

## 261 Under The Oak Tree

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Max ran to her at once. Annette glared at the cat with narrowed eyes and raised her dark brown eyebrow towards Max.

“Is this one of the ingredients for an experiment?”

“N-No! That’s my cat.”

Max scurried and took Roy, securing the cat in her arms. The expression on Annette’s round face furrowed.

“Look here, Max. Just because the senior wizards come less often to supervise the common lab because of the upcoming promotional exams, it’s still not a good idea to bring pets in here.”

“It’s just for t-today, please let it slide. The window latch broke... so there’s no other choice, I can’t leave him in the room by himself. Just this morning, he sneaked out of the room and caused a mess in Miriam’s lab...”

“Miriam’s lab?”

Annette interrupted her words and looked down at Max’s cat again. An expression of satisfaction spread across Annette’s round face. Annette chuckled loudly as her chubby, calloused-covered hands roughly stroked the cat’s head.

“You’re quite smart huh, Max? Using a familiar to derange a competitor—that’s very cunning and clever.”

\*Familiar is like magical creatures that wizards can keep around, kind of like pets but they can be manipulated by magic to do things.

“He-he’s not my familiar! Roy is just an ordinary cat and I-I never intentionally tried to disrupt Miriam...!”

“Fine, Alright, if you say so.”

She winked at Max as if indicating that she was overlooking some kind of a secret conspiracy and quickly got going with her strong muscular legs. Max stared at Annette’s back in bewilderment. Most wizards didn’t really tend to not try coloring other people’s stories, but the three Godrick siblings were an exception. Max sighed and followed the siblings into the common laboratory that was mainly used by wizards in training. As she entered, the first thing that caught her eyes was the huge flame emitting from the furnace.

The twins were placing firewood and coals into the furnace and underneath, manning the bellows, was the other man, much taller for people who come from the Umlri tribe. Next to them were around three to four trainee wizards, tapping iron with a hammer, seemingly making magic tools. Max drew her robe's hood to her face and walked to the relatively quiet corner of the room to avoid the heat. As she tossed her bag over an old desk by the window, she carefully lowered Roy and the cat quickly crawled under the desk and curled up into a corner. The cat seemed to be terrified of the unfamiliar environment around him. After caressing Roy's back to comfort him, Max pulled out the magic spells and formulas she had organized all night. The older Godrick twins who had been pouring charcoal into the furnace, sprinted to Max and gazed at the parchment curiously.

"Is that the magic spell that you'll show for the presentation?"

"Show me, I'll go over it for you."

Alec reached out his chubby, charcoal-black fingers and Max quickly pulled the parchment away.

"Wash your h-hands first!"

"" "

"You're too meticulous even for a noble woman."

Alec frowned and rubbed his dirt-covered hands across his greasy apron and snatched the parchment away from Max, who let out a small squeak. There was a black smudge on the edge of the parchment but the older Godrick twin did not seem to care and flipped over it.

"The Gnome Hall's honor is at stake in this competition. If you're planning to show just some silly magic, I will instantly challenge your eligibility to compete. This time around, we really have to defeat and hit the pride of the Kabbalah wizards."

"It seems everyone keeps forgetting... I haven't decided to become a wizard of Gnome Hall just yet. I am still learning my affinity for fire magic."

The Godrick brothers who were going over the magic spell she had designed raised their heads in a flash and looked at her in bewilderment. Not only them, but the other wizards who were hammering steel by the anvil, casting fiery sparks, casted sharp gazes at her. Max hunched her shoulders, she felt like she was being treated like a traitor. Alec clicked his tongue and spoke as if he pitied her.

"You still haven't given up? Maximillian, you don't have an ounce of talent for fire magic."

“He’s right. Your affinity to fire magic isn’t going anywhere. It’s better for you to rather try becoming a water wizard. At least you have an affinity for water magic. Although it is very miniscule.”

“My water magic affinity... is better than that!”

“Then why didn’t you take up classes at Undaim this semester?”

Max kept her mouth shut at Dean’s sarcastic question. Truthfully, her magic affinity was clearly inclined towards earth no matter what angle it was viewed from. She also had some affinity to water magic, but as Annette said, it was little. To add to that, water and earth properties were usually unrelated to each other and because of that, she was nicknamed “Muddy” throughout her basic lessons that she took at the water tower. Annette, who was well aware of that, took off her leather gloves and smirked at Max.

“Just stop it and give up, Max. You don’t have an ounce of talent for fire magic, and you don’t really get along well with the water wizards. The senior wizards naturally assume that you will get the Mark of the Earth”

“That’s right. It’s better to be called a ‘titan’ here than ‘muddy’ in the water tower.”

Alex said with a mischievous smile as he looked up at her. Max looked around the thirteen trainee wizards of the Gnome Hall with melancholic eyes. All of them were short, had round faces, and thick wool-like hair. Most of the wizards with earth affinity in the world tower were from the Umlis tribe. The Umlis were descendants of ancient dwarves and had an inherently strong earth and fire affinity. They also showed excellent talent in smelting steel and crafting magic tools. Max was able to quickly learn various types of magic training with them. However, the more time she spent training in Gnome Hall, the more she felt like she was straying away from the image of the wizard she dreamed she would be. Strictly speaking, wizards with earth affinity were closer to magic tools craftsmen rather than wizards.

She let out a sad sigh as Agnes, who had fire affinity, appeared in her mind. When she first entered Nornui, she was inflated with the dream of becoming a fire wizard like Princess Agnes. She wanted to be a powerful wizard that Riftan could somehow rely on. However, as soon as her mana affinity test results came out, her expectations became fleeting and shattered. Her mana’s fire affinity had the worst results.

“Usually, those with earth affinity also have a certain affinity to fire. Yet of all things, you have an affinity to water... It’s a very unique case.”

Dean shook his head and Alex added to his statement. “But still, you show excellent talent for magic on the earth element. If you give up on your lingering for fire magic affinity, your future will be much more solid.”

Max refuted their statements with a dissatisfied expression. "But... I want to learn how to attack with magic. Wizards with earth affinity... no matter how excellent they are, they can only support from the rear during battles."

"Yeah, there's nothing so special about defensive magic." Annette, who was examining a Wyvern statue made out of steel, replied sarcastically. "If you want to learn attack magic using earth elements, you should go to a higher level. If you become a high-ranking wizard, then you'll get to learn a lot of taboo magic."

"I d-don't want that! What I want is to leave the island as soon as possible. If I become a high-ranking wizard... I won't be able to leave Nornui at my own will."

"What's wrong with that?" Dean shrugged as if he didn't understand Max's defiance to leave. "I'm not sure what in the is good about the outside world where demons roam. I would rather live in Nornui and study magic for the rest of my life. That would be much easier than face heretic interrogators."

"Nowadays... that rarely happens. The persecution of wizards ended a long time ago."

"That only applies to ordinary humans like you. Wizards of different races like us will become prey for hunter-like heretics once we leave this island."

Max sighed, exhausted from the conversation that they already had dozens of times. "When in the world did you hear such a story? Nowadays even the Holy Father, the Pope, could not easily interrogate and judge a wizard that's a member of the world tower. Even the royal families are very conscious of Nornui."

Annette snorted loudly as if her words were absurd. However, Alex appeared temperamental and continued to prod. He looked up at Max and asked with curiosity in his eyes.

"Are there not enough wizards from where you come from?"

"Of course. There is no place in Whedon that has enough wizards." Max replied to his question enthusiastically. "The lords of each country are so desperate for gaining even just one wizard. Compared to before, the treatment of wizards has excessively improved."

Alec stroked his round chin in thought then opened his mouth again. "Max, you're from the southern part of Whedon right? Do you know anything about the lord of Anatol?"

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T/N – LF: In the previous chapter, I have translated Miriam’s pet as “PEORI.” I thought that it’s the pet’s name but after reviewing the first chapter and read that it’s a fly-like creature, I had an AHA moment (shame for how stupid I was), I have realized that “PEORI” (PE-YEO-RI) is a Konglish (Korean-English) pronunciation for “FAIRY”. We will now refer to Miriam’s pet as a fairy, I apologize for any confusion this have caused.

Max’s whole body stiffened at the sudden out of the blue question. As she hesitated to answer, flustered and not knowing what to say, Dean suddenly interrupted their conversation.

“By Lord of Anatol...do you mean the dragon slayer? What about him?”

“I heard a story recently about him. They say that the Lord of Anatol has a sword made of Adamant and treasure plates of Orihalcon metal.” Alex exclaimed as if just imagining the sight of those made him excited. “Do you believe it’s true? They say he has stockpiled jewels and treasures amounting to that of a god’s! My lifelong dream is to forge an Orihalcon. If I become the dragon slayer’s wizard, I might have a chance to at least touch it.”

“Forget it. Don’t you remember that there is a traitor by the dragon slayer’s side?”

At Annette’s serious tone, Max hunched her shoulders. Annette, who was quietly observing upon her desk a wyvern steel model that was flapping its wings, shot them a stern look. “If you don’t want to be disliked by the senior high-ranking wizards, you shouldn’t go off saying such things. To this day, if you score the south to north, the story of a traitor always comes up when it’s about the Serbel clan.”

As the story about the clan that ruled the Urd tower was discussed, Alec’s face darkened for a moment. Max swallowed dryly. Ruth Serbel’s notorious reputation was more widespread in the World Tower than she had expected.

When they discovered that Max was from Anatol, the senior wizard of Urd seized every opportunity to slander Ruth and even the Serbel clan would relentlessly preach sermons about how shameless the traitor Ruth is whenever they had the chance. Fortunately, the trainee wizards were not aware that she was from Anatol, what they only knew was that she was from the southern region of Whedon. If they found out that she had learned

magic from Ruth Serbel, they would have roasted her as much as the high-ranking wizards did. Most of the trainee wizards who discovered that the World Tower's rules became more restricted because of Ruth who had escaped from Nornui without permission, harbored a deep grudge against him. Max then hurriedly changed the topic, wanting to avoid any spark.

"E-enough with the chitchat! We have a lot to prepare... for the afternoon classes."

"We haven't gone over the magic spell you made just yet. The Gnome Hall's honor is at stake in this competition!"

"Right! And what's more is that your competitor is Miriam of Kabalah! That woman is said to bite at every loophole of her opponent. If you're only half-prepared, you will be humiliated in front of everyone."

Max narrowed her eyes and glared at them. "Before you worry about my own business... why don't you start worrying about your own assignments? If both of you fail to finish translating the ancient language assignment within the deadline, you will be disqualified from the promotion exams." The Godrick twins' faces turned blue at once. Max snatched her magic formula from Alec's hand, rolled it up, and shoved it into her bag. "And for your information, my magic spell will be reviewed by Professor Landon. You don't have to worry about it."

"Professor Landon?"

Annette, who was looking down at her own work delightfully, immediately raised her head. Landon was the headmaster of the Gnome Hall, a wizard from the Umli tribe famous for his meticulous and eccentric attitude. Annette raised an eyebrow; she was well aware that that man treated the apprentice wizards like a nuisance.

"That's new of that twisted old geezer to do."

"Professor Landon... seems like he's paying a lot of attention to the competition."

Max exhaled heavily in an attempt to shake off all the pressure. However, she felt considerably burdened deep inside. It wasn't only because of the fact that she would be representing the apprentice wizards of Gnome Hall, depending on the result of her presentation it would be decided whether she would be included in the ceremony of receiving an official magic attribute the following year. Usually, apprentice wizards were to undergo four years of training before being awarded their official magic attribute. In rare cases, those who were recognized for their talents and qualifications were awarded after only three years. Because of that, she studied day and night to complete the necessary theoretical courses to become a high-ranking wizard and she had been conscious of making her grades on the higher side. If she got a good evaluation on her presentation for the competition, she would be able to leave Nornui by next spring.

'If it pans out well... I will be able to return home.'

"" "

Max felt her heart beating loudly against her chest. Whenever she thought of Anatol, longing and sadness would feed inside her like tidal waves and she struggled not to be swept away by those emotions. Right now, all her focus had to be on the presentation. Max took a deep breath and pulled the chair in front of her desk to sit on.

"Anyways, I have to prepare for the class. Please, everyone, back to your seats."

"...don't push yourself too hard."

Annette stared intently at Max's darkened eye bags, then gave her a pat on the shoulder and went to her own desk, while the Godrick brothers scattered to their own. Max placed her hand under the desk to scratch Roy's chin and then opened her book. Fortunately, Annette helped set up a fairy trap in the window, so Max was able to leave Roy alone in her room the next day. After petting her cat, who was lying down by the windowsill, Max grabbed her bag and went out. She headed downstairs and she had pulled out the material for today's class discussion, when she heard a cheerful voice call out from behind her.

"Max!"

As Max turned her head, she saw a girl with wavy brown hair gathered in a long braid running towards her with a bright smile across her lips.

"Good morning, Sidina"

"Good morning. Are you prepared for today's discussion?"

"Just for today."

The girl groaned painfully at her answer. "How can you do that to me! You have promised not to study in advance!"

"I don't remember making that kind of promise."

Max responded in a coy manner and averted her gaze to the parchment in her hand. Then, Sidina began to try distracting her with loud howls. Max rolled her eyes at her. Sidina was so exceptionally eloquent that even without much preparation, she would stand out in class discussions. On the other hand, Max was prone to embarrassing herself in class if she did not thoroughly prepare at least three days in advance. After desperately making an effort for the past two and a half years, she was finally able to speak almost without stuttering, but her tongue still felt paralyzed whenever she was nervous or embarrassed.



Max was preoccupied with practicing for the discussion, muttering words that were difficult to pronounce to herself for practice, despite Sidina's attempts to distract her. The girl, who was loudly squealing an Osyrian folk song, screamed in annoyance.

"Ugh, this bookworm!"

"If I...don't study this hard, I won't be able to keep with the class."

"You're doing more than just to keep up! Please ease it up a little. It's my turn after Maximillian's. Compared to you, Max, my presentation would look worse. Won't you feel sorry for me?"

Max snorted at her. "Don't try to humble yourself. Your presentation speech will be smooth like it has been greased..."

"There's a limit to what I can speak impromptu. Professor Lauren has scolded me a number of times before..."

"Then you should have prepared for the discussion in advance."

Sidina's bottom lip protruded. Max flicked through the parchment as she blew grunts to one of her ears. They then proceeded to enter the large garden that connected to Urd. Before entering the classroom, Max remembered that she had to return the books that she had borrowed some day before, so she headed for the library and asked Sidina to reserve her a seat in class. The girl complained, but nodded gently in response.

Max ran straight up the stairs located left of the huge arch-shaped entrance two steps at a time. It was an unladylike action, but there she didn't have to worry about that image. She passed through a long corridor with warm sunlight of early autumn streaming down and went through a door that's 7 kvet high (210 cm). Countless amounts of books, easily tens of thousands of them, filled her sight. Max hurriedly crossed between the tight but evenly spaced bookshelves and headed towards an old desk where the librarian sat.

Then, an old woman with a dwarf-like stature and hawked nose, looked at her. "What is it?"

"I'm here to return some books." Max pulled out a couple of books from her bags and whispered in a small voice.

The librarian checked the books she was handing over and frowned. "These are past its due."

"I forgot to return them ye-yesterday..."



She said apologetically and made a guilty expression, but the librarian didn't seem to budge. She then recorded the dates when the books were returned in the log book and spoke in a calm voice. "For the following 2 weeks you won't be able to borrow books outside of the library. If there's any reading material you absolutely need, you are only allowed to read them inside the library."

"B-but... there's a competition coming up soon and I will need a lot of reference reading materials. Please let it slide just this once, I promise I won't ever miss the due date next time..."

"Rules are rules."

The librarian spat sharply like a knife, then returned to the book she was reading as if she had no intentions of hearing another word from Max. Although she wanted to plead a little more, she was well-aware of the librarian's stubbornness and helplessly turned around. At that moment, a loud voice called after her.

"Maximillian!"

She was startled at the noise and turned her head towards the owner of the voice.

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A relatively young man clad in a ragged gray robe, wearing an irritated expression, was striding through the dense bookshelves: it was Ranolf, a senior wizard in charge of supervising the apprentice wizards. He stomped his feet as he stopped in front of her, ignoring the librarian's disapproving glare at him.

"Good thing I saw you here. Now there's no need for me to go looking for you in classrooms."

Max asked him in a quiet voice, conscious of the librarian's piercing glare. "W-what's the matter?"

“You’re asking me what’s the matter?”

The man placed his hands on his waist and gave her an intimidating look. She could feel the wizards who were sitting and reading by the window glancing, curious of what was going on. However, Ranolf seemed to have no intentions of keeping his manners polite. He pulled out a bunch of thick parchments from his arm and shook it in front of Max. She blinked in confusion with her eyes wide open, then she realized that the wads of parchment were the letters she had written for several nights.

The wizard massaged his temple and exhaled loudly. “I have told you over and over again to keep the letters as concise as possible because they are all to be inspected! Have you not learned from having your letters rejected twice?”

“But I made it as co-concise as possible!” Max retorted, her voice reaching a note higher, frustrated that her letter might have been marked as return to sender again.

The apprentice wizards were allowed to send letters outside of Nornui for only twice a year. And unfortunately for her, her letters had already been rejected twice in the inspection process. Max glared at him bitterly

“I did keep... the letter under t-ten pages as you said...”

“Oh, now you’re saying this is under ten pages?”

Ranolf’s face was trembling with irritation as he unfolded the twice-folded parchments. Max squeaked and flapped her arms, trying to cover the contents of the letter. The man disregarded her and shook the parchment that was wide as a tablecloth.

“You wrote it without a single space on a parchment used for huge magic tools with a handwriting as small as a millet grain! I thought my eyes were going to burst while reading it! I was going to let you slide this time but despite my several attempts at reading it, I ultimately ran out of temper!” He growled and pointed to his blood-shot eyes. “Are you deliberately finding a way to torture me every time? Last time, you terrified me with a bundle of bible-thick parchments, and this time, this absurd...!”

Ranolf grunted as if he couldn’t find the right words to describe it. “Please, put yourself in the shoes of those who will read and inspect your letters! Do you know how laborious it is to inspect a love letter as long and thick as a book?”

“It’s not a lo-lo-love letter! I was just trying to tell my well-being to my h-husband! We can only send letters twice in a span of 1 year, it’s only... n-n-natural... that there is a lot to write about!”

The man then raised his chin and snorted loudly through his nose. “It’s a relief that I was able to inspect it. If that letter really had made it across the sea, it would have been a disaster! Your husband would have run far away from that pathetic letter!”

Max turned blue from the impact of his words. 'I'm already anxious to the point of going crazy, but for him to say such words...!'

She forgot that they were in a public place and she raised her voice at him. "That's not true! M-my husband... is not heartless like Ranolf!"

"Stop talking nonsense, write it again." As Ranolf grinded his teeth, he pulled out a piece of parchment about 1 kvet (30 cm) long and shoved it against her face. "I'll give you one last chance. The letters will be sent on a ship in two days so you should finish writing by tomorrow. On a font this size..."

"" "

He walked over to the librarian's desk, took her quill, and quickly scribbled a line over a parchment. "The font should at least be this size! Only five pages long."

"But it u-used to be ten pages..."

"I said five. If your letter passes the inspection, I will stamp it with a seal that makes sure it gets sent so you better do it properly."

Ranolf insisted on the five pages and turned away with a swish, leaving the library at once. As she stared at his back with a bewildered expression, she heard someone clearing her throat. Max turned around slowly. The librarian was shooting daggers at Max with her eyes.

"Creating a ruckus in the library is penalized by being banned from the library for a week."

"..."

"Rules are rules. You are not allowed to use the library for the time being Maximillian. Please take your leave."

Max groaned and dragged her feet helplessly. Despite being half-rattled, fortunately, she was able to go through the class discussion successfully. However, her mood was still in a huge downturn. As she trudged back to her quarters, Max feebly fiddled with the letters she spent months carefully writing. Whenever she felt suffocated with her longing, she would pour all of it down on the parchment. Although it was true that it resulted in a staggering number of letters, there were so many things that she wanted to tell him that couldn't be summarized.

'I have already written it as concisely as I could...'

She opened the door to her room with a sullen face. As she entered, Roy, who was curled up on her bed, leapt down and went to snuggle against her legs. After feeding

her cat, Max sat down at her desk and stared gloomily at the bundle of letters. Suddenly, the brimming anxiety and sadness she was suppressing burst out.

“If you go, I won’t wait for you anymore.”

Max bit her lips. Thoughts that she had driven to the corner of her mind began to hover inside her like ghosts. ‘What if he meant what he said back then? Even if I go back, if he says there’s no longer a place for me by his side, if he doesn’t need me anymore, what should I do?’

Max pulled out a new parchment as the thoughts suffocated her. Then, she started writing again as if she was pushed by something. Although it was strictly forbidden to write in detail about life in Nornui and there wasn’t much for her to tell, once she began to write, it felt like her pen wouldn’t stop. She couldn’t even dare express in words, much less a letter, how much she thought of him, how much she missed the times she spent in Anatol, and how much her heart ached every time she thought of the day she left him. Letters that would reach floor to ceiling won’t ever capture how much her longing was, much less five pages of it. It was difficult for Max to write down her emotions on those five pieces of parchment. At the same time, she tried not to beg so servilely for him not to forget her. However, as she read the sentences she wrote, she deemed that she failed desperately to achieve those.

Gazing down at the yellow parchment with feelings of hopelessness, Max slowly crashed her face against her palms. Suddenly, she started to wonder what was the use of all that. Riftan could not even feel joy from a letter she wrote, maybe by then he had completely forgotten her. Her heart felt like breaking as she thought of such, she wrapped her hands around her face and desperately tried to hold back her tears. A sudden sigh came out of her lips. She had this terrible habit of imagining only the worst of the worst things that could happen and it seemed irreparable. While living in Nornui, she tried so desperately to become a new person, but she couldn’t change her fundamentals that easily.

She stared at the setting sun with an exhausted expression and dipped her quill in ink again. Even if Riftan no longer needed her, she needed him. She would do anything to win his heart back if she was given the chance. Max then began to write down her current life as briefly as possible as she battled clearing her tumultuous mind. Then, she added that she was going to do everything it took to get back to Anatol as soon as possible. After hesitating for some time, she added one last line.

‘I miss you so much that I think I’ll die from longing.’

As she stared down at that sentence, tears that she had long held back began to stream down. She hurriedly wiped the tears away from her cheeks and sealed the letter inside a leather envelope. Caught by the sniffles coming from her, Roy crept over to her feet and snuggled against the hem of her robe. Max grabbed the cat and buried her face against his soft fur.

“You... want to go home too, don't you?” The cat purred and licked Max's cheek with its prickly tongue, as she sniffled. “Me too.”

At that moment, a sudden knock was heard against the door. Max then raised her head. “Did you... cause some trouble again?”

As she looked down suspiciously at Roy, the cat immediately slipped out of her arms and hid under the bed. Max squinted at the cat, then sighed and walked towards the door.

“Wh-who is it?”

“It's me.”

As she pulled on the doorknob, she saw Annette standing by the door holding a lamp in one hand. Max's expression turned into confusion. Annette lived in the Umli village, so it was rare for her to come to the dormitories.

“What brings you h-here... at this time?”

“I came here at Professor Landon's request. He asked me to tell you to the Gnome Hall laboratory as he has something to discuss with you about the magic spell you asked him to review.”

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Max was drowning in anxiety, she worried whether there was a problem with the design of her spell. She quickly put on her robe and came out of her room. The sky was already turning dark blue. They immediately left the dormitories and walked along the forest road that is slowly being engulfed in a bluish darkness. Annette lit the gas lamp she held and looked at Max with an uneasy expression.

“Do you possibly have an idea why Professor Landon has called for you?”

“I’m not s-sure why.”

She nervously fiddled with the hem of her clothes and tried to recall the magic formula she spent months creating with meticulous effort. It was a formula she accomplished by sacrificing her sleep and meals time to make it in time for the presentation. However, it seemed to be that there was some flaw when reviewed in the eyes of a high-ranking wizard. Max moved her feet nervously, her heart feeling like shrinking from nervousness. As they finally reached Gnome Hall, Annette pointed to the pulley used to go up the building floors faster.

“Landon will be in his lab. I’ll be finishing some work in the common lab so if you need any of my help, look for me there.”

“Thank you.”

Max then went inside the huge iron cage installed against the wall followed by Annette and after the iron doors to the cage closed, she lowered the pulley next to it. Then, the huge cage rattled and slowly began to move up. (T/N – LF: It’s like an ancient elevator hehe)

Max leaned against the wall, trying her best not to look below her. The ground below them gradually grew farther and the dark forest appeared like a dense carpet beneath her feet. She could see the edge of the forest and the grayish blue sea beyond it, then felt a choking feeling from longing as she stared at the distant sea and hurriedly turned her gaze away, afraid that she might just burst into tears again. Finally, the gears that pulled them up stopped moving with a rattling sound. She carefully opened the iron cage with a creaking sound and entered the building through the entrance located at the side of the tower. Then, she walked across the hall that was littered with debris and came in front of a wooden door.

“Come in.”

As she knocked on the door gently, she heard a hoarse voice coming from inside. She then pulled on the k\*\*b and entered. Inside the large room cluttered with books, a fat old man was sitting by the fireplace while reading a book.

“Pardon me for calling you at this hour. I thought of putting it aside until tomorrow, but it would be better to discuss it while there are few people around.”

The man said as he closed the book he was reading. Max’s expression turned into worry.

“May I know what’s the matter..”

“First, sit down.”

He pointed his chubby finger to the chair opposite of him. As Max followed obediently and took a seat, Landon pulled out a wad of parchments from his stack of books. She recognized at once that it was the magic formula that she had submitted. He laid out the design on his lap and stared at it for a long time before he began to speak.

“As you may have guessed, I called for you to discuss this magic formula.”

“Was there something wrong... with my magic formula?”

The man then shook his head. “No, not at all. Rather, it’s the opposite. This magic formula is groundbreaking. It is beyond believable that a mere apprentice that had been in the tower for less than three years had designed it.”

””” ”

Max, who was brimming with nervousness, widened her eyes at the unexpected praise. It was a magic formula she made with utmost effort, but she did not expect to receive such an evaluation from the headmaster of the Gnome Hall. Her heart swelled with joy for the recognition of her abilities, but as his brooding face caught her eye, the worries began to rumble in her head again.

“Then... what seems to be the matter.”

“The problem is your work is too excellent.” He said as he tapped the parchment with a thick finger. “If you present this magic formula in the competition, you will be recognized as a high-level wizard in no time.”

“A h-high-level wizard?” Her eyes widened in surprise.

Landon nodded with a serious expression. “As you may already know, if you become a high-level wizard, you may study freely with great support from Nornui. In exchange, there will be a lot of restrictions regarding you leaving this island.”

Blood instantly drained from Max’s face. Her eyes filled with terror as she looked at Landon and the design she had made. Her breath hitched as if someone’s hands were around her neck.

“I-I don’t understand. I put a lot of effort... creating this magic formula... but never d-did it cross my mind... that it would be such a great magic. Compared to high-level magic, the structure of it is rather simpler...”

“Having high complexity of magical structure does not connote excellence. Rather, it is better to use a simple structure for practicality. Because of that sense, this design that you have created is a masterpiece.” Landon picked up the design and read over it with new found wonder, then frowned. “However, it would be impossible for this magic to be put into practice. I am quite sure that Urd will deem your magic as taboo. It’s a pity. We



have to be conscious of the church so no matter how excellent of a magic it is created, it only rots inside the tower..."

Landon heaved a heavy sigh. Max's expression couldn't be hidden, she couldn't believe that she had made a magic so great and blinked with a blank face. Landon chuckled at her stunned reaction and clicked his tongue.

"Haven't you thought of the dangers of making Golems after designing this formula? If it becomes known that such magic exists, isn't it obvious that it would cause such an uproar in the church? Magic that has something to do with monsters is strictly prohibited by the doctrines."

"B-but golems aren't monsters! From what I have studied, golems are some kind of magic tools. If we look back at historical re-records... back in the golden age of the Roem era, they created an army of golems to fight against monsters."

"Golems created in that way are now attacking humans indiscriminately. Because of that, people outside this island regard golems as monsters, don't they? Nowadays, that's the common perception of people." Landon waved her parchment. "In conclusion, the magic formula that you created is a spell for creating a monster. If they find out that such magic exists, how do you think the church will react?"

Max was frozen with fear, unable to utter a single word out of her mouth. She was finally able to fully grasp the depth of the predicament she was in, so she snatched her design from his hands. Landon's eyes widened, surprised by Max's sudden action. She then crumpled up the parchment and tucked it into the pocket inside her robe.

"I'll pretend that th-this magic formula... doesn't exist. Professor Landon, please do that as well."

Landon's mouth dropped in confusion. "But what about your presentation for the competition?"

"I'll make a d-different magic formula. Please, pretend that you didn't see this. I sti-still haven't told anybody about this formula yet... if we keep it like this, no one else will know."

Suddenly, she remembered that the Godrick twins had gone over her design to review it. However, she thought that there was no way they could have deciphered her formula in such a short time. And even if they did understand the contents of her design, she would disregard it if she was questioned. Max spoke pleadingly.

"I-I have no intentions of staying in the World Tower. So far, I've been desperately studying... to get home to my husband as soon as possible. Please... I beg you, please keep this a secret."

“If you have no intentions of staying here, then why did you research this magic formula? There’s a lot of other topics to research on.”

“That’s... that’s because while I was looking into forgotten ancient magic, it caught my interest...”

Max blushed and clamped her lips. She couldn’t bring herself to confess that it was because she was searching for a magic that would possibly help Riftan in battle. Landon sighed softly as he looked at her with his amber eyes.

“There’s no need for you to be so nervous. If I was going to force you to present it, then I wouldn’t have called you to the tower in the first place at this time of the day.”

“What you’re saying is...”

“Is there a wizard here that doesn’t know how desperate you are to leave this island?” Landon spat out grumpily and leaned back comfortably against his seat. “Still, I wanted to confirm with you first your intentions. Presenting this formula will help you establish a position in Nornui. It’s a pity to make waste of a magic like this. In all honesty, I even thought about letting you present this and pretend not to know what could have happened.”

Landon smiled bitterly as Max’s lips stiffened. “However, if that happens, Nornui might just have another wizard fleeing the island.”

“...I am not unhappy with my life in the World Tower.” Max spoke her words very carefully. “I just... I just want to return to my family. Learning about magic for me is certainly fulfilling and rewarding... but I don’t want to spend the rest of my life doing research in the world tower. I want to be with my husband.”

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The man sighed in resignation whilst stroking his thick beard. "If that is what you wish to do, then there's nothing I can do. For now, it will be better for you to return and keep that design. We must find another apprentice wizard to present in the contest to take your place."

Max's eyes widened upon his words. "Am I... d-disqualified from participating in the competition?"

"There's no helping it. Since you have no intention of presenting that design, there is no other choice but to have another candidate to present in the contest."

"If I start making a new magic spell n-now...!"

The man's bushy eyebrows furrowed. "You shall not be greedy. The honor of Gnome Hall is at stake in this competition. A magic spell prepared haphazardly in such a short amount of time won't make the cut. It's either you present that magic formula that creates golems or renounce your participation."

Max bit her lips. As she recalled the countless nights that she didn't sleep to prepare for the contest, she couldn't utter a word to describe the disappointment she felt. She blamed herself, her eyes lighting up with anger and disappointment as she pondered on why she didn't reflect deeply on whether the magic she made would be against the doctrine. However, as Landon said, she shouldn't be stubborn and insist.

Max's head lowered weakly. "I'll give up... on the competition."

An apprentice wizard named Armin Dolph was the one who participated in the competition in her place. He was a 25-year-old young, good-looking, and tall man from the Umlu tribe. Although he was quiet, Armin was intelligent, which earned him a good reputation among the trainees. He looked in confusion at Max as Landon told him he would take her place, but soon snatched the opportunity presented to him with his characteristic calm expression. Max could only sigh bitterly. There was no one else to blame but herself for her lack of judgement.

"Just what in the world happened? Was there something you did that caused Landon to reject your formula?" Annette asked as she came up to Max.

She could only mumble roughly with an awkward expression on her face. "There was a fatal flaw... about my magic formula. After consulting with Professor Landon, I decided to give up on the competition."

"Your skill in designing magic is the best among all the apprentices. Just where in the world did it go wrong? Let me see it, I'm sure it's a mistake that can be remedied."

"N-no!"

Annette's eyes widened at Max's defensive response, who tried to disguise her composure by her lack of sleep and swept her frizzy hair aside.

"I have already thoroughly reviewed it with Professor Landon. I wish not to... talk about it anymore."

Annete's cheeks twitched, then turned around and walked away with a swish: she appeared to be hurt by her words, but Max couldn't even afford to calm her own mood.

Max then left the common laboratory to attend her next class immersed in her thoughts. Her mind was in chaos, she wondered what she could do from that moment on since she needed to gain excellent academic records to graduate early. The best way to achieve that was to prove her skills in the Urd magic battle competition, which happened every two years. The presentation contest had already disappeared into thin air and entering the battle competition when she was vulnerable to magic attacks would be out of the question for her. She bit her lips anxiously, she had to somehow find away.

"Max, what happened? Is it true that you won't be participating in the contest?"

As she entered the first-floor hall in Urd, Sidina, who was just descending the stairs, ran over to her and asked. Max awkwardly laid the same excuse she said to Annette. The girl appeared unconvinced, but she didn't prod further upon seeing her heartbroken face. However, the other trainee wizards were more prodding. As Max entered the classroom for her lectures, dozens of students asked her how she was eliminated from the competition over and over again like parrots. She was exhausted from all the fuss that the people were making.

"" "

She was relieved when the professor finally entered the classroom and began the lecture. She began jotting down notes of the lecture on a small pad, trying to concentrate on the voice that resonated amidst the quiet classroom. However, she felt so anxious and troubled that she was hardly able to focus on the lecture. She misspelled half of the things she was writing down, clearly unable to listen attentively. She had the sudden violent urge to throw her notepad against the floor and tear the pages apart. She questioned why things had to go so awry. All the efforts she had poured over her magic formula for the past 6 months became completely useless and now, she felt like a complete idiot who couldn't even keep up with the classes.

When the professor had finished the lecture and left the classroom, Max trudged out of the room in a completely depressive mood. A few students tried to talk to her, but she didn't feel like dealing with them. She responded somewhat bluntly to their questions and walked past them, quickly making her way down the hallway. As she went down the stairs and was just about to exit the building, a crowd of apprentice wizards looking out the garden caught her attention. She nonchalantly looked, to see what the commotion

was about, and noticed that five men in black robes were walking in a row across the desolate yard filled with red fallen leaves.

Max squinted her eyes and observed carefully. They were wearing their hoods all the way over their heads, so she couldn't identify them clearly, but they all appeared to look like outsiders. Some of the trainees who were watching them muttered among themselves.

"Are they new student wizards?"

"They must either be wizards or merchants who came by to purchase magic tools."

"But it's not even the schedule for the ships to arrive, it's strange."

Max soon realized that all their guesses were wrong. She recognized the silver patterns embroidered on their robes, she remembered seeing that pattern before. It was a mark granted only to the Holy Knights.

'How did the Holy Knights enter this island?'

There were countless secrets in the World Tower that had to be hidden from the church. In the library alone, there were several magic books that could be classified as restricted and there were also books from the southern continent. The laboratories were dotted with experimental instruments that could give a suspicious impression. Max watched them, thinking that it was impossible that they came here to inspect The World Tower without permission from the church. However, her thoughts quickly dissipated upon seeing the Urd wizards welcoming them, the wizards greeted them calmly, as if their arrival was anticipated. Although her worries had gone away, another question arose in her head. She wondered what their purpose was for coming to the World Tower. On top of that, what were the wizards of the World Tower thinking allowing them to visit?

'...it's none of my business, I shouldn't care about it.'

Max let out a bitter sigh. She was in no place to worry about that when she had her own matters to solve, the future of the World Tower would be handled by the senior wizards. Max took her gaze away from them and then headed towards the dormitories. Time passed like flowing water, the season of rest already approached. She began to feel more and more anxious. As her plan to showcase her skills on the presentation failed, Max then went to the laboratories of the senior wizards to volunteer as an assistant. However, unfortunately, she wasn't the only trainee who was eager to catch the eye of one of the senior wizards and she was put out of the options as she hardly got the chance to show off her skills.

All that she could do now was put faith on Landon's recommendation letter. However, excellent trainee wizards who had applied to be assistants filled each tower. She

wondered if it was possible for her to be chosen as an assistant with only a recommendation letter from the headmaster and then graduate within a year, when all the trainees were just as anxious as her to graduate and receive their attributes early.

During the ceremony of attribute awarding, a magic spell would be bestowed upon them, helping them achieve at least 5 to 10 times more magical power than their current body could do. It was not just that, the magic that they had previously learned only through theory could now be used without restrictions and their status in the World Tower would be established. Because of that, most trainees were eager to become official wizards of the Tower as soon as possible. In order to beat all others, having just good records would not be enough. How in the world would she be able to catch the attention of the senior wizards of Urd?

Max watched the blazing flames in the furnace, thinking deeply. If she didn't come up with a solution by the time of their attribute awarding ceremony, she would have to spend another year on the island with nothing else to do. She was about to go crazy just imagining that happening. The following spring it would be exactly three years since she had arrived there to that island.

'Enduring those three years was extremely difficult, and spending another year waiting...'

Suddenly, tears welled up in her eyes and Max hurriedly wiped them away from her face with her sleeve. She wanted to see Riftan so badly that she couldn't bear it. She missed the feeling of being embraced tightly in his wide arms, his low voice that sounded a little husky in the morning, the texture of his smooth, voluminous hair when wrapped around her fingers, and the gentle caress of his hands against her back and her face. She was dying to see him, even if she would be met with his angry face.

Max sat down in front of the furnace with her reddened eyes and buried her face against her lap. At that moment, a loud voice called out from behind her.

"Max!"

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Max was startled by the voice and turned around. Annette was striding across the common lab.

"Landon is searching for you. You must come see him in his room right now."

Annette shouted loudly as if not accepting her voice being drowned out by the sound of metals being hammered, piecing Max's ears. Her tears welled up from the loud voice that seemed to break her eardrums.

“W-what’s the matter?”

Annette only shrugged her shoulders. Max heaved a sigh and left the lab. Crossing the hall and walking straight to the huge steel cage used to climb floors, she wondered why she was being summoned again. After asking a passerby holding firewood to operate the pulley, she opened the cage and went inside. After a while, the steel mechanism rattled and slowly began to climb floors. She fixed her messy hair and straightened her clothes whilst the gears spun.

She was soon about to ask Landon to write her a recommendation letter that would leave a good impression on the Urd senior wizards, so she wanted to look a little more presentable. Although he praised Max’s skills and abilities, Landon may favor those from the Umlu tribe as they were his own people. She tried to flatten her wavy hair with her palms as much as she could. Finally, the gears of the pulley stopped. Max carefully opened the gate of the cage and headed to the arched door. She knocked and asked for permission to come in.

“...please excuse my entrance.”

Max slowly pulled the doorknob. Inside the room was Landon and a lean-built man sitting opposite each other. She was expecting Landon to be alone in his room and her eyes widened in shock. The man, who was sitting with his back turned to her, looked at her with his cold, blue-gray eyes. Max recognized him and froze. It was Calto Serbel, a wizard from the Serbel Clan. She had heard that he was one of the most influential elder wizards in Nornui. Max took a step back, thinking that she went there mistakenly.

“I... heard that you were looking for me. If I am interrupting your conversation...”

“First, sit down.”

Landon pointed a thick finger to an empty chair. Max glanced at Calto Serbel’s face and went to take a seat. Upon seeing Max’s tense expression, he smiled as if to try lightening the mood.

“I didn’t summon you here to reprimand you, there’s no reason to be so nervous. I called you here today to make an offer.”

“An offer...?”

“I’ll be explaining the offer.” Calto Serbel, who was quiet so far, opened his mouth.

Max flinched and looked at him. The wizard’s appearance made it hard to calculate his actual age, his skin was tight as that of a young man in his twenties, yet his neatly tied gray hair was sparse and the back of his thin hands that was tightly holding the arm of his chair had dim black spots. Those were the only clues that he might be much older than what he looked like.



He looked observantly at her with a keen expression and slowly continued to speak. "The World Tower plans to dispatch some wizards to Livadon soon. Right now, we are recruiting for the suitable wizards to come. I intend for you to join the dispatch."

"M-me?"

Clato nodded slowly. "According to Landon, you are fluent in ancient language and could excellently interpret magic formulas. I also hear that you have always been interested and researching in that field. The dispatch team will be needing a couple of such wizards."

"" "

"B-but... I still haven't completed my training yet..."

"If you join the dispatch, although it will be short, I am thinking of granting you a swift magical attribute bestowing ceremony. Although of course, you must carry out the mission with us to the end."

Max almost jumped and screamed that she would do anything he would ask her to do upon hearing that exceptional offer. If she joined the dispatch team, the worries that she had been agonizing about would immediately be solved. Not only would she gain a rank as a wizard from receiving a magic attribute, but she would also be able to leave the island sooner. However, she couldn't just agree to the proposal without knowing the whole deal.

She then asked with the utmost caution. "What kind of mission will the dispatch team do? Why will the help of a trainee like me be needed...?"

"Well..." Clato's wide forehead wrinkled deeply. The wizard, who was stroking his smooth jaw with his boney fingers, heaved a solemn sigh. "This mission is kept only to a few of the elder and senior wizards and those who agree on joining the dispatch team."

"You mean to say... you won't be able to divulge the mission to me if I refuse to join?"

"No, I have no intention of forcing you to join the dispatch team. However, until the World Tower's official announcement regarding this is made... you must remain silent about the mission from now on. I would like to avoid any commotion."

Max thought that it would only mean that it was something serious enough that it would cause a commotion. Max bit her lower lip and nodded slowly.

"I understand. I will never... tell anyone."

He stared intently into her eyes, as if to see if she could be trusted then began to speak in a monotonous voice. "You yourself are well-aware of the monster army's invasion

that took place three years ago. It was a horrendous war that devastated the northwestern region, driven by the allegiance of monster sub-species and trolls.”

Max’s face clouded at the sudden words. How many wizards in the tower knew about that war better than her? Even until now, she would have occasional nightmares about the incidents that happened back then.

Max nodded with a stiff expression. “Yes, I am well-aware. Before coming here to the World Tower, I was on that war’s battlefield... working as a healer.”

“... Come to think of it, you were there, so that puts something into perspective.”

His eyebrows pulled together and he looked at her with a new light in his eyes. It was quite a famous story among the ranked wizards of how she entered the World Tower. Calto’s smooth nose bridge wrinkled with his thoughtful expression then continued to speak again.

“There are lots of questionable things about that war. The monster sub-races were armed with sophisticated weapons and armor, they also had a surprisingly systematic system of command. Do you realize what that means? It means that someone is behind that, transforming thousands of demons into soldiers for a long period of time. Perhaps, beyond Pamela Plateau, those monsters have already achieved a high level of civilization. The church was concerned about that possibility, so they persistently tracked down the remnants of the scattered monster army. However, pursuing them was difficult due to the barren and rugged terrain of that area. Hundreds of monsters disappeared without leaving a trace like ghosts and the Osyrian army had no knowledge about that area. It was like searching for a needle amidst a desert. Only recently that they were able to find a clue.”

Max was speechless from the foreboding story that was narrated so suddenly. Hearing that there might be an unknown place which no one has ever been to, being occupied by a great civilization of monsters... she was horrified by just imagining it. Max swallowed dryly and carefully opened her mouth to ask.

“Is that why a dispatch team is being sent... to investigate on that clue?”

“Yes. The great church of Osyria has been secretly asking for us to cooperate. After much deliberation, we decided to work with them, investigating the Pamela Plateau.”

Max frowned as she recalled the Holy Knights who had come to visit the World Tower over a month before. Although the church now tacitly acknowledged their existence, the great church was once one of the institutions that terribly persecuted wizards. Thus, the tower was built to protect the wizards from such heretical hunters. With the fall of the Roem empire, the Peace Treaty of the Seven Kingdoms was signed. A tacit truce was also signed by the great church and the World Tower, but the traditional people of the

old church maintained an exclusive stance about magic. It was obvious that the church would get backlash from asking help from the World Tower, yet here they were.

“What on earth is the clue... that was found on Pamela Plateau?”

For the first time since their conversation began, a hint of conflict arose on his face. Landon, who had been quietly sitting and listening to the conversation, opened his mouth on behalf of Calto, who was wondering whether he should reveal it or not.

“A small village in ruins has been found in the eastern area of Pamela Plateau. There were records of ancient language.”

For a moment, Max blinked in confusion, not understanding what that could mean, and then realization hit her and she felt a chill run down her back.

“Does that mean that in Pa-Pamela Plateau... traces of human existence have been found?”

“Yes.” Landon confirmed in a subdued, sullen voice. “It is plausible that the ones who were living there were likely warlocks who were exiled to the north after going against the great church.”

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Max felt goosebumps all over her body and wrapped herself with her arms. The stories about terrifying warlocks, that her nanny told her back when she was a child, had always lingered in her mind. Stories about evil warlocks who waged war against the great church, but were brutally defeated and exiled to the north... fear gradually grew in her stomach as she realized that those were not mere legends, but actually existed.

She spoke in a shaking voice. “Does that imply that the exiled warlocks...were the ones leading the war from behind?”

“Nothing is certain just yet. Although it is true that they found traces of the existence of what is believed to be warlocks, it seems that they left the place a long time ago. However, records and various relics that they left behind remain. The great church wishes for us to investigate them ourselves. They think that it will lead to clues where the monsters could be hiding.”

“This is a very grave matter.” Calto said bitterly. “If it turns out that warlocks are indeed behind the war, the persecution of wizards may just begin again. In order to prevent that from happening, the World Tower has decided to actively cooperate with the great church.”

“Why would a trainee like me... be recruited to s-such an important mission? It would be better... to form a dispatch team involving veteran wizards.

“As you already know, high-ranking wizards have restrictions on leaving the tower. Right now, there are only three high-ranking wizards in Urd who are allowed to leave the island: that is me, Celic, and Anton. Other than us, the rest of the high-ranking wizards are either too old to withstand the journey to Pamela Plateau or they are vehemently refusing to leave the island. The three of us are not enough to form a team to investigate and so we decided to recruit a few skillful ones among the trainees.”

“And in particular, we need a wizard who has affiliations with the earth element.” Landon heaved a heavy sigh. “Earth element wizards who are currently living on the island are all from the Umlu tribe. Unfortunately, Umlu wizards are strictly reluctant on going outside Nornui and I highly doubt that the church would be willing to accept wizards coming from a different race.”

“And so... you want me, an ordinary human, to join the dispatch team.”

Max nodded her head understandingly. She didn't want to undermine her skills, but there were several wizards in the World Tower who were far more superior than her. That was the reason why she did not understand why such an offer was being given to her.

“If I had deemed that you are lacking skills and ability, I wouldn't have suggested recruiting you.” Landon said in a disappointed tone as if he was offended by Max. “I have thought of giving the opportunity to another trainee, but I have decided that you are best fit for this mission. You are one of the best trainees of Gnome Hall.”

Max's face turned red. Joy and surprise welled up inside her for being valued so worthy. Although she was not able to present her magic formula for creating Golems, Landon appeared to be deeply impressed with it.

“Now, how should we move on from here? Will you be joining the dispatch team?”

Calto asked, leaning his back against the chair as if he was exhausted from the long conversation. Max hesitated to utter an answer. It was a very dangerous mission after all, the journey alone to Pamela Plateau would take at least a couple months. However, if she didn't grab that opportunity, she would have to stay another year and a few months more on that island. Max bit her lips. She thought that it was too selfish of her to go on a very grave mission because of her intention of seeing Riftan much sooner. However, she longed to return to him even if she had to swim across the sea. As time passed, it felt like his feelings would go further away from her and she felt more and more anxious.

After a long silence, Max finally opened her mouth to speak. "Yes. I will be... joining the team."

A week later, Max headed to the 7th floor of Urd to receive her magic attribute. Among the trainees who were also there were Kiehl, who was a modest boy, two male students from Undaim whom she barely knew and spoke to a few times, Miriam, Sidina, Annette Godrick, and Armin Dolph. After saying her greetings to Miriam, who wished her well, and Sidina, who greeted her cheerfully, she walked over to Annette and Armin who were sitting at a distance.

"Did the both of you decide to join the dispatch team?"

Max's eyes looked astonishedly between them, well-aware of how reluctant the Umlri tribe are to leave this island.

"You will be living among the Holy Knights throughout the journey to Pamela Plateau... will that be alright?"

"" "

"There were no other suitable wizards." Armin replied bluntly. "As you can see, I am the tallest among the Umlri trainees. If no one will reveal that I am from Umlri tribe, the priests won't be able to notice that I'm a descendant from a different race."

"I'm also one of the tallest among the Umlri tribe. Moreover, I'm a woman. There would be plenty of room for someone of this height, right?"

Annette grinned as she pointed a finger on the crown of her head. Indeed, Annette's height is just a little less than 5 kvet (about 150 centimeters) which was taller than those of the average Umlri men, and Armin was about a finger taller than Max. Both of them were too big for their height and appeared a little out of proportion, but not enough to be suspected that they did not appear like ordinary humans.

"More than us, I'm worried about you. Will you be able to make the journey all the way to Pamela Plateau given your clumsiness?"

Annette sneered as she looked up and down at Max, who glared at her furiously. "I-I'm the only wizard here who had an experience in expeditions."

Besides Annette and Armin, the other wizards who were chattering among themselves, turned to look at Max, her loud voice catching their attention. She felt a little daunted by their doubting glances, but she continued to build her reputation.

"That makes me different from all the trainees here."

"Oh my, I see."

Annette mocked her openly. As soon as she was about to retaliate, the door opposite to the room where they were waiting opened. Calto Serbel and four other wizards assisting him entered.

Calto approached them and spoke in a calm tone. "Everyone has arrived. From here on, you will receive your magic attribute that will help generate mana in your body. This ceremony will also serve as an oath that will make you a member of the World Tower for the rest of your life."

He carefully observed each of the trainee's faces. "Once the ceremony has completed, your names shall be engraved on the tower's pillars. As long as you do not do anything that is against the tower's rules, the tower will always take your side and any mistreatment against you, the tower shall take the step forward instantly. Now, I hope that you will promise to abide by the tower's laws no matter what happens."

All the trainees opened their mouths in unison and solemnly swore not to do anything against the interests of wizards and to strictly follow all the World Tower's laws and ethics. Then, the wizards who were waiting behind Calto, recorded each of their names on stone plates and guided them into separate rooms according to their attributes. Max entered through a narrow room hidden in a thick draping veil as she waited for her turn. Each of the trainees were made to stand in the middle of a room, surrounded by candles as The Urd wizards performed a ritual that would grant them their attributes.

The procedure was more painful than she thought it would be. Two wizards drew tattoos on both of her wrists, the markings would serve as the inscription for the magic spell and by blowing magic into those, mana would begin to generate in her body. As her mana pool grew, Max felt a strong dizziness. She clenched her teeth and swallowed her screams from the pain. It was as if fire was flowing through her whole body. Finally, when the magic path from her palms to her heart was finally created, her whole body was completely covered in sweat.

"In the next two days, your magic attributes will be fully established. If you use it properly, you will be able to generate mana that is incomparable in volume than before." The wizard said and wiped off the dye that was used to mark the tattoo with a towel.

“You should make sure to get enough rest for the day. It will take some time for your body to adapt to the amplified volume of magic.”

“Th-thank you.”

Max staggered as she left the room, just as all the other trainees, who also appeared exhausted. After she rested with them for a little while, she returned to her room and instantly fell asleep. As the Urd wizard had warned her, it seemed like it would take some time for her body to adapt to the magic path that was created in her body. Max then stayed in bed all day, and in the evening, she barely came to her senses to feed Roy.

Note – LF: Our girl finally got her attribute

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By the next day, her dizziness had reduced by a little. Max left the dormitories after a quick breakfast and went to see the small market near the island’s harbor. She knew from experience that expeditions would require sturdy boots, leather belts, a bag for her belongings, and a practical weapon. Boots, thick socks, travel hat, and comfortable clothes could all be purchased directly from the market, but the weapons should be obtained from Gnome Hall’s smiths. Max bought all that she needed with the money she earned from the tower and the gold coins that Rodrigo gave her upon leaving Anatol.

Clothing for the winter season was quite bulky so even if she only brought those that she really needed, her luggage was still far from being light. Max loaded her luggage into a small cart she borrowed from the tower, then climbed up to hold the donkey’s reins and drove her way out of the market. After climbing the wide hill and travelling for about half an hour, the hostel building finally appeared. Max then carried her luggage to her room and headed to the temple connected to the center tower to attend a meeting of the dispatch team.



There were nearly 20 wizards gathered. All the archmages wore dark reddish-brown cloaks while the apprentice wizards, who had just received their magical attributes, were wearing casual clothing. Max walked over to Sidina, who was waving a hand for her to come over, and carefully observed the other wizards present. There were three wizards who came from Kabbalah, three from Sigur, two from Undaim, and 8 people who had just become ordinary wizards—a total of 16 wizards gathered. The total number of the dispatch team would be 19 if the three Urd wizards who had yet to arrive were counted. Max frowned at their number which was a bit low for a dispatch team.

“I don’t think there are any high-ranking wizards from Gnome Hall who will join.” Armin sighed at her mutter. “It’s as expected. All the high-ranking wizards in Gnome Hall are learning about taboo magic. A lot of restrictions on leaving the island are in place and the World Tower most likely won’t hastily permit those wizards to join the dispatch team given that it will involve cooperating with the church.”

“It doesn’t seem like that’s the only reason why.” Annete whispered. “I heard that a lot of Urd’s elder wizards were against forming a dispatch team. The Serbel clan despises being entangled with the church... and in fact, it is said that many of those warlocks who were exiled to the north are of elf descent.”

Max gasped at the unexpected revelation. “The e-eleven race... are good. But why would such a thing as black magic...”

“If heretical judges hear me saying this, I will probably have my throat cut but... the truth is, dark magic is not as evil as people may think. The reason why they are being called ‘evil warlocks’ was because they fought against the church. In the past, during the oppression and massacre of wizards and the likes, the Serbel clan was split into two groups. Half of the wizards and non-human races came down south to build Nornui, while the other half remained in the Roviden continent to fight ‘til the end but they were eventually exiled to the north.”

“So... are you saying that the Serbel wizards are not in favor of fighting against the warlocks?”

“Well, It’s not certain whether the warlocks are still alive. What is clear is that the Serbel clan remains hostile towards the church. Some of the elder wizards were first hand witnesses of the massacres the church has done, so it is understandable that their grudges still remain. It seems that Calto Serbel has persistently insisted for this team to be formed. However, it appears like the voices against it were not strong enough, reasoning that creating a dispatch team will be a difficult thing to do. That is why trainees like us were also recruited.”

“Everyone, quiet!”

As Max’s head was swimming with all the new knowledge that Annette fed her, Calto entered the meeting room and spoke in a loud voice. She hurriedly regained her

composure and straightened her posture. After Calto climbed up the elevated platform and checked that everyone was present, he began to explain the expedition in sequence.

“The dispatch team shall depart as soon as the ship arrives at the harbor. We’ll probably be able to leave within a week’s time. I hope everyone has prepared everything for the journey by then. We are planning to find a few hired workers to help carry our loads when we arrive at Roviden, but everything else should be done by ourselves as we always do.”

“What about the matters regarding our safety? Most of the monsters are resistant to magic, so attack magic will not be enough. Travelling with wizards alone will be dangerous.”

“There will be no need to fret about that. Our team will be escorted by the Holy Knights from the port onwards. The church will also provide support for the journey’s expenses and equipment.” Calto paused for a moment as if to see if there were any more questions and Max took the opportunity.

“What will be... our journey’s route?”

“Our plan is to dock at Anatolium’s port and travel to Roviden by land.”

Max’s eyes widened. She was expecting that they would be entering a port located in the northern part for safety reasons, but the plan made her anxious. She bit her lips nervously and recalled how many days it took to travel by ship from the island to Anatol. If it went smoothly, they would be able to reach Anatol in the next few weeks. Her heart fluttered aggressively. At that moment, Miriam spoke in a tough tone.

“How come we’re docking at Anatolium? The journey will be much faster if we go to the port in Revan. Travelling by land across continents will be too slow.”

””” ”

Max stared at the back of Miriam’s head, who was seated in front of her. It wasn’t the first time that Max felt like smacking that impudent woman, but she felt the most hostility towards her at this moment. Her anxious eyes were fixed on Calto. Fortunately, he shook his head.

“The dispatch team plans to visit the great temple in Balbom. The fastest route to that would be to enter the continent of Roviden through Anatol’s port.”

Miriam made an expression like Calto’s words did not make sense to her, but did not argue further. Max discreetly calmed her heart. After answering a few more questions, Calto talked about the things they needed to be careful about in front of the Holy Knights, but nothing seemed to enter her ears. She anxiously tapped her feet,

preoccupied that she might be reuniting with Riftan in just a few weeks. Her chest pounded with fret. She would have to leave for Pamela Plateau instantly, not even lingering long enough to enjoy their reunion. She wondered how he would react and would he be upset about her jumping into something reckless again—or maybe, he didn't care whatever she did anymore. It felt like her heart was shriveling at that thought.

“What are you thinking about so deeply?”

Sidina asked, waving a hand in front of Max. She was drawn out of her thoughts and smiled to tell her that it was nothing. She had already jumped into worrying about things that wouldn't change anything. Max struggled to put herself together.

The day of their departure had finally arrived. As soon as she heard that their ship had entered the port, Max immediately began to pack her belongings. As if Roy had sensed that she was about to go on a long journey, he clung onto her and refused to leave her side even for a second. After barely appeasing the cat who was clinging to her skirt, Max wore the thickest dress she had that was made of wool and two pairs of socks. She had to be extremely equipped to defend herself when the temperature dropped in the coming weeks. Finally, she put on a thick robe and sturdy leather boots, then began to carry her luggage down the stairs.

It was still early 'til the time of their departure, but the other wizards were already busy loading things into the wagons. Max spotted Miriam who was carefully checking her luggage from afar, she then loaded her bag into the back of the wagon and climbed up with Roy. The cat wriggled in her arms and dug deep into her cloak, he was perhaps feeling called as he clung close to her stomach.

'I told Annette in advance that I am going to bring Roy along with me...'

She glanced out the window and eyed Miriam. The other wizards didn't really care about it, but Miriam wouldn't let her bring Roy. Max sat down and lowered her body as much as she could so Miriam wouldn't see her. After a while, she saw Annette who was walking back and forth with a luggage as big as her. Max immediately waved a hand at her.

“Annette, over here!”

Annette yawned and approached the carriage where Max was. Behind her were the Godrick twins, who were also carrying luggage as huge as themselves. They were constantly grumbling to each other and when they found Max, they immediately ran over to her with their short legs.

“Hello, Max. Are you done packing?”

“You went on and on about leaving the island as soon as you can and now you really are.”

Dean gave her a mischievous look. Max's face colored red as she remembered all the things she did and said to leave the island.

“Stop idling around and load those things!”

Annette, who was placing her bag into the wagon's compartment, started yelling at her brothers. They frowned at her and walked towards the back of the wagon. Then, they threw the bags into the compartment and went back to the door, holding something in front of Max.

“Take this with you. This winter seems particularly cold. Even now, it's already chilly.”

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## 269 Under The Oak Tree

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Max received it with her hands, it was a small hand warmer made with fire mana stone. Alex rubbed the bridge of his nose while speaking shyly.

“You're not thinking of coming back here, right? That's a farewell gift.”

“...Thank you, Alex.”

Max awkwardly expressed. It was at that moment that she realized she had to say farewell to the friends that she had made there. Looking up at her, the twins took turns tapping Max's shoulder as she stood there in a daze.

“Be well. Take care of your health. If you ever have the chance, please send us a letter.”

“I'll definitely keep in touch. Take care everyone... and be well. Thank you, for everything.”

“If you're thankful, then that's good enough.”

The twins spat arrogantly and went to nag their own sister. Meanwhile, Max bid her farewell to the other trainees who had come to see her off. After a while, the carriages began moving one after another. Max leaned out of the window and gazed at the well-maintained garden, the expanse courtyard lined with strange devices, and the huge towers standing tall in the hazy mist. Although she thought that she would feel relieved leaving, she unexpectedly felt lonely and there was an emptiness in the corner of her heart. She had imposed on herself not to get affectionate towards the island because of the guilt she felt towards Riftan, but in the end, she had undeniably grown to like her stay.

Max murmured bitterly as she looked at the towers that gradually faded as they moved farther away. "... Thank you for all this time."

Their journey on sea went smoothly. Although on the first day the waves hit their ship hard, which caused her to suffer from seasickness, when the evening came, the sea calmed down. Max went out to the deck to gaze at the foggy sky and the dark sea covered in white foam, then spent time reading magic books in her cabin. It was the first time that she felt having a leisurely moment ever since coming to the World Tower, but she didn't feel at ease nor satisfied. As their ship sailed forward, she felt the anxiety building up inside her. Yes, she would do anything she could to reunite with Riftan, but as that moment drew nearer, the urge to run away haunted her.

The conversation they had the day before she left Anatol played in her mind. It wasn't long until she realized that Riftan had revealed a weakness he had kept so tightly hidden so he could hold onto her. However, what she did was turn her back on him and leave the room, and Riftan did not come to see her off the day she left. Whenever she thought of that day, it felt like her heart was breaking. Riftan's expression, the light in his eyes, his voice, everything was as vivid as if she saw him the day before. Every time that it came up to her mind that he would never forgive her, fear sunk deep into her bone marrow, but on the other hand, she also resented him for not understanding that she had no choice but to leave.

"The weather's getting cloudy."

Max, who was lost in thought, was snapped out by Annette's gloomy tone. The girl sat on the bed with an ashen face as she rummaged through a bowl of porridge and let out a deep sigh, then looked out at the sea through the round porthole.

"I think snow will fall soon. This season of rest is really strange. We are in the middle of the southern sea, it's not time yet for the temperature to drop like this, yet there's already sleet..."

"Will the waves be getting harsher?" Max asked as she looked out at the gray, cloudy sky.

Annette frowned as if the mere thought of that already made her shiver. "I sincerely hope not. If this ship shakes as much as it did the first day, I'd rather jump into the sea and swim."

She laid down the half-empty bowl of porridge by her bedside and flopped down on the bed. Perhaps because of their ancestry, whose people lived mainly in tunnels dug through mountains, Annette and Armin could hardly get used to life on a ship. Unfortunately, Annette's desperate prayer was not heard. From that evening on, the waves only grew harsher, and the ship began shaking violently. Annette laid in bed and vomited a series of groans while Max's anxious cat went under the bed and did not come out for a very long time. The bad weather lasted several days. Even if the sea calmed down for a moment, it would become turbulent again and again. The winds also grew stronger by the day. Even Max, who was somewhat accustomed to being on a ship, felt seasickness. As her dizziness got worse, she gave up on reading books and curled up in her bed, praying that the sea would calm down. Fortunately, the turbulent sea seemed to have served luck for the sail. The next early morning, a sailor knocked on their door and exclaimed in a cheerful voice.

"We expect to arrive at the Anatolium Harbor around noon. Prepare to go alight on the ship."

"" "

"A-already?"

Max, who was getting up from the booth bed, rubbed her eyes as she felt her whole being waking up in an instant. With her surprised expression, the sailor then spoke brightly.

"Thanks to the harsh winds, the ship arrived a week earlier than expected. It's a record for a really fast voyage. It seems like God has blessed the wizards."

Annette, who was lying on the bed looking weak and haggard, let out a grunt as if she was protesting against the sailor's words. Max smiled bitterly and handed a small coin to the sailor.

"I'm sorry to ask, but could you help move our luggage to the deck?"

"Of course."

The boy brightly replied and went out with their luggage that was piled in the corner of the room. Max then soaked a clean towel with the water from a kettle and wiped her face. Then, she changed into her cleanest dress, took out some bottle of fragrant oil from her bag, applied a thin layer of it to her dry hair, then brushed it until it was glossy.

Annette, who was changing her clothes after hardly getting out of her bed, clicked her tongue when she saw Max.

“Are you going somewhere fancy? Why are you all dressed up?”

“...It's because it's been a long time since I've been in a good mood.”

Max blushed as she spat her words out coyly and braided her hair neatly. Annette wore a belt around her waist with all kinds of magic tools dangling around her waist, then wore two layers of cloak. As if that was not enough, she wore a wool hat, fur boots, and gloves. Max wore less than her, but pulled out her thickest stockings and put on a fleece coat. The temperature had plummeted from the past few days and her breath fogged up every time they talked even indoors; at night, she had to curl up with her cat under a thick blanket when she slept. Max hung a small leather pouch inside her coat and tucked Roy into it, so he could cling tightly to her side. Annette, who was hanging pockets of belongings around her belt, frowned at the sight.

“I don't mean to meddle... but you know that it's not practical to take him with you on a journey, right?”

“O-of course! I have no intentions of bringing Roy that far along with me. Don't worry, I'll find someone here to take care of him.”

Annette, who was aware of how much she cared for Roy, raised an eyebrow, but didn't prod further on who she planned to entrust the cat with. Soon, they climbed on to the deck. Although the winds were blowing harshly from all directions, the sky had no single cloud. She stood in front of the railing, weaving through the busy crew who were moving cargo. Beyond the silvery horizons was a magnificent harbor with dozens of shipped moored.

Max blinked her eyes as the scenery became clearer. When she left, there were only a few large buildings, warehouses, and large docks in the Anatolium Harbor. There were many ships, but the roads were not well-paved except for the wharf and not enough dwellings for citizens. However, the Anatolium port that now stretched out in front of them boasted a size that was comparable to that of Levan port. Max doubted what she was seeing beyond the horizon and grabbed hold of one of the sailors passing by.

“Wasn't this ship... supposed to be docking at the Anatolium Harbor.”

“That's right, Ms. Wizard. That's the Anatolium Harbor.”

The sailor replied with a smile. Max looked back at the harbor with a confused expression. As the boat reached the dock, the crew anchored the ship firmly and lowered long planks under it to make a path. She looked all around the place as she alighted the ship along with the other wizards. She never doubted that Anatol would one day become one of the prime trading cities of Whedon: it was a place full of potential



and Riftan worked harder than anyone else to revive the territory. But still, only two years and three seasons have passed.

“This is amazing. I have heard about Anatol’s revival but I didn’t expect it to be this great.”

Annette, who was walking next to her, blew a whistle. Max looked at the orderly line of stone buildings along the pier with a bewildered expression on her face. The streets were lined with people in exotic outfits and carts waiting to be loaded lined the streets. Just how many merchants came last winter season? Max looked at the ships lined up the port, she was completely overwhelmed. Most of them seemed to be ships coming from the southern continent, but rare ships were bearing flags from Rivadon, Dristan, and Alex. Their cargo was being loaded in a ship bearing the flag of Rakasim, and cargo from southern merchants and all over the seven kingdoms entered the port.

Merchants sat around a fire in a spacious area, fiercely haggling and bargaining. After dealings were made, the tax collector accordingly collected taxes from them. The wizards’ eyes widened at the sight of enormous gold being exchanged. Calto, who was watching the scene, approached the merchants and asked if he could purchase a carriage. A man who appeared to be a merchant of Anatol willingly gave them a few workers and a wagon, then they loaded everything they had brought with them onto the wagon. After showing a small medal proving that they were wizards of the World Tower to the city supervisor, they left the pier.

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## 270 Under The Oak Tree

### *Under the Oak Tree, Chapter 270*

The streets were maze-like. So instead, they walked along the main road paved with flat stones and entered a relatively quiet restaurant to have a late breakfast. Calto Serbel was discussing something with the two of his aides as they sat around a long table and filled their stomachs with hot stew. The conversation sounded like they were talking about the schedule of their expedition.

“The plan was for the Holy Knights to arrive before us and serve as our guides, but due to the winds we arrived a week earlier than expected. It seems we will have to wait in Anatol until the Holy Knights arrive.”

After discussing it for a long time, Calto approached the long table. “First, the plan is to head to Anatol’s cathedral and meet with the priests. The church will help provide a place for us to stay.”

“How are we going to get to Anatol? I heard that the journey would take an hour from the port here to the center of Anatol.” A skinny senior wizard named Ben asked in a polite manner.

Calto turned his head toward him and responded. “We decided on accompanying some merchants who are bringing in goods to Anatol. The place is not so far away, and the route is relatively safe, but it would still be better to travel with escorts if possible.”

Max listened to the conversation, but their voices were entering one ear and leaving the other, then she looked out the window and into the street. Several wagons full of goods were endlessly coming in and out. It could be clearly seen that the taxes and tolls alone for such trades would generate a huge amount of revenue. She was completely amazed by what Riftan had accomplished in such a short period of time. However, at the same time, it made her left feeling empty because of the fact that she wasn’t by his side to support him while he worked hard to accomplish something so astonishing. It would have been wonderful to witness this place grow and prosper with her own two eyes.

Max shredded chunks of meat from her stew and fed bits of it to Roy, as she watched people walking on the streets. They were all well-dressed and had good complexions. It seemed that the residents in that area were living abundantly.

“Max, look over there!”

While she was preoccupied with watching the people on the streets, Sidina, who was frantically eating next to her, suddenly stabbed her side with a finger. Max turned her head and gave her a questioning look.

Sidina whispered loudly into her ear. “Over there! There’s a very handsome man.”

Max narrowed her eyes at Sidina, then turned to look at the direction she was pointing at. A slim young man in a deep blue cloak was entering the inn with two men of sturdy physique. Max’s eyes widened. As her friend had observed, the man was indeed a great beauty, his neatly tied silver hair and elaborate features were so beautiful that he could easily take a spot on being engraved on the hall pillars of the great temple. His white, smooth skin seemed to glow but his cold, expressionless eyes looked ruthless.

“He looks like a noble man, doesn’t he? Perhaps he’s a knight from Anatol?”

Sidina whispered softly into Max's ear. She was about to tell her that there was no such person within the Remdragon Knights, but thought that Sidina might ask how she knew that, so Max kept her mouth shut.

The man clearly did not appear like a commoner. He was dressed in simple but elegant clothes and was lightly armed with a sword around his waist. Max thought that he could be a new member. As she pondered on that thought, the young man, who was looking around the restaurant, spoke in a low voice.

"I have heard from the city supervisor that there were wizards from the World Tower who have arrived. Would you spare us a moment of conversation?"

"What matter do you have to discuss that you came looking for us?" Calto turned towards the young man and asked.

The young man approached him and spoke calmly. "I am Yulysion Lovar, a knight who serves Lord Calypse. I have been asked by Anatol's head priest to treat the guests from the World Tower with utmost hospitality."

He paused for a moment then looked through the people around the table with an extremely noble and arrogant look. Max doubted her ears as she stared blankly at him. She sat at the end of the long table, hidden behind a pillar, so he didn't seem to have seen her.

"" "

Yulysion then turned his head back to Calto and continued in a dull tone. "I see that the group has arrived earlier than expected. Now, everyone, get up from your seats. I shall be taking you to Calypse Castle."

"I appreciate the offer, but I should decline." Calto resolutely shook his head. "There is no need for us to be indebted to Calypse Castle. The church has promised to provide us support, we shall head to the cathedral."

"There isn't enough accommodation in Anatol's Cathedral to serve you. The cathedral has begun its expansion recently so even the priests who are living there are staying in Calypse Castle as well." As if he was a little offended by Calto's rejection, he spoke with his forehead creased. "There is one lodging for guests on the cathedral grounds, but it is extremely shabby and may already be full of wanderers who have gathered there for alms. Most of the inns are also full as it is the time when the merchants arrive with goods."

Calto looked around the wizards with a face full of thought. He seemed reluctant to let them stay at Calypse Castle, but also concerned that he shouldn't let the wizards have no place to stay after a long voyage. After a moment of silence, the young man lightly

shrugged his shoulders as if he had no intention of persistently persuading Calto to stay at Calypse Castle.

“It’s alright if you really don’t intend to. I’ll leave a word to the gatekeeper, if you ever change your mind, you are welcome to come to the castle. Well then, I have a lot of work to do, I must now take my lea-...”

The man, who was about to turn coldly, suddenly stopped moving. Max could clearly see him facing her, with his body towards the direction she was sitting. His vivid purple eyes sparkled in the pale winter sunlight that seeped through the window. Max, who was still confused even after hearing his name, murmured with a shocked expression.

“Yu-Yulysion...?”

The man, who had been staring blankly with a face that seemed to have seen a ghost for a while, finally strode towards her. His face that seemed only to be cold as a piece of marble, dramatically brightened and revealed the face of the innocent boy that Max knew well.

“M’lady! You have returned!”

“Are you re-really Yulysion?”

Max looked at him from head to toe in disbelief. She couldn’t keep her mouth closed as it hung open in shock. She wondered where the slender boy, who was only half a span taller than her, had gone. A tall young man with a dignified physique looking over 6 kvettes tall (around 180 cm) was now facing her.

“I heard that wizards from the World Tower had come, but I would have never imagined that the lady would have been with them! It hasn’t been three years since the lady left. I thought that the lady would be back by next spring at the earliest... as expected, the lady really is amazing!” As if he had not noticed that Max was half-frozen, Yulysion excitedly continued talking. “Everyone will be delighted to know that you’re here! We shouldn’t be here, we should immediately head to the castle...!”

“W-wait! Calm down a bit. I’m not coming back yet for goo...”

Max hurriedly denied his assumption, but Yulysion wasn’t listening at all. He went and stood by the entrance and yelled exasperatedly at his linemen.

“What are you all doing! Lady Calypse has returned. Show your respects right now and prepare to take the lady to the castle!”

“Lady Ca...Calypse?” Sidina’s eyes darted bewilderingly between Max and Yulysion, exclaiming in a hoarse voice. “Max’s last name is Calypse? As in that Calypse of Riftan Calypse?”

Max appeared perplexed. Not only Sidina, but all the other ones' eyes flew towards her, the wizards and the sailors who were enjoying a breakfast to warm them from the cold sea breeze. Max, who was suddenly the center of attention, flushed red in embarrassment. People whispered and murmured to each other's ears that the Lady of Anatol had returned. Some of them even snoopied around, stretching their necks to take a good look at her face.

Calto breathed a deep sigh as their surroundings turned noisier. "It seems that it will be right to remain there. If the offer is still valid, we shall accept your invitation."

"Of course, it is! The offer stands valid."

Yulysion exclaimed loudly and ordered his men to have the carriages ready. Then, as if it were natural for him, he picked up her luggage and anticipatigly asked her.

"Will it be alright for us to talk until the carriages arrive? There are so many things I ought to tell you!"

Max looked back at Calto to ask permission and he nodded resignedly. "It's been a while since you've seen someone you know, there will be a lot of things to talk about so do as you please."

"Th-thank you."

Max left Roy with Sidina for a while and followed Yulysion out. There were five steeds who were waiting by the road and two men standing proudly beside them who seemed to be Yulysion's subordinates. She quickly found the Remdragon Knight's crest on the armor he was wearing underneath his cloak and she smiled brightly.

"You are an official knight now! I must call you Sir Lovar from now on."

"The knighting ceremony was held shortly after the lady left." Yulysion said with a blush on his cheeks, as if he was flattered. "However, please be comfortable with calling me by my name as you did before."

"How is Garrow?"

There was a mischievous smile around Yulysion's lips as Max looked around, looking for the apprentice knight who was always paired with him.

"That friend of mine has of course also been knighted. He is currently serving as Lord Nirta's assistant. He says it feels like he's dying."

Max felt a little awkward at the sight of Yulysion, who had turned unrecognizable, but the familiar names made her heart flutter. She hesitated for a moment then asked in a cautious tone.

“How is... Ri-Riftan? Has he been well?”

Yulysion’s face clouded in an instant. Max felt her heart sink.

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