

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 101 – A Knight's Wife (2)

"Bone is just bone. There is no reason to be reluctant." Seeing her expression, Ruth clicked his tongue as if she was pathetic. "When you eat meat, don't you touch the bones?" He continued to jab.

"I-it's di-different." Max grumbled in a sullen voice.

Ruth snorted as if it wasn't worth answering and began to focus on setting up the magical tools. He put it firmly into the stone pillar and fixed it with clay, then went out of the gate. Max also tried to follow him but was intercepted by Riftan who was giving instructions to the guards.

"Where are you going? It is too dangerous outside the gate," he said, a little worried.

"B-But Ru-Ruth was...."

Even before she could finish her sentence, Riftan interrupted her.

"He's a high-level wizard, so I'm not worried. Stay calm, or I'll send you back to the castle."

Hearing the determined voice, Max nodded gently. He ordered the guards to protect her well, then went up the wall and gave orders to Ruth.

Right then, a huge flame swelled beyond the walls. It flew towards the gate with a tremendous roar.

Max screamed in fright.

As if responding to the heat of the flames, the earth shook slightly, and soon a huge barrier soared above the ground to block the flames. She was fascinated as she took in the majestic scene. Even the locals who came out to watch were awed and sat down on the ground with their mouths agape.

"It's still noisy."

The knight standing beside her whistled lightly. When she noticed the calmness of the knights, she realized that this enormous sight was a routine for them. Only did it dawn on her they must have lived through things that she would never even dream of.

"Great! The magical tools are working properly. Open the gates."

As Riftan shouted, the heavy iron gate opened and Ruth walked in covered with the dust. "Do you have to do it like this?"

"It should be known that Anatol is perfectly safe even if I leave the territory," Riftan said as he climbed down the wall.

"At this point, no one will attempt to break in." Ruth surmised and went on, "But well, if this newfound protection would reach the ears of many merchants, I'm sure they'll be flocking to Anatol... now that's a good thing."

"" "

Max realized that the scene that had just happened was not only to test the magical tools but also to reassure the onlookers.

Riftan spoke with the knights for a bit before coming to her side. "Maxi, go back to the castle now."

"A-And... you?"

"I have to take the invaders and to meet the messenger of Libadon. Ruth, Hebaron! Take her to the castle. And get ready to go to the subjugation in advance."

Before she could say anything, he flung his cloak and led the knights to somewhere. Max sat on Rem, staring after his retreating figure as it slowly disappeared from her sight. Unbeknownst to her, Hebaron, the giant knight with pale, auburn hair, and also Ruth had accompanied her on either side with their horses.

"After getting used to a warm bed, he has to crawl into the mountains again." Hebaron said, prompting a laugh from Ruth.

"You also complained about the castle being boring," Ruth reminded him.

"You should sleep in the frost as well," The miffed knight generously offered.

"I'll decline. A delicate and fragile wizard like me could die just by hitting the cold of winter." Ruth insisted shamelessly while the dumbfounded Hebaron only laughed.

"Delicate and fragile? No one amongst the Knights of Remdragon has as thick a nerve as a wizard."

"That's only your opinion."

Max rolled her eyes and watched their tussle. It was a confusing conversation, it was unclear if they had a good relationship or a bad one.

“Oh, wait a minute! Let’s stop by the market for a while before we go to the castle.”
When they reached the town square, Ruth halted his horse and spoke.

Hebaron looked back at him with a displeased face. “Hey, come out later for your personal business. Now is....” He glanced at Max, cutting his words halfway.

Ruth sighed lightly. “Can you please stop that attitude? Madam Calypse is not a boil that gets infected when touched.”

“Hey, when I did...” Hebaron was vexed at the other’s cheekiness.

“You’re acting as if she isn’t here even when she is in front of your eyes. Take it easy.”

Hebaron became visibly embarrassed. Ruth turned the horse towards Max without giving him a chance to argue back. “Today is the last market day. There will be no peddler’s visits for a while. Before that, we need to buy something we need. You should also see how the Anatol market is.”

Max hesitated and looked at Hebaron. The knight, who was stiffened with an uncomfortable face, sighed and steered his horse towards the market. She quickly followed them.

“Wha-What are you go-going to b-buy?”

“I’ll buy herbs and mana stones. I’ve used up almost everything I have.”

The market was booming despite the cold weather. Merchants with tents lined up and were selling all sorts of things on the board. The skins and bones of beasts, rough-looking fabrics, and crude ornaments. On the other side, they were selling meat, bread, and potatoes, and some were selling grain and acorns in sacks. Daunted by their resonant voices, Max stuck tight in behind Ruth.

“Hey, wizard! Go slowly. It’s not easy to escort in such a crowded place.” Hebaron complained from behind, but even the loud voice was buried in the clamor of the merchants. She glanced around nervously.

“You don’t have to be nervous like that. It’s very rare that someone suddenly rushes and swings a knife.”

“I-I’m not at all re-relieved.”

“Anatol’s security is quite good. If you act vigilant like you are doing now, you’re only asking attention from hooligans.”

◀Previous Chapter
Next Chapter▶

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Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 102 – Belongingness (1)

On the wide board with black cloth were roots of several uncommon plants, bottles of unknown powders and thin branches haphazardly piled up. To an untrained eye, who knew not what these were for, it would be nothing more than a heap of trash.

Ruth quickly jumped off his horse and diligently scrutinized the items one by one.

“Are these all herbs?”

Hebaron, who had been haggling all the way behind him, also poked his head out as he couldn't overcome his curiosity. Instead of answering, Ruth called up a man who was trimming the herbs in the corner.

“I would like to buy 20 Segals (100 grams) of all kinds, what's the price?”

“1 Derham for 10 Segals.” A merchant replied with a generous smile on his face. “These are precious herbs of good quality, and the price is pretty high. If you buy all kinds, you have to pay for 40 Derham.”

“Can I pay for it in Liram?” Ruth asked.

“Of course! I'll get the scale.”

She watched as the merchant carefully laid the roots with dried leaves on a brass scale. Ruth, who had a penchant for carrying miscellaneous things in a small pocket, took the pocket out and held out four silver coins. The merchant then weighed the silver on the scale.

Looking at the goings-on, Max whispered by the wizard's ear. “Why.. is he we-weighing it?”

“To make sure it's real silver.” Ruth then added. “Recently, there has been an influx of fake currencies. We have even caught people who grind their coins little by little to make new money.”

“G-grind the co-coins?” Max was astonished.

“When you put money in a basket and shake it, the gold dust falls off. They collect them and make another gold coin. If you repeat it over and over, the coins will wear out a lot more and you will see a difference in weight. But I’m not worried. My coins are almost new.”

He took some coins out of his pocket and held them for her to see. The edges were definitely sharp.

Satisfied, the merchant pocketed the coins and took out 8 Derham to check their weight, while Ruth closely watched the weighing needle.

“The wizard has always been stingy.”

Hebaron boomed, but Ruth didn’t even blink.

””” ”

“I’m just meticulous.” He proudly declared, and went to the other side of the street.

This time around he began bargaining, with a man who seemed to be a mercenary, over a stone the size of a rock. While the mercenary insisted he would accept no less than 15 Liram saying he almost died to get the mana stone, an adamant Ruth snorted and quibbled that 10 Liram was enough. In the end, after a long battle, Ruth bought five mana stones for the price he wanted.

Meanwhile, Max was looking at things on display from the other vendors. A palm-sized dagger with colored beads, a small piece of wood in the shape of an animal, a belt with embroidery, a bronze brooch and a rope with varying colors of threads.

“Wha-what is this?” Max, who looked at the colorful rope with curious eyes, and asked questions to the side.

Ruth, however, was busy haggling with another merchant at a distance. She was embarrassed and tried to stand up from her seat when she heard a blunt voice.

“It’s an accessory for the sword.”

Max turned her head in amazement. Hebaron was bending over and fiddling with the ornaments she was looking at.

He continued, not once lifting his gaze. “Many adventurers believe that they can be protected by spirits if they have it. You tie it up here.”

He pointed to his own sword on the waist. A sturdy-looking leather sword was bound with ornaments made of twisted colored cloth. She alternated between Hebaron and the accessories with an awkward face.

“I ha-have never seen it be-before. Ri-riftan doesn’t wear th-these accessories, so....”

Riftan’s entire ensemble was rather brusque and crisp like the man himself. So it was very obvious that Max, who had only seen that one man in close quarters, didn’t know of these beliefs that seemed to be rife among the general masses.

“The leader thinks this is useless. His pride is too strong to dwell on superstitions.”

The knight’s words were a blend of sarcasm and affability.

Max relaxed and smiled a little. “If it’s Riftan... I t-think so.”

“But if Madam gives it to him, he might wear it.” He asked in a calm voice, scratching his wavy back hair. “Would you like to pick one?”

Max blinked up at him. The unexpected favor flooded her in both embarrassment and joy. “W-wouldn’t it be expensive?”

“How much could this thing be?”

Max blushed at his absurd remarks. She didn’t want to act stupid. She chose a short rope of red, green and orange from among the ornaments hanging. Hebaron handed a coin to the merchant without asking about the price.

“That’s enough money of course.”

Judging from the merchants’ widened eyes, he seemed to have paid much more than the original price.

“I wi-will return it as s-soon as I get back to the castle.”

“It’s alright. I’m not a petty little man like a wizard who brings one coin.”

He shrugged and turned to Ruth. Max picked up her accessory and hurried after him. It crossed her mind that she had not even thanked him yet, but the man had already cut off her attention and was grumbling to Ruth for how much longer he was going to procrastinate. Ruth put the purchased goods in a sack and made an annoying gesture.

“Yes, yes, sir. Let’s go back.”

◀Previous Chapter
Next Chapter▶

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Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 103 – Belongingness (2)

Ruth pulled the reins and walked leisurely to a quiet place. As soon as they got out of the market, they rode straight to Calypse Castle. She was also able to climb the winding hill way with her deft skill.

“Who’s going to take part in this round?”

By the time they reached the barrier, Ruth looked back at Hebaron and asked, Hebaron stroked his chin with his hands as if he were pondering.

“I think Gabel and I are going. And I’m thinking of taking some in-training-knights. It’s about time they got hands-on experience.”

“The castle will be less noisy.”

By Ruth’s contented words, Hebaron grinned.

“I’ll have to ask the leader to bring the wizard out, too.”

“Sir Calypse won’t take me away. When something happens, he’ll be more relieved that I am in the castle.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

Hebaron sighed reluctantly admitting.

“All right. Enjoy your peace while we’re gone. I’ll clean up the mountain in a blink of an eye and come back and make some noise near your tower.”

Hebaron sped up his horse and drove them through the gate at once. Ruth just shrugged carelessly.

Max felt a little envious of their squabbling. There was a deep understanding and bond between Hebaron and Ruth. They weren’t the only ones. When Riftan were with the

knights, they looked more natural than ever. Even the moment they argued and quarreled, they still looked happy. In the eyes of Maximillian, who had always been alone, the firm bond that existed between them seemed as fascinating as ever.

“Now I have to go back and take a nap. I’ve been living like a bat for the last few days because of those blasted magic tools.”

Ruth suddenly passed through the gate and looked back at her. “Madam has done a great job, too. If you didn’t help me, it would have taken me three more days.”

“If I’m he-helpful.. It’s my p-pleasure.”

“We will provide you with that pleasure again in the near future.”

””” ”

Ruth grinned shamelessly. She tried to frown but ended up laughing. She wished she could be accepted as a member of them little by little in this way. A sense of belonging. She was wondering what that would feel like.

The next morning, Riftan got out of bed even before the sun rose. Max woke up half-asleep along with Riftan, rubbing her bleary eyes open with the back of her hand. At her sleepy spectacle, Riftan rubbed his lips on her cheek with a smile.

“You sleep a little more. You don’t have to get up at this time because of me.”

“I s-slept e-enough.”

“I thought I kept you up until quite late....” Riftan stretched his last word and gently stroked her chest. Max blushed and quickly pulled up the sheet. Riftan chuckled and swept away her disheveled hair.

“Don’t go hard on yourself. Just go to sleep.”

“I w-will get u-up.”

Max stepped out of bed, holding the sheets in her hands, and narrowly missed the arm that stretched towards her to put her back. Riftan shrugged as if nothing had happened and began to prepare for his appearance.

She threw the chopped firewood into the fireplace, watching him wash his face and shave along the basin. After a few grazing sessions, the flames flared up and the room became brighter.

Max dampened a towel after warming herself, wiping her face and body, and taking out new underwear and shoes from the closet. Since Riftan didn’t like to be served by

servants, she has recently become accustomed to grooming herself. Max sat in front of the mirror to comb her hair after wearing long thigh-high socks and a thick woolen dress over a vest.

“Give me the comb, I’ll do it for you.”

Riftan, dressed in a navy blue tunic and winter leather pants, approached her back. Max shook her head.

“It’s o-okay. I w-will do it.”

“Give it to me. I won’t be able to touch it for the next few days, I should have enjoyed it enough.”

What’s fun about touching my vine-like hair? She couldn’t quite understand it, but Max obediently handed over the comb. Riftan grabbed a comb as small as a clam with a stiffened hand and began to brush her hair down. Max’s cheeks blushed at his careful gestures that seemed to be worried he might hurt even a hair. Riftan carefully untangled her messy hair and skillfully braided it into four parts.

“Isn’t my skill good enough now?”

He praised himself, looking down at her closely braided hair. Max kissed him on the chin impulsively. Then Riftan’s body stiffened. He often kisses her, but why did he react like this when she approaches first? Max said in a calm manner, hiding her shyness.

“It’s a g-gratitude k-kiss.”

“I mean you...” Riftan breathed a long sigh. “I don’t want to go out anyway. Don’t make it too hard.”

“I don’t m-mean to make it h-hard....”

As she gave a bewildered look at the look that seemed genuinely dejected, Riftan pulled her arm and hugged her. For a moment, when he crouched in astonishment, Max carefully wrapped her arms around his waist. Riftan groaned and rubbed his forehead roughly over her shoulder.

“Will you keep acting so cute?”

“...I didn’t do a-anything.”

“D**n, I’m afraid we’re running out of time to do one more and wash again....”

Riftan looked at the bed with a desperate look.

◀ Previous Chapter
Next Chapter ▶
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Rate this Chapter

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 104 – Unusual Winter (1)

A fiery blush spread across Max's face as she pushed his chest away. When Riftan loosened his arm with a reluctant face, she quickly moved away and shielded herself with a shawl. Riftan, who was looking at it with uneasy eyes, finally breathed out a loud sigh.

"We'll see when I get back."

Then he shook his head, a slight smile on his lips, and walked in front of the armor stand. Max watched from far away as he wore shoulder and chest pads with intricate patterns that of a dragon, gripped knee pads around his shin, and thigh pads one after another. Finally, wearing a waist-wrapping fauld and a tasset over the pelvis, Riftan covered the gloves with silver gauntlets.

Watching the manly figure with satisfaction, Max recalled the sword ornament she had bought at the market yesterday when she saw Riftan wearing a leather belt around his waist. She went straight through the drawer and pulled out the colored strap.

"W-well..."

Riftan, with a sword around his waist, looked back at her with a curious glance. Max hesitantly held out the sword ornament.

"I b-bought this y-yesterday at the m-market on the w-way back. Sir Nirtha s-said if a k-knight had this on the s-sword... He c-can be protected by the s-spirits, so..."

He blinked blankly and looked down only at her palm. Max added mumbling.

"T-the money was g-given by Sir Nirtha, b-but...I c-chose this. It's not a b-big deal, but... if you don't m-mind..."

Her voice gradually crawled as he only looked down, not at all willing to accept it. Does he think it is useless? Max lowered her hand, hiding her disappointment.

“I-if you don’t w-want to... y-you don’t have to f-force it.”

“Give it to me.”

Trying to put the decorations back in the drawer, Riftan rushed to hold her arm. Max looked back at him with a surprised look. Riftan snatched the strap from her hand and tied it to the sword with clumsy skill. The end piece, that of rough leather belts and colorful strap accessories, were ridiculously out of place.

Max blushed with shame at her awful taste.

“Thank you. I’ll keep it well.”

He kissed her on the forehead in return and turned around. For a moment, she was disappointed with the calm attitude, but Max could see the corners of his mouth twitching up.

Riftan rubbed his chin with one hand and turned around, as if to cover the uncontrollable smiles on his lips, and wrapped the robe around his body. But he couldn’t hide his reddish earlobe from Max.

””” ”

She suddenly felt a tight squeeze in her chest—that of pure giddiness. Riftan was genuinely pleased with the humble gift. And she even just bought it at Hebaron’s suggestion...

Suddenly she was quite angry at herself. Even if she couldn’t give him a great gift as he did, she should have prepared something more proper. She can’t believe she made him so happy with something she bought on the street impulsively. If she could, she wanted to hit herself as hard as she could.

“I’ll be right back, so please wait for me.”

When he was perfectly prepared with his appearance, he once again embraced her with a firm arm. Max had her face buried in his chest, trying to shake off the melancholy feeling.

Something settled on her mind—she wanted to give this person a lot in the future. She’ll do whatever she can.

And she made up her mind like that.

Riftan left with three knights, six soldiers and three in-training knights. She was anxious to see if it was too little, but Ruth reassured her by saying that the original small-scale clique consisted of only eight to as many as fourteen or fifteen people.

Max climbed onto the wall and watched until the knights were out of sight, then went to the weaving room to make sure that all the fabrics she ordered had arrived. The corner of the spacious room, where spinning wheels and looms were neatly placed, was full of quality wool, and the maids were sitting by the brazier, diligently making winter clothes.

Max interestingly watched the maids tautly spread the cloth on a large table, drawing designs on it, scissoring it with a clatter sound, and stitching the wool between the thick cloth tightly.

Although the castle, which had closed the shutters of each window due to sudden drop in temperature, was dim and dark, the maids relied on the flickering lights from the lanterns to sew skillfully. The deft touch was greeted with admiration.

“H-how long will it take?”

Rudis, who had counted the number of fabrics to her question, answered with wrinkles around her eyes. “I think we can finish it in about three to four days. I’ve distributed the clothes that we made. Until the rest of the winter clothes are complete, we’re going to take turns to wear them.”

Max came out of the weaving room with a look of relief. The castle of Calypse, where the dark had fallen, looked even more bleak. Perhaps because it was noisy preparing for the winter and decorating the castle for a while, the calm seemed more spooky than necessary. She took a look at the kitchen, the stable, and the annex with Rudis, and then returned to her room to rest.

[◀ Previous Chapter](#)
[Next Chapter ▶](#)
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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 105 – Unusual Winter (2)

While sitting in front of the table and flipping through the pages, the mood gradually subsided. Winter preparations were almost complete, so there was nothing more to do. Max stared blankly out the window, wondering if the day had been this long. She couldn't believe herself that she was already feeling lonely less than half a day after he left.

She used to be alone, but...

"Madam, you must be tired. Should I get you some tea?"

Max, who had been absent-minded, hurriedly straightened her face at the careful question of Rudis. She was the hostess of the Calypse castle. It's impossible to show that she was depressed like a child just because her husband had been away from the castle.

Max nodded with a smile. Just in time, a sharp wind shook the window frame violently. Her complexion froze with anxiety, watching the naked branch shake violently. In the distance, the cries of migratory birds resounded.

Winter was coming to Anatol.

Two days later, the first frost fell. Max looked down through the window at the glistening garden, as if it had been sprinkled with flour. Temperatures dropped noticeably, with winter everywhere. Is Riftan really okay in the mountains in this weather?

Looking at the distant mountain nervously, Rudis, who was sitting in a chair sewing, breathed out a sigh. "It's unusually cold this winter. It's also so early."

"Y-you said Anatol wasn't that c-cold even in w-winter?"

"Yes, Anatol is located in the basin, so it is warmer than other areas in winter."

After saying that, Rudis looked a little embarrassed. "But this winter seems different. There's already thin ice in the well."

"The f-firewood we're going to use in the meantime... Won't it be s-short?"

"We've got more than usual, so it'll be fine."

A gentle smile by Rudis appeared to ease her mind. Max followed her and pulled the corners of her mouth, and sat in front of the fireplace to warm her cold hands. As the weather became rapidly cold, the castle of Calypse was filled with deep silence, as if it had fallen into a hibernation.

The servants, who were briskly wandering around the castle, spent their time in a room where the brazier was placed, doing chores, and the merchants who were visiting the

castle with goods stopped coming in between, making the spacious garden look like a deserted wasteland. Despite her preference for calm and quiet rather than noisy, Max felt lonely in the sudden change of mood in just a few days.

“Shall we start cooking lunch?” Rudis broke the silence and asked in a bright voice as she noticed she was feeling down.

Max nodded her head. “W-what’s for lunch today?”

””” ”

“We have cream stew with peas, smoked sausage with spices, and pumpkin pie with molasses and cinnamon for dessert.”

Just hearing the story made her mouth water. With a look of anticipation, Rudis carefully folded the sewing into the basket and left the room. Max opened up a collection of poems from the library last night, hoping to read until lunch was ready. But before she could even read a couple pages, there was a rather harsh knock on the door.

Has Rudis come back already? When she asked to come in with a curious look on her face, Rodrigo and Ruth opened the door and came inside.

“I’m sorry to come while you are resting, Madam. The wizard said he had an urgent matter, so I brought him here.”

“W-what happened?”

Max rose from her seat with a puzzled look. Then Ruth opened his mouth with a long sigh.

“At dawn, the monsters infiltrated the wall and entered the territory. The guards and knights hurriedly suppressed it, but the damage seems to be quite serious. I’ve been asking for help in the Calypse Castle, so would you please sort out some useful servants?”

In an instant, the color faded from Max’s face. She was surprised by the fact that Riftan had another problem, just even a few days after he was away, and Ruth spoke calmly.

“It seems that the sudden drop in temperature has reduced their prey, and the monsters started to rattle. It is common for the monsters to become vicious during this season... It seems to be the first time that they have ever invaded the walls, so the guards did not seem to respond quickly.”

Max managed to regain her composure by his calm voice. “H-how many servants should I p-pick?”

“We need at least ten to six people. Then tell them to take a pile of clean cloths, a bundle of small woodblocks for splints, a large pot for medical herbs, a bucket for water, a brass bowl, a thread, a needle, a herb and food. It’s a remote area, so it’s hard to get what you need right away.”

Max listened frantically to the pouring words and turned her eyes to Rodrigo. He nodded his head.

“I’ll tell them to be ready right now.”

“A-and send someone to the p-parish temple right now to h-help....”

“The Temple of Anatol does not have a fuse to use divine magic.” Ruth cut off her last words and said firmly. “Anatol is an isolated area for a long time. It wasn’t until recently that Lord Calypse was included in the parish. There’s no way the central temple would have sent a high-ranking official to such remote areas.”

[◀ Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter ▶](#)

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 106 – B****y Aftermath (1)

The first thing Max had learned was that Ruth was the only one in Anatol capable of using healing magic. It made her uneasy. What would happen if there was even one more problem?

Ruth lightly flicked his finger at her as if to bring her out of her anxious reverie.

“Worry later. Right now, it is best to continue preparing the servants. I will go prepare the medicinal herbs.”

“A-all right.”

With that he turned around and left the room.

As soon as he was gone, Max brought out her thick, heavy robe and put it on and rang a small bell to gather her servants. Once they'd all arrived, she chose ten strong, young servants and five maids. She ordered them to start preparing to go out. Then, she left the Great Hall.

When she came out to the military training field, she pulled up her hood to block the cold wind. She saw three huge carriages that were being loaded up with bags by the servants. After confirming that everything was packed, she boarded the carriage along with her servants.

After a while, Ruth appeared carrying a large sack over his shoulder. He packed the medicine into the luggage compartment. Max scooted closer to the carriage wall, so he could climb up. However, the wizard was surprised when to see her.

"Oh, is the Madam going as well?"

Her eyes widened. Of course, she thought she had to go and help. But...

"Wi-will it cause a disturbance if I-I go?"

"No. I was just surprised, that's all. It would be quite helpful if you come." The wizard sat opposite to her smiling softly.

Soon, the three carriages departed and began to pass underneath the gate. As they were crossing the Dogaegyo Bridge, they began to rattle violently, startling Max and causing her to cling onto the handles tightly. The carriage slightly tilted forward while going down the steep hill. Suddenly worried that she was going to fall off, she clung even tighter.

As he witnessed the entire scene, Ruth shook his head and spoke. "The wheels of the carriage are equipped to handle going downhill. You do not have to be so nervous."

Max flushed, immediately letting go of the handle. She was embarrassed to show that she had little experience riding in a carriage. How much he must have traveled...

Like he'd said, the carriage came down the hill safely and turned eastward. She looked through the window as they went along the remote forest path, densely packed with naked trees.

The thin branches of the trees cast web-like shadows over the icy ground. Looking around at the bleak landscape, Max turned away from the window and took a deep breath to calm her pounding heart. After a while, the carriage came to a stop.

"" " .

"We've arrived."

When the servant opened the door, Ruth jumped out first. Following him, Max stepped out only to be greeted by piles of the corpses of evil creatures hardened as if they were stone. In the wide, open space of the lumberyard, there were tree stumps sparsely scattered and it was there that the bodies of huge beasts with pitch-black fur were stacked.

“Werewolves...,” said Ruth calmly, looking down at the head of the beast, “... if they had secretly tried to climb the wall at night, it’s no wonder the guards did not notice. We need to set up a contingency plan.”

Max managed to swallow the bile that began to crawl up her throat. She did not want to see such an unseemly sight again.

“Wizard, Sir! You came!” A loud voice echoed.

Consciously turning away from the gory scene, Max looked towards the direction of the sound. Between the dense tree line, she could see a few shabby cabins and knights leading their garrisons. One of the knights quickly strode forth to Ruth.

“Sir Wizard, Lord Ricardo has hurt his shoulder. Could you please take a look at the wound?” he said solemnly.

“You say Lord Ricardo is hurt?” A puzzled Ruth queried. How?”

The young knight exhaled as if biding a moment to muster a reply. “It was foggy near dawn, so I did not notice the call for help. Lord Ricardo was holding off the werewolves by himself until the backup arrived.”

“What in the world... where is Lord Ricardo now?”

“Come this way, please.”

Ruth hurried after the knight. Max, who had been standing by the side, was now confused as to what she should do. Instructing the servants to unload the carriages, she quickly trailed Ruth.

As she gingerly stepped into the dimly lit cabin, she could see the wounded scattered across the floor in neat rows. Max examined the dusty space and furtively glanced at the guard lying closest to her.

It was a gruesome sight. She gasped without even realizing it.

Arm bent at a strange angle, the once prim and proper tunic ragged, stained with dirt and blood, he lay there with a mottled and blackened face wincing in excruciating pain. There was also a peculiar stench emanating from him. All in all, he made for a ghastly sight.

Max had blindly followed Ruth, she had little experience in tending to wounds let alone the severely injured. She was now but a blank spectator, as she stood there in a state of panic and broke out into a cold sweat.

However, the able wizard had taken the reins in his hands and Ruth yelled out to her from across the room.

“My lady! Please tell your servants to boil water right away. We will need a lot of it.”

Go Maxi! Really love how she’s being exposed more to the world... although this is abit of cruel situation

[◀Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter▶](#)

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 107

Max dragged herself enough to move out of the cabin quickly. She ordered the servants to make a fire to boil water and then to bring it into the cabin. The servants immediately gathered wood to create a fire pit in front of the hut, took a large pot out of the carriage and rushed to the nearby spring.

Ruth finished treating the knight’s wound and scrambled out of the cabin to retrieve his sack of herbs. He faced Max.

“Have you ever dealt with an injured person?”

Max shook her head. She was not going to lie at such a critical time. Ruth nodded and seemed to have expected it.

Ruth took out a few small packets and pushed them out to her.

“This powder is a hemostatic agent. It helps to clot blood. The patient’s clothes are carefully cut with scissors to reveal the wound, cleanse with clean water and sprinkle this powder. Then press it with a clean cloth to stop bleeding.”

“Wha-what about using hea-healing magic...” Max was shocked to hear the procedure. She had thought this could taken care of by magic. Besides, Ruth was known for this very thing!

“I cannot cure all of them with my abilities.” Ruth explained. “Ten people with serious injuries is my limit. We have to treat the remaining directly.”

“O-o-okay.”

Max realized that she could not just sit on the sidelines and watch anymore. There was no time to hesitate, She picked a packet trying to hide her fear. With trembling hands, she repeated the instructions in her heart one by one, opening the packet to look inside.

At that time, Ruth handed her another packet.

“The dried leaves are an antidote. If anyone has a purple swollen wound or a fever, please put this in their mouth and have them swallow it. Call me if they are unconscious and you have trouble feeding them.”

“Y-yes” She nodded with a grave look as she committed the words to her memory.

“I’m sure some of the servants have experience in dealing with the wounded. You don’t have to be so nervous, if you give them simple instructions, they should be able to take care of the rest.” He emphasized to reassure her and took the rest of his sack back in the cabin.

After Muttering a short prayer, Max turned towards the servants who were boiling water over the campfire. She was able to barely pass on the simple instructions Ruth left her to the servants. They went into the cabin and barracks straight away each carrying the prepared utensils, linen, and a bowl full of boiling water.

The anxious Max followed the maids to the barracks. The maids were already familiar with treating the injured. She followed them around as they tended to the injured people, trying to help in any way possible. Some had suffered minor injuries, but a majority had wounds that were strange and unusual.

Twelve men in humble clothings who seemed to be loggers, seven soldiers and if those in the other cabin were included.., there were well over forty injured.

””” ”

It was her first time seeing so many injured people, she had to crack down her fear with immense willpower. Repressing the urge to run away, she leaned over to the nearest guard. The man was almost unconscious.

Max hesitated. She looked at the blanket covering his body. The beast must have bitten his leg. His right thigh was soaked with blood. She swallowed her nausea and brought scissors to his dirty pants. The old-looking guard groaned. She thought she had hurt him more and pulled her hand back. However, she braced herself and cut along the length of his right pants.

The wounds in sight were terrible. His flesh was torn and dug up, and black blood clots were tangled around the injury like mud. Repressing the desire to scream, she wiped the gasp with clean linen moistened with water, as directed by Ruth.

The guard wriggled like an earthworm in salt water upon touch. It took a long time to wipe all the blood off. After disposing off the blood-soaked linen, with trembling hands, she sprinkled the blood-clotting powder on the wound. She then grabbed a fresh cloth, nervously wrapping it around his thigh.

Although she had treated only one person so far, her shoulders became stiff, and cold sweat ran down her back.

Is this really how it is done?

Max stood up from her sitting position, looking down at the guard with anxious eyes. If she simply followed Ruth's instructions, everything should be fine, she reassured herself. She repeated his words over and over in her mind and walked toward the next man in a shaky gait.

Each one had a horrific and terrible appearance. One man had a broken arm with the bone protruding from the skin. Another man had his face stained with blood most likely from hitting his head.

Max took care of a man with a head injury first. The damp and slippery texture made her feel sick and dizzy, but she could barely hold herself from fainting. She came here to help those in need, not to be a hindrance.

She washed his wound, sprinkled the powder, and then bandaged him. It was fortunate the blood coagulated. Max sighed in relief glancing at her servants. Everyone was taking care of someone in a similar way. She could relax a little and as she moved on to the next person, a thin hand unexpectedly held her back.

“Do not touch him. We need to set the bones first.”

[◀ Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter ▶](#)

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 108

Max walked up to Ruth with her eyes widened, looking at his face. He looked very pale and she wasn't sure if it was because of exhaustion from continuously exerting himself using healing magic.

Ruth sighed in exhaustion and crouched down next to a guard carefully lifting the man's broken arm where the bone was poking out through the skin.

"Can you grab hold of his shoulders, my Lady?"

Max took a look at the face of the unconscious guard for a moment and then raised both of her hands to his shoulders. Then, Ruth pulled on the broken arm and realigned the bone.

Immediately, the guard's eyes opened, he let out a scream and twisted his body. Max almost fell to the floor by his power.

"Please hold on tight!"

She could barely keep her balance and pressed hard on the guard's body. After Ruth fixed his arm straight, he covered the open wound which was trickling blood with his hands. Then a white light wrapped around the injury.

Max stared at the sight with her eyes wide. The healing magic she remembers felt rather cold and icy. After being whipped by her father till her skin was tattered, if she were to receive treatment from the cleric, she always remembered feeling like a block of ice was being rubbed on her skin.

But the light surrounding the guard now looked warm and soft, like the spring sun. Max secretly touched the light. She felt the warm heat that seemed to melt the tips of her fingers, just as she touched the tree next to the pavilion the other day.

"The claws and teeth of a werewolf are poisonous. Please give him this antidote when he regains consciousness. No.... mix it first with boiling water and then have him drink it."

Max shook off the strange feeling she was having and hurried up to get up.

“I-I’ll g-go and boil w-wa-ter in the p-pot right away.”

“Thank you, my Lady.”

Ruth lay resting on the edge of the makeshift bed of piled-up straws with a fatigued look and caught his breath. It seems that the healing magic consumed a lot of energy.

During his break, Max left the barracks and asked the maid to brew medicinal tea and bring it to them. She was heading to the barracks with firewood for the brazier, and suddenly saw the guards and knights gathered in the open space burning the corpses of werewolves.

Max froze at the terrifying scene. As the smell of burning meat touched her nose, nausea that she was just barely holding back erupted in her throat.

Max put down the firewood and quickly jumped into the woods. Her inside was beating violently. She squatted on a tree stump and vomited water. Tears flowed down her red cheeks.

””” ”

“Hey, are you okay?”

She was gasping for breath when a low voice came from a distance.

She turned her head in surprise. A tall young knight with light brown hair stood a few steps away from her. Looking at Max’s face, his eyes widened.

“What is your ladyship doing in a place like this...?”

He muttered that he did not know that the Lord’s wife had come with them with a stunned look.

Max was ashamed at being caught looking so unseemly and quirky, and wiped her mouth with the sleeve of her robe.

“I wa-was in the m-middle of fe-fetching firewood when...” She murmured, dozing off. She couldn’t say that she felt nauseous when she saw the monster’s burning body. But the knight managed to grasp the situation and groaned quietly.

“Your Ladyship doesn’t have to come out here. Please return to the castle. I’ll escort you.”

Without waiting for her reply, he churned around and began calling the guards. Max chased after him, flustered.

“I-I’m fine. Ple-please don’t m-mind me...”

“How could I pay no attention to the captain’s wife wandering around? Please don’t push yourself unnecessarily and return. Hey! Bring the carriage. Escort Lady Calypse back to the castle!” He completely ignored her and ordered the guards.

In no time, her temper burned with his attitude. She rounded him up with a big step and stood in front of him, blocking his way. The knight stopped in surprise.

Although Max was frightened and trembled in fear, she deliberately stared at him and gathered up what little dignity she had.

“I-It is natural for the L-lord’s wife.. to come and of-offer her help w-when a p-problem oc-occurs in the barracks! I-I... said I w-would do my b-best to fulfill my d-duty. So... with w-what r-rights do you c-claim that my e-efforts are... un-unnecessary?”

She wanted to sound harsh, but her tongue was mixed up more than usual and her voice kept failing her. She bit her lip. She was so embarrassed that she couldn’t stand it. Her ears turned pink, her eyes fell in all directions and finally she dropped her head.

“P-please, don’t mind m-me... a-and keep doing your own w-work.”

Then, before he could do anything, she gathered the firewood again and ran to the barracks. Her heart was beating faster. She threw firewood onto the dwindling fire and looked at the door again anxiously.

Will they call her a stuck-up stutterer? Nevermind. What was it to her? The knights hated her anyway. Nothing would change because they hated her a little more. Max’s head drooped bluntly, she piled up the rest of the firewood by the fire and headed over for Ruth.

“Ru-ruth... how is h-his c-condition?”

Ruth, who was looking at the woodcutter’s broken ankle, looked up and sighed at her worried tone. At a glance it was obvious that he was very tired.

“I’ve exhausted all my magical power, so I don’t think I can use magic for half a day or so. I have already treated patients in the most serious condition, but we can’t just wait for my magic to recover to treat the rest of the patients. We will have to treat them with what we can do with our hands.”

[◀ Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter ▶](#)

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 109

Max asked anxiously, “Sh-shall I bring a do-doctor from t-town?”

“There is only one good doctor at Anatol.. We can’t ask him to leave his clinic, so we’ll have to send the patients there in a carriage.”

He stood up and tapped his chin as if evaluating how many people they needed to move.

“The clinic will struggle to accommodate so many patients. Let’s first transport those poisoned by werewolf venom and then treat the other patients by hand.”

Max anxiously swallowed. She wondered if ‘ourselves’ included her.

“Wha-what sh-should we do?”

“It’s not difficult. We will first apply poultice to the swollen injury, put a splint the broken bone, and stitch any cuts with a needle and thread.” He explained patiently.

Max stared at him with a shock she couldn’t hide from her face, “Sti-stitch...?”

Looking at her expression, which made it seem like she may pass out any moment, Ruth sighed and said, “I’ll be handling the stitches, so just stay by my side and help me, my lady.”

Max sighed in relief and nodded. “O-okay.”

“First, let’s send those with high fever to the clinic.” He left the barracks in a hurry.

Max pulled herself together and followed the wizard.

The servants of Castle Calypse took 15 patients with boiling fever into a carriage and sent them off under Ruth’s instructions. Those Ruth had healed with healing magic had porridge and medicinal tea prepared by the maids. Regaining their strength, they even began to help with repairing the cabins.

There were a total of eight woodcutter cabins. Four of them had cracked walls and if they did not repair it quickly, there would have been no way to stop the cold at night. They cut the timber into even planks and started hammering them together loudly. Max did her best to hear Ruth's full explanation over the noise.

"Drench a clean piece of cloth in strong alcohol and gently wipe the wound. I can't tell you exactly why, but doing this reduces the chance of the wound rotting."

"Co-could there be so-something in alcohol that sto-stops wounds from rotting?"

"It could be. After all, the alcohol itself doesn't go bad quickly." He agreed carefully while threading small and fine needles.

"" "

"They call it Healing Alcohol of the South and it's not completely clear how it works. According to them, the wound should be kept clean, the bleeding is not good under any circumstances, and the patient's should not get too cold or too hot. I thought it was nonsense at first, but... I got much better results through their methods than by sprinkling dog urine on the wound or using leeches, or searing the wounds with a hot iron. It is incomparable to healing magic... but it is the best way to do this... for these kinds of situations."

While he spoke, he began to finely stitch up the wound. Max recoiled bodily as if her back had been stabbed with a needle.

"If we close the wound like this – one stitch and then tie it off, another and then tie it off, it is very easy to remove the thread later. Would you like to try it once, my lady?" Ruth said, but his gaze did not leave his work.

Max shook her head like a rattle. She hated looking like a coward, but she absolutely had no nerves at all to sew up human skin with a needle!

"It's not that different from sewing leather shoes." Ruth tried to encourage her.

Suddenly the guard who had been reduced to a leather shoe, made a painful groan from his position face-down on a pile of straw. However, Ruth continued to sew wounds without paying any heart. Max, Like a diligent apprentice, soaked some linen in strong alcohol and wiped it cleanly every time some blood trickled out, and cut the thread with scissors that had been sterilized over a flame when a knot was tied.

"Now, finally, if we apply this ointment that helps the wound heal quickly and bandage it up, we're all done."

After Ruth has tied off the last stitch and the thread is cut, he applied a sticky ointment to the wound. It seemed that it was a lot painful for the guard, who had been drooling and lying quietly on his stomach, couldn't stand it and made a cry.

"S-sir W-wizard... Can't you just use your healing magic? It feels like there's a fire pressed against my back." The guard, struggling in pain, pleaded.

"I'm sorry, but I can't use magic anymore today. I've used up all my magical power, you see." Ruth replied as if he was talking about the weather.

"My God..." The guard gasped.

"Just put up little while longer, I'm almost done."

After carefully applying the ointment, Ruth tied the wound tightly with a long cloth.

"If you apply the ointment once every two days and change the bandage, it will heal cleanly within 10 days," he said, then put the ointment in a small bottle and handed it to the guard.

The guard thanked him in a small voice, mumbling as he accepted the bottle of medicine.

Max gathered up the equipment and followed Ruth to the next patient. While he was switching the wound, Max helped with little tasks, like feeding the wounded person water steeped in medicinal herbs, tearing the cloth into long strips for bandages, covering the thread and needles in strong alcohol and handing it over to him.

Even though it was the first time in her life that she was doing such work, Max was able to carry it out well thanks to Ruth's instructions. Whenever Ruth rearranged a broken arm or leg, she applied a splint and fixed it securely with a cloth and wrapped hot towels around the swollen ankles.

Finally, when all patients were treated, she was so tired that bending her fingers seemed difficult and like hard work. Max sank down beside the brazier and let her body melt away by the heat. Before she knew it, the sun was completely set and the darkness fell outside.

[◀ Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter ▶](#)

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 110

The dusk began setting in slowly and exhaustion even sooner. Seeing the sight of the wounded still in need of treatment, Max wondered if she could return to the castle today.

The thought of spending the night out here in the cold, the enervation seemed to sink all the way to her stomach. Her face was filled with worry when a wooden bowl was thrust into her line of sight.

“Please eat this, my lady.”

Max looked up at the man who had come in surprise. A young knight who had previously tried to send her back to the castle earlier stood holding a steaming bowl of soup.

“It’s rabbit stew, my lady. It can’t be compared to the food in the castle, but it’s a good meal”, he said with a smile.

Max who was blinking at him blankly, accepted the bowl. She suddenly realized she had skipped lunch in and was now extremely hungry.

“T-thank you.” She gratefully accepted the bowl.

“Please, say nothing of it. Before... “

Without caring about her surroundings, her quick fingers began to work. As soon as she scooped a spoonful of stew into her mouth, a hesitant voice reached out to her. Max’s nerves spiked. What else could he possibly have to say to her?

Unexpectedly, the knight came before her, who was frozen in surprise and bowed his head respectfully.

“I apologize for my actions earlier. As your Ladyship said, I was rude.”

Max stared blankly at the top of the knight’s head, with spoon still in her mouth. She couldn’t even imagine that someone would bow her head to her. She quickly put down the bowl and waved her hands.

“N-no, please. I-It was rather I... who...w-was... o-oversensitive... I-I’m sorry,” she said hastily.

She was embarrassed enough at being caught in that situation, and she also knew that she had to rein in her nerves hereon

“Please, my lady, don’t apologize. Was it not I who first showed disrespect towards your Ladyship? It was no overreaction for someone of your stature.”

Max’s cheeks turned red at the knight’s words. Her stiff shoulders drooped with relief.

“Th-Thank you... f-for saying t-this.” She was indeed thankful. The weight had been lifted off of her chest.

””” ”

The knight’s face changed uncomfortably at her shyly spoken words, and he wasn’t sure what to say next. The two were saved from the awkward atmosphere by Ruth’s return to the barracks from the outside. He looked at the knight standing next to Max and opened his eyes.

“Sir Karon, is there a problem?”

“No, my Lord. That is... I am apologizing for my bad manners towards her ladyship.” He answered honestly.

The wizard looked like he wanted to ask more for a moment, but then decided against it. He approached the fire, held his hands out towards it, and sighed deeply.

“The knights who ventured beyond the castle walls to scout for dark creatures that may be hiding around just returned. Your Ladyship ought to return to the castle now.”

“Wha-what about you, Ruth?” She was surprised she could return.

“I think I will have to stay here today. Someone could still develop a fever later... When the magic recovers, I can also some of the men better.”

Max dithered for a moment. The part of her that was bone-tired was desperate to return to the castle, throw herself onto the bed and close her eyes, but her conscience was opposing return.

“Th-then I t-too... wi-will stay here today...”

“You have done everything you can. Even if you go back now, you have done more than enough.” Ruth interrupted, cutting her off sternly.

Max’s expression hardened as she wondered if he was trying to say that she was a bother. Recognizing her discomfort, Ruth gave her a soft smile.

“Lord Calypse will throw a fit when he learns that Your Ladyship spent the night in the barracks. I have asked the knights to escort you, so please go back to the castle and have some rest. Then we, too can be relieved.”

“I will escort Your Ladyship.” Sir Karon volunteered.

With two resolute men before her, Max could no longer dig her heels in anymore and finally nodded in consent. To be honest, she didn't want to spend more nights outside surrounded by the smell of burning monster flesh.

Maintaining an act of reluctance, she climbed into the carriage, which was dragged over by two servants. The knight came over on horseback, stood next to the carriage, and finally proceeded slowly forward. She crouched in the bumpy seat and sighed in relief.

Her nerves were relaxed and her exhaustion was gone. Like a cat by the fireside, Max wrapped her arms around her knees and slowly dozed off.

It had been the most tiring day she has ever experienced in 22 years.

As soon as she reached the castle, she took off her blood and dirt-covered robe, washed it, and passed out in bed. When she opened her eyes the next day, her whole body ached as if she had been beaten all over with a club. Max rolled over her stomach and groaned.

When Rudis walked into the room with an armful of firewood, a face buried in a pillow and muffled moans greeted her.

“Is everything all right, my lady?” She asked anxiously.

Max got up from the bed, smiling painstakingly. Rudis immediately called the maids to prepare a hot bath. She soaked in the steaming water until her tightly knotted muscles relaxed, then got out and dressed in a soft underskirt and a thick woolen dress. Rudis paid close attention to diligently drying her hair with a towel and then took great care combing it through for her.

“How about just resting in the bedroom today, my lady? It's very cold.” As if sensing her fatigue, she suggested.

“I-I was thinking about g-going to the li-library for a while. Th-There's a book I want t-to r-read...”

“Then I will immediately send a message to light the fire in the library. Since the wizard is absent from yesterday, it will be very cold in there.”

Rudis immediately left the room. After filled up on soft barley porridge that another maid brought her, Max slipped on a heavy robe and headed to the library. The room was warm and cozy thanks to the servants who lit the lights beforehand.

[◀ Previous Chapter](#)

[Next Chapter ▶](#)

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