

The Duke 491

Chapter 491 - A Dinner With The Guests

After receiving the Earl of Monarey, we joined Silvia and Yul in the sitting room. When we arrived, there was this strange air between them, but I ignored it. Klaus and Claude didn't seem to notice — or maybe they chose not to.

The servants served us tea, and we talked about almost everything that I missed in the five years. They shared their own stories, misadventures, hardships, and everything. I had fun listening, but at the same time, felt a little regretful that I wasn't there to witness it.

Yulis, Silvia, Klaus, and Claude had matured for sure. They grew as a person in these five years, holding equal power and influence over the empire.

We didn't notice the time and only we realized it when Fabian told us it was time for dinner. With that being said, we followed him to have dinner. Sam and Law were already there, staring in our direction without saying a word.

'I felt like I sinned with how they look at me,' I thought, but still sported a smile. Sam and Law didn't speak, as our distinguished guests had taken their seats.

Their silence slowly turned the atmosphere in the dining hall a little... awkward. I glazed over the food and then at our guest. They were keeping their silence under my husband's and son's gaze.

"Sam," I called under my breath when I couldn't take this silence anymore. We were just happy a moment ago, but now it felt like they would kill us.

His lips stretched into a smile that didn't reach his eyes. "I'm very glad to see you again, my brothers, sister."

"We can see that Your — my brother," Silvia responded sarcastically. "I am also relieved to see you again."

"I can see that you are over the moon, sister."

A frown dominated my face, as this felt like a dinner in the imperial palace. Most of my memories in that place's dining hall were similar to what was unfolding; stifling and smiles coupled with sneers and snide comments.

"Big brother, you looked more dashing than ever!" Klaus exclaimed while pointing at the host's seat. "No wonder my nephew is so adorable!"

"It's nice to meet you too, Uncle Norrix. I heard a lot about you from my father." Law smiled — the same smile his father bore. This sort of unity between my son and my husband felt strange.

"Right. This is the first time you're meeting Law, right?" I chimed in a light tone, an attempt to salvage the thick atmosphere.

"Yes, sister." Klaus let out a sigh while gazing at Law and then at Sam. He clicked his tongue, shaking his head before setting his eyes back to me.

"Their personality is uncannily similar," he whispered at me, but with this silence, everyone heard him clearly.

"He took his personality from his mother."

"I took after my mother, uncle."

Klaus winced when the father and son duo replied almost at the same time. Sam and Law looked at each other with dissatisfaction in their eyes.

"How adorable." Claude chuckled in a low tone while his hand reached for the glass of wine.

"Uncle and my cousin, you shouldn't be too stingy in hogging Lilove all for yourself."

"Lucas, what did you call my wife?" Sam raised a brow, leaning back in amusement.

"Cousin, my father might be a detestable creature. However, I am not looking for another father."

Law also voiced out his thoughts, making me wish to evaporate right in this instance.

"Clau — I mean, Lucas, you haven't given up on your fantasy?" Yulis also joined the conversation, laughing in ridicule at the confident young man.

"My gosh... the first family dinner and I already lost my appetite," Silvia commented as she rolled her eyes. Claude was, indeed, mischievous. He reminded me of how Sam had fun aggravating everyone. It was as if the more they get annoyed at him, the more it made him happy.

"Just in case you're forgetting, my sister dislikes this type of air during meals." Klaus, who couldn't care less if Sam and Law strangle Claude, muttered while already eating. "She likes eating, but look at her! So thin as if she'll get blown away by a strong wind."

Klaus pointed at me with pity in his eyes. I rolled my eyes, clicking my tongue. Did he forget that it was only been two months since I woke up from a five-year slumber? If I wasn't a vampire now, I would wake up skin and bones.

"Right. Let's eat." Sam rocked his head, raising his hand to encourage them to eat. He shrugged when I cast her a dead look.

With that being said, we ate in silence. Thanks to Klaus, the thick air gradually subsided as he talked and teased everyone to his heart's content. He was always the playful type. Now, I wouldn't be surprised why Claude turned out like this. Klaus practically raised his nephew, and just like Sam, he probably instilled a part of his habits to the young earl.

In the middle of the dinner, Fabian suddenly came and whispered in Sam's ears. Klaus was still teasing Claude while I observed the smile that appeared on my husband's face. Since Sam and Fabian were whispering, I focused my hearing on their conversation.

"Fabian, no bloodshed. Tell Rufus to come in." My eyes widened as soon as I heard Sam's remarks.

"Ruru already arrived?" I blurted out, catching everyone's attention. I covered my lips as I glanced at them, smiling awkwardly, as I didn't expect Rufus to arrive early. He clearly told me he would arrive a day before Law's birthday.

"My wife, I didn't know you're eavesdropping." Sam smiled in delight. "Ruru came. Fabian, please assist him --"

"I'll do it!" I raised a hand in panic, knowing Fabian could do something evil to his brother.

"Madam, you are still in the middle of your meal. Please trust your head butler to accommodate your guest." Fabian smiled politely, but I could sense the malice from that smile! I trusted my head butler, but not in this!

"Fabian is right, my wife. That is his --"

"Why don't you let Silvia receive the guest?" Yul suddenly suggested, looking at me as if he understood my worry. But Silvia didn't seem pleased at his suggestion as her eyes sharpened at him.

"It's not like you don't know each other. Also, for my sister's peace of mind. It's better if someone who knows Rufus receives him. We're family here, after all."

I pressed my lips into a thin line, studying at Silvia, who had her eyes narrowed at Yul. He knew about Silvia and Rufus, but her reaction was a little strange. I didn't dwell on it as I gazed at Sam. My husband rocked his head in understanding, casting the displeased butler a smile.

"Please assist my sister to receive the guest, Fabian," Sam ordered while Fabian's smile disappeared.

"Yes, Master." Fabian bowed politely before shifting his focus towards Silvia. "My lady?"

"Be thankful I can't stab you right now." Silvia huffed at Yul before she assisted herself up, following Fabian to receive Rufus.

As they left the dining hall, I could not help but gaze at Yul. In the back of my head, I knew there was something wrong with Silvia and him.

'Are the two of them... develop feelings for each other?' I wondered internally before I snapped back to reality when Law suddenly spoke.

"Rufus?" he tilted his head as he set his eyes to Sam. "Father, are you friends with the military general?"

Silence.

There was dead silence in the room as I bit my tongue. Right... this was my son's first family dinner with everyone. And to make it worse, he didn't know the names of the people around him were known for.

"Oh," Sam also seemed a bit taken aback at the slipped of the tongue. He gazed at Law for a moment before he smiled.

"Yes. The military general is Fabian's brother, after all.." All we heard next was Law's cutlery hitting the floor.

Chapter 492 - [Bonus]Claude's Suggestion

"Yes. The military general is Fabian's brother, after all."

There was an instant dead silence in the dining hall as Law dropped his cutlery. I pinched the bridge of my nose, seeing that Sam confessed that easily. On second thought, the reason Sam planned to invite Rufus was that he was my son's ... hero.

"The military general is Mister Fabian's brother?" Law's mouth opened and closed before he finally found his voice to ask. His father answered with a slight nod.

'Gosh...' A sigh slipped past my lips as I glanced at everyone around the table. They were oddly silent as if they wanted nothing to do with this. Understandable, I thought. It was Sam's idea to keep our son in the dark.

"Impossible." Law frowned without taking his eyes off of Sam. "I mean, it's not impossible. If one sibling is strong, there's a high possibility that the other sibling is a weakling."

"My son, good thing Fabian isn't here to hear that. He will be very disheartened," Sam clicked his tongue, feeling sorry for Fabian.

"Father, what else are you hiding from me?"

"A lot of things."

"Sam." This time, I chimed in the conversation as I didn't know what my husband was thinking. Sam glanced at me and cocked his head to the side, sporting a misplaced innocence.

"Mother, are you and father hiding something from me?" I bit my tongue when Law inquired. "How come an important person in the empire such as the military general is inside at a wealthy commoner's estate?"

How am I going to answer that? Should I also confess now? Tell him his father wasn't a commoner? That Sam was actually the military general's boss? That Yul was the genius Duke in the west? Silvia was a marchioness in the east? Claude was the Earl in the north, Klaus was his chief knight? Just where should I start? In the fierce and bloody battle for the throne?

A plethora of questions flowed in my train of thoughts while staring back at our son. I glanced at Sam helplessly, and he shrugged nonchalantly. I couldn't lie to Law more, especially right in his face; we had hidden a lot from him already.

"My son, why are you so surprised? The military general came from humble origins." Sam finally spoke just when my lips parted, catching Law's attention. He leaned forward, propping his jaw against his knuckles, eyes on Law, and eyebrows arched.

"Before the military general got that title, I already knew him. Haven't you heard the saying: birds of the same feather flock together? He was a commoner, but now a military general. I am a commoner but look at our house. It's not really impossible that your father knows a few important people since money can also be of help to some nobles."

Law narrowed his eyes and scrutinized his father in silence. "Are you indirectly implying that you are an important person?"

"Can be? I mean, if important people need my help, that makes me important, yes?"

"That also means we can be in danger."

"Well, yes. But don't worry about it." Sam smiled a bit while Law's countenance stayed cold. A sigh slipped past his lips, sprawling his hand on our son's head to ruffle his hair.

"Just be glad that the military general didn't forget our friendship. I'll let you meet him tomorrow," my husband added.

Law lowered his head, sneaking a glance at me. So, I offered him an encouraging smile. Although I felt bad for keeping him in the dark and was still unsure if this was the best method to do as parents, I wanted to trust Sam's judgment.

"Can I... really meet him?" asked Law, gazing back at his father.

"Of course," Sam replied and nodded. "I will ask him to teach you a few tricks. He is a good trainer, after all. Right? My wife?"

I smiled and nodded. "Ye..." then, my brain was frozen while my eyes dilated. Trainer? Rufus? The sense of horror at the memory of how Rufus trained me years ago resurfaced in my head.

'Oh no...'

"Pffft--!" I slowly turned my head to Klaus, knowing he knew about my hardships in the hands of Rufus. "I'm sorry, Lilou. I just remembered something in the past."

"Kla -- Rix..."

"Uncle, why don't you also apply as a trainer for my nephew?" Claude suggested with a smile, darting his eyes from Klaus and then to me. "If uncle and Sir Knight trained my nephew, and then His Gra — I mean, Kieran, Ameria, and I will tutor him, wouldn't he become a great person someday? Law... he might live up to his name one day."

"I am already living up to my name, cousin," Law replied coldly, staring at Claude with such hostility in his eyes.

"It's not a terrible suggestion, but what kind of Law are you trying to enforce in the future?" Klaus scoffed in dismay. I thought about it and it wasn't really a terrible idea. However, with them joining forces, my son would terrify me as well. Just then, I noticed Yul, who remained silent throughout the conversation.

"Yul," I called under my breath, reaching for his arm. Yul turned his head to me and smiled.

"Claude's idea isn't bad, but you and your husband should think about it together." So he was listening? Yul nodded at me encouragingly before setting his eyes to Sam. "Once you decided, just let us know. We'll assist our nephew to the best of our ability."

"Hmm. Sure." Sam nodded, taking me by surprised since it seemed he was reconsidering. He smiled at me when he caught me looking.

"I will think about it more later. Thank you for the suggestion, nephew." Claude tilted his head down slightly at Sam's sincerity. "For now, I hope you find your stay in our house comfortable. Let the maids know if you need anything, they will assist you throughout your stay in here."

Sam wiped the corner of his lips with a cloth. He then scanned the people around the table and smiled.

"You three, I will appreciate it if you join me for a drink later."

"I will not refuse." Claude smiled and nodded. I studied their eyes, and it seemed they already knew they had to talk to Sam about something important.

'Gosh... I want to know, but I promised myself not to meddle in political affairs.' A sigh slipped past my lips and sported a smile. 'Right. I shouldn't worry about that now. I will have to put my son to sleep. It was a long day.'

The dinner continued as I convinced myself I was a housewife now. Whatever these men had to talk about had nothing to do with me.... or was what I wished.

Chapter 493 - [Bonus]Letting You Go

Meanwhile, Silvia glared at Fabian, who was leading her back to the mansion's entrance hall. She was clearly displeased, but not because she had to welcome Lilou's guest. It was actually an honor for her. But she was annoyed at something or someone else.

"If you planned to kill Ruru, you shouldn't make it so obvious in front of Lilou," she advised, breaking the silence between them. "You know her more than anyone, Fabian."

"My lady, you shouldn't have volunteered if you find this disrespectful," Fabian replied without looking back at her. His eyes were sharp, giving out no other emotion but intimidation.

"It seems there's a problem with your hearing, butler. I didn't volunteer. Someone else did, and I didn't want to disturb Lilou's meal. She hates it."

Fabian shrugged indifferently but his footsteps slowed down a little. "His Grace... you seemed you had already taken a liking to him, my lady."

"For a butler such as yourself, your questions are surely too personal." A snicker escaped her mouth while gazing at his back. "Although what surprised me more is that the matters of the heart intrigued a cold-blooded person like you."

He remained silent for a while, deep in thought. "That night in the capital... the duke had given you half of his life to save you. I'm sure my lady feels indebted to him, but you shouldn't."

"You surely know a lot, Fabian," she scoffed as her hand clasped her skirt tightly, recalling that time in the capital. That night, when Yulis and Silvia headed in the direction Charlotte shot her arrow. It turned out it was a den of undeads.

Back then, they didn't know the severity of the matter until they faced countless undeads. Yulis and Silvia fought with their life on the line, but with only the two of them and Charlotte backing them up from afar, they were at the disadvantage.

In the end, Silvia nearly lost her life as the undead devoured her. The reason she was still alive now was because of the blood of the Bloodfang in Yulis. He sacrificed half of his life just so he could save her.

"His Grace did what he did because you are important to her majesty. You can take my words with a grain of salt and I might also be wrong. But from what I see, the duke's affection to his sister is deeper than what you think. Don't be a replacement, my lady."

"Deeper what I think...? You are surely calm if you think like that."

"That is because I know His Grace isn't a fool." He shrugged. "Neither he is greedy for more. To someone like him, her happiness was enough for him."

Silvia gazed at Fabian's back. She wanted to argue with him more and correct him, but her tongue kept rolling back. Fabian was wrong, that was what she wanted to say, but she couldn't. Because some part of what he said made sense.

"I don't know why you are saying this, but this is the only time I'll let this slide," she muttered and Fabian smirked. "I can't see your face, but I know you're smirking evilly."

"Don't worry, my lady. This is the only time I will voice out my thoughts about this."

"Because this is the only time you feel like you want me to agonize about this matter." She rolled her eyes, knowing Fabian spouted all this just so she would agonize about it. "You're really cruel, Fabian."

"We are all cruel creatures by nature."

"By nature... then, I guess you surely embraced that nature." She breathed out as they soon reached the entrance hallway, where she could see Rufus's figure standing with a dignified air around him. "Someday, Fabian. You will meet someone who will make you question yourself if you are good enough for her. That... just the thought of bearing such feelings for her will make you feel dirty and undeserving."

Fabian smiled as he glanced over his shoulder. "I'll kill her before she can make me question myself."

"We'll see about that." Silvia shrugged before adding, "Karma is a classy wench, after all."

Fabian and Silvia stopped several steps away from Rufus, who was in civilian clothes. A smile appeared on his face as he bowed to her politely. But then, his eyes glinted when he locked eyes with Fabian.

"It's good to see you again, my lady, head butler," Rufus greeted, smiling gently as a response to Fabian's sinister smile. "I see you have been well."

"Welcome to the Roux's humble abode, Sir." Fabian also bowed with his palm across his chest.

"I will appreciate the formalities if you stop pulling an aura on me, Head Butler. You might suffocate me to death."

"My. I am not, apparently." The corner of Fabian's lips stretched wider until his eyes squinted.

Rufus shrugged as he set his eyes on Silvia. The latter sported a subtle smile.

"You came at the wrong time. They were having dinner, so I volunteered to receive the guest instead. I hope you do not find this as an act of discourtesy." She curtsied slightly before raising her head again with a confident smile.

"No. It is an honor to be graced by your presence."

Her smile remained as she motioned her hand. "Then, I shall assist you to the sitting room."

Rufus nodded before she glanced at Fabian. The latter then led them to one of the sitting rooms. Silvia sat across from Rufus while Fabian left to get the tea. As they wait for the tea, the two of them didn't talk for a while.

"You seemed to have a lot of things in mind, my lady." He broke the silence after observing her.

Silvia raised her gaze at him and forced a smile. "Forgive me for zoning out. It's my first time going away from the march and I won't be there for a few weeks. So, I am a bit... worried."

"Understandable." Rufus rocked his head and silence descended in the room once again. Her eyes remained on him.

"It's been five years since I last saw you, Ru," she said, breaking the silence first. "That scar on your face looks deep."

Rufus touched the scar while the side of his lips curled up. "Does it bother you?"

"No. I think it suits you, strangely." A chuckle slipped past his lips at her comment. "I didn't mean to offend you. That scar makes you look more... strong and dashing."

"A person's scar can be a good embellishment sometimes."

She rocked her head while staring into his eyes. "Strange, don't you think? We used to be each other's worlds and my heart used to skip a beat whenever I see you. But now..."

"But now, you only look at me as someone who is a part of your past." He finished her sentence with a subtle smile. "You and I are not those people anymore, my lady.. You are not the curious and mischievous princess, and I am not that foolish and greedy young knight anymore."

Chapter 494 - [Bonus]Thank You For The Pain

"You and I are not those people anymore, my lady. You are not the curious and mischievous princess, and I am not that foolish and greedy young knight anymore."

"Do you still hate me, Ru?" Her eyes softened with bitterness, raising the question she could never ask before. Even Silvia was surprised that she could talk to him like this while staring straight into his eyes and without losing her mind.

"After everything I did in the past... do you still hate me?"

Rufus shook his head lightly. "I never hated you, my lady."

"Tss. You don't have to lie."

"I'm not lying, my lady." His eyes glinted as his expression grew solemn. "The person I hated is myself. I couldn't protect my people from you, and I couldn't protect you from doing that to them. You will not sully your hands if I was stronger back then. That's why I never truly hated you."

"Ru..." A shallow breath escaped her nose as her shoulders relaxed. "... it was a beautiful love, right? What we had... it was beautiful. Just where did things go wrong?"

Rufus pressed his lips and shrugged. "I wonder."

There was a moment of silence as they held each other's gaze. For some reason, this brought them back to a similar situation in the past. The only difference was that he wasn't that young knight who was too flustered by her teasing. And she was not the mischievous princess with a bright smile.

They didn't look at each other with curiosity, interest, and fear like they used to. Right now, their eyes were filled with relief, respect, and a clear line between them.

Surely, they had grown older and mature.

"I loved you," she whispered with a bitter smile. "Ardently and passionately loved you, Ru. You were my world, and I'd rather sacrifice a thousand if that means you will live. I loved you so that I married my brother so I can breathe the same air you breathe — even when I felt breathless at times."

Silvia paused, leaning back as a bitter chuckle escaped her mouth. "Even when you told me to let you go, I can't. No matter how painful, I couldn't. I thought I will die if I did, but holding on to you hurt so much it was slowly killing me too. I kept wondering why would you not see me?"

Questioning myself if that is all I mean to you? I loved you and at the same time, I hate that I love you. I blamed you for everything. Just a little appreciation is all I need back then, Ru.

But you were cruel. You didn't give me the slightest appreciation or recognition. So I hated you even more. But... it's not your fault. The pain, the sufferings, the sacrifices... you didn't ask me to do all that. From the beginning, you already let go, but I just stubbornly held on. You knew if you recognized the slightest of my effort, it will only give me false hope."

Silvia chuckled, recalling her foolishness of the past. She used to shed tears whenever she thought about this, but her eyes remained dry. Rufus remained silent while staring at her, relief filling his eyes, seeing how clear her eyes were. Still, he couldn't deny that his heart clenched with her words.

"I loved you, Ru," she confessed sincerely.

"But I bring out the worst in you," he added in a quiet voice, making her press her lips into a thin line.

"I don't regret it, though. Not even the slightest." Silvia took a deep breath and exhaled it sharply.

"Me too, Via. I never regret our time together. If anything..." he gazed down and smiled bitterly. "... I wished to cherish them forever. They were... beautiful, after all."

"Yes, they are beautiful." — because the youngsters in those memories were long dead. The young knight and the beautiful princess were nothing but the casualties of the past. No matter how they tried, they were already their own people.

She wasn't the playful princess he fell madly in love with, and he wasn't the stubborn knight who would pick up flowers for her. Sad, but that was the story of their love.

"Thank you for the pain, Ru." She smiled as she glanced at the shut door. "You are the lesson who taught me to value, respect, and love myself first."

Rufus smiled, nodding, but said nothing. Her words felt like a hand that had been holding him, but now that hand was letting him go. He should feel lighter without the excess weight, but sadly, it felt heavier now.

"You're free now, Ru," she whispered, but his eyes softened.

"No, Via. You are," he replied under his breath, raising his gaze to see her pair of clear eyes. A weak smile appear on his face as he took a deep breath and out.

"I'm glad that you freed yourself from my shackles." Rufus knew he would never be free because she still owned his heart from then and forever. But he wouldn't hold on to her heart because it would only ruin her. He was already glad that Silvia let him go. Now, she didn't have to carry this heavy burden they'd been carrying together for a very long time.

Silvia just smiled at him in response. She was dazzling, even with the absence of innocence in her eyes.

"Fabian went away to reheat the tea. It will take a while." Rufus glanced at the shut door while she chuckled. "How considerate of him."

"He is full of surprises."

Rufus leaned back and took a deep breath. "Mhm. I'm still a little concerned since he raised the crown prince."

"Your concern is justified." Silvia nodded, thinking about Law. "If Law is my sibling, the late king will kill him, without a doubt. He is one scary child, and what's even more concerning is that Lilou sees him as a harmless little boy."

"Don't fret, my lady. Her Majesty had this ability to make people want to be a good person."

She looked at him with a smile, closed-lipped. "Well, I'm sure she will put Law under control. Just like how she tamed Hell."

Meanwhile, Fabian was walking away from the sitting room while pushing the food trolley with him. A subtle smile appeared on his lips as the tea went cold already.

"Love..." he muttered, thinking of the conversation between his brother and the love of Rufus' life. "... what a complicated thing."

Chapter 495 - Do You Want To Stay Here Tonight?

When Fabian returned with the tea, he informed them that Lilou put Law to sleep while Samael shared a drink with Klaus and Claude. Since he took his precious time, Silvia and Rufus had already talked about almost everything; varying from the closure of their love to political affairs.

"Fabian, if you are planning to kill me, I'd rather if you took out Maleficent," Rufus voiced out calmly while staring at the tea in front of him. "Or were you trying to insult me by poisoning me?"

"I was told that I have to try peaceful methods first," Fabian explained, bearing the polite smile he had been carrying. Surely, for someone who was caught poisoning someone, he was rather relaxed about it.

"We waited for tea and the tea that arrived is poison. My gosh..." Silvia sighed while shaking her head lightly. When she raised her gaze, she waited for Rufus to look back at her.

"Sir knight, since it already came to this, I won't lag you behind. I'm certain His Majesty is eager to see you."

Rufus nodded as he planted his palm on the armrest, pushing himself up. Silvia also stood from her seat and curtsied.

"It was a good talk," she expressed while Rufus bowed slightly.

"Thank you for humoring me, my lady. I will look forward to the project you told me about."

"I hope it won't disappoint you," she replied before glancing at Fabian. "Even if Sir Knight drinks that tea, it is not enough to kill him. If you are interested, I can recommend you something else."

"There is no need, my lady. I prefer a slow, painful death so I wouldn't get accused of murder."

Silvia chuckled, as she had already figured out Fabian's thinking. The poison was, after all, not deadly if taken once. It should be taken consistently and it would look like the victim would die from a disease.

"Well then, gentlemen. I hope you have fun tonight. You don't have to lead me to my room, I already know my way," she said before leaving the Barret brothers alone.

As Silvia left, Rufus's eyes remained on the door. Fabian arched his brow as he studied his brother's expression.

"Sir Knight, it is very impolite to not drink the tea I brew with all my heart." Fabian urged, making Rufus gaze at him. "I'm sure the little pain from the poison will heal the pain in your heart."

"Fabian, you never changed."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

Rufus let out a shallow breath, staring at Fabian's nonchalant expression. "I'm fine, Fabi. You don't have to worry about me."

"Do you have a problem with your eyesight, Sir Knight? I'm certain the worry in my eyes is because I was wondering if you will drink that or not." Fabian cocked his head to the side, still smiling. "Do you want me to pull your eyes out for a check-up?"

"See? You never changed." Rufus chuckled as he reached for the tea. "It won't hurt you to admit you're worried about me. But that will still feel strange and I might actually feel threatened."

Fabian's smile gradually disappeared, watching Rufus enjoy the poisoned tea. "You are a fool, Ru."

"I never said I am not," Rufus admitted while nodding his head.

"So, you deserve it." The smile on Fabian's face resurfaced once again before pivoting on his heel to walk away. "Wallow in the pain you inflicted upon yourself. I changed my mind. I'd rather see you get eaten by your own regrets than give you a free exit."

Rufus chuckled as he watched Fabian leave. Silence instantly deafened him once the door closed behind his brother.

"Really... he never changed. Instead of consoling his brother, he rubbed salt in my wound." A chuckle escaped his mouth as he glanced at the teacup in his hand. "It's not poisoned. How sly to make her go away. Fabian... were you that disappointed in me? But you never understood the matters of the heart, my brother."

Meanwhile, when Silvia left the room, she looked at the door for a long time. Her eyes softened as she exhaled a deep sigh.

'I did a good job,' she told herself, thinking that saying all those to Rufus was just right. 'This way, he will stop worrying about me and stop blaming himself for what I had become.'

Her lips curled up bitterly before turning around to leave. She had been in this mansion before, so she didn't need to ask to find her room. Silvia waltzed through the hallway with her mind drifting away. Before she knew it, she was already standing in front of a door.

She gazed at it and looked from her left to right. The corridor was empty with only the candelabras burning slowly.

'Why am I in here?' she wondered as she set her eyes back on the corridor. This wasn't her room. This chamber was Yulis's.

She raised a hand, about to knock, when she suddenly stopped. "No," she whispered.

Silvia just stood in front of the door for a very long time, wondering why her feet drag her into this place.

"I'm mad at him and I wanted to smack him in the head, but..." she muttered, letting out a sigh while clasping her skirt. "... I'm a bit sad."

"Never mind." She clicked her tongue as she planned to leave. However, the door suddenly opened from the inside, making her freeze on the spot.

"Silvia?" Yulis called with furrowed brows, holding the door open with his other hand on the jamb. "What are you doing here?"

"I... don't know." She slowly turned her head to him, sporting an awkward smile. He was already in his night attire, telling her he planned to sleep.

"Who about you? Where are you going?" she inquired, and Yulis cocked his head to the side.

"Nowhere. I came out to ask you why are you standing outside my room," he answered in a knowing tone, as it shouldn't be a surprise that he was aware of her presence. He tried to ignore it, but she had been here for quite some time, so he came out.

Silvia stared at him for a moment before taking a step until their toes touched. His brows rose when she suddenly wrapped her arms around his waist, resting her forehead against his chest.

"I told Rufus that I am letting him go. I should be happy about it, but I feel a little sad," she muttered, clasping his shirt on his back. "And yet, I am not sad enough that I want to cry. Lilou is with her son and I don't know anyone who I can talk about this with."

Yulis sighed but smiled subtly right after. In the end, he stroked her head gently.

"What a piece of work, coming to the person who is less affectionate than a cat," he humored while consoling this lady, who never once showed her vulnerability to others.

Silvia opened her eyes as her shoulder relaxed. "You're warm, Yul. Very warm," she said while gripping his clothes even tighter.

"No wonder Beatrice keeps visiting you. You make people want to be themselves without worry," she added under her breath. "I want to be myself for once and breathe, Yulis."

Yulis kept quiet and didn't move a muscle. His expression remained the same while stroking her head gently. He called her once, gazing down, and waited for her to look up. Once their eyes met, a subtle smile appeared on his face.

"Do you want to stay here tonight?"

Chapter 496 - I'm Just Confused?

"Do you want to stay here tonight?"

Silvia let out a soft chuckle and nodded lightly. She didn't think she wanted to be alone tonight, and having some company was what she needed. So Yul welcomed her into his chambers.

Now, the two of them laid down on the bed, staring at the ceiling in silence. Neither of them talked for a long time until Silvia opened her mouth.

"I never asked before, but..." she paused and took a deep breath without casting him a look. "Do you love, Lilou?"

"I do." His answer was quick and without a second thought. "Isn't that obvious?"

"I mean, do you see her as a woman?" this time, she turned her head to the side, studying his side profile. Yulis remained quiet, but his expression didn't change. When he cocked his head to face her, Silvia raised her brows as she anticipated his answer.

"No."

"Are you sure? You never thought that you wished you were Hell? That you wished you are the person holding her hand? Kissing her?"

A slight frown resurfaced in his countenance at her question. "I love Lilou and I will die for her. If she asks me for my arm, I will give it to her. If she wants me to warm her bed, I will. It is a bit complicated. However, my love for her isn't something like that, Silvia. I thought you understand that more than anyone."

He stared at her in silence.

"She is my only blood kin and Lilou was someone who also loved me with all her heart. Although it wasn't romantic, our heart is involved. I don't really care if people misunderstand my affection for her," he added in a low and solemn tone.

"Then why are you explaining now?"

Yulis let out a shallow breath. "Isn't it obvious? There are only a few people whose opinions matter to me. Lilou, Hell, and... yours."

Silvia stared into his eyes, and she couldn't help but sigh. There he was again, she thought. In these five years, she had been exchanging letters with Yulis more than anyone. They even met a few times a year; sometimes, he would visit the east to celebrate her birthday.

These were all normal, as they were closer than anyone. But sometimes, she couldn't help but read too much into things, into his actions, words, and the impression in his eyes. Yulis wasn't that kind of man and she knew that deep down.

"Yul," she called after a moment of silence. "Am I worthy to give half of your life?"

Silvia rolled and laid to her side, propping her temple with her knuckles. Her eyes remained on him while Yulis didn't look away.

"Of course," she already predicted his answer, so she wasn't surprised. Thus, she asked again.

"Why? Is it because I am important to Lilou? Or is it because you lost Cassara that you didn't want to lose another sister?"

This time Yulis remained silent momentarily. A hum slipped past his lips as he peeled his eyes away from her to the ceiling.

"I grew up in the palace with everyone. I've always known I wasn't a La Crox, so I picked up the habit of observing. Watching my siblings; witnessed how Cassara foolishly grew into a pampered princess, how Klaus saw Lucia as a mother figure, Dominique's sympathy for Stefan, Alistair's yearnings for everyone's love, Hell's transition, Hanz slowly get drunk of jealousy and inferiority,

how Dyrroth and Lucia sneak behind everyone's back, and your devotion to the knight Hell brought back with him." He paused to take a break, tracing back his memory lane as a La Crox.

"After observing everyone for a long time, I realized I never had the same look in everyone's eyes. I didn't feel the need to prove myself worthy in the eyes of the late king. All I felt was... sympathy for his children. That you were all trying so hard and did your best, but it was never enough for him."

Yulis slowly set his eyes back to her. He raised his hand while his finger brushed away a few strands from her forehead.

"I always think everyone including, Stefan, Hanz, Alphonse, and Alistair deserved to live. I feel sorry for them that the late king ruined his children," he expressed under his breath as his eyes softened.

"I also think that if the late king showed a bit of appreciation to his children, things won't turn out like this. Dyrroth and Lucia will be great rulers. Alphonse will support them, for sure. Hell will probably still be Hell, but at least he will behave in Grimsbanne. Stefan will surely rule over Monarey with Dominique and Alistair since they look up to him. Hanz will probably find his reasons and deal with his inferiority. Klaus... maybe he will become a knight of Lucia. Cassara will still be alive and is living in luxury, our other brothers and sisters living life a bit happier. Jayden will probably become a scholar or live a vagabond life since he was always curious about the world. And you, Silvia, you, and Rufus will probably have children already."

"If I can save you all, I would've done it." Yulis continued as a subtle smile appeared on his face. "But you're the only one I can, Silvia. I have many regrets, but giving you half of my life is never one of them."

Silvia pressed her lips into a thin line as she gazed down. "So in the end, I really read too much into things."

"You didn't." He shook his head, waiting for her to lift her eyes back to him. "It's just... you feel responsible and think that you owe me anything — you don't. You're just confused, Silvia. Whatever you're feeling about me and about that night, they're not yours. Part of me just lived within you, so seeing me makes you think you are mine. You're not."

The corner of his lips curled up as he ruffled her hair slightly. "You are yours, Silvia. No one owns you but yourself."

"Is that so?" she asked in a weak tone and saw him nod. "I'm just confused?"

"Mhm."

Silvia let out a shallow breath as he retrieved his hand. "But does that mean a part of you wishes I am yours as well?" her question made him freeze momentarily before he laughed.

"No, of course, no...t." His words drifted back into his throat when she suddenly bent over and her lips crashed against his. Yulis's eyes dilated as his back stiffened, blinking in disbelief while she drew her head back.

Her lips pressed together, staring into his dilated eyes. "Did that feel anything, Yul? Did it feel it is out of confusion and...?"

This time, Silvia couldn't finish her sentence as he lifted his head, tilted his head, and claimed her lips. Her eyes softened as they closed, deepening the kiss while he cupped her jaw.

She may be confused about a lot of things and there were a lot of unanswered questions in her head.. She didn't know it all, but what she was certain was her heart had always known what it wanted.

Chapter 497 - Love Guru

After putting Law to sleep, I prepared myself to sleep. I thought Sam would stay with his brothers, but he returned to our chambers earlier than expected.

"You're early, love," I pointed out, watching him drag his feet towards our bed. I rolled to my side as he snuck inside the quilt and laid beside me.

"I'd rather spend more time with you than them," he murmured, moving closer to me as he embraced my waist. "This is better."

A subtle smile appeared on my lips, sniffing his argent hair that had a smell of subtle floral scent. "You're such a baby."

"I know, wife. But please, don't tell anyone." I chuckled at his response. Sam gazed up and smiled, moving up until we're at eye level.

"My love," he whispered as he leaned his face forward, but I stopped him by putting my finger in front of his lips. An instant frown replaced his smug grin. I knew what he wanted to do, as we never had a break every night.

"I need to store my stamina for our son's birthday. I want it to be perfect," I explained, hoping he would understand my reasons. "We've been too active and we need to miss each other."

"But I miss you every second of every day. The only time I don't is when I'm with you," he argued with a frown, making me let out a sigh. "I already told you, wife. I love you more than one second ago."

"Yes, yes. I know my husband's love for me, but still no." I clicked my tongue before he reluctantly drew his head back.

"I'm doing so much sacrifice for our son and that little brat doesn't appreciate his father," came out a complaint as he ground his teeth. "Do you know what he told me today when I called him to my office?"

"What?"

"That you are his alone. He will never share his mother with his father!" Sam uttered in distress while I laughed at his reaction. "I want another child that looks exactly like you. Whenever I see Law, I feel like I'm staring in the mirror."

His last remark made me burst out in laughter. That was a fact. Law and Sam looked so similar in appearance and shared a lot of similar habits. The only thing Law got from me was the color of his eyes.

"Wife, this is not a laughing matter. Law needs a baby brother or sister." I slapped his chest lightly at his suggestions. "Come on, love! Law makes my stress level increase! Fabian's wisdom doesn't help too!"

"It's your fault, but well..." A shallow sigh slipped past my lips as we couldn't do anything about this now, could we? Fabian was already part of this family.

"Once you came back from the capital, let's try, okay?"

"Really?" His face brightened up while I nodded in reassurance.

"Really. For now, we just have to make sure our son's birthday will be perfect." This time, I leaned forward and placed a peck on his lips to placate him. "Everyone is already here, so let's all have fun."

"Right... we'll have fun for sure." He rolled his eyes while I clicked my tongue, slapping his chest once again. "Whatever," he added.

Sam then slid his arm under my neck and moved even closer. Naturally, I met him halfway and embraced him.

"So peaceful," came out a whisper with a subtle smile. "Back then, every time I sleep, I always wonder what sort of surprise I'd get the next day. But now, things had truly changed."

"It's quite a predictable life now, don't you think?" he replied in a coarse voice while stroking my back.

"Mhm. Do you hate it?"

Sam didn't reply immediately. "No. It is boring, but there were things to look forward to as well."

"I know, right?" I chuckled softly, breathing in and out in relief. "The things to look forward to is our breakfast, our little family tea time, what happens to the book I am reading, where you'd suddenly appear, the matters of the estate, and Adam's letters. How about you?"

"The same." He kept his answer short and simple, but I knew he was sincere. "Except for whatever argument, Law will come up the next day."

"Well, I guess he will be a bit busy with Rufus around."

"Hopefully." Sam hummed, and we remained silent for a long time. He gazed up at me and furrowed his brows.

"What are you thinking so suddenly?" he asked, out of plain curiosity.

"Well, it's just Yul and Silvia. They suddenly crossed my head," I confessed, and that seemed to pique his interest as he looked at me curiously. So I explained.

"Earlier, during our tea time, they talked about marriage for convenience. I'm worried about the two of them. I wonder if Silvia will change her mind in marrying Yulis once she sees Rufus again."

"Why would she change her mind just after meeting Rufus?" my brows furrowed at this strange question.

"What do you mean? Silvia and Rufus used to be lovers. I know she loved Rufus with all her heart, but things went south. I hope they reconcile."

"My love, even if they reconcile, that doesn't mean they should be together again," Sam imparted his wisdom, which I already knew about. But there was still a part of me that hoped Silvia and

Rufus could patch things up. Silvia seemed to still hold feelings for Rufus with her reaction earlier, after all. She wouldn't be annoyed at Yul if she didn't.

Sam stared at me for a moment before cupping my cheek. "You are so faithful, my wife. Will you ever love another man if I hurt you?"

"You already did in the past, though."

"Well, make sense, but that doesn't what I meant. Silvia and Rufus used to be so innocent and so carefree, but the place they were running wild wasn't. The scar they left to each other is too deep, Lilou."

A frown resurfaced on my face. "So, are you saying Silvia and Rufus shouldn't be together again?"

"If they want to, I don't have any say in it. But I don't think they are foolish enough to do that. I'm not an expert, but they know that their love only brings out the worst in them. Lilou, sometimes, being friends is better than being more than that." Sam smiled, closed-lipped. "Of course, that doesn't apply to us."

"That makes me more worried." I sighed once again. "That only means Silvia will surely marry Yul for convenience."

"Huh? Are you sure it is out of convenience?"

"What do you mean?"

Sam narrowed his eyes as he scrutinized me. "What I mean is, nothing will bend Yulis and Silvia if they already decided not to touch that area. Those two are close, so it's not really a surprise if they somehow develop feelings for each other. Blood-related or not, it doesn't really matter to us."

"But..."

"Lilou," Sam's voice grew solemn as he looked at me in the eye for a moment. "Sometimes, we don't really know that the people that are meant for us had been around us all along. We will not realize that until our hearts pulsate differently whenever they are around."

"Tch. You just said you are not an expert in this area, but you talk like a love guru."

"I am not." Sam shrugged as he pulled me closer to him. "I'm simply speaking from experience. After all, I never know I love you until I laid my eyes on you and felt my dead heart beat for the first time. The situation might be different, but I know the realization will be the same for everyone."

"Oh, Sam..."

"So, if Yul and Silvia ended up realizing their hearts, will you interfere with their happiness?"

I kept quiet for a long time before closing my eyes. "Never.. I just want them to be happy, that's all."

Chapter 498 - Auspicious Occasion

Finally, Law's birthday celebration arrived. I had been busier the past few days for the final touches to the banquet. It was the grandest I had ever hosted in my entire life, so I wanted it to be perfect. Silvia and Yul helped me with a few things and even suggested ideas to make it even perfect.

Meanwhile, Law had been busy with Rufus — inciting jealousy from Fabian. The reason I secretly told Ramin and Charlotte to keep a close watch in the garden, just in case Rufus would wake up buried six feet under the ground. So far, though, Rufus was safe and had been humoring Law.

Thanks to that, I had more time to spare. Claude and Klaus would sometimes spar with Rufus to gain my son's affection as well. I heard Fabian also volunteered, but Law forbid him saying 'he would get hurt.'

Sam, on the other hand, was too busy with the matters of the empire and his business in the south. Although he would spring up out of nowhere, having Silvia and Yul on my side lessened the scare I got.

There were also some matters I settled with the local noble ladies, but Bey helped me. My life was all perfect and our estate was livelier than it ever become. Adam also said he would attend — he was the person who offered the venue for my son's birthday owned by the Crowell. Jaime Malum also approved of this; he only did because he knew about Sam, though.

"I'm nervous," I voiced out with mixed emotions, staring in the mirror after Bey helped me doll up. "I hope everyone will like this banquet."

"With Madam's effort, I'm certain everyone will appreciate this event," Bey reassured as she stood not far away from me. I turned around and scrutinized her. She was beautiful, and I couldn't help but smile brighter.

"You look lovely, Bey." She blushed and lowered her head at my compliment. "You should always keep your chin up, Bey."

I walked towards her and stopped a step away. I held her hand and gazed up, smiling subtly. Bey had been a great help to me more than I helped her. She might think otherwise, but the comfort she had in this manor was nothing compared to her efforts.

"Yes, Madam," came out a weak reply. Bey was always the shy lady who blushes too often after one simple compliment. Gosh... I was surrounded by good people and the more I thought about it, the more I appreciated it.

KNOCK KNOCK!

I shifted my eyes towards the door and saw it open, revealing a dashing man in a grey formal suit. The side of his hair was neatly tucked back while the rest was kept loose, but not in complete disarray. We agreed to wear lighter colors for a friendlier look, but Sam's choice of clothes looked a bit gloomy. But well, his face made up for that. Whoever helped him surely did a great job, as Sam looked more refined while maintaining his arrogant aura.

"Well, look at that," he said, examining me from head to toe with a smirk. "Whose wife is this gorgeous lady? Can I marry you?"

Sam spread his arms wide as he strutted towards me, making me roll my eyes. I knew if he came too close, all these clothes would end up on the floor.

I planted my palm on his chest to stop him. "You look gorgeous, but we have a banquet to host." My brow rose as I smiled, giving him a knowing look.

A frown instantly dominated his face. "I know... I just wanted a kiss."

"Bey is still here." I glanced at Bey and she already had her head hung low. Her ears were red, and I knew she wasn't still used to my husband's shamelessness to show his affection even with many eyes around.

"Oh, come on, Bey! You should get used to it by now!" Sam complained while I chuckled as Bey raised her head, showing her red face. "You're looking at a happily married couple, so it should be fine!"

"Ma — master... how can I..."

"If you don't get used to it, my wife will always keep herself modest in the eyes of the public when, in fact, she --"

"Sam." The side of my lips stretched into a smile until my eyes squinted. "When, in fact, what?"

He pressed his lips together and laughed awkwardly. "When, in fact, that is true."

"Sam, you play too much." I slapped his chest and clicked my tongue. "We should go. We can't let everyone wait."

"Sure, my love." Sam nodded and offered his arm to me. "Shall we?"

"Yes." My smile reached my eyes this time as I hooked my arms around his. We headed out with Bey following behind us and soon reached the mansion's foyer.

The first people I saw were Claude and Klaus talking, or rather, they seemed they were arguing. Silvia and Yul were also there, but they weren't talking as they watched Claude and Klaus. Rufus stood next to Law, while Fabian was standing behind them.

"Lilou!" Kristina, who arrived the next day Rufus arrived, waved her hand. She was already in a beautiful dress. Even though her hair was surprisingly short, Kristina looked stunning. She would make men and ladies fall for her.

When Kristina called me, every one of them turned their head in our direction. Sam and I walked down the stairs carefully until we reached them. My smile grew brighter, scanning the smiles on their faces.

'It's been a while since we all gathered like this.' I thought as I squeezed Sam's arm. 'I hope they will also enjoy it because this party was not just for Law. This was also a celebration of the end of my slumber, our reunion, and to all the merits they achieved throughout these five years.'

"You look dazzling!" Kristina expressed, gazing at everyone as they nodded in agreement.

"Goodness. You flatter me. You all look dashing and stunning," I replied in all honesty, and Kristina laughed loudly as if she was taunting someone. My gaze followed where she was looking and caught Charlotte among the maids.

I bit my tongue, seeing the murderous intent in Charlotte's eyes. I invited Charlotte, but Sam told her not to attend. Ramin as well. That was because they were workers in the estate and it would incite favoritism and raise suspicion. Bey was a different case, though. So those two right and left hands of the emperor will attend as servants. I felt bad for them.

I shrugged that off as I gazed down at Law. "My son, come here." I offered my hand.

Law jogged towards me and held my hand, smiling brightly at me. "Mother."

"Happy birthday, my son," I greeted in a soft voice, and his cheek turned pinkish. He was so adorable.

I looked up at everyone, keeping my smile. "Sam and I might become busy later, so I want to tell you I am so glad that you all came. I hope you enjoy this night."

"My wife had put her heart and soul in this banquet. Don't you dare complain," Sam backed me up, but his latter remarks were really unnecessary.

"We're already glad that we're invited to this auspicious occasion," Claude voiced out and everyone nodded. I looked at them for a moment with a light smile.

"Then shall we head to the venue?"

Chapter 499 - [Bonus]I Love Myself When I'm With You

After our little talk in the mansion's foyer, we all prompted to our carriage. Obviously, Sam, Law, and I rode in the same carriage. Ramin stood as our carriage's coachman just so he would have a reason to be there. Bey used a different carriage with Charlotte and a few maids that were tasked to watch over Law in the party.

Claude and Klaus used their own carriage, saying the Earl of Monarey was only comfortable to use that. Silvia and Yul also shared the same ride. The more I thought about it, Silvia had been smiling a lot lately but she would only say she was happy at the peacefulness in the south. So I didn't think too much about it.

Just like Yulis and Silvia, Rufus and Kristina shared the same carriage, although they weren't partners in the banquet. I was certain the two of them had to talk a lot about the internal and external affairs of the empire. Since Rufus had been spending most of his time with Law, he would use this opportunity to work on important matters.

"You look very happy." Sam snapped me out of my thoughts. I looked at him from across from me and then down at Law, who sat beside me.

"Of course. Everyone is here to celebrate our son's birthday." I placed my hand on Law's head as a subtle smile appeared on my lips. "I wish everyone will forget about their worries and loosen up a bit."

"Mother, I know this will be a fun night." Law grinned until his eyes squinted. He had become sweeter; probably it had something to do with spending less time with me.

"Your son is right. This will be a very fun night because you put your heart and soul into it." Sam nodded reassuringly, crossing his arms while leaning back.

"I hope."

Meanwhile, in Silvia and Yulis' carriage. Silence reigned between the two of them as they sat across from each other. Yulis had his eyes on the window while she was just staring at him.

"You have said nothing to me since earlier." She broke the silence when she couldn't take it anymore. Yulis peeled his eyes away from the window and set them on her.

"You already know you're beautiful."

"I know, but it will make me happy if it came from your lips." She frowned, glaring at him. After that night, the two of them agreed to try if the two of them could work. There wasn't much change in him since he was still less affectionate, but that was because they had been too comfortable with each other that the development of their relationship felt a little strange.

Yulis cocked his head to the side. "Do you still need to be validated by others?"

"Gosh..." Silvia rolled her eyes, as that wasn't the case. "Just how hard it is for you to compliment me? I know I am beautiful, but even if the entire empire tells me I am, it will still feel different if it came from you."

"Why is it different?"

"Because..." she took a deep and huffed, looking away. "Never mind, then. You're abnormal with eye problems. That is why you can't say such things to people. That's right."

Silvia convinced herself why Yulis wouldn't compliment her. The latter, however, smirked playfully, hearing how she was insulting him just to convince herself.

"You look stunning, Silvia," she halted when Yulis praised her. She slowly set her eyes back to him, catching the gentle smile plastered on his face.

"When I saw you earlier, I had a hard time controlling myself from kissing you." He leaned back, patting the empty side of his seat. "And to think that a gorgeous lady only wants my compliment is more than flattering. Come. I want to see you up close."

Her lips pressed into a thin line, clearing her throat to suppress herself from smiling like a fool. She raised her hand to him and pretended his words did not move her at all.

"Help me," she requested, and he chuckled. Yulis clasped her hand and assisted her to change her seat. But just as she stood, Yulis suddenly yanked her to his lap, and she clutched his shoulder on instinct.

"Yul!" she intoned, with eyes dilating. But his eyes drooped dangerously as the side of his lips curled into a mischievous smirk. He glanced at the curtain and with a finger, he slid it open.

"Yul, what are you..." she trailed off, blinking at the road outside. Although it was dark and there weren't people outside, if anyone appeared, they would see them clearly.

"Does it bother you?" he asked, tilting his head back while waiting for her to look back at him. "If anyone sees, will that bother you?"

Silvia bit her lower lips before shaking her head. "Of course not."

"Then, that's settled. Sit here." His knuckles brushed her arm lightly while his other hand that was wrapped around her waist stilled her. "It's better this way, don't you think?"

"Yul..." Silvia lowered her head as she wanted to hide her flustered face. Ever since that night, Yulis does things that often catch her off guard. Her favorite among them was when he would sneak a kiss when no one was looking.

"You make me feel young again," she whispered, wrapping her arm around his neck and burying her face in them. "My heart will explode if you keep doing this."

"I should be the one who should be surprised. I expected you to be someone who will dominate me, not the other way around." He humored with a chuckle, raising a brow as he glanced at her. "But you still look cute when flustered. It makes me want to tease you more."

"I hate you," came out a muffled protest, but Yulis laughed even more. "Stop laughing, Yul. It's not funny."

"Alright, alright. You're so spoiled."

Silvia slowly drew her head back and stared into his pair of playful eyes. "I never thought I'll ever be this happy again, nor did it ever occur to me we'll look at each other this way. But you make me happy and make me love myself more."

"I love myself when I am with you, Yul," she added as the side of her lips curled up into a subtle smile.

His brows rose as the smirk on his face subsided and was replaced by a faint smile. He cupped her cheek, caressing it with his thumb.

"You will hate me, Silvia.." His smile remained as he lifted his head, claiming her lips and expressing his heart in their kiss.

Chapter 500 - Not As Sad As Him

"So, you're saying you hitched with us because Rufus broke the carriage for you?" Klaus inquired at Fabian for clarity. The latter, who sat across from him and beside Claude, nodded.

Klaus scratched his temple with his index finger as he felt his head throb. "You realized I had been avoiding you and Rufus on purpose, right?"

"Yes, but I don't avoid you," Fabian replied in a knowing tone, turning his head to Claude. "His Lordship is alright with it, so it doesn't really matter what you say."

"You can always tag along, Mister Fabian." Claude smiled politely. "Besides, this brings us to old times back in the west garden. Uncle Klaus should be more open about his embarrassing past."

"Embarrassing past? Hah! My liege, even if Fabian and I spar today, I don't mind. If only Lilou didn't put her heart and soul in this banquet, I don't mind pushing this man to his own grave tonight," Klaus scorned as he glowered at Claude and Fabian. These two despicable people...

"Lilou always says it's because I raised you that you turn out like this. When, in fact, it's because you idolized this demon and he had influenced you long before I did!"

"Your Highness, don't make it sound like it is a bad thing." Fabian sighed, disheartened at these 'unjust' accusations.

"It's a bad thing!" Klaus exclaimed as he panted, almost rendered speechless at Fabian's shamelessness. "I'm already scared what Law will become once he grows older!"

"Uncle, you think too much about my cousin's future. You only need to be afraid if you touch his bottom lines like His and Her Majesty." Claude chuckled calmly, shaking his head as everyone seemed to worry about Law growing up. Although this was their first time meeting Law, they already sized him up.

"For a child, my cousin is already dangerous, but..." he paused and gazed at Fabian solemnly. "... Law is also in danger, Fabian."

Fabian pressed his lips together and gazed down. There wasn't much any change in his expression, but the air inside the carriage thickened.

"Five years ago, Her Majesty's existence threatened people and what she can do. Especially with His Majesty's support," he said, not denying Claude's remarks.

"But now, those two had a son. So, of course, not just his blood, but Law's mere existence was a threat to those in the mainland." Claude's eyes remained at Fabian as he added, "You and Charlotte visited the mainland, didn't you? I am not surprised that you two came back alive, but I'm certain you know a thing or two of their opinions about Law."

Fabian kept quiet as he set his eyes on the window. "Their opinions... doesn't matter. Unless they touch my young master, then we will have a problem."

"Damn, Fabian... you're fucking scary, man." Klaus awed and clapped, sensing the murderous intent leaking from Fabian's body.

"Sadly, my cousin sees you are a pushover and Rufus bullies you because of it." Claude shrugged as he leaned back comfortably. "What a sad life, Mister Fabian."

"Life had always been sad, but I am not as sad as him." Fabian averted his eyes from the window to the carriage floor. There, a barely conscious and bleeding man was lying on the floor between them. He wasn't tied because there was no need to; his limbs were severely cut open.

Fabian stepped on the man's head, inciting a grunt from him. "No wonder you kept insisting on using your own carriage. You were torturing a man to kill time."

"Don't make it sound like we're lunatics like you." Klaus clicked his tongue as he kicked the man on the floor lightly. "This pathetic fool attempted to assassinate the Earl on our way here. His companions were already dancing in hell, but we're keeping him alive to get information."

"If you're wondering how come we can't retrieve his memories through his blood, apparently, there were no memories," Claude explained even before Fabian could ask. "We already informed His Majesty about this, and he simply told us he'll have a friendly chat with him once he's not busy anymore."

"He doesn't have a memory? Or it's his ability to lock away crucial information?" Fabian mumbled while rubbing his chin.

"It can also be a third party's ability," Klaus added with a shrug. "Who knows? But I am certain these people are a pain in the neck. They managed to force me to draw my sword."

"That is embarrassing, your highness."

"Come on, Fabian. I am a knight and drawing my sword is not something to be ashamed of!" Klaus ground his teeth as Fabian's gaze felt more demeaning than his words.

"Either way, that only means it is only a matter of time before a large-scale war will break out." Claude's voice was low and solemn, staring at the person on the floor with narrowed eyes. "The Spade is already on the move and, according to His Majesty, Auntie Lilove was certain Stefan was

there that night five years ago. We already consider the small possibility that Quentin and Stefan joined hands, but if they really made an alliance, then..."

Claude trailed off as he raised his gaze up at the two. "They will kill Law for sure. The last thing we all want is those two getting the support from the mainland."

"A battalion that consists of turned vampires, undead, and purebloods, huh?" Fabian muttered as he leaned back, considering the worst enemies of the empire.

There was a long, suffocating silence after Fabian's remarks as their mood turned dark. Unlike how Lilou perceived their peaceful life, behind the scenes were the complete opposite. While she busied herself in this banquet, she had no idea that the people around her had to take lives for the bigger problem that was brewing.

"He can't have a peaceful life just yet." Klaus broke the silence while staring into the man he was stepping on. "Hell is a good liar, but he can't hide this from Lilou or from Law forever. If he put down his guard even just for a second, he'll lose his wife and son.. I'll kill him if that happens."