

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 31 – Her New Home (1)

Max gaze flitted towards the landscape beyond the steep hill. Below the meadow was a large village surrounded by giant gray walls. Riftan pointed his finger in the distance.

“That’s my estate in Anatol. The citizens here are mercenaries, miners, and farmers. But the ground is not suitable for growing, so most of the people rely on livestock, raising sheep, chickens, and goats to survive.”

As she listened to him, Max carefully surveyed the land where she would live. In front of the towering entrance was a large meadow. Beyond it, a steep high mountain peak to the rear acted as its barrier. And in the middle of the mountain, a giant fortress that looked like a terrifying golem sat, splitting the mountain in half. The moment she saw it, she felt a faint chill go down her spine.

The castle of Calypse was very much like her husband’s alter ego—a lonely and overbearing giant...

“It’s not glamorous on the outside, but it’s spacious inside,” confided Riftan nervously.

Max’s eyes were glued to the castle as Riftan started speaking in a more tense voice. She looked back at him in wonderment. She had never seen such a huge shapeless mass of stone blocking half the mountain.

It was quite a stark difference from the regal Croix Castle that had a beautiful exterior following the extravagant designs of the Roem empire.

Riftan nervously added, “It’s hard to change the appearance, but... god d*mn it; it has to be that way. There are too many monsters in the vicinity...”

“M-many monsters?” Max nervously said.

His expression on edge, Riftan insisted, “You don’t need to worry! Do you see how high those walls are?” He pointed to the distance, “I built them as soon as I acquired the estate. It took several years to build a sturdy wall to protect the whole town... but no creatures can get through it now!”

“I’m not worried...” whispered Max.

She responded in a quiet but disconcerted voice, in reaction to the intense defense of his estate. But it wasn’t just to make him feel better. As Riftan said, she could see that the walls surrounding the castle looked well-made and secure, and surprisingly, it made her feel at ease.

“Leader, may we head out already. I’m starving! I think the rest of the knights are also hungry and thirsty!”

At the urging of the knight, Riftan flicked his horse’s reins. Their horses galloped faster down the hill, and Max squinted her eyes at the wind rushing at her face. The hood flew off her head. Her red locks streamed behind her—as if they were dancing with the wind.

“We are the Knights of Remdragon! Open the door!” His knights shouted upon reaching the gate. The guards manning it rushed to give them entry after seeing Riftan’s armor and the crests on their robes reflected on the sun. In front of the entrance, many villagers came to greet the great warrior who had defeated the evil dragon.

Upon seeing Riftan, they all cheered.

“Rossem Wigru de Calypse (Uigru’s Incarnate Calypse)!”

””” ”

Max was overwhelmed by the deafening sounds of the cheering and subconsciously moved closer to Riftan. The incarnation of the great hero Uigru – what a fantastic tribute to him.

The farmers who had stopped their work waved their pickaxes in the air like a triumphant flag. Miners stood on their carts and swayed their arms enthusiastically while tradespeople sat on their roofs and cheered. Children with soot on their faces beamed, showing their toothy smiles.

All the townspeople cried out the name of their Lord, and Max could only be overwhelmed by the genuine outpouring of their love for Riftan.

Max had never seen or experienced such heartfelt love and admiration for a lord. Such a scene was utterly dissimilar from the servants who had obeyed her father out of fear. It didn’t help that her father was a proud, brutal man either; he was always cold and regal.

It was another story here, however. A sense of community and undying loyalty was present in the air, undeniable. And people’s faces were full of incontestable joy and pride.

“Leader! The townspeople have prepared a welcome ceremony. They’ve been preparing ever since news of your victory reached Anatol!” one of the knights shouted in an enthusiastic voice.

Riftan waved his hand to acknowledge the welcome and addressed the crowd, “I have to go straight to the castle. I hope you all enjoy yourself.”

Riftan then spurred his horse on toward the castle, the other knights lightly following with their horses. People had gathered on either side of the road, throwing wildflowers toward them as they rode past.

Max stared at the petals strewn along the path with tearful eyes. She was in awe of such a display. Her heart was hammering against her chest so much she thought she might burst into tears. However, Riftan continued forward with no expression on his face, seemingly unaffected by what was going on around him.

Max inwardly reflected, 'Sometimes...he can be full of emotion, but—'

Many times he's cold as if his heart is stone. Her thoughts died down in confusion. She didn't know how to read him yet, and she frequently wondered what kind of man did she genuinely marry.

[◀ Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter ▶](#)

[Share With Friends](#)

Note: Daily latest chapters updates only on our website so **BOOKMARK** The Website to Get The Latest Chapters and New Novels.

[Rate this Chapter](#)

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 32 – Her New Home (2)

As they approached Anatol, Max realized it was much bigger than she had imagined or had initially thought. She was surprised at the size and that a village on the outskirts could be so vibrant. There were huts, shops, and inns densely packed along the roads and plazas, and there were pubs next to the streams across the village.

While the knights ran to the pub straight away, beautifully dressed prostitutes leaned out of the windows and blew kisses at them. Some pulled up the hems of their dresses, revealing their bare legs. Max couldn't believe her eyes, and her mouth hung wide open.

"We'll hurry up a bit," Riftan whispered in her ear, as he watched the people gathering closer and closer. She nodded her head, and he took it as a sign to go faster, quickly crossing the square. As they climbed a gentle slope along the hill, a wide moat and a large wall appeared.

The guards who heard of their lord's arrival quickly dropped the drawbridge. She opened her eyes wide at the breathtaking sight she saw in the distance. After they crossed the bridge, the first thing she saw was a large yard, a training ground, and a building that looked like a guard post.

It was more of a military fortress than a castle.

"We've arrived."

Riftan entered the second gate, passing through the long lines of guards on their left and right who assembled to meet their lord. Through the steep driveway, she saw the desolate gardens, the massive stone buildings, and the ominous stone that towered all around them.

What was Anatol truly like? What were its true colours?

In front of the grand stairway, there were about fifty people lined up.

"Welcome back!" they all announced in unison.

"Yes."

Riftan responded with a curt nod to his solemnly bowing servants and jumped off his horse. He helped Max get down gently and handed the horse to the old man who came forward.

"Let us rest, we've been through a lot," Riftan said.

"Of course, lord. And the other knights...?" the old man inquired.

"There is a festival in town. They're staying at the pub tonight. Though, if anyone comes back, please give them a clean room."

"As soon as I heard that you were coming, I cleaned up both the training center and the rooms. But Lord, she is...?"

As the old man's eyes turned toward her, Max subconsciously straightened her shoulders. Riftan's steely voice chilled her.

"" "

"She's my wife. I brought her home."

"... It is a pleasure to meet you, madam. My name is Kunel Osban. I am the stableman for this castle. I'm in charge of all the lord's horses."

“I-it is my pleasure to be a-acquainted with you, sir. I’m Maximilian... Ca-Calypse.” Max muttered in a quiet voice, timidly avoiding the eyes of the servants.

Riftan grabbed her hand, and they climbed the stairway without looking back. The castle looked even more dreary upfront. Usually, the staircases leading up to the great hall would be ornately decorated. But there was not a single decoration to be found. The estate’s garden was bare, with one lifeless tree bearing neither fruit nor leaves. The inside of the castle was similar to the outside and equally desolate.

Max followed Riftan into the monotonous hall and shivered. The air inside the castle was chilly that there was little difference from the outside wind. The floor was littered with non-marble slabs, some broken and others chipped. An old chandelier on the ceiling emitted a faint glow, of which seemed to die out immediately. There wasn’t even a carpet on the central staircase leading from the main entrance to the great hall.

“What happened here?”

Riftan walked back to the center of the hall and looked around. The servants who followed behind him in a line turned pale-faced.

“Did I not send a messenger bearing instructions to decorate my castle before my return?”

“I did as you commanded me, lord. I placed a new carpet in the parlor and brought in a lot of new furniture, oils, and expensive candles—”

“That’s not what I asked for; I wanted it to look more luxurious!”

Riftan’s voice raised an octave. He shook his head in frustration and continued.

“D*mn it! I sent more than enough gold coins. Tell me then, did you spend all of that money decorating the castle?”

The older adult expressed his embarrassment.

“Well, we couldn’t spend that much money on our own. Not without asking our lord’s permission...”

“In the message, I told you to leave it up to the butler’s discretion! What in the hell is this?!”

The fiery Riftan pushed passed the servants into the dark, chilly castle interior. His servants shuffled about nervously looking at one another. It was without a doubt that everyone would think that Calypse castle was neglected. The stair railings had rungs missing, and the windows were covered with a yellowish, faded film instead of clear glass.

“D*mn it..” Riftan cursed. “This castle fell apart with its master gone.”

“Lord, I did my best to decorate the castle as commanded. We changed the beds and renovated the old furniture so you could rest when you returned...”

“That’s your excuse now?”

“Ri-Riftan! I-I w-want to rest here...”

Max couldn’t stand this tense atmosphere, so she pulled at Riftan’s sleeve. The moment Riftan looked down at her worried face, he dragged her close and hugged her tight with both arms. Max was so surprised; her knees almost gave out.

◀ Previous Chapter

Next Chapter ▶

Share With Friends

Note: Daily latest chapters updates only on our website so **BOOKMARK** The Website to Get The Latest Chapters and New Novels.

Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 33 – Eyes Only On Me (1)

Riftan then hoisted Max from the ground, making her exclaim in surprise.

“Ri-riftan!”

“Stay still. I know you are exhausted.”

“P-put me down! I can walk!”

Riftan stubbornly carried her up the stairs, pretending not to hear a word of what she said. Upon reaching the top, a large hall covered with reddish-brown carpets greeted them. The path leads to a large oak door. Riftan walked across the hall and suddenly stopped in front of the wooden doors. He gently put her down, steadying her with one hand, and pushed the massive entrance open with the other.

“I hope this room is more to your taste...” he quietly said.

Max looked around the room curiously, walking over the spacious bed in the center. It was a neat and cozy square. In the middle of the room was a wooden column holding

up the ceiling, ancient-looking glyphs inscribed on it. Large, arched windows framed one side of the room, and on the opposite side, a fireplace burned brightly with a warm fire.

Running her hands along the veil hanging off the side of the bed, she discovered that the luxurious bed frame was made of cherrywood. Thick layers of wool blankets were carefully piled on top. The servants must have paid particular attention to this room.

“You think it’s shabby, don’t you?” Riftan asked with a worried look on his face. Max looked at him, bewildered and self-conscious.

He grabbed her hand and groaned, “Curse it! And the servants tried so hard…”

“What? Oh, no! W-what a beautiful room. This ca-astle is wonderful… and the bed is beautifully prepared.”

“You don’t have to lie to me. Did you forget that I recently visited the Croix caste? Compared to your father’s fortress, this is more like a f*****g barn.”

Max felt horror. “No! That’s not true…”

Max tried to find the right words to appease him, but Riftan’s facial expression remained twisted. Perhaps he thought she was only speaking empty words to satisfy him in this situation. She blamed herself again; not once could she say the right thing. When she hesitated, unable to find the proper words, Riftan shook his head and looked equally embarrassed.

“Well… it’s the madam’s job to adorn this place, anyway. When the lord is away, it becomes the job of the lady of the house to manage the castle.”

“I… I apologize.”

“Curse it! What I want to say is… what if we design this place your way? I have enough gold, so you can buy whatever you like. You can even demand craftsmen for ornaments of your fancy. If you want to buy expensive textiles and silver, that’s fine too. I will pay for all the expenses… for the things you want.”

””” ”

Max was surprised by his bold suggestion. She was ignorant of what to expect and what she should do as his wife.

Riftan continued to speak in a slightly excited tone. “Women like to beautify things, right? You can hire seamstresses and craftsmen to aid you that it won’t be too much of a chore.”

Max saw the enthusiasm on his face and felt cold sweat run down her back. Her grandmother had tried to teach her what a noblewoman should do and how she should manage her husband's domain, but Max hadn't paid attention because she never thought she would have the chance to use the advice. Theoretically, books told her what needs to be done, but there was never a moment to put it into practice... until now.

Max wasn't entirely confident that she would be able to do it.

"You don't want to?"

When Max didn't answer him, Riftan squinted his eyes. She shook her head, nervously. Not only did she fear to utter the words she loathed decorating... but even worse was that he would discover she was ill-informed on such matters, and how she was not suited for a lady's job.

Max realized she didn't want to say anything that would make Riftan think less of her.

After several days of traveling together, Max had noticed that Riftan Calypse had no idea of how she was treated in Croix Castle. He firmly believed that Maximilian was a highly educated lady who was used to luxury and pampering. He would do his best to treat her in the manner to which she was accustomed.

With such misunderstanding, Max became increasingly anxious. She suddenly grasped that he had likely taken this belief from her father. The Duke of Croix had hidden her away in the depths of the castle so that no one would know his daughter had a stutter. Doing so, he wanted people to believe it was an act to protect his sick child. And in time, she became known as a sickly noblewoman whom the Duke pampered.

From his actions, it was perchance that Riftan believed in that rumor.

Max didn't understand why the illusion hadn't been broken when he could now see with his own eyes that she was not well educated and was a rather insignificant woman... but she wanted to continue living in the illusion as long as possible. She knew she would be upset the moment he discovers the truth.

It would be too unfair, shameful, and even brutal, to suffer for three years on the battlefield, only to find out that the woman you had just married was a fake and not at all what or whom you had imagined.

His attitude towards himself would surely change.

[◀ Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter ▶](#)

[Share With Friends](#)

Note: Daily latest chapters updates only on our website so **BOOKMARK** The Website to Get The Latest Chapters and New Novels.

Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 34 – Eyes Only On Me (2)

Max apprehensively clasped her hands. She felt terrible just imagining that Riftan might despise her or, even worse, feel sorry for her. Knowing it was disgraceful, she still wanted him to think of her as that sophisticated noblewoman for a bit longer.

Max nodded awkwardly, instead of telling him that she didn't know how to manage servants, or that she had never spent a lot of money to buy things, and that she had never learned how to handle such a grand castle... she would stretch the lie for today.

"If-if you want..."

Riftan's face instantly relaxed and became noticeably brighter.

"I'll tell the butler to give you the books right away. Don't worry about how much it will cost. You can purchase to your heart's content."

Riftan gently stroked her tousled hair with his fingers.

"This... is your home now."

Your home. Such unexpected words pierced Max's heart painfully, and she almost stopped breathing. Her heart pounded against her chest. Maybe he didn't mean anything by it, that it was just something he said in passing or a strange whim.

Whatever it was, Max didn't want to dwell on it.

"I... I'll make it as cozy as possible... for us."

"All right." The good man gave her a satisfied smile. The next moment, he gently pressed his lips over her cheek, and Max shook her head awkwardly. She was suddenly aware of how it was only the two of them in the bedroom. Not having a proper shower or change in a few days, Max was swiftly conscious of her image. She gently pushed him away.

"Ah, I-I... want to take a b-bath..."

"Of course."

He turned his head and said, "I'll tell the maids to come and prepare the bath."

Then he went out and ordered the servants to bring warm water for the bath and a fresh change of clothes for her. Max took off her disheveled cloak and placed it carefully at the chair in the corner. After a while, four maids came into the room with large wooden tubs. While hot water was being poured on the large basin, Riftan took off his armor and laid it on the table.

"I'll call you if we need anything else. Please make sure we have something to eat after the bath."

"Yes, lord. I'll put your clothes right here."

"" "

As the maids went outside, Riftan threw the tunic stained with sweat and dust over his head. Then he swiftly untied his pants. Max panicked and turned around, but Riftan walked to her and started to unknot the straps of her dress.

"Ri, Riftan!"

"Let's bathe together," his voice suddenly sounded husky in her ears.

Max shuddered at the touch of his hands on her bare back. He combed her messy hair with his hands and laid it over one shoulder to reveal her slender neck.

And then, his tongue was over her skin.

"You taste salty..."

"D-don't! I'm dirty..."

Despite her protest, Max's shoulders relaxed as his soft lips traced kisses on the back of her neck. He turned her body around to face him, but she couldn't look at his naked body and closed her eyes. There was a bizarre, new sensation she felt, and she was mortified of it.

"Can you please stop looking at me like that?" He said, lifting her chin with one hand.

"I am aware I am not as elegant or slender as the son of a distinguished noble, but... I'm not that terrible..."

"Oh, you're not terrible! Not at all!"

Max opened her eyes in disbelief. There was a look of despair on Riftan's orbs glancing down at her. His black pupils reminded her of a wild, but a desolate animal.

Is this man truly not aware of his beauty? It made no sense!

“I-I’m just not used to this,” she said, wanting to break the misinterpretation.

“It’s normal for couples... to bathe together,” Riftan said in a low voice.

“Normal...?”

“In all the castles I’ve visited, all the lords and their ladies bathed together.”

Riftan then grinned and pulled down the bodice of her dress. She was about to ask him how he knew that, but she shuddered when she felt the cold air touch her skin. The warmth of the fireplace gently enveloped her sensitive body.

“It’s not strange at all.” He continued, “There exists a custom in the north. Whenever a nobleman or a knight visits, they must bath with the castle’s hostess.”

He gently rubbed her shoulders in persistent effort to persuade her. Max’s eyes opened wide.

“D-do I have to do that...?” she said.

“Oh... no.”

A beautiful but terrifying smile spread across Riftan’s face.

“If anyone else ever asked you of that, I would make him bathe in the Stemnu river... You only need to think about me. Come here...”

Riftan put his muscular arms around her waist and hoisted her gently into the bathtub with him, water spilling onto the floor upon their descent. Max hugged her knees close to her body, trying to hide her nakedness with futile efforts. Riftan brazenly sat down with his naked body openly displayed to her, as if he was a man who didn’t know what shame was.

“Is it too hot?” he asked.

“I-it’s fine.” she hurriedly answered.

Max sat with her knees bent up to her chin to avoid touching his long legs. Looking at her efforts on distancing themselves, Riftan grabbed her by the arm and sat her on his lap.

Max immediately cried in surprise, “Ri-riftan!”

“I’ll wash you.” He simply said, reaching out for the soap on the shelf.

Max urgently tried to get up from his lap, but Riftan had his arms wrapped around her waist like a snake. He began to lather soap over her shoulders and neck slowly.

“I-I’ll do it!”

“You can wash me too. If you like.”

Riftan be making his moves... boi aren’t you smooth? And double chapter update for today!

◀ Previous Chapter

Next Chapter ▶

Share With Friends

Note: Daily latest chapters updates only on our website so **BOOKMARK** The Website to Get The Latest Chapters and New Novels.

Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 35 – Maxi Don’t Fall Asleep

Riftan lathered his right hand with soap and rubbed her bossom gently in a circular motion. It wasn’t an unpleasant sensation, but out of modesty, Max pulled back. This, however, didn’t stop his hand from wandering.

Max closed her eyes as she felt him squeeze her right buttock. He continued to lather soap on her body and massage her muscles while he carefully washed the long hair tumbling around her shoulders, tangled like a vine. Slowly, her stiff and aching body began to relax.

“Wash my hair too.”

He said as he rinsed off the foam on her head. Max’s tired eyes were half-closed, and when she didn’t respond, Riftan picked up the bar of castile soap and started rubbing it over his hair. He lowered his head to make it easier for her to reach over and massage his scalp. As Max came closer, she felt his hot breath hit her face.

Somewhat embarrassed, Max started to wash his hair with timid movements. To her surprise, Riftan moved forward, slowly licking the water droplets on her clavicle with his tongue. Max suddenly had a flashback to her childhood when she would sneak out to the garden and play with her father’s big hunting dog.

Washing Riftan now was an all too familiar experience of bathing her father's dog who would lick her face.

"You got soap in my eyes."

Riftan complained and rubbed the soap from his face with his hands. Max almost laughed at his action. She found it... almost adorable.

She continued to scoop water into the ladle and rinsed the foam off his hair as he picked up the kettle on the shelf and poured more hot water into the bathtub. With every minute in the warm bath, Max's overworked muscles felt more languid. She could feel herself begin to doze off and soon enough, her shoulders submerged deeper into the water. In her lethargy, Max could still feel both anticipation and nervousness from the hands that were roaming her body.

She couldn't deny it felt good.

"Maxi."

In her ears, she heard a lazy moan, like a cat's contented purr. Riftan leaned her head against his chest, seeing her droopy frame. Feeling a ticklish yet burning sensation running down her body, she leaned against him as well, his beating heart sounding like a calm lullaby to her ears. As she listened to the sound, her eyelids became felt heavier.

"Maxi... Are you asleep?" Riftan said, seeing the girl motionless on his arms.

"..."

"Hey, hey..."

"..."

"Really? Did you just fall asleep?"

"" "" "

Max barely felt herself being carried out of the bathtub. As the cold air hit her wet body, she shivered unconsciously. Max felt someone dry her wet hair and body and then covered her with a warm, slightly fragrant, blanket. Throughout, she could feel the comforting heat of the fire as it continued to burn.

The last thing she remembered was Riftan's enthusiasm to caress her body.

Max suddenly stirred, feeling the chill, and awoke to her head cold and hair damp. Rubbing her eyes, she could hardly lift her body out of the bed as the frigid air enveloped her. Max looked down at her naked body, barely covered by the cashmere blanket. For a moment, she couldn't remember what had happened last night or rather in the early morning.

"Of course, we arrived in Anatol yesterday..."

While taking a bath with Riftan, Max recalled falling asleep from the weariness that settled after she looked around in wonderment that was her new *home*.

However, the room was empty, saved for her in the wide bed.

But then she saw Riftan's robe draped near the fireplace where only ashes remained. Max sat up and quickly noticed a change of clothes of what appeared to be an apron folded on the shelf next to the window. She wrapped the sheet around her body and got out of bed and stood on her tiptoes, trying to reach the high shelf, when suddenly, there was a knock on the door.

"Yes? Yes?!"

Max replied in a confident voice that sounded strange, even to herself. A soft voice replied through the other side of the door.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, madam. I need to add some firewood..."

"Oh, of course. I...I'm awake. Y-you can come i-in."

Upon her affirmation, a tall and lanky maid opened the door and walked in. Although she was not a young lass, she had that mixture of youth and confidence oozing from her. Max guessed she was about thirty years old.

"I'm Rudys Ain, at your service, madam."

"Ma-maximilian Cal-calypse. I-It's a pleasure to meet you. "

Even when Max was stuttering, the maid responded in politeness and calmly said, "I heard that you arrived very late and didn't manage to have dinner yesterday. Would you like me to prepare a meal?"

Max couldn't even have guessed she was famished. Everything had happened too fast in front of her eyes.

Remembering her current improper state of clothing, Max hurriedly said, "Before that, I need to get dressed."

“Please wait for a minute, madam. I’ll aid you in changing,” the maid suddenly offered.

◀ Previous Chapter

Next Chapter ▶

Share With Friends

Note: Daily latest chapters updates only on our website so **BOOKMARK** The Website to Get The Latest Chapters and New Novels.

Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 36 – Lady of the Castle

The maid picked up the firewood from the basket she carried, tossed it into the fireplace, stabbed it a few times with a poker before hanging wet clothes a few feet above it.

Not far from where she stood, Max could be seen quivering in cold. She was only wearing linen drawers, her body clad in nothing but a thin cloth. Starting on her tasks, the maid poured hot water into a small basin and dropped an amount of perfume oil in it. She then dipped a piece of clean cloth and gently wiped her mistress’ face, neck, and arms. Afterward, she handed Max a gorgeous skirt that reached the top of her ankle.

It suited her. Dressed in the elegant dress with the intricately embroidered patterns, Max looked stunning—the sunshine-like golden dress, with butterfly wings on its sleeves, was every bit as beautiful as Rosetta’s.

“Is it too tight?” Rudys asked thoughtfully, tying a red chest strap under her swollen chest. Max shook her head, her eyes trained on the image reflected in the mirror on the wall as she did so. As she was in high spirits, her pale face looked brighter, and her reddish-brown hair, which always seemed messy and tousled, looked surprisingly elegant in this beautiful, golden dress.

“Would you like me to braid your hair?”

“Yes, please.”

As she sat in the chair by the window, the maid tilted the mirror, adjusting its position for Max’s view. Not long after, she grabbed an ivory comb and brushed Max’s hair carefully, her hands gliding between the intertwined locks and tresses.

Max looked out the window and listened to the sounds that resonated inside the room. She couldn't help but stare at the steep, gray walls that seemed to reach all the way to the sky.

"Would you like me to bring you some food?"

She wasn't famished still and would rather venture around the castle more. But somehow, she felt reluctant in expressing her desire—a trait she inherited from her previous situation.

But on the corner of her mind, her freedom finally came to realization. There was no half-sister here to look down on her nor a father to hurt her. She could go anywhere freely.

Hence, she defiantly raised her head and said, "I'll eat later..."

"Alright."

Rudys laid down the comb having braided her hair competently and quickly. As a final touch, she brought Max her pair of shoes and slipped it onto her dainty feet.

Max gazed at herself in the mirror. She wasn't used to having a maid help her dress like this. What would Riftan think?

"B-by the way, w-where is Riftan?"

"...The Lord has been out since dawn." The maid responded with a slight irritation in her voice. "Do you need him for anything?"

"" "

"Oh, just..." Max shook her head, not knowing why she was asking. The feeling of being excited for a moment from wearing pretty clothes faded as quickly as it had come. Like a lie which filled her with a flicker of shame.

"Ah, ah, no um...no."

She answered in an unstable voice that even she had hated to hear. Max could not comprehend the shame the maid made her feel. Rudys hurried out of the room—embarrassment written on her face.

"Madam, ma'am, let me guide you to the dining hall." Rudys was nervous but Max just nodded in acquiesce. Even so, she was grateful that the maid treated her respectfully.

"This way..."

Rudys led her to the stairs. She looked around the castle that she had seen for the first time just the day before. The gray walls and arched windows give the place a solid and tremendous beauty. Sunlight pouring from the window casted a light shadow on the floor. She stepped out into the room and narrowed her eyes.

The town of Anatol was very different from what she saw in the darkness of late evening. Yesterday, It had seemed dreary and bleak and rather old-fashioned. But now it was no less than a King's castle straight out of a fairy tale.

Is there any special food you prefer, or dislike?"

"Oh, just... ."

She blurted out words which in hesitation, suddenly died in her throat. An awkward look flashed across the maid's face which caught Max's notice.

Is she lamenting the fact that she has to serve someone as difficult as me? A sense of inferiority rushed over her. Nonetheless, she shook off the negative thoughts and followed the maid into the kitchen. A long cherry-wood table lay in the middle of a spacious dining room.

As she approached, one of the servants on the other side of the room quickly pulled out a chair. "Did you sleep well, ma'am?"

"Yes, I slept well."

"I couldn't introduce myself yesterday, because I didn't want to bother you. I'm Rodrigo Seric. I oversee all the servants of this castle. "

She nodded and found out that he was the old man who had yelled at Riftan yesterday.

"N... Nice to meet you."

As politely as possible, Rodrigo bowed. "I will serve you with all my heart. If you need anything, feel free to tell me."

"Oh, which made me think, yes-yesterday, t-the lord... he told me I c-could decorate the c-castle..."

"In fact, early this morning, Lord Riftan asked me to assist you in any way possible. We're planning to call the merchants to the castle soon, but would you like to take a look around in advance to get familiar with the Lord's property?"

"Yes... yes please."

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 37 – Castle Calypse (1)

Max wondered if the butler was frowning when he heard her stutter. Making no notice of it, Rodrigo placed a silver cup and some utensils in front of her with a solemn face, but otherwise, he didn't show any other facial expression. Inwardly sighing with relief, she began to eat the food in slow bites despite being ravenous.

Although she usually had a modest appetite, Max couldn't find herself to bring her spoon down. Only then did she realize she was quite hungry, having made the arduous journey to Anatol and not having eaten the night before. Or perhaps, it must be from the delicious food being served.

She quickly finished the hearty bowl filled with meat soup and vegetables. She slathered butter on freshly baked bread and even managed to finish a slice of meat pie. When she was replete, she washed the meal down with sweet cider and almost felt a little tipsy.

"Shall I bring out more food?" the butler said on one side.

"I-I'm finished now, thank you."

She delicately wiped her mouth with a napkin and rose from the table. When she left the dining hall, Rodrigo joined her and continued his guided tour around the castle.

"Castle Calypse was built 150 years ago by Sir Anatol, a knight of the fallen Roem empire. At the collapse of the Roem empire, numerous monsters began to appear frequently in this area, and it inevitably slipped out of the rulership of the Seven Countries. Forty years ago, for geographic reasons, this land became part under the rulership of Whedon, but in the early days there were not many residents. Therefore, with the area left unattended, monsters naturally thrived in turn."

Rodrigo traversed the hall and continued retelling the history of Anatol.

"But ten years ago, the eighteen-year-old Sir Riftan Calypse, who had just been knighted, came to be the Lord of Anatol."

His steps slow, his voice took on a more stirring tone, "The Lord not only repaired the castle extensively, but he even rebuilt the walls to guard the land. Thanks to his strong and committed defense against the monsters and from an invasion of evil spirits, the number of people in this area has nearly tripled."

The butler's story was gripping, and his voice was awe-inspiring. Despite his outburst in front of the servants the previous day, it was impossible to question his loyalty to Riftan.

"But... I seem to be more focused on the outside of the castle, the grounds—I guess the practical aspects of Castle Calypse. So the interior is a little dreary,"

Rodrigo added, clearly embarrassed, which made Max laugh awkwardly; this was a problem she was to be tasked with solving.

“H-how many r-rooms are there?” she inquired. Since there was no choice in the matter, she might try her hand at it now.

“There are over a hundred rooms in this part of the castle alone. There are about forty rooms in the annex and castle’s tower, and another 250 rooms, including the guards’ quarters and the knights’ rooms.”

On the mention of the sheer number of rooms to be her responsibility, Max felt instantly weary. How could she possibly decorate all of those rooms? While locked in her inner turmoil, Rodrigo had yet to finish...

“And there are five main reception rooms, two banquet halls, two libraries and a tea salon on each floor... none of which have been used in all these years.”

””” ”

Rodrigo apologized profusely with a deep bow.

“The knights don’t enjoy tea at all, so I’m not even sure why I even go to the market to select the best tea leaves.”

Max imagined Riftan sitting in front of the tea table, holding a small cup, and a chuckle almost rose from her. Indeed, she couldn’t imagine the knights or Riftan, for that matter, enjoying tea. Instead, it would surely be a mug of strong beer.

“Does Lord Riftan like tea?” Then he cautiously added, “Do you drink tea together, madam...?”

Max sported a faint blush at the mention of her husband’s name. “H-he likes it.”

“Then, I shall tell the waiter to prepare refreshments upon his return. And of course, only the best tea leaves for the masters of this castle.”

“I-I-I’m looking forward to it.”

A soft smile made the older adult’s wrinkled face seem younger. At this gentle display, Max also relaxed. Rodrigo seemed to be a good person.

“Then, I will continue the tour around the castle.” He continued to speak as they walked down the stairs.

“As you already know, the dining hall is located next to the main reception room on the first floor, and the women’s quarters, of which your room located, is in the center of the

third floor. The Lord's library is located at the north end of the third floor. The banquet halls and the guestrooms are on the second floor. Lastly, the fourth floor contains the castle's main library."

"T-there's a library?"

"Yes," he nodded. "The Lord has about 8,000 books on his shelves. Most dating from the Roem era... would you like to visit the library, Madam?"

Max hesitated for a moment. From the little knowledge she knew, books were extremely marketed to be expensive; what if she inadvertently tore a page or scratched the cover? For Riftan to think she was careless—she would detest the idea of it.

Max shook her head instead. "I'll go a-another time..."

Rodrigo nodded without another question. "I will show you the reception rooms and banquet halls next."

Max nodded dutifully. The reception rooms and banquet halls were the most important places to greet outside guests. It would be better to check these areas first so she could grasp ideas on how to decorate them.

She followed him into the banquet hall and opened her mouth in shock on their arrival. Not a single item was inside the spacious banquet hall. The cold air wafted from the floor to greet her, some even slipping through the cracked windows.

"Since we never had a banquet..." the butler started to murmur, clearly uncomfortable again.

"Ah," Max tried to lighten the atmosphere. "T-there must have been n-no reason to have g-guests come..."

"Most of the castle's guests are knights, and they don't even stay long enough for a ball. They probably wouldn't even enjoy it, but they do drink a lot in the dining hall."

Rodrigo paused, thinking for a moment. "We have never invited any nobleman to dinner. After spending plenty of money to repair the castle, for building the new walls, and reinforcing the drawbridge—we couldn't afford to host social functions."

[◀ Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter ▶](#)

[Share With Friends](#)

Note: Daily latest chapters updates only on our website so **BOOKMARK** The Website to Get The Latest Chapters and New Novels.

Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 38 – Castle Calypse (2)

Rodrigo sighed lightly.

“It seems, after so many years of neglect, the Lord seems to have forgotten a haven beyond nests of monsters and the bloody battlefield exists in this meager Castle—such things are probably trifle to him.”

Max inwardly vowed to herself that it wouldn't stay such. The bland room before her will come alive in a blaze of colors and luxury, becoming one of the the most coveted banquet halls in the continent. Nobility would fight tooth and nail only to gain an invitation to the elusive castle Calypse.

“P-please call the m-merchants as soon as possible,” she said, a resolution in mind.

Rodrigo nodded fiercely, he could feel her determination and that impressed him.

She surveyed the reception and guest rooms next, both quarters almost no different from the banquet hall. At the very least, the guest room was mildly accommodating with its basic but dull furniture. Each room was equipped with sturdy beds and clean comforters, simple shelves lining the window for whatever the occupant may deem to place on it. There wasn't enough to scrutinize in the simply decorated room, so they continued down to the first floor to check the servants' quarters.

“The male servants live in a separate building, and the maids live in a lodging on the ground floor so that they can always respond to their master's call. If the madam requires of anything, you only need to ring the bell in the room, the maids will come right away—even in the middle of the night.”

According to Rodrigo, castle Calypse only employs 87 servants, a considerably lacking force to manage a gargantuan fortress, the grounds and moats around. Yet, on the other hand, maybe it wasn't too small of a number considering that the owner had left it empty for such a long time.

Different faces passed by before her as she was introduced by Rodrigo to some of the maids working in the castle. After acquainting with numerous faces she was bound to forget in the next day, they continued their tour towards the castle's kitchen. Unlike the former rooms that were dead and cold, the enormous kitchen was the opposite—it was warm and full of activity.

Max glanced at the large fireplace on the left wall, the flames flickering beneath a pot large enough to be used as a bath. Even more so on the deer roasting over the open oven fire under the vent, or perhaps it must be the delicious scent making her focus on the latter.

Her still, standing frame was a contrast against the shuffle of feet of the busy servants who were working tirelessly. Some were kneading bread, others peeling potatoes, cutting smoked meat onto plates and washing dishes, bowls stacked in heaps near the sink.

“The kitchen is the busiest place in the castle. The servants have no time to rest as they prepare food for the knights and guards to eat. And because of the shortage of workers, almost all the servants of the castle have to be equipped on the kitchen whenever lunch or dinner approaches.”

“S-so that’s why we didn’t s-see the servants in the o-other rooms...”

She swore to tell Riftan that he had to hire more servants.

“Would you like to see the annex now?”

When she nodded, Rodrigo led her outside.

Immediately, under the bright glare of the sun, a lifeless garden greeted her. A lonely tree stood next to an unmanaged pavilion, the only life present in the ground the weeds that grew on the flower beds.

””” . ”

She furrowed her eyebrows. Even if the Great Hall is considered as the Lord’s pride, the garden manning the entrance to the main castle should still be emblazoned. As the first thing that guests see, there should be an exorbitant, stunning display of flowers enough to blind them. After all, first impressions leave a lasting impression.

A secret was on her lips. The one thing she could be confident about was her eye for landscaping—it had been her father’s passion and that meant ingraining it on her as well.

‘Even if I can’t do that much this season, at the very least I should make certain we don’t get ridiculed.’

“D-do we have a gardener?”

“The servants take turns cleaning the yard and garden... but there are no official gardeners and landscape architects.”

Rodrigo replied, wiping his forehead laced with cold sweat.

Max knew the servants were not to blame. It was usually the responsibility of the Lord and his Mistress to furnish the castle. Since Riftan had been on a lengthy expedition, the management should have fallen to her hands as his wife... Yesterdays accusations her husband had thrown at her suddenly flooded her mind like an inclement torrent.

“S-show me the annex, please.”

“Yes, madam. Come this way please.”

Quietly following Rodrigo’s instructions, they walked past the gray garden and along the small walkway on the left side of the Great Hall. Old oak trees provided them dense shade on the dirt road from the unforgiving heat.

“The annex was the primary residence of the late Sir Anatol’s clan, but now it has been remodeled and used as lodging for apprentices.”

Max tilted her head curiously. “D-does castle C-calypse have a-a lot of apprentice k-knights?”

“There are about thirty. After the Lord became the Knight Commander, many aristocrats sent their sons and daughters to train under his tutelage. Upon the end of their apprenticeship, they are initiated as members of the Remdragon Knights.”

The butler, who was leading the way, suddenly halted in his steps. They stopped close to a wide, open field at the end of the path. Boys, barely considered adults with their faces reflecting their youth, were all lined up, each of them wielding a wooden sword that looked harmless but Max knew would yield some damage.

“Oh, it’s the hour for training,” he then turned to her, asking for opinion. “What shall we do, madam? Would you like to greet the apprentices?”

“Oh, no... I d-don’t want to d-disturb them. We can c-come back later...”

Sudden embarrassment sprout inside her from nowhere, and she suddenly stopped talking. Riftan’s broad shoulders as he stood ramrod straight in front of the boys caught her eye.

“I guess the Lord was overseeing the training.”

The butler also found himself standing under the shade of the tree and said in a tense voice.

“I believe it’s a good idea to go back, madam. The lord doesn’t like spectators to be present during training sessions.”

“Oh, then let’s go.”

She hoped the disappointment wasn’t evident in her voice. As she turned back to the castle at Rodrigo’s request, she felt the familiar rough palm of a man grab her delicate wrist.

◀ Previous Chapter

Next Chapter ▶

Share With Friends

Note: Daily latest chapters updates only on our website so **BOOKMARK** The Website to Get The Latest Chapters and New Novels.

Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 39 – The Inexperienced Knight (1)

The force of the grab was enough to whip Max around. She was surprised to see Riftan staring at her with a puzzled expression, immediately sensing his gloomy mood. But she was sure he was supervising the boys in an exercise only a few minutes ago...

“I would have interrupted the training session to introduce you to my apprentices if you had only come up to me, why are you leaving without greeting me?”

Max’s eyes widened in surprise. “I d-didn’t want to b-bother you...”

“... You never bother me.”

He looked back at the lads, with his hand still holding her wrist. The apprentices were all panting, sweaty and with carmine faces, having just done rigorous sprints up and down the field with their wooden swords.

“Two more repetitions and then you may rest! You can all take an hour off and resume training after,” Riftan shouted over the boys, already on the verge of kissing the ground. “I’ll rest at the Annex.”

Then he took her hand in his and started walking with her towards castle Calypse. Max turned to Rodrigo with a flustered look, as if to apologize for abandoning him. Rodrigo, however, seemed to have no intention of following the couple. He just stood still, clasping his hands together and bowing his head in deference. Riftan marched up the walkway without even sparing him a glance.

“How about a meal?” he asked out of the blue.

“Oh, I’ve a-already eaten... I w-went to the dining hall earlier. The butler was sh-showing me around the castle, and we were on our way to the annex when we r-ran into you,” she stuttered, avoiding his gaze.

It was not the time and place, but her thoughts betrayed her—concocting the nerve-wracking caresses of the intimate bath they shared some time ago...

“I-I’m s-sorry for bothering you yesterday,” she blurted out. For reasons why she was internally admonishing herself, she was quite unsure.

“Bothering me?” The man slowed down and looked down at her again with a befuddled look.

“F-for f-falling asleep... we couldn’t have a meal together.”

“...You were exhausted from the long journey. There’s no need to apologize.”

Riftan responded curtly, starting his clipped steps again down the pathway. Panic flooded inside her chest as she hurried after him. Although he said everything was fine, she knew there was some agitation inside.

“B-but weren’t you t-tired as well... Since you d-did most of the w-work...”

“I wasn’t the least weary,” Riftan said elusively, faintly wanting to dismiss the matter. “It’s because you’re unceasingly so full of life.”

””” ”

“What?”

Riftan then sighed to himself, now comprehending the naivety of the woman beside him—she simply hadn’t understood how aroused he had been after the bath. Of course, he didn’t want her to fall asleep. He had tried to keep her from sleep’s grip, but she must have been truly drained from the travel.

“Nothing. You said you were looking around the castle? I’ll be your guide this time.”

“A-all r-right...”

The thoughts wondering if she had offended him trailed after her as she obediently followed him...

Riftan climbed across the garden wall and onto the rampart. He then leaned over and pulled her up onto the walls with him as if she was no heavier than a child. From their

vantage point, they could see the expanse of rugged hills, steep cliffs, dark green vegetation dotted on the opposite slope and the looming walls that stretched to encase them.

“Every day thirty to thirty-five soldiers patrol the castle and survey the surroundings to check for sightings of monsters. If they see one, they sound the trumpet to alert other knights. When they hear the signal, the knights begin their preparations to subdue the monsters.”

Listening to his explanation, she looked at the stronghold built on the high ground above the valley and observed its simple structure.

A solid, high wall stood on all four sides. The dormitory and training facilities for the knights were next to the main gate, and a residence for the servants of the castle and annex were behind the second gate. Behind the building stood a reedy, tall tower that stretched to the skies like a spike.

When she looked at it curiously, Riftan explained.

“Ruth resides in that tower. It’s closer to the mountains, therefore a convenient place for casting magic in case of an emergency.”

A scowl laced his features, he then turned to her and said, worry evident in his tone, “Don’t get close to it for any reason. In order to protect his research, Ruth installed outlandish magic circles all over the place, causing the occasional trouble.”

“H-he’s a magician?”

She looked up at him again, bursting at the seams with childlike interest. When she was about to ask more questions, Riftan ended the conversation as quickly as he had started it.

He walked along the patrol road towards the rear of the castle. Max followed beside him, sometimes casting furtive glances (she hoped) at the tower, hoping to see some kind of magic trick appear.

“You can see the stables over there, that’s the barn, and that building is the food warehouse. The warehouse should always contain more than what is sufficient in case of any long and drawn out battles.”

Riftan, who continued speaking monotonously, suddenly looked at her.

“Are you bored? I’m not very good at this. I don’t know how to treat a woman...” he suddenly disclosed.

“I’m n-not b-bored...” her laugh came a bit too high-pitched for her ears.

She was quite aware how he was far from a ‘cultured’ man. She surmised he was one without passion for reading, and who frequently lacked engagement in refined conversations with noblewomen.

Yet, it was also difficult to believe his inexperience with women—unless he had suddenly turned into a man overnight.

Is he insinuating then that in his twenty-eight years as a fine-looking man with a reputation for valor and strength enough to swoon the kingdom’s beauties... he had never been tempted by a woman?

◀ Previous Chapter
Next Chapter ▶
Share With Friends

Note: Daily latest chapters updates only on our website so **BOOKMARK** The Website to Get The Latest Chapters and New Novels.

Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 40 – The Inexperienced Knight (2)

Max recalled stories of the knights who would visit castle Croix—all of them geniuses in the matter of love. She couldn’t count the times she heard maids, seduced by knights for a night’s company, giggle as they reminisced about how some of the knights skillfully led them at seduction.

It was impossible. She firmly believed Riftan must have had his fair share of relationships with young maids or beautiful ladies. Didn’t Riftan also divulge to her that it was custom in the north for lords and ladies to bath together?

How would he know that information unless...

Max caught herself in time and halted her predilections for negative thoughts. No matter what he had done in the past, it didn’t matter now.

“What’s wrong? You’re frowning.”

“Oh, th-the w-wind is a little cold...”

Riftan bent over and embraced her into his arms, warming her body that had gone cold from the chill weather. The masculine aroma that invaded her senses almost stopped Max from breathing, that funny feeling settling in her once again.

“You should have worn thicker garments,” he said in a muffled tone above her head.

“It’s a-all right. If the w-wind wasn’t blowing so strongly, it would be fine... the s-sun is warm...”

“Do you like it? I mean, the dress.”

She looked down at her garb, too gorgeous to be worn by her. It would be strange to tell him that this was in fact the first time she had ever worn such pretty clothes.

“I d-do like it,” she said instead.

“I will have a seamstress come over so you can have as many dresses as you would like. I’ll buy you hundreds of them.”

Riftan grasped her chin lightly and lifted it up, intensely boring into her eyes with the solemn promise of extravagance. Max felt herself blush and turn warm—why, this wasn’t the behavior of a man unfamiliar dealing with women.

She muttered as she looked down. “Should I get u-used to this?”

“What?”

“That you’ll get me w-whatever I a-ask for.”

””” ”

Her blunt words caused Riftan to furrow his brow.

“I am serious. I told you before that I would go lengths to make sure you live as luxuriously as you did in your father’s castle.”

Max swallowed the dry laugh that almost bubbled from her.

How could she have lived a delectable life of lavishness—never had she been given what she desired, or even what a noblewoman needed. If he knew how erroneous his preconceptions were on her past life, would he be trying this hard?

She felt as if she was deceiving him, and it made her feel insufferable, as if she was a villain.

She mumbled slightly, avoiding his eyes. “C-can we take a break?”

“Do you feel tired?”

As she nodded, he stepped forward to lead her home. A strong wind was blowing from the north and swept through the trees covering the blueish hillside afar. Max stopped for a moment, inhaling the scent of pine, the mustiness of mushrooms.

Would she smell this every day?

Max, overlooking the majestic scenery, soon followed behind Riftan down and away from the sights.

Riftan had to leave her again to oversee the training of the potential knights. She returned to the room alone, sitting in front of the fireplace to relax as Rudis brought ginger tea and sweets with dried fruits as snacks to replenish her.

“As you are going to have dinner with the knights this evening, would you like to change your clothes, madam?” Rudis said, refilling her empty cup.

Max, after finishing a mouthful of dried fruits, looked up at the maid in confusion.

“Ch-change?”

“Yes, since you’re meeting them for the first time as the lord’s wife, I suggest it would be better to dress more formally.”

She bowed her head with a tense face. “I apologize if I overstepped.”

“No, you didn’t...”

Max grimaced as she gazed at her own reflection in the mirror leaning against the wall. The hair that Rudis had neatly brushed and twisted elegantly this morning had been ruined by the wind.

She nodded, pulling out some pins and letting her wavy hair down as assent for the maid to do her magic on her locks a second time.

“A-all right... please d-do.”

Rudis went straight out of the room with the teapot and came back with a small jewelry box containing intricate combs, perfumed oils and fine ornaments.

She sat in a chair in front of the mirror as Rudis first used a comb to smooth the knots in of her hair. For a long time, she kept brushing, occasionally adding a bit of the oil and then brushing again. Soon enough, all her efforts to tame her frizzy hair could be seen in Max’s kempt and shiny hair.

“Shall we put in a hairpin? Or would you rather wear a crown?”

Rudis opened the box full of jewelry. At the expensive trinkets that seemed to blind a person, Max’s eyes opened wide as saucers.

Emblazoned brooches, pearl necklaces, gold rings, and silver hair pins were placed neatly on the red satin. And in a separate box was a stunning tiara. To her knowledge, Riftan’s mother had died when he was young, and he had no sister, or other female relative.

So where did this all come from?

Wasn’t it a little too fast to be able to prepare such for a dinner, the day after arriving? She could only infer that these jewelries are items from his past lovers...

“Madam, do you like any of these?”

“I-I do.”

She stopped, feeling as if she was prying into someone else’s domain, one she shouldn’t step inside, and instead focused on picking out something, anything.

“This h-hair p-pin, please...”

“Yes, madam.”

Rudis braided her hair tightly, rolling it around on one side, and fixed it with the silver hairpins decorated with colorful flowers. Then, she looped a pearl necklace on her neck and a crystal ring on her finger.

Max looked at the strange reflection of the woman with her coiffed hair and the jewelry that lit up her face. She didn’t look herself... daresay, she looked beautiful. The simplicity of her look brought out her features more.

“If you don’t like the look, I can bring you other jewelry,”

Rudis, who had been looking down at the many imperfections on her skirt, politely offered.

Max shook her head. “I-it’s lovely. I’ll go with th-this.”

Rudis looked relieved. When they were ready to leave the room, she placed a thin, almost translucent shawl over her shoulders. Suddenly, twilight was falling outside the window.

◀ Previous Chapter

Next Chapter ▶
Share With Friends

Note: Daily latest chapters updates only on our website so **BOOKMARK** The Website to Get The Latest Chapters and New Novels.

Rate this Chapter