

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 201

Max turned her head toward the entrance at the unexpected news. Although she couldn't see inside the central temple, curiosity washed over her, and she shifted on her seat uncomfortably. The Holy Knights of Osyria were admired by the western continent in a different way compared to the Remdragon Knights. Unlike the Remdragon Knights, who gained a reputation for being the strongest knights through military merit and battle achievements, the Holy Knights were historic and had long-established themselves as the guardians of the western continent since the Roem Era.

All of them were paladins who swore allegiance and were ordained by the Pope. They were excellent swordsmen and at the same time high-ranking priests, who had undergone rigorous training since the age of twelve. It wasn't unreasonable for the people to get giddy about doing worship with such esteemed figures. The ladies of Livadon sat with a shameless blush on their cheeks, unable to hide their admiration for the gentlemen.

"Now that the Holy Knights have come, the situation in Louiebell will surely get better."

"That's right! There are now three knights of Sir Uigru's reincarnation altogether. Sir Sejour Aren, Sir Riftan Calypse of Whedon and now Sir Quahel Leon of Osyria. Now, all the monsters will surely run away with their tails between their legs. And all those nasty trolls will be crushed like frogs!"

One of the ladies exclaimed enthusiastically and Max couldn't help but be taken aback by the girl's radical comments. Seeing her expression, the lady sitting next to her scolded the girl to have some dignity.

"Idcilla, a lady should never speak in such a vulgar way."

The girl named Idcilla grunted and pouted. "What's wrong with that? The valiant knights are going to cut those vicious monsters' throats and mince them like dead meat..."

"Idcilla!"

"I get it, alright. For the sake of my well-mannered cousin, I will conduct myself with the utmost dignity and decorum." The girl turned to Max and gave her a cute smile. "My name is Idcilla Calima. I think I've seen you in the chapel often. Nice to meet you."

"Oh my goodness, I apologize for the late introductions. I'm Alyssa Samon."

The other lady quickly added in a slightly embarrassed tone. After a moment's hesitation, Max introduced herself as softly and straightly as possible.

“P-pleasure to meet you. I am... Maximilian Calypse.”

The girls' eyes widened. “Calypse you say... Is the lady Lord Calypse's wife?!”

Max flinched and was embarrassed at the overreaction her name caused. Were they surprised that such an insignificant and shy woman as her was his wife? They gaped at her and looked at her up and down, then quickly looked away, realizing that they were being incredibly rude.

“Forgive us, m'lady. I heard that Lady Calypse is staying in the monastery, but I thought it was just a rumor.”

“I-it's fine. It's not unreasonable... to be surprised.”

There was an awkward silence for a moment between the three ladies. Unable to contain her curiosity, Alyssa looked up and asked carefully.

””” ”

“If you don't mind me asking, May I know what is the reason why the Lady is here in Livadon? I heard that Lord Calypse's estate is located at the southern tip of Whedon...”

“Why do you ask such a thing, cousin? Obviously, the Lady came as she was worried about Lord Calypse!” Idcilla exclaimed, and turned her bright, admiring eyes to Max. “It must have been wonderful to have come this far to follow your husband. I also came here to pray for the good fate of my second older brother.”

The young woman's expression quickly darkened at the mention of her family. “He's been trapped in Louiebell Castle for two months. If the allied forces don't expel the trolls soon, the people in the castle will run out of food and starve.”

Max grasped the coin in her pocket as she remembered Ruth and the trapped Remdragon Knights.

“My acquaintances... are also trapped inside Louiebell Castle.”

“What a tragedy. Why did God create monsters and allow them to do this?”

Alyssa's face hardened at the blasphemy of her cousin's words. “You shouldn't speak like that, Idcilla. Monsters are creations of demons to torment humans. God would never intentionally harm us.”

“Then why...?”

Before Idcilla could refute, the High Priest entered the chapel, and everyone immediately stopped talking and sat up straight. The heavy bell rang and the morning

service began in a solemn atmosphere. As they bowed their heads and worshipped in silence, Max's mind ran endlessly. As Idcilla said, with the Holy Knights' arrival, the situation in Louiebell could soon improve.

However, there were other dangers as well: currently, the monster army matched the strength of the allied forces. With the addition of the Holy Knights, the balance tipped, and an all-out war would inevitably ensue. In that case, Riftan and The Remdragon Knights would definitely fight on the front lines. They weren't the type to stay calm and rational when their comrades were in danger. They were skilled knights, yes, but nothing was certain on the battlefield. In the past, Max recalled seeing countless Knights of the Croix Family return as corpses.

Suddenly, Max's head spun, and her stomach churned. With her face rapidly turning pale, she could barely endure the tortuous prayers. As soon as the mass was over, she bolted out of the chapel. There was a high probability that the Holy Knights were resting until evening in the same building where the Remdragon Knights stayed.

She knew it was insane of her to try approaching the Holy Knights, since they didn't deserve to be bothered like that. However, she still wanted to try and meet them. They had just arrived in Levan, so they weren't aware yet of the situation of the allied forces in Louiebell. Max was lost in thought as she returned to her room, then began to write a letter to Riftan. There was no guarantee that he could receive it, but she didn't want to miss out on this possible opportunity to contact him.

She fed her quill with abundant ink and wrote, in great detail, her life in the convent. She described her life here as peaceful and comfortable, hoping it would ease his worries. Then, she wrote down her last sentence, wishing him good fate and pleading for him not to be reckless. She blew on the ink for it to dry and read the letter over and over again, although it was not very long. After checking carefully for any spelling errors, she folded the parchment and inserted it into her robe's pocket.

Outside, there were several ladies heading to the central temple. Max followed them down the stairs to the entrance and saw that all the seats in front had already been taken. She barely managed to get into a spot in the very backseat and sat with her heart pounding.

There are so many people here to see the Holy Knights... will I be able to hand them this letter?

Max licked her dry lips and her shoulders tensed with anxiety. After a long moment, the knights walked into the chapel in perfect unison, with black cloaks over their heads. She poked her head out of the crowd in order to get a better look. The Knights of Osiriya wore pitch black undercoats over their silverish gray armor. They were completely different from expectations. Max had always imagined the Holy Knights to be in shining silver-white armor, and splendid gold trimmed clothing; she held her breath at the unexpected appearance of the knights.

Each of them had an expressionless face, as if they were wearing a mask, and their eyes kept their focus to the front, none of them even straying focus or squinting their eyes. Even their gait was equal, as if every step was measured with a ruler. Seeing this, Max felt her spine chill indiscriminately.

I don't think someone will accept my request...

The atmosphere they exuded around them made it difficult for anyone to approach, much less ask them for a favor. Throughout the ceremony, Max fidgeted nervously with the letter in her pocket. When the knights knelt in front of the altar, they removed their black hoods and clasped their hands in prayer. The crowd who came to worship did the same, holding their hands together and muttering prayers in the Roem language.

Max couldn't help but feel a little offended by this blatant display of favoritism. When they arrived, there were no such ceremonies. But... thinking about it carefully, it was probably because Riftan didn't want to waste time on anything and departed right away for Louiebell.

Either way, Max prayed for them and memorized the prayers diligently for the Remdragon Knights. When the ceremony finally ended, the High Priest stepped up to the podium and gave a blessing before ringing the bell, ending the service. The knights rose one by one and turned to leave. Max narrowed her eyes to get a better view, and among the dark and cold knights, a young knight stood out and caught her eye.

He was a young man with delicate brilliant beauty, more suited to be a graceful singing bard rather than a swordsman. He appeared to be about 6 kvet (180) cm tall, his well-balanced slender physique was elegant and his softly wavy tan hair gave off a gentle impression. Max felt relieved; there was at least one gentleman who didn't seem so intimidating. She rubbed her sweaty palms against her robe and stepped out of the chapel, pursuing the knights.

Outside there were more soldiers, lines of horses, and seven wagons filled with food, water, and weapons. Max stood at the top of the stairs and looked across the sea of people and knights. Everyone was busy getting ready to leave; no one seemed to be in the mood to talk. Unsure of what to do, Max paced back and forth until she saw a familiar face amid the sea of people.

"Archduke, y-your grace...!"

At her call, Archduke Aren turned slowly and saw Max running eagerly toward him, stopping only when there were three or four steps between them. Standing in front of the Archduke was the young knight Max noticed just moments ago. The knight looked at her slowly with his icy green eyes and she froze like a mouse in front of a snake. The man with the smooth face she saw from afar, now looked more cold and distant than any other knight up close. His eyes gleamed as sharp as daggers. Paralyzed by the threatening atmosphere, the Archduke approached her with a puzzled expression.

“It has been a while m’lady. How is life here in the monastery? Is there something you find inconvenient?”

Max could barely tear her gaze away from the knight and opened her lips. “Thank you for your ge-generosity... Everything is comfortable.”

“I should have checked earlier...I apologize that I was not able to visit sooner.” The Archduke cleared his throat once with an embarrassed expression, then turned to introduce the young knight standing next to him. “This is Sir Kuahel Leon of Osiriya. The lady must have heard of him at least once. He is the Commander of the Holy Knights of Osyria. Sir Leon, this is Lady Maximillian Calypse, Lord Calypse’s wife.”

The man’s eyes twinkled with interest. He looked at her with curiosity in his green eyes and then placed one hand on his chest and bowed politely. “It is a pleasure to meet you, m’lady.”

“Pleasure to m-meet you... I am honored.”

Note – LF: Y’all we might need some holy water :>

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Max hurriedly bent her knees to bow in return. Her stomach knotted in nervousness as she realized that the young man before her was the Commander of the Holy Knights.

She clasped the letter in her pocket with her fist. No matter how much she thought about it, it felt inappropriate to ask the Holy Knight’s Commander to run her an errand such as delivering a letter. She took a step back, feeling self-conscious of his stare.

“I apologize for... i-interrupting.”

“Not at all, if the lady has anything to ask, please don’t mind telling me.”

The Archduke said with a friendly smile. After hesitating for a moment and pushing her worried thoughts down, Max finally opened her mouth to speak.

“If it’s not too m-much to ask... I was hoping to send a l-letter... to my husband...”

“A letter?”

The Archduke looked at her with a curious face. Max squirmed in place and pulled the letter out of her pocket. The letter that she put so much effort into perfecting was now in a badly shaped crumple in just a matter of an hour. Her cheeks flushed red as she tried to straighten out the folds.

“Could you d-deliver this to my husband? It doesn’t contain anything... im-important. I just wanted to let him know how I was doing...”

“Are you asking me to deliver this letter to him?”

The paladin asked in a dry tone. She was placed under the pressure of his indifferent gaze and that made her she spoke in gibberish sentences.

“If it would not cause the s-sir much trouble... when-when you get to Louiebell... and see m-my husband... if-if you could give it to him then...”

In the face of a person masked with an unreadable expression, Max’s voice began to break. She was sweating profusely from being so brazen to even attempt asking a favor, but then the Archduke suddenly intervened with a troubled expression.

“Lady Calypse, the Holy Knights will be coming in from the eastern borders of Louiebell. The Remdragon Knights are stationed on the western borders, they will not be able to meet each other right away.”

“I-I see. I didn’t know that...”

She crumpled the letter and lowered her gaze in disappointment. Then, the paladin took the letter from her grasp, his smile was dry and he appeared calm despite his stoic expression.

“It may not be possible to deliver it at once... but I’ll hand it over to him as soon as we meet. I owe him something.”

””” ”

A brief exaltation passed over her, but his strange tone worried her. Max looked at him confusedly.

“Then... p-please do.”

At Max's desperate reply, the man's eyes narrowed slightly. Then, he secured the letter into his robe and spoke gently.

"I'll make sure this gets to him. Don't worry."

"Well then, it looks like everything is prepared, we must begin the journey."

At the Archduke's urging, Sir Quahel Leon bowed before her and gracefully descended the staircase. Max watched dazedly as the young man made his way through the ranks. The paladin's flag fluttered frantically in the summer wind, as if heralding the turbulent battles ahead.

"Please excuse me too, my lady."

"Ah... I apologize for i-interrupting your time."

The Archduke gave her a smile that indicated it was fine and went down the stairs to follow the paladin. Max watched them as they prepared to leave, then returned to the monastery.

Her heart was beating so fast she clasped her hands together firmly and closed her eyes. Now all that she could do for them was pray for the best.

Ten days after the Holy Knights joined the battle, news of Louiebell's reconquest spread throughout the capital. Cheers and celebrations broke out everywhere; that was, until the bodies of the soldiers and knights who died on the battlefield came through the city gates without end. A long line of carts loaded with corpses filled the courtyard of the temple and people gathered to see if their family was among them.

Max also came with the ladies of Livadon, anxious and nervous, wondering if there was anyone she knew among them. The state of the bodies was unlike anything Max could imagine. Although all were washed, dressed, and prepared for the funeral, the prosthetics could not cover the miserable deaths that those men had faced. Very few of them had their limbs still in place and some of them had black cloths covering the upper part of their torso as they have been decapitated in battle.

Pale-faced, Max watched as the priests carefully placed the bodies in their respective coffins. Some of the noble ladies fainted on the spot, and she too was on the verge of passing out, but she endured the queasy feeling. She needed to make sure that neither Riftan nor any of the Remdragon Knights was among them.

Max wandered through the rows of bodies and swallowed the urge to vomit as she struggled to see and try recognizing any of the faces. Unable to bear the dizziness that had overcome her, she quickly left and crouched under a tree at the corner of the temple's quagmire courtyard. One of the ladies went after her, worried about her state.

“Are you alright?”

Max looked up with trembling eyes. It was the lady who introduced herself not long ago, Idcilla Calima. The young woman’s tan eyes observed her with worry.

“Your complexion doesn’t look well. Should I call for a priest?”

“Oh n-no. I was just a li-little... dizzy. How about you Lady Calima, are you alright?”

“I’m fine. I’m a lady coming from a family of knights, this much doesn’t bother me.” The girl held her head up bravely, but her complexion was just as pale as hers. Idcilla turned to the coffins and looked across the rows, as if to hide her weakness. “Fortunately, my brother is not among them. I asked the soldiers who brought back the bodies and they said that most of the people who were trapped in Louiebell are safe.”

“R-really?”

Ruth and the other Remdragon Knights appeared in front of Max, and a wave of hope blossomed within her; however, it quickly faded when she recalled that Idcilla mentioned “most” of the people were safe. Max looked through the dozens of corpses again and soon tried to calm her trembling heart, standing up to approach the priests who were gathering the corpses.

Relief and sorrow mixed in the courtyard from the people who were watching as the priests named the bodies with the identification attached to them. Sighs of relief and wailing could be heard erupting from everywhere. Max couldn’t relax until the name of the last body was identified. She staggered as she went down the stairs, covered in cold sweat.

Her entire body was trembling. Relief washed over her but at the same time, she felt a chill run on her bones. She held her cold, sweaty hands together tightly. Idcilla hurriedly went to her upon seeing her weak state.

“M’lady, let’s go back to the monastery for now. I’ll accompany you.”

“Th-Thank you.”

Max clumsily climbed the stairs, rocking left and right as she leaned against the younger girl, who was slightly taller than her. Suddenly, shame washed over her. Idcilla was only eighteen years old, it was embarrassing that a girl four years younger than her could bare much more than her. As she entered the Great Chapel on shaky legs, she did her best to straighten herself.

“I’m fine n-now. I can walk... by myself.”

"It's no matter. I'll feel more at ease if I'm around to catch the lady in case she passes out."

Max frowned at her frank words. "I... I'm not going to pass out."

The girl looked at her face carefully and nodded slowly. "I see that now. To be honest, I was surprised. I thought Lady Calypse would be the first one to faint."

"Are you... mocking m-me?"

The girl blushed and sighed. "I didn't mean for it to be an insult, I apologize if you were offended. My cousin Alyssa often tells me that I'll get in trouble for my straightforwardness."

"...I think she's r-right."

The girl smiled faintly at Max's sarcastic blunt tone. "M'lady appears very soft-hearted, but in reality, I think she's not like that?"

"Enough k-kidding around. It doesn't... feel good."

"I meant my words in a good way. Alyssa couldn't handle looking at the corpses, so she returned to her room almost immediately." Idcilla said, then suddenly her face darkened. "It's not her fault though. Alyssa is very faint-hearted. And she loves Elba so much. She's too afraid to watch, she doesn't want see it in case Elba is among those defeated men."

"Who is... Elba?"

Max asked out of curiosity. She thought that talking to Idcilla would help calm her and banish the lingering faces of the dead men from her mind.

"Elba is short for Elbarto Calima, he's my second oldest brother. Alyssa and he were engaged since the age of twelve. The moment he was ordained as a knight, he offered his geth to Alyssa."

"It is rare to offer a geth... to the person you are b-betrothed to."

Traditionally, knights dedicate their geth to a royal lady or the wife or daughter of the lord they serves. Idcilla nodded, indicating that Livadon's cultural traditions of knighthood were not that different from Whedon's.

"The case between those two is really special. Alyssa will be glad to know that my brother is still alive. Now, let's sit down and rest for a moment, my legs are starting to hurt."

They stopped in front of a pavilion in the gardens and Max sat on a chair, exhaling a trembling breath. Idcilla sat across from her and straightened the skirt of her dress silently. Although she wasn't sitting very close to Max, her company brought her comfort. If she had returned to her room alone as she planned to do, the images of the mangled corpses would have haunt her.

Suddenly, Max realized why Idcilla helped her. The young woman was also reeling from the shock.

Idcilla gave her a stiff smile and put her hands in her lap. "The priests and priestesses will be busy with funerals for the next few days."

"B-but... now that the battle is over, wouldn't all the knights be returning?"

"Haven't you heard?" The girl's eyes widened at her question. "The allied forces decided to travel north. Now that they have successfully recaptured Louiebell, the monster army is retreating to Pamela Plateau and the knights will pursue them. They will also retake the other lands conquered by the monsters."

"T-then..." Max couldn't avoid stuttering from her trembling lips. "T-then... when will all this be over?"

It was a stupid question that no one could answer, least of all the younger girl sitting with her. Idcilla kept her lips closed and Max leaned her head weakly against the stone column. Despite the humid summer heat, chills ran in her bones. The battle at Louiebell was just the beginning. Every three or four days, soldiers would bring back wagons loaded with corpses. As Idcilla said, the priests ran all day preparing and hosting funerals. Requiem songs could be heard resounding in the great temple.

Without a proper funeral procession and cleansing ritual, those who have lost their lives could become ghouls or lich. Because of this, hundreds of bodies were mass-cleansed in the Great Temple every day, and bereaved families filled the great temple. Although the monastery was quiet, sounds of wails and weeping erupted everyday in the great hall.

The gloomy atmosphere was so heavy that the Archduke Aren even came and offered to prepare a place for Max in his castle. However, Max refused, because when news about the allied forces came, the temple was the first to receive the information.

Note – LF: I wish Riftan would just set fire on the whole Pamela Plateau and go back to Maxi.

Nymeria: Omg this feels so true. I think the author really portrayed how it must have felt back in the days when your beloved ones were in war and you had to be home waiting for their news. ?

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“Please give it another thought. With the number of casualties piling up from the great war, no servants in the great temple will be able to accommodate any of the ladies properly anymore. If you were to stay in my castle, the Lady will be able to live comfortably and I will make sure to pay extra care and attention.”

The archduke was persistent in his persuasion, but Max’s decision was firm as she shook her head. “I’m... really fine. I’ve gotten used to living here... and no matter where I am... my worries won’t be at ease a-anyway.”

The man opened his mouth to reply, but nothing came out when he saw the sheer determination on Max’s face. He sighed and resigned himself to her stubbornness.

“If that is the Lady’s wish, then I will respect it. If in case you change your mind, please tell one of the priests to call for me.”

For Riftan’s sake, the Archduke left without further arguing. But just like the nobleman said, the temple could not be concerned for the ladies in the monastery. The number of maids who attended her sharply reduced from three to one, and that one servant only came to bring clean water to wash in the morning and collect laundry in the evening. Everything else would have to be accomplished by themselves.

She was not the only one who experienced that and some of the ladies who gathered in the temple complained about the situation. Max would have empathized with their complaint if she didn’t experience an expedition firsthand. Throughout her journey to Livadon, she also had a difficult time taking care of herself without her usual privileges, but now, she easily adapted to change.

Every morning, Max cleaned her own room, made her bed, dressed, and groomed herself, then went to the chapel to pray. At times when fresh laundry didn’t come back as scheduled, she would wash her own underwear and socks. This was the first time in her life that she had to do laundry, but she didn’t hate it. Rather, it was comforting for

her to have something to do to get through the day, rather than just staying in her room all day, eating, praying, and sleeping. If she kept up with such a monotonous schedule, she would surely be consumed with all kinds of worries and anxieties. She desperately needed something to keep her occupied.

Max would also visit Rem in the stables as often as possible to brush her mane. With the attention she'd paid to fix it, Rem's stiff white mane became a gleaming silver.

"There you are, Lady Calypse! I was about to go visit you at your room."

Idcilla called her when Max was at the stables one day, grooming Rem as usual. Max turned to see her, Alyssa, and three other noble ladies occasionally exchanging greetings with her in the prayer room or hallways. They were wearing clothes for going out. She looked at them questioningly, and Alyssa spoke with a soft, ornate smile on her lips.

"We are going to visit the asylum in the city. Would you like to join us?"

"...Now?" Max was surprised by the sudden invitation.

Alyssa cautiously added with a polite smile. "If the lady has other work to do, it's alright not to come with us."

"Ah n-no. After stopping by the stables... I was just going to go back to my room."

Max replied, and tried to flutter the horse and stable smell out of her clothing a bit, but Idcilla walked over to her and hugged her despite the pungent smell.

"Then come with us. You must be suffocated from being in the monastery and fed up with the endless requiem songs."

Alyssa frowned at her cousin's blunt wordings but meekly agreed. "We were talking amongst ourselves and we thought maybe we could contribute something meaningful as well. They say that the families of the afflicted are leading difficult lives right now. Many commoner families who lost their husbands or brothers are staying in the city asylum, and they are quickly running out of supplies, so we have collected donations from the other ladies and hoped to do a little help."

"" "

The girl proudly showed Max the plump leather bag she had. Judging by its shape, inside were probably several bracelets and necklaces. She tried to think if she had brought any items of value to contribute, but had packed as lightly as possible so she wouldn't drag it during the expedition. It was unlikely that she had something valuable to donate. Feeling embarrassed, Max stammered her words.

"I... couldn't help much... I didn't bring anything of value from Anatol."

"Oh, please don't worry about it. Just a visit from Lord Calypse's wife would bring comfort to many people. Lord Calypse is the greatest hero of the west after all."

Max expressed her pride in the praise Riftan received. "Alright, I'll go as well."

Going out with those ladies would be a hundred times better than sitting alone in her room. After discussing the details, Max returned to her room and hurriedly changed into clean clothes. Then, she went through her belongings for anything worth selling. The dagger Riftan gave her might fetch a good price, but the thought of parting with it never crossed her mind, the same with the shekel that he left in her care. Digging through her things, Max found the small hand mirror she brought. She heard that mirrors are quite expensive so this should be of help.

Max put the small hand mirror in her pocket and headed out. In front of the temple courtyard, three carriages and six guards waited. She walked towards it and immediately saw Idcilla, who was already in one of the carriages, beckoning her to come.

"Please sit here. We have already asked the priests for their permission. We just have to come back before the evening service."

As soon as Max sat beside her, the carriage began to roll. Looking out the windows, Max marveled at Levan's exotic buildings. In the summer sunlight, the gray-white buildings gleamed like precious ivory, and the bay trees lining the streets were a rich, lush green. The view was incredibly peaceful, in contrast to the tremendous tragedy that was happening just outside the city walls.

Just as Max was plunging into this strange foreign land, Alyssa snapped her out of her thoughts. "I think we should stop and buy some relief supplies first."

"Some ladies donated gold coins, but most of them donated jewelry such as bracelets and rings. It will take some time to negotiate with a merchant."

"I, I also found something of value to give."

Max quickly pulled the mirror hand out of her pocket and held it out. Alyssa appeared embarrassed and waved her hand.

"There is no need for the lady to do this. It's more than enough that you've come along with us."

"Please t-take it. I've been in the care of Levan's monastery for so long... I wish to contribute as well."

Seeing Max's firm expression, she gave up and took the mirror, stashing it inside the pouch. The carriages passed through the city square and stopped in front of a huge building. They sold the donations and bought a fair amount of food, clean clothes, and lamp oils. With the considerable amount of donations they received, they still had 30 dirhams left after filling all three carriages. They decided to donate the remaining funds to the monastery, before boarding the carriage again.

After about ten more minutes, Idcilla pointed to a building. "That is the asylum."

Max followed her hand and saw a wooden two-story building that appeared to look like it was built a hundred years ago.

"This building was originally a chapel, but it is now used to care for orphans and vagrants who have nowhere to go to. According to the priests, many of the grieving families who have fallen into deep depression have entrusted their lives to this place."

Max frowned at the sight. The old, dilapidated building looked like it was going to collapse at any moment. The wooden planks, that were bricked up together to make the ceiling, creaked every time the wind blew, and a long line of homeless people in ragged clothes filled the entrance.

The guards immediately closed the carriage door on sight. "Please don't come out yet. We'll go inside and meet the priests first."

Alyssa nodded with a grim face as Max stared out the window at the faces of the homeless and hopeless. Most of them were young women carrying their child on their backs. She wondered if those women were living a hard life from losing their husbands in the war. As she continued to stare between their grief-stricken faces, Max felt her stomach twist.

Although she didn't want to think of it, Max couldn't push away the thoughts of what it would be like if she loses Riftan. She wouldn't end up like them. Instead, she would be dragged back to Croix Castle and would receive horrendous treatment 'til the day she died.

Max chewed on her lips. There was also a possibility that she will be forced to remarry by her father's wishes. Either option would put her in a terrible state. Even if the heavens smiled upon her and her father allowed her to live the rest of her life in a monastery, she would long for Riftan for the rest of her life.

Max touched the coin in her pocket and traced her fingers on the rough copper surface. The emotions churning on her chest seemed to calm down a bit.

"Ladies, I have brought the priests. You can come in now."

After about five minutes, the soldiers who went into the asylum returned to the carriages and opened the door for them.

“Thank you for coming even if the place is in a poor state.”

“We heard that the people here are in a difficult situation so we have brought food and other needs.”

The priests looked at the carriages full of supplies and smiled widely at them. “Thank you. We were about to appeal to the royal family for help.”

“Is the situation here that bad?”

“As you can see, the number of people seeking refuge here has doubled and we cannot keep up with the needs given our fund.”

One of the priests sighed, confessing the sad truth. “Not only are there those who fled their homes because of the monsters, now widows and orphans added to the number. These days, it is hard to serve everyone at least one meal a day. Would the ladies like to take a look inside?”

Alyssa turned to look at them, like she wasn't sure she wanted to. But before anyone could say anything, Idcilla bravely stepped forward.

“Of course, we have to look around the internal facilities, to know what to bring next time.”

She took the initiative and entered with the priests and the remaining ladies of Livadon followed reluctantly. Max also followed carefully. The asylum appeared more like a barn than a sanctuary: the line of wooden tables were dense with clearly malnourished children, drinking bland-looking clear soup. There were even children sitting on the floor gnawing on stale bread. In the battered beds made of carelessly nailed planks of wood, elderly people were laying down, shifting uncomfortably. Finally, on the other side, women in dirty and torn clothes were sitting on the floors covered in dirty blankets, nursing their babies.

Contrary to Alyssa's expectations, none of the people inside didn't even look at them, despite their charitable donations. The loss and grief that plagued these people were so tremendous, so much so that they could not pay any interest in the world around them. Even Idcilla, who briskly entered the ruined building, had a bewildered expression on her face. They couldn't even bear to see what was on the second floor, before they finally left.

Alyssa was the first to speak with a deep sigh. “I never imagined it would be this bad. As soon as we return to the monastery, we will try to get more donations.”

“Please do, madam.”

The priest took her by the hand and begged her fervently. Thereafter, Max and the other noble ladies of Livadon frequented the old asylum and brought in generous donations. Sometimes they even handed out food and clothing to the orphans.

Some of the other ladies were reluctant and showed disgust at having to be in the shabby building and around the filthy-dressed refugees, orphans, and widows, but most of them helped. Max also came along every time the ladies visited the asylum.

Note: LF – The author never fails to amaze me. She even goes into details such as this and shows us the reality of how war could devastate people.

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 204

Max helped not because she wanted to be recognized for her good deeds, but because helping in the asylum kept her busy and she preferred that over idling around in the monastery. The physical drain it caused her also helped her sleep at night. Recently, she suffered from severe insomnia. Throughout the dark nights, as she laid alone in her bed, the horribly distorted faces of the fallen knights haunted her mind.

However, since her visits to the charity, she would come back so physically exhausted, that she would collapse in her bed and fall asleep without worrying about nightmares. If possible, Max tried to go there every day and worked like a mule. However, it was troublesome to visit often as they constantly needed to seek permission, borrow a carriage, and find escorts. Not wanting to burden the temple, which seemed to have been hit with the plague, given how frantic the priests and priestesses were running, the ladies had to limit their visit to once or twice a week.

Instead, during their spare time, they would gather in the garden pavilion and sew tunics and blankets out of large pieces of cloth and the maids also helped from time to time. However, no matter how much clothes and bedding they made, after five or six days, they would either turn to rags or disappear. The priests claimed that the vagrants often

stole the supplies, but they didn't have the resources to crack down the thieves. Rumors spread about nobles providing support to the asylum and so the number of people seeking help grew exponentially that food, clothing, and space began running out.

Max soon learned that Levan wasn't as peaceful as it appeared. Due to the increase in monsters, the number of refugees arriving in Levan spread like poisonous weeds. The outskirts of the city were infested with refugees from the north to escape the monsters, and with the increase in population, inflation soared. Merchants from around the world came with their seemingly limitless cargoes, but they still didn't solve their food shortage problem, especially since most of the food and supplies were being sent to the allied forces. And with that, the lives of the poor and the common people grew more destitute with each passing day.

Whenever Max went to visit the old asylum, people who were skin and bones walked around the streets like lifeless beings. While homeless people did not frequent the city center or the port due to high security, they were bountiful in the areas near the city walls. As the number of poverty-stricken people grew each day, the priests' sighs also increased.

"If we fail to quarantine those who are sick, an epidemic might break out."

It was early afternoon when Max visited the asylum with the other ladies. She looked up at the priest whose face appeared to look clearly exhausted. There were dozens of sick people huddled on the wide floor, and the scent of sour vomit from their bodies could be smelled all over the building. One of the women took a step back and ran out of the building, gasping for air.

"Are they p-perhaps... contagious?"

The priest quickly shook his head. "Don't worry. These people are only sick because of food poisoning. As the days grow hotter, food is more susceptible to spoilage so the number of those getting sick also increases. This happens especially in refuge places. The people here are so weak from malnutrition that a mild illness can cause death."

The elderly priest sighed and clicked his tongue. "It seems that a large number of refugees have already passed away. Since the temple cannot cater for all the deceased and they cannot just pile up, they are being thrown into mass graves that are secretly dug in the forest... This is a big problem. Without a proper burial, the rot of death left behind can cause a plague."

The ladies' faces immediately paled, becoming as white as dough at the terrible truth right in front of them. As if suddenly realizing that he was addressing women, whose protected lives revolve around their great estates, the priest quickly cleared his throat as a distraction.

“Please forgive me for telling you the horrible stories here. It seems my senses have recently become stone-dull due to everything that is happening. To utter such words in front of you noblest ladies...”

“If it’s like the priest said, then shouldn’t the sick be treated as soon as possible?”

“I earnestly wish we could. However, due to inflation, the prices of medicinal herbs are through the roof so there is no way we can cure so many when we have no funds.”

They could only keep their mouths shut. It was already incredibly difficult to supply an adequate amount of food, and with the prices of necessities skyrocketing, even their donations would not suffice for more than a month of sustenance.

A young woman, who for the most part had been quiet, suggested carefully. “How about we send a letter to other noble families and ask them for help?”

Idcilla huffed. “With the capital already in this difficult situation, wouldn’t it be better for them to go to other estates? The royal family has already raised the taxes to build up the allied forces. Everyone is already at the limit of their wits.”

””” ”

“Then what in the world would be a better thing to do? If a plague does happen, surely, the monastery wouldn’t be safe.”

Alyssa was on the verge of tears. The air grew cold around them and the priest tried his best to appease the frightened ladies. “If we can quarantine the sick, we can prevent the spread of a disease...”

“I saw a lot of lizard grass on our way here... can’t those be used as medicinal herbs?”

At her sudden words, everyone’s eyes flew to Max and she froze slightly at the attention. The priests then asked her with a puzzled expression.

“Lizard grass... I’ve never heard of herbal medicine like that before...”

“Lizard grass is usually a very effective medicinal herb for stomach and abdominal pain. When you eat spoiled food... and drink its decoction... the symptoms will soon improve...”

Max wasn’t entirely sure of its efficacy; she was just recalling what she read about in her books on herbal medicine. The priest narrowed his eyes and looked at her curiously.

“How does the lady know about herbal medicines.”

"I-I am...a healer. When I started learning about healing... I also studied herbal medicines."

Idcilla's eyes widened at this new revelation. "I had no idea that the lady had such talents."

"I c-can'tt say that I'm a p-proficient healer... But in Anatol... There are a lot of monsters... so I started studying about healing I-last year."

"What does this herb look like?"

Max searched her memories and tried to remember as many details as possible.

"The leaves are rhomboid in shape... it has black spots and grows in shady areas... if you break the stem, there should be a sour citrus smell..."

"It seems like you're describing the weeds in the asylum's backyard. I didn't know if they could be used as medicinal herbs."

His ignorance was no stranger to Max, considering most of the books Ruth had in his studio were from the South. Since books were a luxury item that only the wealthy or influential could have, especially southern foreign textbooks that valued as much as gold, it was not unreasonable that the level of education and knowledge was so lacking here.

Knowing that, Max quickly added in case mistakes were made. "Lizard grass is poisonous if eaten raw... the stomachache would get worse. It is usually subjected to heat... once all the poison is rid of... it can be used."

"The grass in the backyard may not be lizard grass, will the lady help verify that herself?"

Max nodded and immediately followed the priest to the back of the asylum and just like the priest said, there was an abundant amount of lizard grass growing in the yard among bushes and weeds. She leaned over, studied the blades of grass, and tried to remember everything she had studied in her books. However, she only had her memory to rely on, and in reality, she only had practical experience with about twenty kinds of herbs.

Worried about confusing what she might have learned, Max diligently studied the plant. "Here... those with thick, dark leaves are highly to-toxic and cannot be used. Those that have I-light spots and soft leaves... could be picked and heated."

"Will these be enough?"

The priest asked after picking up a handful of leaves and showing it to her. Max felt the leaves with her fingers, measuring their thickness, and nodded. They brought a handful of lizard grass and took it to the kitchen to test their effects. As the leaves boiled in the cauldron, a strange smell permeated throughout the old asylum. With a ladle of the herbs boiled in equal portions, the priests gave it to the sick one by one, their expressions tense and full of suspense.

Fortunately, within an hour, the effects began to take effect and the labored breathing of the sick people became at ease. Seeing that the herb worked better than expected, Max sighed in relief. She was nervous because she would potentially put shame on herself if she failed.

“It seems to be working well. I can’t believe such an effective herb was right under our noses...”

“W-Well, the handling of this herb is... very complicated... so it is not very well known.”

“Are there other herbs around here that we can use?”

After her success with the lizard grass, she gained the full confidence of the priests. Max carefully surveyed the area around the old charity house and chose various herbs that could be used before returning to the monastery with the noble ladies. After a week, the conditions of the patients suffering from food poisoning had improved remarkably. However, the number of sick people did not decrease. Since all the wizards and priests who knew healing magic had left the battlefield, there was only one medic left in Livadon. But due to the inflated price of herbs, most people could not seek proper treatment, and the temple was too overwhelmed to treat the sick.

Due to such dire circumstances, rumors that a talented healer appeared in the capital quickly reached the ears of everyone in the city, and sick people from all corners of Levan flocked. Most of the skilled healers left for the expedition, so there was only one clinic that operated in the city. On top of that, the price of herbal medicines skyrocketed to the point that none of the sick were able to get proper treatment. The central temple also didn’t have the resources to aid the sick, so hearing that a skilled healer has surfaced, it was not a surprise that people were gathering.

With that, Max became the healer of the old ramshackle building. Whenever she could, she would explore the forest with the priests and gather various herbs. She even cast healing magic from time to time on the weakest patients. The other noble ladies also actively cared for the sick. Although there were several who disapproved of such menial tasks, many ladies were delighted to do the meaningful work.

“My husband is risking his life on the battlefield, and now I too have something to contribute. This is a hundred times more rewarding than sitting praying all day and shaking in fear that his body will arrive in one of those wagons one day. If I work hard, God might look favorably on my husband.”

They all seemed to have similar thoughts and cared diligently for the sick and weak. They didn't even hesitate to touch and feed them by hand or wipe their bodies with wet towels. Some of the ladies even learned about medical herbs first-hand from Max. While everyone was busy during the hectic days, their spirits also patched up. Max slept better and her appetite also returned.

Merchants from the south also began to arrive more frequently, with their ships loaded with food, solving Levan's shortage problems and the circumstances surrounding the old asylum also naturally improved with it. News of victory in the north arrived one after another. Max became hopeful that they might be able to return to Anatol before the season changed.

Note – LF: I'M SO PROUD OF MAXI!! And our poor baby tries to downplay her skills

Nymeria: YOU GO GIRL! So so proud!!

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 205

Levan began to noticeably regain its vitality. The fruits on the trees began to ripen so lusciously that the refugees were able to work in the orchards and earn wages. The midsummer heat seemed to have placed a renewed energy into the city's once gloomy atmosphere. Colorful summer flowers bloomed throughout the capital and flocks of waterfowl gathered in the river Krysamt, floating calmly through the flowing body of water.

Whenever Max saw these, as their carriage passed by, she imagined that this was what Anatol would be like now that summer was in full bloom. The lake that Riftan brought her to had also to be full of beautiful waterfowl, the wildflowers had to have already covered the verdant green fields where they rode their horses through and the orchards must have been full of grapes. It would have been wonderful if she could see the beautiful scenery with Riftan before the autumn season took over. When Max thought of

padding in the sparkling summer lake with him, her heart pounded with anticipation and longing.

“There have been a lot less these days.”

Alyssa’s murmurs snapped Max out of her thoughts. They were in the middle of picking herbs in the courtyard of the asylum, when she inclined her head towards Alyssa’s sunburnt face.

“W-What’s less?”

“The wagons that bring back the dead...”

Max’s shoulders shuddered as images of the bodies suddenly came to mind. She quickly pushed the thoughts aside and replied dryly. “Y-yeah... it’s been a few weeks... and they haven’t come yet.”

“That’s a good sign, right?” There was a glimmer of hope in Alyssa’s tone, but even though Max didn’t bother to reply, she continued, her voice mixed with pain and hope. “Perhaps, when the messenger returns, it will be about the end of the war. They always come with the news of victory.”

“Y-Yes... such news would be nice.”

Max did not allow herself to think positive, as she was afraid of being disappointed if she set her expectations too high. Although, in reality, she was also secretly thrilled to finally hear that the war had ended. Currently, the Allied forces were fighting to drive the monsters away from the northwestern territories, and they were fighting to retake the stronghold of Ethylene Castle in the northeastern region. They all claimed that if the battle there was won, the war would end.

Across the capital, everyone’s hopes were high on the news. Max, however, took it all in with a grain of salt, and couldn’t help feeling anxious. After all, the saying “the calm before the storm” carried weight.

“Let’s g-go inside now... this much is enough. We need to get ready to get back in time. The evening prayers... w-will commence soon.”

“Oh, is it that late already?”

Alyssa looked up at the sky and stood up slowly. Just in time, Idcilla called out to them with a lively voice.

“Hey you two! Come in and wash your hands! Everyone is ready to go back. If you don’t want the priests to scold you for being late for the evening prayer, hurry up!”

“We were just about to go.”

Alyssa grunted as she walked towards the entrance of the old building. Max gave a sour smile and followed the girl inside. Thanks to everyone’s contribution in the recent weeks, the old asylum had been completely transformed. The dusty, hardwood floors were now clean and polished, credits to their diligent sweeping and waxing. Carpenters were also hired to repair the roof, stairs, and windows. As a result, the place hardly resembled the old, crumbling building.

””” ”

Max looked around the place for a moment, feeling a sense of pride, then went to the kitchen to wash her hands in the sink. She went out, fixing her hair and clothes, and saw the carriage and the guards already waiting for her. After promising the priests that they would return soon, they all got into the carriage.

“When should we visit again?”

One of the ladies sitting across from her asked excitedly. After pondering for a moment, Alyssa replied with a sigh.

“Maybe in a week. The priests have asked us to refrain from going out for the meantime.”

“Why? The security has improved a lot lately.”

“There are many merchants coming from the south, and the priests believe that they are pagans of polytheistic faith, worse than the refugees. The priests were very reluctant to accept their help and have always seen them as barbarians who cause nothing but trouble.”

Idcilla spoke in her characteristic poignant tone and Max replied with a frown.

“That is not true. Their knowledge... are much more advanced than the west. All the healing techniques I have learned... were based on knowledge coming from the south.”

“You must not say that in front of the priests.” Alyssa warned her with a serious expression. “Although the priests in Levan are Protestants and tolerate the existence of magic... they do not accept paganism. If you openly advocate polytheists, you will be rejected.”

Max recoiled at the prospect. “I’ll be...c-careful.”

As the carriage made its way from the outskirts and onto the main road, Max looked out and found herself in excruciating fatigue. Just as they entered the temple courtyard, a loud trumpet came out of nowhere. The noble ladies who were dozing off against the

walls suddenly woke up, startled by the sudden sound, and they all flocked to the carriage window. Max poked her head too and saw the sea of people parting before an armored knight rushing down the road like the wind.

“Is it a messenger?”

“I-I think so.”

Max responded and her face hardened. The ladies also exchanged glances and trembled with both anxiety and anticipation.

“Maybe it’s news that the Ethylene Castle has been reclaimed.”

Alyssa exclaimed with a jubilant smile, but Max was skeptical. Seeing that a gentleman was sent to deliver the message in a hurry, it couldn’t be good news. A sinister chill ran down her spine, and she shuddered at the hideous weight of anticipation. It was Idcilla who sprang into action and ordered the coachman to hurry through the partition.

“Please hurry back to the temple! We need to know what news the messenger brought!”

The carriage clattered across the yard immediately, and Max grasped the coin in her hand so tight that her knuckles turned white. She could only pray for good news. However, her high expectations were immediately shattered as she entered and sensed the tense atmosphere inside the temple. The priests were in deep discussion with each other when they got out of the carriage.

A priest approached them to welcome them. “Welcome back. We have decided to cancel the evening prayer tonight. Please return to your rooms and rest.”

On impulse, Alyssa reached out and grabbed the priest’s arm who was turning to leave. “We saw the messenger arrive. Did something happen?”

The priest turned to look at them, feeling uncomfortable by the atmosphere, and explained. “I suppose it is better to let the ladies know now. It will become very difficult to serve the noble ladies who will be staying at the monastery from now on. For those who wish, they can communicate with their families and return home.”

“What does that mean? Please explain it to us!”

The priest only sighed at the cries of frustration coming from Idcilla. “It seems that the tides have turned, the monster army has spread all the way to the northeastern border that connects with Balto.”

A moment of deathly silence seized them, and everyone’s anxious breathing could be heard. Alyssa staggered as if she was about to faint and was quickly caught by the priest.

“Please don’t worry too much as the situation is not as serious as it seems. The point is, this war is going on indefinitely, and requests have been made to send a support unit and supplies. The temple plans to send a large number of servants of people to help the men in battle. Therefore, the living situation in the monastery may become incredibly dire for the ladies. It may be better to go home to your families...”

“Are you telling us to go home because we are a nuisance?” Idcilla continued to exclaim fiercely.

Alyssa was startled with her rude tone and scolded her. “You did not come here to demand to be cared for!”

“...First of all, keep calm and go back to your rooms to think about it. We will also pass this message on to the other women.”

Just as Idcilla was about to argue again, the priest quickly scuttled out of sight. Max looked at the back of the retreating priest in devastation. Her expression was clearly distraught and her stomach was in tight knots and tingled like she had swallowed needles. The other ladies collapsed into the nearby seats with bewildered expressions.

“He said that the situation is not that serious, so everything should be fine, right?”

“He’s probably trying to reassure us. If it’s not serious, why would they be trying to get rid of us?”

Idcilla’s anger only served as fuel for her fear, and each and every one of them returned to their bedrooms pale and exhausted. Max also stumbled backward and collapsed onto her bed helplessly. If she had known that the pain and anxiety would be so great, she would have never followed Riftan there. If she had stayed in Anatol, she would not be consumed by such extreme and paralyzing fear and apprehension. After witnessing the casualties of the war with her own eyes, her sanity was put to the test.

The peace of mind that she had finally achieved while working at the charity had now been completely crushed, and the nightmares returned. When she got up the next morning to see the other women, it was clear that they suffered all night like her. They trudged into the chapel like ghosts, physically and mentally exhausted. As she crossed the garden, the priests were rushing around, paying no attention to them. It seemed they were busy preparing to send a support unit for the war.

Max was completely distracted while looking at them, when suddenly, someone tugged on her arm. Idcilla clung to her with a finger to her lips, motioning for her to follow her silently. Max could only follow with a puzzled expression. Idcilla moved her behind the pomegranate orchard, and looked around to make sure they were alone, before she finally spoke.

"I'm sorry for suddenly dragging you here. I need to talk to the lady secretly about my plan..."

"W-what's going on?"

Max asked, filled with concern at the hesitation that was uncharacteristic of the girl. Unable to suppress her intentions, Idcilla divulged everything rapidly.

"After yesterday's happenings, I couldn't stay put. So, I went to speak to the priests and priestesses to see them personally, and according to them, the backup support unit will move northeast and move towards Servin Castle. They're thinking of supporting the allied forces from there."

Max could only blink questioningly, as she did not understand why Idcilla was secretly telling her such information. Seeming her questioning expression, the girl hesitated for a moment, then continued.

"As the name suggests, the backup support unit will provide assistance from the rear. They must take care of the wounded and do random tasks such as preparing meals for knights, washing clothes, identifying the deceased, and helping with the transport of bodies. Since most of the men have left, this unit will probably consist primarily of priestesses."

Slowly sensing the motives for this conversation, Max swallowed a lump in her throat, and waited for Idcilla to finish before assuming. The girl inhaled deeply and spoke fiercely with determination.

"I will be sneaking in and joining the priestesses."

Max's mouth fell open and she immediately threw thoughtless objections. "T-that's ridiculous! It's t-too dangerous."

"I am the daughter of a knight. I know how to protect myself. Besides, we won't be doing in the front lines, we're just helping with the chores from behind. It's not that different from what we've been doing for the asylum now."

"It's completely d-different! You're traveling to a war zone..."

When Max's voice raised unconsciously, Idcilla quickly reached over to cover her mouth. "Please, be quiet. If Alyssa finds out about this, she will drag me home by the hair if she has to."

Max thought she needed to inform Alyssa immediately about Idcilla's reckless plan, but as if she could read minds, she narrowed her eyes.

“I trust the lady and confided my plan only to her. The lady wouldn’t do anything to betray my trust, right?”

“... Idcilla, really, please r-reconsider... you’re only e-eighteen...”

“I have been an adult for two years now. As I am an adult, I can take responsibility for my own decisions.”

Note – LF: WELP; “I’m not gonna do it girl... I’m just thinking about it...”

Nymeria: And in the next chapters we’re gonna have the “I did it” ending, I can already feel it in my bones lol

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 206

Max was completely at a loss seeing the sheer determination in the girl’s eyes. Idcilla, who was four years younger than her, was a hundred times braver than her. Feeling uncomfortable under her gaze, Max looked away.

“I-Idcilla there is no reason for you to...leave and go all the way there.”

“Why not?” Idcilla snapped back sharply. “Because I am a noble and a woman? It wasn’t my choice to be any of those two.”

“If something happens to you I-Idcilla... your fa-family will be devastated.”

“That applies to everyone. People who go to war all leave their families behind. Everyone bears the same sacrifice.”

Max could only keep her mouth shut. It suddenly occurred to her that not everyone would bear the same suffering. If Riftan fell, she would mourn for him with all her heart. But that wouldn’t be the case for her, neither the Duke of Croix nor Rosetta would blink at her cold corpse.

All of a sudden, Max felt her throat tighten. Riftan's voice saying that she was his only family echoed in her ears.

Right now, the only person who treats me as family is fighting in a dangerous place, what in the world am I doing here? What is the point of living for a hundred years if I wouldn't be seeing him again?

While Max was lost in her depressive thoughts, Idcilla began to speak about her purpose.

"Last year, my brother suffered from a serious injury on his right arm during a joust. Although he was healed with divine magic, the aftermath of it didn't go away and his hand would occasionally limp. When the order to join the expedition came, the whole family fought to keep him from leaving. Even so, he chose to heed his honor as a knight. So why can't I be like my brother too?"

There was anger in Idcilla's tone, and Max did her best to appease her agitation.

"I-Idcilla, there's n-no need to make a reckless decision... because of the indignation you feel for your b-brother."

"I'm not doing this because I have ill-feelings towards Elba. No matter what the Lady says, my decision won't falter." The girl said as she stubbornly raised her chin. "I didn't disclose this to the lady because I was undecided on leaving. The support unit is leaving in five days. Before leaving, I intend to learn at least one useful healing spell. I know that the remaining time is short, but I want to take with me what I can learn. Will you help me?"

Max's lips remained closed. It felt like there was a typhoon currently raging through her thoughts. Everything was screaming at her to inform the priests and Alyssa immediately about Idcilla's rash plan, but her heart was telling her something completely different.

She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. After stuttering for a few moments, she finally blurted out her answer. "I-I... I'll go with you too."

Even she was shocked by her own statement. Didn't Riftan plead for her to stay here and wait? Max could practically see Riftan's enraged face in front of her right now. Reaching into her pocket, Max touched the shekel nervously. Idcilla gave her an unsure smile.

"I think that Lady Calypse is more impulsive than I am. There is no need for you to be pressured to come."

"" "

"Maybe... I am i-irrational. However..."

Max didn't know how to justify her reasoning and Idcilla also kept her mouth shut. Idcilla appeared conflicted on the matter of whether it is alright for her to pull someone else into a dangerous expedition. After a moment's hesitation, Idcilla spoke again.

"For me, there are only two options; go home or join the support unit. The priests are planning to send home most of the ladies who are staying in the monastery. Soon, I will be called to go home immediately. When that happens, it will be even more difficult to receive news about the Allied forces. I won't be able to bear that. However, the Lady can remain in the monastery, so she does not have to take the same risk as I will."

"T-That's not true... I also..." Max bit her lip.

The pain in her heart now piled up to the point that it was becoming unbearable. She truly regretted being left behind and not putting more effort into persuading Riftan to take her with him. There was nothing more painful in this world than being away from him.

Max has an extraordinary talent for torturing herself, she would imagine the worst possible scenario and dark, bleak future. It would have been better to enter the battlefield than to be tormented for months with nightmares.

Max opened her mouth again, her tone scratchy like she had thorns stuck in her throat.

"I also... I want to g-go. I have to go."

"Are you sure?"

Max nodded slowly and she saw relief wash over Idcilla's eyes. The girl looked around again to make sure they were alone and told Max in detail, her plans to sneak into the support unit.

"Then milady, please prepare your belongings in advance. I have a friend amongst the priestesses, I will seek for her help. I'm planning to disguise myself as a priestess. Since the priestesses' robes cover the entire body including the face, it will be a perfect way to hide identity and join the support unit."

"H-how about me... what should I do?"

"I'll get you one of the priestess' robes too."

"W-what if they discover our disguise... wouldn't that be a huge p-problem?"

"It will be fine. Many of the sisters who were assigned to the support unit have not been officially appointed as priestesses yet. If we are caught, we could claim that we were thinking of becoming priestesses but had a change of heart."

Max looked at Idcilla skeptically, not sure if anyone would absurdly believe a simple excuse but she had no other choice.

“But, are you really sure that you want to come with me?”

Max nodded and licked her lips. The day Riftan found out about this, there would be a fiery to pay. However, even if Riftan would scold her endlessly for it, she had to do it for she was going crazy yearning for him.

“Alright. Then... later when the service is over, come to the patio. We have a lot to prepare.”

The two left the orchard and went to the chapel for the morning prayers as if nothing had transpired. After the service ended, the noble ladies gathered among themselves to discuss their future with grim faces. With her expectations crushed by the new turn of events, Alyssa returned to the bedroom, saying that she wanted to be alone.

This left Max and Idcilla a lot of privacy to plan their infiltration of the support unit. Max packed a generous supply of herbs and some manastones, a sewing kit, casts, and other relief supplies in her leather bag that she had brought from Anatol. She also took some of the linens from the monastery.

When they weren't busy preparing to leave, she taught Idcilla medicinal herbs and what to watch out for if they encounter monsters. Idcilla had no practical experience, but coming from a family of knights, her knowledge in monsters was on the same level as knights.

“There are two ways to kill a troll. First is to cut off their heads.” Idcilla explained while drawing a diagram on the ground with a thin twig.

“Trolls are said to have rapid regeneration, any damage will heal in the blink of an eye. The books even go as far as to say that a severed limb could simply be reattached. The only part that cannot regenerate is its head. Second, they're vulnerable to fire. If burned, their wounds can't heal immediately, that's why fire mages are extremely effective against trolls.”

The description of the monster only stoked her fear, and Max swallowed the lump in her throat. When she thought about going to a place infested with terrifying monsters that are resistant to attacks made her shudder. However, these were the kinds of monsters that her husband was currently battling against. As the days passed, Max became more and more determined to leave with Idcilla.

Time flew by so quickly that the day they would finally leave with the support unit was already the next day. Max waited until late at night before secretly sneaking out of her room. Idcilla was waiting for her in a corner of the garden, and she sighed in relief when she saw Max.

"I was worried that you suddenly changed your mind and wouldn't come."

"I'm here n-now, that's nonsense" Max answered and looked around to make sure no one was following her.

"Idcilla... tell me honestly if you're having s-second thoughts. It's not too l-late if you say it now."

"Nothing will change my mind. My only regret is not thinking about this sooner."

She breathed out through her nose and walked toward the priestess's quarters. Max tiptoed behind her as carefully as possible. In the dead of night, only the cries of the insects and the soft sound of the wind can be heard. They left the dark garden and entered a small, quiet building. As Idcilla walked through the gloomy hallway, she went over to a door in the corner and knocked. The door was immediately opened and there was a slight whisper.

"Come in."

Max quickly entered behind Idcilla. In the compact bedroom lit by dim candles stood a stiff-faced, dark-skinned woman in her late twenties. She looked between Idcilla and Max, who had her bag strapped behind her back, and frowned, as if she couldn't believe this was actually happening.

"You're really sure about this?"

"Yes, as I have told you many times."

"... I was hoping you'd change your mind now at the last moment."

Max's eyes widened in surprise, she thought the priestess would be cooperative as Idcilla had claimed. The priestess stared at Idcilla's defiant expression with a conflicted look. Finally, she resigned with a sigh, then went to retrieve two priestess robes from her clothing trunk and handed them over.

"It seems like no one is stopping the miss. Please, don't let me get punished for this."

"Don't worry. Even if we are tortured, we will never confess that it was Selena who helped us."

Idcilla reassured with absolute confidence and went behind the partition to change into her robe. Max just snuggled up on the spot as she looked uneasily at the priestess.

Reluctantly, the priestess introduced herself. "My name is Selena Keyman. I was Lady Calyma's playmate when we were children. Since childhood, I have been a poor soul forced to be an unwitting accomplice of the headstrong miss."

“I can hear you”. Idcilla yelled from behind the screen, but Selena was unfazed.

“Such as that.” Selena sighed heavily and looked at Max up and down.

“It’s not too late to go back to your room now. You don’t have to get caught up in her mischief.”

Max frowned at her disrespectful attitude. “I-I am Maximillian Calypse. Nice to meet you.”

She tried to be as polite as possible but blunt at the same time. “And for your suggestion... although I am grateful, I will have to refuse.” She added.

The priestess rubbed her aching head as if she had just been burdened by all the troubles in the world. Max waited silently for Idcilla to finish changing before going behind the screen to switch her clothes. The moment her silk dress fell to the ground, there was no turning back. Max pulled the long drab robe over her head and dropped it over her ankles, then she pulled the hood over her head.

“I’m d-done.”

“The robe’s fit is a bit big. Although it’s not that noticeable...” Idcilla muttered as she adjusted the fit. Max smoothed the creases on the robe. She wanted to check and see herself in front of a mirror but since it was a priestess’ room, there were no dressers or mirrors around.

“Don’t worry, most of the priestesses haven’t even seen each other’s faces. Only those who entered vocation at the same time have seen each other. As long as you keep your mouth shut, you won’t be caught.” Selena explained as she tied the laces around Max’s waist. “Also, no one would ever suspect that two noblewomen are entering a war zone disguised as priestesses.”

Her tone was laced with sarcasm at the ridiculous plan, but Idcilla simply ignored it.

“Thanks you. Hearing those words makes me feel more at ease. “

The two of them stayed in Selena’s room to rest until dawn. As soon as the sun began to pour light into the window, all the priestesses came out of their rooms one by one. Selena peered through the cracks in her door, and as soon as the hallway was mostly cleared, she slipped outside.

Max and Idcilla followed Selena to the temple courtyard. At the base of the stairs, dozens of wagons filled with luggage and supplies filled the large space. At the front, knights wearing Livadon’s royal crest lined up.

Max rubbed her sweaty palms on her robe and joined the line of priestesses entering the covered horse-drawn carts. As Selena had said, they had gone unnoticed as the

soldiers were scrambling and didn't even find something suspicious about their fake identifications, letting them on the carriages without a word.

As soon as she got into the carriage with dozen other priestesses, Max crawled to the far corner and hugged her bag tightly. Selena and Idcilla sat across from her. After everyone boarded, a loud signal sounded in all directions, indicating that they were ready to depart. Soon, the wagon she was in shook and slid into a slow roll.

Max's heart was in danger of jumping out of her chest. We're really leaving. For real.

Max carefully lifted her head and glanced at Idcilla, but it was difficult to read what the younger girl's expression over the robe that her face up to the bridge of her nose. However, Max could see that her knuckles that were sitting on top of her knees were white with tension.

Note – LF: Time to reference this, "I'm not gonna do it girl, I was just thinking about it." ... "I did it."

Nymeria: Here we fricking gooooo

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 207

Proofreader- Nymeria

Max wanted to comfort Idcilla and tell her that everything would be fine, but she was afraid to open her mouth and attract unwanted attention.

All the women were covered by their robes that she couldn't see their faces clearly but most of them were young women. And they too tense as hardened stones—whenever the carriage rocked when rolling over a rough surface, they would rattle along like pebbles in a sack.

Max leaned against the wall of the carriage and looked out the window. Dozens of supplies-filled wagons lined up to exit the large city gate in an organized file.

“How long does it take to reach Servyn Castle?”

Idcilla suddenly opened her mouth. Even though her voice was a soft sound, it sounded loud against the silence that everyone’s eyes flew to her.

Max was afraid that someone had already recognized them, but Selena responded calmly.

“Around a week to 10 days.”

“I didn’t think it would be that far when I looked at it in the map...”

“With a handful of troops and supplies to carry by wagon, it takes a lot more time.”

After their exchange, silence immediately filled the carriage again. Just the sound of the horse hooves, rattling wheels, and the occasional rustle of the soldiers’ armors filled the air.

The glow of dawn seeped into the tense atmosphere. The unit passed through the gates of the capital and at some point nearby, stopped at an open field.

“Why are we stopping? We just left.”

Idcilla muttered nervously. Max noticed that she’s worrying about them being found out in their disguise.

“The knights of Archduke Aren will be accompanying us.” Selena quickly explained to her in a whisper to assuage her concerns.

“I heard that the Archduke will be in command of this procession. As we have an excessive amount of food with us, additional guards are needed to ensure safety.”

At Selena’s explanation, the faces of Idcilla and all the other priestesses sighed in relief. Only Max cowered. If what Selena said is true, then she would have to avoid the Archduke’s eyes until they reached Servyn Castle in 7 to 10 days.

””” ”
.

Max bit her lip. She wanted to take countermeasures and let Selena and Idcilla know about it, but she didn’t dare speak, fearing that she might be discovered by one of the priestesses. She was afraid someone might recognize her by her very distinctive stutter.

Max became very wary and didn't speak a single word. When noon came, the soldiers and knights stopped in a large weed field to eat. The priestesses immediately began distributing food to the men. Since Max and Idcilla are hiding their noble identities, they also joined the assigned task.

They distributed bread, cheese, and wine to the men, then distributed food to the priests. After they finished, the priestess gathered near the riverbank and they ate their own food.

Max sat with Idcilla and chewed on the stale loaf of barley that scraped the roof of her mouth.

Walking around under the intense sunlight had beads of sweat forming around her nose and the heat that she felt under the robes was similar to being inside a sauna. But no matter how red her face was from the trapped heat; she didn't dare remove her hood to allow the breeze to come in.

She concentrated on her food and vigilantly watched her surroundings. The Archduke's knights were at the front and rear of the massive procession. She would be able to avoid being seen by them if she's careful.

"We are moving too slow."

Idcilla complained after returning from washing her face and hands in the river.

"If the temple discovers our absence too soon, they will soon catch up with us at the speed at which we are traveling."

"Y-You said that... you took care of everything before leaving."

Max, who was constantly on guard, asked in a low voice. Although no one could hear since they were sitting some distance away, she was still worried about the worst.

"I did. But there is always the possibility that something will go wrong."

"What the did you do?" Selena asked with a clenched jaw, but Idcilla just shrugged.

"I paid some people to pretend to be us. As soon as dawn came this morning, they will join the other ladies and act like they are going home in hired carriages."

Selena laughed, stunned at the ridiculous plan. "There is no way that the central temple would fall for such a lame plan. They would surely have figured it all out by now."

"That would be true if the war wasn't this large-scale. But right now, they can't afford on paying much attention. If two women similar our build wear veils and show their identification will easily get into the carriage. I also paid the coachman."

Selena sighed in exasperation. "Won't Lady Alyssa know?"

"She is completely in her own world right now. She might find it strange that I went home without talking to her, but as long as the priests tell her that I have gone home...she will be convinced." Then Idcilla added bitterly. "I just pray that she doesn't come to her senses too soon... or else she would become suspicious of my behavior and contact my family..."

Selena's eyebrows furrowed at Idcilla's fractured plan, then turned to Max.

"What about the lady?"

"I... left a l-letter... saying that Idcilla has invited me... to stay with her. And speaking of which..."

The person whom she addressed the letter to deliver is with them right now. She sighed for a moment then finally confessed.

"T-the person...who was supposed to watch over me...is Archduke A-Aren. He is close to my husband... and my husband left me in his care before he went to war..."

At the new revelation, a moment of suspense silence passed through them. Selena clutched her head abruptly in frustration and moaned loudly as Idcilla stroked her chin thoughtfully.

"Don't worry. Nobody pays attention to the priestesses. We're in the rear and they're in the front, so as long as you don't get too close to him when distributing food, you should be fine."

Idcilla comforted her with her usual optimism.

"Y-you think so?"

Idcilla nodded enthusiastically.

"It's actually better. If His Grace received the letter, it will only complicate things as he might verify if you are indeed staying with me in my home. The priests wouldn't go through that detail."

Her words sounded plausible, and Max felt regained a little of her composure, finishing up her share of bread. When lunch was over, the expedition continued without delay.

Max got into the narrow carriage where there wasn't even room to stretch her legs until sunset. Max's entire body was stiff and cramping, and cold sweat was dripping on her cheeks, but it couldn't be helped. She rested her throbbing hips on a thick blanket for a while.

She was absolutely exhausted but there wasn't enough time to rest as they had to help setting up the camp. While the knights and soldiers tended to the horses and surveyed the area, the women were tasked with preparing the fires and dinner.

Max followed in the footsteps of the priestesses and gathered dry branches and straw for the fire. Idcilla helped bring water to fill the cauldron and collected stones to build a makeshift stove.

That was not all. They had to prepare the ingredients, c**k it, and then distribute it. Only afterward did they sit near the fire to enjoy the hearty soup and roast potatoes.

Sleeping on the blanket covered ground was uncomfortable, but Max isn't in the position to complain. She closed her eyes and tried to fall asleep under the clear, starry sky.

The next morning, she woke up with five mosquito bites on her fingers and calves. There were also ants crawling on the skirt of her robe and her back was covered in dirt. The rest she acquired didn't really amount to sleep, it was more like just closing her eyes.

After washing her face, she got back into the carriage. The day played in the same monotonous routine. They left at dawn, stopped at noon for lunch, and moved immediately afterward.

Just as Idcilla said, the Archduke did not even look in her direction. Max saw him scouting the surrounding area with his knights in search of monsters, but none of them took a glance at the priestesses in drab garb. Nobody cared about them at all.

Thanks to this, Max was able to relax and adapt to the demands of the expedition. Surprisingly, Idcilla was the one struggling to adapt.

She didn't cry or complain, but every night, she tossed and turned, and the narrowness was difficult for her, who had long arms and legs.

"The journey might be longer than I thought."

Selena commented with an anxious expression as she looked at Idcilla's pale and tired face.

"I overheard the knights say they are taking the longer route to Servyn for safety. Will you be okay?"

"Of course."

Idcilla responded without missing a beat.

"I can adapt like everyone else."

The girl's pride was so fierce that any act of compassion and concern for her was intolerable. However, when Max prepared herbal tea to help her sleep, Idcilla did not refuse. Judging by Idcilla's complexion the next morning, she appeared to have been able to sleep soundly.

They rode in the wagon that rocked violently. Whenever the car rattled and rocked, all the women bounced off their seats. And when the car turned around, they were all thrown to the side of the vehicle like rolling pebbles. There wasn't an inch of skin that wasn't covered in bruises from the rough ride.

When they finally neared their destination, Max realized that the journey had been surprisingly and suspiciously peaceful. As if jinxed, the sound of a sharp flute echoed through the procession, and all the carriages immediately began to shake violently as if an earthquake had broken out. Screams from everywhere pierced her ears.

Max held onto the windowsill to keep her from falling to the floor of the carriage and looked out the window. The soldiers all hurried to their horses and drew their swords in unison. Soon, Max saw why. Giant dark green monsters rushed towards them, causing a dust storm with their footsteps.

The horde of monsters stirred the men and chased after them like raging bulls. The sudden halt of the carriage caused them to scramble inside, and Max fell to the floor, trembling. The thunderous roars of the trolls hit her ears like a whip.

"Everyone! Get your things and get out now!"

The soldier screamed at them as he swung the door open. The women were huddled, sobbing in fear as he forced them to get out.

"We can't put a barrier on every carriage. If we all get together in one place, we can build a magic shield for everyone. Hurry!"

They grabbed their bags and jumped out of the car at the man's behest. The soldiers led the priestesses to the center of the procession.

Max was barely able to keep up as she struggled to find her balance in the chaos. However, the moment the trolls appeared, her legs froze in fear. If it weren't for Selena's quick reflexes, she would have collapsed on the ground.

Max allowed herself to be herded like sheep as they squeezed through the crowd of people. Once all the defenseless were gathered in one place, the high ranking priests immediately threw a barrier around them with divine magic.

Max clung to Idcilla and looked around her, eyes unfocused on the chaos unfolding before them. The dark green monsters clad in iron armor swung their massive maces and the bodies of the soldiers flew in the air like mere scarecrows.

Max screamed at the blood splattering everywhere. The sizes of the trolls are twice to thrice larger than the men.

The knights raced forward with incredible speed to slice through the bodies of the trolls, but the monsters didn't even flinch. When Max saw the wound close in seconds, her eyes darkened with inexplicable fear.

What she read in the books was completely different in real life. How on this earth have humans fought such monstrous beings possessing such formidable strength?

With a blow of the iron hammer, the giant smashed a handful of the war horses. Max barely suppressed the urge to vomit and squeezed her eyes shut. Even Idcilla clung on Max as if she was on the verge of death,

At that moment, Archduke Aren's roaring voice pierced their ears.

"Reinforcements have arrived! Everyone, come to your senses!"

Note – LF: Dang, sh*t's about to go down hardddd

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 208

Max mustered what little courage she had left and barely managed to open her eyes. It was difficult to see what was happening with the dust surrounding them as thick as fog. She could hear screams, the sound of steel colliding, the angry neighing of horses, and the sickening sound of ripping flesh. She stayed as close to the people around her as possible and shuddered in fear. A group of horses passed them, leaving behind a thick dust of earth, and the glow of the knights' silver-gray armor passed before their eyes. Their silhouette charged the trolls like a storm and soon, a violent battle ensued against the dozens of trolls.

Max looked around nervously. Too much was happening, and it was hard to tell who was winning, it all felt like a living nightmare. Knights threw chains of hooks everywhere

and wrapped them around the massive body of trolls like a net and the monsters fought back, roaring in anger. Their huge limbs hitting the ground rumbled and almost split the earth in two.

Max was terribly daunted by the fierce battle ensuing right in front of her. The knights mercilessly impaled the trapped trolls with spears and hooks, cutting their heads off when their struggle went down a notch. These counterattacks were repeated several times, until the battle eventually came to an end. The trolls who were still on their two feet dwindled down to half of the initial number and even those stumble helplessly under the constant attacks of the knights. Eventually, they drove the monsters to a corner in an organized tactic.

“It appears that it will all soon be over.”

As the thick dust settled, Archduke Aren beckoned to the high-ranking priest. Then, the barrier surrounding them disappeared, as it melted into thin air. Max flinched as she trembled: although it was announced that the battle was over, her stiff limbs couldn't move an inch.

“It's all over now. Hurry up and aid the wounded.”

A knight urged them. It was only then that they carefully went to the blood-covered battlefield and Max glanced terrified at the troll's dead body slumped against the ground. The soldiers removed its armor, revealing its terrifying build: dark green skin like a swamp toad, muscular, heavysset body and a face of a monster like how it was described in the books. It had a large, hawked nose, yellow teeth with fangs protruding out of its mouth, sparse long black hair, and cheeks drooping like the face of an old saggy man.

She was watching the troll with such an engrossed gaze that she later realized that the head she was observing was already decapitated from its body, quickly turning her eyes away. Her stomach turned and her eyes became unfocused.

“Hurry and carry the wounded to one place! Those who are seriously injured should be brought to a high-ranking priest, while those who can still move should be gathered in one place to receive initial aid.”

One of the knights instructed firmly, and the priestesses all began to move. Max desperately pushed the gruesome image away and ran toward the fallen men. Some died right where they were, but she averted her eyes from those who were crushed, concentrating on finding those still breathing and conscious.

It couldn't be said that they had been fortunate, since many people had perished, but two-thirds of the men left in the battlefield were still breathing. After carefully checking the extent of their injuries, Max casted healing magic. She felt a bit anxious, wondering if people would find it strange that a priestess was capable of conjuring magic, but no

one paid attention to it. Soldiers and knights rushed to remove the armor from the trolls' body, while the priestesses and the high priests were occupied with tending to the wounded.

Making sure no one was looking in her direction, Max stealthily applied more healing magic. After healing seven people in a row, her mana reached its limits. Carefully judging how much mana she had left, she decided to refrain from using healing magic to prevent the risk of magic exhaustion. Instead, she concentrated on moving the wounded to an area, as the other priestesses were already doing. Those in critical condition were brought before the high priest to be treated with divine magic, while soldiers with minor injuries, such as fractures or heavy bruises, were led into the hastily erected tents. The wounded were placed neatly on the blankets, and a knight who was supervising yelled in a stern tone.

“At the moment, we cannot cast healing magic for everyone. There's one more day left until we get to Servyn. Once everyone has received first aid, we will take a short break and begin to move immediately. I hope everyone can endure it for a little longer.”

The wounded soldiers nodded wordlessly as the priestesses stripped off their armor and began to clean their torn flesh, and Max also helped remove their armor to clean dust and dirt from the wounds. Watching the soldiers squirm and groan in pain, she felt a strange sense of guilt creep inside her: if she only had more mana, all those wounds would heal in no time, but she couldn't afford to try too hard. If she pushed herself and collapsed just like the last time, it wouldn't do anything but trouble.

Max applied the cast to the wound and wrapped it in bandages made from torn sheets. Some of the wounds were so large that she had to stitch them up, just as Ruth taught her. Many soldiers paled at the thought of their skin being stitched together with thread and needle, but most of them wordlessly accepted her help. After giving them painkillers, she began to stitch up their wounds one by one.

“There are more injured here! Someone please give me a hand!”

Just as Max finished suturing and bandaging the wound, a soldier yelled in the distance. She got up quickly and walked over. The moment she stepped outside, the body of a troll lying near a large rock caught her eye and she froze in shock.

””” ”

“What are you doing?! Hurry up and help me with this guy!”

She had no choice but to follow the soldier, finding two unconscious men lying next to the monster's body. Max supported one of them and struggled to lift him up, as the soldier who called for help picked up the other one and the two returned to the tent with the unconscious soldiers in tow. Suddenly, a strange thumping sound came from behind her as they moved, sending a foreboding chill down her spine.

Slowly, she turned and saw huge red, burning eyes staring at her. Her legs shook and she froze on the spot. Her first thought was to run away, but she couldn't move, it was as if she had turned to a stone statue. The troll, whose head was barely attached to his neck, grabbed his half-severed head and held it back into its rightful place. As soon as the flesh healed and his head was once again properly attached to the rest of his body, he came running towards her.

At that moment, a huge h**k caught the troll's neck and Max's leg gave out. The giant monster, who was 7 kvet (210 cm) high, recoiled like a fish caught on a h**k. The troll swung its limbs in retaliation, but the knight on top of the rock didn't even budge. As he violently yanked on the chains, its body scraped against the ground, sending dust everywhere. It was truly a sight to behold that of a knight who managed to coil a monster three times his size. At that point, he drew his sword and quickly lowered it on its rock-boulder sized head, which snapped in two like a pumpkin. The scene was so unrealistic that Max couldn't even feel nauseous.

"Can't you even properly confirm if it's dead?"

The knight's cold voice resounded like a whip. The soldier next to Max was quickly shaken from his stupor and launched a round of apologies for his incompetence.

"F-forgive me."

The gentleman clicked his tongue disapprovingly, then gestured his chin towards the tent. "Hurry and bring him in."

The soldier with the wounded man on his back obeyed immediately. Max wanted to follow him, but her legs refused to move, she could only look up at the knight who had saved her. The knight had such ruthless expression that she could hardly believe that it was him who had struck such a strong blow. He leapt away from the dead monster's body like a graceful cat and wiped the blood from his sword. His hood flapped, and his tan hair shimmered like gold under the sunlight.

Max groaned internally when she realized who it was. The knight who had just saved her life was Sir Leon Quahel, the Commander of the Holy Knights.

"What is it? Are you hurt?"

Max immediately lowered her head and grabbed her hood as the knight turned to her. "I-I-I'm f-f..fine."

She tried to lower her voice to avoid being recognized and struggled to stand up. Her legs had lost their strength and as she tried to carry the weight of the unconscious soldier over her back, they shook like she was a newborn foal. Sir Quahel, who was watching her pathetic struggle, went over and snatched the soldier from her.

“I’ll carry him.”

Max looked at her feet, conflicted on what she had to do. She pulled her hood over to cover as much of her face as possible, but it seemed like he wasn’t close to recognize her. If he did, Max had no idea what kind of explanation she was going to offer him.

“What are you doing standing there? Go and lead the way.”

Hearing his urging cold voice, she hurriedly went towards where the camp was. The knight gently supported the unconscious knight and walked beside her. She could feel his gaze stinging the top of her head, but she dared not lift her eyes to check.

She swallowed hard. Did he perhaps recognize me?

However, he simply dropped the unconscious man on an empty bed space without saying a word. When he finally disappeared from her sight, the accumulated tension disappeared from her shoulders.

There’s no way he can remember a person he only saw once. Max convinced herself and went to where the wagons were. For once, she was thankful that she wasn’t so memorable.

“I heard that one of the fallen trolls was actually alive and suddenly attacked. Are you alright?” Idcilla asked anxiously when she saw Max, and Max nodded her head in response.

“I’m-I’m fine. A knight...saved me.”

“We were fortunate. The reinforcements who came are led by the Commander of the Holy Knights.”

“Yes... they arrived just in time.”

“They must have been patrolling over this area in case the trolls attacked to steal our food.”

Selena replied as she got out of the wagon, carrying a cauldron. Max hardened into the prospect that it was a premeditated attack. Contrary to their dull appearance, trolls were considered highly intelligent monsters. If such terrifying monsters had the ability to form armies, craft weapons and armor, a tremendous disaster would surely befall on the human race.

She pulled a packet of herbs from the wagon as she tried to deter her negative thoughts. At that moment, she had to focus on helping the injured, rather than wasting time worrying about such useless things. She passed down herbs to the priestesses and told them how to create a mix that would help replenish their energy. They also

made medicinal tea and made the wounded take it. Then, Max went to help retrieve the bodies of the fallen warriors.

Being exposed to the sight of blood made her senses numb. As the belongings of the fallen ones were being collected, the gruesome crushed corpses were wrapped in large cloths and taken to the high priests, who prayed and drizzled holy water over their mangled bodies. After the simple ceremony was over, the soldiers began digging graves and constructing headstones for the dead, and Max was quite surprised by the informality of it all.

“Aren’t all the bodies...sent back to the capital?”

“It is too difficult to send them all back to the capital. Since there are priests here, the funeral rites could be executed and have the bodies buried immediately. Only their belongings will be later sent to their bereaved families.”

Selena whispered in a grim voice and Max felt her stomach twist at the possibility that a Remdragon Knight was also buried that way. She did her best to shake off those ominous thoughts, but they clouded her mind like a thick fog. Perhaps, it was because she had witnessed too many horrors in one day.

She assisted with the funerals by helping retrieve the mangled corpses with her mind and body in separate states. After the corpses were all buried, another ritual was done to purify the dead monsters. When everything was sorted out, their journey continued straight away. Max sat on the corner of the wagon and rubbed her stiff, tired eyes. She stank of blood and her mental state was in shambles, but strangely she did not shed a single teardrop. She hugged her knees and watched the sun set in the horizon inside the rocking wagon. The Holy Knights, embraced by the glow of the setting sun, seemed more somber and intimidating than ever.

Were you able to deliver my letter...? Max wanted to ask how Riftan was doing, or if he was hurt, but she knew she wasn’t in the position to do so.

Once we get to Servyn Castle, I’ll be able to know. Max reassured herself.

She was drowning in terror and dread, but the thought of potentially seeing Riftan gave her strength. As long as she could verify that he was safe, she could endure anything.

Just a glance, from a distance, that’s all I need. She told herself as she buried her face in her lap, driving away the nightmarish horrors from her mind.

Note – LF: I’d collapse on the spot if I see anyone get squashed to death. Anyway, - Quahel is strong as (and Riftan defeated him? I can now understand why Ruth doubted that Riftan is pure human lol).

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 209

They were significantly delayed because of the troll attack that, by the time they stopped to make camp, darkness had already descended on the sky. Knights stood guard holding torches, while priestesses focused on the wounded. Most of their conditions worsened due to traveling continuously despite their weak bodies.

Max went with Idcilla to fetch water from the spring, so they could use it to boil herbs for the medicinal tea. After giving it to the wounded soldiers, they went to prepare a meal with the other priestesses. She was exhausted enough to pass out, but there was no time to take even a short rest. Only after they took care of the injured and handed out food to everyone, could they finally settle down to eat their own meal, consisting of whatever bread and soup was left.

Max didn't think it was unfair. When the battle broke out, the soldiers risked their lives to protect them, now it was their turn to help nurse them back to health. She filled her stomach with the meager meal in the dark and went to lie down on a blanket near the campfire. Idcilla, who had also worked without a word of complaint, came to lay by her side. After a moment of silence, Max could hear the girl shuffling around.

She asked her in a whisper. "A-are you alright? Are you hurt somewhere...?"

"N-no. It's just... it's more terrifying than I thought it would be..." Idcilla blew her nose on the blanket, her eyes glittering with unshed tears. "I'm sorry. I'm a fool. What I did is practically not different from begging you to come with me..."

"No, i-it's not. I... made my own decision." Max responded quickly, then added hesitantly. "Do you want to go b-back?"

Idcilla shook her head. "Nothing like that. No, honestly, I want to go back. But still... I won't do it."

She bit her lip lightly before continuing. "You remember I told you about my older brother, right?" Max nodded. Idcilla's voice was as weak as the wick of a dying candle.

“Elba did not join the war to maintain his honor as a knight despite suffering from an injury. Although he claimed it was to maintain his honor... in truth, he did it to raise money for my dowry. My family is one of the oldest families in Livadon, but... since my father’s generation, our wealth and influence has been in constant decline. And my fiancé is from the Sedo clan of the southern region...”

“In that r-region... do they ask for a large amount of dowry?”

Idcilla nodded stiffly. “I told them to break the engagement, but my father would not hear it. For a noble woman, breaking an engagement or marriage is the same as a death sentence... Elba didn’t want me to be subjected to such a dishonorable situation. So, to earn my dowry, my father sold the little land we had left and Elba was forced to join the war. I knew this... I just pretended not to know and did nothing to stop it. If I had just walked into the monastery and become a priestess earlier... If Elba... ended up like those soldiers buried in the ground today... If something like that happens to him, I will never be able to forgive myself.”

Max heard the faint sound of sobbing. To think that Idcilla was struggling with guilt all that time... it all made sense now, she could understand why she came up with such a reckless decision. She was very unfamiliar with it all. A brother who would risk his life for his little sister, or a father who would sell his land for his daughter; it sounded like something out of a storybook.

“Sorry. You must feel uncomfortable from what I just revealed.”

“...It’s fine.”

“Tomorrow, everything will be better.” Idcilla wiped away her tears with her sleeves and claimed defiantly. “I must be very tired because my emotions became vulnerable.”

“...sleep now. When d-dawn comes... we’ll have to leave for the road again.”

Idcilla nodded and covered her head with a blanket. No more crying could be heard, the girl had to be really exhausted since she fell asleep very soon. Max rolled onto her back and looked up at the starry sky with a grim expression. Although she was born a girl, she never imagined that she would be loved. If she were smarter, prettier, and didn’t stutter, would have the Duke of Croix treat her differently? She felt her heart freeze at the thought.

Max curled up and pulled the blanket over her chin. There’s no use in making yourself miserable by comparing yourself to others.

”””” ”

She had Riftan now. Even when she was tattered and covered in dirt, he loved her. Just having him by her side was what she would probably ever need. Max closed her eyes and tried to erase the memories of her miserable past.

The next day, the preparations to depart began even before dawn broke. Max, feeling her mana returning, applied some healing magic to the wounded. The injured soldiers were not surprised as they thought they were receiving divine magic. Sighing in relief, Max went to the stream to fetch water to make breakfast; however, when she got there, she was the only priestess around. Perhaps the other priestesses already brought water.

Max turned towards the camp, when she suddenly saw her reflection in the water. She had been wearing the suffocating robe since the beginning of the expedition, so the exposed part of her face and neck were sticky with sweat. She hesitated for a moment, then quickly sat down near the water, pulled back her hood, and splashed the cold water over her face and neck. Her clothes were getting soaked, but she didn't care. Rolling up her sleeves, she washed her arms and armpits before getting up.

At that moment, Max heard a rustling sound above her. She looked up and froze, as her face paled: it was Sir Quahel Leon, perched on top of a steep rock. He looked down at her with an expressionless face as he bit into his apple. It suddenly dawned on her that no one was around there to avoid disturbing his rest. She hurriedly covered her head with hood and quickly went to leave, but a monotonous voice stopped her from escaping.

“What were you thinking coming all the way here?”

Her heart fell to her stomach. The knight threw the core of the apple into the bushes and leaped off the rock.

“I've been snooping around and noticed that the Archduke knows nothing about this... just how did you sneak in?”

“Wha-what... are you talking about...”

Max pulled the hood down to her chin and played ignorant. The man said nothing for a while and stared at her, as if prompting her to answer his question.

Max felt her mouth go dry. “I-I must return, I have something to do...”

“I have delivered your letter.”

As soon as he said that, Max couldn't move as if she was caught in a snare. It occurred to her that he may be lying, but the temptation was too hard for her to resist, she wanted to know from him.

“Is... is he hurt...?”

“Who the could hurt that person?”

Her eyes immediately filled with tears at his confident tone and her heart lit up with relief. She slowly raised her head to detect any lies in his words, but the man simply looked at her with an inexplicable expression. His eyebrows furrowed and his eyes narrowed suspiciously.

“Did you come all the way here just to verify that?”

Max grew red at the accusatory tone. “P-Please pretend you didn’t see me. I’ll make sure that I won’t bring you any trouble...”

“You didn’t have to go this length, nothing will harm him.”

Max looked at him furiously, upset at his sullen tone. “Ri-Riftan... is not immortal.”

The Paladin’s mouth twisted, as if wanting to refute her statement, but decided to keep his mouth shut. A strange emotion, too quick to understand, flickered through his cold gaze.

“Nothing will change even with the lady here.”

“...I know that. I j-just... want to see his face even from afar, I m-miss him...”

Max stammered in shame; her ears dying red in embarrassment. Sir Quahel, who was looking down at her, spoke bluntly.

“The camp where Calypse is in is at least a day or over away from Servyn Castle. Won’t that make your goal quite difficult to achieve?”

Doing her best to hide her disappointment, Max spoke as calmly as possible. “I-it doesn’t matter. As long as I can get frequent news about the situation, since it’s closer than the city, that would be enough for me.”

The Paladin’s mouth remained closed at her answer and Max looked into his impassive face with pleading eyes. Sensing her despair, the man frowned and went to pick up the cloak he had left on a nearby branch.

“It would be better for me to pretend that I don’t know you’re here. Otherwise, I would have to go to the trouble of finding an escort for the Lady. Do as you please.”

The man’s emotionless eyes slowly looked her up and down. Max hunched her shoulders, realizing how shabby and filthy she must appear. The knight opened his mouth, as if he wanted to say something else, but turned and walked away, knowing it

was none of his business to meddle in. The tension on her shoulders barely subsided. The knight didn't seem to want to be involved in her affairs, and it made sense. The Commander of the Holy Knights could not be bothered by whatever she was doing. She slowly returned to the camp to prepare breakfast with the other priestesses and then she tended to the wounded.

Once the sun rose, the expedition began to move. Those who could ride on horseback did so, while those who couldn't were transported through carriages. Because of that, the already crowded carts now barely had room to breathe. Max, sandwiched between everyone, began to nod off. The other priestesses were also drained by the scare of the day before and fell asleep despite the violent shaking of the wagon. After travelling for half a day, the wagon suddenly stopped moving. Max, still in a groggy state, looked out the window and saw the walls of a huge castle. They had reached Servyn Castle.

"Idcilla... I think we've arrived."

Idcilla, who was sleeping on Max's shoulder, raised her head. She leaned over and peered out of the window. Soon, the barred gates of the territory rumbled open for them and the wagons began to move again. She looked around curiously outside the window as they passed through the gates. Ruined buildings and debris were scattered everywhere, which were perhaps brought by the trolls' conquest. Most of the walls were half-collapsed and the buildings were burned down, some were even reduced to ashes. If it hadn't been for the thickly packed tents ahead and the Livadon flag, Max would have thought the city was abandoned.

"We have arrived. You may come out now."

The wagons stopped and the soldiers went to open the doors. Max came out of the wagon with dozen other priestesses and a soldier led them to their tent.

"Follow me." He instructed.

She did as she was told while looking around. Horses were tied to the fences, soldiers were busily running in and out of the barracks, and priests were busy caring for the wounded. She poked her head out, trying to find a familiar face, when the soldier leading them stopped abruptly, causing her to crush her nose into Selena's back who was walking ahead of her.

"The women will be staying here."

The soldier rolled up the entrance to their barracks and Max bent over to catch a glimpse of the inside. Thick piles of hay littered the floor of the low-ceilinged tent. The dark space was clearly only set up for sleeping, there was no space for privacy if one wanted to change or wash, and there was no proper bedding either. The space was so small that Max didn't think there was even room for them to toss and turn in their sleep.

All the priestesses went inside, and Max sat at one corner of the tent with Idcilla. She organized her bag and immediately went back outside. The priest outside instructed them on their chores. They were responsible for preparing breakfast and dinner, while caring for the wounded all day. In addition to their main tasks, they also had to fetch water several times a day, tend to the horses, wash clothes once every ten days, and occasionally attend to the knights. Max's face paled at the thought of having to do so much work, but she had no right to complain. Determined, she immediately went to work.

She also wanted to gather information about the Remdragon Knights right away, but with so much on her plate, it was going to be hard to find time to talk to the soldiers. Max got so worried internally that Selena took pity on her and went out of her way to gather information on Ethylene for her.

"I heard that reinforcements have arrived from Balto. And it seems that the situation is not as bad as it seems."

"R-really?" Max, who was starting a bonfire with a soot smeared on her face, smiled genuinely.

Selena nodded. "I also heard that Sir Calypse is doing incredible on the battlefield. He managed to relentlessly defeat an army of a thousand trolls with only two hundred knights. There's no one as valiant as him."

Note – LF: I feel bad for Idcilla, I understand her now

On another note, imagine someone slaughtering a thousand trolls because he wants to go back to you as soon as he can—, I am selling my soul to get myself a Riftan.

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 210

The light on Max's face grew cloudy. Her spine grew cold as if she was submerged in ice water when she heard that Riftan faced a thousand trolls in battle. They were monsters who were heavier than bulls and had incredibly fast regenerating abilities, to the point that even with their head half-cut, they could heal in a blink of an eye when they were attached back to their neck.

To think that he battled an army of such terrifying monsters with only two hundred men... How could you be so reckless?

Max felt her heart shrivel, Selena's words were far from reassuring her. She opened her mouth and couldn't help groping on her stiff tongue. "H-how about the others..."

"Don't worry. There wasn't a single casualty among the Remdragon Knights."

Max let out an audible sigh of relief and Selena continued in a more hesitant tone.

"But... it appears that some of them were injured."

"Wh-who? How many... how serious are their injuries?"

"I don't know the details. I only heard that some of the knights were seriously wounded after the battle and that they had to stop their advance to recuperate and receive medical treatment."

Max clasped her blood-drained face with trembling hands. The faces of the Remdragon Knights flashed rapidly in her mind. Divine or healing magic could quickly repair an injury on any part of the body, then halting their advance could only mean that their injuries were far from being minor. As her heart squeezed, worrying about which ones of the Remdragon Knights were hurt, Idcilla suddenly approached them with an anxious expression.

"Have you heard anything about Elba?"

Selena shook her head. "Aside from the Royal Knights of Livadon camping near the Ethylene Castle, there was nothing else that I could find out."

Idcilla's head bowed in disappointment, and Selena reached out to comfort her, placing a hand on her shoulder. "In a few days, each unit from the warzone will be coming here to replenish their supplies. When that happens, we can get more information, so don't fret too much."

Idcilla perked up a little at the prospect. Selena then left, she would often gather information and Max would always cover for her duties on the other tent. Staring into space for a moment, she pondered on the news the priestess brought, then quickly cleared her head and concentrated on her tasks. Her cheeks burned and her face was covered in sweat from being near the fire, but the searing flames helped distract her

from her terrible anxieties. Max emptied her head and concentrated on simmering the herbs in the cauldron. After the medicine had cooled down, she fed it to the patients, cleaned their wounds, and replaced their bandages. Once she was done, she went to help with the food preparation. There wasn't even time to catch her breath.

Finally, when she finished her work for the day, Max sank onto the stack of hay in the narrow tent. She couldn't even lift a finger. The summer heat only served to rot all the grime on them, and the smell of blood, sweat, and horses filled her nostrils. It was even difficult to breathe properly due to the stench and humidity, but Max was too exhausted to make a fuss about it. She curled up like a withering cabbage, thinking about what the future would hold for her.

Would this way of living continue until the war is over?

Her confidence and willpower to keep all of herself together crumbled to the annoying hum of the mosquitoes swarming around the dark tent. Tears fell from Max's eyes: she yearned for Riftan dearly and she missed Calypse Castle, but she was the one who decided to come all the way there. As if to gather all her spiraling feelings, she closed her eyes tightly.

The next day was just as hectic. Before the sun had even risen, she went out of the tent to wash her face in the nearby stream of water and went straight to the makeshift infirmary. A total of three hundred wounded men were encamped, and only five high-ranking priests capable of using divine healing magic were around. Due to the scarcity, the priests only focused on treating those who were in critical condition. The others had to recover naturally over time and were left to the care of the priestesses. Once they had confirmed that one of the wounded had died during the night, they went to the main storage tent to prepare medicinal herbs. The priest who supervised the herbs gave them a palm-sized flat board made of wood and gave them instructions.

””” ”

“From what we saw yesterday, most patients suffer from broken bones. Since they could not move properly, you priestesses will have to help them from eating to washing. You must carefully monitor their conditions from morning 'til evening and inform me immediately if anyone loses consciousness or develops a fever.”

Max listened intently as the priest continued to speak hastily. “Pay special attention to those patients whose wounds are still bleeding. You must check whether their wounds have pus or maggots, you should prepare a detox medicine and feed it to them three times a day. Also, make sure their hands and feet are always clean and change their bandages at least once every three days. Herbs and firewood are available here in the main storage tent, you can take as many as you need every day.”

After the priest finished, he divided them into six groups, each group made of seven priestesses. Each group oversaw forty patients. Fortunately, Max and Idcilla were assigned to the same group.

“I heard that most priestesses only know the basics of healing. If you have any questions, feel free to come and ask right away. I will be stationed near the northern gates.”

When the priests left the tent, the priestesses began to divide their tasks. For each group, two will be taking turns on watching over the patients while the other five will be preparing food and fetching water. Max went with two other priestesses to hoist water from the well. The task sounded simple enough, but constantly providing drinking water, boiling herbs, and cleaning was not that easy. They had to prepare medicines for forty men, provide them breakfast and two other meals, wash hands and feet, clean the pus from their wounds, and wrap them with new plasters and bandages. After that, they still had to take care of the horses and prepare food for the other soldiers in the fortress.

Every day passed by them in an instant, as if time was on fast forward. Slowly, Max got used to the tough work. Although it was much harder than she had expected, she didn't mind and didn't complain about it. Her heart ached so much seeing men who could forever be crippled from fighting monsters that she felt sorry for not being able to help them more. If she could, she wanted to heal each and every one of them with her healing magic. However, that was a distant dream, given her limited supply of mana. Even casting it on merely 3 to 4 people a day drained her energy to the point that she could not handle the rest of her tasks. In the end, Max decided to refrain from using magic as much as possible. In such a situation where she was responsible for dozens of men, she could not pour it all on only a few of them.

She meticulously cared for the wounds of the patients assigned to her and soothed their pains by offering analgesic herbal teas hourly. It was another busy day when Idcilla secretly beckoned to her.

“Madam.” She whispered.

Max was in the midst of preparing a medication, but stopped what she was doing and looked. Idcilla had a finger against her lips and urged her to come out quietly. She looked around for a moment in confusion, then followed the girl out of the tent. The sweltering rays of summer sun pierced her eyes. Max paused for a moment to rub the sweat away from her forehead and nose and Idcilla grew impatient and waved her hand, urging her to hurry.

“This way.”

Idcilla sneaked around the campsite and stopped her tracks when they reached the fortress wall. She hid behind the bush and abruptly pulled her arm to hide with her.

“J-just... what is happening?” Max asked in a whisper as she leaned in next to her.

“Look over there.” Idcilla pointed her finger above the bush and Max soon realized why the girl called out to her. Dozens of knights lined up outside the wide open gates.

“Those are the Knights of Wedon. They are here to get food.” Idcilla whispered in her ear.

Max’s eyes widened. Just as she said, the knights’ coats were bearing Whedon’s crest. Her heart began to race at the thought of Riftan being among them.

“I think they will be leaving immediately once they’re done getting their food supply.”

“I-immediately?” Max asked in disbelief and Idcilla nodded in response.

“Now’s your only chance to gather news and details about the Remdragon Knights. What do you want to do?”

Max bit her lower lip. Even if Riftan wasn’t among them, she would be able to at least know how he and the knights were doing. She covered her face with her hood and stepped out from behind the bush.

“I’ll go and pretend that I’m only helping out... I’ll make sure n-no one notices me. Then maybe I can listen in... on the kn-knights’ conversations.”

“I’m going too”.

Max shook her head. “If we both go, we’ll get noticed. You must go back to the tent Idcilla... before the others find out. If I hear anything about the Royal Knights of Livadon... I-I’ll let you know.”

Idcilla thought for a moment, then nodded and turned to leave, knowing that Max’s words made sense. She headed straight to where the Knights of Whedon were, and as she approached their barracks, she heard the Archduke’s hospitable voice.

“It must have been difficult getting here. Please, come inside. Take a break while the soldiers load the food into the wagons.”

He led the Knights of Wedon to the barracks while Max hid behind a wagon, watching the knights pass one by one. Max poked her head out, trying to get a good look. Just as she was about to approach one of them to ask him about the situation in the frontlines, someone familiar crossing the gates suddenly caught her eyes. Max’s eyes widened.

Sir Karon...?

It was Elliot Karon, who left before them and got caught up in Louiebell, and he was entering the castle gates with the other soldiers. Max felt like crying at the face she hadn't seen in months. She heard that Riftan came to the rescue successfully, but she did not know if any of them were seriously injured and wondered if everyone else was unharmed. She felt like a kettle of boiling water, wanting to act on impulse and rush to him to ask for any detail or information, but if she got caught now, she would likely be forced to return to Levan. With great self-control, Max crouched behind the carriage, careful not to be discovered. However, she froze in place when she saw that behind Sir Karon there was Ruth.

She watched warmly, seeing the face of her friend who she hadn't seen in months. Oh, how she worried about that pestering and sarcastic guy! Ruth's gray hair had grown a bit longer than the last time she saw him, it was messy and reached the nape of his neck, and he had lost weight, making his already slender face look even skinnier. He opened his mouth wide to yawn, looking exhausted as he always did, then, he dismounted from his horse. Max smiled. Even from a distance, she could hear his usual grumbles.

After leaving instructions for the knights, Ruth headed towards the nearby small stream. Max hesitated for a moment, but quickly decided to follow him. He walked over to the stream, rolled up his sleeves, and splashed the water loudly all over his face. Once she made sure no one was around, she approached him silently and squatted next to him. Ruth didn't immediately recognize her, whose face was covered in sweat and dirt and who was dressed in shabby priestess clothes. To him, it appeared like she was just another priestess who came to fetch water. He shot her a disinterested look, then went to wash his stained hands and feet.

Max frowned and reached out to touch his arm. Only then did his blue-gray eyes turn to see her clearly. She smiled awkwardly at Ruth, who blinked at her with a blank expression.

"I-It's been a while, Ruth. You seem well... I'm relieved."

As if struck by lightning, the wizard immediately stood straight up and opened his mouth as if he was about to scream at any moment. Max jumped at him like a rabbit, quickly covering his mouth to prevent him from doing so. The action made Ruth's thin body fall backwards, looking like a scarecrow, and then he fell straight into the stream with a splash, splattering water all over her robe.

Max looked at him with pleading eyes and desperately begged him. "P-Please... don't 'cause a commotion. N-nobody knows... that I'm here."

He stared at her in utter disbelief, then upon seeing her priestess robes opened his mouth again.

Note – LF: AAAAAH RUTH IS HERE!!!

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