

# Under The Oak Tree

## Chapter 211

Ruth's wide-open jaw trembled. He then grabbed his head as if he was getting dizzy and spat out a lot of gibberish before finally saying something.

"I did hear that you were staying at the monastery... did you perhaps willingly become a priestess? What about Sir Calypse?!"

"W-What... What are you saying? Of course not!" Max argued again in a shrill voice, then looked around, surprised by her sudden outburst. The soldiers who were coming down from the hill looked at their way with interest. "I wore th-these clothes... to infiltrate the support unit. I'm now... working as a caregiver... h-here."

"You're working as a caregiver here...?" Like a trained parrot, Ruth repeated her words.

Since he didn't appear like he was in his right mind, she seriously thought of giving him a few knocks on the head. "I don't have t-time to explain everything. I need to go back, but before I do... I want to know what's happening. How is... Ri-Riftan? Is everyone... u-unharmed? I heard that some have serious injuries..."

"Ho-hold on for a second! How could I respond to that when you just came out of nowhere, and probed for things you wanted to know? Give me a moment to clear my mind."

Ruth retaliated in a frustrated tone and jumped out of the water. He then scanned her from head to toe with narrowed eyes as he squeezed the water out of his robes. Aware of her dingy old clothes, tangled hair, dirt and sweat covered face, Max's cheeks reddened under his scrutinizing gaze.

He let out a long groan and covered his face with his hands. "Goodness gracious... Does Archduke Aren know that m'lady is doing this?"

Max brought her hood lower to her face as she started to mutter. "I t-told you... nobody else knows that I'm here."

Only then did Ruth seem to have finally grasped the totality of the situation. "If Sir Calypse finds out about this, he will go berserk!"

Scared, Max reached out to cover his mouth again. "Please... tone it down." She implored him.

Ruth looked up in the sky like his whole patience was being tested and muttered as if he was praying in question. "Why in the world are you doing this to me? If you are so afraid

of getting caught, you should have been desperately hiding from me too! You didn't have to involve me in this."

Max narrowed her eyes at his absurd words. The tears of joy she was about to shed for him had completely dried up. "We haven't seen each other in so long... and that's what you would say to me? I have been so worried...!"

Ruth snorted in response, his tone dripping with rude sarcasm. "Did you expect that I would be dancing happily after meeting you in this situation?"

Max could only lift her chin up to show the anger on her face. "I'll make sure to avoid... avoid you Ruth! Please tell me what's happening in the war zone... I went all this way to know... I have so much work to do, I don't have much time to find out."

"That's not how it works! I don't know what kind of plan you hatched to pose as a priestess and infiltrate the support unit, but now that I know the lady is doing this, I can't pretend to be ignorant! You placed me in a very difficult position!"

"Is there a problem?"

"" "

Max flinched, then froze on the spot when an unfamiliar voice spoke to them. It was a soldier with his horse, checking out the commotion Ruth was causing. She shook her head, then looked at the wizard's conflicted expression: the stupid man looked like he was going to give her away. She squeezed her eyes shut and held her hands together so tightly that her knuckles turned white. Then she heard a small click of the tongue, followed by Ruth's voice.

"There are no problems here."

The tension eased off her shoulders and she let out a long sigh of relief as Ruth stepped out of the stream and glared at her. "Which tent is it that you are staying at?"

"The one in the eastern end."

"Alright. I'll come and find you later."

"No, you can't. It might cause suspicion..."

"Then you will have to make up a good excuse." He shot her an annoyed look, then sighed in resignation. "I have an important meeting to attend now so I don't have the time now, but I will come find you in an hour or two."

Without waiting for an answer, Ruth climbed the hill and headed out onto the gravel road again. Max watched his back as he walked away from her and then returned to the

tent. Idcilla, who was waiting eagerly for her, ran to her the moment she entered the shop and asked what she had found out.

“L-later... I’ll tell you everything.”

It was time to distribute the medicine and the tent was crowded with the other priestesses. Idcilla nodded silently, realizing that the time was not right. Max rolled up her sleeves and immediately went to work; however, she kept glancing towards the entrance every few minutes.

He said he will come find me in an hour or two? Will he try and convince me to go back to Levan?

She felt unhappy and a little betrayed by Ruth’s reaction to seeing her there. Wasn’t he the one who taught her how to heal with medicine and magic? Nevertheless, she noticed that he wasn’t in favor of her working as a caregiver there. Max bit her lip and began to feel more and more agitated. If that was how he reacted, she didn’t even want to imagine how Riftan would respond if he found out. She nervously pushed her hair into her hood, and gathered the medicines she had to give the patients.

As he promised, Ruth showed up at the tent just as she was starting to change the wound dressings of the wounded. Her eyes widened as she saw him walk casually into the tent. The other priestesses who were tending to the sick also looked at him with suspicion. However, he remained calm under their inquiring gazes.

“We’re going around to examine the condition of the patients. Ignore me and get on with your work.”

True to his words, he began to weave between the beds and looked over the wounded men. Max glanced at him, she couldn’t guess what he was trying to do. It wasn’t until Ruth checked all the patients that he finally turned to the soldier she was caring for. He opened his mouth to speak as he studied the long cut on the soldier’s chest.

“Your stitches are very well done. The threads will be able to come out in two days maximum.”

She nodded, wondering where he was going with that facade, but Ruth just continued to examine her practical work and waved a hand at her, indicating for her to continue. Max stiffly applied the herbal cast to the wound and bandaged it. Looking at her, he spoke in an exaggerated tone that made her shudder at his poor acting skills.

“You have excellent skills. I would like to ask this priestess for advice on healing techniques. Could you give me a moment of your time?”

She blinked, unable to believe that this was the extent of Ruth's acting ability; but luckily, the people around them seemed to have bought it, especially when another nearby young priestess suddenly chirped in.

"Sister Max is the most skilled among us. She knows all about medicinal herbs and can sew up any wound in the blink of an eye. She will definitely be able to help you."

The sudden compliment made her blush, she had no idea that she was so appreciated for her abilities. Ruth gave her a strange look, then spoke in a polite tone that didn't suit him at all.

"That's reassuring. Then, please give me a moment of your time."

"...Alright."

Max apologized to the wounded soldier, who was grimacing at the new stinging sensation caused by the herbal medicines in the cast. Ruth immediately led her out of the tent and went straight to a sparsely occupied area. Her eyes shifted nervously at the aura he was emanating. The wizard silently walked and made his way through the dense woods. After making sure that no one else was around, he looked back at her.

"The lady does not fail to surprise me every time. When I first met you, never in my wildest dreams would I have thought you would be so fearless."

Max pouted at Ruth's words, which sounded more like he was reprimanding a child. "A-After receiving the news that the war would drag on... I couldn't sit around and wait longer. If I would be closer to the battle... I thought that at I-least I'll be able to know more of what is going on..."

"So, you used these shabby clothing and sneaked in?"

Ruth looked down at her robe which was full of holes in the seams from fanning embers on firewood. Max felt her ears burn with shame for presenting such an unpleasant side of herself, but she quickly brushed it off, pretending she didn't care.

"W-what's wrong with my clothes? These clothes... are nothing to be ashamed of. This represents that I'm working hard!"

"I have no intention to criticize you."

Ruth said, then let out a long breath. "You are a very talented healer. Coming to a place of conflict and offering your services to those in need, you deserve to be praised."

Feeling a momentary sense of relief at such unexpected and sincere words, Max smiled a little, but was quickly stifled as he continued in a firm, reproving tone.

“But I can’t praise you for hiding your identity and sneaking into the support unit. The Great Temple must be frantically looking for you now, m’lady.”

“I a-already took care of that! I left a letter saying I’m staying at a f-friend’s house, so don’t worry.”

Despite her reassurance, the wrinkles on Ruth’s face did not go away. “The day that the lady’s disguise is discovered, there will be chaos. Archduke Aren will be very ashamed, and Lord Calypse will be furious.”

“I’ll offer a formal apology... I-later.”

Max drew her neck back like a tortoise when Ruth poked the hole on her plan. He shook his head and took a deep breath.

“Not even the Archduke would have ever imagined that the Lady would do something so reckless.”

She swallowed dryly at his bitter tone of voice. “Are you... thinking of sending m-me back to Levan?”

The wizard fell silent and Max anxiously looked up at him like a criminal awaiting sentence. Ruth scratched at his tousled hair and let out a long, painful groan.

“If I were to do so, then I would have already informed the Archduke.” She unconsciously smiled in relief, but that seemed to fuel his irritation even more. “Don’t smile. The day Lord Calypse finds out about this, he will be pulling my scalp off.”

“He... He won’t find out. Ruth, you didn’t even recognize me too. Besides, he’s so far away... Ri-Riftan won’t know...”

“It’s not that simple. We are planning to move the support unit to Ethylene next week!”

Max’s eyes widened at the news. “The reconquest of E-ethylene... was it successful?”

“That’s right. We will use it as our base from now on in preparation for the final battle. So, we need all the manpower, equipment and troops on the front lines for all-out war.”

“B-But... There are still many who have not yet recovered. If they are forced to move, their conditions will get wo-worse...”

“That is why another wizard and I will stay here to help with their recovery. From what I saw, there were none with serious injuries. What we will do is to have them up and running in the next three or four days, enough to have them move into Ethylene Castle without any difficulty.”

Max was haunted by conflicting emotions. Her heart was fluttering thinking that she would soon see Riftan again, but at the same time she felt heavy knowing that the men she cared for with such dedication were to be subjected to another battle. As she lost herself in her inner dilemma, Ruth quickly added.

“Honestly, I want to send the lady back to Levan right now if possible, but I can’t guarantee the return trip will be safe. It would be better to head to where the Allied forces are concentrated.” He said, while shooting her an annoyed look. “Please stay away from Lord Calypse. My head hurts just thinking about the he would incur with all of us.”

“Don’t worry... I’ll only see his f-face from afar.”

“As long as you are outside 50 madion (about 1 km) radius of him, you can observe for as long as you please.”

“I won’t be able to s-see if it’s that far!”

“Don’t get any closer than that. His five senses are sharper than any wild animal.”

Max thought that he was exaggerating. She made it all the way here without the Archduke noticing, no one was suspicious of her aside from being caught by Quahel Leon. She felt very confident in her stealth abilities.

“D-don’t worry. Even if I get caught... I won’t get you in trouble, Ruth. Then, please tell me how the s-situation is right now. I heard that some of the Remdragon Knights got injured... were they seriously hurt?”

“Sir Nirta injured his shoulder fighting a lizardman.” Ruth explained, and his dark face gradually grew at the reminder. “The injury is not serious... but because the lizardman cast a curse in his attack, his injury wouldn’t go away with healing magic. The magic of monsters is different from that of humans, so it’s hard to break it.”

Note – LF: I cackled at the 1 kilometer radius xD Really praying Hebaron will be fine though

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Upon learning of Hebaron's injury, Max's eyes widened in shock. Just hearing about the monster's curse was terrible in itself.

"Th-then...is there no way to heal the wound?"

"Divine magic might work." Ruth responded by frowning as he scratched his disheveled hair. "Don't worry too much about it. The Remdragon Knights will have reached Ethylene by now, and the high priest there will take care of Sir Nirta."

"W-what about everyone else? Are they alright? Riftan..."

"Sir Calypse is so robust that I'm considering having him leashed. The others are fine."

He cut her off and replied in a dry tone, but Max was eager to know the details. "W-When I found out that you and everyone else were trapped in Louiebell... I was really worried. How was everyone doing there, being trapped for h-how many months..."

"I'd like to explain it in more detail, but there isn't much time." Ruth turned her toward the barracks with a difficult expression. "The knights will soon leave with the assembled troops and there are still many things to discuss before they leave."

"Ca- Sir Caron... will he stay here too?"

"No, we will only be left with a royal wizard from Whedon and me".

Ruth massaged his temples to soothe his growing headache. "If Sir Karon finds out about this, he will definitely insist on taking the lady back to Levan, whatever it takes. Then, until they leave, try to stay out of sight."

Max nodded determinedly. "I-I get it. Until Whedon's troops leave... I won't be leaving my s-station."

Suddenly Ruth turned to look at her piercingly. "Can you really live in such poor conditions?"

"It's not a problem at all. A-all the other priestesses can do it... so can I too."

Ruth looked complicated as he swept his eyes through her messy, ragged clothes. "But, m'lady is..."

He wanted to comment further but fell silent. He studied her appearance again from head to toe with a slight complexity on his face before speaking again.

“I guess so, no one would notice that you are the daughter of a duke when you look like that.”

Max contemplated Ruth’s words for a moment, trying to figure out if he was insulting or complimenting her, but the wizard turned to leave before she could say anything.

””” ”

“Then, I’ll come see you again after the knights leave. Until then, don’t go outside your tent if possible.”

He warned her sternly as he walked away through the trees, leaving Max sulking on her way back to her tent.

The Knights of Whedon left with a handful of soldiers and wagons laden with food and supplies. As soon as they left, Ruth immediately set out to treat the wounded and a handsome wizard named Veylron also lent his help. They first targeted those with serious injuries and applied healing magic, then they gave mandrago potion to those who were in better condition. The priests also used their divine magic to heal the soldiers’ wounds.

Seeing this, Max felt incredibly inept. She had broken her back working, boiling herbs, making plasters, applying poultices, and squeezing out the yellow pus every day in an attempt to heal the fallen men. However, in just half a day after Ruth joined, a third of the patients had fully recovered. RutThe wizard couldn’t help but laugh at her expense, seeing the dejection plastered all over her face.

“I am one of the ten best wizards in the West. It is an insult to compare myself to a hatchling who has only recently started learning magic.” He said in a cheeky tone. “Stop making yourself miserable with these pointless comparisons. The lady did her best. If it weren’t for you and the other priestesses, half of them would have already died. They are all stable and alive thanks to you.”

Despite his attempt to comfort her, Max didn’t feel better. She wished that even if she couldn’t be as skilled as Ruth, she could at least have a larger mana pool that didn’t drain so easily. Meanwhile, she had to help with the burial of six soldiers whose conditions seemed to be improving, only to be found dead the next morning. There was nothing she could have done: by the time she got to them, they had already stopped breathing at some point in the night. However, she couldn’t help but feel racked with guilt, if only she used her magic the day before, then maybe everyone would have lived.

Seething with frustration at her own incompetence, Max buried an eighteen-year-old soldier in a secluded corner of the ruined fortress with a solemn heavy heart. As she

shoveled the dirt over the boy's body, she remembered Medrick's words, that a healer's life will be filled with frustrations and sufferings.

"Is there... a way to increase m-mana... in a short time?"

Over a large pot of boiling water, Max and Ruth mashed mandrago roots, herbs, and honey. The man, who had just caught a handful of purple lizards, looked at her when she popped the question and she added in a slightly softer tone, trying not to reveal her desperation.

"If my m-mana pool increases... I will be able to help more."

"You are already helping a lot."

Max frowned at his dry answer. "Please I-listen to my words sincerely. If I improve with magic... it will also help reduce your burden, Ruth."

"M'lady." Ruth responded with a bored look as he extracted off the goo on the lizards' skin in a small glass bottle. "You are already showing amazing progress. Don't rush too much. It takes time for a mana pool to grow and rushing it will only strain your body."

But Max wasn't going to give up there. She doggedly pushed her questions into him. "S-still... is there a special technique or training... that the wizards in the Wizard Tower use?"

Just as Ruth frowned and was about to lecture her again, the priestess named Nora, whom Max had become acquainted with, came inside the tent and rushed towards Max.

"Sister Max, I think Sir Lloyd's wound has reopened. Could you take a look?"

Max quickly set the vial in her hand aside and followed the priestess. The tent housing the sick and injured smells of pus and blood, brined in the humid summer heat. Even with diligent daily cleaning and bathing of the patients, the smell of the sick would not disappear. As they walked to the corner of the large tent, she saw a large stain of blood pooling on the soldier's back. Max leaned over and examined the wound and frowned at what she saw: the stitches were opened due to the soldier forcing to move his body. She glared at the soldier with scolding eyes.

"I told you... you shouldn't move just y-yet."

"I thought it would be fine, since I have felt so much better."

The man muttered with a grievous face. With a clean cloth, Max carefully wiped away the blood from the wound. Ruth, who followed her, peered at her over her shoulders, then took a seat next to her, gently pushing her away.

“Please pass me the tweezers. It would be better to remove the rest of the stitches and cure it with magic than stitch it back up.”

“You-you’ve already healed... sixteen people with magic today.”

“Don’t worry. I still have enough mana left. Could you please bring some more clean cloths and a small pair of tweezers?”

Following his instructions, the priestess immediately went and brought cloths, scissors, and tweezers. Ruth meticulously removed the b\*\*\*\*y threads baked on the wound, then skillfully casted a healing spell. The wound disappeared without a trace and the soldier, who had been bedridden on his stomach for weeks, jumped up and grabbed Ruth’s hands.

“Thank you very much, wizard! I will never forget this grace!”

Ruth got up from his seat and waved the soldier away like he was annoyed. Even though he said he was fine, Max could see how tired he was as she followed him outside. She knew from experience what a burden it was to deplete one’s magical energy. Fearing that he would collapse at any moment, Max approached the wizard.

“Is-is it too much?”

“I’m fine. Just one day of rest and I’ll be fully recovered.”

Ruth rubbed his sweaty face with cold water, and Max handed him a clean towel. He wiped his face, then let out a long breath.

“How many more men who could not move properly are left?”

“Twenty... no, there are about e-eighteen left.”

“Then we can prepare to leave tomorrow.”

Staring at the tent full of wounded men, Max couldn’t help feeling dark and heavy at the prospect. Although most have recovered, they had weakened due to prolonged bed rest in deplorable conditions. She was extremely concerned that they would have to endure another difficult journey so soon after recovery.

“H-how long will it take... to get to Ethylene from here?”

“On horseback, without rest, about a day. But to move a great number of people like this, it will take much longer.”

Max swallowed nervously. In about three days, she would be able to see Riftan. Her heart was beating so frantically with anticipation, she couldn't help but reveal it on her face. They had only been apart for a few months, but it felt like years to her.

"It won't be that simple." Seeing the blush spread across her cheeks, Ruth ruthlessly snapped her out of her reverie. "There is a high probability that we will be attacked by persistent kobolds or rom goblins along the way. The monsters will surely be targeting our supply of food and weapons. It will not be like a journey walking on thin ice."

"B-But... the Holy Knights... and Grand Duke Aren's knights... are all highly s-skilled... so, it should be fine, right?"

"Even with them, it's hard to tell. Keeping track and protecting a huge group of people and vast amounts of supplies... I doubt we can make it through unscathed..."

Ruth muttered bitterly under his breath, but quickly closed his mouth seeing Max's face turning rapidly pale. He sighed and scratched the back of his head.

"I seem to have worried you with my words. What I meant is, it never hurts to be vigilant. Always have your defensive magic ready and stay as close to me as possible."

With a tight face, Max nodded with fierce determination mixed with fear. Ruth soon left her to tend to the other soldiers, and she spent her time preparing emergency relief supplies to distract her racing heart fueled by fear.

Finally, the day they would depart for Ethylene came. The priestesses got up at dawn to start packing and help the patients climb onto the wagons. After loading all of the herbs and necessities, they helped the soldiers dismantle the barracks. Max was sweating profusely as she made several trips back and forth between the barracks and the wagons, carrying heavy loads on each trip. After three or four hours of hard work, they were finally ready to go, and the priestesses barely managed to get into their assigned carriages. Ruth wanted to ride in the same carriage as hers, but all the priestesses opposed his presence in a women's carriage, so he had no choice but to travel with the priests.

Not feeling comfortable leaving Max alone, he scolded her relentlessly. "Now that the Lady is a priestess, no knights or soldiers will risk their lives to protect you. You must not do anything reckless. If something goes wrong, come to me immediately."

After pouring out endless amounts of promises and guarantees, Max finally got him to give in and leave her alone. She sat next to Idcilla and secretly reached for the dagger hidden under her robe. She still wasn't sure if she could use it or not but having it close offered her comfort. Max could only hope nothing happened to force her to use that. Looking out the window, she saw that the knights were lined up on both sides of the carts and wagons. After the rear of the long procession passed through the gates of the ruined Servyn fortress, they began to pick up their pace. Once again, she had to hold on

for life so as not to fall into the violent rocking of the wagon. It was hard to sit still when they were all so exhausted.

“I’m sorry... but can I lean on you a bit? My back hurts a lot...” Idcilla asked with an apologetic expression.

“Of course. You can lean on me comfortably.”

The girl leaned closer and laid her head on Max’s shoulder gratefully. In recent days, Idcilla had noticeably lost weight, but that was to be expected: all they ate was the crumbs of food left behind by knights, priests, and soldiers, as they worked like mules from dawn to dusk. Looking down at her own figure, Max noticed that her arms and legs seemed a bit more muscular from the hard work, but her body had become thinner. She pictured in her mind loaves of buttery pastries, stew made of goose, and pies filled with mutton or sweet jam.

At the end of this war, she wanted to go home with Riftan and have a month-long feast where she would eat from morning to night. She was sure that now she could eat a whole chicken by herself. Max was completely immersed in the wonderful dream as she staggered in the aggressive rocking car. Contrary to their expectations, the expedition advanced towards Ethylene without any difficulty. They managed to travel half a day without a break. When they reached a forest area, they took a quick rest, ate, and then immediately set off again.

They did not stop to set up camp in an open field until they were all nearly deaf from the rattle of the wagons. After the priestesses checked on the wounded along with the priests, Max had dinner and slept on the grass. The next day, even before dawn, they started moving again. It was on the third day that the procession suddenly stopped. Max, who had been dozing off while she and Idcilla leaned on each other, woke up to the violent racking of the carriage. She wondered if perhaps they had arrived, but as she looked out the window, their surroundings were an empty field without a single tree.

Looking confused, Max poked her head out the window and barely managed to stifle her screams. At the front, soldiers and knights were locked in battle with red monsters.

“We are being attacked by red goblins! Don’t come out until the battle is over!”

A knight, who saw her, angrily yelled at her to go back inside. She hurriedly tucked her head back into the carriage. All the priestesses clung to each other, their faces full of fear. Idcilla also latched onto Max who unconsciously hugged her back as her eyes darted back and forth anxiously. She wondered if it was really alright to not do anything and sit still.

She was getting restless when suddenly, the loud thunderous thumping of horse hooves echoed around her before everything became deadly silent. Max was waiting for news

or a cry from outside; anything to let them know what happened, but the car shook and started to roll again, as if there was no battle that had happened.

“Is the raid over?”

“I-it seems like it...”

Before Max could intervene, Idcilla opened the window and asked the soldier riding his horse next to them. “What happened? Is the battle over?”

“It was over in a blink of an eye.” The soldier puffed out his chest with pride. “Thanks to the Remdragon Knights, who were standing guard nearby, they managed to finish off all the monsters without much damage taken. With two Wigrew incarnations accompanying us here, there is nothing to worry about.”

Translation Note: Rem is “white” and Rom is “red” in Under the Oak Tree Universe)

Note – LF: OH MY OH MY OH MY..... AT LAST, RIFTANNNN!!!

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### Chapter 213

Max’s entire body stiffened. Idcilla glanced at Max who had suddenly gone stiff, then turned to the soldier.

“Are you saying Lord Calypse of Whedon is here?”

“That’s right. They were scouting the area around Ethylene in anticipation of our arrival and came to our aid just in time.” The soldier replied in a tone as if he was a bit annoyed, but answered the question. “We can reach Ethylene Castle in about two hours. The Remdragon Knights and the Holy Knights will protect you, so you can be at ease.”

“Is Lord Calypse riding in front of us now?”

Idcilla poked her head out of the window to look ahead. It took all of Max's willpower not to follow Idcilla's example and stick her head out as well.

"Lord Calypse is at the forefront. Now stop asking questions and stay inside."

Pouting at the angry man, Idcilla shoved her head back into the carriage and sat. Max impatiently tugged on the girl's robe and whispered in her ear. "Did you-did you see him?"

Idcilla slowly shook her head. "No, he's too far ahead."

Max bit her dry lips as she sat tensely in her seat. Her body felt stabbed from the sheer tension building inside her knowing that Riftan was only a few steps away. He would never forgive her if he discovered her disobedience, and that she willingly got to the heart of the conflict. Perhaps, he could really be disappointed in her this time.

She shoved her sweaty hands into her pocket and grabbed the copper coin he left for her. Her throat went dry at the fearful anticipation of Riftan possibly opening the wagon's door just at this very moment to find her. In the tense silence, Max's stomach twisted with nausea as she shifted in her seat stiffly. The loud sound of a horn sounded, and the rattle of the cart remarkably reduced. Max was so frightened that she couldn't even look to see what was happening outside and hunched her shoulders. In her stead, Idilla cautiously peered out of the window. Suddenly, an eager exclamation came out of her lips.

"Wow, I've never seen such a big stone wall before."

Unable to overcome her curiosity, Max pulled the hood over her face deeper and quickly looked out: a gigantic gray wall of rock stretched up as if they were about to reach the heavens. Her mouth fell open at the incredible sight. Idcilla was right, it really was unbelievably tall and huge. The massive wall was built of gray and white rocks stacked together to form the entrance to Ethylene and beneath it was a solid foundation that appeared to have been carved out of stone. Max's eyes followed the wall up to the steep top, which seemed to look like it would fall at any time.

"It looks like it will c-collapse s-suddenly."

"That rock wall is the guardian of Ethylene, it has survived the brutal north winds and enemy invasions. You don't have to worry about anything."

The priestess, Nora, who was sitting across from her, explained proudly and Max looked at her questioningly. "Have you been to E-ethylene... before?"

"This is my hometown. I lived here before I moved to Levan." Nora stared out the window with a gloomy expression. "I was really surprised when I heard the news that It had been overtaken by monsters. I thought this was the safest place in the world, being

surrounded by towering rocks on all sides; everyone believed it to be an impenetrable fortress.”

“There is no place in the world that is not impenetrable...” Idcilla murmured darkly, and Nora couldn’t help but agree with her cynicism.

””” ”

“Perhaps it fell due to the careless thinking of men that it is impenetrable.”

Max couldn’t take her eyes off her as they approached the doors. Like Nora said, the magnificent fortress nestled between mountain walls made of stones truly seemed impenetrable. It made her wonder how on earth did the knights and soldiers manage to reclaim this land from monsters. Suddenly, the familiar dark gray armor of the Remdragon Knights came into view, and Max quickly snapped out of her stupor and crawled back inside.

Sir Gabel Laxion was inspecting every carriage as they passed the city gates, and she couldn’t keep the cold sweat from soaking her back. When it was finally the priestesses’ turn to go inside, Max ducked as far back as possible and pulled the hood over her head so deeply that it covered her entire face. One of the soldiers opened the carriage’s door and glanced inside. The coachman on the other hand explained his cargo in a polite tone.

“These are priestesses of the Great Temple who have come to care for the wounded.”

Max didn’t even dare lift a finger for fear that she would attract the attention of a soldier. After a suffocating moment, which felt like hours of agonizing anxiety, Gabel’s calm voice spoke.

“All good. Let them in.”

When the door closed and the carriage began to move again, Max immediately released the breath she was holding, Idcilla’s shoulders relaxed as well as if she herself had been holding tension. However, it was not reassuring to have made it through the gates. The Remdragon Knights were probably wandering all over the ruined city and after getting off, they would probably escort them to their homes. Feeling like she was stepping on thin ice, Max bit her lip as her endless agitation built up again.

Even after passing through the doors, the carriage continued to move for about ten more minutes before finally coming to a stop.

“We’ve arrived. You may come out.” A soldier opened the door and Max faltered, she did not abandon the carriage until she was the last.

Outside, a triangular flag fluttered in the wind, and dozens of barracks were everywhere, with soldiers busily running between them, carrying supplies and errands for the knights. Her eyes darted in confusion; Ethylene castle was several dozen times more hectic than Servyn castle. Men wearing armor crowned with unknown emblems swarmed everywhere. She heard swear words from every corner, sounds of metal colliding, and the screams of cattle.

Max looked around incessantly, her energy slowly wasting away. On top of that, her stomach was still knotted at the thought of Riftan discovering her, but she couldn't get over her desire to see him either. She looked up at the knights riding horseback one by one, expecting to find him among the sea of men, when suddenly, someone abruptly grabbed her arm and pulled her away. Max barely contained her scream.

"Ru-Ruth! You scared me."

"Stop looking around like that. Do you want Lord Calypse to find you?" He pushed her behind a barrack and scolded her. "Lord Calypse is speaking with the Grand Duke. You must conceal yourself from his gaze when they conduct an inspection."

"You don't have to be so tense... I won't be caught. Even Sir Laxion didn't notice me. Riftan would never even t-think I'd be here."

"I'm really not in the mood for a getaway right now." Ruth muttered annoyingly. "Don't you know how his senses are very particular when it comes to the lady? Personally, I prefer not to have the entire place turned upside down."

He groaned and then walked away hastily, motioning for her to follow him. Max couldn't help but feel sorry for still darting her eyes to and from. She cast her eyes back and hoped to see him, but reluctantly gave up and followed Ruth. Even if she couldn't see him now, there would be more opportunities in the future now that they were in the same place.

As if trying to hide a tree in a forest, Ruth hastily pushed her toward the group of priestesses, then led them to a place far out of the knights' barracks. "The priestesses will be staying here."

The wizard pointed to a large, clean-looking barrack off to the side, and they almost burst into the tent with enthusiasm. Compared to the small dwellings of Servyn castle, this place was like a palace. There were beds and partitions installed, they even had twice larger personal space to move around in. They all sighed in relief knowing that they would no longer have to sleep in a muggy tent.

"The wounded will be taken to the barracks next to it. If someone's condition worsens, please inform one of us immediately." When they began to unpack their bags, Ruth, with a solemn look, continued. "In the future, after every battle, big or small, dozens of wounded men will start to pile up. Always be prepared for emergencies, always have

emergency relief supplies in stock, and always have hot water on hand. The well is about 5 minutes away. There is also a storage house behind the barracks where you can get more herbs. So in case of an emergency, you should immediately..."

"There you are."

A thick baritone cut him off abruptly. Ruth's shoulders tensed and Max felt her heart freeze as if it had stopped beating. It was him who first recovered from his shock and he shot Max the most intimidating look he could muster, then turned to the large man as if blocking him from entering the tent.

"Lord Ca-Calypse, what is it?"

She clenched her jaw tightly and did her best to make it look like she was unpacking and organizing her things, but Ruth's acting skills in normalcy were truly terrible.

"I was looking for you, it's about Hebaron's injury. Why are you here instead of coming straight to my headquarters?"

Ruth laughed too awkwardly under Riftan's skeptical words. "Here... I was giving instructions to the priestesses on their duties."

"Priestesses?"

"These are priestesses from the Great Temple, they came here to care for the wounded."

"From the Great Temple..."

Max trembled with fear and longing at that reassuring voice she hadn't heard in months. If it weren't for Ruth's awkward manners at this very moment, she would have given in to her impulse and would have already run to Riftan.

"Anyway! I'm worried about how Sir Nirta's doing. The priests will take care of things here, let's hurry to Sir Nirta. How is his condition? Is he not getting better?"

Somehow, Ruth's terrible performance managed to distract Riftan's attention, and after a few breath-taking moments of silence, his focus miraculously returned to Hebaron.

"The High Priest is doing his best, but there's still no improvement. It will probably be quicker to find a cure yourself."

"Geez, it seems like the Remdragon Knights couldn't hold it together even for a second without me. I guess it can't be helped. Now, now, let's go see Sir Nirta."

Ruth spoke in a tone too gibberish and exaggerated, to the point that Max was sure Riftan would find out everything, but luckily he allowed Ruth to lead him away from the tent. She kept her ears wide open, making sure that she could no longer hear Riftan's voice, before running out of the barracks.

By the time she came out, Riftan was already buried in a sea of people. Unable to control her momentum, she pulled her hood over her face and chased after him as if she were being dragged by an invisible rope. In the distance, she could see him leap over Talon and ride slowly, alongside the wizard, toward a section where several large barracks were erected.

Max quickly ducked behind a tree and looked behind the thick trunk. She only saw him for a second. And in that second, even though he was so far away, Max felt her heart clench painfully with longing. After a few months had passed without seeing him, he appeared far more dignified than she had remembered, fully majestic and breathtakingly handsome. Even though he was now gone from her point of view, she was left stunned for a little more while.

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## Under The Oak Tree

### Chapter 214

It felt like her hurt was burning at the fact that he was within reach, yet she couldn't even meet him. For a moment, Max seriously considered going after him and confessing everything, but just imagining how Riftan would react sent chills down the spine.

"Hey, what are you doing standing idly here?"

Just when Max was struggling with an internal dilemma, someone's hand suddenly landed on her shoulder. A small scream reflexively escaped her lips as she turned to look. A man as big as Hebaron was staring down at her. He gave a strange smile, then tilted his bearded face to hers.

"You're quite cute, are you looking for a man to have fun with?"

Max took a step back, her face immediately filling with fright. "I'm n-not looking... f-for something like that."

"It's okay, you can tell me honestly. I'll do anything to help you."

The man chuckled as he took a step closer towards her. Max hurriedly looked around for help; there were soldiers everywhere, but no one seemed to pay attention to help. She had no choice, so she tried to hide her fear and responded as cold and firm as she could.

"Although I am grateful... I don't need any help. I... must g-go now..."

As she turned around to leave, the man grabbed her by the forearm. Max stifled a scream and the man growled in annoyance as he pulled her body towards him.

"Why are you leaving just like that? If you need payment for it..."

"What the are you doing?"

Max turned her head at the familiar frigid voice. Quahel Leon was glaring at the man with his piercing cold eyes.

"Don't you know you'll be punished under the military rules, if you cause any problem here in the camp?"

Even with the knight's warning, the man did not back down. "Don't be so uptight. I was just trying to help this lost woman."

"She is not just a woman." Quahel Leon prowled coldly at the man, without casting a single glance at Max. "Don't you see her clothes? She is a priestess from the Great Temple. You should know even without me explaining what sorts of punishment would befall upon someone who dares touch those under our church's protection."

"What the-, I said one thing and you're already putting me in a difficult situation." The man snorted rudely without feeling any fear or remorse for his actions. "How the am I supposed to know by her clothes whether she's a priestess or just some who came to this place to help comfort the men in this camp?"

Max paled quickly when she realized he had mistaken her for a and Quahel's lips twisted in contempt as he also grew tired of the man's impudence.

"" "

"I don't want to argue anymore. Go back to your post before I accuse you of further insulting our church with your dirty words."

With an air of arrogance, the man tossed Max aside. "Yes, yes, I'll do as you ordered."

She ran quickly to hide behind the knight while the other man shrugged with attitude, then leisurely turned around to walk away. As Max watched the man move further away, she felt a piercing gaze on the crown of her head. Hesitantly, she raised her head and saw Quahel Leon looking down at her, his eyebrows furrowing deeply. Then, he ordered her in his usual bored tone.

"Follow me. I'll accompany you back to your tent."

Still in shock from what had just happened, Max didn't want to be alone and obediently followed him. She stuck to his side as they made their way through the crowd and only when they reached a quieter place did he open his mouth to scold her.

"Please refrain from wandering alone." His speech was courteous, but his tone was reprimanding. "Ethylene is full of men from Livadon, Whedon, Osyria and Balto. Furthermore, a third of them are hired mercenaries. If you do not wish to experience such misfortunes again, please refrain from wandering around by yourself."

"From now on... I'll b-be careful."

The man sighed and turned to leave. "Go inside. I'll assign a guard to have a post near this tent."

"Th-Thank you."

Max ran into the tent like she was running away. The tension and strength immediately drained from her limbs, and she stumbled toward her bed before collapsing on top of it. Seeing her like this, Idcilla and Selena quickly ran towards her.

"You really surprised us when you suddenly ran off. Did you perhaps... went to meet with your husband?"

Max shook her head. "No. I o-only went to see him... from a distance."

"Wouldn't it be better to tell the truth? You came all this way to see him."

Selena frowned and whispered, seeming like she couldn't stand seeing her losing weight because of her worries. Max couldn't help but blush, feeling like a girl in love waiting for just the right moment to confess her love.

"I... don't wish to be a bother... and... in reality... I'm afraid of how he will react when he discovers the truth."

"That's understandable. Even Elba will scream like crazy if he sees me."

Idcilla grabbed her by the arms and gave an exaggerated shudder to try to animate. Max managed to smile at the girl.

“Did you find out anything about your b-brother?”

“Not yet. I’ll try and visit the place where the Royal Knights of Livadon are staying.”

When the priests entered the barracks, their conversation was immediately cut off. Max rubbed her sweaty hands on her robe and tried to clear her head of what just happened: if she followed Quahel Leon’s advice to never leave the barracks alone, no such thing would happen again. She then went out with the other priestesses and immediately began tending to the wounded to distract her pounding heart.

Ruth came to visit her again in the evening. After checking all the wounded men, whose condition worsened due to excessive movement, he signaled Max with a nod to follow him. She looked around to make sure no one was looking, then grabbed a small lamp and ran after him. He led her silently into the dark forest, and only after confirming that no one was around did he sit down to rest on a tree stump, looking completely exhausted.

“This is really taking years off my life.”

“Did he perhaps... notice something suspicious?”

“If he did, then there would have already been quite a ruckus. Since his entire focus is on Sir Nirta, he isn’t as sharp as before. I don’t know if I should call us lucky...”

“Is Sir Nirta’s i-injury...very serious?”

Ruth ran his fingers roughly through his messy bangs and sighed deeply. “The wound itself is not that big, but due to the curse, it is causing him excruciating pain. Divine magic is not working, and my magic is also useless.”

“T-then, what should we do...”

“I’ll have to find a way to break the curse. Don’t worry about him. He faced problems worse than this and survived. He’s so stubborn that I am pretty sure he’ll make it through this too.”

Ruth sounded confident, but his face couldn’t hide his deep concern. Seeing that Max’s expression also clouded, he forced a smile and changed the subject.

“I’ll take care of Sir Nirta so the lady should concentrate on her own tasks. Tomorrow, the Remdragon and Holy Knights will be out patrolling and guarding the front for a week. Until then, we can relax, but the problem is when they come back... I don’t know how long we can keep this from him...”

Max's eyes widened at the news of Riftan heading to the frontlines. "He's going to the frontlines? I-is the final battle...going to happen?"

"No, that won't happen for a while. All the trolls are encamped beyond Karav Gorge right now. For the final battle to occur, either side will have to cross into a dangerous place through a narrow canyon. The first side to launch an attack will be at a disadvantage, so both sides will be calculative of each other's moves for a while."

"Then... isn't th-that dangerous?"

Ruth shot her a look that made her feel pathetic, like this was the first time in his life he was asked such a stupid question.

"We are at war, of course there's no way that it wouldn't be dangerous." He replied dryly, then continued in a softer tone. "Based on my own personal judgment, I do not believe that major battles will occur at the moment. We have enough food to last us so there is no reason for us to launch the first attack. On the other hand, the trolls have also suffered substantial damage during their retreat from Ethylene Castle, so they won't try to launch an immediate attack. It'll be quiet for a while, unless something unexpected happens."

"I s-see."

Although the news was not completely reassuring, Max was still relieved to know that Riftan would not be heading into battle anytime soon. "Saving as much power as in case an all-out war happens while remaining vigilant and keeping advance is key to winning or losing a long raging war. The Allied forces are divided into three units and are taking turns in defending the frontlines. Anyway, you'll be able to be less wary while the Remdragon Knights are out in the frontlines. We'll think about how we should keep this up when they return."

Max nodded and Ruth returned to his tent after checking on the patients again. Left alone with her chores, she tended to the wounded men throughout the night and did not go to sleep until dawn. The next day, just as the wizard said, the Remdragon Knights went to the front lines in the dim glow of morning. Max watched them as they galloped on their horses, feeling a strange mix of emptiness and relief. Only when the last of the knights left and the doors closed firmly behind them did Ruth approach her.

"I have to go look after Sir Nirta. Shall any problem arise, please send someone to my barracks immediately. I have informed the soldiers to come and find me if a priestess asks for me."

"A-alright. Thank you... for taking care of me."

Ruth just shrugged like it wasn't a big deal, then walked back to the barracks he's assigned to. Max spent her time caring for the wounded just as she did at Servyn

Castle, but since Ethylene had cooks to prepare meals, they only had to focus on the wounded. However, even with their duties reduced, they were more exhausted than ever.

Mercenaries approached them to flirt whenever the opportunity arose, so the soldiers of the Holy Order kept their eyes wide open and watched closely on the priestesses' quarters, but the persistent gazes of men towards them remained. Sometimes the men even spoke openly and obscenely about what they wanted from the priestesses. In particular, Northerners were the worst. According to Ruth, it was because Balto had no priestesses, so they did not understand that they were God's servants and therefore untouchable.

Max was shocked by the rudeness of the men who did not pay attention to the principles of the doctrine. She wondered how those men could feel l\*\*t for a woman that's not his wife or lover and she felt threatened by their infidelity.

But her real discomfort was not avoiding the tenaciously leering stares of the men, it was her own body. It had been days since she last washed, afraid of the men's lustful gazes. Back in Servyn, she was able to wash her hair in the cold springs with the other priestesses at least once every three days, but ever since they reached Ethylene, all dreams of bathing were shattered. It was unbearable to have the dirt and sweat cooked on her skin from the scorching summer heat.

"I can't take this anymore. Why can't the Holy Order soldiers stand by to watch while we take turns bathing? If only we could soak in the spring to bathe for even a little while, it would do." Idcilla, unable to bear it anymore, exploded in frustration.

The priestesses exchanged anxious glances, agreeing with her. They were all in the same boat, so they decided to approach the priests with their sincere request. Fortunately, the high priest readily gave his permission, and now two soldiers stood guard from a distance as they all took turns in groups of four, bathing by the spring in the forest. Max and Idcilla volunteered to go last to avoid being recognized once their robes were removed.

She couldn't count the days since her last bath: Max's heart filled with joy just at the thought of dipping her dirty body into the cool, refreshing water of the spring. She was impatiently waiting for her turn, when suddenly everything became unexpectedly noisy. She looked outside to see what was happening, and her face filled with confusion. The soldiers were running around in commotion.

"W-what happened?"

A priestess burst into the barracks and screamed urgently. "The knights who came out to defend the front have returned. It seems that there were men who were injured."

Max paled and jumped up to her feet to go to the infirmary. Just then, she saw soldiers carrying wounded men and she hurriedly led them to lay the injured ones on an empty bed. There were a total of seven victims, none with life-threatening injuries, but they all complained of suffering from so much pain. Max looked at the faces of the wounded, then turned to ask a soldier who had brought them.

“Is-is everyone else... unharmed?”

“Some knights were injured, but they immediately received healing magic and have recovered. It’s just these guys left.”

“Were there any casualties...?”

“There was none.”

Max let out a sigh of relief and immediately started preparing medicine and tools for treatment. Meanwhile, the soldiers helped remove the wounded men’s armors. She sat next to the men and carefully examined their wounds. One of them had a terrible bruise around his ribcage, while the other men bled profusely from being pierced by a spear on the leg.

“These bruises are not serious. I will prepare the poultice, so please tend to the bleeding patients first.”

Nora, who was tending to the other men, told Max. She immediately prepared a hemostat and hot water. They removed the blood-soaked clothing from around the wound, and quickly washed the torn flesh, revealing the deep wound. After removing the blood clots and any other foreign objects found in the wound, Max applied the medication and gave them an antidote to combat any potential poisons. The soldiers writhed from beginning to end due to immense pain. Once the emergency treatments were completed, her entire body was drenched in sweat.

“All d-done with the initial treatment. Please p-prepare more analgesic herbs and medicine to reduce their fever!”

“Got it!”

The priestesses eagerly set out to carry out their tasks. No matter how fast they worked, by the time they finally finished, the sky was tinted red with the setting sun. With an exhausted face, Max slumped in the corner of the tent to catch her breath. She had the hood over her face all day in the sauna-like tent and now her face was burning red.

“M’lady!”

While she fanned her face with her hands to cool off, Max suddenly heard Idcilla urgently call out to her, so she turned to look at her with confusion. Idcilla had a towel in her hand, and waved at her enthusiastically.

“What are you doing there? If all the tasks are over, let’s go shower before the day is out.”

“N-now?”

“If we miss taking a bath today, there may not be another chance. The soldiers are still guarding the springs. Let’s hurry up!”

Max quickly grabbed her soap and a change of clothes. It was getting darker, so she was a little tired, but she couldn’t battle the craving she was having for a bath. They sped through the forest as the darkness slowly began to settle, with the only thought that they would finally be able to wash off all the accumulated grime in their bodies in their minds. After a while, they saw two soldiers who were standing a little further away from them in the woods. Idcilla turned towards them and yelled over to Max.

“I’ll inform them that we are here so they can stand guard while we wash up, please go ahead and wash first.”

Before Max could respond, Idcilla was already running towards the soldiers. She felt a little scared to be alone in the dark forest, but she quickly pushed her fears away and walked briskly. She was determined to take a bath before the sun completely set. After a while, a cling spring emerged from the thick bushes.

Max excitedly ran towards it. She started to remove her clothes and was about to jump into the water when suddenly, the sound of splashing water echoed from a distance. She jumped up like a frog. From a short distance, she saw a large man half-submerged in the water, bathing himself. As Max stared in shock at the man’s smooth back, he turned his head.

Max immediately bowed her head to hide. She was sweating profusely and her heart pounded like crazy.

The man was Riftan.

## **Under The Oak Tree**

### **Chapter 215**

She was in such a deep shock that she fell into a stupor and wasn’t even able to think of escaping on the spot. A buzzing sound rang in her ears, making her head spin a little. Max staggered, losing her balance for a moment, she didn’t know whether it was from

fear or yearning. She barely managed to steady herself by leaning against a large rock, when his cold voice echoed from the spot a short distance away.

“I instructed everyone not to disturb me.”

Max lowered her head and swallowed dryly. She knew that she had to respond, but she was worried that as soon as she opened her mouth, her identity would be revealed. For a long time, Max stood there, drenched in her own sweat under the intimidating pressure he exuded. Finally, she managed to croak out a few words, sounding like a frog’s stutter.

“Pa... pardon... me.”

A heavy silence fell around them. She felt his sharp gaze pierce her forehead like a needle. He then ordered her in a skeptical voice.

“Lift your head.”

Max grabbed her hood like it was her only lifeline and anxiously took a step back. Then, she heard the sound of water sloshing: he was coming out of the water. It was followed by the rustling sound of putting on clothes. She didn’t dare to lift her head, looking sideways for a way to desperately retreat through the trees. However, before she could find an escape, big, wet feet came forward and came into sight. He was now wearing his trousers and was now standing directly in front of her.

“Didn’t you hear me? I said, lift your head.”

Max felt her frantic pulse in her head. She looked around desperately, her heart pounding violently and cold sweat dripping from all the pores in her body. She trembled like a trapped prey, then suddenly she heard Idcilla’s urgent voice emerging from a distance.

“F-forgive us, Sir!” She ran like the wind through the trees and placed herself as a barrier between Max and Riftan. “We have been treating the wounded until late... we haven’t been informed not to approach this place. We deeply apologize for disturbing you.”

Idcilla must have discovered Riftan was there the moment she had reached the soldiers who were supposed to stand on guard, so she rushed on her way back to Max, quickly grasping the situation and shielding her from his sight.

“If you would please accept our apology Sir... we shall head back now.”

Idcilla shoved Max, who was behind her, towards the bushes before Riftan even had the chance to respond, but he had no intention of letting either of them go.

“I still haven’t given you the permission to leave.”

His high, authoritative voice was like a whip, and Idcilla immediately stiffened as if she had been beaten. Max cowered behind the girl as much as she could, trying with all her might to stay out of his sight, but his low bass voice resounded.

“That woman in the back, how many times do I have to tell you to lift your head and show your face?”

“Sir... as priestesses, we shouldn’t be recklessly showing our faces to men.”

””” ”

“I wasn’t talking to you.”

“We are priestesses under the protection of the Great Temple. Any rank of knight from whichever order has no right to go against the church doctrines. Please, you must understand.”

Despite the intimidating and dominating pressure he put on them, Idcilla managed to respond with a surprisingly calm and firm tone. If it weren’t for Max being scared to the bone, she would have admired the girl’s courage, but right now, all her nerves were focused on Riftan.

After a suffocating silence, he finally spoke. “... Fine, leave.”

Max had almost collapsed on the ground in relief if it weren’t for Idcilla, who immediately leaned over to support her. The two hurriedly turned back the way they came from, when a strong hand reached out and grabbed the back of her hood. There was no time to respond to the sudden action: her hood fluttered off her head helplessly and she fell back, due to the force he put tugging at her clothes.

Max was forced to face Riftan. Her eyes froze in shock as they met Riftan’s eyes. His gaze trailed from the top of her head to the tip of her toes as if he couldn’t believe what he was seeing. Drops of water from his wet hair dripped onto her cheeks and rolled down her face. Max’s face burned red like she was set on fire. She looked like a tramp, while her husband in front of her appeared like an ethereal nature spirit who emerged out of the springs. His soaked hair shimmered with a dark blue tint like satin and his bare, muscular torso had a copper-like glow from the light that shed from the setting sun.

Despite the icy, thick tension that ran between them, Max drank it down with her eyes. She was now seeing the face of her husband whom she hadn’t seen in months. Although amidst the terrifying moment, his eyes also never strayed away from her. Riftan took her in as well, his gaze just as passionately longing as hers, then a restrained groan came from his throat.

“What in the-, why are you here...”

His hand trembled as he cupped her face. Seeing his initial reaction, Max had this absurd expectation that he might actually welcome her with open arms. However, her fantasy was short-lived; his unfocused eyes immediately hardened, and realizing she was actually there, burning, blind anger replaced his shock.

“What in the world are you doing here?” Riftan grabbed both her shoulders and growled violently. “Who brought you here?! What were you thinking coming to a place like this...?!”

“D-don’t lash out at your wife!”

Idcilla hastily tried to stop him, who was yelling like a madman. Riftan’s furious gaze flew towards her and she trembled in fear as she still desperately tried to defend Max.

“Your wife came here because of me. I told her that I was going to join the support unit...!”

“T-that’s not the case! I-I have... made the decision myself. I could no longer... w-wait around restlessly, I couldn’t take it...”

“So, are you telling me that you came here on your own?”

His furious eyes fell back on Max and she immediately shut her mouth. Raw, taut anger emanated throughout his body, and she could feel that he was about to explode with wrath. Her handsome husband, whom she was so anxious to see even just once, now looked like an evil terrifying lion that walked out of the deepest pit of.

“Is the Archduke aware of any of this? What kind of imbecile let you join the support unit?”

“No-no one else... knows.” Max licked her dry lips and replied in a choked voice. “I have been hiding my identity... secretly... among the priestesses.”

With her confession, his anger seemed to have reached a new level that might not be expressed through human emotions. Riftan opened his mouth again, as if he was about to scream, but nothing came out. His jaw clenched, and his teeth crushed, as if he were using all his strength and mental faculties to regain control. Then his face became expressionless, as if he had put on a mask. It wasn’t a good sign. Max knew very well that when he appeared calm and didn’t speak, his anger and patience had reached their limits.

Riftan looked at her pale face with chilling eyes, then turned to Idcilla. “Were you involved in this?”

"I-Idcilla... she didn't do anything wrong. It's all my..."

"You, keep your mouth shut."

Max lowered her head helplessly like a criminal in front of a jury. Riftan took a long, deep breath and swept his face with one hand. His gaze then shifted to the spot behind them. The two soldiers, who seemed to have chased after Idcilla, stood behind the bushes and Riftan beckoned for them to come.

"Take this priestess back to her tent."

They quickly approached Idcilla and gestured for her to follow them. Max tried to sneak away with them, but Riftan's creepy, creepy voice stopped her in her tracks.

"Do not even think about it".

Max's shoulders slumped in defeat. Picking up his clothes and his sword, he started to walk away in the opposite direction. Max had no choice but to follow him like a tethered foal. She was completely trapped; there was no way out of this. Like the quiet eve after a destructive storm, they came out of the forest in silence. As they reached the barracks, the soldiers who were dining around the campfires casted curious glances at them.

"Where did you come from looking like you had a good time?" One of the mercenaries whistled loudly at them. "Must be nice to be branded as the reincarnation of Uigru. They get to find women to play with in this barren place!"

The man blatantly said, seeing how Riftan was not properly wearing his clothes. Fits of laughter echoed from all over the place and Max grew tired of how he was being ridiculed because of her. However, Riftan didn't even blink an eye when he gave them a daunting look and continued to stride forward. His pace was so fast that Max almost had to run to catch up to him.

Upon reaching his tent, which had a flag bearing the emblem of the Remdragon Knights, he roughly pushed her inside and shut the entrance behind them. Instinctively, Max took steps back, pulling away from him. Riftan glared at her with furious eyes and groaned.

"Now! Explain yourself." He threw his sword and clothes violently to the ground. "Tell me your excuse!"

Max couldn't find the words to explain and her lips trembled. Riftan paced back and forth inside the tent like a wild beast in a cage and spoke in a furious manner.

"I begged you to wait patiently for me to come back, was it that difficult of a request for you to fulfill!? What the were you thinking, coming all the way here! Don't you have any

idea how dangerous this place is? How could you, when you came here without even having a proper escort...!" Riftan screamed like a madman and clasped his forehead like he was suffering from a terrible headache. "My God, what were you going to do if a massive attack happened while you were travelling on your way here? F\*cking! Do I have to hold you upside down and shake you for you to come to your senses?"

"N-Nothing serious happened! The Knights of the Archduke and the Holy Knights... escorted the priestesses... nothing happened to me on the way here."

"sh\*t! You were just lucky, that's all!" Riftan let go of the restraints in his anger and yelled at her. "If a large-scale battle happened, no matter how many soldiers or knights there were, people would have died! Who in the world would have been there to properly protect you? Who would risk their life to protect a priestess? Just one slip and you could have died. Do you even realize how serious this situation is?!"

"Th-that... could happen to anyone!" Max, who was carried away by the intense momentum, exclaimed in agitation. "Everyone here... e-everyone is risking their life. The same goes for you Ri-riftan. If you met a ba-bad luck... you could have been injured or even I-lose your life. Yet... Riftan you're still here. I, I also..."

"You're comparing yourself to me now?" Riftan was stunned, he smirked and shed one sardonic laugh. "I've been rolling around the battlefield my whole life. I've been doing this for over ten years! How could you compare yourself to me?!"

"I... I don't intend to fight this battle with a sword! There are young men here... and other women who are also weak, like me. Everyone... is working hard, there are wounded men to be cared for."

Riftan's blood seemed to have climbed to his forehead at her retort, it appeared like he was about to explode. "Who cares if everyone in the world came here to die, work, or not! You shouldn't be here!"

"Wh-why? What makes you say that!"

"You are the daughter of a duke! A lady! Why on earth should you come to a place like this to suffer like everyone else?"

Max heard something break inside her at his ridiculous and absurd statement. She was so sick of it. She was not the noble lady he always thought she was to be, she was just an ordinary person, no different from any other person. It was so frustrating that he didn't seem to notice.

"I-I am not the daughter of a duke! I am the wife of a kn-knight! I-I am not a Croix... I'm a Calypse!"

Riftan stared down at her, speechless. As Max glared at him, she suddenly caught her breathing. She saw pain clearly emerge on his dark eyes.

“Is that the reason why you came here?” He murmured in a very low tone. “Because you are Maximillian Calypse... that you are in a place like this?”

“T-That’s not what I meant! I-I just wanted to be by Riftan’s side...”

“Forgive me for interrupting while you’re in the heat of your argument.” Suddenly a voice entered the barrack and Max turned to see Uslin Rikaido standing tall in the doorway. “There’s a crowd of spectators gathering outside. Unless you want to put on a full show for those northern barbarians, it might be better to stop now.”

Max’s face turned blue when she finally came to her senses again. Riftan glared at Uslin with chilling eyes, then went to pick up the sword that he had tossed to the ground and draped his robe over his head. He then turned to Uslin and gave orders.

“Protect her. I need to go and cool down my head for a while.”

Max ran quickly and grabbed her arm just as he was about to leave the barracks. “Ri-Riftan... please don’t be mad and listen to me. I was so worried about you... I couldn’t help but co-come here. I couldn’t take it... to wait i-idly...”

“We’ll talk later.”

He gently pulled his arm away from her. Max couldn’t hide the shock in her eyes as he drew away from her. Riftan merely looked at her with a subdued expression, then turned around and walked away.

“Right now, I might end up saying things that I will later regret. I’ll come back when I’ve cooled off, wait for the time being.”

Max gazed hollow-eyed at the entrance as the night breeze blew and floated through her listless body. Tears spilled over her cheeks in sorrow and Max quickly wiped it off with her sleeves. Uslin, who had been watching wordlessly from the side, spoke awkwardly.

“... I’ll call for Ruth and Elliot.” He ordered the soldiers to stay on guard outside, then turned to her again. “Those guys might help make you feel a little better.”

He seemed to not know what to do, looking at her with an unfamiliar expression. It felt like they were meeting each other for the first time in their lives.

Note – LF: Am I the only one who is thrilled whenever they fight? They become really expressive when they fight, I like this flavor of tea. lol

Nymeria: This kinda is my favourite chapter so far. I was laughing a lot in the beginning, the way Max tried to sneak away with Idcilla was very comical. And their argument... I like this flavor of tea too! The way she stated she's a Calypse made my heart swell with pride, but the way Riftan perceived her words broke it the following second. Poor baby, we know exactly what he's thinking ?

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## Under The Oak Tree

### Chapter 216

Sir Uslin Rikaido's attitude towards her felt a little different, but Max was too exhausted to think about it. She collapsed helplessly in the corner of the barracks and stared blankly into space. She was so out of her mind that she didn't even hear the urgent sound of footsteps running toward the tent.

Ruth jumped into Riftan's barracks and his eyes found her immediately. "Are you alright?"

He ran up to her and asked anxiously when he saw her looking so weary. Max quickly wiped her face, conscious of any tears that remained on her face.

"I-I'm fine."

Ruth exhaled deeply as he looked at her figure. "In the end you got caught. I thought you would last a few weeks at most... who would've thought that your disguise would be discovered in less than ten days."

"I also didn't expect it... But because we ran into each other at the s-spring at the wrong time..."

Max trailed off, shaking her head sadly. Ruth just sighed in resignation and his shoulders slumped. "Well, it doesn't matter anymore. This was bound to happen sooner or later. Where is Lord Calypse now?"

"He got extremely fu-furious... and left. He said he needed to cool his head..."

Ruth grimly looked at the entrance at her somber murmurs. "It would be better for him to calm down and cool off."

"... You seem to have known from the beginning that the Lady was in this place."

Uslin, who had been listening to their exchange in silence, suddenly intervened in an accusing tone. Ruth frowned and avoided his questioning gaze. Uslin's shoulder shook as if he was about to scold him endlessly, but he then shook his head and spat out coldly.

"The Commander will be lashing out at you, so I'll save my breath."

"I begged Ru-ruth... to pretend he didn't know, he had n-no choice."

"Even if that's the case, he should have put the Lady's safety above all else and informed the Commander immediately."

"If there had been a problem, of course I would have reported it sooner. But the Lady was handling everything well on her own, so I decided it wasn't worth causing a commotion and getting things out of proportion."

"What gave you the right to make that call..."

Just as Uslin was about to rebuke Ruth for his failure of good judgment, Elliot Caron and Yulysion ran into the tent. Their astonished gazes immediately landed on Max and she blushed, suddenly being conscious of her messy hair and dirty clothes. The young boy gaped at her, as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing, then quickly ran towards her with a bright smile on his face.

"" "

"When I heard the Lady was here, I didn't believe it! But you are really here! How have you been?"

The tension on Max's shoulders relaxed upon feeling reassured that someone was glad to see her. "I... I've been fine. How about you, Yulysion, are you unharmed?"

"Not a single scratch. They won't even allow me to fight in the frontlines! If there's anything they let me do on the battlefield it is to bring spears, tend to the horses, or polish armor." Yulysion exclaimed resentfully, then focused back on her again with a twinkle in his eyes. "But I was really surprised when I heard you were here! How did you get here?"

"I came with the s-support unit."

"Now that I think about it... you're wearing a priestess' robe."

Elliot, who stood blinking blankly, murmured his remarks with a bewildered expression. Max blushed and ran her fingers along her tattered robe.

"I'm working with the p-priestesses... I'm he-helping them with the chores and taking care of the wounded."

"Are you saying you've been with priestesses all this time?"

Yulysion looked at her like he was seeing a ghost and repeated her words like a parrot. Elliot turned pale at the realization of how severe the situation is.

"You traveled all the way here in the heart of the war, without a single guard or attendant?"

"We were escorted... by the Archduke's Knights and the Holy Knights..."

Even with her effort to reassure him, Elliot's face remained completely horrified. "You are so reckless! What if you were attacked or had an accident!"

Completely stunned by her antics, he groaned and grabbed his head. "If you're with the support unit, you were there when I visited Servyn Castle. Did the wizard know about this back then?"

Ruth kept his mouth shut and avoided his gaze, but that only gave him away. Elliot stared at him and made a huge fuss about it.

"Are you crazy?! Why didn't you tell me about this right away?"

"... I didn't want to cause any unnecessary commotion."

Ruth's vague and nonchalant response left the knight so speechless that he could only look at him in disbelief with his face red in anger, then he lashed out again fiercely.

"So, you're saying that the Lady was left unattended all this time because you find it troublesome? The day Lord Calypse discovers this truth, you will be digging your own grave!"

"Sir Caron! P-Please don't tell Riftan. I forced Ruth to keep my secret... I b-begged him. Ruth didn't do a-anything wrong."

Seeing her pale, exhausted face, Elliot's demeanor immediately softened. "Forgive me for raising my voice. However, I can't let this go..."

"I apologize for causing worry to everyone. But... I really am fine and didn't encounter any problem. I don't want any more a-arguments... because of me."

Unable to deny her earnest gaze and desperate pleas, Elliot relented and nodded. Ruth, who was staring at her absent-mindedly, scratched the back of his head.

“What are you going to do now? Now that Sir Calypse knows about you, you won’t be able to live among the priestesses.”

Max bit her lip anxiously. It was like he said, there was no way in Riftan would allow her to stay at the priestess’s barracks. However, she did not want to let Idcilla, who depended on her a lot, fend for herself. She rubbed her forehead, not knowing what to do.

Just when Max was fighting her dilemma, her stomach rumbled loudly. Her entire face turned red, and she raised her head, wondering if the men had heard it too. Each of them, with senses as keen as animals, gazed at her with wide eyes. Muttering under her breath, she tried to defend herself,

“I-I haven’t had dinner yet...”

“I’ll go prepare and bring food right away!” Yulysion exclaimed and rushed out of the barracks.

Elliot went and pulled a chair from the table and gestured for her to come and sit. “You must be exhausted caring for the injured all day. Sit down, take a break. Is there anything else you need?”

“I would like water to w-wash...”

Immediately understanding her hesitant words, Elliot instructed the soldiers standing outside to bring a tub full of water. After a short while, clean towels, soap, and a large basin of cold water were brought in. It felt like years since she received such services, and she fidgeted awkwardly at the suddenness of it all. However, the sparkling clean water was just too tempting. As the knights stood guard at the entrance, Max went behind the partition and quickly stripped off her clothes. She hadn’t washed herself for almost a week and she couldn’t pass up this opportunity.

Looking towards the entrance from behind the partition to make sure she was really alone, Max dipped a clean towel with the water and immediately began to cleanse her body. She tried to conserve as much water as she could, but after cleaning her body three times, the water level in the basin only had half left. With the remaining water, Max washed her hair, but due to her thick curls, there was not enough water to wash off all the soap. She felt a bit uncomfortable, but the fresh, clean scent of the soap made her feel alive again. Max folded her tattered clothes and set them aside. She found one of Riftan’s clean robes and put it on. His tunic reached his thighs, but when she wore it, it reached down to her calves. She tied a belt around her waist and poked her head out from the doorway.

"I'm a-all... done."

"I've prepared you a meal. If perhaps it is not enough, please let me know."

Elliot, who was waiting patiently by the entrance, handed her a large tray filled with a variety of meats, stew, bread, and wine. Max's eyes widened at the feast in front of her and she stared at him dumbfounded.

"T-This is more than enough. By the way... Riftan..."

"The Commander went up the castle fortress. Don't worry, he will be back soon."

Max accepted the tray with a sullen expression. She was starving, but when she remembered the anger on Riftan's face, her mouth dried up and she felt like she was chewing sand. Setting the tray on the table, Max slowly stuffed bread into her mouth. She managed to empty about half of the tray before drowsiness began to settle. She drank the rest of the wine and went to Riftan's bed, staring at the tent's entrance. It was already late at night, but Riftan still showed no signs of returning.

They finally reunited after months of being apart, but he had to be so angry that he didn't even want to be by her side. Max's heart pounded when she recalled the pained look on his eyes. She knew he would be furious, but she never dreamed that he would be so distraught over it. She hugged her knees and buried her face in the middle. Perhaps she should have really waited for him at the monastery, but she really couldn't. No matter the risks, she wanted to be with him. She could endure any amount of hardship and suffering if it could bring them together.

She told herself that when he came back, she would tell him. For her, being by his side was more important than anything else, as it was because of him that she had become Maximillian Calypse. And living as Maximillian Calypse made her feel more alive than ever. She sat on the bed, waiting for him, but she couldn't fight the built-up fatigue and eventually fell asleep sometime during the night.

She woke up in a drowsy state. Feeling a sturdy forearm wrapped around her, she opened her eyes. In the soft light of dawn, she saw Riftan's large, strong body at her side. She looked at his sleeping face in astonishment. Max could see that he had lost weight. His cheeks had hollowed a bit, and faint dark circles shaded his under-eye area. Max's heart clenched at the sight. Even though he was furious with her, he still carefully crawled into bed next to her, worried she would wake up.

Max pushed his bangs that had grown longer with a careful touch, exposing his forehead. With his forehead not wrinkled together in his sleep, he looked three to four years younger.

Unable to contain the temptation, Max leaned in and placed a soft, light kiss on his lips. When he didn't open his eyes, she grew bolder. She traced her finger along the strong

line of his jaw and leaned in for a longer kiss. His lips were incredibly warm and velvety. It was hard to believe that something so soft and velvety could be found in a man whose entire body was as hard as iron. Max continued to touch his lips gently when suddenly, Riftan grabbed her wrist.

“That tickles.”

Max’s shoulders huddled in embarrassment, her face flushing red. “I-I’m sorry. Did I...wake you up?”

“I couldn’t sleep for a moment.” He slowly opened his eyes and looked at her with a clear gaze. “I still can’t believe you’re really here.”

Max felt her heart drop at his blunt tone, and she sank deep into his arms as if she was burying herself into him. “I-I’m s-sorry for following you here. Please don’t be mad at me.”

Riftan’s body stiffened, and he embraced her tightly. The feeling of his strong arms hugging her washed over her like a tidal wave of comforting warmth. Max buried her face against his collarbone and took a deep breath. As his unique masculine scent filled her lungs, she felt warm, like a lost person who had finally come home after wandering the world for years.

“I really... missed you. That’s why I came, I wanted to see you. It w-wasn’t difficult at all coming here.”

“it, don’t even think about overlooking this whole situation just like that.”

He took the back of her head with his big hand and pulled her even closer. Max could feel her heart beating like a drum, sending pulses throughout her body. She could also feel the rhythm of Riftan’s pulse on the back of her neck. He ran his fingers through her hair, then wrapped his arms around the back of her neck, looking down at her anxiously.

“I have no idea what I’m going to do with you. it, if I could, I would have put off this war and take you back to Anatol right now. I really want to.”

His words sounded so tempting that Max swallowed dry. However, she knew she couldn’t place such expectations and burdens on him.

“I-I don’t want to stand in your way. I have no such thoughts. I-I just... wanted to be close to you. And if possible... I also wanted to contribute.”

Note – LF: I really like this chapter. The knights are realizing further that Max is really a selfless woman. And it was so funny how Ruth was ganged up on hahaha. Lastly, it’s so sweet how Riftan still hugged her to sleep even if he was angry, he must miss her a lot too.

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## Under The Oak Tree

### Chapter 217

“But I can’t bear the thought of you being in a place like this even for a moment!”

Riftan pulled her away from his chest and held her at arm’s length, making her sit straight up. His broad, tensed shoulders gleaming pale blue in the dim glow of dawn. His eyes were shaded under his hair as he looked down at Max, roughly sweeping his eyelids.

“I had no intention of having you in this situation when I brought you along with me from Anatol.”

“Riftan... I really don’t mind this situation. We are h-husband and wife. I also... want to help you in any way. I may be w-weak, but... I know how to c-cure, and I am capable of casting healing magic. My body is also much healthier than before. The journey of coming all the way here... I withstood it well, didn’t I? I am not that w-weak.”

Despite her profound persuasions, the skepticism on Riftan’s face didn’t fade away. Max leaned in an attempt to burrow in Riftan’s arms, but hesitated when she thought that he might push her away. Then, Riftan let out a deep breath that he was holding in and drew her closer to him. Max moaned as she felt his thick tongue press for entrance and pushed into her mouth. Her b\*\*\*\*\*s were pressed tightly against his sturdy chest as his large arms secured her body like the roots of a tree.

She chased her breath, like a fish that was caught in a net. He passionately devoured her lips, his high, perfectly straight nose pressed eagerly against hers and his rough, stubbled jaw brushing over her delicate chin. As she felt his hot, damp tongue covetingly explore the roof of her mouth and swipe the inside of her cheeks, she shuddered in pleasure. The kiss was so ravenous that it felt like he would swallow her.

“Maxi...”

Riftan called her name in a low, heated voice, as he gently laid her down on the bed. His hot fingers trailed a path between her legs, making her shiver and grab his forearm. Riftan's black eyes burned so intensely that she could have easily thought that he hated her. He stroked her passionately but at one point, as if all his patience was lost, he used his body to crushingly grind her underneath him. Dizzying heat spread throughout her body, pulling her out of her right mind with the weight of his body moving above her.

Max greedily trailed her eyes over the sturdy, smooth figure of her husband, a gesture that meant no less than desperately asking him to take her. Beads of sweat started to form on her skin and blood rushed to her fingertips. The yearning for him seemed to burn the insides of her body. She ran her hands incessantly against his back as an invite, drawing an e\*\*\*\*c moan from Riftan lips to echo in her ears. The way she was lying down with him like this was so good that she could die.

However, the passionate heat engulfing them was snuffed out by the loud sound of approaching footsteps.

“Commander! They’re calling to assemble!”

Someone exclaimed from outside the quarters. Riftan slammed his face against the bed and spat out frustrated profanities.

“, such a timing... at this moment...” He closed his eyes tightly and temperamentally yelled back. “I’ll be there soon.”

Max pulled down her clothes that had been rolled up. Riftan looked at her with the eyes still burning for passion, then forced himself to stand up. She could see how the muscles on his back were taut, showing his distress from the desire that he hadn’t been able to satisfy.

He capriciously swept the ruffled hair on the back of his head and pulled out a new tunic, pulling it over his head. Then, he washed his face and wore his armor in a blink of an eye. Max was wrapped in a blanket as she sat down to watch him transform instantly to an ingenious knight. While he was strapping his sword around his waist, he finally looked back at her with poignant eyes.

“I’ll be back soon, so don’t go anywhere and stay here.”

“B-but I also have work to do...”

””” ”

Max immediately shut her mouth. He warned her in a tone similar to that of a growling wild dog.

“I can’t have you wandering alone in a place full of vulgar brutes. Don’t even think about stepping out of this tent.”

He shot her one last daunting look as if warning her that he would not tolerate it if she disobeyed him again, then he went out of the tent. She was too late when she hurriedly adjusted her clothing and attempted to go after him, as she was blocked by a soldier guarding the entrance.

“My apologies. Sir Calypse left specific instructions not to let the Lady leave the tent.”

She looked up at him with uneasy eyes. Idcilla must be worrying about her, not to mention, it would arouse the priestesses’ suspicions if she wasn’t back immediately. Max grew more restless as she looked at the sky that grew brighter every moment.

“J-just for a moment... I must go to the infirmary, I will come back.”

“We must honor Sir Calypse’s orders above all.”

The soldier did not even budge. Max bit her lip as she looked up at the man and went back in. She felt furious with the coercive treatment Riftan was giving her, but she couldn’t despise him for it because she knew that he was only trying to protect her. She plopped down helplessly on the bed as she waited for him to return. However, as she had never been idle for the past few weeks, having gotten used to working from dawn until dusk, she grew increasingly anxious.

Max wandered around the tent, touching the things he had arranged. His barrack was sparsely decorated, but very spacious and comfortable. An armor and a sword stand were placed next to the bed lined with tapestry, along with several spears and shields. A table with dozens of chairs was set up near the entrance, it was so long that it could easily accommodate thirty people.

In the rhombic ceiling, a round hole was made instead of a window, and a long rope connected to the canopy hung to the floor so that it could be closed at any time. Max tugged on the rope like a curious cat, then moved onto something else. She leisurely looked around the barracks, then she felt the surroundings of the tent grow increasingly noisy. Max jumped up from her seat and went to the entrance, pushing away the flap that covered it. Then, from a distance, she saw a woman engaged in an argument with Riftan. Max’s eyes widened as she recognized her face.

“A-Agnes?”

They both turned their heads towards her at the same time when they heard her voice.

“Maximillian!” The princess ran towards her before Riftan could even open his mouth to speak. “When I heard about it from the knights, I thought that there was no way, it couldn’t be. But it’s true! It has been a while. How have you been all this time?”

Max stared wide-eyed at the unexpectedly warm welcome. The princess continued to greet her cheerfully and held her hands despite Max being in stupor. "Coming all this way must have been very difficult. And yet, these brutes nagged you instead of welcoming you, didn't they?"

Unable to refute the princess's statement, Max turned and shot Riftan a nasty look, who frowned and clenched his jaw at the accusation.

"Don't even think about spewing nonsense to my wife."

"Nonsense you say! What makes you say that?" The princess snorted at him. "I am proposing a rational offer. Besides, it's the lady's decision that will matter, not the lord's decision."

Max couldn't understand what was going on, and out of nowhere, Ruth appeared to prevent the two from embarking on another argument.

"Both of you, stop it and calm down. You're making the Lady uncomfortable."

Riftan shot Ruth a b\*\*\*\*y look before focusing on Max. She had no idea what they were talking about, and seeing the concern on her face, her husband roughly swept his face and reluctantly headed towards his barrack.

"Fine. Let's talk inside."

"Oh heavens, you are so benevolent."

Agnes said, her tone dripping with thick sarcasm. Max followed them with her expression still confused. Seeing the disorientation spreading across her face, the Princess gave her an apologetic smile.

"I apologize for being so sudden. We were discussing the Lady's situation and someone got so riled up that he lost his temper. This man here had to be stubborn."

"M-my... situation?" Max looked anxiously back and forth between Agnes and Riftan.

Clearly annoyed by the state of events, he screamed in frustration. "What happens to my wife is my business. It means that the Princess has no right to interfere."

"I am the commander of Whedon's forces. Since the Lady is a subject of Whedon, then of course I have the right to interfere!"

"She is not a wizard dispatched by Whedon!"

"That is why I am going to appoint her to that position now!"

“W-wait a minute!” Max quickly intervened before the two of them went at each other again. “What... I don’t quite understand what you’re talking about.”

Deciding that it would be too difficult to get a proper explanation from them, Ruth, who was standing at the sides, sighed and explained it himself. “It’s actually quite simple. The lady is here as a priestess from Livadon who joined the support unit. However, you can no longer claim that identity. With that said, it would be better for the lady to be introduced formally as an official wizard from Whedon.”

“An o-official wizard?”

“You have nothing to worry about. It’s only as a nominal introduction. The lady can go about living her life as she normally would.”

The Princess added quickly when she saw Max get flustered at the prospect, but she remained skeptical of the proposition.

“I-if everything stays the same... d-do we really have to go through a cumbersome process? I can stay with the priestesses like I’ve been doing...”

“Do you really think I’m going to let you stay there?” Riftan fiercely said between his clenched teeth. “it! The fact that you have been living all this time in that place makes me want to flip it upside down! Are you kidding me right now?”

“... And because of that, the Lady cannot stay with the priestesses.” It seems that Ruth has suffered quite a ton from Riftan, as he mumbled the words and his shoulders drooped wearily. “Currently, the lady’s position is very ambiguous. As the identity of being a priestess could no longer work, the two of them are now arguing over the option of granting the lady an identity that would make her a wizard from Whedon.”

“Once again, nothing will change regarding your daily duties. You will still tend the wounded, but as a Whedon healer, and not a priestess of the Great Temple of Livadon.” Agnes explained in a softer tone. “This may seem insignificant but ranks in the barracks are very distinguished. Soldiers from Livadon, Whedon, Osyria, and Balto are now gathered here in Ethylene. There is no central commanding system, and it becomes confusing because there’s no unity. If you do not have a clear affiliation, the lady may not be able to receive protection in case of any unfortunate event. You have been under the protection of the knights deployed by the great temple all this time, right?”

Max nodded.

“From now on, you must be under the protection of the soldiers and knights of Whedon.”

“I will protect my wife!” Riftan yelled out the words as if his patience was about to reach its limits.

“So stop this unnecessary interference.” He spat vehemently.

“Does the lord think he will be by his wife’s side all the time? What are you going to do if you are out on the battlefield?”

Agnes crossed her arms over her chest and cynically sneered at him. “Are you going to lock her up in your barracks? Stop being so stubborn! We have a war going on. We don’t need a Lady here. If Maximillian stays here as the wife of Riftan Calypse and not a wizard, both of you will become a laughingstock to everybody.”

“I don’t give a what everyone else says. I’ll take care of everything. There’s no reason to put any burden on my wife!

“But I... want to bear that burden w-with you.” Max intervened urgently. “I don’t want to be an extra l-load. I’ll do... as the princess suggests.”

Riftan’s jaw clenched. His barely masked emotions from before were now completely released, she could feel chills from the aura he’s emanating but she couldn’t back down.

“Back in Calypse Castle... I also worked as a healer. It’s going to be no d-different from that. I will never overdo it... so p-please consider and don’t just oppose. I can do really well.”

Seeing the determination in her eyes, Riftan’s entire face hardened, and his eyes darkened.

“Fine. Do what you want.” He spat in a voice of ice. “No matter how much I disagree, you’ll still do it anyway. It would be better to have a person in your sight in the first place, than be stabbed in the back again.”

Max recoiled, her shoulders hunching from his pricking tone. He stared at her for a moment, then turned away. “I will assign an escort for you right away. Don’t even attempt to turn that down.”

When Riftan walked away, Max hurriedly tried to pursue him, but Princess Agnes dissuaded her. “Let it go until his head cools down. He’s ill-tempered, but he’s a rational person. When his mind clears, he’ll realize that what we’re doing is for the best.”

“B-but...”

“Riftan is irrationally overprotective when it comes to the lady. He’s just like a six-year-old kid storming off.” The Princess had a displeased expression on her face. “If Maximillian is satisfied with being treated like that, then it doesn’t matter. Otherwise, it is good to make sure that he understands that you have your own will too.”

Note – LF: In another episode of “Riftan deprived of snusnu”. He might be extra hot-tempered ‘cause of that lol. Anyway, completely stanning Agnes here.

Nymeria: YOU GO AGNES! You tell both of them! She really has to make him understand that! We agree that what she did was reckless, but she’s handling it well and as a wizard she has a lot to offer. She can totally manage!

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## Under The Oak Tree

### Chapter 218

For some reason, the princess’s words felt like a scolding to Max. At the same time, she felt more confidence on her shoulders, like the words were also meant to support her. Agnes gave her shoulders a tap and smiled coyly.

“Anyway, it turned out well. Right now, there are twenty-two wizards here. We are swamped with tasks to put up barriers everywhere, creating magic formulas in preparation for attacks, and crafting magic tools. It’s a waste not to gain another newbie wizard.”

“Didn’t Sir Calypse make it clear that he doesn’t want his wife to be burdened?”

Ruth glared at the Princess as if he couldn’t believe what she was suggesting to Max, who looked at Ruth, unable to understand why he was against the idea. Wasn’t he the one who insisted that she learn magic so that he could unload some of his burdens on her? The wizard said his words so fluently as if he didn’t recall any of those times.

“Sir Calypse won’t sit still if he finds out. It’s hard enough to explain this to the other wizards, so just having her work in the infirmary as a healer is enough.”

“You’re making it sound like an awful plot!” Agnes glared at him and screamed, then turned to Max and took her hands. “I won’t ask much of you. I will never forget your graceful favor if you come to help me at times with making magic formulas.”

“I-if I can help... o-of course I will.”

Agnes looked positively excited by her answer. When she saw the Princess's face light up, Max suddenly remembered the times when she had to help Ruth with his magic formulas from morning to night. She started to get a little worried that maybe she responded too hastily, but Agnes just pulled her towards the entrance.

"Well then, let's go to my barrack right away. The lady needs a change of clothes." At the mention of her looks, Max swept over Riftan's robe, which was too loose for her. "Before that, I must stop by the p-priestesses' barracks... I need to collect my belongings."

"I'll take care of that."

Ruth, who has been looking for a way to escape the Princess, quickly seized the opportunity. He turned toward the barracks that housed the priestesses and was about to run, when Max stopped him.

"W-what are you going to tell priestesses? I suddenly disappeared... they must think it's suspicious..."

"The lady wore a robe all this time. Even if the lady appears before them under the title of Wizard of Whedon, no one will suspect anything."

Max was taken aback by how Ruth was thinking it so simplistically. "We've been working and traveling together for w-weeks, so of course some of them may have seen my face... m-moreover, my way of speaking... my voice, they will recognize it."

Ruth threw his head back, looked up at the ceiling, and let out an annoyed groan. "Alright. I'll give them a proper explanation."

"That I was pretending to be a priestess... won't it cause a big problem?"

"It's not like the lady hid her identity to be a spy, you simply volunteered to nurse the wounded. There is no reason for this to become a problem. However, there are many unsavory people who like to misrepresent the facts and spread malicious rumors, so I would like to limit the number of people who know about this." Ruth shook his head and sighed. "Fortunately, there are over 15,000 people here. If a newbie wizard from Whedon suddenly appears out of nowhere, most won't even notice. Don't worry too much."

"" "

He patted her shoulder reassuringly and left. The princess took Max directly to her barrack and brought out several of her own outfits for her to try on. She tried on a few outfits that would neither be drab or difficult to move in, but the Princesses' pants were too long for her and too tight for her hips that in the slightest movement, it might rip. She

became infinitely depressed, feeling like a duck with her short legs and wide hips. Her shoulders drooped as she looked at the princess' slender deer-like figure with envy.

Agnes, a little uncomfortable, handed her a dress this time. "They may be a bit uncomfortable compared to wearing pants but this dress was made to cater for unrestrained movements, so you won't have a problem moving around."

It was a simple navy blue dress that came down to her ankles and provided good coverage. Max finished her look by tying the dagger that Riftan gave him around her waist and circling subtly. Since she had only been wearing swaddled robes for a while, she felt incredibly uncomfortable in her new outfit, like attending a ball.

"This will represent your affiliation with Whedon. Although Riftan said he will give you an escort, you should carry this around with you just in case." With a firm expression, Agnes gave her a small wooden pin with Wedon's crest carved into it. "As I told you before, men from Whedon, Livadon, Osyra and Balto have all congregated in Ethylene. Everyone wants to do things their way, so there may be conflicts here and there."

"Co-conflicts...?"

"What else. Duels." Agnes explained as if she was fed up with the subject. "Especially with the Remdragon Knights, who have gained recognition as the strongest knights in the world in recent years. They are always being thrown into disputes. If you defeat a Remdragon Knight in a duel, you will be immediately recognized as a first-class knight. And because duels are forbidden, everyone squirms with impatience."

"Even during a war...you're saying they're still trying to fight with each other?"

"What a bunch of idiots, right?" The princess snorted bitterly. "Although duels are strictly forbidden, it's hard to control because there's no central command system properly established. If I would put it honestly, the Allied Forces right now could be compared to an unstable magic tool that could explode at any time. With Sejour Aren of Livadon, Riftan Calypse of Whedon, Quahel Leon of Osyria, and even Phil Aron, the deputy commander and strongest knight in the north... with all these strong figures gathered in one place, isn't the current state comparable to mixing oil and water?"

Agnes frowned in frustration. "Don't even get me started with the knights and soldiers following these men. This whole coalition is a huge mess."

Max felt the blood drain from her face at the ugly truth that was buried beneath all the glory and glamor of these famous men. As if the army of trolls weren't a big enough problem, now she learned that conflicts existed.

Seeing her face pale, Agnes added quickly. "Don't make that face. There will be people who will use the fact that you are Riftan Calypse's wife as an excuse to start a fight. I just wanted you to be extra vigilant, I didn't mean to worry you."

“I’ll be...c-careful.”

The princess gave her a soft smile and led her outside. Agnes showed her around the barracks belonging to Whedon’s forces. Max took note of where the wizards were residing, and where the Remdragon Knights stayed, as well as the areas she must refrain from entering, then immediately made her way to the infirmary.

Max simply wandered out of the infirmary aimlessly; knowing how awkward this was going to be and wondering how she was going to approach it. Just as she struggled with her thoughts and stood idly, Idcilla saw her and ran towards her.

“Madam, are you alright? Did he reprimand you?” Idcilla questioned anxiously as she hurriedly led Max to the back of the tent.

“I’m f-fine. But from now on... I don’t think it would be possible for me to disguise myself as a priestess.”

Idcilla looked at Max’s new clothes and sighed. “I expected that when I saw his face yesterday. Lord Calypse is truly formidable. The look in his eyes really terrified me that I couldn’t move.”

“It’s because of m-me... he’s shocked, that’s why he acted like that. Normally... he isn’t like that.”

Max muttered in defense of her husband, but belatedly recalled how she also thought he looked like a lion who walked straight out of. Idcilla looked at her with interest, seeing Max’s fiery eyes.

“Seeing how he has quickly forgiven the lady, he seems more generous than he appears to be. A little while ago, the wizard came and explained that the lady will now work here as a healer from Whedon.”

“Wasn’t everyone... surprised?”

“Most were, but some seemed to have gotten wind of it.”

Max’s eyes widened and Idcilla explained with a smile. “Sister Nora and Sister Karen have known long before. They said that they have seen and recognized your face at the monastery.”

“How about you, Idcilla... did they discover your identity?”

She shook her head. “They have their suspicions, but I’ve been avoiding them.”

“How about r-revealing your identity as well, Idcilla? I can no longer stay in... the priestess’ barracks. If it’s alright with you, Idcilla, I can ask R-Riftan...”

"I'm alright. I want to continue my work here until the end." Idcilla interrupted her. "After joining this support unit, I have realized that I am not as useful as I thought I was. Now I know how protected and pampered my life has been."

A bitter smile spread on Idcilla's lips. "I do not wish to receive the privilege of a noble status in places like this. I will continue working as a priestess here until this end. Because that's what I can do to contribute."

"B-But...I don't feel comfortable... leaving you here alone."

"Don't worry about me. Selena is here with me so there won't be any problem. All I ask is that you help me get information about my older brother." Suddenly, Idcilla's face clouded. "I still haven't found anything apart from him being in the frontlines."

"I understand. I will surely... look into it."

Max promised in a firm voice. She felt guilty that she was now reunited with her husband, while Idcilla still lived every day with concern for her brother.

"Come on then, let's get to work. The new patients who arrived yesterday are not doing so well."

Idcilla took a deep breath and led Max inside. At first, the priestesses felt noticeably more uncomfortable around her, but when they started working together again, things returned to normal. Plus, there were so many things to do that Max didn't even have time to worry about her discovered identity.

She naturally went back to her old routine of inspecting wounds and applying healing magic to some. As the hours passed everyone forgot that she was a noble lady who came disguised as a priestess. Princess Agnes's words rang true, a battlefield is no place for a noble woman. The only thing that mattered in the battlefield is whether you could fight or work in support, and she fell in the latter category.

"M'lady, you must come back to the barracks now."

Max was in the middle of refilling the emergency medicines with mixed herbs, when Yulysion entered the tent. The young man looked uncomfortable seeing the wounded lying on the bed, and urged her on again.

"Lord Calypse has instructed me to bring you back before sunset."

"B-But I still have to finish..."

"I'll make the rest of the medicines." Selena, who was gathering herbs nearby, quickly took over. "Leave it to me and go back."

Feeling like she was being pushed, Max had no choice but to leave the infirmary. Yulysion took the place by her side and proudly took his strides.

“By Lord Calypse’s orders, I am once again in charge of protecting the Lady. I will always be by your side from now on.”

“I-I’m sorry for the inconvenience.”

“What are you talking about?!” The young knight beat his chest proudly and smiled cheerfully at her. “It’s an honor for a night to serve the lady! I am absolutely thrilled that Lord Calypse considered me capable and entrusted the Lady to me. I will risk my life to protect you whatever happens.”

Max looked at Yulysion, who seemed to have grown taller and more manly in just a few months and he had also become incredibly dignified. A smile spread on her face: the teenage boy, always ready to be a hero, was incredibly cute in her eyes.

“Th-Thank you... for your kind words.”

“Please listen to me, this is serious.” Yulysion looked at her, apparently a bit dissatisfied with her reaction. “When this war is over, I will be officially ordained as a knight. After the ceremony, I will challenge Sir Nirta to a duel and take his place as Lord Calypse’s second in command. So please don’t take my words lightly at once.”

“M-my... apologies.”

He narrowed his eyes at Max, as if trying to determine if she is sincere with her words. Then he smiled again with that same youthful tone of innocence. “Because it is the Lady, I will forgive you.”

Max had to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from bursting out laughing at Yulysion’s sulky tone as he escorted her back to Riftan’s tent with the courtesy of a true gentleman. He even prepared a magnificent dinner for her, with trays full of all kinds of luxurious dishes. She washed her hands thoroughly and sat down in front of the table.

“When is Ri-Riftan coming back?”

“Lord Calypse is in a strategy meeting right now. It will probably end late.”

Note – LF: Yuri is so CUTE

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## Under The Oak Tree

### Chapter 219

Max felt dejected at Yulysion's words, she wondered if perhaps those were only excuses so Riftan could avoid her. Whenever he was angry at her, that was always his course of action, keeping away from her. Max ate her dinner with a worried expression, then went to rest.

As if her suspicions were proven right, Riftan did not return even until the night was deep. Max forced herself to stay awake, but the overwhelming fatigue engulfed her, and she eventually fell asleep. The next day when she woke up, she was alone as she had expected. She hurriedly got up from bed to wash her face and fix her hair. When she was done wearing her outfit and was just about to head outside, Yulysion, who came to wake her up, greeted her.

"Good morning, m'lady!"

The young man placed a plateful of breakfast on the table accompanied with his usual cheerful smile. Max asked him, doing her best to appear calm and nonchalant.

"Last night... Riftan did not return. Did the meeting drag on a-all night?"

"The meeting concluded at dawn. I stood guard in front of the tent and when I saw Sir Calypse return, I went back to my barracks." Yulysion replied while tilting his head. "Perhaps the lady appeared so tired that the Lord did not bother waking you up."

What Max understood from that was that he was careful not to make any sound when he returned and quietly left as well in an effort to avoid her. And she was probably too exhausted from using magic to notice. Max frowned, looking annoyed.

"May I ask...where he is now?"

"He went to the front of the castle gates to oversee the defenses. Does the lady have any urgent matters?"

Max licked her lips and shook her head weakly. In truth, she didn't know what to tell him. She already told him everything she had to say. Just as the princess said, there was no other choice anyway but to let his head cool and settle. Max sighed in resignation.

However, four days had passed, and Max still hadn't managed to see the man's shadow. Rather than feeling dejected, Max began to feel angry. When she thought of her cowardly husband, who snuck into the barracks in the dead of night, then slipped away before she woke up to avoid her, she became furious. No matter how much she tried to program herself not to fall asleep, she was so exhausted that eventually she would succumb to her fatigue. On the other hand, Riftan seemed not to know the definition of exhaustion. For him to wait for Max to fall asleep and leave before dawn when she wakes up, the man only slept a few hours at best.

Agitated, Max brushed her hair out of her face and angrily tossed the herbs into the boiling pot. It made her even more upset that he stopped by every night to check on her but wouldn't even show her his face. As she glared angrily at the herbs boiling in the cauldron, Idcilla, who was coming in with firewood, tilted her head.

"What is it? Is there something wrong with the medicine?"

Max quickly wiped the emotions out of her face. "N-No. I was just...for a moment I was lost in my thoughts."

"Are you worried about your husband leaving for the frontlines again?"

Max did not confirm nor deny her question, her face turning into an ambiguous expression. Then, Idcilla comforted her as if she knew what she was feeling.

"They say that an all-out battle won't happen for now, so don't worry too much."

"" "

"... I'm sorry. Idcilla, you must... have more things on your mind than I do..."

"There's no person who wouldn't worry about their family. For now, it's enough for me to know that he's doing well."

Idcilla said courageously. Not long ago, she was able to get information about Sir Elbarto Calima through Elliot and Idcilla's face noticeably lit up.

"Soon... the kn-knights guarding the frontlines will change... you'll be able to see your brother."

"I will never go to meet him." Idcilla firmly shook her head and vowed in resolution as she threw branches into the fire. "Elba may be a great knight, but he's not invincible like the Lady's husband. He must be pushing himself to his limits because of his arm injury. I don't intend to burden him and make him worry about me. I'll go and greet him when the war is over instead."

Max felt embarrassed after hearing how mature Idcilla sounded. She felt ashamed that she was frustrated and angry for not seeing Riftan's face for only a number of days. And now, she began to feel anxious that perhaps her presence here added undue burdens to Riftan. Maybe he was too stressed, bearing the brunt of this war, taking care of the lives of his men, and now her.

"Ah there it is."

Max snapped out of deep thoughts when someone called out to her. He turned and saw Ruth trudging out of the trees.

"What do you need from...h-here?"

"I've been working on magic formulas all night to break Sir Nirta's curse, but to no avail. He must be in excruciating pain, so I came here to get him some painkillers."

He massaged his stiff neck and yawned loudly, then flopped down to sit on a tree stump. Max's face hardened with concern.

"I-isn't that serious?"

"It's not a life and death situation." Then, Ruth continued to speak with a sigh.

"However, because of the inflammation his wound is getting worse. The pain also seems to be turning severe."

"Shouldn't he be treated with medicines... aside from healing m-magic?"

"He's taking regular medicines. However, it's not making any big difference" Ruth ruffled his hair in frustration. "But this curse is causing a much more serious problem. It is reducing the morale of the allied forces. Everyone is worried that if they fight the monsters, they will end up in the same situation as Sir Nirta. Even His Grace, Grand Duke Aren, suggested that it would be better to postpone the war until we find a way to break the curse."

"I also... think it's better to wait... until we discover a w-way to break the curse. If... the monsters cast more of such curses, even the Remdragon Knights... w-won't have the guarantee of being unscathed."

"I understand where you are coming from. However, if we let this go on for longer, it will put us at a disadvantage. Our enemy's regeneration powers are infinite, while ours is not. There's internal division already ensuing. It's better for us to attack before the alliance weakens." Ruth shrugged and took a deep breath with his serious words. "Don't worry, ignore my arguments. For now, it's more likely that only small confrontations might continue to arise. What's making me worry is for us to end up staying here until winter."

Max and Idcilla, who was sitting silently in a corner, had clouded expressions. Sensing the heavy atmosphere he created, Ruth quickly tried to change the subject.

“I’ve talked too much. Anyway, I have to hurry and bring Sir Nirta his medicine before he pulls all my hair out. I heard that you have very effective painkillers, can you give some to me?”

“Of course. About that... is it a-alright if I take a look at Sir Nirta’s injury?”

“The Lady?” Ruth looked at her with skeptical eyes.

Max felt a bit furious about how he reacted. “I’ve studied a lot all th-this time! I learned so m-many skills from a new wizard who came to Anatol, things that even Ruth doesn’t know about. Who knows, maybe it will work better instead of magic...”

“Well, there is nothing wrong with trying.”

Ruth shrugged with an arrogant smirk. Max felt disrespected with his attitude, but left Idcilla to tend to the boiling herbs in the cauldron and took with her medicine and tools for treatment. As she came out of the camp, Yulysion, who was carving wood with a dagger, immediately followed her.

“M’lady! Where are you going?”

“To Sir Nirta... I’ll bring him some medicine.”

Yulysion turned to look at Ruth. “Hasn’t he overcome the curse?”

Ruth could only shake his head weakly and they proceeded to walk to their destination in a gloomy atmosphere. She felt the gazes of other soldiers follow her, but because Ruth and Yulysion were with her, no one approached them. Max felt secure and followed behind Ruth at a slow pace. After going through the densely set up barrack tents, they finally reached the Remdragon Knight’s barracks. Ruth was first to go in. Then, they heard a hoarse voice exclaiming.

“You’re finally here, you sure took your time! I thought you were going to wait until I died before coming back!”

As she entered and followed after Ruth, Max’s eyes widened. Hebaron appeared quite restless lying on the bed with thick bandages wrapped around the upper part of his muscular body. She was quite taken aback by how animated the supposed wounded knight was, and when Hebaron finally saw her, he broke out into a bright smile.

“Now who do we have here? I heard you were here, but now that I’m seeing your face, I really am impressed. I must say, your courage is truly formidable.”

“I heard you were h-hurt. How is your...injury?”

As Max approached his bed, the knight's thick eyebrows furrowed. “No one here cares about my pride! Did you really have to tell the lady that the invincible Sir Nirta was injured?”

“The pride you have left wouldn't even amount to a handful of dust.” Ruth clicked his tongue and responded with his usual cynical sarcasm. “Sir Nirta is known to everyone in the barracks as the ‘Knight Cursed by a Monster’. There is not a single person who does not know the tragedy that has happened to you.”

“B\*\*\*\*y!”

Max's shoulders flinched at the harsh outburst. He clutched his scarlet, curly hair like he was really furious.

“I'm more disgraceful than an idiot!”

Max flinched at the profanity thrown around him as she continued to watch their exchange of words.

“If you want to restore your honor, then please cooperate obediently during treatment. Every time you start screaming, I lose concentration and have to start all over again.”

Ruth said through clenched teeth, as Hebaron stared daggers at him as if he was deeply offended. Max glanced at them and then began to prepare the herbs and tools she had brought.

“I wish to examine your i-injury. The bandages... may I take them out?”

Ruth and Yulysion helped Hebaron to sit up and quickly undid the bandages. Seeing the large, ripped flesh, Max swallowed the groan coming up her throat. The deep wound extended from his shoulder to his chest. It was red and swollen, like a red centipede crawling up his body. As Ruth said, the skin was reddened from inflammation, and she could see dark blue silky fibers sticking out of the wound, resembling the legs of insects.

“H-how did you get such a wound...”

“A whip.” Hebaron answered in a slurred voice. “A lizardman with black scales hit me with a whip. It was a strange monster.”

“Lizardmen possess the highest intelligence among dragon subspecies. It is not uncommon for them to know how to cast high-level magic. The one Sir Nirta faced was probably the best of the best.”

“Makes it worse.” Hebaron commented.

Max didn't know what to do with the wound. After careful thought, she gently applied the salve she brought with her. Among the pain medicines that she had learned how to make from Medrick, it was the most effective one she knew for alleviating inflammation. Fortunately, after about ten minutes of observation, Hebaron's face became noticeably brighter.

"Woah, this is amazing. I feel like I can go out and fight right now."

"The pain went away by n-numbing the feeling... it doesn't actually heal the wound. It's just numbing the pain... you must never force yourself."

Max warned him in the strictest voice she could manage, then bandaged the wound with new strips of cloth. She then burned some herbs, removed the ashes, and placed it in a cloth pouch.

"Please apply this to the wound... for about 20 minutes. Because Sir Nirta's nerves are numb from the pain reliever, be c-careful not to burn his skin."

After carefully testing the temperature, Max handed the small bag to Ruth, who eyed it warily before applying it to Hebaron's shoulder. The knight grunted when the hot compress made contact with his wound, but soon relaxed and fell asleep. Ruth muttered that he must have been very tired from the pain and hadn't been able to sleep well for weeks.

"Thank you for your help. Now that he's quiet, I can focus on breaking this curse."

"It's just a temporary relief for the p-pain and i-inflammation."

"That's more than enough. Please leave the rest to me. I'll break the monster's curse as soon as I can."

Ruth's tone sounded a bit muddy, so Max gave him an encouraging smile and then quietly packed up and went out of the tent.

Time passed surprisingly fast, the sky was already a faint purple color. Before returning to Riftan's tent, Max hurried her steps so she could return to the infirmary and do a final check on the wounded. Just as she was about to leave the barracks, someone blocked her way. Max squealed and took a step back. A tall, brute man with a scary look in his eyes was staring down at her.

"I haven't seen this b\*tch before. Why are you wandering around the barracks?"

"Back off right now!" Yulysion quickly hid Max behind him and grabbed the hilt of his sword. "Men of your kind should not talk with such rude words to her."

“Who’s this guy again?” The man looked at Yulysion, his eyes full of ridicule and smirked with mockery. “Well, if it isn’t the puppy that is raising white lizards. At first glance I thought they were two pretty b\*tches looking for customers.”

Yulysion’s face burned red in anger at the man’s blatant insult and in an instant, his sword was drawn and aimed at the man’s throat. His movement was so fast that Max couldn’t believe even upon witnessing it with her own eyes.

“The pigs in the north have no manners indeed.” Yulysion spat back so fiercely that Max could hardly tell if he was the same innocent boy she knew. “If only Sir Calypse had not ordered me to not cause trouble, I would have already cut your throat in this instance and made you pay the price for having your filthy words reach the Lady’s ears.”

Suddenly, a round of snorts and laughter erupted after his venomous remarks. Max, who was hiding behind Yulysion, shuddered in fear and turned her head towards where the sound came from. From a short distance away, several large men were sitting around, playing dice. One of them yelled at the man who was blocking their way.

“Hey, Devron! I already told you not to mess with that kid. Bane wasn’t the only one who got his nose cut by letting their guard down with that pretty faced kid. He’s a son of a devil, a bad-tempered little chick who hasn’t even been appointed as an official knight.”

When Yulysion turned to see who the man was, his expression grew fiercer. Max’s eyes looked at him, alarmed. The man speaking seemed on the younger side, with pale blonde hair and a sharp impression. He tossed the dice he was holding onto the table and flashed her a sly smile.

“, 2 and 3 again! I have really bad luck today, young miss. Won’t you come here and become my goddess of luck?”

“That’s enough! Even if you’re Phil Aron’s right-hand man, you have no right to speak rudely to the Lady.”

Max’s eyes widened at Yulysion’s screams. That scoundrel is the commander of Balto’s forces?

The man simply laughed frivolously, not taking him seriously at all. She couldn’t believe that such a barbarian held such a high position.

“Lady? Hey, you son of a devil. There’s no such thing as a Lady here. Even your Princess could not be treated as a Princess in this war. But it makes me wonder who this woman is, that this kid is making such a big fuss.” The man took a swig from the bottle he was holding and scanned her from head to toe with the gaze similar to a snake. “I heard Calypse brought a woman to his barracks, are you that woman?”

Note – LF: Hebaron and Ruth bickering is a different level of comedy lol. AnYway, YURI PLEASE SLIT THEIR THROATS

Nymeria: I'm ready to throw hands. These brutes! But Yulysion is making this auntie proud <3

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## Under The Oak Tree

### Chapter 220

Max trembled nervously at the unsettling aura that the man emanated. He got out of his seat and approached them, heading right for Max. Yulysion immediately intercepted him, but the man was so quick with his movements that he caught her by the wrist and pulled her harshly to face him.

“Hmm, although you look pretty cute, you’re no match compared to the Princess, huh?”

“Licht Breston! Get your hands off her, now!” Yulysion yelled and pointed his sword at the man, but he didn’t bat a single eye.

“Hey, kid. No one has pointed a sword at me and was left unharmed. Are you determined to die?”

“She is the wife of Lord Calypse! If you don’t release that hand right now, you’re the one who won’t come out of this unscathed!”

“Ha! That’s interesting. I’ve always wanted to see that southern mongrel provoked!”

The man looked down at her with gleaming interest in his eyes. Unable to bear it anymore, Yulysion charged towards the man with his sword, but the surrounding northern barbarians all drew their swords and intercepted him. Max held her breath as the situation began to spiral out of control. She felt more numb at this moment than when she faced monsters.

“Hey, I heard that the miss is a descendant of the Roem Royal Family. As a Royal descendant of Roem, don't you think it's absurd? How dare a filthy southern mongrel who is of pagan blood claim the title of being a reincarnation of Uigru!” The man grabbed and lifted her chin softly in a creepy way, spitting out vulgar insults about her husband. “Uigru is a hero of the western continent. His name should not be defiled by a peasant with an immigrant mother.”

Max's eyes flashed in anger at his mockery. A rush of adrenaline ran through her veins and she completely forgot her initial shock and fear as she glared at the man.

How dare does a barbarian insult the most honorable and majestic knight in the world!

Livid and unable to take it anymore, she drew her leg back and kicked the man's shin as hard as she could. Unfortunately for her, the man was wearing greaves and Max screamed in pain as her toes crunched against hard metal. Seeing her in agony, the man tilted his head back and burst into laughter

“Isn't she cute?”

“L-let...let me go!” Max twisted and pulled to escape the man's grasp, but the man held her firmly as if he was simply holding a small, fluttering bird.

“Are you angry because I insulted that half-breed? I know that deep down, you're ashamed of him, miss.”

“M-My husband... Don't call my husband h-h-half-breed!”

She was so shaken with maddening rage that her tongue began to stutter more than usual. Max's face almost exploded with embarrassment at her stuttering and anger at the man. The man gazed down at her red face and smiled wickedly.

“Your husband is a half-breed.” He brought his face near hers and repeated it. “His disgusting pedigree is written all over his face. Don't tell me you didn't notice?”

””” ”

“Y-you ... you!”

Max's chin trembled with blind fury. She had never felt such seething fury in the entirety of her life. She tugged on his arm, fought for all she was worth, and tried with all her might to fight off the insults.

“You're... j-jealous of... R-riftan! Because you... kno-know that you're not even at the toe level of... Ri-Riftan... You're a c-coward for m-mocking him behind his back... you're sh-shameful!”

The cruel smirk on the man's lips was wiped away. Suddenly, the expression on his face became so freezingly cold that Max's whole body became stiff. She was terrified by the man's murderous eyes, broad, tense shoulders, and rough hands that violently tugged at her wrists. Her whole body trembled uncontrollably, wondering if he was going to hit her any moment now. She mustered what was left of her courage and murmured in a weak voice.

"L-let... go."

"Now I realize, you are the perfect wife for that. A stupid stutterer, a perfect match for that peasant."

The blood quickly drained from Max's face. She wanted to get back at him and yell a retort, but her tongue felt as if it was stuck to the roof of her mouth. Tears started to form in her eyes from the shame and humiliation she felt. She clamped her lips tightly. Seeing her defeated, the man clicked his tongue and threw her aside, like a cat tired of playing with the mouse he caught.

At that moment, the man's body suddenly turned around and a loud sound of a punch colliding against human flesh and bone resounded. Max screamed in shock. Before she could even understand what had just happened, the man's body flew through the air like a sheet of paper. She watched him collapse into the barrack, and Max's eyes widened in astonishment.

Riftan ignored the shouts coming from all directions and lifted the man by his collar, then raised his fist to land another powerful punch. The man's face was terribly distorted like an evil monster after being hit twice by Riftan.

"This...!"

Licht Breston quickly regained his balance and drew a dagger from his waist. He spat out the blood in his mouth and charged at Riftan. All Max could do was scream at the sheer violence before her. She felt her throat rip from screaming, but that wasn't enough to make any of the men stop snarling at each other like enraged beasts.

The commander of Balto's forces brandished his dagger like a mad bull, but Riftan easily dodged every slice. Within seconds, the man's dagger was in his hands, who barely broke out in a sweat. Riftan easily outmaneuvered the man and grabbed his jaw, forcing his mouth open and thrust the dagger into his mouth.

"You will live a much longer life without your tongue."

He murmured darkly and thrust the dagger deeper into the man's mouth. The larger man squirmed and struggled as he felt the sharp tip of the blade touch the back of his throat. The northern scoundrel was much taller and bulkier compared to Riftan, but he

easily downed the man and overpowered him. Riftan stared at the man, unable to move with the dagger in his mouth, and growled in a calm, b\*\*\*\*y voice.

“That useless tongue only serves to hasten the death of its master, so I’ll skillfully remove this dangling thing.”

“Calypse! Stop this right now!”

Balto’s warriors, who were preventing Yulysion from entering the fray until now, screamed and pointed their swords at Riftan, but he showed no hint of fear and continued in an icy tone that promised death.

“I guess everyone would like to see who can wield a sword faster.”

Balto’s soldiers, who were about to charge so vigorously, seemed to be petrified by his threat and immediately stopped their advance. Their faces flushed red in anger.

“You’re a coward for threatening us! And yet, you call yourself a knight!”

“Then is surrounding and threatening a woman a knightly behavior?” His burning black eyes that seemed to emit flames turned to Max’s pale face. “You keep on provoking my anger, Breston. This time, you’ve done it. You’ve provoked it very well. Now let’s spill the blood you so wish to see.”

“Enough is enough, Calypse! You attacked Sir Breston who was defenseless. Don’t even think that such a cowardly act will be pardoned!”

“If I were you, I wouldn’t use the excuse of being defenseless when he was the one to point a knife at my face.” Riftan his sarcastic words coldly mocking. “Only to have the weapon he was holding stupidly taken away.”

The man who was under Breston’s command fell silent in an instant, helpless as his face became dark red with anger and humiliation. Max, paralyzed with fear under the strain that stops her heart, didn’t know what to do. Although nobody was moving, it was all too obvious to the eyes that they were having a difficult struggle.

Licht Breston’s throat was red because of the compressed blood from Riftan’s grip and more blood was dripping from the man’s open mouth. Riftan grunted and clenched his hand around the man’s neck so hard that Max could see the large veins on his bulging forearms.

“So, you enjoy laughing at other people’s expense. In that case, I’ll make it into a state that you can’t ever laugh again.”

“Stop this right now!”

Amid the b\*\*\*\*y and murderous atmosphere, a roaring, commanding voice cut through the tension. Everyone's eyes, except Riftan's, flew to the owner of the voice. Princess Agnes walked through the crowd of onlookers with powerful steps.

"What the is happening here? You told me you wouldn't cause any trouble until this war comes to an end!"

"This here threatened and insulted my wife." Riftan said in a low, foreboding growl. "I won't let him get away with it without paying a price."

"What Lord Calypse says is true! These guys harassed the Lady and dared to demean her with vulgar insults. Lord Calypse's actions are justified!"

Yulysion stepped forward and enthusiastically supported Riftan. Balto's men did not remain silent before this accusation and began to launch endless insults and blasphemies. Princess Agnes rubbed her aching head and turned to Max, begging for help. She, still frozen in place as if she was paralyzed, quickly came to her senses and rushed closer to Riftan.

"Ri-Riftan... I'm fine. So... please stop and l-let go of him."

Hearing her own stutter in her ears, Max's ears burned with embarrassment, and she urged him in a barely audible voice, but Riftan didn't even budge. He turned and looked at her, his face terribly distorted by rage. She slowly and carefully reached out and placed her hands on his hardened arm. Then, Riftan, whose whole body was tensed from fury, muttered a harsh curse under his breath and finally released the man.

Like a beast finally released from its cage, Balto's commander quickly scooted away from Riftan, wiping his mouth that was still dripping blood. The man's eyes were red with hatred and malice.

"How dare you do this to me! This isn't over. Don't you dare think you'll get away from this, Calypse!" He screamed like an angry wild dog, and Balto's soldiers behind him rebelled in support of their leader. "I demand a duel! What happened was unacceptable, I'll take you out right now!"

"If you really want to be further humiliated, then I will please you." Riftan muttered darkly.

"Interpersonal conflicts are absolutely prohibited!" Princess Agnes quickly stood in between them.

Both men glared at the princess with vicious eyes. "Are you going to turn a blind eye on what this just did? There's no way to settle this but a duel!"

“You were the one who started this! And Riftan here crossed a line. Because of this, both of you are at fault. This should end here!”

“That doesn’t give justice!” The Northerner turned and protested fiercely, his eyes practically blistered with blind loathing. “Unless I shove a blade down your filthy throat, it would never be given justice.”

Riftan laughed darkly.

“Both of you, stop!” With her patience lost, the Princess screamed and sparks of fire flew everywhere. They were forced to separate due to the flames Agnes conjured. She stood there like a judge and yelled loudly. “We are at war! I will not allow internal fights to occur just because of your stupid prides!”

However, the two men did not shift their hostile gazes away from each other. Unexpectedly, it was the Northerner who withdrew first amid the suffocating tension. Phil Aron’s right hand turned and gave his neck a crack, spat blood to the ground and then walked toward his barrack. Following his example, Balto’s other men sheathed their swords and followed after their leader without saying another word.

Max exhaled the breath she was holding as they all walked away. With the terrifying pressure gone, she felt her legs shake and she began to collapse. Riftan quickly reached out and grabbed her, holding her up in his arms. He swiftly lifted her and carried her in his arms. She looked around, puzzled and a little embarrassed. Knights, mercenaries, and soldiers all gathered around to watch the commotion.

“P-please put me down. I... I can w-walk by myself.”

“Stay still.”

His tone was still stiff as he strode through the crowd who were spectating them. Yulysion followed him a few steps back and began to apologize profusely.

“I apologize for not being able to keep the Lady safe, Lord Calypse.”

Riftan kept his pace fast without even looking at him, and Yulysion’s head drooped down weakly like a scolded puppy. Seeing this, Max looked at Riftan reproachfully.

“It’s not Yu-Yulysion’s fault. Those people... suddenly jumped out of nowhere and... started saying insulting things...”

“Right now...” Riftan’s neck swelled as if there was something stuck in his throat and he clenched his jaw. “Do not say anything.”

Feeling the terrifying furious aura from her husband, Max immediately closed her mouth. The crowd around them silently dispersed, as if they also sensed the murderous aura surrounding Riftan.

He immediately brought Max to his barracks. She blinked a few times, adjusting to the darkness of the tent as Riftan laid her down on the bed and lit a lamp with a flint. She looked at the outline of his face that the light granted and swallowed dryly. Max wished her erratic heart would calm down, but instead, she felt her eyes fill with tears. She thought he would get angry as usual and start yelling at her, but seeing his clear and calm expression, as if he were in his own world right now, twisted her insides terribly.

Stupid stutterer. Maybe that was what he was thinking right now. Max bit her lips close. It was an insult she heard her father call her repeatedly, to the point where she had almost become numb to it. However, what made her feel excruciating pain was that her flaw was turned into a weapon and used as an insult to attack Riftan. She couldn't bear the stifling silence any longer and opened her mouth to speak.

"I'm s-sorry. Because of me you were m-mocked..."

Riftan turned his head. He looked at her in disbelief at what he just heard and knelt on one knee in front of her.

"Why are you apologizing! He did that to provoke me. If it weren't for me, you would never have had to be insulted by that son of a..."

As Riftan wrapped his fingers around Max's wrists, she winced at the pain. Seeing her in pain, Riftan's shoulders tensed. He gently rolled up her sleeve and took a deep, sharp breath. A clearly visible patch of dark red bruises could be seen even under the dim lighting

"By all means, I will kill that." Riftan declared in a voice that was similar to that of a growling beast. "As soon as this war comes to an end, I will challenge him to a duel. I'll make him learn his lesson for daring to hurt you."

Note – LF: I hope Licht Breston would die an excruciating, humiliating death—severed of all his limbs and nasty tongue, in front of all the northern scoundrels.

Nymeria: What she said, thank you ^

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