

119: Cooling off

After a while, Scarlett was sitting in the parlor with Evelyne and Leon once again.

It hadn't taken too much time to get everything in order again after Leon's barging through the mansion, but it was annoying nonetheless. Not only did she have to go find Molly and give the servant a vague summary of what happened so that she could up and help the Countess, but she also had to figure out what to do about the ruined bed and the fact that a lot of people had seen Leon running around like a madman.

For now, she'd had Molly bring the Countess to an empty room in the east wing and instructed Marlon to have a couple of servants go up to the attic and clean things up. She would also need to come up with a decent excuse for everything, though that could be left for a later occasion.

She could at least be thankful that Fynn hadn't caused more of a mess after everything had been resolved. The young man *hadn't* immediately rushed after Leon after escaping the man's barrier, it seemed, which is why Scarlett had been given the opportunity to talk things out instead. While she had been appeasing the Countess, Fynn had apparently noticed that the situation had calmed down somewhat and decided to stay back for the time being.

It showed that he *was* learning. Just...slowly. And perhaps a bit arbitrarily.

Scarlett glanced at Evelyne, who was sitting to her right, then turned to Leon, who was sitting on the couch to her left. She had already chewed him out enough about what had happened, but that didn't mean she could just let things go.

"So, Sir Leon," she said, some of the steeliness still lingering in her voice. "Before you leave, was there anything you wanted to say?"

The man at least had the dignity to look embarrassed at her words. "No, there isn't."

She examined him for a few seconds.

If she was going to be honest with herself, rationally, she couldn't blame him for his behavior *too* much. She knew he had apprehensions about her even before they started working together, and she also knew that the sword styles he practiced—which were directly tied to the empire's patron deity of the sun, Ittar—were in direct opposition with those of the Countess.

It was like mixing oil and water, and she imagined it must have come as a very sudden surprise to him, suddenly encounter something like that here. It also seemed like the reaction was a lot more *instinctual* than Scarlett thought it would be. And she knew all about the annoyances of having to fight against your instincts.

That did *not* mean she would just forgive and forget. Like hell she was that generous. She would only go as far as to ensure he didn't spread the information around.

“Then,” she began. “I will give you one last expression of my appreciation for the assistance you provided me over in Autumnwell, as well as for the advice that you deigned to provide to my retainers. That was outside of what was demanded of you by our agreement. As promised, I will take all of your actions into consideration as I look into how to handle the subject of our betrothal in the near future.”

He looked at her with an unreadable expression. Then he gave a slow nod. “Thank you.”

To the side, Evelyne was giving the two of them probing looks, but Scarlett ignored it for now.

Leon stood from his couch and righted his attire. “I’ll be taking my leave, then. Evelyne, it was a pleasure meeting you again, even though only briefly. And Scarlett...” He seemed to hesitate for a moment, then shook his head. “I regret my showing earlier, but I hope I won’t regret giving you my word. Contact me when you’ve reached a decision regarding the betrothal.”

“I will.”

He made to leave, but Scarlett raised a hand to stop him as he passed her by.

“Before you go, there is something that I had almost forgotten.” She reached down to her [Pouch of Holding] and pulled out a leather-bound tome. It gave off a dark aura.

[Tome of Hopelessness (Rare)]

{An ancient tome carrying secrets that should remain unspoken}

She held out the tome towards the man.

He gave her a surprised look as he stared down at it. She raised an eyebrow at him. He was the one that said he’d take care of it to begin with. Seems like both of them had forgotten. Maybe she *should* have kept it.

The man reached out to pick up the tome. “I’ll make sure it’s dealt with properly. Thank you, Scarlett.”

“It was my pleasure.”

With that, he sent the two of them one last nod and left the room.

After the door closed behind him, Scarlett turned back to Evelyne. The younger woman was giving her an intense look. “I have a lot of things to ask.”

“I would imagine so,” Scarlett replied.

“First of all, what was that book?”

“A tome on matters of necromancy.”

Evelyne’s eyes widened, and she turned to stare at the door.

“Do not forget that Sir Leon is a Solar Knight. I gave the tome to him so that he could ensure its removal.”

Evelyne blinked. “That...makes sense.” She shook her head. “I feel like I’m starting to imagine the craziest things because of all the strange things that you do all of the time. But nevermind that. What was that whole mess earlier? Why did Leon rush through the whole mansion, and why did *you* just let him go after he acted like that?”

“I did not simply ‘let him go’.” Scarlett clicked her tongue as she began tapping her finger against the armrest of her seat. “I made sure he will not repeat such behavior ever again, but there is a limit to how much I can do. Surely you do not think I can actually do anything to punish an imperial knight?”

“Honestly, I’m never sure what to think with you nowadays.”

Scarlett eyed the woman. Actually, what *did* Evelyne think of her at the moment? Most of their recent interactions had been relatively peaceful—even though Scarlett often had to push down the disgust and irritation she felt of the woman—but she didn’t know what kind of image Evelyne had of her inside her mind. Was it still that of an overbearing and scheming villain? Just one that happened to be cooperative and very knowledgeable? Or had that changed?

“...So, what was the reason?”

Scarlett was brought out of her thoughts as Evelyne looked at her.

“The reason?”

“The reason Sir Leon acted like he did.” The younger woman gave her a pointed look. “I stayed quiet and tried not to pry, just like you asked me before, but not only did your fiance barge through here because of whatever you’re hiding, but a *Solar Knight*. I can’t just *ignore* this anymore, Scarlett. Especially not if you’re doing something that you really *shouldn’t* be doing inside the mansion.”

Annoyance and anger bubbled to the surface at Evelyne’s words, but Scarlett tried keeping it down as best she could. The woman’s reaction was completely reasonable, considering things.

But what should she say in reply?

Eventually, she let out a brief sigh and turned her gaze to the table in front of her. “It is not anything illicit, if that is what worries you.”

Just housing the Countess technically wasn’t illegal, at least.

“If it had been, do you truly believe Leon would have left without taking further action? The simple truth of the matter is that the guest that I am housing in the east wing practices a rare kind of magic that had an aversive reaction when faced with Leon’s aura. That was the cause for his outburst earlier, as well as his...*excessive* behavior.”

“Exactly what kind of magic are we talking?”

“I cannot tell you. Partly because I myself am not too familiar with it, and partly because it is best if you remain unaware. I can, however, inform you that it is related to a deity separate from Ittar. One that the Followers of Ittar might not look too favorably upon, despite technically no wrongdoing is being made. This is also why I endeavour to ensure complete secrecy surrounding my guests, so as to spare them from any undue harassment from overly zealous members of the Followers.”

That was *technically* true, though far from the main reason behind keeping the Countess hidden.

Evelyne furrowed her brows, appearing to think over Scarlett’s words. “Is this guest from outside the empire, then? The Luciean Isles, or some other place where they worship the other gods?”

“No. They hale from the empire, just as we do. One could say that their ‘worship’ of this deity is more because of happenstance rather than true worship. It is exactly due to this that it is best to maintain their anonymity.”

Evelyne went silent for a bit with a serious expression. Finally, she nodded her head as if to accept what Scarlett said. “Alright. I can at least understand what you’re doing then. But I hope you’re being careful and aren’t about to get us into a mess with the Followers because of this.”

Scarlett wanted to laugh at that. If Evelyne knew what she was planning, the woman might literally faint from shock. That, or just try to strangle her to death for her madness.

That’s why it was imperative that no one ever found out.

“By the way,” Evelyne said, her countenance having relaxed a bit. “While you were gone, we received another letter from Livvi. She asked whether we wanted to come over for dinner.”

“Dinner?”

“Yes. Count Knottley and his son will be there as well.”

Scarlett frowned. Didn’t that mean it was basically a gathering with the ruling noble family of Freybrook? She had only met Count Knottley once, but from that meeting, and from what Livvi had told her, it didn’t seem like the man was particularly fond of her.

“I think we should go,” Evelyne continued. “The Count is the most powerful person in the region, and it would be a good idea to improve your relationship with him now that you have the opportunity. Especially after what happened in Elystead. I know he doesn’t like *you* much, but he doesn’t mind me, and showing that we have a working relationship could be good for both of us.”

Scarlett eyed the woman for a moment. It wasn’t as if she was wrong. It could also be a good chance to get some more noble-mingling experience. This was probably the closest she would come to an informal noble gathering.

That didn't mean she was looking forward to it, though.

"When is this dinner?" she asked.

"The day after tomorrow."

That would mean she had time to visit Freymeadow tomorrow, at least. As well as to start tallying up the artifacts they had gathered in Autumnwell, to get a grasp of what to keep. She was also planning to look over the [Obedience's Solitude Loci] to figure out how it actually worked, but she might be able to do that in Freymeadow, in between practice sessions.

"If that time works for you as well, then you may inform Livvi that we will be there."

"I have a few things to take care of during the afternoon, but I should be free in the evening," Evelyne said. "I'll send her a letter when I get back to my house later."

"You are leaving the mansion, then?"

"I'm meeting with a few prospective business partners, and most of the necessary documents and papers are there. I'm also more used to hosting people there." Evelyne paused, looking at her for a few seconds. "Are you saying it would be okay for me to handle things like that here in the future?"

"I see no reason not to."

"...Alright." The woman's words almost came out as a whisper. "I'll have to arrange rooms and offices for Kinsley and the rest first, though, so it will have to wait until then."

"I am sure that you can speak with Garside regarding that."

The old butler was still recovering, but now he had at least reached a state where he could perform some minor work without issue. Scarlett had tried telling him to wait until he had recovered completely, but the man had refused to budge now that he could finally leave his bed.

Her training sessions with the man would have to wait, however.

"There was one more thing," Evelyne said.

"And what is that?"

"That wizard from the Elystead Tower that you had been in contact with before, Adalicia Mendenhall? She sent a letter saying that she had returned from the Rising Isle and was finishing things up over in Elystead. It was proceeding faster than she had expected, and apparently she was planning on visiting Freybrook in a few days and wondered if you would be available."

"In a few days, you say?" Scarlett raised a hand to her chin as she looked out one of the windows. The plan hadn't been for Adalicia to arrive for another week or two. She hadn't booked passage through the Kilnstones for their travels until that time either, so pushing

things up like this could prove a bit troublesome, even if it would be nice to deal with all of this as early as possible.

“Adalicia and I were supposed to investigate the remains of another set of Zuverian ruins when she had the time to do so. Unfortunately, I have prepared no passage through the Kilnstone that would be suitable for this so soon.” She turned to Evelyne. “Would it be possible for you to arrange new passage for me in time?”

A crease appeared on the younger woman’s forehead. “It might be tough if you’re planning to leave within the week. Depends on where you’re going, though.”

“It is to Faybarrow.”

“Faybarrow?” Evelyne seemed to consider it for a moment. “I know a merchant who often travels there from here in Freybrook. I might be able to negotiate a spot off of him. You’d have to go through the normal Kilnstone line, however, and convincing him will probably cost a decent amount. But it isn’t like money is looking to be a problem for us at the moment. Not until we start actually paying for all of these reconstructions and things that need doing.”

“Good. Then see if that is possible.” Scarlett nodded her head.

With that resolved, they moved on to discuss exactly what they would be doing for this upcoming dinner with the Knottley family.