

## Chapter 1577

The azaleas of Eldermere Keep bloomed in a riot of color, spreading across the hills in a blaze of purple and red. The sight was enough to dazzle anyone who set eyes upon it, especially those who had never visited this secluded place. It was the kind of beauty that made one long to stay forever.

Yet, there was one exception.

A young man rode his horse to the base of the mountain, dismounted, and secured his steed. Without a glance at the dazzling scene around him, he began to walk the path up the mountain, his gaze fixed firmly on the road ahead. †

The vivid azaleas stretched out along either side of the path, reaching out as if to claim him, but he merely brushed them aside with a casual swipe of his hand.

His pace was swift, and he occasionally used his Lightfoot Skill. Eldermere Keep was not high up, but its location was well-hidden, with many winding paths leading in. However, he had studied the map countless times before embarking on this journey, so the route to the keep was etched into his memory.

When he came of age and inherited his title, his aunt had gifted him many things, the most significant being a map, along with a piece of news that set his blood alight with both excitement and apprehension.

Connor was still alive, though he now went by his middle name, Clarence.

That night, the young man barely slept. Memories from the past, that seemed to belong to another lifetime, flooded his mind.

After inheriting the title, there had been duties to fulfill—paying respects at the palace, lighting candles for his late family members, and receiving congratulations. His aunt had advised him to solidify his connections, so

he had spent half a month attending to all necessary obligations before finally setting out.

During those two weeks, he had already memorized the map, and his thoughts had long since been fixed on Eldermere Keep. 1

Now, standing here, he wished he could simply sprout wings and fly up there. Yet, the moment he reached the entrance, his steps faltered. A profound sadness washing over him, he stood frozen, as though rooted to the spot.

His aunt had told him that Clarence's legs had been ruined. Though he had survived, he was dependent on medicine for the rest of his life. He would never walk again, forever confined to a chair or bed, carrying the burden of his ailment with him like a weight he could never escape.

But the Clarence in his memory was twofold. On one hand, he was willful and stubborn, often brash and powerless. On the other hand, he was diligent and studious, always putting forth his utmost effort in both martial arts and learning because he was afraid of disappointing the queen dowager and the king.

Their martial arts training, in particular, had been something his uncle had made enjoyable, which is why they had always been full of life and energy.

The young man found it hard to accept that the lively boy from his memories had turned into a weak invalid, unable even to walk.

"Since you're here, why not come in?" a voice rang out, calm, yet with a hint of barely contained excitement. 1

The young man snapped out of his daze when he saw a frail young man in dark green attire leaning against the black doorframe, looking somewhat strained.

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"Why don't you come and assist me, Ryan? I can only stand for a moment," said the frail young man, his brow furrowing slightly. His legs wobbled, and it seemed as though he would collapse any second.

Tears welled in Ryan's eyes, blurring his vision. When he heard those words, he quickly stepped forward, reaching out to catch Clarence before he could fall.

His voice trembled with excitement as he asked, "You can stand now?"

Clarence smiled gently as he replied, "I can stand, but today is the first time I've walked. It seems I timed it just right to see you." 3

Ryan helped him inside. There was someone standing behind the door, but when they saw someone was supporting Clarence, they stepped back to give them space.

Both men were brimming with emotion, though each fought to keep their composure. 1

Once inside, they sat. Clarence let out a long, exhausted breath, beads of sweat dotting his forehead. He raised his gaze and studied Ryan, who was now tall and imposing. His youthful freshness had faded, replaced with a maturity that made him seem more composed.

But then again, he had always been composed.

Ryan gazed at Clarence as well, but through the haze of his tears, he

couldn't quite make out his features clearly. All he could see was how thin the latter had become. 1

"Have you been well all these years?" Ryan asked, his voice trembling slightly. "It's not that I didn't want to visit you; I didn't know you were still alive. It wasn't until the day I inherited my title that Aunt Carissa told me. I came as soon as I could. I didn't dare bring anyone with me—just myself." 2

Clarence's smile softened as he reassured, "I'm well enough. I don't blame you. I'm just happy you came to see me. Honestly, I'm so glad. I thought I would never see you again in this lifetime."

"I thought the same," Ryan whispered in reply.

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