

The Duke 381

Chapter 381 - Is There No End To This?

[My lord, I am writing this letter to you in a hurry. Please forgive my penmanship.

Baron Martin had finally agreed to side with you and Her Grace. However, he had told me information that raised my concerns and this may alarm you the same.

From my understanding, the Moriarty were the ones who gave the idea to the Bloodfang on how to make their sacrifice a success. However, there was a high probability that the Moriarty had also manipulated the clan's will.

Currently, Her Grace still had her clan's will under control whilst retaining hers. That was because it was incomplete, my lord.

Her Grace mentioned the voices in her head, but Baron Martin told me that wasn't everything. The other half of the will was in another person's, waiting to return those voices to its rightful owner.

Those voices will manifest into the duchess once she met certain requirements: such as having contact with this 'key' as what Baron Martin had called (but unsure what exactly), and... absorbing Prince Yulis.

The clans — I'm saying the Bloodfang's and the Mortiaty's — will be hers and she will be them.

We can all be in danger, and so is Her Grace. We don't know how the Moriartys manipulated the Bloodfang and Lara, nor we can be sure where everything leads.

We can't let that from happening, Your Grace. Prince Yulis is important to her. We can't let her kill Yulis in a moment of madness.

My lord, after knowing this, I begged you to save my kin. Please take Her Grace and Prince Yulis out of the palace immediately before it's too late.

Marquess Cameron Crawford]

"You...!" Samael stormed his way on the estate's dungeon prison, kicking his way inside the cell. He grabbed their prisoner's hair, pulling it up to reveal the middle-aged man's mangled face.

"Where in hell is Zero?" he inquired with a shaking voice. "You better start talking now before Rufus' steed drags you across the kingdom by your foot, Mister Theodore Darkbridge."

[A/N: A review: Theodore Darkbridge appeared in CH 251 - Collecting the pieces]

"Heh..." Theodore let out a weak chuckle.

"Fucker..." Samael scoffed menacingly, sucking air through his gritted fangs.

"His Majesty never got in his position by being vicious alone. He is right when he said you might be alive." Theodore chortled and coughed out blood, unable to struggle with the torture they had done to him. "You might be strong, Your Grace... but you don't scheme, sadly."

Samael tightened his grip on the man's hair before letting it loose. "Sadly, you are quite right, but that is due to the fact that scheming is so fucking boring. I get what I want even if I don't do that."

"You can, Your Grace, but you can't just recklessly dive into madness because you now have people to protect." Theodore inhaled deeply as if he had been deprived of air. "It's not just you and those two monsters. You care now, Your Grace, and that had become your weakness."

"I never see my people as my weakness. It might be the opposite." Samael scoffed as he let his hair go and stood up. He didn't say a word as he turned around to leave.

Just when he was by the gates of the cell, he halted. "You are correct when you said scheming is never my style. My ways are far more entertaining, after all." Samael glanced over his shoulder and smirked.

"I will keep you alive for as long as I can, like a mistress, Theodore. We have many years together, be sure to look forward to it."

Samael resumed in his strides after saying his piece. With him was Fabian, who remained outside the cell. Fabian turned his head to their captive and smiled.

"See you later, Lady Mistress." He bowed politely before following Samael's tracks.

The sound of chains clicking against each other as Theodore struggled resonated across the dungeon prison. He clenched his teeth, enraged at Fabian, the person who abducted him and tormented him out of boredom.

"Tch! That brat...!"

Fabian's smile grew brighter as he heard Theodore's protests before leaving the dungeon. There was just something in a person's hateful remarks that uplifted his mood.

"Your Grace!" as soon as they exited the dungeon, Charlotte rushed towards them. "Are we really going to the palace? Tonight?"

Charlotte followed their tracks as Samael and Fabian didn't stop in their steps.

"Yes. Why are you still here?" Samael inquired, glancing at Charlotte. "Rufus and the others had already left to join the hunt."

"Pardon? But I can shoot arrows from this distance!"

"How convenient." Fabian nodded in satisfaction. "I should master archery as well. It will save me some time in traveling."

"Mister Fabian, can you stick in close combat? I can't let anyone else surpass me in long-range." Charlotte pouted as it was clear to her that Fabian was just good at anything.

Suddenly, Samael stopped in his tracks and pivoted on his heel. Charlotte could not help but raised her brows, darting her eyes from Fabian to Samael.

"My lord?" she called under her breath.

"Charlie, I want you to do something for me." Samael's eyes glinted while his lips parted.

Charlotte furrowed her brows as she listened to Samael's orders. Her eyes slowly dilated as her mouth fell open.

"Good luck." Fabian smiled, patting her shoulder before leaving Charlotte in a daze.

"Oh, my goodness..." Charlotte trailed off, staring blankly at where the two left. "...is there no end to this?"

Yul's scent and aura led me to the throne hall. I encountered a few who tried to stop me, but they're all high-fiving with Satan now.

I gazed at the door leading to the throne room. This door I never gazed at properly before; the same door Klaus and I kicked a year ago, only to see my husband's head rolling down.

"It's been a year and yet..." I paused, using the end of my scythe to push it open. "... I still can't move on about that. This place doesn't give me anything but bad memories."

The loud creaking of the door as it opened echoed in my ear. I moved forth, throwing all the terrible memories at the back of my head as they were unnecessary now.

"Yul." My steps stopped, seeing that Yul was lying on the floor near the step up leading to the throne. There was barely blood around him, telling me no grave injuries were inflicted.

"Yul," I called once again and resumed in my stride, squatting down when I approached him. I first checked his pulse and heaved a sigh of relief when it was still beating.

"Goodness." I smiled while shaking him awake. "Yul, wake up."

I shook him lightly, which grew violently over time. Before panic could creep into my heart, Yul grunted as he opened his eyes weakly.

"Your Grace?" Yul blinked while assisting himself to sit up. He looked around in confusion.

"What the...? Why am I here?"

"It's fine now, Yul." My eyes softened, seeing him well. "Let's go back?"

Yul cast me a baffled look as if silently asking me for an explanation. But Yul knew to read the air, so he pressed his lips in a thin line and nodded.

"Come. Let me help you," I offered, after seeing him wince when he tried to stand. Yul didn't refuse my offer, placing his arm across my shoulder and after the count of three, we both stood.

"Gosh, you're so heavy." A teasing chuckle escaped my mouth while he rolled his eyes.

"You put this upon yourself."

Just as we were about to walk away, my eyes shifted on the throne. I paused and just stared at it, making the whispering voices in my head grow louder.

"Lilou? Are you alright?" Yul asked, but I ignored him.

"It's..." I murmured. "... calling for me."

"What?"

"Because it's yours, to begin with!" Suddenly, a familiar voice came from across the room. Even though I didn't turn my head in her direction, I recognized who it was.

Beatrice.

Chapter 382 - First Drink

I heard her heels click against the marbled floor as she approached. Deep down, I knew I shouldn't be listening to her or to the voices in my head. But I couldn't stop myself, nor I could stop myself from staring at the throne.

"What are you doing here, Your Royal Highness?" Yul inquired, alarmed at what was going on.

"What is going on is we are putting things back to where they should be." Now Alphonse had also entered the scene.

"Your Grace... Lilou, let's go." Yul held my wrist in panic, but that didn't faze me. "Lilou, what are you doing?"

Yul tugged my hand, but to no avail. My eyes were fixed on the throne, pulling my hand away from him as I took a step forward.

"Lilou!"

"It's no use, Yulis," Alphonse chimed in with a chuckle. "It had started."

"What had started?"

"The ritual. What else?" Beatrice humored gleefully.

"Cassara had only survived for one reason. That is to return what she robbed from her, and now that the Will had returned to its rightful owner we must proceed to the next steps." Alphonse's voice was laced with bottomless viciousness.

I could hear them all talking behind me and Yul calling for me to stop. But I didn't and soon stood in front of the throne. My hand, as if having its own mind, reached for the armrest to caress it.

[The throne is yours to claim, little child. Kill every single La Crox and avenge the Bloodfang. The Moriarty is your only ally, remember that.]

The voices in my head repeated that chant until I lost count. It was as if they were engraving those words in my skull, making my heart race.

"That is my purpose?" I whispered, and another wave of answers rang in my ear, making my head throb painfully. "Right... the Moriarty is my only ally and I shall kill every La Crox."

A subtle smile resurfaced on my lips as my eyes softened. There was a part of me that was screaming at me to get it together, but the dominant part of me told me otherwise.

"So, that is how you put things together." I nodded in understanding. "If I kill every one of them, everyone will be happy."

"Sis! What are you mumbling about?! Come!" Yul's enrage voice came in and he soon approached me.

He grabbed my bicep and forced me to look at him. His lips parted, but no words came out. Instead, he looked at me with disbelief in his eyes as his grip tightened.

"What is... going on?" he stammered under his breath.

"Yulis..." I cupped his cheek and smiled subtly. "I'm thirsty. I feel like I'm dying."

"Lilou." His breath hitched as his fangs finally grew. It was my first time seeing him reveal his fangs; they were lovely.

And his cerulean eyes slowly changed their color to red, reflecting me in them. The longer I stare into his eyes, my reflection grew clearer.

A pair of burning crimson eyes and short fangs...

Why do I have fangs in his eyes? I wondered.

"Yul," came out a soft desperate voice as my brows creased. "I... I'm thirsty."

His mouth opened and closed, holding both my shoulders while taking deep breaths. I could feel him tremble through his grip while hanging his head low.

"Drink him."

"Feed on him!"

"He is your vessel, child. His blood and life that sustain him until now are yours, to begin with."

"Have him and become one of us, child."

I gnashed my teeth as the vicious voices screamed in my head. They wouldn't stop until I followed what they were saying.

"I don't want to hear them, Yul," I murmured, feeling my heart sink.

Yul raised his head and planted his palm on my ears. He stared at me deep in the eyes, smiling, closed-lipped.

"It's alright," he said, nodding encouragingly. "It's not your fault, hmm? Never blame yourself for this."

He didn't ask me any questions, nor did he berate Alphonse and Beatrice, who were watching us. Instead, he focused on reassuring me that everything would be alright; that this was not my fault.

"Do you remember what I said before? If it's necessary, my life is yours to take." Yul chuckled weakly. "I guess this was it."

I listened to him and stared at the determination in his eyes. It barely moved my heart, though, because all I felt was quenching this thirst.

"Come here, sis." Yul pulled my bicep to him, bending over while wrapping his arm around me. "Thirsty?"

"Mhm." I nodded, turning my head to him, and sniffed his neck. It was enticing, as I could imagine myself sinking my teeth into his skin.

Yul stroke the back of my head. I couldn't feel any reluctance in his touch, as if he had accepted this long ago.

"Be careful on your first drink, alright? There is also etiquette in drinking, sis. I should've taught you, but well, I will guide you now." His voice was calm as he instructed me how to drink properly without making a mess.

I opened my mouth and leaned closer to his neck. As I came closer, I felt his grip on me tightened slightly, embracing what was to come.

Meanwhile, in the middle ward of the palace, Stefan gazed up at the darkfield. Dominique approached him from the side, bowing with his fist across his chest.

"Your Majesty, is this the right decision?" asked Dominique with genuine worry in his voice. "She will become more troublesome if she becomes a vampire now."

"Hah... Dominique, does your arm hurt?"

Dominique furrowed his brows at the sudden question. "No, Your Majesty."

Stefan slowly turned around and faced him, hands behind him. His face bobbed to examine him.

"Is that so?" he nodded in understanding, trudging towards him. When Stefan was a step away from Dominique, he bent over as a smirk resurfaced on his face.

"Then, how about this? Does it hurt?" Stefan inquired, arching his brow as he glanced at Dominique.

The latter's eyes dilated as his pupils constricted, turning his head at Stefan in shock. His hand wrapped around the sword's handle that pierced through his abdomen.

"What... who are you?" Dominique panted as he finally noticed that this Stefan wasn't the king he served.

Chapter 383 - I Might Die Tonight

"Ahh...!" Just as the tip of my fangs pressed against Yul's neck, I drew back and winced in pain. I gazed down at my leg, seeing Lakresha's dagger version in it.

"I managed." I exhaled sharply as I managed to wake myself up from this nightmare. "Go away Yul."

I pushed Yul's chest away while holding the dagger plunged in my thigh. Yul took a step back, gazing at me in disbelief.

"But... you will --"

"Yulis!" My voice hitched as my eyes sharpened, glaring at him. "I will rather lose my sanity than kill you! Go where I can't see you."

"Oh, no, Your Grace! Even if you don't want to kill him, he will still die." Alphonse clicked his tongue helplessly while shaking his head. "Between the two of you, you are a much better choice, you know?"

"Yulis had accepted his death. How can you deny him, Your Grace?" Beatrice frowned as she dramatically wiped her fake tears. "I almost teared up with his sacrifice."

I ignored them. "Yulis, get out of here." I clenched my teeth, pulling Lakresha out of my leg. A grunt left my gritted teeth and my wound oozed with blood. That hurt like hell.

"I can't, Lilou." Yul shook his head lightly. "I won't let you die for me."

"Yulis!" My piercingly loud voice echoed across the throne hall until it shook. I could barely keep my own will right now, and if these voices took over once again, I'm afraid I would kill him this time.

"Get the hell out of my sight!" my eyes glinted with fury, staring at him dead in the eye. "That is an order."

"Lilou..."

"Now!" I yelled.

Yul clenched his teeth tightly and nodded after a second. "If that is what you want," he said, glancing at our audience before disappearing from his standpoint.

Just as Yul moved like a bolt of lightning towards the exit, Alphonse appeared to block his way.

"Oh, no, I told you..." he trailed off as I grabbed his wrist before it could reach Yulis, appearing beside him.

"You don't call the shots here, Alphonse." I bore my fangs, glancing over my shoulders as Yul stood before Alphonse. I cocked my head lightly, tightening my grip around Alphonse's wrist.

"Go."

Yul ground his teeth, glaring daggers at me, but still followed my orders. As he sprinted away, I set my eyes at Alphonse while he chuckled.

"Do you really think he can escape?" he asked, but I ignored him. I wielded Lakresha on my other hand and threw it in a certain direction.

"I said, you don't call the shots here." I moved my gaze to Beatrice, who was nearly sliced in half by Lakresha as it landed inches away from her. "If I want someone to go, they will, and if I told you to stay, you must. Those aren't request, they're orders."

"Hah... we can't expect anything less from the vessel of the core." Alphonse laughed heartily, making me glanced at him.

The louder his chuckles were, the louder the voices in my head had become. It felt as though needles were pricking my brain. I tightened my grip as I sucked air through my gritted teeth.

"You will not be in pain if you just submit, Your Grace," Alphonse advice with a knowing look on his face. Despite the cracking sound coming from his wrist, it didn't seem to faze him.

Undead. I let him go and hopped back.

"Funny, Alphonse. The voices in my head abolished the word submission." The side of my lips stretched viciously. My eyes shifted in Beatrice's direction.

"I won't ask you questions since it is clear to me what is going on in this place," I spat out in ridicule. "Pity."

"Lakresha. Catharsis." As soon as I called my weapons' names, they flew back into my hands, grasping them tightly. My eye twitched at the piercing pain in my head, but I shrugged it off as I held onto my consciousness.

'Not yet,' I told myself. 'Yul is still around.'

I faced the two of them and noticed the dark shroud exuding from Alphonse's back. Black veins protruded under his temple, his sclera changing into black, and his fangs growing longer and sharper.

My eyes veered towards Beatrice, and her eyes glowed in red, smirking viciously.

'Sam... I might die tonight, love,' I muttered internally while stretching my neck from one side to the other.

I took a deep breath, spreading my arms wide while holding Lakresha on my right and Catharsis on my left. "Well, here goes nothing."

The marble floor under my foot cracked before I bolted towards them, baring my fangs.

Meanwhile, Yulis clutched his hands tightly as he sprinted away without looking back. Lilou's agitated face while yelling at him to go away kept flickering in front of his eyes.

"Damn!" Yulis halted in the hallway and cursed at the top of his lungs. He looked back at his tracks and clenched his teeth.

A strong aura colliding had suddenly exploded from a distance, reassuring him that a clash was taking place. He could tell Lilou was battling those two all on her own while he was running away to save his own throat.

"Damn it!" he cursed, about to go back, when a hand suddenly grabbed his wrist.

"Yulis!" he turned his head back to see Silvia shaking her head. "Don't."

"Silvia, how can I not return when my sister is inside fighting two monstrous purebloods?" His eyes glinted with killing intent as he panted heavily. "We are here to protect her and not the other way around."

Yulis pulled his hand away with all his might. In terms of strength, Yulis had an advantage, so he managed to escape her grip.

"Yulis, you are given an order. If you want to disobey the order, you will have to go through me!" Silvia wielded her saber at him, pointing its blade to his throat. "If you die, that is akin to killing her yourself."

"And if she dies without us doing anything, what's the difference?" Yulis argued adamantly.

"Get a grip, Yul." Silvia's voice grew solemn as her eyes sharpened. "I can't let you lose your senses right now. You're a La Crox, not a certain butler. The La Crox way is perfection, and screwing things over can cost you your life."

"That is how we are all raised. That is the La Crox way, brother," Silvia added in the same menacing tone.

Yulis ground his teeth while his fist trembled. He calmed down a second later, nodding in understanding.

"Right," he said, running his fingers through his hair in distress.

Silvia smiled subtly before withdrawing her weapon. "Let's go."

Yul nodded once again and both of them fled without looking back.

Chapter 384 - Uncle, So Cool!

Meanwhile, in the towers near the cold palace. Claude raised his head at the person who entered his room. He clutched his teddy bear closer to his side, flinging his legs forward and backward while sitting on the chair.

"What is it that you need, Uncle, the sixth prince?" Claude inquired in a tiny voice. "Does Father know you are here?"

"Why would he need to know?" Alistair inquired, leaning his side against the jamb of the door, arms crossed.

There was a moment of silence between them. Alistair cocked his head to the side while assessing his little nephew.

"Do you want to play with Uncle Ali, Claude?"

Claude shook his head lightly. "No. Thank you. It's not fun to play with you."

"Oh? But you enjoy your time with Klaus?" Alistair chuckled in mockery. "I guess you only like spending time with fools."

"Uncle Klaus is not a fool. He may be reckless and hotheaded, but Uncle Klaus is not as foolish as everyone thinks he is." Claude argued calmly, sporting a subtle smile on his adorable face. "But I think Uncle Ali is the foolish one."

"Oh? Pray tell, my nephew. Why did you say such hurtful words?"

"You switch sides and sold your strongest ally for temporary power. If that is not foolishness, then I do not know what you call this treason."

Alistair chuckled upon hearing Claude's explanation. "You think I am a fool for temporary power?"

"Auron will never listen to you, Uncle."

"How can you say that when we haven't even tried?"

Claude pursed his lips into a thin line, gazing at him in pity. "Do you know the actual reason Father kept me alive instead of killing me along with my biological parents?"

His question caused Alistair to quirked a brow. Wasn't it because of his ability to stop time Claude inherited from Lucia, the child's mother?

"Well, Father must have told you the other reason about my mother's ability, but that is not it."

Claude let out a shallow breath before jumping out of the chair. "My biological father had put his last remaining power inside Auron. It will shatter along with every divine weapon if I died because of it."

Alistair furrowed his brows at this information he hadn't heard before. Stefan trusted him, so he would hear about this if it was true.

"Father didn't trust you as much as you think he did. He is not the person who will trust just anyone." Claude smiled, enjoying the confusion in Alistair's eyes. "Also, it's not like keeping secrets in this place is news to you. You've had your fair amounts of secrets, after all."

"Well, it's not like having Pandora had been useful." Alistair shrugged after a minute of contemplation. "Not having the divine weapons lying around might just work well for us."

Claude pressed his lips together, studying his uncle's demeanor. He knew Alistair came to take his life to get Auron from him. His jaw tightened and his breathing slowed down.

"Did you kill Auntie Cassara?" asked Claude out of curiosity.

"Does the truth about who killed Cassara matter?"

Claude nodded, closed-lipped. "I'm just curious."

"Well." Alistair raised his brows, pulling himself away from the jamb, and sauntered towards his little nephew. "Apparently, I'm not sure who did it, since I don't care if that wench dies. Oh, actually, I care since I will silence her if no one does."

Alistair lifted his arm up, taking out the ax clinging across his back. His eyes glinted as the side of his lips turned up into a smirk.

Claude looked up and hugged his teddy bear. "You will really kill me?"

"Yes." Alistair gazed down and chuckled. "Shall I ask for any last words?"

"Please, don't."

The sixth prince burst out in laughter, unsure whether his nephew was trying to humor him. It was funny for him, though.

"Well, I hope I can just do this without killing you, my nephew." Alistair sighed after he recovered from laughing. He rested his ax on his shoulder, clicking his tongue.

"Pity. Just close your eyes. I'll make it quick instead."

"Alright." Claude closed his eyes and hugged his teddy even tighter, waiting for the quick pain.

Alistair arched his brow at how obedient Claude was. He shook his head before lifting the ax up.

"Farewell, my nephew." There was not a trace of pity in his eyes, as his tone was colder than ever. "You will finally reunite with your parents."

After a beat, Alistair swung his gigantic ax down that could slice through someone in half without a problem. He stopped inches before hitting Claude's head, causing him to furrow his brows.

"Uncle, what are you waiting for?" Claude inquired as he slowly opened his eyes, and they crossed, seeing the gigantic blades in front of him. He raised a finger, pushing the side of the blade away.

"Can't move?" a wicked grin slowly appeared on Claude's bubbly face. "Didn't I tell you, Uncle? You are the foolish one."

The window behind them suddenly shattered as a figure crash into it.

"Claude!" Klaus called in hurry, searching for his nephew, only to see Claude looking back at him in dismay.

"You're late, Uncle. Just when I was expecting to see you in a different light. I rescued myself in the end." Claude sighed deeply while shaking his head in disappointment.

"What?" Klaus gasped in confusion, darting his eyes from Alistair and Claude before nodding in understanding. "I see. You want me to appear while that numskull strikes you?"

Claude just frowned in response. This uncle of his was too slow even after being a chief knight of the Duchess of Grimsbanne's knighthood brigade.

"Then, let's do it again. I'll jump back out while you reverse the time." Klaus suggested, with his fangs glinting proudly.

"Alright." Claude nodded and took a deep breath, reversing the time to redo the scene for the second time.

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"... you will finally reunite with your parents." Alistair swung his ax down without a second hesitation.

CRASH!

As soon as Klaus crashed from outside the window, he didn't waste a second and blocked the gigantic ax with the body of his sword. Alistair narrowed his eyes, meeting the burning pair of eyes that were glaring back at him.

"The last time I know, you are not qualified to send anyone to heaven, little brother," Klaus smirked and then turned his head to Claude. His expression literally screamed 'how about that?'

A broad grin resurfaced on Claude's adorable face as he raised his thumb. "Uncle, so cool!"

Chapter 385 - Playtime Is Over

"Ah!" I gnashed my teeth, blocking Alphonse's attack. "Goodness. Just how thick is your skin? No wonder you're unreasonably shameless."

A light scoff escaped my lips, eyes glaring at him. Even though he didn't have a weapon, Catharsis couldn't slice through his palm, and it even trembled under his grip.

"My duchess, why do we have to fight?" he cocked his head to the side, tightening his grip around Catharsis' blade effortlessly. "We share the same goal, after all. Your death is not what I want."

"Yul's is?"

"Heh. Just let him go, duchess. If you do, you will have everything you need!"

"Everything? Do you even know what I need?" I scoffed before shoving Catharsis to him, making him hop back. "What you assumed is not what I need, nor what my clan wants. I am pretty sure these additional voices screaming at me right now are not part of the Bloodfang."

I swung Catharsis as if made a swoosh sound before I added, "I won't become your figurehead, Alphonse."

"Duchess, I am giving you an option." The side of his lips curled up into a sinister smirk. "Your husband is dead, and why is that? Didn't you want vengeance?"

"So vengeance is also your goal?" I chuckled softly, enduring the piercing pain striking my head. "I remember you telling me we will share the same goal. I didn't realize it will be this shallow!"

He didn't respond and simply smiled. I shook my head lightly and set my eyes on Beatrice, who I pinned on the wall with Lakresha moments ago.

"Pity," I muttered with a ridiculing laugh. "You are pathetic, Alphonse."

"Am I?"

My eyes veered back at him slowly. "For you to need me for vengeance means you can't do it yourself. I think I had overestimated you, Alphonse. How disappointing."

"I do not need you, Your Grace. I simply enjoy destroying everything in the most beautiful way."

"And you call this beautiful?" I raised a brow, scanning the throne hall, which looked as if it went through a storm. The only thing that remained unharmed was the throne.

"I guess you have a different meaning of beauty, Your Highness," I said while I set my eyes back to him. "I'm not judging. It's just..."

I trailed off as my vision zoomed in and out, staggering back to keep my balance. The voices were deafening, and it was only a matter of time before I lose my consciousness.

I would be screwed.

"Oh? What happened, Your Grace?" Suddenly, Alphonse appeared on my side.

Thanks to my reflexes, I was able to raise Catharsis to keep him from a distance.

"I am simply concerned, Your Grace. Even if you want me dead, I don't. I still need you." His tone sent a chill down my spine as his eyes glowed even brighter. He looked like a demon instead of just a vampire.

A monster, indeed. No wonder my husband was wary of him.

"I will kill you before these voices take over," I declared and heaved a sigh of relief upon sensing that Yul just got out of the darkfield. "Thank God."

"Thanking God, eh? You had taken too many lives that calling God should be a sin itself." He humored with a chuckle, taking a step forward while I thrust my sword as a warning.

"One more step and I will plunge my sword into your throat." I cautioned, but that sounded empty as my vision blurred once again.

Before I could react, Alphonse was already standing on my side. He immediately clutched my wrist.

"I guess playtime is over?"

I turned my head at him slightly, grinding my teeth before wincing at the pain.

A loud scream escaped my mouth, scratching my throat with the sudden pain in my head. It felt as though someone was literally hammering, stabbing my brain.

This time, I was screwed, were my last thoughts before collapsing on the floor. All I knew next was I was screaming my lungs out, tugging my scalp while I writhed in pain.

I heard Alphonse's waves of laughter, along with my screams.

"Take everything from the La Crox, child."

"Put things back into place, Lilou."

"Kill them all!"

"Lilou, listen to us."

"No, no, no!" I panted as the hissing voices started screaming even louder, overwhelming those faint ones.

It hurts so fucking much.

My body... my blood felt like boiling on its own, scalding my skin from the inside. I slammed my body against the floor to ease the pain until I left marks of blood on it.

It didn't help.

Everything from the top of my head down to my sole just hurt terribly. Not to mention the pain from the inside, as if my blood were attacking me aggressively.

The pain went on for what felt like an eternity until I finally stopped.

I panted for air, catching up to my breathing while lying helplessly on the floor. I blinked weakly, lying on my side, and watched the boots that were approaching me.

With all the energy I got, I moved my head only to see Alphonse squatting down beside me.

"Poor thing," he said, tracing my temple with the sharp nail of his index. "You wouldn't have to go through this if you absorbed Yul. Don't worry, Duchess. I will get him for you."

With all the screaming I did, I still tried to find my voice to speak. "Fu..."

"Fu?" he cocked his head, brows furrowed.

"Fu... ck you." I breathed out heavily, making him chuckle.

"Well, aren't you commendable? Until the end, you are still resisting. However, the more you resist, the more aggressive your blood will attack its host." He smirked, wiping off the blood on me, and raised his finger to his lips.

"I will test your blood," He uttered as if trying to ask my permission. "Please do not misunderstand."

The infuriating smirk on his lips remained before licking his finger. As he tasted the blood, his smirk slowly vanished while the corner of my lips stretched into a weak smirk.

"Gosh, my queen~! You could've been more gentle to me!" Suddenly, Beatrice's voice caressed our ears. My eyes veered to Beatrice, who stood behind Alphonse with a sword pointing at his nape.

"My back still hurts and my shoulder was dislocated!" she complained, but I ignored her as I gazed at Alphonse.

"Playtime is over, Alphonse," I muttered with a weak smirk.

Chapter 386 - What Will You Do Without The Great Me?

Meanwhile, in the private estate on the outskirts of the capital. Samael walked out of the estate, seeing that Noah was just standing outside.

"Noah," he called, making Noah look back at him. The latter bowed to show respect until Samael stood beside him.

"Did you think he believed it?" he inquired, looking at the enormous gates of the estate far ahead.

Noah set his gaze forward, rocking his head lightly. "Well, he seemed he did a job well done, Your Grace."

"He must be happy. I put all my effort into acting, after all."

"You're truly an artist, my lord." Noah chuckled, assessing the proud smirk on Samael's lips.

Noah could not help but heave a sigh of relief while gazing at him. Samael wasn't the type of person to scheme, but when he do, he would do it with passion.

"You're really terrifying, my lord," he muttered helplessly. "I'm glad I didn't choose to be your enemy."

"Before you praise my godly strategic plans, the night is still long. Lilou is still out there and I can't still get through her head." Samael's voice lowered as his breathing grew slower. His pair of crimson eyes glinted as his jaw tightened.

"Lilove... just listen to my voice or I will have to go there myself." He balled his hand into a fist, suppressing his urge of rushing to the palace himself.

He had promised to stay out of it and trust her, but he could barely contain himself. If Lilou didn't respond to him soon, that only means this plan would be half-success.

"Ten minutes, Noah." Samael breathed out heavily. "You better prepare yourself to restrain me from spoiling this fucking plan."

He then jogged towards the stairs while Noah followed him in a hurry. "We have ten minutes to kill. Let's kill Alphonse. Shall we?"

Back in the Capital, Silvia and Yul ran far away from the palace. Yul looked back at the shroud around the place, balling his hand into a fist.

"Sis..." he whispered in worry, trying to contain himself from going back.

"Yul." He frowned when Silvia slapped his chest with the back of her hand. He gazed down to see a small glass cylinder clipped between her fingers.

"What's this?" he asked upon accepting it, gazing up at her. "Blood?"

"Blood of the dead."

His expression distorted in disgust. "Blood of who?"

"Cassara." Silvia offered him a side-eye, witnessing how his eyes dilated in shock.

"Didn't she...?"

"Yes, she's dead, and we got every bit of her blood." She ground her teeth while taking deep breaths. Her shoulders relaxed after letting out her third sharp exhale.

"Did you... kill her?"

"I swear it's not me or any of us." Her answer was quick to clear up whatever misunderstanding he had. "Just drink it, Yul. This is not the time to hesitate."

Yul rubbed his thumb on the small glass container. Aside from disgust, it was dishonorable for Cassara. Not that Cassara had something to be proud of, but this still felt strange.

"She's still my twin even though we aren't that close or share the same blood," he murmured, gritting his teeth and opened the bottle to drink it.

Drinking Cassara's blood had unlocked the missing memories in their head, which Samael erased. Yes, memories.

The memories they all agreed to be erased.

Three months prior to the present day. As usual, they had gathered in the third squadron's hideout, brainstorming on how to deal with their enemies.

"I disagree." Samael raised his hand, catching everyone's attention.

As usual, Samael had his feet resting over the table with his chair inclined while rocking it. Lilou, who stood at the end of the table with her palm resting on the edge, raised her brow.

"You disagree? Why?" she asked, cocking her head to the side.

"Well, it's a poor plan."

"Mister, if you disagree with this plan, give us some explanation so we can understand." She rolled her eyes while shaking her head lightly. "You're not working alone anymore. We're a team, remember?"

Fabian and Rufus suppressed themselves from clapping and cheering, 'Well put, Your Grace.' But they suppressed the urge from doing that.

"Well." Samael shrugged. It was obvious he was not used to letting everyone in his plans.

He cleared his throat and knocked on the table lightly. "It's been almost a year since you've gone to the Capital. With all those ingrates walking freely in the palace, it will be more strange if Stefan is alive or still sane."

"Stefan stayed alive for centuries, Sam. I also confirmed it from Prince Heliot." Lilou reasoned out, tossing facts on the table.

"Do you honestly believe whatever you see in that place?" he asked as his eyebrow raised.

This time, Lilou's mouth parted, but no words came out. She closed her lips into a thin line in the end, as she couldn't argue with that.

"You kids are so hopeless." Samael sighed heavily while shaking his head. "I'm not saying this plan wouldn't work, but we have to tweak it a bit."

Lilou and everyone tilted their head to the side, eyes on him. Samael was only listening to them all this time, but only now he had voiced out his thoughts.

"If you stick to one subject, you will lose sight of some minor details. Take it as looking at a painting. We naturally look at the subject but rarely notice the minor details that complete the entirety of it." Samael paused as he scanned their attentive faces.

"Right now, your focus is Quentin, Stefan, and Alphonse. The bigger details are the people working under them; their allies." He counted their subject with his fingers, and then cast them a knowing look. "How about the smaller ones that made them the subject of this discussion?"

Lilou and everybody else could not help but furrow their brows. Little details why they were the subject of this discussion? Wasn't that obvious? Because they were their enemies?

"Goodness... what will you do without the great me?" Samael sighed as he looked at them in pity. They didn't know whether to accept his aggravating stare or get mad about it. He had been quiet all this time, after all.

"Quentin wouldn't be a king if he is that stupid. I bet he had figured out that I was alive even before I woke up. Stefan wouldn't keep his position if he was easily defeated." Samael took a deep breath before he resumed. "And I wouldn't be wary of Alphonse if he is not a crafty bastard."

Silence ensued when Samael spouted all those facts. He had a point, a strong one at that, which they were already aware of, but unconsciously disregarded it.

"What a hopeless bunch. My wife's plan is perfect, if she plans to die, at that. But since we're a team," He stressed the word with sarcasm, eyebrow raised. "We have to make it work while sacrificing no one who is sitting around this table."

"Brother, is that possible?" asked Klaus in shock, staring at Samael intensely.

"Well, it'll be hard and tricky."

"Hell, do you have a plan in mind?" This time, Silvia inquired with the same interest as everyone in the room.

"Hmm." Samael pressed his lips together in a thin line, gazing at each and every single one of them. After a moment, the corner of his lips curled up into a smile until his eyes squinted.

"Will you allow this great one to erase your memories?"

Chapter 387 - First Subject

"Will you allow this great one to erase your memories?"

Everyone one of them could not help but furrow their brows as they looked at each other. After a few seconds of confusion, they set their eyes back to Samael. They figured they wouldn't understand this proposition if he wouldn't explain.

"I'm not saying every single one of you, but those party who will enter the palace." Samael raised a finger and pointed it at the few individuals, including Lilou. "This will be tricky, but the thing is, you will trick no one in that place if you have the slightest idea of what is going on."

"The bad guys can smell their fellow villains," he added, retrieving his finger while putting his feet down.

A slight screeching noise resonated in their ear as he dragged his chair closer to the table. Samael leaned forward with his arms over it.

"Hear me, people." He motioned them to go closer, which they all did on instinct. "Lilou had her memories erased twice; first is Stefan's doing and second by yours truly."

"That is not something to be proud about, my Lord." Fabian could not help but comment as Samael sounded like boasting.

"Well, I know that, but now she had retrieved her memories, and how did that happen?"

"Cassara," Silvia murmured with her brows creased. "That's her ability. Are you telling us to feed on her?"

After Silvia's question, the majority of them frowned. Drinking Cassara's blood, who had nothing to do with this, gave them mixed emotions.

"Sam, I don't like Cassara, but I don't think we should drag more people into this." Lilou voiced out after noticing their expression.

"Believe me when I say I don't want more people in this as well, but Cassara is already involved." A sigh slipped past Samael's lips and traveled his gaze to their faces. "I'm uncertain, but I think when Cassara returned those memories to Lilou, she unconsciously robbed something of my wife."

"Pardon?" Klaus blurted out, getting more confused.

Samael set his eyes to Lilou while the latter's brows rose. "Didn't you say you hear voices in your head?"

Lilou pursed her lips and cast everyone a look. Once her eyes returned to Sam, she nodded without saying a word.

"I think that's not all of it, love. The Bloodfangs aren't the ones who will want their sacrifice to go in vain. They are the people who will make things happen, even if it means sacrificing the entire clan's bloodline." Samael's tone grew solemn, hinting to them the severity of his claims.

There was silence across the room that even a drop of a needle could be heard. Again, Samael made his point clear.

"We don't know what will happen if you bore the complete will, Lilou. If you allow me, I am willing to share it with you." He proposed sincerely, with no trace of arrogance he bore moments ago.

"But we can't let having the two of us lose control, Sam," Lilou whispered as that response came out of her mouth naturally.

Samael let out a shallow breath and nodded. That was his point. Since they didn't know what could have happened, one of them should be out of the Will's control.

"That is why I am asking." Samael peeled his eyes away from her and set them at Yul, Silvia, and Klaus. "I hate to ask you this, but will you take this risk with my wife? You might lose control or hear unwelcomed voices for life."

The three of them stared at Samael in silence. He sounded more like begging them instead of ordering or asking.

"You don't have to ask me that." Yulis was the first to answer, breaking the stifling silence that shrouding the room. "I will do it if that means keeping her sane. Although she isn't very sane until a month ago."

Yulis turned his head in Lilou's direction. The side of her lips moved subtly as her eyes softened upon meeting his eyes.

"Hell, did you turn daft or what? My sister-in-law had dropped her sword for us to live." Klaus clicked his tongue in irritation as gazed at Samael with dismay. "Of course, we will risk our lives and willing to die fighting alongside her."

"I just think Hell is underestimating our loyalty just because he's only loyal to himself." Silvia backed up, shaking her head lightly. She then snuck a glance at Lilou and smiled.

"Even before you asked us, you already know the answer. Be it a bland soup or hard bread that is harder than a stone, if that is what she eats, we will eat it as well."

"Sivi..." Lilou bit her lower lip, moved by their sentiments.

"Gosh... I wanted to poke eyes for fun," Samael mumbled while rolling his eyes. He had always hated anyone who snatched his wife's attention from him.

"My lord, whatever you eat, I will eat it too!" Charlotte patted her chest proudly, raising her chin with a grin plastered on her adorable face.

"You're just telling that because you know His Grace is a picky eater," Ramin muttered as he looked at her with disdain.

"What?! Are you questioning my loyalty?!"

"Alright. I appreciate your thought, Charlie." Samael clapped before the two could start with their usual banter. "Now that is resolved. Let's talk about the big details. Let's start with Alphonse."

"Yes." Lilou blinked twice as she organized her thoughts.

Once again, their eyes returned to Samael. They kept an attentive ear, afraid they would miss the slightest detail.

"Honestly, the reason I came up with the brilliant plan of dying is inspired by Alphonse. If you're wondering what I meant, I had killed Alphonse in the past."

Shocked was once again plastered on their faces upon Samael's last remarks. When did he do that? And how was Alphonse still alive? Samael's previous statement about his 'inspiration' suddenly made sense if they put the two together.

Pleased at the change in their reaction, Samael nodded. "Alphonse and I didn't have the best relationship. We banter every time our eyes meet, and if chances are given, we will surely kill each other."

"That's not true." Klaus shook his head. "I know you two don't get along. I mean, we all didn't get along and we verbally attacked each other. Sometimes, fight until we bleed.. But killing? That is only possible now."

Chapter 388 - Congratulations

"... that is only possible now."

"I understand, Klaus, but this case is different." Samael shook his head, fully aware of where Klaus was coming from.

The La Crox siblings were used to showing their affection for each other through violence. They see each other competitively. Their bonding was to infuriate each other, but not to the point they wanted to kill each other.

A love and hate relationship.

That sort of relationship lasted for a long time until the present time, where only hate remains.

"I always know Alphonse is someone dangerous," Samael explained while knocking his knuckles against the surface of the table lightly. "Dyrroth also feels the same. That why he... he made a way to banish Alphonse in the past."

"I thought what Dyrroth did is enough, but I was wrong." Samael continued as he gazed down to recall something in the past. "Back when I was a traveler, I stumble upon this small country flourishing. Its situation is eerily similar to ours. I didn't care at that time since, well, why would I?"

Even though Samael hadn't finished his story, they had guessed what would be the end of this story. Still, they listened while holding their breaths.

"So, I moved on and continue to travel. A year or two later, I came back to this land and..." Samael paused as he gazed up at them. "It's barely a kingdom."

"What?" Ramin gasped in disbelief. He couldn't help but clench his fist.

"Out of curiosity about how a flourishing small kingdom can be destroyed in a year or two, I investigate. Not that I planned to save it, but just to feed my curiosity. What came to me as a surprise was, the parasite who sucked the kingdom dry and orchestrated for its downfall is none other than Alphonse." Samael shrugged and rolled his eyes as telling this part of his journey to everyone felt anti-climatic.

"To make the story short, I met Alphonse and we fight. Before you think I did it for that country, I didn't. My gut feeling just told me he would do the same in here, which he admitted. So I killed him."

"But here he is, alive and supporting Stefan?" Silvia murmured in horror, blinking twice as she failed to do so while listening.

"Exactly." Samael nodded. "Moving on, I tried to experiment on how he did it while dealing with those fucking undeads."

"The result is the puppeteer? But that is not Alphonse's ability." Yul spoke this time with curiosity in his voice.

"Well, as I've said, Alphonse is a crafty guy. We don't know if he purposely hid his actual abilities and only showed us what he thought we should know."

"Does that mean that body walking around freely in the palace is not his actual body?"

"That's a stupid question, Charlie." Ramin spat out the obvious. "What you should say is, killing the Alphonse in the palace wouldn't solve the problem."

"So bright, Ramin!" Samael nodded in satisfaction while Charlotte glared daggers at her colleague. "We should still be aware of Alphonse, who is in the palace, but our actual goal is to find his original body."

There was a moment of silence that ensued once again, but deep in their heart, they all agreed with that. To stop Alphonse madness, they had to kill his original body, or else he would come back to haunt them.

That was how our discussion about our first subject concluded. I could barely remember everything, but the memories Sam erased were steadily coming back to me. How they returned surely had to do with the Will coming back to me.

"So you two had conspired, huh?" Alphonse chuckled without a care at the sword pointing at his nape. "Oh, goodness... how can I not see this coming?"

"Because you are busy fucking me?" Beatrice chortled as well. "It was fun, though. I had always enjoyed my time with you, darling."

I blinked weakly, fighting off the demons in my head. My body felt so heavy as if they placed a gigantic rock on me.

"Well, I take that as a compliment, Beatrice. Thank you." His smirk remained while gazing down at me. "You are truly astonishing, Your Grace. It feels new that someone had finally deceived me."

A light scoff escaped my dry lips. If only he knew Sam was the first who deceived him, he wouldn't give me this credit.

"Duchess." Alphonse let out a sigh, wiping the blood off the floor and guided it to his mouth. He nodded in understanding while smacking his lips.

"So he is alive, after all." The corner of his lips curled up into an amused smirk. "I knew his death came off too easy. I shouldn't have let Stefan handle it, and did it myself."

So he was trying to trace my memories by tasting my blood. I tried to lift my arms, but it was impossible. It felt as though I was paralyzed.

"No need for regret, Alphonse. You will die by your beloved bedmate." Beatrice humored. I couldn't see what she was doing right now, but it didn't faze him even the slightest.

Instead, Alphonse just stared at me in silence. He tilted his head to one side and then to the other. His gaze sent a chill down my gut as if he could see through my soul.

"Take my advice, Duchess. Kill Yul or you will die," he advised with genuine concern in his voice. "You don't want to die, do you?"

"That's not for you to worry about." I breathed my words out and winced at the sudden pain in my abdomen.

"Apparently, it is my problem as well now." My brow rose upon his remarks. "I can't wait a few more years and redo all this."

What was he talking about? I wondered.

"You don't even have a day more, Alphonse." Beatrice scoffed. "Thank you for everything, Alphonse. I will surely remember all those fun times."

"If you do not accept the core, you will pass it to your child. Congratula --" He couldn't finish his sentence as blood spurted on me, making me shut my eyes in instinct.

I weakly opened my eye, only to see the tip of the sword plunged into his throat.

Beatrice held Alphonse's shoulder so his body wouldn't land on me. She pulled it away and tossed his lifeless body beside me.

"Goodness, my Queen. What a terrible state you are!" she exclaimed as she squatted beside me. I didn't know if she was being sarcastic, but she still held my arm to assist me up.

"Thanks," I said as I looked at her, resting my arms across her shoulder.

"This is girl power. Women domination." The side of her lips stretched into a smirk as she winked at me. I could not help but chuckle weakly.

"What he said..."

"That guy will say anything that messes with people's heads. Don't mind him." Beatrice shrugged my worries off. I glanced at her once again and nodded.

I couldn't trust any word Alphonse said.

While Beatrice dragged me away from the throne hall, a sudden sense of dread crawled up my spine. Beatrice also stopped. Behind us was something dark and powerful.

"Crap..." she cursed under her breath and turned her head at me. "... it looks like he is still a step ahead of us."

Beatrice turned around with great difficulty while carrying my weight. My eyes instantly fell on the corpse that was now standing while looking back at us.

"As I was saying, congratulations on your pregnancy, Your Grace," Alphonse smirked and raised his brows briefly. "But alas..."

We couldn't react on time as he suddenly appeared in front of us.

"My Queen —!" Alphonse sent her flying, and she crashed on the wall.

"Bea." I choked as I felt something pierce through my chest. I slowly moved my head to him, then gazed down to see his hand plunged into my chest.

'Sam, I'm.... dead.'

Chapter 389 - His Goal

"It's here, my lord," Noah announced as soon as he barged into the room in the estate they infiltrated. He turned his head to his right and went in when Samael walked towards him.

Noah's eyes instantly landed on the coffin lying in the middle of the empty room.

"My lord, this..." he looked back at Samael, who was by the door with furrowed brows.

Samael gazed at him with a complicated expression before setting his eyes on the coffin behind Noah.

"This feels wrong," Samael muttered, which alarmed Noah.

"Is there something wrong, Your Grace?"

"I don't know yet."

Samael didn't waste a second as he marched towards the coffin and kicked it with all his might. The coffin didn't fly away despite the impact, but it left cracks on it until it shattered completely.

"Alphonse," he whispered, gazing down at the person inside the now shattered coffin. It only took him a few seconds to idle as he squatted down while his nails grew longer and sharper.

Even though he was certain this was Alphonse, he couldn't shrug off the restlessness in his heart.

"Your Grace, shouldn't we —"

The rest of Noah's words rolled back into his throat because Samael suddenly plunged his hand into Alphonse's chest.

Noah anticipated good news amidst their silence, but a large portion of his brain told him he shouldn't celebrate yet.

"Your Grace?" he called when he couldn't take the silence anymore. "Have you figured out the problem?"

"Yes." Samael finally withdrew his hand, revealing a beating heart in his hand. He slowly stood and let go of the heart, which rolled down on the floor.

"Search this entire estate and find him. I will have to go to the palace." His eyes darkened as he pivoted on his heel to walk away. "I need to get her out of there."

"What...?" Baffled, Noah furrowed his brows while shifting his eyes from Samael to the heartless body. His confusion grew, even more, the second his eyes landed on him.

"Who... is that?" he wondered as Alphonse was gone and replaced with someone he hadn't seen before. He turned his head to Samael, but the latter continued to walk until he brushed past Noah.

"My lord." Noah's breath hitched, trying to collect his thoughts. If Samael knew who that person disguised as Alphonse was, he wouldn't have to rush to the palace.

This was a problem.

Suddenly, Samael halted when he was by the door and turned around. His eyes narrowed as he studied the room.

"Your Grace?" called Noah, but Samael ignored him as he walked back inside.

"Noah, search this room and see if it had some secret passage," Samael ordered while he was already groping the walls. "I think there's something more in here."

It was a mystery that Samael felt the faint presence of Alphonse in this place. He could still feel it even now, so he had to make sure that that person in the coffin wasn't just a distraction.

"Ye — yes, Your Grace." Noah cleared his throat and shook his head to clear his thoughts. He didn't waste a second and searched the walls, knocking and kicking it and left no area unchecked.

THUD!

Noah turned his head to where the source of the sudden noise followed by a long eerie creak. There, a secret door came into sight while Samael stood in front of it.

"This doesn't look good," he murmured, following Samael's tracks going to the secret passage.

Just as he predicted, what was inside sent a chill down his spine.

The two of them stopped near the entrance as they looked around. There were stone coffins lined up on either side, making a path for anyone who would walk in.

"One, two, three..." Noah counted the coffin while pointing his finger. "... eighteen, nineteen, twenty."

His brows furrowed as the number of the coffin matched the number of the La Crox siblings. Was it just a coincidence? But it didn't feel like it was just a coincidence.

To feed their curiosity, Samael approached the nearest coffin. He placed his foot on the lid and kicked it. The sound of stone grazing each other filled the soundless air for a while until it stopped.

"My lord, what is it?" asked Noah as he rushed to Samael's side and gazed down. As soon as he did, his eyes dilated in disbelief.

"No..." He staggered back in shock. "How can the crown prince be here?"

Samael clenched his hand into a tight fist while staring at Dyrroth. It had been a while since he had seen his older brother, so this unexpected event gave him mixed emotions.

"Check the rest of the coffin," he ordered under his breath, snapping Noah to his senses.

"Ye — yes."

Noah didn't stay idle as he took off all the lids of each stone coffin with all his strength. Each time he opened the coffin, he couldn't help but feel shocked, especially when there was one for Samael.

"Your Grace..." he muttered as he looked back at Samael helplessly. "What do you think is this? Everyone is in here."

Samael gazed at the coffin, seeing his dead and still living brothers and sisters. What did he think about this?

"It's his plan." His voice came out as a whisper as he felt this heaviness in his heart. "I think I finally understand his goal."

"Goal?" Noah's brows knitted. For him, he could only assume that Alphonse wouldn't be satisfied with killing his siblings once. So, he planned to resurrect them to kill them once again.

But... Samael's expression told him otherwise. Right now, Samael looked extremely heartbroken, which Noah couldn't understand.

"So this is what he meant back then..." Samael muttered before he took a deep breath while clenching his fist until his nails dug deep into his palm. When he opened his eyes, his grip loosened as his shoulder relaxed.

"Burn this place, Noah," he ordered, pivoting on his heel as he walked away. "That Alphonse over there is the real one."

He didn't look back at the coffins, despite wanting to. His steps felt heavy, but Samael had to walk away.

'Alphonse, my brother... forgive me for I will trample on this beautiful dream you've been planning to achieve.'

Chapter 390 - A Life

While Samael walked away, leaving Noah to do all the work, his mind drifted to a memory of the past. A memory from a long time ago which held no importance, but still etched deep in his mind.

Samael grunted, wincing at the slightest movement the second he woke up. He looked around to see he was still in the dungeon, where he was tortured until he passed out.

"He surely gets creative every time," he mumbled through his gritted teeth while crawling to the wall to lean in. Samael had a hard time with his legs not listening to him, but he managed.

"Ah, goodness..." came out a relieved sigh as he leaned his back against the rough concrete wall.

"That will take a few days to heal."

Suddenly, a familiar voice reached his ear, making him look at the entrance. A frown instantly resurfaced on Samael's face the second he locked eyes with Alphonse.

"Brother, as you can see, I'm not in the state to humor you," Samael grumbled as he cocked his head slightly.

"Oh, don't worry. Just the sight of you is fun enough to entertain me."

"What a bastard." He spat out in irritation, only to wince as his lungs constricted. Giving Alphonse any attention would strain his body, so Samael ignored his presence and fixed his dislocated shoulder.

"Ah..." came out a hiss after the crack from his shoulder. He then closed his eyes to rest.

"You should kill him."

After a moment of silence, Alphonse spoke once again. Samael kept his eyes closed, trying to convince himself that he was deaf.

"I mean, your father, you should kill him."

"Can you stop spouting nonsense?" Samael muttered lazily. "Unless you want to get punished. I won't sacrifice my body for you, though."

"You break my heart, little brother. I am also your brother, so you have to be fair."

"Call me big brother and I will."

"Big brother Hell."

Samael's face twitched as he snapped his eyes open to look at him in dismay.

"Don't you have the slightest shame or dignity to uphold?" he gasped. "I didn't think you will actually call me big brother."

"Shame and dignity will not help me and I don't want to get hurt." Alphonse shrugged indifferently, raising the already injured Samael's blood pressure.

"If you don't want to get father's attention, then shut your mouth and leave me alone!"

Alphonse pressed his lips together, batting his eyelashes languidly. "Have it ever crossed you that what you are doing right now doesn't benefit anyone? You are only hurting yourself and stocking up the guilt in your younger brothers and sisters. Father also got stricter because you're trying to become a hero."

"Goodness. This is annoying." Samael grumbled in distress. He didn't take Alphonse's words to the heart because they would end up bantering.

"You are doing this not for them, but for yourself, don't you?"

This time, Samael frowned as he shot him a glare. "And why would I want to do this to myself?"

"Because you're a lunatic?"

"Tch. Go away, will you?"

Alphonse pressed his lips in a thin line, sizing Samael up. This pathetic state Samael was currently in had become normal now, as he would be like this once or twice a month.

"If you truly want to protect those children, take out the root." He uttered after a moment of silence.

"If you think what you are doing is enough, you are wrong. The more you do this, the more His Majesty will increase the torture he will inflict upon you and that will be the standard of his punishments."

"What will you do if you can't be there to sacrifice yourself and one of those children had to face these sorts of punishments you receive?" Alphonse continued in a knowing tone. "They might die because they are not used to it."

Samael opened his eyes once again and stared into the damp ceiling. "I will always be there for them. Even if it kills me, I won't let him touch those children."

"You are so stubborn."

"Call me whatever, but I will continue on doing what I'm doing and leave me alone." He shifted his gaze back at Alphonse, clicking his tongue in irritation.

Alphonse let out a shallow breath while staring at his stubborn little brother. "You make me want to kill you myself."

"Please have mercy, my big brother. I can't fight back in this state." Samael's response was quick without even thinking twice.

"Look who was talking about shame and dignity." He shook his head but was not surprised, as Samael's character had always been like that.

"Alphonse, haven't you had enough at seeing my pathetic state?"

"You should kill him." Samael raised a brow as Alphonse repeated. "Your father, kill him before he kills you or those children."

Samael's lips opened and closed while he stared at his brother's solemn expression. "Do you think I wouldn't do that if I'm confident that I can?"

"You can."

"Tch. I'm flattered that you regard me that highly, but I am no fool to believe this is out of the goodness of your heart. No matter how you abhor me, you shouldn't push me to my death like that, my dearest brother." Samael paused as he winced after speaking too much. "I am not trying to be a hero. I'm simply doing something as pathetic as this because I'm weak and this is the best I can do for now."

"I don't think so."

The frown on Samael's face grew grim with his brother's stubbornness. Alphonse gazed at him with different emotions in his eyes, which made him hard to read.

"If you are so worried about this beloved brother of yours, why don't you volunteer as a tribute for once, eh? I might actually feel the brotherly love you speak of." Samael suggested just to tease Alphonse.

"Why would I do that? I am not as dumb as you." Alphonse let out a low chuckle before he pulled himself from the wall and turn around to leave.

"So you will just watch like always? Don't you really care about us?"

Alphonse stopped just as he took a step, glancing over his shoulder. "I said I'm not as dumb as you. I had my own method of showing my affection, brother."

After stating such a vague response, Alphonse left Samael alone. The latter didn't take their conversation in his heart as he was busy healing his wound, and that was how the flashback ended.

Samael gazed up ahead with his eyes glinting with sadness. With what he had seen just now and that memory he recalled, he finally understood Alphonse.

A life.

That was what Alphonse wanted. A life with his family; a life with freedom and unlike what they had all endured. To achieve that... Lilou must bear everything.

"I'm sorry, Alphonse... I can't sacrifice my wife for that."