

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 111 – Slow Wave of Change (2)

She flipped the curtains back to let the light flood the room and began to look through the shelves one by one. However, she soon found out that the book she was looking for was not as easy to find as she had expected. She pulled the books out of the bookshelf, checked the contents one at a time, and returned them over and over again.

Will I have to ask Ruth when he returns... ?

After a long time of going through the books, Max's shoulders fell in disappointment. She was about to give up and turn away from the bookshelves when the title of a book on a precariously piled stack in a secluded corner of the room caught her eyes.

When she pulled out the book, Max's face lit up. The book was full of illustrations of medicinal herbs and traditional remedies. Many dark creatures lived in the vicinity of Anatol. Events of the same kind as yesterday can recur at any time. To prepare at least a little better for such a period, she thought it was necessary to learn a little more about healing.

Sitting by the window bathed in the pale winter sun, she sat down to carefully read the arduously written book. However, the illustrations of medicinal plants are blurred and difficult to identify.. and as far as treatment is concerned... Well, it was full of dubious methods like sprinkling ashes on bruises and covering hair in beaten eggs to lower a fever.

After trying to read for a long time, Max finally sighed and closed. Her energy disappeared when she found out that the book she had been looking for so hard was eventually useless and sapped the energy out of her.

It would be comfortable if there was only one more person who could use healing magic even a little...I could be ease.. but...

They could hire other wizards or ask for a high ranking priest to be sent to them from the main temple, but neither method was particularly easy. Several lords held fierce tournaments to attract great wizards into their territory, and besides, hasn't Ruth already said that the main temple in Osiria would never send a high-ranking preist all the way out here?

As Max contemplated what to do before she rose, she squinted and decided to explore a little more to see if she could find a different book.

But in the end, after spending a quarter of the day and getting no more results, Max was forced to trudge sullenly out of the library. Upon returning to the room, Rudys brought her generous servings of crispy goose, crepes slathered in apple jam, and a rich

pumpkin soup made from goat's milk for her evening meal. But she found she had little appetite, so she sat in front of the fireplace and flicking through a book she had brought back. There was a voice in her head claiming that doing this may pay off in the future, but in the end her patience ran thin.

Max stared at the blazing fire with trembling eyes anxiously. Countless thoughts swept over her, and her insecurities resurfaced. Riftan may love her for the time being, but there was no guarantee he would feel that way forever. She wasn't the noble and charming woman he thought he was. The moment he realizes the truth, his affection can disappear like a mirage.

Max couldn't get rid of that persistent anxiety. What did one have to do to feel confident and secure in one's position? Max sighed in wonder at the extend of her own weaknesses as she fingered the pages of the book impatiently.

A dark motive was hidden behind her desperate attempt to help. If she could make herself a little useful, perhaps he would still allow her to stay there, even if he came to hate her.

Max unintentionally put down the book and buried her face weakly in her knees. Every time she recalled this twisted reality, her heart trembled dangerously. If only he was here to wrap his arms around her and melt away her angst... The thought only made her feel lonelier.

The next day, Max was in the company of the book she had found in the corner of the library that listed ancient healing methods. Although the writing on the faint yellow pages was small, tightly packed, and in an ancient language, she was able to read it without any problem thanks to the time she had spent hiding in the library as a child. But as the book continued, the number of words she had never seen before increased, making it more and more difficult for her to understand.

She slowly skimmed through the book and carefully wrote down the new vocabulary. It looked like an old term for medical tools and parts of the body, so she searched for relevant texts and soon had a whole pile of books stacked up on the desk.

A crease appeared on Max's brow as she clutched her quill. She was just reading through the book as if it was in front of her because she hoped it would help, but honestly she couldn't understand half of what she was reading. She sighed heavily. Sweeping her hair back in impatience, she wondered if she could learn something like this.

"" "

Right Then, there was a rattling sound and the library door opened. A happy smile spread across her face when she spotted the person striding into the room, swinging his arms.

“R-Ruth! Wh-when did you re-return? A-Are all the injured m-men doing well now?” Her excitement was evident in her voice. It seemed like her savior had finally appeared.

“I returned last evening. And all of the injured have been treated.” Ruth replied firmly as he stepped back to his usual place. Then suddenly he noticed the titles of the books on the desk and looked at her with curiosity.

“Are you trying to learn about healing, my lady?”

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Chapter 112 – Max’s Resolve (1)

He picked up the top book from the pile and looked at the girl on the other side with his eyebrow raised.

Max’s confidence in facing a meticulous gaze disappeared. She mumbled an answer.

“A-and... be-because it could happen...E-even just a little bit... I t-thought it would be g-good to know...”

Ruth suddenly smiled brightly as she looked at him nervously, not sure if he was going to snort.

“It’s a very admirable idea.” He spoke as if praising a child and pulled out his chair across him.

“Did you start studying yesterday? Show me what you did.”

He picked up a pile of parchment before she even allowed it. Max glared at him with slits. One day she will tell the wizard that he should never touch a woman’s object without asking her permission. While making a decision...

... Ruth asked unexpectedly, “Can you speak the ancient language?”

"I I-learned it... W-when I was little." She said awkwardly.

By the time Rosetta grew up to be a perfect girl, Max had the most rigorous education. It was the Duke of Croix's order to correct her daughter's foolishness. However, even with a rigorous curriculum, her symptoms were not alleviated, and it was not long before Rosetta's excellence was revealed. That way she was freed from the terrible task of reciting poetry in front of a high-intensity teacher and her father once a month.

Of course, she never recited a poem she had memorized all night long. She was beaten to death by her father even before the first verse was over. Max hastily lowered her eyes to hide her white face with terrible memories.

"I-I am not g-good at it, but..." She started to speak.

"When I look at your handwriting, it seems meticulous."

"B-because I-I like to r-read books... I h-have n-no problems with r-reading and writing. The h-hard words... I don't k-know.."

Ruth stayed silent for a long time. Max averted her eyes because the silence was uncomfortable. Ruth, Looking up at the pile of parchment she had left behind without a word, Ruth suddenly said, "Why don't you learn magic?"

Max didn't understand what he was saying at once and blinked. Excited by his own suggestion, Ruth suddenly reached out.

"Learning magic is much better than learning healing. If you could use healing magic, my burden would be less!" The wizard did not hide a little suggestion that it was purely for his own benefit.

"" "

Max frowned and refuted, "Ma-magic... is very complex and requires sophisticated calculations... I he-heard it's a high le-level of le-learning. It's too m-much for me."

"Of course it takes a long time to study and train to learn high level advanced magic, but it's a different story when it comes to general magic. As long as you have basic mana affinity, you can learn some magic from years of education and training."

"Wh-what's general ma-magic?" Max asked curiously.

"It refers to all shamanistic magic. It includes simple healing magic, recovery magic, levitation, etc." Ruth spoke naturally as if healing magic, healing magic, or levitation was a plus or minus.

Max gave a passive smile. “If I c-could... it w-would be great... but it will take years. It’s good to le-learn th-therapy right away...”

“It takes years to develop your mana affinity and learn math, ancient languages and basic studies. You have the basic skills to learn because you are weak but interested in magic and can do ancient languages and math. If you only train for a few months, you’ll be able to learn some simple magic.”

With his continuous persuasion, Max felt her expectations waver. Can I really do magic?

She looked up at him with trembling eyes. “C-ca-I... can I... re-really learn ma-magic?”

“There’s nothing to lose from trying.”

That’s right! Max gathered up her courage. “I-if you co-could teach me... I w-will I-learn diligently!”

“Okay, then come to the library tomorrow afternoon. I’ll have the equipment you need to learn magic.” Ruth spoke cheerfully, walked to the shelf and picked up two thick books.

“These books will help you understand magic. Read it whenever you have time.”

She came out of the library holding the book and a fluttering heart. Her heart was beating very fast. She seemed to have found her potential for the first time in her life.

An unfamiliar pounding kept Max awake until dawn. She resorted to candles and read the book Ruth gave her until it was dark under her eyes. One was an outline of magic and the other is a simplified version of the magic principle.

It wasn’t as difficult as she thought. Determination soared in her heart, thinking that she could do it. As far as she knows, she could really be a wizard.

She portrayed the scenes in her mind of spewing fire from her palms, smashing the mana, and causing rain and wind to annihilate enemies trying to invade Anatol. The sight of Riftan hugging her with pride was there too. Just imagining him being proud of her, her lips parted and a smile emerged on her face.

If she could do magic, she could have probably accompanied Riftan on the expeditions. She completely forgot that she had fainted at the sight of the devil as she stomped her feet on the bed. Her heart was filled with hope.

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Chapter 113 – Max’s Resolve (2)

The enchanting illusion was shattered by Ruth the next day, who appeared as excited as he was at noon.

Max looked at the intricate diagrams drawn on a large stone tablet and listened to a long lecture by the wizard, who was very excited. Having made a pedantic remark about the concept of magic, Ruth started a heated explanation of how magic worked. It was as if she was listening to a foreign language.

“How is it? Do you understand?”

At the end of the long, long explanation, Max almost sobbed on the spot with frustration and disappointment.

Ruth frowned at Max’s tearful face, unsure of the reason for her demise, “Is there a difficult part in my explanation?”

“Th-there was no-nothing that was not dif-difficult” Max mumbled with low energy. “As expected... it w-was too much for me.”

“That attitude is already difficult.” Ruth grumbled discontentedly at her passive attitude. “You have to cultivate a habit of continually digging in. When you can’t understand, you have to ask until you can understand.”

It was too much of a demand for someone who got used to resigning. Max turned her eyes down and nodded blankly.

In a calm and soft voice, Ruth said, “I’ll repeat it step by step. If you don’t understand, let me know. I’ll explain it from the beginning.”

“I-I see.” Max felt a bit better.

He erased the diagram from the stone plate and began to draw a simple picture again.

“There is an invisible power in the natural world. Wizards call it ‘mana’.” This time he spoke slowly, but his hands moved quickly.

She immediately wrote it on parchment. Ruth waited until he finished writing and then continued his explanation.

“The wizards train themselves to accumulate the mana that exists in the natural world. Then, the ‘mana’ that is enriched by bringing it into the body is called a ‘spell’.”

“Th-that’s... isn’t it the same?” She asked.

“It is a mix, but it’s technically different. If mana is a stable energy that exists in equilibrium in the natural world, spells are quite unstable energy that artificially accumulates inside humans and monsters. Mana tends to obey the laws of the natural world, while spells are against it.”

“I-I... really don’t un-understand.” She was almost on the verge of breaking down.

””” ”

“Look at this.” He reached out in the air. “Now the mana in this space is in perfect balance. It’s a very “natural” situation. But like this...”

He flicked his finger. Then, a fire the size of a fist rose into the air.

“I used my spell to break the balance of mana in this space. This is magic. From the point of view of the natural world, it is very unnatural. Originally, there should be no fire, light, or heat in this space. So, nature puts constant pressure on this unnatural state. Wizards call this force an anti-spell. Except, the spell the wizard placed into the natural world is a power to move on to a “state that makes sense’ and we are back to a ‘natural state’. By this power...”

The flames disappeared when he lowered his hand.

“The magic does not last and disappears like this.”

“D-didn’t you say you can’t do ma-magic without magic ski-skill the other d-day?” She refuted.

“The flame that just started is also caused by magic skills. If the spell is an ingredient, the magic skill is the recipe. The specific explanation for how much spell to put into this space is the magic skill. To become a wizard, you need to steadily accumulate enough mana in your body and learn how to manipulate it according to magic skill.”

She hurriedly took down his explanation, breathlessly.

Ruth squinted his eyes and asked. “Did you understand this far?”

“I-I un-understand, but...” Max looked grim as she looked down at the books she had piled up on her desk.

“That’s... h-how to d-deal with s-spell exquisitely ... like the ma-magic skill...it’s too di-difficult and co-complicated to do.”

“Then I’ll explain that one by one.”

He scratched his head and rolled up the magical design of the book and tucked it into the back of the road.

“First, practice collecting mana and dealing with spell. Now, take this.”

He took out a transparent stone from his small pocket and held it out.

“W-What is it?”

“It is a mana stone used to develop mana affinity. It tends to draw nearby mana and produce a faint heat. If you hold it and practice detecting the minute movement of mana around the stone, you will become more mana-friendly and sensitive to mana’s flow. First of all, we will practice with it... Here, Read all of these books. To understand the skill of magic, you need to study geometry and surveying as well as math.”

He handed out three thick books that seemed heavy to him to hold in one arm. Max felt less than a handful of confidence vanish. She looked at the book in a sullen way. The dense letters broke her heart at once. Can I really do it?...

Max recalled the fantasies of the previous day to revive her motivation. Riftan, who proudly looked at her being able to use magic. And Maximilian, donning a gorgeous robe worn by wizards on an adventure with him.

When imagining herself traveling through the mountains and fields with Riftan, she felt a great pressure on her shoulders. Only then did her heart become firmer and her fingers stretched out to take the mana stone in it.

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Chapter 114 – The Loving Welcome of a Wife (1)

For the next three days, Max was immersed in the book that Ruth introduced her to. The task was taken very seriously by this dedicated disciple. She didn't stop until her head spun, or she had to visit Rem in the stables to comb its mane. Sifting through pages, memorizing, revising...this also acted as a nice diversion since it was now a full week after Riftan had left for the goblin hunt.

Max felt a little nervous about the hunt lasting longer than expected. Warm winters have described Anatol. However in the past few days there has been a sharp decline in temperatures, one had to break the ice even to scoop up the well. Her anxiety was multiplied by this sudden cold spell.

It was heartbreaking just imagining Riftan crouching and sleeping on the icy ground in the freezing wind while she slept on a soft, warm bed. While the one responsible for it was toiling away in the harshest conditions, she felt guilty about the luxury she was living in.

She was absorbed in the book, and she checked every now and then that she did not see Riftan riding outside the window on a horse. In the vast garden, there was nothing but a dreary breeze, adding to her bleakness. Two more days had passed before the suppression force returned. It was noon after that, Max was holding the mana stone in her hands, struggling to feel the flow of Mana. She was so focused on the act that she jumped upon hearing the announcement of the Lord's Arrival.

She dashed out at once, glimpsing the riders entering the garden, and her pace quickened down the stairs as she saw Riftan at the helm.

Mounted on a splendid combat charger, Riftan jumped from the horse, catching sight of the sprinting figure. Max's blood heated with excitement as she neared the handsome man.

Calling out to him, she pounced right into his wide arms, buried herself in the thick robes, without any care for those around. Delighted, Riftan burst into laughter and wrapped her in his strong arms tightly. The cold armor gave her goosebumps behind her neck, but she had not the slightest intention of wanting to shake it off.

With her red eyes, she looked up at him, rubbing her face against his loose robes. His hair was a mess after almost ten days of camping, and even though his face was rough, he still looked incredibly good. Max lifted her hand and stroked his cold, frozen cheek gently.

"W-wel-welcome back... D-did you g-get h-hurt....?" Her last words said anxiously and with worry. Max took a breath of urgency, fearful that she had misspoken.

He held her around the neck and pushed his tongue deep into her mouth. The feeling of a large soft tongue sliding through the soft mucous membrane... Max clenched his shoulders and let out a moan. Heat rose from her body, as if she was suffering from fever.

Like a cat, she clung to him not wishing to let go.

Right at that moment, Hebaron, Gabel, Yurixion, Garow, and the rest of the expedition team came into her view from above his shoulders. Only then did Max hasten to push him away, grumbling at her own audacity. But in Riftan's embrace, she couldn't even move slightly. Like a drunk man crushing a rough chin on her neck, he murmured.

"Had I known such a passionate welcome was waiting, I would have set the mountain on fire and ran right back." He groaned then pressed his lips on her cheek.

Max was red to the top of her head. She could not bear the embarrassment of her thoughtless conduct. What was she thinking running into his embrace in full view?! But he didn't care, and incessantly peppered her cheeks and necks with kisses.

Her eyes were stinging, her face tearful.

She whispered, "Ri-Riftan... Eve-everyone is wa-watching."

"I know" Even so, he did not have the slightest intention of stopping.

"" "

"Y-you know...."

She wouldn't let him continue, now that she was conscious of the surroundings. The man breathed out a deep sigh, held her in one arm, and turned his head toward the knights standing in the back.

"Those who have participated in the hunting will be excluded from all duties for the next week. I'll send someone to wait on you, so you can rest as much as you like." He declared.

Hebaron grinned sarcastically, rubbing his lips, "Thank you for your concern."

"We'll disband on our own, so you can put out the fire right away."

It was so hot that steam rose from the top of her head. Despite Hebaron's brazen teasing, Riftan turned around and rode up the stairs holding her in his arms. Max was begging him to let her down, but he wasn't even trying to listen to her. He went into the hall at once and shook his head impatiently to Rodrigo and the other servants who had come to greet him.

He instructed them, "Take good care of my horse, and bring bathwater and food to those who have been hunting.

"... Very well, my lord. Would Your Lordship like a bath?"

Rifan frowned just then, realizing the mess of sweat and dust that he was.

"Yes. Bring it right away." Rodrigo bowed his head calmly and then backed away. The servants standing behind him kept their cool and followed suit. Max was just thankful that they didn't see her in their lord's arms like a child.

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Chapter 115 – The Loving Welcome of a Wife (2)

"I'll have a meal later. Just bring a change of clothes." He gave last instructions and strode up the stairs.

Finally, when the door closed behind her back, Riftan put her down and began pouring kisses again. Max hung from his arm and gasped breathlessly. He tasted her mouth and took off his iron gloves, stroking her neck softly.

With the unusual wriggling of his rough lips, her neck went numb. She buried her cheeks in his hands, where warmth emanated. Riftan played his fingers on her disheveled hair giving out a low moan.

"How much I missed this touch.... Oh my God...."

He lowered his hand and caressed the skin under the hem of her dress greedily. Max put her hand in his robe, imitating his movements, and touched the thick chest bundled under his armor. Then Riftan breathed in roughly and pulled her hand and rubbed it against his thick neck like a large animal poking its head in and begging for a touch.

"Y-your b-body is so co-cold", she said.

“No way.” His voice almost had a metallic tone. **“I think my body is on fire.”**

“W-where does it h-hurt? D-did you g-get hurt?” she asked, nervously.

“I’m hurt because of you.”

With a blurry face, Max looked at his body and wondered if she had jumped in and caused the injury. Then Riftan groaned low, almost ripping the robes apart.

“Dn, in my whole life this has never been stiffer and tinglier.”**

Then Riftan, who hurriedly stripped off his breastplate and threw it on the floor, lifted her up and pushed her to the post. Max opened her eyes wide at the strong man who was pressing down on her lower abdomen. She was wrong that the kiss of reunion, the caress of desire and love, was more like a fraternity.

Riftan rubbed her hot body and sucked her lips like a very hungry person.. A slight moan escaped her lips, she held his neck tightly. The lovely move of a large dog easily rubbing itself turned into something fierce and passionate. To make her feel perfect with her excited body, he grabbed her hips and pulled them together. True to his words, his body was blazing hot.

“Now, I have to get inside you right now!” his gruff voice rang.

Max looked dreamily at his wet, damp lips that kissed repeatedly. He tugged her waistband off roughly, pulling her skirt and inner skirt up at once. Max wrapped her legs around his waist in line with his hands that were around her hips. He untied the straps of his trous*rs, ripped her und*erwear off and pushed in at once.

Max gasped and struggled with her legs. **“Ri-Riftan...”**

He stroked her thighs and slim waist under the hem of clothes he had rolled up. She clung on tightly, squeezing her waist. Riftan flinched like being kicked out and soon began to move quickly and powerfully.

””” ”

Max pushed her man to the brink of madness, and whenever he pressed heavily on the deepest part, he slammed his head against the post. A ferocious feeling of never getting used to it shook her over and over. Electric pulses danced along the nerves that ran over, demanding an urgent response.

Max lost her senses, a cry almost escaping from her lips as he tore of the hem of her clothes. Riftan rubbed his wet lips against her forehead.

“Maxi... a little more. Almost there. Almost the...”

Max looked up at his red face with tears. In the midst of his wild breath, Riftan wrapped her head with one hand and poured out a swarm of voracious kisses. His tongue and his manh*od filled her whole body. Max groaned like an angry cat. She was worried that Riftan, who had reached his peak, would collapse. Twice....Thrice... He pushed himself all the way and trembled.

Max stretched her toes at a deafening climax. Riftan held her hips and stood motionless until the frantic heat subsided.

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?” Only when the tremble had calmed down a little, he lifted his head that was stuck to the bedpost, and muttered in a hoarse voice.

Max only stared blankly at him in a daze...

Riftan muttered in a rough voice. **“I didn’t mean to be this rough”**

He laid her down on the floor and stared at her with a concerned face. With her frail legs, Max barely held out and shook her head.

“I-I a-am... O-kay...” she said, her cheeks flushed and her eyes misty.

“That’s your favorite phrase.”

He grabbed her swaying waist and held her upright. Max stared blankly as he pulled down her skirt again, unable to snap out of the peak aftertaste.

The husband had the right to get it from his wife whenever he wanted. It didn’t matter if it hurt her or she hurt him because she was like his property and belonged to him.

Nevertheless, he always cared about her feelings.

Max spat out in a tight voice.

“I-It really....didn’t hurt..”

“Okay. Now, let’s get it right....”

Right then came a hesitating knock at the door..

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Chapter 116 – A Warm Winter (1)

“M-Lord... I prepared a bath. What should I do?”

Max was feeling extremely embarrassed as the maid's young voice ran into her ear.

She wasn't listening outside that door, was she?

Leaving her on the verge of death with shame, he calmly pulled his pants up and opened the door.

Max hid behind the bed quickly and covered herself with a blanket, not daring to even peek. The maids filled the bathtub with hot water after a while, arranged to change towels and clothing, and then went outside.

After checking that they had disappeared, Max sneaked her head out. She caught Riftan taking off the rest of his armor, clothes and step in the bathtub next to the fireplace.

“Maxi... come here.” He reached out a hand to her.

Max stared at his black hair, water dripping down. Putting his arm on the bathtub, Riftan grinned as if he was tempting a timid cat.

He said in a husky voice, **“I'm so tired that I can't even lift a hand. Please wash me”**.

“Li-lies...” She shook her head, not believing the man one bit.

“I've been sleeping in the mountains for ten days. My whole body aches and my toes are numb. Help me, please.” He grumbled about his struggles.

Max crawled out of bed and approached him, although it seemed clear that he was bluffing.

Riftan easily pulled her down by the arm, pressed his lips on her palm, and rubbed her cheek, not missing a second.

“Take off your clothes and come in here.” he gently ordered. Riftan urged with a voice containing impatience as the heartbeat pumped again. **“I'm still short of you. Hurry up.”**

Max looked at him with trembling eyes. How dare she disobey those words?

Max began to undress slowly. She undid the dress's strap, put it on the floor, pulled the undergarments down, took the stockings off, and hung it on the chair.

Riftan stared at the figure with burning black orbs, not missing a single movement. She finally took off the tattered and carefully entered the bathtub. He got close, grabbed her waist and buried his lips in the swollen right dune. Max instinctively grabbed his wet, shiny hair and gasped.

””” ”

In the stomach, fire shot up again as fiery lips wriggled sensibly on the skin. He sat her carefully on his lap, and, n!pped gently at her collarbone.

Max and clasped his face. When a near-painful pleasure scratched down the spine painfully, she could not tell if she wanted to pull it off or pull it closer.

“You want me too, right?” He whispered, holding her

Max said nothing, only her face turned red. That was enough for an answer. Riftan's eyes are content and full of desires... aroused by intense emotions that cannot be described in words. He swallowed her lips, spread her legs, and came in again with her legs apart. She was helplessly dissolved in the arms of an insatiable man.

Riftan did not allow for even a moment of respite, trying to relieve all her desires. He kissed her from head to toe, bit her softly, tasted her; his lips were within reach of every inch of her body. He pulled himself in after so much burning, and he owned her until she was in trouble.

Max couldn't keep her head up to the endless When he finally cleared all his passions and hung himself on the bed, she felt like she wanted to thank heaven.

“Ri-Riftan, are you n-not... t-tired?” Max was exhausted and lying on his chest.

His fingers gently stroked her back and his face was satisfied. He said with a tired sigh, **“Maxi, if you make a feast in front of a man who has been starved for days and days... what do you think will happen?”**

Max looked up at him with dim eyes.

He wiped her lips over her shoulder. **“I was about to faint from fatigue, but now I'm wide awake.”** He nibbled at her shoulders and neck as if he wanted to eat her.

Max shrugged her head and glared at him with a frown. **“I a-am not a m-meal...”**

“Looks so appetizing.” He rubbed his lips over her shoulders and stroked the sensitive part of her neck.

With a true fright, Max swooped into the quilt. Riftan chuckled and wrapped her closely in it, seeing the burrowing figure. When a peal of heart-rending laughter hit her ears, a thrilling shudder shook her body. She rubbed her head against his chest in a burst of happiness. It felt like a blessing in and of itself to her, being able to share such a close and affectionate moment with someone.

“Since I’ve cleaned up the mountain area while I was out, I won’t be emptying the land any more until the winter is over.” Riftan murmured tiredly, stroking her head with his big hand.

“Let’s take it easy for a while. When it gets a little warm, you can go horseback riding again... You could go see the west lake. It’s pretty good even in winter.”

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Chapter 117 – A Warm Winter (2)

“I w-want to s-see it.” Her voice whispered with hints of joy.

“It’s too cold now, let’s go if it gets a little hot.” His voice also subsided little by little. Finally he succumbed to exhaustion.

Max waited until he sunk deep into his sleep, then embraced his waist stealthily. Riftan hugged her face to face naturally.

The lovely warmth seemed to fill the big void in her heart. Only then did she realize how hungry she was for affection. Because he filled her, she noticed she was empty.

Max felt joy and fear both at the same time. She could no longer deny that he occupied the deepest part of her heart.

Riftan may have deeply wound her soul, or may have completely deprived her of her energy to live. If he no longer wanted her, she would have to live the rest of her life in the void. Just imagining such a miserable future made her dizzy. She looked up at his sleepy face peacefully with terrified eyes. A completely different kind of fear came to mind in one corner of her mind, such that she had never felt for her father.

Even though she was exhausted, Max couldn't fall asleep easily.

Riftan went out early in the morning to check for problems at the castle. It wasn't until noon that Max woke up, washed her face and groomed herself. Winter clothes are ready, so there was no more work left for her to pay attention to in Calypse Castle.

Max decided to go back to the book that Ruth had given her to read and sat at her desk. There was a late breakfast set up next to the books stacked up by Rudis.

"I prepared food that is easy to eat while reading a book."

Max smiled and thanked Rudis for her care. The tray contained a small crepe with grape jam, an oatcake with walnuts and warm milk with honey. Max opened a thick book on her desk, flipped the pages, putting a small piece of bread in her mouth.

It was not very difficult to understand the contents of the book. Perhaps because Ruth has chosen the right book for her level. Max worked hard on the parchment, stepping through the basic theories in her head.

A few days after having started her studies, she already had a bunch of parchment that she wasted this way. But she didn't feel like she was becoming a wizard or any changes. She wondered if someone could do magic just by studying like this. When she opened her eyes in doubt, she heard a knock on the door. Max closed the book and turned her head.

"W-Who is it?" She looked at the door and said.

"It's me. I'm coming in."

Since it was Riftan, she hurriedly set aside the book and parchment. He opened the door and stepped in, wearing black robes that reached down to his knees. Even when she was in the same castle, it was unusual to face him in broad daylight, so she was happy to see him.

"Did you sleep well?" Riftan kissed her forehead and whispered sweetly.

"" " "

Max nodded shyly. **"I-I am so-sorry I woke up I-late.."**

“Don’t worry about it” Looking down at her, his gaze was very gentle.

“B-But, Ri-Riftan you w-wake up and I a-am still sl-sleeping....”

“I told you, you don’t have to worry. You don’t have to fit into my lifestyle.”

Max was a little sad as the tone of his voice seemed to draw a line. She shook her head. He must be saying that to show he cares for me... she thought to herself.

Comforting her, he wrapped his arms around his shoulders and touched the hem of her dress with his palm.

“Aren’t your clothes too thin?” He didn’t seem to like it.

“It’s o-okay. I am wearing thick layers inside.” She reassured him.

“Come here.” He pulled closer, opened the box, and put her hand on a velvet cape.

Max opened his eyes. **“W- Where are we g-going?”**

“I’m not trying to get out of the castle. Follow me. I want to show you something.”

Riftan grabbed her hand and went out of the room. Max followed after him without knowing what was going on. He went down the stairs to the kitchen, then through the side door. In the cool air, she curled herself up. Noticing it, he quickly wrapped around her shoulder and put a hat on her head.

“It’s cold, isn’t it? Hang in there a bit,” he said softly.

Max wondered where he was leading her. She could only see bare trees and shabby walkway. She reined in her curiosity and quietly followed him along the icy road.

He turned to the back of the castle and entered the wide stable located among the trees. She slipped off her hat from the warm atmosphere. The horse smelled terrible, but the stable was well maintained and quite comfortable with a thorough wind.

“A-are we here to s-see the horse?”

“Shh!” Riftan placed his forefinger on her lips.

A startled Max agreed to shut up. What the hell is going on? She inwardly rolled her eyes.

Riftan pulled her arm and carefully stepped into the stable.

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 118 – What I Desire (1)

She continued walking past the grunting horses into the innermost area with a curious look on her face before she reached Riftan's warhorse, Talon.

Max was a little more fearful of these bigger built horses than other horses, so she trailed closely behind Riftan, hardly leaving some gap between the two. To soothe her, Riftan patted her back to soothe her and she started to walk towards where Talon was bound.

Max, who had been nervously trotting along, now marched with confidence, eyes wide open and concentrated. Something had groaned on top of the mound of straws next to the warhorse.

"I found it this morning as I was visiting Talon."

Riftan leaned in close to her ears and muttered. Max looked closely at the little creatures lying on top of the pile of straws. Three palm-sized kittens were lying curled up on top of the dry straws there. Riftan knelt down softly.

"We don't know where the mother is.. When Talon was in a hasty rush, he found these guys nestled on this pile."

"Oh No! Do you think the mo-mother ab-abandoned her own children?"

"It seems like it. I asked all the stables and there was no signs of cats entering or leaving. It seems that a stray cat secretly gave birth and just left them. Talon seems to have gotten his bedroom stolen."

Riftan gently patted the back of the black horse who was kicking the ground impatiently. Max was amazed that Talon hadn't just stomped all over on the little kittens at the sight. Riftan's warhorse seemed very enraged. Max looked up at Talon with suspicion, wondering if he would change his mind, and as curiosity overtook her, she walked towards the pile of straws to take a closer look at the three kittens.

All three had different colors. One was white with gray stripes all over its the fur, and the other was black, as if someone had ink spilled all over it. The last kitten was so white that it looked like it was covered in flour. Max suppressed her desire to embrace them tightly and looked up at Riftan.

“C-Can I .. can I touch them?”

“Do what you want to do.”

Riftan gently leaned against the pillar and smiled warmly. Once Max received permission, she carefully started to pet the little kittens. Under the soft, fluffy fur she could feel their small and fragile bones. Max frowned. When she saw how skinny all three of them were, she felt sorry for them.

“It... It do-doesn't look like they were a-able to e-eat much..”

“Shall we take them to a room and feed them a bit of milk?”

“Ca-Can we really do that?”

Max stared up at Riftan with an innocent expression of hope. He just grinned, bending over to lightly brush his lips across her cheeks.

””” ”

“You can do whatever you want. You don't have to ask me for permission.”

“T-then... I... I want to take them to my room.”

She murmured in a quiet, shaky voice as she softly held one of the little kittens in her arms. As Max took it back to her room, the kitten squirmed softly at the mild turbulence. It was so delicate that it looked like the tiny creature could be killed by some slight amount of pressure. She wrapped the kitten in a cloak and embraced it gently. The other two were taken by Riftan and embraced in his own arms.

“We should look for a small basket for these little guys to sleep in.”

“Ru-Rudis. If we talk to Rudis, surely w-we will be able to find one.”

Max was afraid that the harsh winter winds would cause the kitten to fall ill, so as they continued towards the stable, she hugged the kitten protectively and closely to her chest. As she listened to the kitten breathe in and out softly, a sudden sorrow swept her heart.

“I-it's m-my first time t-taking care of a c-cat in m-my r-room.”

“Is it Really?”

“My Fa-father didn’t r-really li-like animals.. H-he wo-wouldn’t even l-let a wa-watchdog e-enter the c-castle..S-so I used to a-always sneak dogs or c-cats in to p-play with t-them.”

Riftan gently looked down at her. Max was so excited that she didn’t notice the strange way that he looked at her. He said in a soft, and gentle voice.

“Should I also bring you a watchdog?”

Max’s eyes widened and she shook her head back and forth.

“I-It’s okay.H-having them is e-enough for m-me.”

“If there’s any dog you want, there is no reason to hold back.”

His voice suddenly became empowered. Max noticed his sudden discontent appearance. She wondered what could have caused his mood to suddenly change like this. Riftan, who was looking forward, spoke in a nervous and tense tone of voice.

“When we were at the Croix Palace... No, even after the day you first came, I said I would make you live more luxuriously. While you lived with me, you told me you get angered at the thought of all the things you wanted, but couldn’t have.”

Max shed an embarrassed little laugh. It seems that his opposition to Duke Croix was greater than she thought. In a slight mumble, she replied, as though a big thorn had been stuck in her throat.

“Re-really... I’m o-okay. If there is a-anything I really want, I’ll let you know r-right a-away.”

Unsatisfied, Riftan raised his eyebrows a bit before sighing deeply and continuing to walk with her. Max followed behind Riftan slowly as she gently pet the little kitten who stretched its claws in her warm loving embrace.

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 119 – What I Desire (2)

As soon as Rudis saw the kittens, he said, “Oh!” in amazement. She immediately put a cloth in a basket of reeds to make a small nest for them.

Max gently laid the kittens in a small warm basket, while Riftan slightly warmed the goat’s milk. He poured some into a spoon and gently placed it towards their mouth and they rushed towards it.

Max took the cushion and put it on the floor. She sat down and watched Riftan feed the kittens lukewarm milk. They drank till they were full, and after they were satisfied, they purred and nuzzled their heads under his big hands.

“What will you name them?”

Riftan asked Max, gently stroking the soft fluffy cat with his fingertips. She watched the kittens as they stretched their limbs at the touch of his hand in a bit of envy. In no time she pulled out of him and looked up to him in amazement.

“I-I can n-name them?”

“You stay in the room longer. It would be best for them if you were the one to name them, don’t you think?” After a long hesitation and struggling to speak, she finally opened her mouth.

“T-the cat with the s-stripes, I will n-name him Ron, the wh-white cat Rola, a-and this bl-black cat Roy”

“Ron, Rola, Roy?”

“I-It’s the n-names of the 3 fairy brothers in a n-narrative.T-the story I was t-told as a little g-girl I-long ago just came to t-thought....”

Riftan smiled faintly at her small explanation, and his fingertips picked up the fluffy black cat.

“It looks a little too tacky to be a fairy, doesn’t it? ”

The cat suddenly raised his claws and, in rebellion, wielded its paws. At the slightest attack, Riftan burst into laughter.

“Looks like this little guy knows how to be feisty.”

“Yo-you can’t an-annoy w-weak an-animals”

“Who said I was annoying them?”

Riftan complained and laid the cat back down. Max moved the basket to a place that was neither too hot nor too cold, and then placed a small ball of thread next to them. The cats started playing with the ball of thread, biting and clawing at it until they soon fell fast asleep from expending a lot of energy.

””” ”

Max looked down at their small stomach as they inhaled and exhaled with short breaths. She bent down and rubbed the underside of one of their chins carefully. He took a long, satisfying breath in happiness.

As Max was looking down lovingly at the cats, Riftan suddenly grabbed her arms and pulled her towards him. Max turned around and looked up at him, wondering what had just happened. He placed a cushion between the pillar and himself, leaned back to sit and then tapped his thigh.

“Come and sit here.”

Max’s face turned bright red. She knew very well what that secretive lowered tone of voice meant. The pleasures of sharing intimacy with him felt good, but she hesitated because she thought it might be a bit too much in this situation. Riftan raised one eyebrow and smiled at her hesitation.

“I just want to hold you in my arms. Don’t be nervous and just come here.”

She hesitated for a bit longer, then slowly approached him. Riftan lifted her up, sat her in his firm thighs, and leaned her head against the concave part of his neck and shoulder.

In perfect harmony, leaning comfortably against him, Max gently curled her toes with satisfaction in his embrace.

Riftan gently wrapped one arm around her knees and pulled her in closer. His other hand gently traced the back of her spine slowly.

Max, who felt like a small chick nestled in the crook of its mother’s embrace, burst out in a small chuckle.

“Your laugh is adorable.”

There was an inevitable tone of satisfaction in his voice as he spoke. Just as he had lightly caressed the young kittens, he lightly brushed his fingertips up and down her back before he gently massaged the nape of her neck.

Max barely swallowed her soft moans and a heavy, ecstatic thrill swept through her body. Riftan gently squeezed her cheeks between the palm of his hands and gently caressed them before he pressed his lips against her forehead in a gentle kiss. A surprisingly peaceful and relaxed atmosphere surrounded the two. She felt completely comfortable and at ease. She was so relaxed, that all she could hear were the sound of his steady heartbeat, the rattling in the wind, and the flames licking the firewood in their silence.

After a while of staring deep into the crackling flames in the fireplace, Riftan opened his mouth and spoke.

“Did you enjoy living in Anatol?”

Max was dazed by the warm air, as if she were drunk, and wondered at the question, gently raising her head to look up at Riftan. Riftan looked at her with no particular expression, but in his eyes she could see a hint of anxiety hidden within.

“Is there really nothing that is discomforting? Something that you’re lacking....?”

“T-there is nothing that I a-am la-cking... And no-nothing that ma-makes me feel un-uncomfortable.”

Max shook his head quickly back and forth. Life in Anatol was perfect. For the first time in her life, she seemed to have finally found where she really belonged. There is always someone who needs her, she is surrounded by kindness everywhere, and everyone is willing to listen to her story. Most of all, right next to her, there was this person who would hold her and kiss her. There could be nothing more satisfying than that. Like a newborn baby, she leaned against his chest and curled herself up tightly into his arms.

“I... I like it here.”

He stopped breathing for a second, and then embraced her even tighter to him, enough for it to even be painful to her. Her ribs were squeezed tightly and breathing became a bit difficult, but she didn't let out a single complaint. If it was Riftan, she didn't care how tightly he held her, even if it were to feel like her bones would break. His light touch and caresses along her back, the sounds of his fast and loud heartbeart, and his masculine body odor, everything was lovable to her.

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 120 – Girl in the Mirror (1)

A sweet feeling of pleasure and a little remorse welled up in her heart as Max slipped her arms around his waist. Castle Croix and Castle Calypse were continually compared by Riftan, anxious that she would not be pleased. Riftan would have relaxed if she had told the truth. Nevertheless, in order to save her pride, she kept Mum.

Max muttered, firmly pressing her face against his chest, feeling guilty.

“Castle Calypse, w-well, it’s a w-wonderful place.”

A troubled smile appeared on Riftan’s face, but the woman continued to praise him even though she did not believe him.

“Well, the wa-walls look mag-magnificent and powerful, so I’m re-relieved... The castle is on the hillside, with a nice view of Anatol looking out the window. There are a lot of mountains, so... the whole scenery is beautiful. The servants are friendly and po-lite. Tr-treated kindly...”

She hurriedly continued, realizing that the last words seemed like the servants of Castle Croix were not kindly treated.

“Above everything, the chefs at Castle Calypse are excellent. I-so it’s de-delicious, whatever they make, that.... “

Max, who was going to say that after she got here she had gained weight, kept her mouth shut. She was afraid that when he learned that, he would think she’d become fat.

“It’s so delicious...that?” For a moment, Max paused before answering, **“The mealtime; it’s fun! The-there are so many different dishes... the desserts are great as well.”**

“I’m glad the food suits your taste.” He grinned and stroked around her neck, reassuringly.

Max, feeling a lot lighter, buried her face in his shoulder again and rubbed her head with it.

Riftan groaned, and her ear between his fingers. Suddenly, the atmosphere became romantic, their backs arching as the sound of a knock on the door cut through the intimate air that drifted between them.

In a low voice, Riftan mumbled his displeasure, then asked in a blunt tone, **“Who is it?”**

“It’s Gabel Raxion. We are all in the conference room now.”

Riftan let out a deep sigh. **“I will be there soon.”**

“Then, I will be on my way”

Troubled, until the sound of voices had died away, Riftan sat still. Max sat on the cushion and gazed at him. Even the soundly sleeping cats crept out of the basket to check if they felt a bit bustling.

””” ”

“I’ll see you later in the evening. We’ll have dinner in the hall, so I’m looking forward to it.” Riftan looked at her face, which was glowing red under the light, and placed a kiss on her cheek.

“Goo-goodbye... go forward”

He got up from the floor, put his robe on, and walked away. Max stood up, took out some of the goat milk, and fed the cats purring by her feet. Until the cats were quiet, she rolled the yarn, then she opened a book she had been reading throughout the day.

Time went by as she sat flipping the pages of the book in front of her desk. She stared at the ever-darkening scenery from the window, then pulled out the magic stone that she had put in the pocket of her robes. She always carried it around with her and touched it like this, but she could not feel any special changes.

Max closed her eyes gently, holding the magic stone in both of her hands. She had no idea what was different between these stones and ordinary ones. She was wondering if a plausible spell had to be memorized.

A knock echoed just then; she heard Rudis’s voice outside the entrance.

“Madam, before dinner, I’d like to dress you up. Are you ready? ”

“It’s o-okay. Yes, come in.”

“Excuse me, then.”

After her permission, Linda, the wife of a seamster, Seric, hired by Rudis and Riftan, and two young maids who came in a few weeks ago entered the room in a single file.

Max saw a pile of dresses in their hands, her eyes grew wide. Rudis set on the table a small box of ornaments and put the cats rolling around the floor in a basket so that they did not get in the way, then changed the angle of the mirror.

In the meantime, Linda and the maids spread their colorful dresses out on the bed.

“I brought your new dress with me. It’s been a long time since we had a feast, so you should dress up!” The wife of the seamster spoke cheerfully and unfolded a beautiful navy blue dress.

Standing on her feet with a shocked expression, Max unknowingly exclaimed.

A dark navy dress, almost black, appeared to light up, a blue glow coming from it. It looked pretty magical as Linda kept the shimmering skirt wide open. Then a delicate, ivory dress accompanied by a green one embroidered with golden threads unfolded.

“How do you like it? We made these dresses with great care,” said a beaming Linda, seemingly proud of the creation of her husband.

Max murmured with fascination, **“I-it’s s-so bea-beautiful.”**

Ishinda, a chirpy maid, gave her a slight nudge and said with a lot of excitement,

“Try it on, Madam, I’m sure everyone will be amazed at dinner. Which one would you like to try on first? Try this green dress first! I’m sure your hair color would go along with it.”

The maid came up with a dress before Max could respond. She soon changed her clothes and thus the words of the maid were proved correct-the green dress seemed to fit very well with her hair colour. The skirt’s long, ruffled hem seemed elegant, and it was indescribably wonderful with the vine-patterned embroidery.

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