

The Duke 411

Chapter 411 - [Bonus]Calm Father

Meanwhile...

"She... the Madam is gone!"

All the servants in the mansion's foyer were frozen in place. Their eyes immediately veered from the maidservant to the house's patriarch. Everyone knew how Samael loved his bedridden wife that he rarely left her side. Now, this servant was telling him the Madam was gone?

"What do you mean my mother is gone?" asked the child coldly after a second of silence.

"I was..." the Maid's voice hitched as her eyes darted from the father to son. How would she explain it?

Samael slowly closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He wanted to keep calm and collected because his son was present. He suppressed the raging emotions swelling up in his chest, opening his sharp eyes.

"Son, you will have to stay here while I search for your mother," Samael informed, gazing down to his son, who was looking up at him. The latter frowned and clutched his hand.

"I will look for mother as well."

"No."

Samael and his son stared at each other for a moment before the former sighed. He knew his son more than anyone. Even if he told him to stay, he would search for his mother on his own.

"Alright." He nodded and squatted down. "But promise me you won't go off on your own. If you do, you can't run away for the next 10 years."

His son frowned while staring into his father's eyes. Seeing that Samael was serious, he nodded. With that, Samael held his son's hand as they walked towards Lilou's room to investigate first, followed by the servants.

Once they reached the room, Samael scanned it to detect if there was an unwanted presence left in here. To his relief, he couldn't trace anything aside from Lilou's lingering presence. He and his son walked towards the open balcony, caressing the railings carefully.

"There are only two options that happened here. First is, that time of the year came early, or she had already awakened. Either way, if it's the former... I had to get her back.'

While Samael was deep in thought, staring at the landscape of the estate, his son was staring at him. He was not pleased how his father, who spent so much time with his bedridden mother, could be so calm in this situation. He was even zoning out instead of ordering a search party.

"Father," the child called, tugging Samael's sleeve to drag him back to reality. "We must hurry."

Samael gazed down at him and nodded. "You're right."

The servants who stood behind them watched as Samael carry his son in his arm. They were waiting for a search order, but all they heard was Samael's footsteps going away. Their master didn't speak a word as he strutted back to the mansion's entrance hallway, and they followed in silence.

"Master," called the butler when he couldn't take Samael's silence anymore. Although the master of the house had always been calm, they thought he'd be enraged and would panic with the disappearance of his wife. He loved her, after all.

"Should I hire a search party to look for Madam?"

"No need... I mean, sure." Samael glanced over his shoulder and stopped when he reached the mansion's lobby. His eyes caught a man's figure carrying a crate of fruits inside the mansion.

"You." He snapped a finger, catching the man with a towering height and a robust physique.

"Yes, master?"

"Come with me, and..." He looked around to see a maid entering the entrance hallway with a broom in her hands. "... you, as well."

The servants, including those he called specifically, were rendered speechless. The other maidservants looked at each other, bearing the same questioning eyes.

Samael wasn't in the mood to explain, though. He just faced the old butler with the same stoic expression.

"Hire a search party to look for my wife, but tell them to be discreet. We don't want to offend the Malum if we make a lot of noise."

"Yes, master." the old Butler placed his palm across his chest and bowed. Samael nodded before shifting his gaze to the other servants behind.

"Prepare a hot chocolate and some foods just in case my wife is hungry."

Puzzlement dominated the faces of the servants, but they still bowed. To them, it was impossible for someone who was bedridden since birthing the young master to move as if nothing happened. After giving his orders to them, the servants could only watch their master walk away with the young master, a young maid, and the stable boy.

"What are you waiting for?" the Butler clapped, snapping the servant's attention to the current lapse. He didn't even wait for them to respond as he ordered.

"Do what the master said. Now."

"Yes!"

With that being said, the servants scattered to prepare a banquet for the Madam who could just be abducted. Meanwhile, the butler had reached out to people and some guarding knights on the estate to form a search party.

While everyone was busy executing their orders, the young master darted his eyes from the maid to the stable boy. A frown dominated his face before gazing at his father.

"Do you want to see mother?" the young boy asked, as his father's action showed him otherwise.

Samael just glanced at his son, who was in his arms. "Of course."

"Then why are you taking a maid and a stable boy as your company? Don't you have enough money to hire all mercenaries to look for Mother?" he inquired; although it sounded more like he was suggesting. "Having more people to look for her raises the chances to see her immediately."

"The butler will do that."

The young boy's frown turned grim. "And what will the four of us do without a proper knight with us?"

The maid and the stable boy looked at each other, biting their tongue to hold their comments. They were used at the young master, and wouldn't blame him, as he knew nothing.

"Ramin and Charlotte are enough." Samael smiled and patted his son's head.

"You know their name?"

"I knew everyone who works for us, Son." his son didn't doubt Samael's words as there was no denying his father had a good memory. "Ramin, prepare my steed. No, a carriage. Riding in a horse will gather more attention."

"Yes, Your — Head."

Chapter 412 - Rich Father

Just as what Samael ordered, Ramin prepared a carriage for them. Charlotte and Ramin stayed outside so the father and son could have some privacy together. Although they simply wanted to avoid the young master's questions.

Inside the carriage, the young boy gazed at his father, who sat from across him. Samael's demeanor was relaxed as ever, looking out the window without a trace of panic or worry. He could not help but wonder what was going on inside his father's mind most of the time.

"What will you do if Mother is arrested?" asked the young boy, out of plain curiosity. "You can't fight back."

Samael slowly peeled his eyes away from the window to his son. "Pay them money?"

His son frowned in disappointment. Samael couldn't blame his son, though. Since having him, he tried not to cause trouble for anyone. His son's existence was his constant reminder that he couldn't act rashly anymore. So, if he could resolve things peacefully, he would choose that path.

So far, Samael had survived with that method.

But his son had a short temper. He didn't like when his father wouldn't fight back, even when someone spilled a drink on him. It annoyed him that his father would let things slide, even when other nobles mocked him for being a rich merchant without a noble status.

The young boy wanted his father to teach those people a lesson, but Samael was a 'coward.' He could only assume that his father fought no one all his life. That Samael only looked intimidating, but actually couldn't land a punch.

"Father, what if someone hurt Mother?" the young boy threw another question. "Will you also pay the person who hurt Mother? or will you bribe Mother so she wouldn't be in pain?"

Samael pressed his lips together. "Your mother won't get hurt."

"How can you say that?" his frown disappeared, replaced with a dead expression not suited for a child his age. "Father, your money can't protect us all the time. You are kind and I admire that, but there should be a limit to kindness."

"I didn't know my son see me as a kind person." A smile resurfaced on Samael's face, hearing how his son viewed him.

"And a coward."

Samael's smile died down just as fast as when his bright smile appeared. He gazed at his son solemnly, and the young child looked back at him sharply.

"Father, you should change. There is a limit to a person's kindness and there are situations that money can't help. I do not mind if other people mocked us for not having a noble status, but I won't just sit still if they hurt my mother's feelings." The child expressed solemnly while staring into his father's eye.

A subtle smile resurfaced on Samael's face and nodded. "You are quite smart, son. But violence is not an answer to everything."

'Because if it is, we wouldn't be in such a situation,' he continued the rest of his words inside his head as the carriage soon stopped, and Ramin stood outside the door.

"Master, we've arrived at the Earl's estate where two girls were said to be taken in," Ramin announced as he opened the door for them.

The young boy gazed at Ramin and then cast his father a quick look. His brows furrowed when he caught the menacing glint that flickered across his Samael's eyes.

Samael hitched outside first and then helped his son. He didn't let go of his son and just carried him in his arms. The latter kept looking at his father, but he couldn't trace the danger in his eyes anymore.

"Ra, are you sure they had taken them to this Earl's estate?" he inquired, turning to Ramin, who was walking beside them on the long pathway.

"Yes, Master."

"Where is the maid?" asked the little boy, looking around, but the maid wasn't with Ramin.

Ramin sported a forced smile and chuckled awkwardly. "She will look after the carriage."

"Now we're minus one." the Child frowned and looked at his father. "This is the Earl's estate. It's already a surprise to come in here without an invitation. The guard has some guts to accept a bribe to let us enter."

Ramin bit his tongue as he glanced at Samael. Actually, they bribed no one. Charlotte was just in the guardhouse and tied the guards to let their carriage pass through. It was a good thing it was Samael's job to explain this to his son.

"Aren't you friend with the young earl?" Samael quirked a brow as he cocked his head to the child he was carrying. "That's why you keep running away and coming back since the young Lord can't go to your meeting place."

"How did you know that?"

"I saw him the last time while he was being dragged back to this place."

The young boy frowned, forgetting his inquiry about Charlotte and the 'bribery'. Samael guessed it right. His son was good friends with the young Earl. Unlike his son's almost carefree life, the young Earl's life was very strict with Jaime Malum as his political advisor.

"I wanted to take him away from here. They weren't respecting him or considering his decision at all," the child mumbled as he snapped his tongue in annoyance, recalling his friend's situation. "The south should follow how the northerners do it. I heard the young prince of the royal family, who is also an Earl in the North Monarey, had all absolute control over his land. But in here, the Malum's control everything — even trying to take control of my friend's life."

A faint chuckle slipped past Samael's lips, ruffling his son's head. "Your friend will learn how to fight back. Being in power is not as easy as it looks and sounds on the outside. There are a lot of greedy people, and your friend is doing a good job keeping his ground."

"Father, you speak like you know everything when we don't even have a noble status."

Ramin could not help but cough in his own saliva upon hearing the young master's claims. He nearly choked when Samael glanced at him, feeling the sudden wave of chill running down his spine with just the gaze.

"I didn't need status to know that, my son." Samael shrugged, and they soon reached the entrance of the estate.

The young boy looked around and could not help but furrow his brows. The entrance was oddly deserted, but he assumed it was because it was already late in the night.

"Ramin, open that door for me," Samael ordered, and Ramin looked at him with questioning eyes. So, Samael had to specify just in case Ramin planned to break the entire door.

"Gently."

Chapter 413 - Roux Family

"Gently."

Ramin opened his mouth, producing a low "ahh," before he nodded. He then carefully planted his palm and pushed the door open, peeking his head in as the door continued to creak.

"What are you doing here? And who are you?"

Suddenly, a man's voice from behind them reached their ear. The three looked back to see three knights looking in their direction, wielding their swords in the presence of the intruders.

"Oh, forgive us. We are here because we heard that two women are taken into custody." Calm and collected as ever, Samael explained as he faced the three knights. "My wife went missing, and I'm here hoping she was lost and was taken in here out of the goodness of the Earl's heart."

The young boy glanced at his father. He was already used to his father's humbleness, but was this really alright? Unlike him, Ramin would never get used to this fakery — never. Samael's patience just grew longer in the past five years, but he was certain he didn't change a bit.

Somewhere, deep inside Samael, the devil was still there, waiting for the right time to come out. That was why Ramin still had to tiptoe around Samael, afraid he'd trigger the devil whenever his son wasn't looking.

"Your wife? You should come back tomorrow. It's already late..." the knight who was about to chase them out halted when his colleague whispered in his ear.

"Isn't that the merchant, Samael Roux?"

"Yes, I think he was that rich merchant who is wealthier than other lower nobles."

They whispered to each other, scrutinizing Samael, who was carrying a child. Although this man was full of mystery, one fact that everyone knew about him was, he would do anything for his wife and son. One could imagine just how much money he would shell out to bail out his wife.

The knight who was trying to chase them out initially cleared his throat. "Are you Samael Roux?"

"Yes, sir." Ramin's face twitched, biting his tongue while listening to Samael.

"You came looking for your wife?" asked the knight, and Samael nodded. He studied the three of them and, aside from the dirty-looking man with Samael, they didn't pose a threat.

"Alright. Follow us. They were being held in before they go to trial. You can check if the thief is your wife."

Samael smiled and nodded, glancing at his son. The latter didn't seem pleased, but this situation didn't surprise him. People only liked his father's money, but he knew they were mocking him internally. Still, he kept silent as they followed the three knights to the prison.

They followed the knights and soon reached the jail quarters, where they detained offenders. It wasn't an underground prison, but more like a separate building from the Earl's office. As they waltz through the building, the child could not help but look at the people being detained.

Some cells were crowded with men and women inside. Some had fewer people but were in a terrible state.

'This is terrible,' the child thought, thinking that his friend also mentioned being locked in whenever he was being disobedient.

Unlike the child, who observed their surroundings, Ramin and Samael kept their eyes ahead. It did not surprise them that not a single person asked for help or made the slightest noise despite their presence. Even without looking at them, Samael and Ramin could smell their fear and their rotting spirits.

The young Earl's political advisor was someone who would crush the spirit of the people who opposed him or challenge his power. These people didn't have any hope anymore, and thus, they were like living corpses waiting for their verdict.

"We're here," the knight leading them announced, knocking on the metal bars to catch the attention of the person inside.

Samael walked closer and narrowed his eyes. His gaze landed on the woman's face as she gazed up.

"That's not her," he uttered coldly, turning his head to the knight. "Where is the other one?"

"I..." The knight scratched the back of his head before shifting his attention to the woman inside the prison. "Hey, you thief, where is the woman with you earlier?"

Bey darted her eyes from the men outside, seeing that there was also a child. Her lower lip trembled as they parted, but no words came out.

"I'm asking you!" The knight rattled the metal bars, producing an echoing noise across the prison. Bey trembled with the noise, shaking uncontrollably in fear.

"Stop," Samael ordered, gazing at the knight briefly before shifting his attention back to the frightened woman. He squatted down, still carrying his son while holding the metal bar with his other hand.

"Do you know a woman who has hazel, wavy curls and clear green eyes? She is a little petite and has fair skin." He described his wife in a soothing voice, trying not to scare the woman inside the cell.

Bey raised her brows, thinking that his description suited "Lady Sam's" appearance. So she nodded, unable to speak as being alone in here brought back all the trauma she tried to forget.

"Where is she?" this time, Samael's eyes darkened while leaning closer to the cell. "Where is my wife?"

"She — Lady Sam... some knights went here and drag her with them," Bey stuttered, shaking at the fresh memory that happened minutes before these people came. "It's my fault... they will hurt her because of me... Lady Sam..."

Samael watched Bey weep and mumble for a moment. He didn't need to ask what happened as he got a gist of it.

"Master," called Ramin under his breath and watched Samael put down his son before he stood up. The latter ignored him as he faced the knight.

"I'll bail her out as well and then take me to his Excellency."

The young boy let out a sigh, as there was no way this knight would follow his father's request. No matter how wealthy his father was, there was no way he could see the Earl on short notice. To his surprise, the knight's eyes turned blank before he nodded and agreed.

"Yes." Even the knight's colleagues were surprised at how their fellow knight agreed. But before they could tell him to think twice, he already told them to free the woman and told Sam's group to follow him.

The only one who wasn't surprised by this was Ramin. 'Goodness.. This Minowa is in danger. I'm not even sure who will set this place on fire first! Will it be the wife? Or the husband?'

Chapter 414 - [Bonus]Jaime Malum

"Hands off!" I flung my arms aggressively while the knights finally released me after dragging me to the Earl's audience room. I clicked my tongue at them as they stood on the side while I remained in the middle.

"You are the woman who hurt my son?"

The voice that echoed across this small throne room of the Earl made me look ahead. I looked up and saw an old man sitting on the throne, resting his jaw against his knuckle while he looked down at me coldly.

'Didn't they say the Earl is young? This man right here is already knocking on death's door!' I snapped my tongue secretly, finding my joke lame. I was aware he wasn't the earl Bey was talking about. He was probably the Earl's political advisory.

'How audacious to sit on the Earl's sit.' I thought.

"Woman, His excellency is asking you!" one knight snarled at me while I observed that old man in front of me.

"Yes." I nodded and looked back at him fearlessly. "We could've avoided it if your son didn't deceive a young maiden like me."

"Hah... you are quite bold, child." I kept my poker face while he laughed arrogantly. Now I knew where that stupid son of his got his arrogance.

"You had cut his limbs to incapacitate him, which is undeniably commendable considering my son is a trained knight." He clapped as his dry laughter slowly came to a halt. He held the armrest and his eyes flickered menacingly.

"What is your name, woman?" he inquired coldly.

Instead of answering, I shrugged indifferently. My nonchalant demeanor triggered some knights as they glared daggers at me.

Weren't these knights supposed to follow the Earl? How come they seemed they would die for this person?

"How about you?" I asked, taking the old man by surprise. "What is your name?"

"You...!" Before a knight could lose his composure, the old man raised a hand. His eyes remained on me, although it flickered with a mix of amusement and annoyance.

"My lady, I don't know whether you are brave or naive. It could also be you are simply courageous, knowing that you are from a noble clan. Either way, you are now standing in the land of the south. There is a limit to my patience."

A snicker slipped past my lips, making him narrow his eyes. "My apologies, Your excellency. Please have mercy on me, for I haven't been myself lately. I also apologize for what happened with your son."

My snicker and my humble words seemed to have confused him. Well, there was no need to offend him anymore.

I was curious what kind of person the Earl's advisor was. Now that I've seen him and discerned he was a big fish in a small pond, my curiosity was fed. I needed to get Bey out of here and avoid causing trouble for Sam and his family.

My eyes softened as I hung my head low, recalling Sam and his new family. Right. I just snuck out. I had to come back as soon as possible.

"Your Excellency, I will surely repay the damages I've caused and pay for my friend's freedom." I raised my head, and he arched a brow upon seeing the repentant expression dominating my face. "I didn't mean to cause trouble for Your Excellency."

This time, I wasn't playing with him. I was honestly sorry, but not to him, but to Sam. If I pushed my luck too far, Sam would be in trouble. It seemed he was already having a peaceful life, just like what he wanted. I couldn't destroy that with my recklessness.

The old man assessed me in silence, nodding in satisfaction. "It's good that you know your place."

I hung my head low, heaving a sigh of relief. Fortunately, he was cautious because he believed I came from a noble family. Technically, I was, since I was a Bloodfang-La Crox. But even without a title, I could make a mess in here and get out alive. But, I care about the people who would be affected by the consequences of my actions.

"Jaime?"

Suddenly, a young boy's voice was heard. I turned to where it came from. My eyes landed on a child walking from the side of the throne. My brows furrowed as my eyes narrowed, noticing the swelling of his cheek.

"My lord, why are you here?" asked Jaime Malum, the old man who was sitting on the throne. He didn't even glance at the young Lord and simply checked his nails.

"I told you to rest early, didn't I?"

'Ahh, poor child...' I thought, assessing the young Earl. He looked like he was around five, but if I remembered correctly, the late Earl Crowell had bragged about his five-year-old son. It had been over five years since then, so I could assume this child was already ten.

'He is too small for his age.' A shallow breath slipped past my lips, fighting the urge to break Jaime's neck to give this child some slack. But I figured this wasn't my problem.

"Jaime, I heard some noises from my room so I came here to check." The young Lord shifted his gaze to me. He had round, adorable eyes with the color of the sun. Small and weak in appearance, and a timid voice. Anyone could tell he was being subjected to abuse, which was hard to turn a blind eye to.

"There's nothing in here, my Lord. Go back."

"But --" Before the young Lord could argue, Jaime signaled a knight to drag him away.

"Jaime, wait, I'm scared!" he cried in panic, but the knight grabbed his arm and dragged him like a doll. "Jaime! Jaime!"

"Stop!" I ground my teeth, regretting my call seconds after. Although the knight stopped and looked back at me, Jaime's attention was back to me again. This was now or never — damn you, Lilou!

"You!" I pointed at the knight and awkwardly raised my chin. "Let him go!"

Jaime let out a dry laugh and beckoned the knight to let the young Earl go. The child looked at me with teary eyes, clutching his chest while trembling. I couldn't look away from him or turn a blind eye to this child's misfortune.

'I'm sorry, Sam.'

"My Lord, come here." To my surprise, Jaime crooked his finger at the young Lord. The latter hesitated but still walked beside Jaime.

As soon as he stood beside Jaime, a loud slap resonated in my ear. My pupils constricted as my eyes fell on the young Lord, who slumped on the floor in shock.

I heard Jaime's authoritative voice saying, "My lady, it seems you don't understand my position in here. As I've said, I do not have long patience."

"So, you're practicing your authority to prove that to me?" I questioned under my breath, eyes still on the young Earl. I didn't even blink when I raised my gaze back at the old man.

My heart was pounding against my chest as my breathing grew ragged. My hand balled into a fist and I apologized to Sam in my heart because I would slaughter this person.

"I will..." Just when I took a step forward, the loud creak of the door behind me stopped me.

"Hey! Who told you to let anyone in?!" one knight yelled while I stood frozen in place. The next voice that reach my ear sent a shiver down my spine as I detected his suppressed rage behind his calm tone.

"Good evening, my Lord. It seems you caught my wife's eyes."

"Sam...."

Chapter 415 - Insolent Family

"Good evening, my Lord. It seems you caught my wife's eyes."

Sam's voice sent a chill down my spine that refrained me from doing what I was about to do. I couldn't even face him out of guilt. All I could do was look at Jaime Malum's frown and that young Lord slowly turned his head to the people behind me while touching his cheek.

"Adam!" A child's voice from behind me echoed across the room, catching the young Lord's attention.

The young Earl's eyes slowly dilated in surprise as he yelled back. "Law!"

"And who are these insolent who dared barged in here without permission?" Jaime inquired with a deep frown, moving his glowering eyes on our faces. I took a deep breath and calmed myself down, thinking of reasons to tell Sam why I ended up in this place the second I awoke.

But first...

My eyes landed on the Young Earl's position before gazing back at that old fellow on the throne. That man, Jaime Malum, will have it tonight.

"Please forgive my insolence, Your Excellency. Let me introduce myself properly. My name is Samuel Roux, this is my son, Law, and that woman over there is my wife, Lily. I rushed in here when I heard my wife was arrested," Sam exclaimed calmly and humbly, which was a little surprising.

My brows rose as I momentarily doubt the person behind me. Sam would never sound this humble; it almost felt like a sin hearing him explain things. But then again, it had been over five years since I slept. He had a son to protect now.

'He even lied about me as his wife...' I sighed before my brows furrowed and my eyes squinted. 'Did I misunderstand it? Maybe I was still his wife. His first wife at that.'

The thought of being the first wife and Sam having a second one pushed me to turn around to face him. My eyes instantly caught the little boy tugging Sam's sleeve. His son, Law, looked up worriedly. Sam gazed down at him and offered a kind smile while patting his head.

When Sam raised his head, our eyes instantly locked. He slightly narrowed his eyes, gazing at me from head to toe.

"Love," he called as the side of his lips curled up into a subtle smile. My heart skipped a beat as soon as he called me, making me bit my lower lip.

"Roux... so, you are that merchant Roux, huh? I had heard a lot about --"

"How dare you?" My interruption cut off Jaime's nonsense while I gazed at Sam intently. "Did you take in another woman while I was bedridden?"

I clasped my hands on my rear tightly, staring back at Sam with eyes glinting. I knew this wasn't the place for a family drama, but I couldn't stop myself from confronting him. These thoughts had been messing with my head, and I couldn't even look at his son anymore.

I was already too ashamed to face his son.

"My love, your imagination is as wild as ever!" Sam raised a brow and chuckled, shaking his head lightly. "I don't know how you got that conclusion the moment you wake up."

"Who is she?" I inquired under my breath, looking down for a second before raising it back up to him. What was I thinking by asking who his other woman was with such a tone? Am I planning to kill her? Skin her alive? Well, for a moment, I had those fleeting thoughts which I squashed down as soon as possible.

"Wife, you don't have to be jealous."

"Sam."

Sam let out a shallow breath, biting his lower lip while looking away. Was he trying to suppress his laughter? I assessed his expression, noticing how the side of his lips curled up. He was, indeed, trying not to laugh.

"Missus Roux, this place is not the right place to confront your husband's infidelity."

"Shut up." I glanced back coldly, as I didn't care about Jaime anymore. He should be glad that he didn't have my attention now, or I would silence him forever.

"My. Please forgive my wife, Your Excellency. You can charge her with all the criminal charges that exist in Minowa and I will pay each."

"You don't have to do..." I unconsciously moved my gaze to the person standing steps away from Sam. That familiar person waved at me awkwardly.

Ramin?

"Father." My attention moved when Law whispered and tugged his Father's sleeve. When he turned and faced me, my brows furrowed. His eyes had the same color as mine while his hair was just like Sam's.

He oddly looked like Sam and... me? It was as though someone just combined our facial features.

"Mister Roux, I appreciate your humbleness in this situation. However, even though you are the richest man in Minowa, I will not let your wife getaway after offending me multiple times." Jaime spoke from behind us. His tone was low and authoritative, reaching his verdict about my offenses.

"I had been lenient despite that the Roux Family doesn't even have noble status."

Doesn't even have noble status? I shook my head and ignored the thoughts clouding my mind. I turned around to face Jaime, who managed to keep his composure.

"I will kill you, Jaime Malum," I affirmed without a second hesitation.

"My wife, please don't speak such violent words in front of our child! Don't listen to your mother. She is not a violent person." Sam spoke, which made me look back, only to see him covering Law's ears. My brows twitched seeing how he was acting like an exemplary role model.

Law was looking back at me innocently. I couldn't help but hold my tongue under his gaze. Did I really sound violent? Well, there were children around.

"Insolent woman," Jaime spat out in irritation and beckoned a knight to arrest me.

"Please do not touch my wife."

"I don't need your help, Sammy." I rolled my eyes at Sam, ignoring the knights, who were approaching me. "Please, let's not argue in front of your son and take him and that kid over there away from here. It'll be better if you also wait for me outside."

I pointed my thumb back. There was just one child behind me and that was the poor young Lord. Sam tilted his head to the side with a close lip.

"Ramin, can you pick up his lordship?"

"Yes, master." Ramin bowed politely, but just as he took a step, Jaime's voice thundered as he suddenly harrumphed.

"You insolent family!"

Sam popped his eyes in surprise while I looked back at him with eyes wide.? "My goodness, wife! Did you plan to kill him by angering him to death?" Sam gasped, blocking Law's ears like a good father.

"Huh?"

Chapter 416 - My Rules Are Simple

"My goodness, wife! Did you plan to kill him by angering him to death?"

Jaime was already standing up while looking down at us. Sam and I should take this seriously, but honestly, this felt more like a chore now. I would just end him and get over with it.

I gazed up at Jaime, only to realize that several knights already surrounded me. Two knights had already hooked their arms around mine and my feet already left the floor.

"Wait!" I exclaimed but didn't struggle because Jaime spoke once again.

"Seize those intruders as well. The Roux family had offended the head of House Malum and tried to abduct the Earl of Minowa."

Just as he dropped his accusations, all the knights on standby took a step forward. I winced and looked back at Sam. To my disappointment, Sam raised both his hands just like his son and Ramin.

"What?!"

"Please don't hurt us." Sam pleaded calmly while casting those knights a helpless look. "My son is still young."

What was wrong with him? Did he truly change??? But a leopard never changed its spot!

Law gazed up at his father and sighed helplessly. "Father, I'm so disappointed in you."

After spouting his disappointment, Law let go of his father's hand and rushed to me. "Mother!" he yelled, making my brows furrow.

'Mother?' The next thing I know, Law was already punching the thighs of the knights who were restraining me.

"Let my mother go! Let Adam go!" Law cried while desperately trying to help me and the young Earl.

"Law... stop... don't do that," the young Earl Crowell muttered with a shaking voice. I glanced at him and then at Law, and I instantly knew they were friends.

"Hey, kid!" One knight holding my arm shook his leg in annoyance. His action inevitably caused Law to fall with a brief shriek.

"Law!" Adam, the young Earl, called aloud in panic.

"Ugh..." Law assisted himself up and glared daggers at the knight while grinding his teeth. He didn't stop as he jump right back up and did what he did, only to get kicked by the knight again.

I couldn't understand why this child was losing his young mind, nor why he was calling me his mother. But watching him hinder these knights from taking me away despite being kicked multiple times was enough to leave my mind blank. I could still hear the young Earl yelling before he suddenly appeared next to Law to stop his friend.

"These brats!" the knight had finally reached his limit as he kicked the two of them without restraint.

My pupils instantly constricted as the two youngsters came flying to a distance. Fortunately, Sam caught his son and Ramin caught Adam. All I could see next was Sam gazing at his son, and hearing him say, "my son is just like his mother. So stubborn."

"Father..." Law's voice was muffled while gazing at his father and clutched his chest. "... don't let them take away Mother."

"What a stubborn child." Sam just sighed as he carried his son, resting Law's head on his shoulder while patting his small back. He then cast Ramin a look.

"No one leaves here," he ordered calmly and Ramin bowed with the young Earl in his arms.

"Hah! I had heard a lot about you, Mister Roux. I guess the rumors that you never fight back are mere hearsay. You have the guts to stand before me, after all." Jaime scorned, but that didn't faze Sam.

Instead, my husband glanced at Law and pinched the side of his neck lightly to knock him out. Jaime ordered his knights to seize us. The knights restraining my arms grew tighter while multiple knights marched towards Sam. However, just as one knight approached, he stopped when something came flying and landed an inch away from his foot.

My eyes landed on the arrow as a thin smoke resurfaced from the ground. One look at that powerful shot and I instantly knew who shot it.

Charlotte.

That sudden appearance of an arrow raised the knight's guards, but they still approached stealthily. This did not please Jaime, as he frowned.

"You dare fire an arrow inside the Earl's estate?!" he questioned with his veins protruding from his temple. "What are you all doing? Seize all of them!"

The knight looked at each other. I knew that even though they were following Jaime and not the young Earl Crowell, a knight could discern danger. That was the reason they couldn't recklessly approach Sam, as that arrow was a warning. But they probably thought Jaime would also kill them if they didn't seize us.

"How dare you mock his excellence --" One knight courageous enough to keep his resolve lunged forward. But he couldn't finish his sentence as an arrow instantly pierced through his open mouth. The next thing everyone saw was his body collapsing with the tip of the arrow at the back of his head.

"You...!" Jaime's eyes dilated as he clenched his hands until they shook. The knights hesitated once again, realizing whoever was shooting those arrows never missed a shot.

"Viscount Jaime Malum," Sam spoke as no one dared come at him again. His eyes were at the person standing above our level and in front of the Earl's seat.

"It is not hearsay that I never fought back to those insecure nobles who had titles but lack in wealth," he corrected while taking a step, rubbing his unconscious son's back. It was a bit strange to see Sam intimidate someone with a child in his arms, but it didn't make him less daunting.

"Even my son is dissatisfied with why I never bickered with anyone. What you and my son cannot understand is, I don't bark back at the dogs barking at me." Sam continued strutting forth like he was walking in the park, but the knights took a careful step back.

"I don't mind if someone purposely spills their drinks on me. I have enough wealth to change clothes hundred times a day. I don't care about those nobles who can never hide their insecurity, who smile in front of my face but speak ill in my back. They are not worth my time and energy," he added calmly, stopping before the first step on the stair to the throne. Sam looked up at Jaime, and everyone, including me, could only stare at him cautiously.

"What... what are you doing?!" Jaime panicked as he showed his fangs, gazing at the knights who weren't moving. "Hoy! I told you to seize him! What are you doing by just standing there?!"

"Viscount, my rules are simple. Do not cross my family and... don't stand on a level where you will look down on me." Sam's voice was the same, but it still sent a cold chill down my spine. Even the knights restraining me unconsciously loosened their grip until they let me go.

"Apparently, you cross those two." Sam chuckled, still looking up at Jaime. "It's been over five years since someone dared look down on me."

CRASH!

Everyone looked up when a loud crash came from the ceiling. All I've seen was a hole in it as rubbles fell down and a petite figure came along with it. When I blinked, that figure already landed as a violent gust of wind blew past me.

My eyes landed on the woman who was already pinning down Jaime; knees on his back while her hand was on the back of his head. She was in a maid's uniform, but I recognized her. What I didn't know was that her next words would shake me to the core.

"You have no manners, Viscount," Charlotte hissed, eyes glinting menacingly.. "Bow down to His Majesty, the Emperor when he is in front of you."

Chapter 417 - Inside The Labyrinth

"Bow down to His Majesty, the Emperor when he is in front of you."

Silence descended on us until the last drop of the rubble bounced on the marble floor. What did Charlotte address Sam? I didn't believe my ears the first time, but I was certain I didn't hear it incorrectly.

Charlotte addressed Sam, His Majesty, the Emperor? No way.

Everyone was beyond shocked, as we could only stare blankly at Sam as he took the three steps up. Charlotte dragged Jaime to the side to make way. When Sam sat down in the Earl's seat, he rested his leg over the other and cradled his unconscious son.

"Jaime Malum, you poor, poor thing," he drawled while Charlotte aggressively grabbed Jaime's hair and pulled it up to raise his head. She still had her knees on the viscount's back.

One would wonder how her small frame could pin down a man, but Charlotte was more than what meets the eye. She had been bickering and sparring with Ramin, the strongest Bearer of the Order, after all.

"How can you be so foolish?" asked Sam, staring at Jaime in pity. The latter seemed to still be in shock as his complexion turned pale.

"I had been in Minowa for five years and lived in peace, taking care of my wife while raising a son. Why do you have to disrupt my peace when it is not your time yet?"

Jaime opened and closed his trembling lips. "How dare you pose as His Majesty, the Emperor? Are you not afraid of the consequences?!"

"Why would I be afraid of myself?" Sam cocked his head to the side.

Even though Jaime didn't have enough voice to speak his doubts, I understood his point. How could Sam be the emperor if he had stayed in Minowa for five years? He should be in the Capital! A lot of questions arose in my head and I couldn't deny that I doubted his claims as well.

It didn't make sense!

Sam was not the person who would take more power than the title of the Duke. Being the Duke of Grimsbanne was already a chore to him. What more handling an entire empire? But Charlotte called him the emperor! How could I question its legitimacy?!

Just what happened to this kingdom in the past five years?

"I can't blame you if you doubt me. I don't even want this title if I had a choice," Sam replied lazily as he leaned back and scanned every single knight. His eyes lingered on me for a very long time.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, eyes still on me.

I opened my mouth, but I couldn't find the voice to respond. He sighed and shook his eyes after seeing my reaction.

"It seems you are fine, my wife. Although you played too much..." Sam let out a disheartened voice and set his eyes back to Jaime. "... now, what should I do with you, Viscount? Your knight hurt my precious son."

"Your Majesty, let's use him as a fertilizer!" Charlotte suggested happily. Her tone didn't match the stifling air.

"Should we?"

"Your Majesty, please don't listen to Charlotte's suggestion. Why don't we punish him and let him do a walk of shame?" this time, Ramin finally spoke. I could still feel the competitive air between the two, but this wasn't the time to feel nostalgic.

"You won't get away from this..." Jaime mumbled as soon as he retrieved his voice back. "Do you think these cowards are the only ones I had? My people will soon find you and I will make sure to take my precious time to slaughter your wife and that damn son of yours right in front of you!"

"Pfft —!" Ramin snickered, making us glance at him. He waved and shook his head, seeing that he caught everyone's attention.

"I'm sorry, Viscount. Please go on."

"Gosh... he is more stupid than I initially thought. Let them come in since I hadn't been exercising for a long time," Charlotte commented with a devious grin, turning up on her lips.

"Apologies, Viscount. Apparently, even if you screamed for help, no one will come." Sam sighed deeply and shook his head. I wondered if Charlotte had already slaughtered everyone outside this hall. That was why he said that. The answer to my question came out too quick, though.

"We are inside the labyrinth, Viscount."

I instinctively turned to Ramin, and he gave me a shrug. Back then, Ramin couldn't reach his full potential. So I never got to see the full extent of his Labyrinth, so I had no idea what did Sam mean by 'we are inside the labyrinth.'

"It seems you did not understand, Viscount. Do you want me to show you?" Sam cocked his head to the side, brushing his fingers through his son's hair. He scanned the knights and smirk.

"I will kill everyone here in ten seconds. If I were you, save yourself and leave Viscount Malum."

His remarks made the cautious knights look at each other. For a knight to run away from his duty was the greatest dishonor, but these knights had no notion of what a proper knight should be. So, even when they hesitated, they fled once Sam started counting.

"Hey! What are you...! Do you not have shame?!" Jaime harrumphed, only to have his face meet the ground as Charlotte pinned him down once again.

"So loud," she muttered irritably.

I felt like a background seeing everything unfold and did nothing. The shock of the turn of events had frozen me in place.

"Eight... nine..." Sam trailed off as he batted his eyes, gazing up at the main door ahead as it abruptly opened.

My eyes instantly dilated seeing that these were the knights who had just run away from here. Why did they come back? I assessed their aghast countenance, and it seemed they were just as shocked as I was.

"They didn't want to go back..." I whispered, and I instinctively glanced at Ramin. He had this smug smirk on his lips.

"Welcome back!" Ramin exclaimed happily while still carrying the young Earl in his arms. "Did you like the tour?"

The knights looked at Ramin blankly. I heard one knight murmur, "Labyrinth... the emperor's left hand," before he shifted his eyes to the arrow, standing erect on the floor, and whispered once again.

"and the emperor's right..."

The knight's mumbling was loud enough in this silence. After spewing his disbelief remarks, the knights' eyes widened as if they had finally realized things.

Jaime, who was rendered flabbergasted by the same realization, turned his head to Sam. He tried to speak, his mouth hung open for quite some time before his voice came out.

"Your Majesty..." Jaime's voice shook as his breathing grew heavy and ragged.

Sam raised a brow as if he gazed back at Jaime. "Yes, Viscount?"

"Damn... the manners of the knights in Minowa never ceased to disappoint me." Ramin let out a series of clicks of his tongue. His comment snapped the knights back to their senses as they immediately rushed inside.

The knights glided on the knees and bowed until their forehead touched the floor.

"Your Majesty, have mercy on us!"

Chapter 418 - Is This Safe?

"Your Majesty, have mercy on us!"

Sam didn't have a change of reaction, but Jaime's expression turned paler. The knights had already acknowledged Sam after what they had realized.

"Really... so disappointing," Ramin commented with a sigh. I glanced at him while he looked at the unconscious Earl in his arms.

I could understand where Ramin came from, as the Bearers of the Order were like knights. The royal knights and the Bearers of the Divine Order may have different purposes, but they were people who would die with dignity. These knights in the Earldom, on the other hand, were different. They switched sides when they knew the other party was far stronger.

They were just a bunch of cowards wearing their suits. What a shame.

"It's disappointing, indeed," I mumbled, gazing down at the knight's kowtowing, then raising my gaze at Sam. Jaime had also accepted his defeat as he voluntarily slammed his forehead on the floor.

"I have offended His Majesty! Please have mercy on me, Your Majesty!" Jaime chanted desperately, which was even more disappointing.

Did I say he was a big fish in a small pond? He acted as king in the south, and when the people from the capital had now stood before him, he was no better than a clown. No. This place was an entire circus.

Sam sported a bored look, tapping the tip of his fingernails against the armrest. He glanced at Jaime and then at the knights.

"If you give me the head of the knight who hurt my son, I will reconsider," his request beckoned the knights to raise their heads and looked at him in aghast. Seeing the disinterest in Sam's eyes as if their lives didn't matter to him, the knights turned their heads at the knight whom Sam was referring to.

The knight who restrained me earlier and hurt Law shook his head and mumbled, "No."

In a blink of an eye, he tried to escape from his colleague, but to no avail. All those knights, he thought his brothers chased him. He couldn't even escape because someone wielded his sword and slashed his back.

It didn't even take that long when the knight's head came rolling on the ground. The sight of these knights ganging up on a sole knight was vicious, making me recall how this empire was truly like.

This empire... was never flowers and butterflies. This place was all about blood and death.

"I feel sad for the young Earl Crowell." Sam sighed as he didn't look pleased even when the knights executed his orders. But he didn't dwell on it and turned his head to Charlotte.

"Charlie, take the young Earl and my son to a nice bed."

Charlotte nodded as she pushed herself up from Jaime's back and then walked to his side. Sam passed his son to her, but she only carried her in between her side and arms.

Sam ruffled his son's hair lightly before Charlotte dashed towards Ramin. She was like a bolt and lightning, appearing and disappearing in a blink of an eye. While Ramin passed the young Earl, Adam, to her, Charlotte turned her head in my direction and grinned.

"Lilou, my queen~! Is that really you?!"

"Charlie..."

I jumped slightly when Charlotte suddenly appeared in front of me while carrying two boys. Her eyes twinkled as she leaned in, standing on her toes. As if seeing me up close was not enough, she walked around me and assessed me.

"Charlie," I called under my breath, and she stopped in front of me once again. "What are you doing?"

"Your Majesty, is this safe?" she didn't answer me but asked Sam with a raised voice instead. Her eyes were still on me and I frowned.

"What safe?" I inquired.

"Take her with you. I still have some business with the Viscount."

I gazed at Sam and caught him staring at me. There was something in his eyes that I couldn't pinpoint, but it told me not to be stubborn.

"We will talk later, Lilou. Follow Charlotte for now," he said in the same cold tone, making me purse my lips.

"Let's go, Your Majesty." Charlotte snatched my attention as she smiled brightly. I nodded in agreement and followed her tracks.

As we left the throne hall, I glanced at Sam for the last time. He wasn't looking in my direction and just gazing down at Jaime. Even though the sit he was sitting on wasn't as appealing as that in the imperial palace, I couldn't deny that his demeanor, aura, and just everything was befitting for an emperor.

'Did he really become the emperor?' I wondered as we departed the throne hall.

Charlotte and I waltzed through the hallway of the Earl's estate. I didn't know the place, so I only followed her to wherever she was going.

"Is he really the current emperor, Charlie?" I asked, breaking the prolonged silence between us. She looked back at me and kept her smile.

"Yes!" her answer was full of conviction and there was no shadow of a doubt she was lying. "I am the emperor's right-hand man~! Hehehe!"

She sounded so happy; I thought. "How did he become one?"

Charlotte hummed a long tune before stopping in front of the door. My eyes lingered on her as she gazed at the door.

"I'll get it," I proposed and before she could reply, I already opened the door. I knew she would kick the door open, but having a broken door where these boys would rest was not a good idea.

"Thank you, Your Majesty~!" Charlotte grinned as she immediately entered and walked directly towards the bed. I watched her from the door as she carefully laid the boys on it.

I slowly closed the door and stepped in, but I just leaned on the wall beside it. I had a lot of questions, and I knew Charlotte had avoided my previous query. I would wait for her to tuck these boys in.

Just as Charlotte pushed herself away from the bed, Law, Sam's son, grunted as he opened his eyes.

"Hmm?" he rubbed his eyes and tried to move, but winced as if a sudden pain struck him.

"Young master, you should rest first." Charlotte planted her hand on the little boy's shoulder.

"How about mother and father?" asked the child in a coarse voice, clearly worried about his parents.

"Don't worry, young master. The master had settled it already. They were safe."

The young boy stared at Charlotte before he nodded. His eyes still welled up, though, and his muffled voice came in.

"I'm so glad..."

My chest tightened as soon as I heard his remarks.

Chapter 419 - [Bonus]The Past Five Years

"I'm so glad..."

Charlotte's expression softened as the young master cried. I could see that Law was trying not to cry, but he was probably overwhelmed by what happened. He was still a child, after all.

"I was... so worried..." Law hiccuped through his gritted teeth while rubbing his eyes. "... I thought... they will take... Mother."

"Young Master, your father will never let that happen."

"Does she hate me...?" he inquired and there was a sudden tension in my throat upon hearing it.

"Did... Mother runs away because she hates me and Father?"

"No, of course not! The Madam is just confused. Why would you think like that?"

"You're just saying that..." Law hiccuped and paused for a long time. My eyes burned for reasons unknown, making me avert my eyes from him. Why would he think I hate him? No. He wasn't my son, and I was not his mother. He must be confused, not me.

"Mother hates me because..." his hiccups grew worse that Charlotte had to tell him not to cry anymore, but he didn't listen. "... she hates me because she gave birth to me."

"What?" I blurted out under my breath, but it seemed my voice didn't reach them.

"Young master, that's not true...!"

"Because of me, she was asleep for a long time. Mother... wouldn't be in that state... if she didn't have me."

My heart broke into many pieces listening to him. I wanted to tell him I didn't hate him, but I could only stand in the corner and listen in silence. Charlotte consoled the child until he had finally fallen asleep crying. She glanced at me apologetically but said nothing.

We didn't speak as Charlotte tucked the two boys in. Even when she left and returned with a clean cloth and a barrel of water, silence reigned in the room.

I watched Charlotte wipe Law with a clean cloth and then Adam, the young Lord of Minowa. After wiping the dirt off of them, she tended to their wounds and put an ointment on them before changing their clothes. I didn't have the leisure to admire Charlotte's newfound skills in being an efficient maid as my eyes fixated on Law.

'Had he been blaming himself all this time?' I wondered, feeling guilty about it. The silence granted me enough time to think and recall my memories before my long slumber.

Back then, I nearly died at the hands of Alphonse. Before I lost consciousness, he congratulated me for having a child. If I put two and two together, I could assume Law was actually my son. But how?

I was unconscious for the past five years! How could I carry a child and give birth if I was asleep?

I just had too many questions, but no answer. So I waited patiently for Charlotte to finish tending to the children.

When she let out a sharp exhale and perched on the edge of the bed, I snapped my tongue to catch her attention. I cocked my head towards the set of armchairs and pulled myself away from the wall. I strutted towards them, plopping my butt down on the divan.

"Let's talk, Charlie." I pointed at the armchair across from me. "Sit."

"Alright..." she sighed heavily.

Charlotte was still on the bed and pursed her lips. She reluctantly dragged her feet and sat in the chair across from me. It was obvious she didn't want to be interrogated, but I needed some questions to be answered.

She looked at me awkwardly, holding her hand on her lap. I let the silence get to her before my lips parted.

"How come I had a child?" was my first question. "I didn't recall until now that Alphonse told me I was with a child. However, I was in slumber for five years. It doesn't make sense, Charlie."

Charlotte looked at me with hesitation but still explained the best she could. "Thing is, you are not entirely in slumber throughout the five years, Your Majesty. You are always half-conscious, but unresponsive and, at least once a month, you wake up."

"Huh?"

"Your Majesty, what I'm saying is, you are simply unresponsive but you still open your eyes and make subtle movements." She repeated with some added information to make it more clear to me. "And once a month, you get your consciousness back."

My brows furrowed, as I couldn't remember waking up throughout the past five years. Charlotte looked at me with a conflicted look and cleared her throat, detailing what she meant by that.

According to her, there would be a time of the month where I was responsive and had control over my body. However, the Lilou that awakened every month was not the Lilou they all knew. They figured that out when I first awoke after the first month of my slumber.

The palace, which was still in the process of recovering, and still had no official king, once again fell into a night of terror. The culprit? It was me.

The Lilou that would awaken every month for the past five years was vicious and cold-blooded. Charlotte said I even hurt Sam, although she didn't give me the details and swore she'd rather die than detail it. That alone was enough for me to understand that whatever I did to him was something I could never forgive myself.

To keep me from doing something I would regret later, Sam would lock me in in a dungeon during those times of the month. He would accompany me all night, though. But still, I could imagine how painful it was for him to lock his wife because she was turning into a beast without her knowledge.

Because of that, I was able to carry the child and give birth. However, birthing Law came with huge consequences.

"What did you say?" I asked in disbelief, as her previous words didn't register in my head properly. Charlotte looked at me with hesitation, pursing her lips into a thin line.

"Charlie, did you say I died?"

She bit her lower lip, letting out a sigh before nodding with her eyes fixed on me. "Yes, Your Majesty.. You died giving birth to the young master."

Chapter 420 - You're My Favorite

"Yes, Your Majesty. You died giving birth to the young master."

There was a long silence between us, as that was something I didn't expect. Surely, I was alive, and I knew I was. How could she say I died giving birth?

"Charlie..." I scratched my temple, trying to make sense of this additional information. "How am I still alive? Did I...?"

I set my eyes back on her and watched her raise her head once again. Charlotte didn't speak, pondering the right words to say.

"Heliot."

Suddenly, Sam's voice came into the room, and I gazed at the door. He was leaning against the jamb with his arms crossed. His eyes scanned our face before setting it to Charlotte.

"Charlie, how are my son the and Earl?" he inquired, prioritizing his son's situation first.

"They were alright, Your Majesty. But it seems the young master had internal injuries. He should be fine if he rests."

Sam nodded ever so slowly, shifting his eyes to Law. "That boy is so stubborn. I told him not to run off on his own."

I studied Sam's expression and I could tell he had treasured his son. Sam wasn't very fond of children, but the way he looked at Law was full of affection and worry. It reminded me how my father used to look at me whenever I injured myself because of my recklessness.

"And his friend? That young earl?" asked Sam without taking his eyes away from the bed.

"The Earl is alright, although his body had too many bruises," Charlotte reported as if completely forgetting about me. "I already know that damn Viscount abuse the Earl, but I didn't think he would hurt him to this extent."

"He is greedy," Sam commented and sighed. "Poor thing. No wonder my son keeps trying to take his friend away from this place. The earl is just a few years younger than Claude, but his body was smaller than my son."

"What should we do with him, Your Majesty?"

"He still needs Jaime Malum to establish his position. For now, we'll let him rest."

Charlotte nodded in agreement. "Yes, Your Majesty."

Sam pressed his lips together and shifted his eyes to me. I nearly jumped when he locked his eyes on me.

"Charlie, stay in this room and look after the children." Sam glanced at Charlotte, which made her nod once before setting his eyes back on me. He crooked a finger, staring at me intensely.

"Come with me."

I instinctively swallowed down hard, sensing the intensity of his gaze. Being ignored by the two of them was better than having all his attention. Did he purposely ignore me so he could focus on me now?

'Damn it! I'm not prepared to be interrogated!' I cursed and mentally ground my teeth.

"Lilou," he called and this time, his tone sounded more dangerous than when we were in the throne hall. "Come with me and we will talk, my wife."

I swallowed down hard and nodded. "Alright," I said and stood up while keeping my composure. It was better if I asked him the questions that Charlotte was hesitant to answer. Sam might be angry about misunderstanding him and running away from home, but I would just kiss him to placate him.

"Thanks, Charlie," I expressed, gazing at Charlotte for the last time before strutting towards the door.

"If you plan of kissing me to shut me up, it's not going to happen," Sam uttered as he opened the door for me, standing on the side to make way.

My heart sank as my steps grew slower. I heard him tell Charlotte not to leave the children before the door creaked close.

I didn't have the will to face him, so I gazed at the hallway and meandered. I knew he was following behind me. His gaze left this chill down my spine, after all.

"Do you know the way to the garden?" I asked to break the silence in this empty hallway. "I think it's better to talk there since I'm feeling stuffy."

He didn't answer, making me gaze down on the floor. I clutched my shoulder as my footsteps grew slower.

"Sam, I..."

Just as I wanted to apologize to him, I felt his weight on my back, which froze me on the spot. His arms circled around me as he buried his face in my shoulder.

"It's really you, right?" came out a muffled inquiry, feeling his arms trembled as he locked them around my waist. "You just didn't find another way to deceive me, right? Lilou?"

My mouth opened and closed. The fear I could smell from him was the fear of holding on to false hope, only to be shattered.

"I missed you so badly... let it be you this time," he whispered desperately, and I could feel my heart sink. "Please."

Why did we have to struggle so much? Was actually one of the questions that had been in my head for a very, very long time.

"Was she that cunning?" I asked under my breath. His answer was a simple nod. I pressed my lips and smiled subtly, planting my hand on his arm so I could turn around and face him. Fortunately, Sam loosened his grip.

"Sam," I called and searched for his eyes. My heart broke once again as soon as I saw the forlorn filling in them.

I raised my hand and cupped his jaw, caressing his lean cheek with my thumb. "That book you've been reading is my least favorite."

I bit my lower lip as my brows rose, seeing relief cloud his eyes. Sam let out a weak chuckle while I rocked my head.

"I actually thought you are trying to punish me by reading me a nonsense and aggravating story." His chuckle grew louder as we looked at each other for a moment. "Thank you, Sam... for everything."

I took a step forward and stood on my toes and whispered. "You are my favorite book, Sam. Your stories are,"

My eyes closed before our lips touched and at that moment, I felt alive more than ever. We.... felt complete once again.