maxine, who never stayed in the same spot. Hence, Stefan couldn't afford to track them down if they changed location, so recruiting them now while he knew what those people were doing and which place they were staying currently was the most efficient way.

Both Stefan and Klaus didn't exchange words again as they galloped through the thick forest. When they exited the forest, they didn't even cast each other a look as they parted ways; Klaus continued ahead while Stefan turned to the right.

Their eyes, despite separating, bore indistinguishable fire with the unbending resolution to attain their goals.

[Heart's Kingdom: Inner Palace]

"You've been acting strange."

Silvia turned around when she heard Yulis' voice. Yulis was approaching her while she stood in front of the window in one of the hallways.

"What are you doing here?" he asked as soon as he stood beside her. Yulis glanced at the window to see what Silvia was staring at so intensely, only to realize there was nothing out there but a vast expanse and thick darkness.

"Nothing interesting." He shrugged, looking back at her. His brows elevated when Silvia was staring at him silently. "What?"

Silvia hugged herself and shook her head, setting her eyes back to the window.

"Nothing, Yul," she said, swallowing down the tension that suddenly appeared in her throat.

"Are you certain?"

Her eyes lowered upon his question, knowing the answer was definitely, 'no.' Silvia's mind had been in disarray and her heart had been restless since remembering her forgotten memories. But more than the puzzlement of why they all go back to the past, there was one thing that was like a stake that was stuck in her heart.

Yulis.

At a time like this, Silvia would usually seek her husband's warmth. Yulis was the warmest person Silvia had ever known, and his comfort often put her heart, mind, and body at ease. But right now, Yulis only sees her as his sister while he pretended to be a member of the La Crox, waiting for his Queen (Lilou) to come and claim what he believed was rightfully hers: the throne.

"Silvia, if there is anything you need, you can always tell me." His voice once again pierced the still air while observing her side profile. "I am always here for you. You know that, do you?"

Silvia gripped her biceps tightly, telling herself not to do or say anything rash. She slowly faced him, and her heart sank with longing, seeing the deep worry in his beautiful eyes.

"Can you..." her lower lip quivered and her voice cracked. "Can you... embrace me, Yul?"

Her request took him aback, but seeing the desperation in her eyes, Yulis reconsidered. He let out a deep exhale, treating this as Silvia, simply wanting comfort from her longing.

"Come," he said, spreading his arms wide with a subtle smile.

Seeing him open his arms with that gentle smile, Silvia's heart clenched. It would be nice if his eyes mirrored his lover, not his sister. But she missed him, and regardless of the biting pain his eyes

brought to her heart, Silvia, without a second hesitation, leaped into his embrace. She buried her face in his chest, feeling his arms wrapped around her securely.

"Is this one of those nights?" Yulis asked, patting her back gently. When he received silence as an answer, he sighed but asked again. "Do you miss him?"

Bitterness pooled in her eyes, clutching his back tightly. His question was obviously about Rufus, but Silvia still answered even when she was referring to a different person.

"Yes... very much. I feel like breaking, Yul," she whispered, telling herself not to cry, but her traitorous heart let a tear leak out of her eyes. 'I really, really, missed you... Yul.'

Chapter 773 This particular night III

Florence managed to hitch a ride on a group of merchants who were leaving the land of Karo. She covered her head with a shawl, just showing her eyes. She was glad that these people were kind enough to let her hitch a ride, even though she had to be on the empty wagon. Florence could feel every bounce. Sitting on this rough wooden surface without any cushion was uncomfortable and painful on her rear, but it was better than going by foot. By this, her brother wouldn't be able to catch her once he figured out she fled the palace. Hugging her knees, sitting on the corner of the wagon, Florence raised her head. The night sky was clear, and the moon was in clear view for everyone who would look up tonight. Her eyes were slowly filled with bitterness, remembering her encounter with Fabian several hours ago. "He can be very frustrating," she mumbled, peeling her eyes from the sky to her surrounding. It was dark, but as a vampire, she could see through the darkness clearly. It was just that despite this ability, Florence always felt scared of what comes along with the darkness. The silence. The heightened emotions made her feel wary of the slightest sound lest she had to run away. "Don't return to Karo at all cost..." she whispered, recalling the words the letter told her with such conviction the night of the regression. "... I'm scared."

For someone who was too weak to be out in the outside world, her decision to run away was bold. However, she wanted to keep that promise. Heliot might not remember, but Heliot and some people were aware of the regression, and Florence had to make this decision. She had to do it before it was too late. 'I won't become a leverage,' she told herself, burying half of her lower face in her arms that were resting over her knees. 'Never...' .c(o)m

Florence lowered her eyes that swirled with uncertainty and fear. She knew where to go, but she didn't know how and if she could survive all on her own. However, her desire to not become a tool for someone to use her to destroy her land and her brother was stronger. "You're not the same Florence anymore," she whispered, looking up at the sky to look at the moon once again. "I will be fine, right?"

The corner of her lips curled up bitterly, embracing the uncertainty of tomorrow. Under the same moon and sky, someone on the other side of Karo was staring at the moon. Fabian was lying on the wagon, unbothered by the harsh bounce it would make while going through the rough road.

Fabian had been staring at the sky as the cart ambled away from the Kingdom of Karo. He was using his arms as his pillow, watching how the moon follow him. His mind, however, would wander from time to time to different timelines and scenarios. He kept thinking about what happened to him a minute before the regression because he couldn't remember clearly. Anything could happen within that one-minute time frame. But in the middle of his deep thoughts, Florence would cross his mind. 'She really left,' he thought, blinking ever so tenderly. Fabian could vividly recall the letter Florence

received the night of the regression, and as Fabian was Fabian, he already got a gist of what she had planned to do. Honestly, he was tempted to take her on his journey.

"She will die..." he told himself, estimating the distance between them right now. "... no, she won't."

Stubborn people usually die first, but there was a part of him who believed Florence wouldn't die. That woman, who was scared of many things, would learn to stand on her own. He was sure of it because he was once been a weak and helpless man. Back then, Fabian was weak and couldn't survive on his own without Rufus's protection. Even when he was uncertain and incapable of protecting himself, he fled Grimsbanne — previously called the Mock Town — because he couldn't bear to watch Rufus fight every single day for him.

Even though the result was Fabian gained Maleficent and lost touch with his sanity, he achieved his goal. He didn't need Rufus to protect himself; he could protect himself now, take another person's life if he must, and could stand on his own without being a burden to anyone. If a helpless human like him could do it, Florence, who was a pureblooded vampire, could. As long as she was willing to use the gift she was born with, she would manage. "I wonder... if she would be able to reach the mainland? It seemed that will be her destination." The side of his lips curled up as his eyes fastened with anticipation. "I am looking forward to meeting her again. I'm certain she will be different."

"Will I get a kiss then?" he smirked. "It'll probably be difficult."

With that being said, Fabian chuckled as he looked forward to what Florence would become in the future. He dwelled on this thought for quite some time, before his focus shifted to another important matter: his destination. *****

[THE ROYAL PALACE OF KARO]

Heliot kicked the door open, only to see the infirmary empty. His eyes flared, marching inside to look around. Someone told him the princess was missing. He rushed here to double-check, and much to his dismay, they were correct. Just as Heliot called for the knights, he noticed a letter under the lamp, on the bedside table. He hurriedly picked up the lamp and took the letter underneath it. Reading the short message, the anger in his chest slowly subsided. [Your Highness,

If you are reading this, then that means you already figured out what I was missing. Do not fret. This decision was my responsibility to bear. You might wonder why I fled home. To be truthful, the reason was simple. You might not remember everything, and you and I might not share the same memories, but I cannot turn a blind eye to what I know. That is why I chose to stay away from Karo for I... am told by Your Highness to never return to Karo at all costs. That was after your death, Your Highness. And also before mine. Until now, I do not understand the purpose of this message. However, I deem it of great importance. Therefore, before anything can happen and before it is too late for everyone, I decided to stay away from our beloved Karo.

Please do not look for me and do not send your men to bring me back. If you truly want me to return, then, Your Highness, find out the truth behind those orders. Only when you uncovered the truth, will I return to face the consequences of fleeing from my post. Thank you for your protection until now. I, your humble subject, will always be grateful to Your Highness. However, please allow me to walk on my own and shoulder the responsibility for my decisions.

May you take care of yourself, Your Highness. The land of Karo and your subjects need you. Your humble subject,

Florence Von Stein]

Chapter 774 This particular night IV

Heliot slowly crumbled the piece of paper after reading the letter once. 'This again,' he thought. Heliot had been hearing certain memories from different people that he couldn't remember. He was aware it was because of this reversal of time that he forgot the relationships he had built in the original timeline. It was annoying, especially since his last encounter with Lilou had left an impression on him.

But now, even Florence left a letter, telling him he ordered her not to return to Karo at all costs. Why would he say that? And did she say she died? Didn't they say Florence would become the empress of the Heart's Empire, and become Rufus's wife? How would an empress die so easily?

Myriads of questions surged in Heliot's already muddled mind, and this letter was the last straw. No one knew what happened to him, and he could've died just as they claimed. But why would he die?

As Heliot was forced to focus on this mystery, everyone didn't have any clear answer, a knight stepped inside the room. "Your Highness," called the knight, putting an abrupt stop to Heliot's train of thoughts. Heliot slowly snapped his eyes at the knight, frowning, furrowing his brows. "A guest is requesting an audience," said the knight the moment he met Heliot's eyes. "A guest?" Heliot's frown deepened. "At this hour? Tell them to return tomorrow."

The knight showed conflict in his eyes. "But Your Highness, the guests came from a prominent clan."

"Which family was it?"

"The request came from the Le Blac," the knight reported. "There was a woman. She said her name was Beatrice Le Blac, and she told us you will regret it if you refuse her request."

Heliot kept his frown, but hearing which clan his guests were, his displeasure was replaced with puzzlement. He pondered about it for a moment, before gazing at the knight. "Lead the way."

"Yes, Your Highness." With that being said, the knight led Heliot to the sitting room, where the guests were waiting. Stopping in front of the room after minutes of walking, the knight stepped aside to give way. "Don't let anyone know about this meeting," Heliot said, casting the knight a sidelong glance. "Yes, Your Highness." The knight bowed, already keeping this visit with the highest secrecy. The reason he personally went to the prince to report about it.

Heliot nodded in satisfaction, raising his chin. His face bore the same plain countenance, opening the door. As soon as he stepped inside, closing the door behind him, his eyes searched for this guest. There, standing in front of the window, was a woman. Her head was kept in a neat bun with a few strands of hair dangled down her slender neck. Even from this distance, Heliot got a whiff of this unique scent coming from her. As a person who wasn't fond of strong perfumes, Heliot found her scent a little tolerable. Actually, she smelled pleasant. He studied her from head to toe. Her stature was alright — not tall, but also not short. Even when the woman was facing him, he could tell her bearing was not bad, her shoulders a little low.

"What do I owe this visit, Princess?" Heliot's monotonous voice pierced the silence after a moment of observing the woman. The woman slowly turned on her heel to face him. She had a small face and alluring facial features. She was beautiful at first glance. Enchanting was the correct term to describe her. However, despite her allure, which was worthy of every man's admiration, Heliot felt this slight disgust from her subtle smile.

"Greeting, Your Highness, Heliot Von Stein." The woman, Beatrice Le Blac, curtsied meekly. She kept her smile, straightening her posture, and facing him with a smirk. "I am grateful for accepting this sudden request."

"Take a seat, Princess." Heliot marched towards the armchair, motioning his hands to the other chair across from his spot. "I assume for the princess of the Cross Kingdom to be in the land of Karo, this matter will be important."

Despite the repugnance in his gut, Heliot concealed any traces of it from his face. This wasn't the first time he felt so repulsed by another vampire's presence. Hence, hiding this distaste was not a problem for him. Beatrice simply smiled as she sat down across from him. "It is, indeed."

"However, if this matter Your Highness wants to talk about was an official matter both kingdoms needed to talk about, you would've sent an official letter of request." Heliot didn't beat around the bush, insinuating they should cut to the chase. "Seeing you are here alone and without a delegation, I presume this matter requires secrecy."

"That is right, Your Highness." Beatrice's eyes shone with an inexplicable glint, keeping her subtle smile that just appeared like she was seducing someone. "I will cut to the chase just as what His Highness wanted."

"That would be greatly appreciated."

Beatrice let out a dry laugh.

"The purpose of my visit doesn't have anything to do with my status as a princess of the Cross Kingdom," she said while he listened attentively. "I am affiliated with some people on the mainland."

"With the king?"

"I cannot disclose their identities."

Heliot frowned. "I also have connections in the mainland, Princess. If they need something from me, I believe they do not need to go through you first. They would come to Karo directly."

"Indeed, but as I've said, this isn't an official matter that needed to be recorded," she said, and the side of her lips curled up into a smirk. Seeing her reaction, Heliot narrowed his eyes. He got the gist of her remarks. If not for unjust elimination, what else would this woman want from him? Knowing there was a regression, and he needed an answer for himself, Heliot remained silent and waited for further details.

"Lilou Bloodfang," Beatrice dropped the name. "I heard you already met the last pureblooded Bloodfang."

"And what about her?"

"People... wants her gone," she answered without a second hesitation. "We want you to do the job."

"And why would I do that?" he laughed in ridicule, only to see Beatrice smirk. When her lips moved, dawdling her words, his pupils dilated as he unknowingly held his breath.

"Interesting, isn't it? Your Highness?" she asked, cocking her head to the side. "I bet that caught your attention."

Chapter 775 This particular night V

Heliot stood in front of the window, hands on his back, deep in thought. Beatrice had left. He didn't accept her request, but he also didn't refuse it. The answer he gave her was a simple, "I will need time to think about it."

Fortunately, Beatrice from the royal family of the Le Blac didn't press on the matter. She only told him, "I'll be waiting, but they didn't have that long patience to wait for a long time," before she bid him farewell.

"Beatrice Le Blac," Heliot whispered monotonously. Even though Heliot hadn't met her until their secret meeting tonight, he had heard about the Le Blac clan and their kingdom. Their clans used to have strong ties, founding the Heart's Kingdom, and lived in it once in harmony until the late king of the Heart's Kingdom was eaten by his greed.

As a result, the founding clans, Le Blac, Von Stein, and Moriarty, left the land. The Crawford and Bloodfang stayed, but everyone already knew the massacre that happened in the Bloodfang while the Crawfords lived as silently as a dead rat in Cunningham within the Heart's Kingdom.

So, Heliot, as a man who was always attentive, especially to these particular clans, had heard about them. For instance, he knew what sort of place the Spade Kingdom was. That was the only place that had these strange beliefs and practices that left a lot of intrigue for Heliot. But what was the most beguiling of all was how the people in the Spade Kingdom take in werewolves as pets for luxury. That practice of taking werewolves as pets or slaves to toy with was the reason Heliot had taken an interest in it at first. Heliot had always been curious about people and their beguiling nature, but his interest never last that long. The reason for this was because his passion for making the land of Karo the best place for humans and vampires to live was his priority. "Lilou Bloodfang, a product of a forbidden ancient spell," he muttered, now understanding the reason she smelled so desirable. The said woman, Lilou, was very pleasing in the eye even as a human. However, when her mien changed, her scent smelled different. It was as though her blood had a mix of a potent aphrodisiac, making any vampire desire her. If not for Heliot's years of abstinence, the temptations Lilou was giving off would affect him even the slightest. Not only that, but as a product of an ancient forbidden spell, the quality of her blood was in the caliber of the king on the mainland of vampires. Meaning, that she was only a second to the Grimsbanne Clan who stand at the top of the blood hierarchy. No wonder people wanted her dead.

That had always been how it was, wasn't it? Since they couldn't have Lilou, as Samael, a pureblooded vampire of La Crox and Grimsbanne, claimed her, she had to die before she could even produce an insufferable bloodline of her blood and the Grimsbanne. "Why... didn't I end her back then?" Heliot wondered, tapping his fingers against his wrist as he held it on his back. "I would've."

Considering all the details laid on the table, Heliot understood the worries of some people who wanted Lilou dead. Lilou's cursed blood, which could produce a bloodline that could challenge the king and the Grimsbanne, was something to be alarmed about. Sure. Lilou probably didn't intend to

harm anyone and she might be able to raise her children well. However, no one could tell what that bloodline could do after several generations. It happened in the founding clans of the Heart's Kingdom as the newer generation shared a different sentiment, parting ways instead of living in harmony.

"This time, I will protect you. I promise."

Heliot's eyes drooped, narrowing them as Lilou's promise to him crossed his mind. His jaw tightened, recalling the deep sincerity in her eyes once again. "Why didn't I kill you?" he repeated, thinking about the possibility of him sacrificing his life and the land of Karo for Lilou. "Why..."

Again, her promise rang in his head and he trailed off, pausing from repeating the same question for the umpteenth time today. Just then, Heliot had an idea why he did what he 'probably' did for Lilou. "She had a way with her words," he whispered as her last remarks to him left an impression on him. He wouldn't recall her promise repeatedly if there wasn't something special in it. It could be because of how she said it, the message itself, or the look in her eyes while speaking such a promise. Either way, Heliot had an idea why he chose his own end just to protect her. "She... probably did something that only she can do," he guessed. "After all, I didn't find it repulsive hearing her words of promise." — Heliot would normally deem it insulting if someone wanted to protect him, as that would make him feel the other party was looking down on him. But he finds her promise reassuring in a strange, platonic way. "How conflicting, indeed."

Heliot raised his eyes at the clear night sky, keeping his silence for a very long time. He only stared at the moon, shunning all unnecessary thoughts from infiltrating his peace. "I am now more intrigued... about the current situation of the mainland."

Knock knock

Heliot fluttered his eyelashes, glancing over his shoulder. A knight entered the room, and after he ceremoniously paid respect to the prince, he straightened his back. "The remaining guests of Karo had left their lodging. They were moving in haste; it was hard to follow their tracks," reported the knight sternly, referring to Samael's group. "However, some knights managed and had confirmed their departure from your territory, Your Highness."

"I see..." Heliot rocked his head in understanding. "And the small unit I told you to gather?"

"They had discreetly left Karo, Your Highness. There were no eyewitnesses."

"Good." Heliot nodded, pleased at the report. "Gather another unit and send them to check the current state of affairs on the mainland."

"I will do so immediately, Your Highness."

"And another unit to the Cross Kingdom." Heliot's eyes sharpened. "Investigate the Princess named Beatrice Le Blac. I would like to know her connections on the mainland."

"At once, Your Highness."

Heliot let out a shallow breath as he listened to the knight's footsteps as he left. His eyes were still sharp and his expression was solemn. For obvious reasons, Heliot was expecting the worst after this night. Knowing Samael's plans and their destination, Heliot was aware of the brewing tension that would explode at the right time in the Spade Kingdom. "The land... of the remaining Moriarty. He is the only person I didn't want to wage a war with."

Under the same moon and dark sky, the restlessness in Heliot's heart was felt by many. For reasons unknown, the air and the silence on this particular night felt especially unsettling and filled with uncertainty. No one had any idea what tomorrow would bring or if tomorrow would even come just as quickly as how the night fell. Regardless of that, everyone only had one choice, and that was to survive this seemingly endless night. – END OF VOLUME 10 –

Chapter 776 Rookie

[Welcome to Volume 11]

PROLOGUE

SPADE KINGDOM

Two months later...

It had been quite some time since Lilou, Samael, Tilly, Law, Claude, and Rufus stepped foot in the land governed by the genius king and the last pureblooded Moriarty, Quentin Zero Moriarty. Their journey took over a week as they rarely made a stop, sprinting day in and out like shadows, just to reach the Kingdom of Spade. They entered the Spade Kingdom as silently as possible, and in it, they learned the land's customs, way of living, and current state of affairs. The said kingdom was just like the Land of Karo with less sand. It was a rich kingdom just like Karo, but the difference was that Karo was a place where everything was organized. It was a far more solemn place while the Spade Kingdom had all sorts of entertainment and games they could enjoy.

The loud cheers and shouts inside the colosseum reverberated across the surrounding. Some men stood from their seats, raising their fists in excitement. Women kept their modest but were clearly enjoying the spectacle unfolding. "End him!"

"End him!"

"Come on! Give him the finishing blow!"

No one found the vicious shouts and cheers echoing as the tension consistently rose. Everyone's eyes were fixed on the arena.

There, two people stood that appeared to be as tiny as ants from the farthest seats. The two people were facing each other, holding swords and shields on the other. Both had towering stature and a well-built physique, parading their sweaty and blood-stained bare top, and then a special kind of undergarment for the lower part of their body.

They were called warriors. Warriors were official participants of a contest that would happen weekly. The rules were simple, and that was to stand victorious until their opponent was incapable of fighting or dead. And right now, it was clear to everyone who was winning. Between the two warriors, one was already bleeding heavily and could barely stand. The other one, although blood could be seen on his muscular body and on the blades of his sword, could tell the blood wasn't his. "End him, Rookie!" yelled the crowd excitedly. The one who was obviously winning the duel was a rookie and a new warrior who appeared around two months ago. Ever since this man participated in these types of contests, the excitement had soured. This rookie was bloodthirsty, and each time he fight, he would torture his opponents by striking them whilst avoiding any vital points. As a result, his opponents would bleed profusely, riling up the audience. The most exciting part for the audience was how his opponents bleed without dying, making their fight even bloodier until they were barely

lifting their swords. Once the rookie's opponents had dulled, the audience would start cheering him to end his opponent. They would cheer and cheer until their voices would reach a certain volume, and only then would this rookie warrior would grant their requests. And how would this rookie end the fight?

By beheading his opponent. On the spot. No mercy. "End him! End him! End him!" The cheers and shouts continued in unison, growing louder and louder. "Will he end him?" A petite among the cheerful crowd, wearing a huge hat to cover her head, wondered. "This will be the eighth time if he did."

"I feel sorry for them." Next to the woman with long silver hair that was braided over her shoulder was a child. Law turned his head at Tilly and sighed. "Does he have to go this far?"

"He chooses his opponents, he must've had a reason..." Tilly kept her eyes on the arena, not blinking as the warrior swung his sword up, and his one swift down, the shouts from the crowd exploded. "Now that's the eighth head in two months."

Law let out another shallow breath, shifting his focus to the arena. As soon as he did, he saw this warrior pierce the severed head with the tip of his sword and then raised it for everyone to see. The warrior had never done this before, so when he did, the crowd went wild.

"I wouldn't be surprised if this was Mister Fabian," murmured Law, whilst shaking his head sideways. "Did Mister Fabian's spirit possess his brother?"

"We are in this cruel land," said Tilly, snapping her eyes at Law calmly. "If we do not go with the flow, it'll be our problem."

She then set her eyes back at the arena, seeing some facilitators approach the area while the rookie, Rufus, walked away. He flung his sword and rested it on his shoulder. Hence, as he walked away, everyone could see the head that was still on the tip of his weapon. "He knew that. Hence, even if it was out of his character, he had to," she added in the same tone.

"Where is he getting all these ideas, anyway?" Law mumbled as they remained seated to watch the rest of the duels.

Meanwhile, Rufus halted at the path upon seeing a figure leaning against the wall. A shallow breath escaped his mouth. His face had paint on it so no one could recognize him. His mysterious appearance was also one of the reasons his popularity soared in just two months. "You did my suggestions?" Rufus stopped when he walked past the other warrior. He turned his head to look at the latter. The other warrior was unlike any other warriors who had the same huge physique just like him. He was also wearing a helm.

"Wow... what a poor guy." The other warrior raised the visor of his helm, revealing a pair of crimson eyes. His eyes were squinting. "I heard Uncle Hell had become one of your fans. I wonder if he was among the crowd."

"I'd appreciate it if you refrain from talking to me inside the colosseum," said Rufus monotonously at the mischievous Claude, who had been feeding him ideas to gain popularity. "Hehe. I didn't want to, but my duel is just right next to yours. I wonder what sort of show should I give those wicked people to make them forget about your battle," Claude wondered as he walked in the direction where Rufus came from. He lowered the visor as he stepped out of the light, looking up at the lively crowd.

'These people are really scary,' he thought as they were rather in a good mood after watching Rufus behead another person today. Despite his thoughts, Claude spread his arms, basking in the crowd welcoming cheers as one of their favorite warriors, as he was even crueler than the other rookie.

Chapter 777 Questionable family values

Meanwhile...

Samael opened and closed his hands, flexing the muscle in his arms. His sleeve was folded up to his elbow, staring at the multiple bruises on his pale skin he got from the constant injection of needles. "Apparently, those little needles stings than when fangs sink into your skin," he remarked, shifting his eyes at the person sitting on the chair near him. The other person had his back facing him as he placed back little jars containing red fluid inside a suitcase.

"How many can you make with those?" Samael asked.

The person slowly turned around to face him, revealing an old vampire that Samael was so, so familiar with.

Theodore Darkbridge. One of Zero's strongest support and also a part of the 'seance' Lilou used to attend back then, which was also attended by Mortas Martin, Acheron Roseberg, Tristan Willow, Yulis, and Zero himself. Thanks to Lilou, who used to be a part of this group in the past, they were able to create a meticulous plan. They got an idea of whom to approach first, and how to make these people agree in a negotiation. Samael still thinks using violence to threaten these individuals was far easier, since this man, Theodore Darkbridge, died in his hands if he remembered correctly, or probably in Fabian or Rufus's hands. But well, they all wanted to survive and couldn't be complacent of just brute strength alone. They had no idea what sort of crafty trap Zero had prepared. Samael would applaud Lilou for her strategic planning if only she were here. "I've been drawing your blood for over a month now," said Theodore as he took off his monocle, facing Samael squarely. "Once I finished the production in a few weeks, my men could start the distribution. You just have to tell us when would you like to launch it."

"Heh..." Samael snorted, sitting upright while unfolding his sleeve. "That, if you can, start distributing it as soon as possible. It has been two months, after all."

Theodore Darkbridge gazed at Samael solemnly. "Once this had reached the royal palace, he will hunt me down to the ends of the world. Zero... is a madman, and I only accepted your offer because you gave me your word."

"You will stop Stefan La Crox from his madness," he continued, watching Samael fix his cufflinks from his seat. "Both kings are mad, and as someone who had human affiliates, the last thing I want is to watch them fall into their madness."

"No, you accepted my offer because you know I can be twice as crazy as Zero or Stefan." Samael snapped his eyes at the old vampire. "I got Stefan by the neck. All you need to do is go into hiding once the distribution starts. Take your family with you in the land of Karo because I cannot guarantee your safety. You'll be on your own until I displayed his head and his people's head at the gates of the royal palace."

Theodore gulped, huffing sharply. "I cannot do that."

"You cannot, what?" Samael blinked with genuine wonder in his eyes.

"I had sent my wife and children to the land of Karo and by now, they had probably settled down in their temporary homes," he explained solemnly, holding Samael's gaze firmly. "I will stay. In that case, even if he finds me, he would need some time to find them."

"Using yourself as bait, huh?"

"I am a man who has a family to protect, Your Grace," said Theodore as he slowly rose to his feet. "The danger I have to watch out for will buy my family enough time. If my death will save them, then I do not mind walking to hell myself."

"That, I can understand," Samael smirked. "Everything for our family."

Theodore glanced at Samael and barely concealed the dubiousness in them. What could this man know about family values? This third prince of the La Crox and also the Duke of Grimsbanne disgraced his own father after winning a duel against him and still continued to antagonize Stefan, Samael's brother, and also the current sovereign of the Heart's Kingdom. So what was Samael was talking about? Theodore would want to renounce Samael and his questionable family values, but it wasn't important. Lecturing this man was akin to lecturing a frog to stop eating insects. It was pointless.

"May this be the last time we meet again, Your Grace." Theodore Darkbridge lowered his head, taking a step back from the chair Samael was sitting on. "You will hear from me once everything is prepared."

"I'll be looking forward to it." Samael nodded with a smile. With that being said, Theodore Darkbridge left the private lodging of the house, where he would secretly meet Samael once a week to draw his blood. Samael watched the old folk's figure with a smirk, chuckling with his lips closed when Theodore was out of his sight. "Theodore Darkbridge, life is funny, isn't it?" a glint flickered across his eyes. "Back then, you were Quentin's avid supporter. Who would have thought? I only need to meet you sooner to steal that unbending loyalty you had to that guy sitting on that golden throne?"

His smirk stretched, recalling the last memory he had with Theodore Darkbridge. Their last memory wasn't very pleasant as the latter died along with Zero and Stefan in Minowa. Acheron Roseberg also died that day in Lilou's hands.

At times like this, Samael couldn't help but feel satisfied with keeping his circle small. He only had Rufus and Fabian and no one couldn't change their mind just like what he did to Theodore because they had known each other for many, many years. The additional people in their group were all Lilou's people including, Klaus, Silvia, Yul, some members of the Divine Order, Noah, and the list goes on. It wasn't surprising, though. Lilou was an outstanding leader in her own right and he couldn't blame others for getting attached to an admirable leader like her. Unlike Samael... who only attracted the weirdos.

Well, Rufus was quite normal by the standard of society, but Fabian was definitely far from ordinary, and his sanity had always been questionable. Yet, those two were the only ones who stuck with him — the land of Cunningham too, but well, that place was also filled with a bunch of weirdos as they were literally cults. "Goodness, why do I feel so depressed whenever I think about

leadership?" he mumbled, flinging his legs out of the long chair. "I gotta go see her before her admirers steal her attention again. Damn! This is probably the curse of marrying a beauty."

Chapter 778 The Heart's Kingdom

[HEART'S KINGDOM]

"You're leaving again?" Silvia asked incredulously at Yulis. He was sitting across from her, joining her for an afternoon tea. Silvia was excited for today as she thought of spending a day with him again, only to hear the news of such depressing news. "I had to go on an inspection again," Yulis said with a reassuring smile. "As a La Crox, I have to do what I can to reassure His Majesty. Don't worry. It's just an inspection, and this wasn't the first time I'm going to do it on His Majesty's behalf."

Silvia bit her tongue to stop herself from saying nonsense. It was true that around this time, while Yulis was still pretending a part of the La Crox, he would habitually conduct an inspection to make sure the kingdom was in a good shape just as the report said. Sometimes, her other brothers would do it, especially in those territories near Grimsbanne. Klaus or Alistair or Dominique would go there, and their last stop would be Cunningham. Only Stefan would dare step foot in the duchy.

In other words, it was not a surprise that Yulis would go on an inspection as it was part of his duty. It was not like his destination was Grimsbanne. "When will you return this time?" she asked after a moment of contemplation. "Around the same time," he answered, picking up the teacup to his lips. "Around a month or two. Depends if there's nothing amiss."

Another sigh escaped Silvia's lips, looking at him with worry. After regaining her memories before the regression, Silvia had a lot of regrets. One of them was her set up with her husband, Yulis, as they used to live separately because he had a duchy to take care of and Silvia had a march to oversee. They could live together in the capital as it was the center. However, they figured out that they wanted to be hands on. After all, Yulis was working on a project that could possibly change the education curriculum, while Silvia wanted to maintain being the main producer of the agricultural economy. Both of them had become important individuals in ten years' time. Hence, for their people, they had to compromise. They had always trusted each other and respected each other, so they decided to spend months separately and then a few months together. All of that, however, had become Silvia's regret. If only she knew they would go back to square one, she would've made more memories with him. Perhaps, focused on starting a family since their setup had refrained them from successfully having a child. "Silvia." Silvia was caught distracted, as he called her. "Are you alright?"

"Uh, yes." She nodded, a bit distraught. "Why wouldn't I? It's not like this is the first time you'd be away. I was just a little saddened by the news since you've been a great company." Yulis sported a reassuring smile. "I will buy you gifts on my way."

"You do not have to." She chuckled, tucking her hair behind her. "Just return in one piece. I'd personally prepare you tea on your return."

Yulis chuckled. "That would be my honor, Your Royal Highness."

Silvia kept her smile on the surface and sentiments a secret. And just like for the past two months, the two of them enjoyed a cup of tea, talking about the most menial things. After that night two

months ago, Yulis had been kind enough to be a little bit sensitive about what he would say to lessen what was burdening her.

Time quickly past without the two of them noticing, and before she knew it, the sun was about to set. "It was yet another well-spent afternoon," Yulis crooned with a gentle smile. "But despite that, I would need to excuse myself first with a heavy heart."

Silvia chuckled, hiding her reluctance with a playful smile. "I appreciate that you spare me a time of the day again, Yulis."

"Not at all," he said, shaking his head. "It was my honor to be in your company, and also, I enjoyed spending time with Your Highness."

"If that is true, why not spend the night with me?" she humored, catching him off guard. Silvia burst out in laughter, seeing his reaction. "I was jesting. I am His Majesty's first wife, and sleeping with his brother — our brother will only result in a scandal."

Yulis shook his head while chuckling. "You've been getting good at your jokes, Your Royal Highness. For a moment, I thought it was true."

'Because it was,' was what Silvia wanted to tell him, but stopped herself. The current Yulis was a lot more reserved and sensitive. Therefore, if she outright seduced him, she was afraid he would just keep his distance. Rejection was also what she was afraid of — even though intermarriage was not forbidden in the kingdom, some of them -- Yulis, for instance -- had a different perspective regarding that matter.

"Anyway, let me send you off," she proposed.

"There's no need, Your Royal Highness."

Silvia shook her head and flashed him a polite smile. "I insist, Your Highness. This is the least I can do since I don't think I will be able to send you off on your departure for your inspection."

Yulis opened his mouth, only to close them again. He assessed her eyes and discerned she had already decided. Hence, he smiled warmly and nodded. "How can I refuse my sister?" he remarked, leaving this pang in her heart that she barely survived without crying. With that being said, Silvia walked Yulis to the exit of the Avolire Palace. However, just as they were nearing the exit of the palace, both of them stopped to look at the person entering the premises.

"Klaus," Silvia called before her eyes fell on the young boy holding her brother's hand. "I didn't hear you are visiting the Avolire Palace with the crown prince tonight."

Klaus darted his eyes between Silvia and Yulis before he smirked. "He's your son. Even if his birth parents were not the king or his first wife, Lucia and Dyrroth are still your siblings," he remarked politely. "It won't hurt you if you had dinner with him, yes? Moreover, I need to have a word with Yulis. I came here after hearing that he had visited the Avolire Palace."

Silvia's jaw tightened, still wary of Klaus. To her understanding, Klaus was still on Stefan's side, but it was obvious he still held his initial grudge against them because of the death of Lucia and Dyrroth, Claude's biological parents and their elder siblings. "I would also request an audience with you, Your Royal Highness." Klaus's eyes glinted, staring at Silvia with complexity in his eyes. "It was regarding a matter of great importance."

Chapter 779 Why did we go back?

"What do I owe this pleasure, Klaus?" Klaus assessed the sharpness and hostility in Silvia's eyes. For the past two months, Klaus had always kept an eye on Cassara and Silvia. These two always had this love and hate relationship, until years later, hate would be the only thing that would remain. During this time, before the regression, Silvia and Yulis also had a good relationship. Hence, there was nothing wrong with Silvia's tea time with Yulis since she hadn't done anything suspicious. Moreover, Silvia had acted the same: hostile, always wary, alert, and sophisticated. It was hard for Klaus to find out whether or not Silvia and Yulis had regained their memories since both of them had drunk Lilou's blood and it wasn't just a small amount. Lilou enhanced their blood, after all. He couldn't also ask them outright, knowing giving them the idea of the regression would do them no good. Even when Klaus was aware of the regression before he retrieved his memories, the sheer thought of it messed with his mind. He could imagine Yulis and Silvia having all sorts of questions in their head and the frustration of not recalling a single thing. That was the reason Klaus was careful. But it had been two months, and Klaus had to make a gamble. "Did you ask to have a private audience with me to stare at my face, brother?" the side of Silvia's lips curled up, assuming Klaus was still at Stefan's side at the moment. She had been wary of everyone aside from Yulis, but Silvia had to constantly remind herself not to cross the line with Yulis. Until now, Silvia didn't know if Stefan knew about the regression. If he did, she was afraid if Stefan found out she regained her memories, he would kill her. That was the least she wanted right now. "If that is the case, you are wasting my time. Don't do this again." Silvia planted her hands on the armrest and pushed herself up, a layer of frost coating her eyes as she gazed down at Klaus. "Even if you tell me to love that child as if he was my own, I will never do that. Claude is Lucia and Dyrroth's child, not mine. And even when Stefan legally adopted him, don't expect me to have any maternal attachment to him."

There was not a trace of remorse in Silvia's tone, despite knowing her words were nothing but harsh. She could always protect Claude in the shadows, just like what she had always done in the past. "Claude is just right next to this room. Get him out of the Avolire Palace. He doesn't belong in here," she added before she stepped away from him. Her steps, however, came to a halt when Klaus spoke. "You were an excellent teacher," he said, slowly setting his eyes on her back. "And an admirable marchioness."

Silvia's eyes zoomed in and out as her pupils dilated, holding her breath at what she heard. But instead of rushing back to him, she kept her composure. This could be a trap laid meticulously by Stefan. "Have you lost your mind, brother?" Silvia looked back at Klaus, mockery apparent in her eyes. "A teacher? And a marchioness? Me? The Royal Consort of His Majesty, the King, is being mistaken as a lowly marchioness? Did you learn a new way to antagonize me?"

Klaus was unfazed; he had expected such a reaction from her. This could be a natural reaction or just a facade. Either way, he wouldn't leave the Avolire Palace today without knowing the truth. "You remember, do you?" he continued calmly, assessing her subtle reaction. "That time in Grimsbanne with her and that time with Hell... you remember everything, yes?"

"I remember no such thing, Klaus." This time, her voice was firm and dark, facing his vantage point squarely. "However, I will surely remember this insult."

Klaus slowly rose from his seat and faced her. "I remember everything, Silvia. And when I say everything... I meant every single damn thing."

Her neck turned taut, eyes shaking. However, her resolve didn't break completely, although it faltered slightly. Anyone could say all these vague remarks to make someone confess. Silvia was far too familiar with such a tactic that she would be dumb to fall for it herself. "And those were?" she pried with a delicately arched brow. "I don't think your vague remarks will refresh my memories."

"Grimsbanne..." Klaus strutted towards her as he spoke. "The Duchess of Grimsbanne — you and I pledged an oath and offered our blood to her, didn't we?"

He stopped right in front of her, his expression solemn, which was very rare to see with his blithe nature.

"I was her chief knight while you were a lecturer in an academy and her handmaiden," he continued quietly. "When she fell into a five-year slumber, even though we had supported the new king and became his limbs, our hearts were always with her."

"I hope you understand that everything you are saying now can be considered treason," she replied stubbornly, knowing what he uttered was all common knowledge. Their enemies knew these details, and she was only waiting for him to mention a small piece that their enemies didn't know about. Something private... It didn't matter if it was an embarrassing moment or just a menial detail that left an impression on them. Just anything. Anything that others didn't know but them.

Seeing her unyielding front, Klaus drew a deep breath. He was keeping things vague for her own sake, lest she truly didn't remember. However, it seemed this wasn't enough and he couldn't blame her. Silvia was a meticulous person, and she wouldn't yield so easily.

"Do you remember that time... in Minowa?" Klaus breathed out. "When we gathered there for her son's birthday. We were on the second floor, talking. It was just the two of us back then. You were... a bit emotional — jealous, to be precise."

This time, her heart thudded. It didn't cross her until now that there was such a thing in the past. That time wasn't an essential event for the two of them, but now that he mentioned it, that conversation with him suddenly bore importance.

"Silvia, I... remember everything and came back to this place under her orders." Klaus took another step as he lowered his head to her. "If you say you don't still remember, I will pretend this didn't happen. But if you do remember, which I wish you do, I need your help."

Silvia gulped, studying his pair of burning eyes. This time, she was certain he was being serious and candid.

"Klaus," she whispered in a shaking voice. "Why did we go back?"

Chapter 780 Do you think he's pretending?

"Klaus, why did we go back?"

Klaus's eyes softened with bitterness, pressing his lips into a thin line. He watched the layers of defenses in Silvia's eyes carefully unravel as she waited for his response. The aloof and fierce woman had slowly disappeared, leaving this vulnerable and confused Silvia. "Let's seat first," he suggested with a mild tone. "We have many things to talk about, Silvia."

With that being said, Silvia and Klaus returned to their previous spots. They looked at each other, and knowing filling her in was more important than his questions, Klaus let out a shallow breath. When his lips parted, Klaus let her know about every little detail that had happened.

The regression, what happened in the north and Claude, Stefan and Samael's alliance, Lilou's death which caused their memories to return, and things for her to understand the situation. Although Klaus didn't detail Samael and Lilou's plans for Spade and their whereabouts, he told her they were already doing something to fix this mess. "If..." Silvia's lips quivered while doing her best to absorb all these pieces of information in one go. "... Lilou's death was the reason our memories returned, why can't Yulis remember?"

She swallowed the frustrating tension in her throat. "My husband was with us in Grimsbanne and, just like you and me, he had consumed Lilou's blood. Perhaps, much more than us, since Lilou was always worried about him and their fallacious affair."

"That... I have no idea, Silvia." Klaus shook his head in disappointment. "I can only think of two reasons Yulis hadn't regained his memories."

"What are they?"

"He didn't drink Lilou's blood," he answered almost immediately. "You know those Bloodfangs and their affection for each other. Lilou is Yulis' only blood family, and therefore, he probably couldn't stomach drinking his sister's blood just so he could survive."

"But that doesn't make sense," Silvia argued with a shaking voice.

"Why?"

"It is true that Yulis cherished Lilou more than his own life. However, he wouldn't insult her as to waste her blood, Klaus," she explained with a level of certainty. "For us vampires, blood is the most essential thing. We lived for the blood, and we die for the blood. Yul will not disrespect Lilou like that."

"That's why I am not fully convinced about that." Klaus let out a shallow breath because what Silvia had said was all true. "You said there are two reasons you can think of," Silvia breathed out sharply, clasping her skirt tightly. "What is the other one, Klaus?"

"That..." this time, he trailed off as he held her gaze. "... I wish that is not the case."

Silvia bit her inner lower lip. "Do you think he's pretending?"

"Yes," Klaus answered with great difficulty, knowing this suggestion would hurt her. "Just like you and I, he probably didn't want to show any sign that he remembered. After all, during this time, we didn't have a great rapport."

"But Yulis and I always had a good relationship."

"Even if he knew that... you were still his wife, Silvia," he argued calmly. "Your husband cherishes you, and knowing you'd be fine for the next several years, he probably didn't want to burden you with such information."

There was a moment of silence between them. Silvia carefully lowered her eyes, rearranging her thoughts. When she raised her head, she shook it mildly.

"No," she whispered, causing deep lines in between Klaus' brows. "Yul doesn't remember."

"How are you sure he didn't?"

"Because he never looked at me anything like how he used to look at me."

"Yulis is good at concealing his emotions, Silvia. He had lived his entire life within the palace's walls in deception. Even Stefan and Hell didn't know he was a Bloodfang, and not a La Crox," Klaus stressed but maintained his voice at the lowest volume. "That had always been his survival method, Silvia. Do not underestimate how the Bloodfang could hide things from anything — they could even deceive the world. You saw how Lilou deceived people for her goal."

Klaus huffed silently. "It is in their blood, sister. I hate I sound like I was badmouthing them, but that was a fact we mustn't overlook. If he wants to deceive you, he would. It might be for a good reason or for something else, but we cannot rule out all possibilities just because of your personal feelings."

Silvia opened and closed her mouth, but no words came out. She couldn't argue with him because everything that came out of Klaus's mouth was nothing but the truth. If Yulis had regained his memories and was simply pretending, then... it wouldn't be hard for him to make everyone believe what he wanted them all to believe. "Is... that even possible?" she fumbled with her words, her voice cracking. "I am his wife. How can he not look at me with the slightest affection other than affection for his sister?"

"Because if you didn't remember, what would you see him?" Klaus returned, and this time, she couldn't answer him. "Just like how you've kept him around without crossing the line or letting your longing overwhelm you, he's probably doing the same. I have good faith in Yulis, not because I had admired him, but because I know he will never betray Lilou."

He leaned forward, looking at her straight in the eye. "Convince yourself that if that is the case, Yulis is simply doing it for your sake."

"But now that I know Stefan and Hell had an alliance, I won't have any problem if I confront him."

"Don't." Klaus shook his head. "Until we know his reasons, don't tell him you knew things."

"Why?" Silvia frowned. "Isn't that better? And also the easiest?"

"Silvia, what we had discussed was nothing but speculation. I still have another conclusion and that was there were only certain people who drank Lilou's blood who knew about the regression, but I highly doubt it. It's still better if we are careful; we don't know who is watching our every movement."

Silvia's grip on her skirt tightened, having these conflicting emotions in her heart. Sensing her dispirited mood, Klaus pinched the bridge of his nose.

"I'm glad that you already remember everything," he said, dropping his hand from the bridge of his nose. "For now, focus on your own survival. Continue doing what you are doing, but be extra cautious of your surroundings, especially around Cassara."

"Why? What's with Cassara now?"

"Nothing." Klaus shook his head. "Just — just be careful around her. She retrieved Fabian's memories, and you know what that means. As for Yulis, I will investigate him. Allow me to carry this burden, Silvia."

"I don't know what to say, but let me know if you got anything."

"Of course —" Just then, Klaus and Silvia's bodies stiffened as their pupils slowly dilated, catching a whiff of Claude's blood.