

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 11 – The Duke of Croix (1)

The fall of the Roem Empire, which seized power over the West territory and soon, controlled all the way to the South, has brought an era of emperors to the continent.

The empire was torn into seven pieces: Whedon, Balto, Dristan, Osiria, Suikan, Arech and Libadon. Emperors from each country struggled to gain the loyalty of the *service members* to protect their territory. The nobles had to strive to have more knights and wizards of their own accord.

Maximilian's father, Duke of Croix, was no exception. The first Duke of Croix was one of the emperors of Whedon who succeeded in taking over Okto, a rich land of Dristan, formerly owned by royal family members of the Roem Empire. The Duke of Croix fought dozens of wars across generations to get his hands on a vast granary and tens of thousands of serfs, whom he could very well take advantage of, in the land he seized.

Then, 30 years ago, the seven countries signed a cease-fire agreement to counter the exponential increase in lynching*, putting pressure on the duke to return the stolen land to Dristan. The Duke of Croix, who already lost about half of his territory, opened his eyes to every solution and soon, found one.

****T/N: Lynching is the act of extrajudicial killing or administering punishment by death without trial.***

It was to marry a noble lady from the Roem family to gain the legitimacy of his land control. He found a Roem virgin and succeeded in marrying her. She was Aryan Roem Gorta. At the time of their marriage, the Duke of Croix was very pleased with his marriage.

Aryan was a chaste maiden with beautiful features, obedient, gentle, and, above all, she was a direct descendant of the royal family, who once ruled the entire continent. Hence, the Duke, who was freed from the land dispute by marrying her, was deeply contented. He couldn't ask for a more suitable match.

But not long after, he was faced with just another problem. It was the issue of successors.

Like all noble men, the Duke of Croix was also fiercely longing for his heir to inherit his title, vast territory, and his precious castle of Croix. But for almost six years into marriage, Aryan remained fruitless, much to his disappointment. Multiple times did she get pregnant, and multiple time was the couple devastated with the miscarriages that followed.

Under such circumstances, the Duke's anxiety was beyond description. Although he has made every effort to secure a healthy heir to his wealth, he had experienced only frustration for ten lengthy years.

Finally, a healthy child was born, perhaps because of his devotion to God, or so what he claimed. Unfortunately, the baby was a girl. The despondency felt by the Duke when he found out about it was immeasurable. By the time the baby was three or four years old, he was filled with rage. The useless girl couldn't even be on a horseback!

By the time his daughter grew up, he gave up the slightest hope that she would marry to one of the bachelors of the royal family of Whedon and get a successor in between. Yet, his daughter had a problem with her speech—a trait he feared would be inherited by her son.

A disabled man could not be counted as heir to the Croix family. He firmly believed that only a healthy boy with no faults would protect his family's honor.

However, Aryan was unable to give birth to a son until her last breath. She died of exhaustion and complications due to her frequent miscarriages. The Duke, who was desperate of a successor, immediately greeted a new bride among Aryan's cousins.

Yet, odds remained against him, for after a short time, his second wife died of a disease leaving him another daughter. Not only that, rumors that the Croix family was cursed, hence causing his wives' early demise started to spread in the continent. This made the Roem family refused to him another bride. In the long run, the Duke of Croix had no choice but to put all his hopes and expectations on his second daughter, Rosetta Croix.

Fortunately, Rosetta, unlike her first daughter Maximilian, had beautiful features, wit and outstanding skills. If she was married to a reputable family and produce an heir, she could retain control over his vast territory while continuing the superior lineage of the Croix family.

To achieve that end, the Duke spared no pains. Excellent tutors, hundreds of servants, beautiful clothes, jewelry... He gave whatever Rosetta wanted, anything to make her the most perfect bride in Whedon.

””” ”

While he gave extra pampering to his younger daughter, he couldn't afford to bat an eye towards his first daughter, who was not all useful. Hence, Maximilian was always on the back burner.

No, it would have been better if he had just treated her as a total stranger. But this was not entirely the case.

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