

Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 141

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“You are inexperienced, but you’re already as good as any other knight. Especially in terms of talent, you’re even comparable to Lord Riftan.”

At Hebaron’s words, Yulysion immediately jumped up.

“What nonsense are you talking about? I’m not even close to the feet of Lord Riftan’s feet!”

“... it would be really useful if you could just fix that insincere personality.”

Hebaron sighed deeply and told the servants standing behind him to serve more food. Riftan sat right next to Max, ignoring all the conversations, and she smiled awkwardly at his sharp face. Riftan, wearing a black tunic and a gold belt, was giving off a seductive charm like the devil in the Bible, but at the same time he looked cold. After that day’s incident, Riftan was as alert as a watchman whenever he witnessed her being around the knights. He seemed worried that someone might hurt her, just like Uslin did.

“You didn’t rush during the meal, did you?”

“Oh, no. T-the knights... T-they were e-explaining about t-the initiation c-ceremony...”

Sir Gabel didn’t succumb to Riftan’s flamboyant attitude and entered the conversation with a smile.

“Don’t Rovar and Livakion have to make a declaration before the ceremony? It’s right before the water season that the Banryongs wake up from their lethargy.”

Riftan stroked his chin with a thoughtful look.

“Are you training them to hunt the beasts?”

“I’m doing it, somehow. But I think it would be better to gain more hands-on experience before the initiation ceremony or they won’t be trustworthy.”

At Lord Caron’s severe words Yulysion pouted in protest, but when Riftan’s eyes came to him he immediately straightened his mouth and posture. Riftan carefully examined the two apprentices with a sharp look.

“You guys should join the next scouting. A marmul hunt is different from normal combat, it would be helpful to have hands-on experience.”

“Okay!”

Riftan smirked at their quick answer. The eyes of the boys who were looking up to Riftan were filled with awe, respect and admiration, and he seemed to be somehow affectionate to the young knights too.

””” ”

Max was envious of the strong bond between them: she was there with them, but she didn't really belong in their world. On the other hand, Yulysion and Garrow were about to become knights in a few months and share all the risks with Riftan. She felt left out in the corner, thinking they were closer to him than she was herself.

“What's wrong? You don't like the food? Should I ask the servants to prepare you something else?”

Riftan frowned and asked as he realized that her spoon was no longer moving. Max shook her head.

“Oh, no. I've had enough.”

“Eat a little more.”

“I-I'm full...”

With an awkward smile, she picked up the book she had put aside.

“I-I'll get up. I'm a little t-tired.”

“You haven't finished yet.”

“I-I'm telling you, I a-ate a lot”

Riftan looked at her and nodded with a sigh, so Max slowly walked out of the kitchen. After the winter he probably had to leave for an expedition again and this thought broke her heart, she would have to wait for him alone in the castle again. Max nervously bit her lips. If she could perform a powerful magic, would have Riftan decided to take her with him? After a moment of hopeful thoughts, Max shook her head, recalling his stubborn attitude. In reality, she didn't even know if she had the courage to ask him such a thing. She gave a long sigh as she swept her messy hair with her hands.

The severe cold wave was now gone and spring was slowly approaching Anatol. At that time, Max began to learn new defensive magic and patiently tried to correct her stammering habit. At first she noticed some little progress, in fact, as a result of her persistent practice with a calm attitude, she became able to read a verse without stuttering. Of course, they were not verses from difficult ancient poems as those she

learned when she was young, but from poems with easy and simple sentences that wandering minstrels enjoyed singing. However, she shed tears of joy when she succeeded in saying her first perfect sentence. As Ruth said, it was helpful to relax and practice speaking slowly. It was still hard to say words with a difficult pronunciation or long phrases, but the stutters improved little by little, probably thanks to the fact that she consciously tried to talk a lot.

Max had also begun to read aloud sentences that Ruth had made in his spare time and started exercising to loosen her stiff tongue which started to feel sore as if she had been biting a needle for a long time, maybe because she was using muscles she didn't usually use, nevertheless she practiced every morning without skipping it. If it could fix her stammering, she would have done it even if she had to keep a knife in her mouth. On the other hand, Max became too slow in speaking as she tried to do it accurately. Ruth said it would get better over time, but Max was still conscious of it, thinking that someone could feel frustrated with the way she talked.

"On the second floor... u-underneath the terrace... I want to make a flower garden... How long will it take?"

Max, who was reading the landscape plan carefully, looked up and observed Aderon's expression on the opposite side. The merchant answered in a polite manner, showing how competent he was.

"It's not easy to get so many seedlings right now. Why don't you plant small shrubs first? If it's a seedling of azaleas, you can easily get it from us. Beautiful red flowers will bloom."

"B-but... I want to fill the flower bed, too...."

"If it's a modification, we can get it right away. I'll tell the servants who manage the garden."

Rodrigo, who was following them, helped her with a few words. Max tried to draw a picture in her head: if she laid quality soil in the desolate garden, planted grasses and shrubs and decorated them with various flowers and landscapes, it would become unrecognizable.

But Max couldn't help but think about the costs. More servants had to be hired to manage the garden, and planting flowers and trees costed a lot of money. She put the plan down on the table, thinking it would have been better for Ruth to examine it one more time before signing the order.

"I'll have to think a little more..."

"Okay. I'll try to get as many species of flowers as I can in the meantime."

“Please... do.”

Max smiled and got up from her seat. As the day began to unravel little by little, the market in Anatol started opening again and merchants began to visit. According to the knights, there was a den of Banryong beyond the northern part of the Anatol Mountain and mercenaries flock in time for them to wake up from their lethargy. The dragon’s subspecies was very dangerous, but their scales, mana stones and bones were expensive, being very useful as ingredients for elemental weapons.

Mercenaries, who naturally tried to find things to be sold for a fortune, and merchants, who wanted to buy the mana stones and bones they would bring back, began to visit Anatol. In the full-fledged water season, more people would definitely come.

I’d like to finish all the landscaping before then...

In spring, a banquet would be held and there would be occasions where wandering musicians and theater troupes would be invited. She wanted to prevent them from spreading rumors that Lord Calypse’s castle, who had gained great fame across the continent, was gloomy.

Above all, Max was worried that Riftan would be looked down by the aristocrats, so she was determined to decorate the garden as nicely as possible since it was an important place that gave visitors a first impression of the castle.

“Madam, here you are.”

Thinking about what kind of trees and flowers would be good as she was walking down the stairs, a maid called her. Max looked up with a curious face and the old maid spoke in a polite tone.

“My Lady, Lord Riftan asked you to come to his office.”

“Any... any problem?”

“Lord Riftan didn’t tell me the exact reason, My Lady.”

It was rare for Riftan to be in the office in broad daylight, but it was even rarer for him to call her in this way. Max hurried up the stairs wondering what was going on. Riftan’s office was located on the upper floor of the library, opposite stairs. She walked quickly on a dark brown carpet and stood at the wide mahogany door, waiting until the maid who followed her knocked on the door to let him know of her arrival.

“Come on in.”

When his loud voice rang out from over the door, the maid pulled the handle with a careful touch. Max stepped cautiously into a spacious room with a fluffy carpet and then

she heard a loud flap of wings from somewhere. She looked around the room surrounded by bright light with curious eyes. Next to a large window in front of her, a cage was placed in a spot higher than where she could reach with her head. Inside of it white and small pigeons were sitting tightly and peeping, while on the left side of the room there were shields and swords so huge that made her wonder if people could actually lift them.

“Come on in. Why are you not sitting down?”

As she was standing absently by the door and looking around the office, Riftan, who was sitting in front of the desk and writing down something, rushed her. Max walked slowly towards him and looked at his sharp face. His black hair was messy, as if it was swept away roughly several times or he had been hit by the wind, and his muscular forearms under his rolled-up sleeves were in tension. Mack blushed with anxiety.

“W-What’s the matter... Did something happen?”

“I got a telegram from the palace of Drakium. I think I should tell you in advance.”

“Drakium?”

Note – Well that was a way to describe how charming Riftan is, a devil in the bible?! Lmao. Also I apologize if you feel this chapter was a bit off, for some reason I found it particularly difficult to proofread ?

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Riftan suddenly took a deep breath and sighed.

“There will be guests from the palace in a few weeks, they’ll be about twenty to thirty people. I’d like to have the best room available for them to stay, and a small welcome.”

Max opened her eyes wide at the unexpected announcement. She knew that guests were supposed to come visit in spring, so she was appalled by the news that it was going to happen earlier than expected.

“Guests...?”

“It is King Ruben’s Inspection Team. The Knights of The Crown.”

Riftan blurted out the last words and glanced at her face. For a moment, his sensuous lips were subtly twisted because of complex thoughts, but then he immediately returned to his emotionless face and casually added: “Princess Agnes is coming.”

Max stared blankly at Riftan’s face, without even breathing. A lady who once had a marriage talk with him is coming, but Max couldn’t figure out what kind of reaction she was supposed to have. When she didn’t answer, Riftan added in a nervous tone.

“Of course, they’re just coming here to inspect Anatol under royal orders. Agnes is the only member of the royal family who is acquainted with me and has a friendly relationship with the Knights of Remdragon.”

“Well, I see.”

Mack swallowed, her nerves on edge hearing that she was close to him, but they were colleagues of the Dragon Toval, of course they were acquainted! According to Ruth, everyone had thought that Riftan was going to marry Princess Agnes, so they had to be close enough for such rumors to spread. Her stomach twisted painfully, still she smiled nonchalantly, fearing that if she had showed a sign of dislike she would have looked like a woman blinded by jealousy in his eyes.

“W-We will prepare the best r-rooms and get ready... Do we have a-anything else to do?”

“...just tell the maids to be thoroughly prepared for the guests. You don’t have to do anything more.”

Riftan, who was staring at her face as if he was looking for something, replied bluntly and lowered his gaze on the table again. It was a strangely cold attitude, but she didn’t have time to pay attention to it and hurriedly got up from her seat before her emotions could show on her face.

“T-Then... I’ll tell them right now.”

“Please.”

Riftan said without raising his head. Max left the room immediately and quickly went down the stairs while calling Rodrigo.

After hearing the news from Riftan, Max's mind was a mess. She grumbled in confusion over the thought of Princess Agnes visiting Anatol.

Is it common for an aristocratic woman who got refused for marriage to visit the estate of the man who rejected her? What makes the princess want to come to visit Riftan?

Perhaps King Ruben had not given up on making Riftan a member of the royal family yet. The inspection could be just an excuse and the Princess might be coming to change Riftan's mind. The thought terrorized Max. Just because Riftan wasn't willing to divorce in that moment, there was no guarantee that he would still not be willing to divorce in the future. What if Princess Agnes tried to persuade him?

"Madam, you look pale. Do you feel uncomfortable?"

Rodrigo, who saw her face, asked with a worried face. Max quickly shook her head.

"I-I think I'm a little tired."

It wasn't the right time to zone out. Max hurriedly shook off her anxious thoughts and tried to concentrate on what she had to do: she couldn't let the castle show a shabby appearance when the guests would come from the Palace. She looked down at the landscaping plan crumpled like a dishcloth in her hand and thought she hadn't the time to put her head together with Ruth and leisurely review it.

"P-Please call Aderon for me. I w-want you to start the landscaping now, c-can you tell him? We need to h-hurry up and decorate the e-entrance of the Great Hall. I-I hope that the trees we planted few days ago started to grow."

"I'll get in touch with him right away, Madam."

"T-The guests will be staying a-at the colorful tapestries room with a-a luxurious bedding, I'd like to have that ready. P-Please inform the maids that every inch of the castle has t-to be clean and I'd like you to serve the guests with r-respect."

"Yes, Madam."

Nothing more than the instructions she had already given came to Max's mind, so she tapped her lips and sighed.

"I-If there's a problem... let me know."

Max returned to her room after informing the servants and mechanically opened the magic book, but none of the letters caught her attention. For a moment she nervously turned the pages, then she bit her fine lips. She hadn't any sign of being pregnant yet,

so if Riftan changed his mind their marriage was still as easy to tear as a parchment. Her anxiety doubled when her awkward attitude came to her mind. He said he couldn't easily give up on his marriage vows, but how strong was his determination? Wouldn't it be shaken if a beautiful woman seduced him?

Maybe Princess Agnes is just coming for an inspection, like he said.

Max desperately tried to drive out her growing cloud of anxiety. Riftan was an upright and adamant man, his will wasn't as easy to bend as a reed.

Let's stop imagining bad things.

He was a knight who followed King Ruben, there would be occasional encounters with the Royal Family, she couldn't be so intimidated and anxious every time. She struggled with her unstable mind.

As Max began to prepare for the guests at a fast pace, she couldn't let herself worry over anything: she supervised the task carefully, gathered merchants to select the decorations for the rooms and gardens and kept studying magic too.

Since she hadn't time to decorate all the wide garden right away, she started to plant shrubs and put statues everywhere. Fortunately, the frozen ground had begun to melt smoothly a few days before, so it didn't take as much time as she thought. Workers were tasked to dig deep the ground with shovels and to plant trees at regular intervals, while servants planted seedlings in flower beds and sprinkled flower seeds everywhere. Although it was a little early, mixing the soil had helped in softening it, so when the weather would get warmer they were meant to quickly take root and sprout. Max wanted the lifeless garden to be revived before the guests arrived.

"The Royal Flag and the knights... T-they will stay in the Annex. The P-princess and her attendants a-are staying in the Great Hall. Everyone s-should pay special attention s-so that there will be no i-inconvenience."

"Yes, Madam."

"All the u-utensils should be made of s-silver and gold. E-expensive wines are already prepared... if more food is needed, p-please don't hesitate to a-arrange it."

"We will keep that in mind, My Lady."

Max gave meticulous instructions to the servants and went around the castle several times a day to see if they were ready to greet the guests, but it wasn't just her. The maids opened the wide shutters and wiped the foggy glasses, spent all day scooping up water from the well to wash the rugs and ripped off the curtains on the windows to wash them clean, while the servants cleaned the soot from their faces, settled the fireplace with piles of ashes, took out the brazier and washed away the scorched marks.

Max was busy supervising all the work and filling out orders every day, but she didn't mean to complain, others were several times busier than she was. Ruth seemed to stay up almost every night since he had to deal with everything on his own, busy as he was making harnesses, and Riftan and the knights worked from dawn to late night on the road construction plan that would begin in spring.

Building a wide road connecting the port and the Anatol was a great construction plan that involved a huge amount of manpower. Riftan stared at the map all day discussing the safest and fastest route with the knights and paid full attention on securing the manpower and structure materials needed for the construction.

As a result, the number of nights that Max and Riftan could be together decreased. It was not until the dark night that Riftan returned to his room, but Max was exhausted from walking around in every corner of the castle since early in the morning, so she always fell asleep in the evening. There was even a time when he came back late at night, slept like a shrimp, and left early in the morning, so she couldn't even see his face the whole day.

Max became increasingly discontented with such habit, she wanted to get a warm and soft kiss from Riftan, to lie on his solid and wide chest, rub his face like a cat and feel his big hands touch her hair. She thought it would have been better if the season of winter didn't end, missing the days when they were stuck together in the dark and cold castle.

As such loneliness accumulated, her anxiety, which she had worked hard to put aside, gradually shook her.

Maybe he's tired of me. His passion for me may have cooled down, so he's now showing a lukewarm attitude, Max thought.

When Max was lying in the bed waiting for Riftan, she thought about this and went crazy. At least the busy daytime was better since she couldn't think of anything, but when she was gripping the cold side of the wide bed all kinds of negative thoughts came and bothered her. She felt like she was drying up with the desire to see her husband's smiling face, to ride a horse out of the castle and spend time alone with him.

On a sunny afternoon, when spring was in full swing, Max, who was overseeing the landscaping of the garden, stiffened her body when she heard that knights with royal seals had passed through Anatol's gates. The garden was growing from its previous wild appearance thanks to shrubbery planted here and there, but it still wasn't to the point of being satisfying.

Max hurried to go prepare herself to welcome the guests, thinking it would be inappropriate to welcome the Royal Inspection Team with a dull appearance. She urgently called in the maids and ordered them to clean up the entrance to the Great Hall as neatly as possible and went into the room to check her clothes. She was wearing a

colorful and nice dress, but she thought she was lacking somehow, so she opened a jewelry box, wore a brooch that she didn't usually wear and dressed up with a necklace and a ring, then asked Rudis to fix her hair again. She didn't want to show a shabby appearance to the woman who had a marriage talk with her husband. Rudis, who had realized her thoughts, worked several times harder than usual to braid it up and cover it with silk and jewelry.

After a while, a long sound of copper was heard from afar, announcing the arrival of the guests.

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Max walked down the stairs with her maids with a colorful shawl on her shoulder. Her heart was beating heavily and her back was sweaty. The first guests who would meet her as the hostess of Calypse Castle arrived. However, the fact that the first guest was Princess Agnes increased her tension several times. What kind of person would she be? Was she as cold and arrogant as Rosetta? Was she the kind of person who would look down on her, saying she is worth nothing? She rubbed her wet palms on the skirt and waited for the guests to appear in front of the door wide opened.

Suddenly, people's voices were heard from afar and people dressed in colorful costumes began to walk up towards the entrance. Max was able to find Princess Agnes in a heartbeat: she led two young women who appeared to be her maids, five or six men who appeared to be her attendants and many knights in silver armor, all stately walking toward the entrance of the Great Hall. Near to them there was a line of Remdragon knights and, next to the Royal Princess, Riftan stood as if he were protecting her.

Max watched the scene, astonished to the point of forgetting to bend down and bow. The appearance of Princess Agnes was truly unconventional. She was wearing long boots on pants that men would wear and a long cape on a knee-length purple tunic. Her

long blonde hair shined without the need of any common accessory and she approached her cheerfully with a light smile on her golden face, which looked particularly good in the sun. Max was embarrassed to face such a simple yet energetic woman, very different from what she expected. Her clear blue eyes seemed to radiate brilliance, as jewels would do.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Agnes Drakina Ruben.”

“It’s an honor... to meet you, Your Grace. I am Maximillian... Calypse.”

Although she was a little tense, she was able to greet her calmly as she had been secretly practicing.

“Please feel comfortable... while you are here.”

She stood behind the sun as she bent slightly unfolding her skirt and the maids followed her politely. Princess Agnes gave a cheerful and dignified smile.

“You must have been abashed by the sudden visit, but thank you for welcoming me.”

Riftan took a step forward as if he were shielding the Royal Princess, his face looked more solemn and dignified than usual since he stood facing the sun and his dark blue tunic and silver-gray eyes, which were almost navy, seemed to stand out more than ever.

“I’ll guide the knights. Please show your Royal Highness to the guest room.”

“I... got it.”

Max looked up, expecting him to lightly kiss her forehead or even her cheek. However, Riftan just stared at her for a moment and then turned to the royal knights.

“Follow me. I’ll show you a room where you can rest.”

Then he began to walk ahead to the back door toward the annex. As the guards followed him, the servants standing by started one by one to serve the guests. Max hid her disappointment and instructed the maids to show the attendants to their respective rooms and they hurriedly began to move their luggage.

“I’ve prepared the guest room... on the second floor of the Great Hall. The attendants... are also on the same floor... will that be alright, Your Grace?

””” ”

“Of course. Thank you for your concern.”

“I’ll show you your room.”

Max turned around and walked up to the stairs on the red carpet. The princess walked next to her and looked around the castle with an interested look.

“I heard it’s a castle older than the Drakium Palace, but it’s well-managed.”

“T-Thank you.”

Although she did not intend to do so, Max was showing an overly polite attitude because she felt overwhelmed by the natural dignity of the Princess: even though she was dressed like a boy, her royal authority overflowed. She watched as Agnes took a couple of steps in the wide hall, looking around without showing any signs of displeasure.

The royal princess was tall, which was rare for a woman: she looked like around 5 feet and 2 inches tall (approximately 174 centimeters) and her limbs were long and slender as those of a deer. Moreover, her face was a little far from the classic beauty that Max imagined in her head. Her lips were thick enough to look a little too big for her face and the almond-shaped elongated eyes were slightly raised upward, giving off a cat-like impression. Her face was pointed and thin like an arrowhead and the nose was high and straight. The word handsome was more appropriate than the word beautiful. Overall, Princess Agnes gave off a provocative and intense charm that was different from Rosetta’s delicate and perfect beauty.

“Being here makes you feel like you’ve fallen into Roem’s fort.”

Agnes expressed her appreciation of the Great Hall in a calm tone.

“I’d like to take a closer look at the castle. Can you show me around?”

The Princess looked back at Max and narrowed her eyes. Her expression seemed friendly and at first glance easy, but there was a hint of something else in her blue eyes, as if she wanted to find out something. Max unknowingly shrugged his shoulders and nodded.

“Of course, Your Grace.”

“Thank you. I’d like to wash up and change my clothes before that. Where’s the room?”

“I’ll show you, Your Grace. This way…”

Rudis, who was standing behind her, came forward and bowed politely. The princess smiled and turned gracefully.

“Well, I’ll see you later.”

Max looked at her back as she walked away, feeling a little lost. After their first encounter, it felt like she had already been swept away by the spirit of the Royal Princess.

“P-Please prepare a bath... in the guest’s room.”

“Yes, My Lady”

Max gave strict orders to the remaining maids and then went down to the kitchen to check how the preparations for the welcome party were going. The spacious kitchen was crowded with servants preparing food for the guests. She wanted to see if there was a problem, but all she could think about was how well Riftan and Princess Agnes matched, like in a picture.

Watching the appearance of a blonde beauty, who gave off a dazzling charm like the sun, and a handsome knight standing side by side, creating together a beautiful and intimidating atmosphere, could make anyone think they had just popped out of a story book. Max thought it was not unreasonable that people wanted them to be together.

She nervously bit her lips. Was it true that Riftan felt nothing for her? The princess seemed a little unusual, but she was nevertheless a pretty and charming woman. Wouldn’t she catch men’s eyes?

“Madam, I’m about to prepare the lamb... Are you going to be all right?”

Suddenly, a servant asked with a worried face. Max hurriedly turned away when she saw a black bearded man with a lamb tied to a pole, sharpening a knife outside the wide-open door. She didn’t really want to watch the scene, so she smiled awkwardly and hurried out of the kitchen.

On the spacious hall where the sun was pouring, maids were busily running around with their arms full of white linen. The servants’ sleeves were wet as they moved hot water from the sauna to the guests’ rooms and the sound of the firewood rang loudly in the backyard. Even the stable keepers looked busy feeding water and food to the horses that the guests rode.

Max meticulously gave them instructions to work in an orderly manner. First, they were asked to bring bath water, soap, and clean towels so that the guests could properly rest, and then provide wine, biscuits, and pickled fruit if anyone wanted to drink or snack. After asking them to closely check if they needed anything else, Max went up to the banquet hall.

In the evening, guests had to be served a welcoming dinner. She called three or four servants and ordered them to spread out two long tables at the banquet hall, then she chose a tablecloth, candlestick and utensils with Rodrigo. Since high-quality tableware made of gold, silver and glass could be stolen, as the hostess she had to figure out the

number of everything. Max took an expensive golden candlestick from the warehouse, then carefully recorded the numbers of silver trays, plates, forks, and knives on the journal. After checking it twice, she counted the number of candles, firewood, and alcohol and food for the banquet.

Alcohol and food couldn't possibly be scarce at dinner, however, they also didn't have to overdo it as it would have been a waste if the guests didn't eat it all, in fact they would have to throw it away.

"Madam."

In the midst of recording the amount of alcohol in the journal, Rudis approached her cautiously and Max looked at her with a curious look.

"What... what happened?"

"The royal princess asks if we can show her the castle now. What shall we do?"

"I'll take care of it..."

Ordinary guests were expected to take a rest right after arriving at the castle, however Princess Agnes seemed to be full of energy after a long journey from the northern end of Whedon to the southern end.

Max hurriedly finished the remaining records and handed them over to Rodrigo. When she came out of the banquet hall, she could see the royal Princess, who had changed into a deep blue dress, walking out of the hallway. Max glided in front of her.

"Thank you for preparing a nice room. The tapestry on the wall is wonderful."

"O-Of course, Your Grace."

Princess Agnes smiled as Max replied in a passive manner.

"You don't have to be so formal. You can call me Agnes and I'd like to call you by your name too, would that be okay?"

Max stared blankly at her as she was speaking, then nodded mechanically. The Princess smiled, satisfied, then pulled her arm.

"I want to look outside the Great Hall. Can you show me around?"

Then the Princess started to go down the stairs without waiting for her and Max followed behind her like she was caught in a raging typhoon.

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Max couldn't help but be embarrassed by her friendly behavior. She never thought that the princess would show a favorable attitude toward her, so she was utterly confused. The princess wanted to marry Riftan, didn't she?

"Is Riftan in the annex with the knights?"

Princess Agnes asked as she went out of the hall. The name of her husband flowed out so naturally from the princess' mouth that it made Max show a gloomy face.

"H-He might be, Your Grace."

"I'll have to ask you to show me around the training center later. I want to look around the castle first, can we go up?"

Max hesitated for a moment, then nodded and guided her to a small, cobbled path surrounded by trees. As they walked along the narrow path for some time, the guards patrolling the outer walls appeared ahead. As soon as the soldiers spotted the princess and Max, they immediately bowed to greet them.

Max explained to them that she was guiding her royal highness around the castle and then they went up the stairs, climbing the wall. Although the days were getting warmer, it was still early spring, in fact Max flinched as the cold wind blew from the mountains. When they finally reached the top, she saw the long skirt of the royal princess fluttering like a flag as she was standing in front of the choir. Agnes stretched out her arms letting the wind blow over her body, enjoying the refreshed feeling.

"It's a beautiful place."

Max followed the royal princess and looked over the wall. The wind was blowing violently over the pointed peaks and steep hillsides, where snow had not yet melted. The princess fixed her eyes on the distant mountain and swept away her fluttering hair.

“Since this place has many monsters, I expected a land covered in blood as the entrance to the demon world.”

The princess calmly walked along the wall and turned to Max.

“But the town was bigger than I expected, and it seems that the market is developing too... To be honest, I was surprised”.

“In spring... we expect a lot more merchants to come”.

Max mumbled, trying to remember what she had heard from Rodrigo. The princess stroked her chin with a thoughtful expression and sighed.

“So that’s why Riftan is attached to this place. It must have taken a tremendous amount of effort to enrich this land that has been neglected for decades.”

Max felt her stomach clench. The princess herself spoke as if she knew and understood Riftan well and this made her want to yell at the princess not to pretend to know her husband, but she just bit her lips holding back the urge, surprised by the sudden and violent surge of emotions flowing from her. Her earlobes reddened.

””” ”

“Ri-Riftan is working from dawn until late at night without a break... for Anatol.”

“Riftan was like this during the expedition too. No one has ever seen him take a break. He showed no hesitation or weakness. That’s why everyone called him Mahgo, out of amazement and fear.”

“Mah... go?”

“It’s a legendary monster who is said to never sleep or get tired and to have hundred lives.”

A bitter smile spread across her lips.

“It’s a nickname given to him by the holy knights of Osiria, because he continued to act as if he had a hundred lives.”

Even though Max heard about Riftan’s recklessness from Ruth, her chest still tightened sharply. She quickly shrugged her shoulders to shake off the feeling and the princess, who had been watching her with a calm gaze, slowly spoke.

“I was wondering what Mahgo’s wife would be like. Who was the person he was so desperate to get back to, to the point where he would throw himself into the dragon fire without hesitation?”

Speechless, Max dampened her dry lips. Even though the princess wasn’t criticizing her, Max felt like she was being blamed. Max knew well that she didn’t deserve to be the wife of such a brave knight and there was no way Agnes could not have noticed that. Seeing her shabby reflection in those beautiful blue eyes, it only grew more painful, so she turned away from her, even though she thought it was rude.

“T-The wind is cold, Your Grace... Let’s go back inside the castle...”

“... Of course...”

Before coming down the stairs, Princess Agnes looked over the view of Anatol once more. Max looked up at her and walked ahead, as if she were running away. She felt anxious and confused, as if a strong cold wind had begun to blow in her heart.

As the sun began to set, servants climbed up the ladder and lit candles on the chandelier, while the maids placed braziers filled with red charcoal throughout the banquet hall and prepared appetizing food to put on the wide table.

Max sat there, alongside Riftan. The royal princess and her attendants sat directly at the opposite side of the table, and the knights filled the rest. When the servants poured fragrant wine in their glasses, Riftan lifted his golden glass and spoke.

“Welcome to the guests who have come a long way.”

The people sitting around the table raised their glasses in unison. The royal princess, sitting across from him, also smiled gracefully, raising high her glass filled with fluttering wine.

“Thank you for welcoming me.”

“It must have been a tiring journey, you must be hungry. Go ahead and eat.”

When an old knight shouted loudly, the princess smiled and raised the glass to her mouth. Taking that as a signal, everyone took their knife and fork and began to eat and drink.

Max mechanically put the bread in her mouth and scanned the people on the long table. The royal knights were joking with the Remdragon Knights and their acquaintances, while the royal princess was exchanging stories with the knights too.

Max was surprised by the princess’s behavior: she didn’t seem to care about the etiquette a lady should follow. Right in that moment, Princess Agnes laughed out loud

and hit the shoulder of the gentleman sitting next to her, her voice booming and attracting everyone's attention, but she wasn't showing any signs of intimidation even among men who were much larger than her, and surprisingly the knights were delighted by her unrefined demeanor.

"I want to look around Anatol tomorrow. Can you show me around?"

The royal princess, who was talking to the knight sitting next to her, suddenly looked at Riftan with dazzling eyes. He wet his mouth with wine and answered heartlessly.

"Uslin will guide you."

"Hey, brusque lord, don't even try to treat me so lightly. I traveled to the ends of the earth to see you."

"I've never asked you to do it."

The knights frowned at his rude reply and Max stared at the princess's expression with a nervous look. No matter how famous the knight was in the whole continent, it couldn't be tolerated to be so rude to the royal family. However, instead of getting angry and yelling at him, Agnes burst into laughter as if she had heard an interesting story.

"Your personality is still the same."

Then the princess smiled strangely and turned to Max.

"Then, will Lady Calypse guide me through the estate?"

Riftan, who was cutting a thick piece of lamb with his knife, stopped and looked at the princess. Max felt uncomfortable when the topic of the conversation was suddenly redirected to her and blinked blankly. Regardless of the reaction her words had caused, Princess Agnes continued softly.

"I want to get to know you better."

"Your Highness."

Riftan put down his knife loudly so that everyone could hear a crackling sound and spit out a chillingly soft voice.

"If you don't mind getting up early in the morning, I'll show you around."

"Oh my God, I didn't think I would receive such special treatment from the Lord himself."
“

The princess replied sarcastically despite Riftan's cold demeanor, showing any signs of intimidation. The scene seemed like a quarrel between a loving couple, so Max's face hardened. Just imagining Riftan and the princess have a cozy tour of the estate made her jealousy grow and she opened her mouth impulsively.

"I'll show you around, Your Grace."

Riftan turned his head towards her in surprise and she did her best to sound calm.

"Riftan... y-you're busy, so may I s-show her around..."

"What are you talking about, you yourself came here only last fall."

Riftan's direct reply made her cheeks redden.

"W-Well, I've been to the market... and outside t-the city with Ruth..."

"Outside...?"

Riftan interrupted her with a surprised tone. Max looked up and saw a dangerous glint in his eyes. Come to think of it, she had never told him that she had gone down to the area affected by the monster attack while he was away from the castle. Max carefully examined the faces of the knights sitting around the table. Sir Karon, who was sitting at the end, shook his head fiercely, as telling her not to talk about it. She swallowed dry saliva. She had only done natural things as the wife of the Lord, but Riftan might not see it that way. Max hurriedly changed the topic of the conversation, recalling his anger for not telling him in advance that she was learning magic.

"W-well, what I want to say is... I-I know Anatol well enough, so I can s-show her highness a-around..."

"Stop it. I can't let you wander outside the castle defenselessly."

"Oh, my God, I'm good".

Princess Agnes skillfully intervened in the conversation and Riftan looked at her annoyed.

"Your Highness is capable of protecting herself, but my wife is different. She's never been outside of Croix Castle in her entire life!"

"H-hey, if it's o-only within the territory, I-I can do it too!"

Max glared at him in a fit of rage. Her pride was deeply hurt because he was openly treating her as an incompetent child in front of the royal princess. She could feel her cheeks burning, but she continued to protest fiercely.

“A-and I didn’t spend m-my whole life at Croix Castle. T-there was the trip from the Duchy t-to Anatol.”

“Lord, what are you worried about when the guards are escorting them?”

Hebaron crept out to take her side.

“If you are still worried, I will accompany them.”

Riftan’s face grew increasingly grim and Max’s heart sank at his expression, afraid he would yell at her, but she didn’t want to back down. Indeed, she wanted to prevent the two of them from being alone together at any cost.

“Riftan... You didn’t even have enough time to sleep because you’ve been busy... Leave it to me... Let me attend to my guests...”

Riftan’s face was slightly confused by her rare stubbornness but after a long silence, not without hesitation, he eventually raised the white flag.

“Okay, I’ll leave it to you.”

Note – That’s it, it’s time to found a fanclub for Sir Karon and Sir Hebaron, apply in the comments! Agnes is still a bit difficult to decipher for you guys, right? Also, Riftan’s behavior will have a clear explanation this week, so everyone stay tuned!

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 145

Proofreader – Nymeria

Note: Uslyn was in the beginning called Rikaido, then it was switched to Ricardo. We’re now going back to call him Sir Uslyn Rikaido, since we feel it’s more accurate.

Riftan glared at Agnes, who was smiling in triumph.

"You're fine with that?" he said.

"What can I say when I'm just a guest? I'm thankful you're letting your wife accompany me."

The princess placed one hand on her chest, mocking a salute. At that moment Max blushed, wishing she could be half as confident as her, and felt sorry for Agnes since it was because of her weakness that Riftan felt compelled to send a guard to accompany them. However, at the same time she was elated that she had obtained his permission to leave the castle.

Riftan looked at the royal princess without smiling.

"You haven't changed a bit."

His tone was flat and unwelcoming, yet Max could feel her heart stop. It seemed that Agnes was used to his rudeness, otherwise how could Riftan dare address the princess like that? There seemed to be an invisible bond between them that had developed over their adventures together.

Max looked down, feeling the tension. The mood subsided quickly, but she could not shake off how casual Riftan had talked to Agnes, without titles or honorifics. She was an ally who had fought in battle with him. The Remdragon Knights, Ruth, and the princess: all of them had earned Riftan's trust. And yet, his wife had done nothing. What had she done to deserve any affection and trust from him?

As her face darkened with these thoughts, Riftan frowned and grazed the strands of her hair with his fingertips.

"You can do whatever you like. Don't be upset now."

Max smiled weakly, trying to hide the jealousy dwelling inside her. Riftan gave a small smile in relief and then took a sip of wine. Since his expression was soft, she suddenly felt the urge to crawl onto his knees to kiss him. She wanted to touch his beautiful, masculine face, bury her face in his wide chest, and breathe in his scent forever.

Why did she have to desire him like this? If anyone found out what she was thinking...

Max covered her face with her glass, pretending to be thirsty. These emotions were so new to her and she felt lonely, like a lost child in a foreign place.

Max only remembered taking a sip to get rid of the uneasy feelings she had, but when she woke up, she found herself in bed. She blinked confusedly in the dark. Riftan was next to her, removing the accessories from her hair and untying the straps of her loosened dress.

“F*cking torture” he grunted and stripped off the remainder of Max’s dress.

””” ”

She frowned, looking at him from underneath her eyelashes, and he saw her lying there, defenseless in her thin, see-through chemise.

“I want you, but I can’t. Not when you’re like this. Do you know how difficult you’re making things for me?”

Max wanted to say that he didn’t have to hold back, but no words came from her mouth. She didn’t deserve his concern since she had been distracted and had drunk excessively, so his self-restraint only made her more ashamed and self-conscious. She wanted him to have her if he sincerely wished it, to see her as someone elegant and not poor or shabby. She wanted him to be hard for her. Only in his arms could she forget her anxiety and loneliness.

Riftan sat on the bed and touched her disheveled hair, brushed her cheeks with a burning gaze and then grabbed her fingers before touching her b****s, too severely tempted to resist any longer. Max gave a sharp intake of breath and pushed her chest out, wanting his hands to touch her more. Riftan breathed heavily before their mouths met, his moist tongue tasted like wine on Max’s lips.

Her ears were beet red from the pleasure and she blinked under her heavy eyelids, waiting for him to roll up her chemise and induce heat between her legs. Riftan’s large hands seemed to be burning a hole on her torso, fingers flickering around, as if longing to caress her entire body.

But it didn’t go any further. Riftan slowly moved away and sighed, the bed shifted as he rose. Feeling disappointed, Max soon fell asleep again.

Max opened her eyes when she felt something dry and scratchy tickle her cheek: Roy, the black kitten, had begun to lick the bridge of her nose. She rubbed her face and rose from the bed. Riftan had already disappeared earlier, as if he had never even been there last night. Max washed her face and called for her maid, Rudis. Fortunately, her head wasn’t split with pain from a hangover like last time.

“My lady, the Princess Agnes went out early this morning to view the training grounds. She asked you to join her when you awoke. What should I tell her?” Rudis said.

She imagined the long journey from the royal palace to Anatol. Despite the travel, Princess Agnes was already up and about before her, unfatigued and ready to view the town. Max snapped her eyes shut for a moment, before quickly pulling a cape over her shoulders.

“P-please help me prepare to go o-out with her highness. We will go b-by carriage to see the town. B-but I don’t know t-the city that well... I’ll need a m-maid.”

“Then I’ll go with you.”

Max was relieved that Rudis didn’t need further instructions, she didn’t even know the directions from the castle to the market square.

“G-good. Then tell P-Princess Agnes that we will d-depart soon.”

Max walked quickly through the Great Hall towards the training grounds. Agnes didn’t seem like a bad person, but she was still uncomfortable with her. It wasn’t just because of the previous rumors about Riftan marrying her: Max still didn’t know why the princess had come to Anatol in the first place, so she had to be alert. Agnes was a prestigious wizard. Had she really come from the north to Anatol to simply see a temple?

I know that even if she has an ulterior movie... I don’t have the means to stop her, but...

When Max saw the training field within sight, she tried her best to keep her depressing thoughts at bay.

The weather was sunnier than yesterday, the wind was chilly, the air was hot and the ground was turning green from early spring. As the clouds shifted lazily in the blue sky, Max stepped past the gates into the training field and caught Agnes’ distinct accent among the other shouts reverberating in the air. The princess was wearing a knight’s uniform, Max was half-impressed and half-scandalized by the princess’s audacity. She was not only wearing pants like a male again that day, but had also added silver armor and wielded a sword. She moved nimbly, like a dancer, as she sparred and attacked her opponent, listening to the instructions that were yelled at her.

“Your lower body is open. Lower your posture to defend yourself!” the voice echoed sharply over the field. Max turned mechanically only to see that it was Uslin instructing the princess. After Riftan had punched him, Max had not seen the knight, except from a distance. Sir Rikaido was still on the stairs, bellowing encouragement. The princess sat on the floor to rest.

“Really! I thought I trained well, but I couldn’t even land a single attack!” Agnes grumbled.

At her complaint, Uslin smiled and sheathed his sword, letting the scabbard dangle on his waistbelt.

“If I had a hard time training with a wizard, I would be expelled from the knights.”

The voice coming from the gentleman who always looked at Max disapprovingly was an incredibly soft and gentle.

“But your skills are much better than before.”

The princess stood up, muttering with a grumpy face.

“You say that, but you don’t even have a drop of sweat.”

Max hesitated before descending the stairs to join them. The princess took a towel from a servant and wiped her face. When she saw Max, she smiled kindly.

“Good morning, Maximilian.”

“G-good morning. Was y-your room c-comfortable?”

“I slept well, thank you.”

Agnes frowned slightly at Max.

“Please speak with me comfortably. No need for formalities.”

“Y-your royal h-highness...to speak w-without honorifics... I can’t.”

“Maximilian is a cautious person” she observed nodding. “Then, at least call me Agnes. I would like that. It keeps me from getting a swelled head since I won’t be constantly reminded that I’m royalty.”

The princess was such a very confident person that Max couldn’t look at her intense blue eyes directly, so she lowered her gaze with negative emotions swelling in her heart.

“I u-understand, Ms. Agnes.”

“Good! Now, I still want to see the town. Are you ready to leave?”

“Y-yes. I gave instructions t-to prepare the c-carriage.”

“It may be easier to ride by horse”, Agnes said.

“T-there will be one maid... w-with us.”

The princess knitted her eyebrows before shrugging.

“Well, let’s try it your way” she said amiably.

Uslin, who was standing behind the princess in silent, looked briefly at Max, slightly shook his head and then turned to follow the princess.

A lavish carriage pulled by two thoroughbred horses stood at the front gates. Max climbed into the carriage and sat beside Rudis. When the princess was ready, she came with a guardsman and sat opposite to them, while the two escorts, Hebaron and Uslin, flanked the carriage on their horses. When all the preparations were completed, the coachman raised the whip and the carriage started to move out of the castle grounds.

Note – LN: In addition to Under the Oak Tree, I am now translating 여주인공의 오빠를 지키는 방법 / The Way to Protect the Female Lead's Older Brother. Please read! One sentence summary: a woman wakes up in a R18 novel and must save the prince from her psycho family.

Nymeria: Ugh Uslin can you just... stop? Also, I miss Ruth T.T

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 146

Proofreader – Nymeria

Max opened the carriage window and looked outside the castle. White birch trees were lined neatly along the road with warm sunlight filtering around the tree leaves. Agnes smiled serenely while the birds were twittering.

“I’m glad the weather is good. Yesterday I was worried because the rain clouds were moving closer, it seems they drifted west instead.”

She pushed her head out of the window, breathed in deeply, and then looked at Max.

“Where are we heading first?”

“F-first we’ll go to the s-square.”

The Town Square was the busiest place in town, close to the market, with shopkeepers littering the streets with merchandise. Agnes smiled and nodded in agreement.

“When I first came to Anatol, I passed by the square. There were many interesting bars and vendors.”

“Princess, you don’t expect to be in a bar again this time?” her attendant said quietly, in a harsh tone. His clothes were ironed and neat. He coughed and touched his trimmed beard.

“The princess adores alcohol, so much that she cannot live without it.” he told Max. “Any town she goes to, she has the inclination to stop by a bar.”

“Ms. Agnes, w-would you like t-to go to the village b-bar?” Max said.

Max looked at Agnes with an alarmed expression. She had heard that knights sometimes stopped by the bars that local commoners occupied, but she had never heard of a lady going to a bar.

Agnes answered seriously.

“Omo, I don’t enjoy alcohol. I go to those kinds of place to gather information. Many visitors stop by inns and bars. It’s the best place to hear what the public is thinking.”

“That sort of information gathering can be left to your guard, the princess just likes alcohol. The last drinking game you had with your guard... When I think of the princess’s actions, I’m too ashamed to face His Majesty”.

“I didn’t do anything embarrassing” Agnes said, annoyed. “I hate missing the fun. I should be able to laugh, brag about my feats, and enjoy myself with everyone. That’s how I form bonds with my team.” She raised her pointy chin proudly. “I believe that trust between all of us will motivate us to overcome all hardships together.”

“What does drinking an excessive amount of alcohol have to do with trust?” her attendant said, before dropping the matter.

””” ”

Agnes pursed her lips, as if she were about to sulk, and then waved her hand dismissively at him.

“Ugh, always nagging as usual, Seville. I wasn’t going to bother Lady Calypse anyway with asking to go to a bar.”

Max laughed nervously, unsure of how to act. The princess lived so roughly, like a knight. Surely, being a magician allowed her to live differently from the average noblewoman.

Maybe if Max could perform stronger magic, she could be able to travel like her and go to exciting places like bars. The world was so vast, and she had hardly seen any of it! It seemed exciting to venture wherever she liked, but would Riftan be okay with giving her so much freedom?

Suddenly, the carriage started to shake.

"The road is uneven. Please hold on tight", the coachman said opening the front seat window, and everyone in the carriage held onto the door handles.

As the coachman warned, the wagon began to move dangerously. From inside, it felt like an earthquake had started. Max sat straighter, feet planted firmly on the ground to keep her from slipping off the seat.

The forest path soon ended to show a stream with a fast current and a water mill. The carriage started moving downhill over an arched bridge.

Soon, frequently used roads, wooden buildings, and tents emerged over the horizon. Max was impressed, the town was livelier than she expected. On the main road, carts and wagons were being driven by people egging on their donkeys and horses.

"I already noticed it yesterday, but the buildings here are quite tall", Agnes said admiringly.

It was true. The buildings rose so high that that area could no longer be considered a small town on the continent's outskirts. The construction of the three-story buildings had finished and the streets were littered with visitors and merchants.

"As the Leviathans brought more goods, the stores grew in number." Rudis said softly. "Back then, the mercenary visits brought business not only to the restaurants and hotels here, but to the arms dealers and blacksmiths."

"I knew that this town was growing in number, but not to this extent" Agnes muttered softly.

Max became anxious after seeing her thoughtful expression, her reaction was strange. Again, she couldn't fathom why the princess had visited Anatol at all. She turned away to view the village scenery.

"I heard that Riftan has been at the quarry since the early morning. Are you planning to expand the estate?" Agnes asked.

“H-he plans to construct a-a road that will c-connect the p-port and the rest of t-the land. At least, that is w-what I heard.”

The princess opened her eyes wide at her response and became interested in the business.

“If you reconstruct the road for larger traffic and reorganize the route to the port, this will become the shortest route to bridge the southern and western continents. Then Anatol will become a metropolitan, commercial city.” She didn’t seem completely pleased with these prospects.

Max’s heart sunk. Maybe Riftan had been acting outside of the Royal Family’s interests, she didn’t know if he was under surveillance. Although their journey had just started, she could feel a drop of cold sweat flowing down her back.

As if Agnes noticed that Max was getting uncomfortable, she quickly changed attitude and talked more good-naturedly.

“Of course, the monsters are still an issue. If you don’t get rid of the monster habitats surrounding Anatol, it will not be easy to convince the South Continent to trade along this route.”

“Lord Calypse’s reputation may be the turning point to convince the Southern Continent”, the attendant said.

Max looked quietly at him and the princess, who were both occupied viewing the crowded buildings and intricate streets filled with horse-driven carriages.

Was Agnes right in assuming that Anatol would become a new metropolitan? Although there were many people in the streets, Anatol was still a small estate that laid near the countryside. Between the castle gate and main town, old houses were still being used, with people who kept small orchards or raised sheep, goats, chickens, and geese in fenced areas. Max felt a little disappointed that the peaceful countryside might disappear because of the industrialization.

“I want to see the market. Why don’t we start walking around here?” Agnes said. Max nodded, opened the front window, and asked to stop the carriage. After a while, the carriage stopped on a secluded road, and the coachman opened the door.

“Would you still like to stop here to see the market?” the footman asked.

Max nodded and stepped out of the carriage, followed by Hebaron and Uslin.

“Leave the horses by the carriage. I will escort the ladies”, Hebaron said.

“Why me?” Uslin started, but closed his mouth when he saw Max, then took the horses to the side where they could rest without saying anything else.

Hebaron threw a coin to the coachman for a repast, organized the guards and led Max and Agnes to the crowded marketplace.

It was busier than the last time Max had come with Ruth. On both sides of the road, merchants were huddled in thick tents, while mercenaries were trading demon bones and gemstones. Agnes, who viewed the scene comfortably, suddenly pointed to a stall at the end of the road.

“Should we eat lunch there?” she said.

The place had several crudely-made wooden tables, with some worn, old travelers sitting around a keg, eating food and playing card games. To sit and eat there...

Max looked at the place that was too poor to be called a restaurant. A woman who was grilling meat on a fire pit pulled a whole, live chicken on the cutting board, planning to roast it on a spit, and raised her knife high above the rooster’s neck. Max panicked and looked away quickly, but the rooster’s scream continued echoing. Soon enough, the headless rooster was hung upside down on a rope. Max looked back and flinched when she saw it revolving, the woman instead was calm as she put a bowl under the rooster’s neck to collect the blood, and then wiped her hands on her apron. Max covered her mouth in shock and turned back to Agnes.

“M-maybe it is too e-early for lunch.”

“Don’t say that” Agnes said. “At least eat a little. Look how fresh and delicious the grilled chicken is here.”

She did not seem offended by the chef’s b****y skills. Max broke out in a sweat, but luckily the attendant interjected.

“How do you expect a princess to eat off the market streets?”

He shook his head, striding past the mock kitchen.

“Princess, we did not come here to play, but to inspect Anatol under the name of the King. Let’s finish our tour and return to the castle quickly.”

“Ugh, killjoy” Agnes boomed, but relented, and passed by the stall. Max sighed in relief before walking after them.

The princess took great attention on the market, she investigated the quality and price of goods carefully, and checked the competency of the shopkeepers. Sometimes, she asked questions about the town to Max.

“How do you manage your security here?”

“The g-guards come about three or f-four times a day to p-patrol the village. S-sentries stay along the wall. Th-there are also control points t-to enter the area. No one can enter t-the premises without an i-identification card from the t-temple.”

“What happens when someone disobeys?” Agnes said.

When Max didn't know the answer to the princess' question, she grew silent and confused.

Note: Nymeria: Agnes' servant exposing her... I'm stanning, ngl.

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 147

Proofreader – Nymeria

Rudis spoke up quietly to Agnes.

“Your Highness, if a criminal commits fraud or steals, the general law to resolve the matter is to pay back the victim ten times the cost of the equipment or lost business. If the criminal cannot pay, he will have to conduct labor accordingly.”

Agnes stroked her chin.

“It's more generous than I expected. In the Capitol, they cut off their wrists right away.” She sounded used to violence. “How are murderers condemned?”

Rudis answered calmly.

“If convicted, murderers are exiled or hanged. The verdict is usually influenced by the victim's family. If no family exists, the decision is based on the priest, who acts on the will of God.”

Max became more depressed. Even though she was the Lady of the land, it was embarrassing how little she knew about Anatol.

“Look at that crowd of women!” Agnes suddenly pointed. “What are they staring at in that stall?”

Max looked up. In a narrow alleyway, more than a dozen village girls were squabbling. The princess grew excited and grabbed her arm, wanting to get into the pandemonium.

“What in God’s name are they arguing about?” Agnes said.

The village women were in a catfight to retrieve the best fabrics piled on rows of shelves. Max had no idea about what was happening, she stayed silent like a silly noodle and looked at her maid, Rudis.

“T-there. W-what is that?” Max asked her, referring to the fabrics.

“My lady, those are accessories that are worn around the waist. When the spring festival starts, the village girls twist these fabrics around their waists, wear flowers in their hair, and sing songs in the fields.”

“Is this a tradition referring to the nymph who was Uigru’s lover?” Agnes said.

Rudis nodded and responded courteously to her.

“According to the legend, the nymph had seduced the hero, Uigru, by wrapping a piece of cloth around his waist and bestowing him with a flower garland on his head. For centuries, the maidens in Anatol have dressed to represent the oak spirit in the spring and sing songs in the field. It is a very well-kept tradition.”

””” ”

Agnes’ eyes brightened.

“Us too.”

“Y-yes?” Max said.

“Maximilian, you can’t miss a festival in your own town. Let’s participate in this one together!”

Ignoring Max’s response, Agnes grabbed her arm again and pulled the two of them among the fighting maidens.

Max's scream died in her throat. Her hair was pulled by the girls shoving each other, shoulder to shoulder, who also mussed her clothes. However, she could not escape since Agnes' grip on her arm was too strong and she felt like crying.

"How about this?" Agnes said.

The princess was in her element, she pushed women out of the way, got into the middle of the throng and grabbed a purple piece of cloth, then shook it in front of Max's face, who nodded alarmed. She was still struggling in the crowd, her stomach was cramping, and it felt like Agnes was going to tear her arm out of her sleeve. She just wanted to leave, but the princess was not finished yet.

Agnes frowned at the piece of cloth she held.

"Green or yellow would suit you best, Maximilian, it would complement your red hair nicely..."

"W-well, a-anything is fine f-for me."

"What do you think? Blue would suit me best, wouldn't it?" Agnes said casually.
"Wouldn't this match the color of my eyes?"

"W-well, I-I..."

Max screamed when the crowd pushed her roughly. The village women were shouting, shoving, and pulling on one another's hair and dresses. She had never had an experience like this, to be pushed back and forth, while she was in shock. Agnes finally decided on two fabrics she liked and threw three coins to the stall owner.

"I'm buying these two!" Agnes shouted. "Is this enough?"

"Oh, of course! Let me get the change."

"No change, thank you!" Agnes shouted happily and drew back from the crowd. Max retreated with her, touching her tousled hair and loosened dress. Hebaron, who had fallen back to watch, sighed.

"Princess, won't you please avoid these types of situations? What if you were struck badly? Or if someone found out about your identity..."

"Omo, are you worried that those feisty country maidens could hurt me?" Agnes laughed, still excited about her experience.

Hebaron softened his voice and talked paternally.

"I spoke wrongly. Those girls were the ones in danger. Your Highness was pushing and aggravating them as if they were harmless reeds..."

Agnes snorted at his sarcasm and turned to Max. She was half-listening and when noticed Agnes' gaze, flinched. The princess gave her a red cloth with a genuine smile.

"This is a thank you gift for guiding me around Anatol. I picked this for you because it reminded me of the color of your hair."

"T-thank you." Max hesitated before accepting the gift, and Agnes smiled satisfied.

Max looked at the fabric she was given, that had a rough texture. She was confused. Why was Agnes being so nice to her? She watched the princess, who was holding a blue piece of cloth around her waist.

"Should I tie it around me like this?" she asked Rudis.

"Yes, tie it this way to keep it from touching the ground."

"Maximilian, try your gift on, too", Agnes said.

"I-I, to d-dress in public..."

Max unraveled the fabric in her hands and made a nervous expression and Agnes shrugged her shoulders.

"Alright, you get a pass today. However, we're going together to the spring festival for sure!"

Agnes batted her eyelashes and smiled softly, then began to walk quickly through the marketplace again. Max folded her gift and went after her slowly.

The group continued to walk around for an hour and a half before returning to the carriage. During this time, Agnes had purchased on a whim five gemstones, dragon scales, Wyvern monster leather and a variety of medicinal herbs. Her enthusiasm over the herbs reminded Max of Ruth bargaining in the marketplace. Were all wizards obsessed with rare herbs and magical items?

"I can see why merchants take the risk to travel to Anatol." Agnes said. "There are many rare herbs here, and the gemstones are comparably cheaper than in the rest of the kingdom."

"According to our wizard, there are a lot of rare herbs in the Anatorium Mountains" Hebaron said. "Because of the monsters there, it's also easy to get monster bones, skins, and gemstones."

The knight continued to pack Agnes' purchases in the back of the carriage and she stared at him, confused.

"I see that you're selling monster parts in the marketplace, and yet you don't dare interfere with the church nearby?"

"In Anatol, the Protestants, not to mention the Catholics, have virtually no power. Although the church exists, it is only a place to raise orphans with funds the Captain provides. The church has only recently congregated. It used to be just land."

Agnes pointed and shouted. "What's this? I'm jealous!"

Max was confused. "W-why are y-you jealous?"

"From a wizard's point of view, this scenario is ideal. Wizards and priests often don't see eye to eye." Agnes huffed. "Priests often see us as beings working against God's will."

She took a seat inside the carriage. Max recalled the priest who had mentored her in her youth and could not imagine the man hostile to wizards. She asked, confused.

"Why? T-to use m-magic is amazing. A-any noble w-would want a w-wizard."

"Wizards only began to be a commodity when this war started." Agnes said. "Once the fights over land increased, ransoms on wizards increased a lot. Since I knew wizards were needed to support my father's reign, I convinced the Protestant sector to take a more tolerant position on magic. Today, magicians are so powerful that the Church must accept them. According to traditional doctrine, magic is a demon's power that refutes God's will. Demons are evil spirits, and it is sacrilegious to trade demon bones, scales, and gemstones."

The princess took out a red gemstone she had recently purchased and sighed.

"The Catholic Church still strongly influences the trading of monster parts, and usually only allows mana stones to be traded. If you're caught trading monster bones, scales, or skins, you are referred to them. I have only been able to make a few magic tools, myself, since resources are limited."

"Do p-protestants allow t-trade?" Max said.

"Protestants allow people to trade gemstones, monster bones, scales, and even monster skins freely. However, trading the blood or flesh of a monster is strictly prohibited."

Max frowned.

"W-what w-would you do w-with the blood or f-flesh?"

She had heard that mana stones and bones from monsters and dragons could be used for magic equipment, such as using scales and skin to make armor. But how could one use the blood or flesh? Agnes smiled, amused at her trepidation.

“They can be used for black magic or alchemy. There are rumors that some people even consume monster flesh.”

“Eating that!” Max exclaimed.

Note – Nymeria: Unpopular opinion, I really like Agnes, she doesn’t really care about anything and she’s so easygoing! I think she’ll be a good influence for Maxi.

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 148

Proofreader: Nymeria

It wasn’t just Max. Rudis and the attendant in the carriage made faces as if they were sick and Agnes burst into laughter.

“It’s only a rumor. If you’re caught, you’ll just be exiled from the Church. You would have to be crazy to attempt it, anyway.”

“Ripples in the water exist once they are made.” Seville, the attendant said. “It’s madness to consider eating monster flesh.” He covered his mouth with his sleeve as if he were about to vomit.

“Anyway, it is usually easy enough to make magical tools in Drystan, the state bordering here.” Agnes said. “The problem is getting the materials. Buying the materials requires permission from the government. Although a black market exists, the prices there are astronomically expensive. Wizards in the capitol often come down to the southern provinces to buy materials at cheaper prices, since Protestantism is more prevalent there.”

"T-then, is t-that why w-wizards are co-coming to Anatol often?" Max said.

"From what we've seen today, that seems to be the case, doesn't it? There were a good amount of wizards in town bartering with the merchants. Perhaps part of the reason wizards are coming to Anatol is because the Church has less influence here."

As Agnes had said before, wizards flocking into Anatol would be a great blessing to the province. There were just not that many wizards who lived here permanently, the province needed three times as many healers then they had now to adequately support their wounded after monster attacks.

"Even if more and more wizards come to Anatol, the traffic will stop in the wintertime." Agnes observed, thoughtfully. "You really need wizards to settle here to make a permanent difference. Maximilian, are you a Protestant?"

"I-in the D-duchy of Croix, o-our head priest was Catholic. He p-preached about the t-testaments strictly." Max began to add quickly, in case Agnes misunderstood. "B-but he was a p-pragmatic person and did not openly o-oppose magic. M-magic is useful l-like swordsmanship. God g-gave us magical r-resources."

"Thank you for speaking like this." The princess smiled gently.

Max didn't mention that she was currently learning magic, too. It would be too embarrassing to speak about her feeble attempts of harnessing mana to Agnes, who was already an Archmage. She coughed and couldn't stop the blood from rising to her cheeks, as the princess suddenly knocked the carriage door to get the coachman's attention.

"Where are we going now?" Agnes said.

"We're going to the castle." Seville grunted. "Haven't we been at the marketplace long enough already? I'm exhausted. Before the sun goes down, I want to wash away the dust that's been cast on me today and rest." He stretched his legs out.

Besides Agnes and the knights, the group was tired. And so, the carriage drove to the outskirts of the town and returned to the castle in a roundabout way. The sun was soon setting, turning the sky in a brilliant red.

When the carriage finally stopped, Max stepped out to see purple clouds among an amber-colored sky. Her shoulders and neck were stiff from being on her tiptoes around Agnes. She frowned and started heading to the main hall when someone wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled Max tightly against his chest. She looked back in surprise to see Riftan hugging her from behind.

"It must've been hard to be dragged along all day."

“Omo-omo, what are you saying?” Agnes said. “You make it sound as if I were taking Max everywhere by force.”

The princess stepped down from the carriage. Uslin was helping her down out of courtesy and grunted at Riftan’s comment, but covered his mouth to hide it. Riftan ignored her and shifted his arm to hug Max around her shoulders. He kissed her head softly.

Max’s face reddened. Although he was often physically affectionate, it was still embarrassing for her to receive intimacy in public. At the same time, Max’s heart jumped with joy and she felt ticklish on the back of her neck. As Riftan caressed her neck with his thumb, she got goosebumps.

“Captain, has the patrol been completed?” Hebaron said. “I was going to join later in the night to help investigate the area. Any issues so far?” He continued to unpack Agnes’ purchases from the carriage.

Riftan sighed and released his arm from Max.

“We stopped early. There’s something we need to discuss. Gather all the knights to the meeting room.”

“Cap’n, right now?”

“Yes.” Riftan said.

Hebaron stretched his lips out like a duck, annoyed by his bluntness. Max also bit her lip, a bit disappointed that she wouldn’t be able to spend time with him that evening. Ignoring the others, Riftan gently pushed her back toward the Great Hall.

“Go back to the room and rest. You’ve been through a lot, today.”

She hesitated before signaling Rudis to come with her. Was Agnes going to retire as well? At that moment, the princess said to Riftan straightforwardly.

“Please let me join the meeting. I will help if I can, based on the history of our alliance.”

“Thank you.” Riftan nodded.

Max stood still and watched Hebaron, Uslin, Riftan and Agnes walk to the knight’s quarters across the field.

The group had left to the meeting room. Max’s heart ached for no reason, and her stomach felt upset. She headed up the stairs quickly, trying to shake off her uneasiness.

She stayed in the room, ate dinner alone, and spent the evening watching the kittens playing on the floor. Riftan and the knights didn't come out of their meeting until it was very late, the topic of their discussion was still a mystery. The maids told Max that they brought meals to the conference room for them.

She was tired but tried her best not to fall asleep, so she lit a candle on her desk and started reading a book with ancient text. After a long time, the door clicked open and Riftan walked in without making a sound.

"H-have you finished?" Max said.

Riftan, who was throwing off his armor in the dark, stopped and looked over his shoulder at her.

"I thought you'd be sleeping already."

He took off his shirt and tossed it to the floor before getting closer to her.

"You must have been tired from going out today. Why are you still awake?"

"N-no, I-I'm not t-too tired."

Riftan's forehead creased as he touched her cheek and lightly swept the hair from around her dark eyes with his rough, callused thumb.

"You've been decorating the garden and welcomed the guests. There's no need to overdo yourself."

"I-I'm okay. R-Riftan, you work much h-harder."

His touch felt good on Max's cheek. She instinctively tilted her head and rubbed her lips against the palm of his hand. He flinched and groaned, then covered her lips with his. Riftan's mouth was a little cold to Max and his tongue tasted faintly of wine.

"It's been difficult to hold back." Riftan muttered darkly, obviously trying to control himself.

He wrapped her face in his hands and rubbed the strands of hair curling around Max's ear. His face was turning a golden color from the candlelight, which gave him the appearance of a devil.

"But I don't want to force you, if you don't like it."

"I-I don't mind." Max slowly wrapped her fingers around Riftan's arm. She had missed him so much.

Riftan was struck dumb. As soon as he saw the assent on her face, he groaned like a beast and began to kiss her, almost violently.

Max touched his hair and reciprocated, her body feeling hot. Riftan undressed her quickly and grabbed her b****s. Without preamble, she slid her hands against his firm chest as well. He was like a hunting dog without a leash who couldn't hold back his enthusiasm. He soon moved their position to the bed, where he began to move his hands between her legs, hungrily pouring kisses below her knees as if he wanted to swallow her whole.

When he lost reason, he began to fill her with his body. After a beat, Max began to melt from the intense pleasure. The grinding went on until she climaxed, and the worries in her heart burned away. Yet a small corner of her chest felt hollow, despite the fleshy pleasure.

Max rested her head against Riftan's arm and gazed at the canopy above the bed. She couldn't imagine why she didn't feel satisfied after being with him in that way. What could she do to get rid of this anxiety, despite how nicely he treated her? She had never felt this way before she had met him.

"Has your day been difficult?" Riftan asked, worried.

He had felt Max tense and began to rub her skin that was still cold with sweat. She shook her head and buried her face in his shoulder. Riftan frowned, as if he didn't believe her, and cupped Max's pink, puffy b****s with one hand, rubbing them softly and resting his lips on her shoulder.

"Has Agnes started her useless games again?" he said.

"U-useless? W-what do you mean?"

Riftan raised his head and frowned a bit. "Here, come lie on top of me."

"W-well, r-regarding what you've said. I d-don't u-understand."

"The princess is calculating. She's a genius at opening people's minds with a few choice words. She has the ability to make people feel as if their insides were pushed out and manipulate them at will. I'm worried that she may have treated you badly."

Max was shocked by his words. How could he gossip so calmly about the princess like that? She squeezed her legs around his iron-hard calves and crunched her toes together.

"You two l-look g-good together." Max said stubbornly.

“...What?” Riftan said. His eyes widened in disbelief and then laughed at the ridiculous statement. “Have you seen how I treat Agnes? Why in hell do you think we look good together?”

“R-Riftan. Y-you treat her like Uslin, Hebaron, and the o-other knights. T-that’s why it s-seems you two have a g-good relationship.”

He raised his head to look at Max’s expression. She was embarrassed to show her jealousy out in the open, Riftan instead gave her a mean smile.

“If you think about it that way, I suppose our relationship is not that bad. She’s annoying, but a great woman of skill, and not arrogant like most royals. But that’s it. We’re only comrades, and I’ve never thought of getting close to Agnes that way. She probably feels the same.”

“R-Riftan, how c-can you be sure?”

“During the dragon expedition, we were together for almost a year, but none of us had the desire to cross that line.”

Max resisted asking what he meant by “crossing that line”, feeling that the truth would hurt her more. She hated that they had spent a year together. Even though she knew she could trust Riftan, her stomach became upset again.

As if noticing that she was still uncomfortable, Riftan blushed and spat out.

“You also have a good relationship with Ruth.”

Max raised her head in shock. How had Ruth’s name suddenly cropped up?

Note – Nymeria: How cute is Riftan, so jealous about Ruth? They’re finally gonna talk a bit and I can already smell wholesomeness, it’s just around the corner!

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 149

Proofreader – Nymeria

Riftan looked down at Max's face.

"I don't think you want to sleep with him", he said sharply, as if checking her response.

"N-no! Of course not!" Max said.

She was stung by his words, as if he had insulted her. She spoke up heatedly, in case Riftan was still concerned about Ruth.

"W-well, I p-promise. Even t-thinking that, I never considered! R-Ruth too. He a-and I would n-never betray R-Riftan."

"I know" he whispered, subdued. He gently sucked on Max's lips. "That was just an example. I don't hate the princess. She's a reliable companion, but I've never thought of kissing her like this."

Max enjoyed Riftan's chin rubbing against her, which had a slightly scratchy texture.

"What I feel for Agnes is different to how I feel for you."

"W-What do y-you mean exactly?"

She gazed at Riftan's manly face with shaky eyes. They only shared a bed together, she was only a small part of his life. He saw her expression and pressed her face against his chest.

"You are my only family" he sighed over the top of her head.

Max's heart began to beat quickly at his declaration. She stopped breathing for a moment and contemplated his words. Family. She had never considered the concept before. Yes, they were family indeed, he was her husband, and she was his wife. Suddenly, she felt a lump in her throat.

Riftan moved his hand and began rubbing her stomach to lighten the mood.

"And if we have a child someday, our family will consist of three."

"Oh, a-a child. W-would you like one?"

"A birth would be good. It would be agreeable if we could see the child crawling on the floor while having red hair and grey eyes."

“I-I think b-black hair for the b-baby would be n-nice.” Max murmured, choking up. She felt happy just imagining a beautiful child who resembled her husband.

To be with Riftan and have his child... Since arriving to Anatol, Max had been wrapped around several adventures and tasks, so she hadn't even considered becoming pregnant, but thinking about it now, it wouldn't be strange to finally have a child. Her eyes became unfocused as she started daydreaming. What would it feel like to hold a soft, milk-white baby against her chest and brush the baby's heavy, black hair? Watching the child's rosy lips pucker? Could she even begin to imagine the joy she would feel when the child would call her 'mother?' Max's heartrate increased as she thought happily about the future.

However, a sour thought came to her mind. It had been almost half a year since she came to Anatol, was it normal that she had no child yet? According to the nanny who raised her, menstruation stopped when women became pregnant. If so, she should expect to not have her period again since last month, right? Although Riftan had left the castle several times, they went to bed together so frequently...

Max became anxious as she recalled her mother, who had suffered from not being able to bear any sons.

“Sleep now.” Riftan told her. He reached out to turn off the lamp and pulled the blanket up to Max's chin. She fell into his warm arms and tried to forget about her dark predictions.

The time just hasn't come yet, she thought.

Some couples had children only after three or four years since their marriage. Obviously, in due time, good news would arrive for them too.

The next day, Max woke up alone when the sun was already up. She checked the empty space on the bed where Riftan had laid. With disappointed eyes, she sat up and sighed. He was an amazingly diligent man.

She got out of bed and began her toilette. That day, she was going to start doing the duties she had neglected while showing Agnes around Anatol. The gardens had to be inspected and she had to ensure that the guests were being properly accommodated.

Although the busy day had just begun, Max felt lighter and more at ease than the day before. She smiled as she remembered Riftan's wide arms, who held her warmly throughout the night, feeling more relaxed after confirming that his feelings for her had not cooled down.

"Greetings, my Lady," the maids bowed with cheerful smiles, as they opened the door and met Max. "Did you sleep well last night?"

"I s-slept well. Thank y-you. D-Did the g-guests have any i-issues?"

"Everyone slept comfortably, my Lady. Besides the princess, everyone is still resting in their rooms", said Rudis.

"H-how is the p-princess?"

"She's been outside on the grounds with Lord Calypse since early morning".

"T-together with t-the Lord?"

Rudis noticed Max's worried expression and added quickly.

"The knights are also with them. One of the other servants mentioned that they were all planning to go over the guard's training."

"I-I see."

She was embarrassed that Rudis had realized her dark mood and quickly turned her face away. Even though last night Riftan had said with his own mouth that he had no feelings for the princess, Max got immediately nervous hearing that the two of them were together. Had she always been such a jealous woman?

She rushed down the stairs, rubbing her hot face. Her nervous feeling did not go away, even while she searched the garden for Rodrigo, the head butler. Riftan wasn't having a secret meeting with another woman, so why was she so anxious? Max wandered restlessly through the garden for a long time, before giving in and heading to the training grounds. Even if she would feel awkward and uncomfortable with all of them together, it would make her feel more at ease than she was now.

With deep thoughts, Max hurriedly went through the training ground gates when a loud shout erupted. She stood at the entrance and looked down.

Similar to when there were special trainings, there were more knights and trainees than usual, all cluttered together around the stands. On one side was Agnes and her entourage, on the other side were the apprentice knights.

With all eyes on them, two knights walked into the field. Max's eyes widened. Both knights were wearing helmets, but it was easy to recognize by his confident stride that one of the knights was Riftan. Was he going to duel with one of Agnes' men? Why?

She watched them, confused, as the knights pulled out their swords. The armor proved that the challenger was a formal knight, not an apprentice. Had an argument occurred with the guests?

While Max blinked, Riftan rushed at his opponent, like a shotput flying across the sky, with such a shocking speed that it was hard to believe that he was in full armor. Max screamed and stepped back as the opponents collided, the sound of metallic banging was reminiscent of a thunderbolt.

Riftan easily defended himself and threw off his opponent's sword, who immediately took another position to attack. Their swords collided violently at a speed like that of the beating wings of a hummingbird, the tearing sound of metal reverberating in the air.

She could not move. She stood there and watched, shocked by the violence of the act. The fighters' feet dug into the ground and scattered dust around them, creating a layer of mist made of dirt. The fight was so intense that Max could no longer watch without feeling dizzy, so she turned away.

Sir Karon, who was standing nearby, approached her.

"My lady, are you okay?"

"S-Sir Karon." Max instinctively grabbed the edge of his cloak. "W-what are t-they doing? W-why is Riftan f-fighting?"

"Stay calm, my Lady. It's not a duel, just a light match".

"L-light?" Max stared at him in disbelief. The sound of thunderbolts still resonated behind her back. "H-how can t-that be light? W-what if someone gets i-injured?"

"I don't know the challenger, but the Lord is going easy on him. This level of training is common among us knights. Please don't worry".

Karon tried to reassure her, yet every time someone moaned her heart started beating more strongly. The knights around her were standing with their arms folded and watching the fight in a relaxed pose.

"If you're not feeling well, I can escort you back" he said, looking at her pale, nervous face.

Max automatically pressed her hand against Karon's arm to support herself. At that moment, a sharp CLANG erupted, and the surroundings grew quiet. She looked back, wondering if her husband got injured.

Riftan was standing still like a stone statue, he had pushed his sword against the challenger's neck with a firm grip. The challenger, who had not moved, eventually raised his hand to admit defeat.

Max exhaled in relief and felt the tension ease within her body, neither of the fighters seemed to be injured. Her shoulders drooped as she relaxed, when she suddenly felt a sharp gaze upon her.

Max saw Riftan, who had thrown off his helmet, staring at her fiercely. He strode over while sheathing his sword around his waist and swiftly pulled her away from Karon.

"What are you doing?" he asked Karon.

"My lady seemed to be in shock from the training fight" he said, embarrassed, and took a step back. "I was only supporting her."

Riftan glared at him with vicious eyes before turning to Max.

"Don't come here, this place doesn't suit you."

He grabbed her arm and moved her body towards the entrance. Max gasped in discomfort as Riftan's metal gauntlet tightened against her arm. As if she were burning, Riftan instantly released her. She rubbed her forearm where he had grabbed her tightly and looked at him, confused. Why was he so upset?

"I-I'm fine. It w-was my first time s-seeing a fight. I was just s-surprised."

"Have you never seen a joust or sword competition?" Agnes suddenly intervened.

Note – Nymeria: Riftan at the start of the chapter = chef kiss. Riftan at the end of the chapter = CHILL DUDE! Idk, I understand he's jealous and very protective of her, but I'd like for him to realize she's a grown woman with, finally, her own freedom >:c

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Under The Oak Tree

Chapter 150

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Max stepped back in surprise as Agnes face popped up and immediately regretted moving her foot, her action could be seen as terribly rude to the princess.

“I-I have not seen a f-fighting competition.”

“Have you ever visited the Palace? My brother comes almost every year. Do you not like the Capital, Maximilian?” Agnes said.

Max broke out in a sweat, she did not like this topic.

“To tr-travel. I do n-not enjoy it m-much.”

“Still, please visit us with Lord Calypse once. This time, I will guide you around Drakium.”

“Thank you for the offer, but my wife is not strong enough to travel so far” Riftan answered, cutting off Max’s reply. He led her toward the exit and she looked back over her shoulder, bewildered. Agnes shrugged her shoulders, as saying she was used to Riftan’s rudeness, and gave her a strange smile.

“D-don’t do that. Y-you must not be so r-rude to the princess. As a l-lord, you m-must set an example”, Max said anxiously.

“Even if she is royalty, we don’t have to go that far. She’s just toying with us and enjoys getting on my nerves. I’ll take care of escorting Agnes, so don’t meet her anymore”, Riftan spat. **“Like I said yesterday, that woman has a way of manipulating people to do her bidding. There’s no reason for you to mess with her.”**

“B-but Riftan. Y-you’re already b-busy with the r-road construction.”

At her words, Riftan sighed as if he didn’t want to admit something.

“Actually, Agnes will help us regarding that matter.”

“He-help?”

“In order to build a road that connects Anatol to the port, we need to get rid of the monsters along the southern border. If a high-ranking wizard like Agnes assists, it will save us effort. There’s no need for you to guide her around Anatol any longer.”

Max was lost in her thought for a while.

“The princess is s-still a g-guest. To ask for s-such a r-request... w-what if the r-royal family t-takes it a-as an offense?”

””” ”

“One of Agnes’ attendants said something similar” said Riftan, clicking his tongue in annoyance. **“It wasn’t me who had the idea though, it was the princess who offered to help. Don’t worry, I haven’t broken any rules.”**

In the end, he was involving Agnes and the other guests in dangerous expeditions. Riftan saw Max’s worried eyes, grinned and stroked her head with his metal-clad hand.

“Don’t worry so much. I wasn’t extremely rude to her, it’s how we usually talk to each other. As for the expeditions, Agnes’ skills aren’t completely necessary for the more dangerous raids. I’m not crazy enough to endanger a royal guest who only came as an ambassador.”

Max closed her mouth because she felt a loss of words. She did not like this situation but could not find an alternative solution.

“Don’t worry,” Riftan said again. **“Rest in the room. It was unreasonable for you to support the guests for so long.”**

“I-I can also he-help outside, c-can’t I?”

“Can you?” his eyes transformed into thin slits, as if he disapproved.

Max was intimidated and stuttered, **“I c-can do h-healing spells a-and other t-tasks.”**

“Thank you for your concern”, Riftan said with a firm tone. **“But Anatol has a lot of wizards and I will pay for their services. There’s no reason for you to get involved.”**

Max closed her mouth. It was clear that he only wanted her to play two roles, the role as the Lady of Calypse Castle, and as his wife.

Riftan had said that she was his only family in the entire world, but she was not his equal that could solve his problems with him. Hiding her disappointment, Max walked one step ahead of him to hide her face.

Since that day in the training grounds, Max didn’t see Agnes at all. The princess was with Riftan almost every day. The two went out from early morning to head to the

southern border often, and when they did not leave the castle grounds, they often had long discussions in the field or inspected the land.

Of course, the two of them were never truly alone, there were always a few Remdragon Knights and Agnes' bodyguards, so there was no reason for Max to feel anxious or worried about the situation. Nonetheless, her heart was not at ease. Just seeing the princess' brilliant blonde head standing by Riftan's side jolted a pain in her heart. Max sighed sadly as she looked outside her window. Spring was showing in the gardens.

Agnes was the exact opposite of Max. Unlike her, she was confident, strong, beautiful, and worldly. Surely, after spending so much time together, he would realize how poorly he had chosen his wife, who was often melancholy and ungraceful. Her thoughts became gloomier. Max had been comparing herself to her sister Rosetta for almost her entire life, what if Riftan also started comparing her to other women? She bit her lip. Her inferiority complex was etched deep into her bones.

“What’s with that look?” Ruth said.

Max looked up from her philosophy book only to see Ruth standing at the entrance of the library, who was casually eating an apple.

“W-where have you b-been? I w-was worried a-about you since you h-haven’t been in t-the library!”

“I’ve been working in the tower for a while and making medicines here and there.”

Ruth walked to his favorite seat with a hearty stride.

“Y-you used to work m-more in the library.”

“I had evacuated in fear of encountering a dirty adversary.”

“W-who do y-you mean?”

“Agnes. I’d like to avoid her if I can.”

At the unexpected comment, Max opened her eyes widely. Most of the Remdragon Knights and the rest of Riftan's men saw Agnes in a good light. She had assumed Ruth viewed Agnes the same.

“D-do you two h-have a bad r-relationship?”

“It’s just one-sided on her end. Agnes is a wizard of Nornui, so she treats me as a traitor who has broken the rules of the Wizard Tower.” He wrapped his arms behind his head and leaned back. **“To be honest, I just don’t want the attention. I had a**

dismal time over there. By the way she treats me, I'm probably being treated more horribly from her and the other wizards than how the Church treats the pagans."

"I h-had no idea. The o-other day w-when I heard t-that the p-princess was coming, I d-didn't know it w-would affect you."

"Why tell a story about bad blood if it can be avoided?" Ruth spoke grandly, as he opened a book that was close to him.

Max looked at him oddly and felt a kinship between them. She was relieved that there was at least one other person who didn't favor Agnes. It was embarrassing how much Agnes upset her, but Max couldn't get rid of her restlessness.

"I d-don't think she is a b-bad person", Max muttered.

"The princess is not a bad guy", Ruth agreed. "Objectively speaking, her knowledge and skills are quite capable and she gets along well with the Remdragon Knights. How I feel about her is a separate matter."

Max hesitated before saying honestly, "I-I am u-uncomfortable with t-the p-princess."

"I'd be surprised if you weren't", said Ruth turning a page. "It would be rather strange to be happy about seeing a woman who almost married your husband."

His words made Max feel better. It was exactly as Ruth said, her feelings were reasonable! Before, she had often compared her jealousy of Agnes to a grumpy witch who harbored ill feelings, like those in fairy tales.

"Still, t-the princess is h-helping Anatol. I s-should see her in a b-better light".

"She's not helping us to be friendly", Ruth closed his book and smiled lightly. "When I heard she was getting involved, I knew it was because helping us would eventually supply more materials for the Capital. That alone is a business the Princess Agnes would have self-interest in. I'm sure His Majesty also pressured her to convince Lord Calypse to come to the High Court. King Reuben wants the Lord by his side."

Max's shoulders stiffened. "The King w-wants Riftan to go to Drakium?"

"Didn't you know why she came?" Ruth said. When he saw Max's face, he quickly added. "But it's not going to happen. Of course, Lord Calypse won't be going anywhere. He doesn't like the life in the Capital, the same goes for the Palace."

"W-why?"

“Obviously, since he’s been knighted, Lord Calypse has despised the nobility he’s seen going in and out of the palace. Even if nobles are respectful to him, it doesn’t make him feel better. He despises pretense.” Ruth shrugged, as if this was a universal fact. **“Besides, Lord Calypse likes Anatol. Why would he want to be in Drakium, when he can act like a king and be in charge here?”**

“A-a king, y-you say”.

“To the young people in Anatol, Lord Calypse’s reputation greatly exceeds King Reuben’s. Lord Calypse raised Anatol, like a man who revived reeds from the point of death. The citizens here sincerely adore their Lord since Lord Riftan has supported them.”

Max looked out the window, feeling overwhelmed. The landscape was picturesque as if a masterpainter had boldly drawn the scenery with a brush. Did Riftan truly care for this land? She was relieved he felt that way, and yet she also felt lonely. She was envious that he was so tied to a land.

“Anyway, Agnes won’t be here forever”, Ruth said cheerfully. **“She will soon realize that persuading Lord Calypse to go back to the Capital is impossible and will leave. I won’t have to avoid her for much longer, I’ll just have to put up with the inconvenience until then.”**

His absurd cheeriness made Max give a faint smile. As Ruth had said, she just had to wait for the princess to give up and leave. Once she left, surely her anxiety about losing her husband would cease.

Note – LN: I forgot how much I missed Ruth!

Nymeria: Yay finally Ruth! He’s so refreshing, I like seeing Maxi so comfortable around him! Also, Riftan not treating Maxi as his equal, like a proper partner... ugh, their relationship has still a long way to go :c

Announcement – Riftan’s POV is now being translated on LNH!

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