

The Duke's Passion

Chapter 8 - I Didn't Steal It, I Borrowed It.

"You're early, but welcome home," he said, grinning from ear to ear, and all I could do was just look at him in silence.

Announcing my arrival was a habit I couldn't break. By doing this and rambling about my day, practically talking to myself, it made me feel... a little less lonely by my father's passing. But now, this vampire was saying the words I had longed to hear. I shouldn't have felt moved by it, knowing I'd pay for my life, but I couldn't help it.

"Come. I repaired the table and chairs while you were gone. This will be done in a moment," he said, moving clumsily through the small kitchen.

I glanced at the table, where a few apples sat, and eyed the two new, sturdy-looking chairs. I hadn't had fruits in such a long time; they were always too expensive for me. I had been surviving on potatoes or whatever I could take from the field. Seeing fruit on the table should feel like a miracle, but I didn't feel that excited. It only reminded me of how he planned to fatten me up before devouring me. How comical, I thought. I would have never thought that having more food on the table could feel so dreadful.

I raised my head, glaring daggers at him. 'Perfect meal, huh?' He was surely devoted to making that come true.

Without a word, I dragged my feet towards the chair and plopped my butt down on the seat, put my hands on the table. They were dirty and I should have gone to the river to wash them, but being wary of hygiene didn't matter now since I would be dead soon, anyway.

"Here you go!" Elated, the silver-haired man carrying a pot, placed it on the table.

Soup...

I bit my lower lip, hearing my stomach growl just with its aroma. Was that meat I'm seeing? It smelled delicious and appeared very appetizing.

I hadn't had such a meal in a long time. But I held myself back because I wouldn't let my appetite get the better of me.

"If you're worried it may be human meat, no, unfortunately," he said in defense as I stared at the food, refusing to eat.

Unfortunately? I never truly thought about his concerns. But now that he mentioned it, I could not help but cast him a suspicious look.

"Try it! I just grabbed this dish today, you know." He grinned, still looking suspicious and wicked.

"It's edible." He encouraged as he wiggled his brows.

'Well, ignorance is bliss,' I thought, making up an excuse.

"Thank you for the food," I muttered under my breath, as I grabbed the wooden spoon he took from who knows where.

The wooden spoon trembled in my hand. I knew he was only doing this for his own agenda and eating to my heart's content was an act of embracing being his prey. The soup just smelled so appetizing and slowly, I scooped a spoonful of soup and blew on it. Just a sip, Lilou. Just a sip. After blowing it mildly, I placed the wooden spoon before my lips. Carefully, I took a sip of the soup until my eyes instantly gleamed.

Delicious.

I never tasted such exquisite soup with so many flavors. It was marvelous, warming not just my muscles, but my heart.

Instantly, I felt my cheeks heat up as my spoon automatically went for another scoop, even though I knew I shouldn't eat more.

I had already eaten three more spoonfuls in the blink of an eye.

"Ahh... Rufus' chefs are great, huh?" he muttered, catching my attention as I raised my head. "I wonder if I can steal more from their kitchen."

"Huh?"

He smiled, close-lipped. "Nothing. I mean, I didn't actually cook it myself." He shrugged before he chuckled. "I just heated it up, but you should enjoy it. You're too thin. I'm surprised a strong wind hasn't blown you and this shack away yet," he added, cupping his cheek as he watched me eat.

"You stole this?" I asked incredulously.

"Well, I wouldn't call it stealing..." He grinned, in denial about his immoral behavior. "I just borrowed it!"

He was, indeed, in denial.

"Milord, I don't think they called this borrowing. We should return it," I argued, placing the wooden spoon down. It was a shame that I nearly forgot to sabotage his diet plan for me. But eating stolen food was beyond my morals. Even if he stole it from those well-off families, I wouldn't be proud and satisfied eating something stolen.

"Huh? But, why?" he asked, tilting his head to the side as he sported a baffled look.

"Even a peasant has morals to uphold, milord," I answered, staring him straight in the eye.

Perhaps slowly accepting my fate as his prey made me relax around him. I wouldn't lie and say I had overcome my fear, but it was less terrifying knowing he wouldn't kill me now. Or maybe, I'm acting braver knowing he could just snap my neck and everything would be over... just like what I wanted.

"Is that so?" He frowned, appearing to understand my reasons. "Well, if that's what you want, you can return it." He added, nodding in agreement before he set his eyes on me. His eyes glinted as he smirked evilly.

What was he up to now?

"I stole it from the mansion from that mountain." His grin appeared more wicked as he said it. "Return it there."

My eyes widened as I came to an understanding of where he stole it. "At... the Duke's Mansion?!"

My soul momentarily left my body upon my realization. I stared at him blankly. My mouth gaped open a little as I felt my heart sink.

"Yes! That mansion!" he sighed in distress. "I snuck in and nearly got myself caught. Ahh... my struggles just for this silly, ungrateful, little girl." Again, he let out a weary sigh, as if he nearly got himself killed. How could he infiltrate the Duke's mansion and be left unscathed?

Just who was this vampire?

"You..." I trailed off, unable to articulate my disbelief.

Just then, I heard horses and voices from outside my shack. "Search the place and find that thief!" was what I heard.