

The Duke 681

Chapter 681 Emotional damage

Lilou felt helpless when Rufus dragged her with him. How could she fight him even when she was yelling while he carried her on his shoulder like a sack? No amount of pounding on his back and struggling helped her.

And so, she found herself inside an estate she didn't know where in the world was. Sitting in the lobby with her arms crossed, her frown grew worse.

"I'm not rich." She broke the silence, darting her eyes at the people inside this mansion's lobby. Lilou was sitting on the long settee. Her eyes first landed on the woman drinking tea on the armchair, and then they veered to the man standing near the woman's seat.

She could tell he was some butler by his clothes and demure. She cringed when he smiled at her with squinting eyes. Lilou then glanced at the person entering the main entrance and her frown grew uglier. It was that man who abducted her.

Sensing the glare from his side, Rufus arched a brow as he glanced in Lilou's direction. He pressed his lips into a thin line, feeling this familiar hostility because Lilou never liked him from the beginning as well. It was not like he could blame her in both lifetimes.

It was just that their first meetings always started on a grim note. He didn't know why, but the situation had always been like that between the two of them. Rufus tossed this brief thought at the back of his head as he marched towards the window. He leaned against the jamb, arms crossed, staring outside to see any strange movements.

"You won't gain anything from me," she added when all she received was silence.

"You are everything we need, my lady." Lilou gazed at the butler with an ugly frown. "My name is Fabian, and I am glad to see you again."

"Again?" she arched a brow before they creased. "You know me?"

"We used to live in the same house and you always brew me cold tea." This time, Tilly also spoke without much change in her expression. "You were bad at it at first."

Lilou's expression contorted as she darted her eyes between Fabian and Tilly. She ignored Rufus since he didn't seem interested in joining the conversation. If Stefan kept her in the dark about the reversal of time, she would think these people were unhinged. But... she already knew about it.

The only question was, were they truly friend just as they claimed? Or foes? Like those people, Stefan told her about?

"My lady, do not fret. We do not mean harm." Fabian reassured upon noticing the doubt in her eyes, chuckling as it amused him how Lilou was too different from before. She used to be a little silly but showed significant progress the more she learned things.

"It seemed His Majesty truly changed his decision this time," he added, warranting a question from her.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked almost innocently. "What do you mean, Lexx changed his decision this time?"

Fabian, although a little taken aback by her inquiry, kept his smile intact. He simply glanced at Rufus and then at Tilly before setting his eyes back to Lilou.

"It's not my place to speak further, my lady. My apologies." He tilted his head down slightly.

His response caused her lips to purse into a thin line. It bothered her. That single sentence raised too many questions in her head since she had been wondering about her relationship with Stefan. Deep in her heart, she knew her relationship with Stefan was more complicated than she thought, but just how complicated was it? It was something she hadn't measured yet.

"If we used to live together..." Lilou spoke once again when she recovered her voice, raising her eyes at Fabian and Tilly. "... does that mean I also used to live with that man?"

"You mean the person who ordered Sir Knight to bring you to this abandoned estate?" asked Fabian, still bearing his smile with eyes unseen as they were barely slits. Lilou nodded profusely and watched him chuckle with his lips closed.

"Yes, my lady." He nodded, glancing at Tilly's side. "We all used to live together in another land — not Grimsbanne. We all lived in Lady Tilly's house."

"Huh?" Lilou looked at Tilly, but as usual, she didn't have a change of reaction.

"My lady, I know you are keen and by now, you probably guessed who we are and who is that man you were talking about," Fabian stressed since it appeared to him Lilou denied her own conclusions. She had this bad habit of denying things when they were too confusing or tough to accept.

"No." Just as he thought, Lilou was in denial. "I don't have any idea of who you people are. Your name doesn't ring a bell."

"Of course, since your memory is wiped out." Tilly chimed in, giving her a knowing look. "It'll be more odd and disappointing if you simply accept things because that means you're dumb."

Lilou frowned while Fabian chuckled because Tilly surely never filter her words. But that was right. They already expected the worst even before they set off to the Karo Kingdom. Lilou's reaction was still a little mild than what they all expected since she wasn't throwing a huge fit.

"That man, Samael, is your husband. I am his auntie, he is the head butler of the manor, and him..." Tilly pointed at Rufus and then cocked her head to the side. "... your eldest son."

"What?" Lilou gasped. The husband part didn't shock her since she was aware she had a husband, but a son this old?! Lilou looked at Rufus, wide-eyed until the latter couldn't ignore her gaze as he clicked his tongue and cast her a blank look.

"It's a long story, but that's your relationship with us." Tilly added.

Lilou scoffed as she held her breath, gazing back at Tilly, who kept a straight face despite saying all that.

"That can't be," she laughed weakly, failing to notice that the door was opening from the outside. "I don't think I have a son that old and a husband like him!"

"Why is that?" Tilly tilted her head to the side, curious about why Lilou seemed very convinced of her claim.

"Because —" Lilou took a deep breath as she recalled Samael's face. "He — he's not my type."

"..."

Chapter 682 I want to go home

"He — he's not my type."

The door that was opening stopped as Lilou's voice echoed across the entire lobby. Tilly, Fabian, and even Rufus could only look at her with conflict, rendered speechless by her claim. Rufus, who was standing by the window, glanced at the door and nearly cringed.

Lilou huffed as she lowered her eyes, fidgeting with her fingers nervously. After a minute of nothing but silence, she glanced at Tilly and Fabian. The latter's eyes even showed and his smile finally came off of his face.

"My..." Fabian was the first to recover from his shock, snapping his eyes at the door. "That is quite the blow."

"You just killed Samael a hundred times." Tilly also voiced out, gazing at the ajar door.

Their shift of attention forced Lilou to follow the direction they were looking at. Her eyes slowly dilated as her breath hitched, seeing the shadow stretching from outside through the short gap in the door.

"I didn't know that's what you felt back then," Rufus mumbled as he looked away, pursing his lips into a thin line to suppress the laughter, tempting to escape his mouth. He knew he shouldn't be laughing, but he couldn't help it. Lilou's reasoning was hilarious and not a single one of them had ever thought Lilou would say such a claim.

"Hold your laughter Rufus until you die." A minute had passed and Samael's dark voice reached everyone's ears, followed by the loud creak from the door as he entered the mansion. His eyes glinted as he set them to Fabian.

"You too, Fabian. If I hear even the slightest giggle, that'll be your last."

Fabian bit his tongue as he lowered his eyes, pressing his wrist, which was behind him, to stop himself from laughing. Meanwhile, Tilly looked at Samael as if he wronged her.

"What about me, Samael?" she pointed at herself. "Won't you warn me as well? I feel left out."

"How I wish I can, Tilly, but you don't know how to laugh." Samael waved as he faced them, letting out a deep exhale as he set his eyes on his wife. He placed his hand on his hips, sighing once again.

Now that she mentioned it, he couldn't help but wonder. Was that the reason Lilou kept refusing his proposal in the past? Although he knew it was because of their racial difference, he never actually thought Lilou didn't like his face.

"Where's my son?" he asked, glancing at Fabian. The latter cleared his throat before he replied.

"He is resting, Your Grace, since it was quite a journey," Fabian explained and his response was enough for Samael to know his son had yet to meet his mother. It was for the better, though. Lilou still didn't know them and it would be hurtful to Law, knowing how emotional he could be.

"Rest for tonight." Samael waved.

"What about Prince Heliot?" asked Rufus almost instantly to confirm what he had already guessed.

"He is busy dealing with Zero's men." Samael glanced over his shoulder. "He'll deal with Tilly later."

"Well, it can't be helped since we were running out of time." Fabian rocked his head since it was easier to deal with powerhouses like Heliot if Tilly handled them.

With that being said, Fabian gestured for Tilly to rise from her seat, which she did. She glanced at him and nodded before leaving the lobby without a word aside from that ringing bell tied around her white hair. Fabian offered Lilou a smile as he cleaned the coffee table and placed all the untouched snacks and teas back on the trolley tray nearby.

When he was done, Fabian walked away while pushing the trolley. Rufus, on the other hand, didn't move from his leaning position, eyes outside the window.

As everyone left except Rufus, Lilou kept her mouth shut and eyes on Samael. The latter was also staring at her with his hands still on his lap.

"Let's talk, Love," he suggested gently — almost begging her to listen. "I know you have a lot of questions —"

"I do have questions," she replied even before he could finish his sentence. "But they were questions I didn't want answers to... at least, not for now."

Lilou slowly rose from her seat and held her chin up. "I already know you're the Duke of Grimsbanne, the third prince of the Heart's Kingdom, the future Emperor of the Empire, and... my husband, in a few years." She gripped her hand to stop it from shaking, keeping her false bravado as she stood on her ground.

"You might know me and we might've shared things — genuine and happy things, memories. But I don't recall any of those." She breathed out as she lowered her eyes. "I might have been happy during those times, but those times... that person in your memory is not the current me. Right now, I only know your name and a little bit of your story, nothing else."

"I might regret all these words in the future, but I am not your wife right now," she added, which felt like knives in her ears as she felt another pain in her heart while speaking her honest thoughts aloud. Still, she ignored it as she mustered her courage to draw the lines.

"Please, let me go home." She pleaded as she bowed, hoping he would listen to her despite slamming him down even before they could talk. "And let me live my life the way I want it, not the way you remembered it."

Samael's face crumbled, watching her bow at him as she requested what she wanted. He had always known Lilou was stubborn and it would be a problem. Not because he knew it was hard for her to believe him, but the problem would arise if she requested something like this.

He loved her to the point he couldn't say no to her. Even if her request would devastate him, he wouldn't say no.

"Lilou," he breathed out, taking a step but stopping when she raised her head. Her eyes were clear and determined, staring at him straight in the eye.

"Please. If I am truly important to you and you truly know who I was, you will understand me," she continued, swallowing down the frustrating tension in her throat. "I want to go home."

Chapter 683 Not her home

"I want to go home."

Lilou bit her tongue as soon as the last syllable left her lips. She knew this man wanted things from her, but she wasn't ready for it. It was easier to accept Stefan because of the current state she was in when he appeared. But she was no longer alone now.

For her, she didn't need anyone right now. She was content and happy. Even though Stefan wasn't the man, she would think she would ever marry. All she needed was a company, and he gave that to her. She needed time to take everything in.

Still, deep down, she also thought this was a futile attempt. She heard rumors about the duke and he wasn't the person to mess with. If he said, "no," she wouldn't be surprised and only hope to escape.

That was why when the quiet, "sure," left his lips, her brows furrowed. Lilou momentarily doubted her ears, but there was no way she heard him wrong since it was too clear.

"Rufus, take Lilou back to the estate where she and Stefan are staying." Samael kept his eyes on her as he gave his order to Rufus, who was still leaning against the jamb of the window. "If that is what you want, Lilou. I won't force you to stay but... I hope you give me a chance."

Lilou blinked twice, and she only snapped back to reality when Rufus was already by the door. She glanced at him and saw Rufus looking back at her as if waiting for her.

"You won't strike me once I'm not looking, right?" she blurted out, covering her lips a second later. Her shaking eyes caught Samael chuckled bitterly as he shook his head.

"I wish." Samael tipped his head in Rufus's direction. "He will take you there safely."

"Oh..." Lilou cleared her throat as she cautiously side-stepped her way towards the door, keeping her eyes on Samael, just in case. She only sighed in relief when she was near the entrance, and Rufus opened it wide.

"This way, my lady." Rufus motioned his hand, but instead of waiting for her, he left the entrance with the door wide open. Lilou, who was following behind him, stopped and looked back when Samael spoke.

"I missed you, Lilou." Her heart tightened as soon as her eyes fell on that longing in his eyes. "I'll visit you tomorrow. Take care on your way."

Lilou pursed her lips and bowed without saying a word before following Rufus. Her heart felt heavy as the distance between him and Samael grew deeper. Yet, she forced her feet to walk forth without looking back.

Meanwhile, Samael stood in the same spot for a long time. He kept his eyes on her back while the door creaked on its own, blinking when it shut closed.

'I want to go home.' Those words that left her lips so easily were like sharp daggers stabbing him right through his chest. They used to say they were each other's home, but now... Samael heard something from within him break. His jaw tightened at the frustrating tension building up in his throat.

"I want to go home too, love," came out a whisper, balling his hand into a fist to remind himself to be strong. "We will go home soon... I promise."

Samael couldn't blame Lilou if she was being so stubborn. Lilou was the person who disliked not having control over her life. She was the person who never believed someone's words so easily. It had always been like that.

Wasn't that the reason she never believed him in the past even when he confessed his feelings from the get-go?

He had already known Lilou wouldn't just mindlessly accept him with open arms. She was silly, but she wasn't that foolish. Lilou would deny, deny, and deny things. All he could do was show his sincerity and hope he could capture her heart once again.

He had already seen this coming — starting over again — it was still hurtful. While his love just grew deeper, Lilou was back to scratch. And this time, he wasn't confident anymore.

He was... scared.

What if her heart would change? What if, with the reversal of time, she would change? Thus, the outcome would turn? He couldn't force her if that was her decision... even if it would devastate him and kill him while he still breathe.

Meanwhile...

Lilou glanced at Rufus, who sped away with the horse they rode to the estate where she was staying with Stefan. They didn't talk throughout the journey, and right after she stood outside the gates of the estate, Rufus immediately took off.

"What a strange night," she mumbled, raising her skirt as she entered the small gate. As she gazed up at the mansion from a walking distance with a short driveway, a deep exhale escaped her mouth.

"What a strange man," she added, marching towards the estate in silence.

Her steps slowed down as the look in Samael's eyes hovered over her head. No word or a sound came out of her mouth until she stopped under the portico of the mansion and gazed at the shut doors for minutes.

Creak...

The door opened from the inside slowly, and its creak sounded overly loud in her ears. It only opened slightly and a figure immediately turned up by the door. The second she locked eyes with Stefan, a tear suddenly rolled down her cheek.

She didn't know why, but somehow, her tears wouldn't stop staining her cheeks. Not that she tried to wipe it. Lilou and Stefan simply stared at each other for minutes before he decided to walk out. When he stood in front of her, his eyes flickered with bitterness as he wiped her tears.

"This... is not your home, Lilou," he whispered bitterly, not surprised she was back in this place, knowing her personality. "Your mind may not remember him, but your heart does."

"I..." she hiccuped, clutching his chest as she hung her head low. Tears dropped on the floor, clinging to him as this crippling pain in her heart was unspeakable. It was as if a part of her had just died.

"... feel lost."

Chapter 684 Old habits Lilou wasn't testing Samael when she asked him to let her go. She deeply wanted to go home. But when she stood in front of the mansion where she had been staying for months and saw Stefan, one thing came clear.

She wasn't home.

This house and this man weren't what she thought she wanted to go to. They weren't the ones she meant when she said she wanted to go home. Although Stefan was an important person to her, he wasn't her home.

But that made her even more confused because she didn't understand her heart. Lilou was the person who would always listen to her heart and even wore it to her sleeve. But somehow, her heart was speaking a language that was alien to her and it was tearing her apart.

She felt sad the more she thought about Samael, but she just couldn't simply smile at him and embrace him with open arms. It felt like she was cheating and deceiving herself. Lilou couldn't do that to herself. She just couldn't charge head-on into something without thinking about it at least once.

Going with the flow... had always been her life. Lilou just gained control over her life, and she didn't want to lose it. It felt like she would lose a part of her if she just went with the flow... but it also felt the same by denying Samael. She felt like she had lost a part of her.

Lilou had thought about it all night. She barely had sleep, trying to stop her tears that were coming from an unknown source. But she just couldn't make up her mind overnight. Her feelings weren't a switch she could turn on and off easily.

So, even when the people she met last night were already in this mansion, she was still undecided.

"Good morning, my lady." Fabian greeted as he served food at the dining table. Lilou stood by the entrance, darting her puffy eyes at the people sitting around the table.

Stefan was sitting on the head seat, in his usual spot, enjoying a cup of coffee. On the first seat on his left was Tilly. She was already snacking some grapes without a care in the world. And then, her eyes fell on the person sitting on Stefan's right.

Samael.

"Good morning," Samael greeted with an indifferent air around him. "Your eyes were swollen. Are you alright?"

"Uh." Lilou instinctively covered her eyes by placing her hands over her brows. "Yes."

"Stefan, what did you do to her?" asked Samael nonchalantly, shifting his attention from her so as to not make her uncomfortable.

Stefan simply glanced at Samael and then at Lilou momentarily. "She ate too much last night. You didn't even feed her."

"Your point?"

"She got allergies." Tilly chimed in, causing Stefan's face to contort, but went with it anyway.

"She got allergies."

"Hah..." Samael laughed as he leaned forward, pointing at his brother. "Stefan, let me tell you something. Never listen to Tilly. She's the worst liar you'll meet in this life."

"Fabian is the worst."

"In my defense, Lady Tilly, I never lie." Fabian defended with a chuckle, placing a plate full of fruits in front of Tilly. "I simply don't detail things and keep it vague, leaving the conclusion for others to mull about."

"It seemed the butler also retained his memories. How surprising." Stefan glanced at Fabian as he talked like how he would talk.

"Cassara retrieved it for me." Samael shrugged, glancing at Lilou, who sat down two chairs away from him. His lips opened, but he bit his tongue to stop himself from telling her to sit beside him.

He didn't want to scare her since the more he tried, the more she would run away from him. So even if it was hard to ignore why her eyes were swollen, he had to bite his tongue multiple times to stop himself.

"You used Cassara?" Stefan's eyes darkened, watching Samael gaze back at him. "To retrieve that man's memories?"

"What are you going to do about it?" Samael cocked his head to the side. "I needed Fabian. I needed extra hands because time is my enemy."

"So you chose Cassara as collateral damage."

"If not her, should I let my family take the blow?" his lips curled up in mockery. "Stefan, even after life and death, you're still a hypocrite? That's some amazing talent. I'm not even joking."

Silence instantly fell in the dining hall and the air thickened as the tension between them rose almost instantly. Samael's and Stefan's eyes were sharp, exchanging taunting gazes, and both of them didn't back down. Anyone could tell they were just waiting for someone to initiate a fight, and they would happily take part in the altercation.

Clang... clang... clang...

Stefan and Samael furrowed their brows as the silence broke by the continuous sound of cutlery hitting the plate. They slowly shifted their attention to the source of the noise, only for them to see Lilou stuffing her mouth. Samael ran his tongue across his inner cheek as his eyes softened while Stefan let out a deep exhale.

"It's fun to see her ladyship still keep her old habits." Fabian was the first to break the ice, very familiar with Lilou's coping mechanism for stress. Lilou would tend to stuff her mouth with food every time she was stressed or pressured.

"You two should calm down." Tilly was still calm as she shoved a piece of grape into her mouth.

"We will be squatting in this place since Heliot raided the place we were staying at last night."

Lilou nearly choked upon hearing Tilly's remarks, gazing at her with wide eyes. She then shifted her eyes to Stefan and Samael, only to catch them clicking their tongue at the same time.

"That damn Heliot..." Samael blew his lips as his face grew sour at the thought that crossed his head.

"It's your fault." Stefan was a little calmer, although he was clearly displeased at the thought of living under the same roof with his brother. "You knew Heliot since you've been allies before the reversal of time. So, how can you think he will be pleased if, instead of dealing with the horde of undead coming for your life, you led them all into this place?"

"What a stupid fool," he added, and received a scoff from Samael.

"And you joined hands with him despite knowing he is hostile towards me? Stefan, your hate for me is what really keeps me going!"

As the two brothers bantered, Lilou could not help but cringe at their conversation. She glanced at Tilly and somehow felt envious, as it seemed she was deaf. When she raised her eyes to Fabian, the latter smiled at her kindly.

"Please don't mind them. This is their only way of saying they missed each other."

"Shut up, Fabian."

"I will miss death, but never this abomination."

Chapter 685 Someone

"You have to come with me once you're done."

Stefan wiped the corner of his lips, hiding his satisfaction at eating proper food for the longest time. Lilou wasn't picky because she ate anything, but Stefan, who was born and raised as royalty, had a different taste bud. So today's breakfast was actually a treat.

Fabian was undeniably good with house chores and things like this. If only he was a little bit normal.

"No." He arched a brow at Samael's refusal. "Let's talk here."

When Stefan snuck a glance at Lilou, Samael added. "It's fine. There's nothing to hide from anyone since we're all involved."

"Do you always include everyone in your plans? Even the innocents?" Stefan looked up to ponder about it, only to figure out what sort of personality Samael had. He would even use children if he must.

"There's no point in keeping Lilou in the dark so she wouldn't get surprised if someone appeared in front of her to rip her heart out." Samael threw his head back, setting his eyes on Lilou, only to see her eyes go round. She had been oddly quiet, and even when he tried not to argue with Stefan, they couldn't help pressing each other's nerves when an opportunity arose.

"Is it that dangerous?" she blurted out.

"Did that sound dangerous for you?" he asked, warranting a look of dismay from her. "Well, people are targeting us. So, of course, it's dangerous."

Samael chuckled as if he hadn't had a broken heart last night, and picked up the pieces of his heart himself.

"So? What is it?" asked Samael, shifting his eyes back to Stefan. The latter kept quiet for a moment before a shallow breath slipped past his lips.

"Heliot agreed to assist me in my expedition to Spade. The recent movements of the Nightwalkers and the people on the mainland who were affiliated with the Von Stein alarmed him. Although he simply gave me the benefit of the doubt, it's still good news for us," Stefan explained solemnly, recalling his conversation with Heliot the previous night. "But since you brought your friends in here, he will be a little busy cleaning up your mess."

"He should just ask me for help."

"This is the reason he is unconcerned with you." Stefan's eyes glinted as his expression grew icy. "You brought your enemies here, hoping Heliot will ask you for help? Why would he ask for your help when it was your mess to begin with? You're fooling no one, brother."

"You always read on things too much, Stefan. I didn't deal with them because I am in a hurry to go here." Samael shrugged nonchalantly, as that was the truth. "It'll be easy to use darkfield and wipe them out, but we're conserving our energy. Knowing Zero and those damned hypocrites, their tactic is to exhaust us so they can strike and take the credit."

Stefan held his hand in front of him while Fabian took out the used plate in front of him. He glanced at the latter, only to see Fabian's smiling face as if he was just a butler who had nothing to do with this discussion.

"Make sense. Even so, Heliot's defense is he had nothing to do with this..." he sighed the more he thought Heliot was slightly close-minded as ever, who hated things that were going out of order.

"The only good news for us is he left a room for negotiation. Once he took down all the rats you let inside Karo, I'm certain he will lead his men and surround this place."

"As I've said, Tilly will deal with him." Samael shrugged once again. "For now, we need to... uh, train Lilou to defend herself, and calm down someone."

Stefan's brows furrowed. "Someone?" he then glanced at the people in this dining hall. Aside from him, Tilly, Fabian, Samael, and Lilou were here with him. He knew Rufus hadn't arrived with Law, but they would be here anytime soon.

Samael wasn't the person who would address his people as merely 'someone.' They all had names, and they all took pride in it.

"Err... well..." Stefan's curiosity significantly increased when his brother scratched his temple as Samael pondered how to explain it to him. "Thing is..."

Samael huffed as he glanced at Fabian and then at Tilly. Fabian busied himself with cleaning the table, only to replace it with sweets. Samael was never fond of it since the only dessert he wanted was his wife. Tilly, on the other hand, was still being Tilly. But it was obvious she was purposely feigning ignorant, leaving the explanation on his shoulder.

"You should just check it yourself." In the end, Samael looked at Stefan helplessly.

"I don't like how that sounds like."

Stefan knew Samael quite well that he was familiar with his brother's shenanigans. And he was right. When Samael and Tilly led him outside, that 'someone' he was talking about was someone Stefan was very familiar with.

"Why... in the world did you bring him here?" he inquired in a dead tone, peeling his eyes from the person tied inside the carriage with his eyes and mouth covered as well.

Tilly and Samael stood beside the carriage, averting their eyes to avoid eye contact with him.

"Why... in the world is Klaus here?" he repeated, but this time, his voice grew colder and firmer.

"It's Tilly and Fabian's idea." Samael sported an innocent face, cocking his head in Tilly's direction.

"You can ask her."

"It's Claude's idea," she explained, keeping a straight face only to confess under Stefan's unmoved gaze. "I want to make Claude a little happy. So Fabian invited his dear friend to join us on this adventure."

"This is not how you invite someone and definitely he is not Fabian's friend." Stefan pinched the space between his brows as he set his eyes inside the rented carriage. Klaus seemed to have passed out, but the red lesion on his wrist was enough to hint him he struggled to break free but to no avail.

"Weren't those ropes?" he narrowed his eyes only to hear Tilly's voice almost immediately.

"They're special rope." Tilly proudly peeked inside to see Klaus lying pathetically on the floor of the carriage. "I used a spell so it will be unbreakable."

"Seriously... as if our problem isn't troublesome enough." Again, Stefan pinched the space in between his brows in distress. "Just what are you all thinking? I know planning is never in your vocabulary, Hell, but haven't you learned yet?"

"Come on, Stefan. Claude needs some love from his favorite uncle!"

Stefan shook his head before he paused, as it only dawned on him now. He raised his eyes and then set them at Samael, narrowing them in disbelief.

"Claude?" he asked, catching Tilly's attention. "What do you mean, Claude? Claude is still young in this timeline and I even checked myself. Don't tell me you took that child in here?"

Chapter 687 Do you have a death wish?

"Lilove..."

"Love..."

"Son of night, swear by the blood that fills me to devote myself completely, eternally, without question or doubt... to shield you, to give you my impossible warmth, and choose your life over your blood... and if you are taken away from me, I will stay with you until my ash coalesces with yours."

"We're married forever."

"Silly..."

"Knowledge is power."

"Why are you running, silly? Will you marry me?"

Lilou gasped and caught up to her breathing as her eyes popped open. She winced right after at the piercing ring in her head, causing her to press a finger on her temple. She dozed off because of the lack of rest last night, but when she did, she felt tired.

It felt like she experienced a hell of a ride in a flash, hearing a familiar voice. His words moved her heart. It was just snippets of memories. There were times she would see herself smiling, blushing, or getting angry.

Overall, Lilou... the Lilou she had seen in those flashing memories looked... happy and content.

She almost didn't recognize her because her aura looked utterly different from hers right now. It was almost like that woman wasn't her.

"Are you alright?" Lilou jumped when a voice caressed her side, causing her to twist her neck on instinct. Her eyes went round, seeing Samael lying on his side. He had his temple propped against his knuckles, his lips curled subtly, eyes soft.

"Uh..." she swallowed and cleared her throat, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand. "Yes, I am."

Lilou pushed herself to sit up with her elbows. She then set her eyes back to where he was lying so leisurely.

"Why are you here?" she asked, still trying to calm her racing heart.

His brows elevated. "Accompanying you, obviously."

"Is that so?" Lilou breathed out as she closed her eyes while she took another deep breath.

"You look... tired." She reopened her eyes and glanced at him when he remarked. "Do you want a massage? I'm good at it."

"It's alright."

"Are you sure?"

"Ye —" she abruptly stopped and gazed at him with conflict in her eyes. 'This voice... that is the voice I kept hearing in that dream.' "Hmm?" he blinked twice. "Why did you suddenly stop?"

"Nothing." Lilou shook her head as she looked away from him. "It's nothing."

Samael studied her with his lips pressed closed before his eyes settled on her slightly swollen eyes. "So, why did you cry yourself to sleep? Did I say something upsetting last night?" he asked when he couldn't take it anymore.

"I promised not to push my luck, but I'm dying to know the cause of your swollen eyes," he added in a lower voice. "Even if you say you are not my wife right now, for me, you were and will always be my other half. Although I don't plan on forcing you, let me care for you."

Lilou bit her inner lower lip, lowering her eyes. How would she answer that? Refusing him was irrational and nonsense, since she was aware his feelings were his and she had no control over them. The only thing she could control was her emotions.

"Allergies," she mumbled, causing him to frown deeply. "Of the unknown."

She huffed and smiled bitterly. "I did say there were questions I didn't need an answer to, but somehow... just the sight of you hurt me." Lilou slowly set her eyes back to him and heat immediately pooled in her eyes.

"I don't know you, Your Grace," she continued under her breath. "I just met you. But somehow, your touch, the way you look at me, your voice, and just your presence are something I was familiar with. And that... feels unnatural. It feels like these feelings weren't mine — I feel like I am being forced by something I do not know, and it scares me."

It was too late for her to stop as words naturally came out of her lips even before she could stop herself. But saying those felt like a weight was lifted off of her shoulder and the heaviness in her heart lightened.

"That's why I was crying. I feel lost... because I don't know who I am and whose heart was within my chest." Lilou clutched her skirt as she hung her head low. "I feel out of place and I had no place to go. I hate it."

Samael pushed himself to sit up, bending his knees closer to him as his hand rested on them. He understood her feelings since Lilou was the person who often sought freedom... from this world and from her own limitations. Feeling the things she didn't know where it was coming from wasn't only confusing but at the same time frustrating.

"I'm sorry," he breathed out with sincerity in his eyes. "I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault. It's an internal issue."

"Still, I'm sorry," he repeated and this time, Lilou didn't answer as she simply looked at him in silence. "If hurting me will make you feel better, then it's fine. I can take it."

"In exchange for what?"

"For... nothing — or maybe, let me stay close."

Lilou laughed weakly as she shook her head. "I guess you don't know me, just as you claimed."

Her remarks caused his brows to raise as he tilted his head to the side. Samael patiently waited for her to continue and looked at her with an almost innocent countenance when she raised her head once again.

"If hurting you don't hurt me, then I would've probably left when I realized you were here," she explained and took another deep breath as if that would help her muster her courage. "I'm saying, as long as you don't force me and decide for me on things I should or shouldn't do, I can probably... go with the flow. We're in the same boat, anyway. So I'll just hurt myself if I keep chasing you away when the situation already shows that is impossible."

"Lilou..."

"Don't get me wrong, though." She raised her chin up, sporting a brave expression. "I'm not saying I am accepting that you are my husband, but we can be friends. I want to figure out my feelings on my own... after all."

His eyes softened as a subtle smile turned up on his face. "Mhm. Let's do that."

Lilou let out a shallow breath as she smiled back at him a little. For reasons she didn't understand, she felt a little relieved just by looking at him.

"Thank you," he whispered before his brows creased slightly as if he remembered something. "Can I ask for a favor?"

"We just became friends for only ten seconds and you're asking for a favor?"

Samael laughed weakly before he cleared his throat. "It's just that... my son will come here soon. You can keep me at arm's length, but can you be nice to him?"

"Your son?" she tilted her head to the side.

"Yes. He was out and had a stroll with his uncle and cousin."

Lilou frowned as he looked at him in dismay, a little riled up at him. "You let Law have a stroll in a place full of enemies? Do you have a death wish?"

"Lilou... what did you just say?"

Chapter 688 Love at first sight

"You let Law have a stroll in a place full of enemies? Do you have a death wish?"

"Lilou... what did you just say?"

Lilou furrowed her brows as she paused, looking back at Samael, who wore genuine confusion in his eyes. What did she just say? Lilou reviewed the words that slipped past her lips moments ago and her face crumpled with bafflement as well.

"Who's Law?" she asked as she lifted her eyes back to him and then forced a smile as she felt confused. For a moment, the surge of irritation she felt toward this man to the point she wanted to smack him in the head disappeared. Lilou couldn't understand the source, and neither did she ever feel that sort of anger.

It wasn't a wave of anger she could kill, but more like..., it was disappointing.

"My son..." came out a deep exhale as his eyes glistened with hope, crawling with his hand until their distance lessened. "Our son, Lilou. Our firstborn."

Looking at him up close, her breath hitched for a reason she couldn't understand. Their son? Right... they were married, but they were married in the future, right? For Samael, this was a part of his past. But for her, this was her present. There were myriads of questions that rose in her head at the existence of their son — a fruit of their supposed 'love.'

Lilou bit her lips, but before she could speak, a voice of a boy caressed her ears.

"Father."

Samael surveyed her expression and sighed quietly. He turned his head and his eyes instantly landed on Law. Standing behind his son was Rufus.

His lips opened and closed, not knowing what to say to his son or to Lilou, since she hadn't agreed to anything yet. Law was already staring at Lilou while his wife had her eyes lowered, frozen on her spot.

"Uhm, Law..." Samael cleared his throat as he drew his head back, forcing a smile on his face.

"Right. Lilou, that is... our son."

Lilou didn't realize she was clutching her skirt out of fear. She didn't know where this fear was coming from, but this fear... was something that caused all the fibers in her body to tense up. When

she mustered enough courage to raise her head, she caught the conflict filling Samael's deep crimson eyes.

She bit her lip on instinct, moving her eyes to the two figures standing several feet from her vantage point. Her eyes first fell on Rufus, and then on the boy with silver hair just like his father, and those pair of emeralds just like hers. The little boy resembled his father as if he was his younger version, but in her eyes, he looked like her.

No, he didn't look exactly like her. But in her heart, there was this strong sense of make-believe he took after her.

"Mother..." Law called in a voice barely above a whisper as he locked eyes with her, but she heard him loud and clear. Despite the distance and volume of his voice, Lilou heard him as if there was no way she wouldn't hear him, even if he was from the end of the world.

Mother... that word no one ever called her somehow felt familiar.

A tear rolled down her cheek without her realizing it, staring at that boy who brought this inexplicable pain and happiness into her heart. It was as if... this feeling... was akin to something so strong she just couldn't ignore it. It was the same with Samael, but Lilou could stop herself from diving into something she couldn't understand.

But to this boy, this familiarity, and this unexplainable love that resurfaced in her heart at first sight as if she could trade this world for this boy, was something she couldn't dismiss. She loved him at first sight and accepted him with her whole heart. There was no explanation needed or valid arguments to speak.

This boy was her son, her own blood and flesh, her heart.

"Law," she whispered and smiled in relief, picking herself up as she rushed to him. Seeing her action, Law's heart warmed up as he also took steps until he was running into his mother's embrace.

Law was a smart and wise little boy. Even though his father didn't detail to him the situation of his mother, he was aware there was a higher chance she wouldn't recognize him, much more accept him. This brought fear and anxiety to the little boy's heart; the reason he asked Rufus to take him for a stroll was to prepare his heart for his mother's rejection.

Lilou rejected his father last night, and Law was there in the dark corner to witness it. Samael was devastated, so Law could only prepare himself.

Who would have thought his mother would still remember him?

"Mother!" he yelled, jumping into Lilou's embrace as she squatted down and wrapped her arms around him tightly. "Mother!"

"You..." she tightened her embrace while his little arms were wrapped around her neck. Her heart was thudding louder against her chest, but she was more concerned at the beat of this little boy's heart. Lilou's eyes stung as she rubbed his little back, patting it lightly.

She never felt this sense of comfort and relief, embracing someone she just met. Was love even possible at first sight? Lilou never thought that was possible until she laid her eyes on this little boy. It felt like she had loved him even before she met him, and her love for him would simply grow deeper.

"I'm sorry," she blurted out under her breath, as she felt like she had tons of things she should apologize for.

As Lilou and Law embraced each other, Samael breathed out deeply as his eyes softened. He was already standing, smiling subtly. He glanced at Rufus, who was watching his wife and son with furrowed brows.

'There's a possibility...'
Samael peeled his eyes away from Rufus and gazed at his wife and son. His eyes blazed with hope and determination. 'That her memories aren't completely wiped out.'

Chapter 689 It was fun

"I — I'm Lilou."

Lilou introduced herself to Law as she let him go, smiling and crying at the same time, wiping her tears with the back of her hand. Law laughed and nodded at her introduction, getting a grasp of the situation even without an elaborate explanation.

"I... I don't know about anything, but I'm really glad to see you, Law." Tears once again filled her eyes as she cupped his face. "You are so cute."

Law smiled. "I took after my mother."

"I know." She nodded profusely, not knowing her response brought this different feeling to Law and Samael. To them, it truly felt like the Lilou they both knew was there. She used to argue with her husband that all her children looked like her.

Although Samael's one and only wish were to have a child who would look exactly like Lilou, she would always argue all her children look like her. But everyone knew Samael's genes were strong.

"Did you like Karo?" she asked to change the subject as she would continue crying if they talked about anything family-related.

Law nodded with his lips closed. "It's different from empire and the mainland."

"You went to the capital? Did you see Yul?"

"Mother..."

"Hmm?"

Law blinked twice as he turned his attention to Samael. The latter had his brows furrowed, darting his eyes between Lilou and Law. Since Law was staring at his father, Lilou could not help but follow his gaze and saw Samael narrowing his eyes.

Once again, Lilou knitted her brows as she realized her remarks. Yul? She thought. Once again, Lilou didn't know who this Yul was, but her question naturally came out of her lips without realizing it. Just like moments ago about Law, her questions and feelings felt like they were always on the tip of her tongue.

"Lilou," called Samael and snapped her back from her trance. "Let's head inside."

She bit her lip and forced a smile before she nodded. "Mhm."

"Mother..." Law looked at her and smiled subtly. "Can I call you that?"

"Of —" she paused, feeling her heart sink to hear such a ridiculously painful question from this boy.
"Of course."

Samael inside.

He smiled while Lilou stood from her squatting position. She gazed down, wiggling her fingers for him to clasp. Pleased by her gesture, Law happily held his mother's hand and then faced Samael. They didn't say anything anymore as they followed Samael inside.

As they did, Rufus, who remained in his spot, walked to the side to give way as if there wasn't enough space for the family of three. He watched them quietly, narrowing his eyes.

"She knows the young master and Yulis..." he whispered, knowing all these were in her subconscious and even Lilou was not fully aware of this. "I don't know if that is good news or something to be alarmed about."

Samael let Lilou and Law spend some time together since the two needed that. He knew his wife and son and they could live without him, so while the two went to have some snacks, Samael went to find Tilly. He looked for her everywhere and it took him quite some time before he found her in the mansion's food storage.

"What the..." he trailed off as there were more people inside the food storage than he thought.

Inside was the wild Klaus, cursing the hell out of Fabian. He still had his hands and feet bound but without a blindfold and a cover on his mouth.

With them was Stefan, who was standing and leaning on the corner, arms crossed. Tilly was standing beside him, gazing at the entrance where Samael stood. Claude was also there, sitting on the crate near Fabian and Klaus. It was safe to say everyone was gathered in here except Rufus.

"Ughh...! Just when did you and Stefan reconcile?!" Klaus snapped Samael back from his trance with his loud, aggressive yell. "What did I do to you?! Why are you doing this to me?"

"We simply want you to calm down." Fabian sighed, but his reply only triggered Klaus.

"Calm down!? How the hell would I calm down if I'm tied here, huh?! And you of all people in here have the nerve to tell me that?! Have you forgotten what you did to my fangs?!"

"That's already in the past, Your Highness!"

"Hah! Goodness! I'm lost for words — really! Why did you even abduct me? Kill me now!"

"Uncle, don't be so dramatic." This time, Claude, who hadn't trimmed his beard and had a dark circle around his eyes, chimed in.

"Hey, why are you calling me uncle? I don't remember having a nephew who looks older than I am!"

"That's too much." Claude frowned.

"People." Samael pinched the space between his brows before he planted his palms on his hips. "Why don't you let Klaus go? There's no point in holding him captive since he won't go away, anyway."

"But it was fun to tie him up," answered Tilly, causing Stefan and Klaus' faces to contort in disbelief.

"That's your reason?" asked Stefan as he cast Tilly a look. "And you asked me to come because?"

"So you have fun as well."

"..."

Stefan was rendered speechless that he could only stare at her for a moment. He couldn't believe he fell for her excuse of asking him to help with what he could about Klaus. That was the main reason he was here and endured Klaus' yelling.

He turned to Samael and sighed. "I don't know how you can handle your people."

"I don't handle them." Samael sighed while his eyes glossed over at them. His gaze then settled on Tilly before he cocked his head to the side.

"Tilly, let's talk. I need to discuss something with you," he invited. Tilly seemed reluctant but still nodded.

"I'll be on my way, Klaus." She waved at Klaus and then marched towards the entrance, ignoring the ugly expression that turned up on Klaus's face. Stefan also followed her since he had nothing else to do here.

"Calm down, Klaus, and they will let you go," Stefan remarked as he walked away, casting the three a look. As he did, Claude glanced at him and their eyes met for a split second.

The latter snickered in ridicule before he peeled his eyes away from him, while Stefan remained silent, knowing the hostility Claude had for him since he came into this place.

Chapter 690 She's my mom

Meanwhile...

"Mother, you said you can't remember me, correct?" Law inquired as he raised his gaze at Lilou, who was sitting beside him on the stairs.

Lilou smacked her lips, staring at the entrance of the mansion. Her arms were resting on her thigh, fingers playing with each other.

"Sadly," she replied after several seconds of silence, turning her head to smile at him. "I don't know you, but somehow, my heart does. It's strange — it's like... His Grace."

She smiled meekly as she glanced at him, only to see him staring back at her innocently. "It feels strange. How I am already a mother and know nothing about it. I admit when I saw His Grace, I felt like I had known him more than I should've."

No, it wasn't as simple as how she put it. The second she locked eyes with Samael, it was as if forbidden that her heart yearned for him. If she was less cautious, Lilou would've taken a step further and followed her heart. However, she didn't want to get controlled by an 'unknown' force.

She didn't want to give in, nor did she want to believe she loved a person whom she didn't know her entire life. Even if her heart yearned and ached for him; even if her skin burned with his simple caress, and even when she felt breathless under his gaze, she didn't want to succumb to something she didn't understand.

"For you, it just feels right. Maybe because I had always had a soft spot for children and I do not want to hurt you," she continued with a bitter smile, eyes on the light filtering through the window and onto the floor. "But I don't think I can with His Grace — at least, without knowing the reason why I feel the things that I feel."

"It's hard when everyone seemed to have shared the same memories, but you can't remember any of those," she added. "Like why would you people look at me the way you look at me, and just how deep our relationship was? It should be deep enough to have you all come to me, but still... I feel lost."

Lilou laughed as she shook her head, twisting her upper body as she faced Law squarely. "I shouldn't be telling you all this, but don't worry." Her eyes softened seeing the worry in his eyes, ruffling his hair, and, to her surprise, it was as soft as silk threads.

"I'll figure things out soon."

"Mother..." Law exhaled deeply as he bit his tongue, restraining himself from mentioning Sunny. He wasn't sure if his mother would remember Sunny, but it was better not to worry her about her youngest, who was left behind on the mainland.

"Law." Lilou pressed her lips into a thin slash as she retrieved her hand from him. "Can you tell me what sort of mother I was? I'm a little curious about what she was in your memories."

"Mhm..." he took a deep breath as he faced ahead, recalling the mother he loved and the best one in his opinion. "She's the mother I am thankful to have."

Law leaned forward and rested his arms over his thigh. "My mother can be a little silly. She learned how to tailor clothes so she could tailor our clothes and make matching outfits for everyone. But she can also be very fierce when necessary. She's the person who would cut her own limbs for her family and do multiple things at the same time... and yet, she would still have time for her family."

"Sometimes, she would forget to take care of herself because she would put her family first. That's why I am thankful that my mother and father love each other since Father would take care of her; carry her to her bed when she was so tired for the day and would fall asleep in the middle of doing something. My mother takes care of us, so we also take care of her because she's worried about everybody else but herself." A subtle smile resurfaced on his face as he recalled their life on the mainland before Lilou and Samael set off on a journey to look for someone since Tilly was unreliable to do the job.

"Mother and Father often tell me to live my life on my own terms. They fought and put their lives at the stake for me and everyone to live in peace. For others, they were the thorns that must cease to exist and the hateful duo who shouldn't be together," he continued as his eyes softened, expressing his heart out, which he hadn't done in the past. "But for me, they were my heroes. I want to protect them when I grow older, just like how they protected me. I want to be stronger so they won't worry about me anymore, and maintain the peace they fought with their blood and tears."

"My mother..." Law raised his head and smiled at her. "... is the strongest woman I knew and respected. So, even if she can't remember me completely, I will still love her."

"She sounds amazing." Lilou raised her hand once again as she patted his hair. "She probably loves you so much for you to love her that much."

He smiled and let her ruffle his hair. There was just something in her touch that somehow calmed his heart, making him feel everything would be better in time.

"She's my mom, and that alone already made her amazing."

Lilou secretly bit her lower lip as tension built up in her throat at his last remarks. Law was smiling, but she felt like crying. In the end, Lilou tried her best to keep her composure as she spent time with him, talking just about anything they could.

She couldn't understand until now how she could forget someone who was important to her. But what she was certain of was that Law... was raised with loving parents.

Love... what a complicated word that somehow messed with her head. But it triggered her curiosity about this unstoppable force that the more she fought it, the stronger it gets.