Self Fulfilling Prophesy

by Kimium

Summary

Fairytale AU.

“Silence!” Garon roared. “The prophesy has spoken and has informed me one of you will try to kill me.”

They're scattered across Nohr and cursed. For years Leo lives in a tower and tries to escape and fails over and over. Then, one day all that changes when two people (idiots) break in and claim they'll help Leo find his siblings, break the curses, and kill his father.
Hello everyone!

This AU came about because one evening I was talking with ObscureReference about fairy tale AUs and I jokingly said "Tangled/Rapunzel AU with Leo as Rapunzel and Odin and Niles the ones sneaking in". Said AU exploded into this story where we needed to figure out why Garon has locked Leo away which lead to all of them locked away and cursed.

A massive, massive thank you to ObscureReference for bouncing ideas with me, ironing out plot points, beta reading the first part, and generally being the most amazing friend I could ever ask for. Please go check her works out if you haven't already!!!

I'll be updating the tags as I go along but for Ch. 1 I want to remind everyone to be CAREFUL. Iago says some problematic things (sexist, using feminine looks as degrading etc.) and also breaks Leo's legs. Your safety when reading is up to you and is MOST important, so take care of yourselves!!! (EDIT: Iago only means to torment Elise like verbally not anything gross. I'd never write that.)

Please feel free to leave comments and kudos as those always make my day. Rest assured everyone I have all my points planned so the next part should hopefully be quick. Also, if you want to check my tumblr out or message me there my tumblr is right here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"A fortune teller?" Leo asked as he shut his book.

"More like a seer." Camilla gently corrected before she tapped Elise on the shoulder. "Sit still sweetie. I'm not done."

"Camilla…" Elise whined and kicked her legs a little bit. The chair she was sitting in dwarfed her in height, but Elise made up for the seat with her large flowing dress. "I'm not a child. I can sit still."

"Of course, sweetheart." Camilla cooed and kissed the top of Elise's head before gently weaving the braids together. "Ten is very old. Old enough to come greet the seer in our fanciest clothes."

"We're meeting them?" Elise asked. "Not just Xander?"

Xander looked up from his book. He was at the table with Leo. As a twenty-three year old and an adult it was uncommon for Xander to not greet guests with their father upon arrival to the castle. Leo wasn't sure why their father insisted he discuss matters with the seer alone but he wasn't in a position to ask.
“Yes, all of us are going to meet the seer, even Corrin.” Xander confirmed. “Father says after he’s done discussing some private matters we’re to attend.”

Elise’s eyes widened and she practically clapped in glee but refrained herself as Camilla was still working on her hair. Leo almost self consciously tugged at his own hair, happy he didn’t have to do much for it to be presentable. What Camilla and Elise went through sounded like a nightmare.

“I’m so excited.” Elise’s voice bounced. “We’ll get to see Corrin too! It’s been so long. I hate that father confines them to the west wing.”

Didn’t they all? Leo’s mouth twisted. They never received an official explanation to why Corrin was mainly on the west side of the castle with their retainers Jakob and Felicia, but with Garon as King no one really wanted to press too hard. Leo touched his cheek and remembered some of Garon’s more violent outbursts.

“We all do Elise.” Camilla softly said before she finished the braids. “Done.”

Elise wiggled and lightly reached back to touch her hair. “Thank you, Camilla.”

“Be careful.” Camilla warned before she stretched. “Now, let’s wait for the summons.”

It turned out they didn’t have to wait long. A servant opened the door and soon they were all walking down the hall to the throne room. The air was heavy and Leo saw Elise curl her hands into her dress slightly. Upon arriving at the throne room’s doors, which were massive, carved wooden doors, the servant announced their presence and opened it up.

Inside was Garon on the throne and the seer on the side. Corrin was also there. Elise almost dashed for them but stopped herself in time. Leo exhaled slowly and listened to the sound of the door closing loudly behind them.

“My children.” Garon’s voice was loud and oppressing. Leo felt his heart rate slow down.

“Father.” Xander took control as usual. “We’re here as you asked.”

Leo waited for Garon to introduce them to the seer or perhaps have the seer introduce themselves but what came out of Garon’s mouth froze Leo to the spot.

“I’ve been enlightened by the one who speaks for the gods.” Garon firmly said, his sunken in eyes staring dark holes into Leo’s body. “A prophesy has been spoken.” He then stood up. “Guards arrest them.”

In a blink of an eye guards appeared out of no where. Leo felt rough hands grasp his arms behind his back and shove him to the floor. He barely had time to flinch or react. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the guards roughly shove his siblings and Leo’s blood boiled when he saw even Elise was being restrained.

“Father, what’s the meaning of this?” Xander asked, his voice loud.

“Silence!” Garon roared. “The prophesy has spoken and has informed me one of you will try to kill me.”

Kill… their Father? Leo’s heart stopped and he stared at Garon. He had aged over the years, his face wrinkled and his hair white. His eyes were dark and wild, clouded over with the words he was speaking. Did he really believe the seer? Leo whipped his head around to see the seer who was still standing off the side, shrouded by a cloak.
“Father,” Camilla started, “if I may speak…”

“I said SILENCE!” Garon’s voice echoed off the walls. “You’re all ungrateful whelps! I’ve raised you, sheltered you, and this is how you repay me? By plotting treason?!”

“Father…” Leo found his voice. “We haven’t…”

“So, instead of simply executing you or taking you to the dungeons, I’ve made up my mind.” Garon’s voice was at a low, deadly level. “I’ll curse you and scatter you to the corners of this country.” He then paused. “You’ll never step foot in this castle ever again.”

Leo didn’t remember much after that. He distantly remembered Elise screaming for them and Xander trying to shout reason to their father. However, the guards dragged them away and soon Leo was bound and taken by carriage. Something along the way was slipped into his mouth and soon Leo lost consciousness.

When he woke he was in a large, circular room with no doors but at least it had one window. There was a bed and a desk and supports that ran all the way around the top of the room with every book imaginable. There was also a kitchen, a table, and beyond that a room he assumed was the bath. Leo looked over at a group of guards and mages that were standing away from him. Leo tried to stand up but felt the effects of whatever drug they had slip him still effective. He collapsed against the wooden floor and spotted runes written on it in chalk.

“What is the meaning of this?” Leo’s voice felt dry and chalky.

No one answered him and soon the mages began to chant. Light welled up around Leo and smoke formed lightly around the edges in a circle. Leo couldn’t hear what the mages were saying and couldn’t move. Staring up at the mages Leo wondered what they were doing. They weren’t killing him because of the layout. Clearly it was all for him. The chanting soon stopped and the light faded. Leo weakly tried to sit up again but something felt heavy. Shifting forward Leo saw something fall into his vision. It was hair, his hair. Leo forced his hand up to touch it and his fingers numbly ran down the strand. It was long. His hair was long. Looking up Leo opened his mouth to ask the mages for confirmation but they along with the guards were gone.

It was just Leo, the tower, and his impossibly long hair.

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After the drug wore off Leo managed to sit up without tugging his hair and walked over to the bathroom and stared at himself in the full length mirror. His hair wasn’t just long. It trailed on the floor. It was glossy and thick and impossible for any normal growth. This had to be the curse Garon was talking about. It was magical and it explained why his head wasn’t snapped right off his shoulders from the weight. Gingerly Leo tried to pick his hair up but there was too much. He slung some over his shoulders and over his arm and did his best to carefully walk out to the kitchen.

Opening the drawers Leo finally located a knife. It was probably futile but Leo wasn’t going to give up or make assumptions. Slicing messily through a good chunk of hair Leo let it fall to the ground. A minute later the hair started to grow back until it was the same length as before. Leo sighed and set the knife on the kitchen table.

Sitting on one of the kitchen chairs, Leo did his best to part his hair into three manageable parts. Rummaging on his body Leo took out a long braided bookmark Camilla had made for him. Then he
cut his hair as quickly as he could so that it was still long enough to pull back. Before it grew back Leo pulled his hair into a ponytail. It wasn’t the most effective way to hold his hair back but Leo would worry about that later. Standing up Leo looked at the hair on the floor. First thing he had to do was clean up. Then make something to eat. If he was captive than Garon would make sure he wouldn’t starve in the tower. Not that Leo was going to wait around. He needed to leave but for now, he had other matters to attend to.

As he worked to sweep the hair up (rather clumsily) his hair grew back until it trailed on the floor. It made Leo’s heart sink a little but he wasn’t going to give up. Throwing the hair away Leo walked over to the kitchen. He had never really cooked but he had read recipes. Looking through the kitchen Leo found a box that was enchanted to always be cold. Inside were eggs. Recipes would have to wait for later. Even Leo could cook eggs.

After he ate and washed up (again, clumsily) Leo walked over to the shelves and pulled a book out from one of the lower ones. It was a leather bound diary. Finding a quill and ink Leo went to the table and opened it up.

Scribbling the entire date even the day of the week, Leo then wrote in neat columns some observations, mainly about his hair and the rate it grew back. He’d have to test out and see if the method of cutting affected the growth rate or if the growth rate naturally became longer over time. His heart ached at the thought of where his siblings could possibly be or what sort of curse Garon decided to inflict upon them but Leo had to focus. He’d save himself and then he’d find his siblings.

Closing the diary Leo changed out of his clothes into night wear and then crawled into bed. The bed had the sort of new quality that made it feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Doing his best to make sure his hair wasn’t in his way as he slept, Leo closed his eyes and lay against the foreign pillow.

Sleep came slowly.

The next day before eating breakfast Leo did a quick scan of the tower. Outside was a valley, completely surrounded by lush green hills. The tower was also very tall and Leo couldn’t just jump out the window without breaking something or dying. He wrote that in the diary under the date and then moved on. The hair he had cut from yesterday was gone along with the egg shells. Water also ran easily when Leo turned the taps. Did that mean the entire tower was magical? Leo made a note before cooking breakfast. This time he added toast with his eggs and made the meal feel more complete.

Next Leo checked the books in the tower. There were a lot. Leo had to mind his hair as he walked slowly up the wooden structures that spanned all around the tower so he could access the books. There were books of all sorts: novels, geography, magic, cooking, etc. Leo took a book on magic, cooking, geography, and hair styles. He couldn’t escape the tower with his trailing hair everywhere. It made him angry at his past self for not paying attention to Camilla as she worked with Elise’s hair. At the thought of his siblings Leo’s heart ached and he closed his eyes. He wouldn’t cry. Opening the book, Leo quickly read how to do a simple three strand braid. The steps were simple and Leo was sure he could handle it.

An hour later Leo’s arms hurt and his hair was messily in a braid. Some strands were falling out and the braid was very loose but working with so much hair was a challenge. Leo threw his hair over his shoulder and began to look at the geography book.

Garon had stated he was separating them into the corners of the country. Leo scanned the map of Nohr and looked. One of the furthest points was to the Northern Tribe, where Felicia and Flora were
from. One of his siblings had to be there. Not Xander, Leo idly thought. Xander with his charisma and leadership was dangerous close to people. He could rally them against Garon. Same with Camilla who had natural conversation skills. There was also no way it was Corrin. Corrin had spent many hours with Felicia and Flora and out of them all would have the most favour with the Ice Tribe.

It had to be Elise. Leo’s heart twisted. Was she alone? Leo hoped not but had no confirmation. Swallowing Leo shoved the image of a scared, crying Elise out of his mind and continued to look at the map. Another obvious location were the mountains to the west. Leo tapped his finger on the location as though to memorise it and moved on.

There were also forests and mountains to the east so thick and tall that they spanned on for eons. Leo had seen the forest only once as a child. He remembered Gunter telling him some of the trees were over thousands of years old. No one dared travel through at night in fear of getting lost or eaten by something. Not that it wasn’t possible to travel through the forest. Leo tapped his finger on the map again. One of his siblings had to be there too. It was isolated so Leo suspected Xander or Camilla. Possibly Corrin. Leo couldn’t make up his mind to who would be stuck in the mountains.

Of course, there was where he was. Leo already knew. Despite their best efforts to obscure his location Leo knew he was in the valleys to the south, nestled deep within the hills close to the ocean. That meant it would become humid when it was summer. Leo frowned. With his hair he’d be miserable but that was something to worry about later.

That left only one more location. Leo’s eyes trailed over to the ocean. It wasn’t on the map but Leo remembered rumours of a small island that Garon had claimed in his youth. No one had gone there in years, including Garon himself but what better place to banish someone than an island? Tapping his finger on the water in general Leo figured that was another good place to have Xander or Camilla.

Opening his diary Leo decided to write his ideas where no one would see them. Leaving his thoughts on a map wasn’t good in case Garon sent people to check up on him. Missing a large geography book was more obvious than a small diary. When he finished Leo shut the diary and went over to his bed. Lifting the mattress like he did at home, Leo stuffed the diary under it and then went to his next order of business: magic.

Leo had been studying magic since he could read. When he escaped Leo had to be on his toes. There was no way his father would just isolate them and not have someone check up every so often. Leo hoped he didn’t send Iago. Opening the book Leo tried to find a sense of normalcy with his studying. Closing his eyes Leo tried to imagine he was in the library and soon one of his siblings would arrive and sit with him.

The memory kept Leo both warm and cold as he studied.

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After a rather pitiful attempt at cooking dinner (Leo vowed to read the recipe books closer and work his way up), Leo tried to get rid of his hair. Focusing Leo first sharpened a knife with magic and tried. It didn’t work. He then tried fire, carefully making sure he was burning far away from his face. A bucket of water was beside him in case something went wrong. The smell of hair burning was sickening and it didn’t work. Leo dropped his hand and began to clean up his mess. As he moved Leo tried to not think of the weight, of the heaviness. It made him want to claw at his head, rip his hair out but Leo was sure that wouldn’t work either.

He threw the hair out.
That night as Leo lay in bed, his hair messily on the side, he tried to, once again, not think about what sort of curses his siblings were under.

Sleep was once again hard to come by.

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A silent, slow routine was established. Leo would wake up, make breakfast (the easiest meal) and then write in his diary. He’d also braid his hair, an endeavour that was always a challenge. Sometimes Leo left his hair alone. Then he’d practice magic until his throat hurt and his arms ached. When he was hungry he then made lunch, always testing out new recipes. The tower always provided what he wanted so at least Leo didn’t have to worry about ingredients. Then he’d study the single opening he had in the tower, the window.

Outside the tower was completely smooth, again unnaturally so. Leo knew it was magic. That made scaling it a challenge and Leo wasn’t sure if he could use magic to counter the tower (like create indents for his feet and hands to scale down). He tested on the window sill and nothing happened. The other possibility was using his hair like a rope to go down. Leo would have to make sure he found a way to secure himself first before any attempts.

Then it was usually supper time and once again Leo tested new recipes. Sometimes the recipes worked. Sometimes they didn’t. Leo still ate what he could.

Finally, bed time. That was when his mind raced. Leo dreamed of his siblings and where they were. He dreamed of them not having it as good as he did with food all the time. What if they were starving? What if the weather was terrible for them? How were they dealing with the isolation? Were they as lonely as he was? What about their curses? Leo’s imagination ranged from physical alterations to illusions and mental chipping.

He never slept well but Leo was determined. He’d get out of this and find them. He just needed more time.

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A month passed.

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At the end of the month Leo was surprised by a crackle of magic in the late afternoon before someone was in his tower. For a naïve moment Leo wondered if it was one of his siblings. It wasn’t. It was Iago.

Leo’s face fell slightly before he stood up, careful to not give the (greasy) man anything to hold over him.

“To what do I owe the visit?” Leo kept his voice icy even though his mind was screaming for information on the outside world.

“Ah Lord Leo.” Iago’s voice was slimy as usual. “Oh, my apologies, not a Prince any more, are you? King Garon has official labelled you as a traitor to the throne.”

That was a low hanging fruit and expected. Leo didn’t feel shocked by the news. It only made sense that his father would say that as an excuse to the masses for their disappearance. Iago was a fool if he thought that was enough to make Leo flinch.
“So, King Garon is sending one of his right hand men to visit a lowly fugitive?” Leo sweetly asked.
“I didn’t realise that was our new policy.” He saw Iago flinch a little. Leo held the victory carefully.
“That brings us back to my question, to what do I owe a visit?”

Iago’s eyes narrowed. “Routine check up.” He bit out. “Making sure you’re behaving yourselves.”

Despite trying to make them sound like children, Iago had used the plural form, indicating that Garon
still thought them all a threat. That was also not surprising to Leo. If he was in Garon’s paranoid state
of mind he too would send people to check up on them. Best to comply. Thankfuly Leo hadn’t been
studying magic, though it didn’t seem like a concern if they had supplied him with the books. Still,
treading carefully for the first bit was a good option. Leo wasn’t going to give Iago anything to write
home about.

“As you can see I am behaving.” Leo blandly repeated, gesturing to the table. “I was just reading.”

Iago huffed. “I’ll be the judge of that.”

He stormed over to the table. Leo silently turned and watched Iago pick up the book he had been
reading. It was a simple history book. Then his eyes spotted the other book Leo had been skimming
through. It was on braids. Leo watched as Iago set the books down and poked mildly around the
tower. Leo couldn’t wait until Iago was gone.

After what seemed like an eternity Iago seemed sated, ready to leave him. Leo held his tongue to ask
if Iago was visiting his siblings. He had sasssed Iago enough. No need to push. Except the moment
Leo thought that Iago reached out. Leo’s heart skipped a beat and he wanted to slap Iago’s hand
away or stab him with the weapon he didn’t have. The thin, white fingers brushed against Leo’s long
hair.

“This hair seems more fitting for a woman.” Iago told him. “Then again you were always the more
delicate prince. Shame you’re a male.” He grinned.

Leo felt Iago’s word slap him. His mind raced to what would happen if Elise (or Camilla, who knew
what curse was upon her) would be subject to with Iago visiting them. Without another thought Leo
grabbed Iago’s hand and cast a fire spell, burning Iago’s hand.

“If you even think of touching my sisters I’ll murder you.” Leo hissed at Iago, glaring.

Iago yelped and his other hand came too quickly for Leo to see. His face burned as Iago hit him
across the face. Leo let go of Iago’s hand and felt red blossom but he didn’t back down. Leo
continued to glare at Iago.

“Oh, you will, will you?” Iago asked. Leo sensed a tremor in his voice but that didn’t matter to what
Iago said next. “You’re trapped in here and are powerless.”

Before Leo could think up a retort Iago disappeared. Leo tried to console himself that Camilla was
strong and Elise smart. They’d be fine. He had to believe they were fine. Iago was wrong and he
wasn’t powerless.

That didn’t stop Leo from feeling dirty where Iago had touched him. Going to the bathroom Leo
frantically washed his face, chanting to himself that Camilla and Elise were fine. Then he took a
knife and despite knowing it was futile, cut the section Iago had touched. Then, throwing the hair
into the sink, Leo burned it, scorching the porcelain a bit. He didn’t care.

Leo just wanted to get rid of the hair Iago had touched.
That night Leo dreamed of Iago’s hands on his hair, tugging and pulling him down into a dark, dark, inky abyss. He woke up coughing and spluttering. Wheezing a few times, Leo ran his fingers through his hair and tugged until it hurt his scalp. Scrambling out of bed Leo went to the kitchen and grabbed a knife. Then, he plopped down in the chair and cut away until his fingers felt numb from holding the blade too tightly and his arm ached from the angle.

The hair grew back, of course, leaving Leo with an aching arm and hand as well as a mess to clean up. It was going to be difficult with no sunlight. Leo lit a candle and got to work.

Routine continued and Leo kept testing a way to get out of the tower by scaling down using his hair. There was no way for him to anchor his hair outside the tower. Leo couldn’t break the stone even with magic. That meant he had to anchor it inside the tower. Without proper materials it proved to be a challenge. Leo had to make sure he was anchored properly and as he scaled down the tower he could freely move his hair while not losing the support. Unfortunately, there was only one way to test it and that was with experimenting.

The obvious answer was to cut off his hair as short as he could manage and use the leftovers as rope. Leo did that one evening after he spent hours braiding his hair as tightly and neatly as possible. Then he cut the braid off and tried to figure out a way to make a secure rope. However, as he worked through the day the hair Leo cut off began to disappear and become nothing but ash. Leo huffed. So much for an easy method. Making a note in his journal Leo moved along with another idea.

Since he couldn’t cut his hair and make a rope Leo decided to start with what he had. Using chairs Leo tried to create a sort of system where his hair ran around the legs of the chair and could spiral around like a pulley system. He then had to make sure the chairs wouldn’t topple over. Luckily, Leo had a lot of books. He stacked many books on the chairs and tested, seeing how many he needed so the chairs stayed upright. Finally, Leo needed a way for his hair to drag slowly, like an anchor at the end. Leo rummaged around the tower and found a heavy wooden chest with handles at the end. Filling the chest with things (mainly books again) Leo tied the end of his hair into a knot to the handles of the chest as tightly as he could. He then used the same leather bookmark Camilla had gifted him to tie his hair firmly and more securely.

Then Leo stripped the sheets off his bed and tied the four corners into a make shift parachute around his body. With a knife, magic tomes, a map, and some non perishable foods, Leo decided on a sunny morning to attempt his escape.

Gingerly Leo made sure everything was fastened and nothing would give before he went to the window sill. The height made him dizzy but Leo tried to ignore it. Throwing one leg out the window Leo just went for it. There wasn’t a strong wind and that made the attempt feel slightly better. Facing the wall, Leo tried to remember rock climbing lessons and took his first leap downward. His hair moved as Leo expected and nothing was giving in. Leo exhaled and kept going down for what seemed like an eternity. He was halfway down when he heard something above crash and his support slightly falter. Leo gasped out and tried to not scream as he fell a good bit but was caught just before he hit the ground. His make shift parachute had helped slow his decent and the chest must have hit something that blocked movement.

Leo exhaled and looked down. He only had a little more to go. He tried to move down and realized that it wasn’t going to work any more. His system was compromised. There was only one way out. Leo dug into his pocket and looked around below him. It was just grass. It would help cushion the fall. Sawing through his hair, Leo cut off the last of it and toppled down into the ground. The impact
hurt a little but for the first time in a month and a half Leo felt grass and dirt under him. He laughed and felt tears run down his face.

Sitting up Leo decided to not waste this victory. He gathered his items and while he untied the parachute he decided to keep the cloth. Who knew what else could come in handy? It had grass stains and there was a smudge of dirt in the corner but Leo wasn’t going to throw it away.

Then, Leo began to run, wanting to get away as quickly as possible. Beyond the valley was a small nook of trees. Leo would duck in there just in case his father had more than Iago checking up on him for security measures and then stay covered before night. Leo’s first destination was the island. It was the closest to him. Fishers frequented the area and hopefully Leo could either convince one to give him a ride or borrow a boat in the night.

However, Leo barely made it to the nook of trees when he felt a pulse of magic around the area. It was too late though, Leo stepped through the barrier of magic and next thing he knew he was back in the tower. Wobbling Leo lost his balance and fell harshly onto the floor, elbowing a pile of books painfully.

Inside the tower Leo saw what had happened. A chair with books was half knocked over but held up by another chair. The books were on the floor and the chest lodged between them. Leo winced in pain as he stood up. Looking out to the window Leo frowned. He should have known there was more than one measure keeping him locked up. The magic around the area was not common but Leo knew the theory behind it. It was a can-trap spell. It looped two destinations together so when anything passed through the barrier it would return to the starting point. The starting point for Leo in this case was the tower. The object also had to be worked into the spell, meaning it only affected Leo.

His heart sank a little before Leo shook his head. Now wasn’t the time to be depressed. He had figured out how to get out of the tower and learned there was a spell keeping him contained in the area too. Magic was Leo’s strong point. He’d find a way to break the spell. All he needed was to break the spell along the forest. Without that spell the one on him pulling him back to the tower would break without a destination.

First, though, Leo had to clean up the tower. Leaving the hair, now that Leo knew it would just disintegrate with time, he began to pick up the books.

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Elise’s birthday came. Leo wrote out a long beautiful letter to his sister and then folded it and stuffed it into an envelope for when he saw her again.

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A week passed and Leo had become engrossed with research. All the books on the table were about spells and Leo had notes upon notes scattered. That was why when he wrote the date on top of his diary page Leo had to flip back a couple of pages and make sure he had written the correct date. When he confirmed it was the real date Leo looked over at the kitchen.

End of Spring Festival was slowly creaking in and that was celebrated with tons of food, dancing, and prayers for good weather, rain, and bountiful harvests. They also prayed for the livestock growing up strong, healthy, and well.

Leo could taste the braided breads encrusted with honey and almonds. He could taste the young leeks in soup and small sweet onions roasted over an open fire. Leo could see the first calf of the
But what Leo could see the clearest was the time spent with family. He could see Camilla running around with Elise, not caring about the flowers woven in her hair or the long dress she was wearing. Leo could see Xander smiling fondly at them. Leo could hear Elise cry out for her brothers to join her and Camilla. Later they’d all sneak away to Corrin’s side of the castle and eat a very late feast thanks to Jakob and Flora’s efforts. Then, overstuffed, they’d all pile into Corrin’s massive bed and cuddle together, drifting asleep in the same bed.

Leo’s heart ached and he wanted it so badly. He wanted to escape the tower and see his siblings, eat delicious food, and talk the night away.

His heart clenched and Leo shoved the memory deep inside before returning to his research.

Leo managed two more attempts on the barrier (both unsuccessful) before the month was over and Iago once again showed up. Being cautious Leo had hidden all of his research and had replaced his reading materials a day before with recipe books and spent most of his day testing some of the recipes out. Leo had also decided to do a bit of cleaning. Though his clothes magically appeared as well as bedding that didn’t stop dust from settling, mainly on the bookshelves. After putting some soup on (a vegetable soup Leo remembered one of the head cooks making) Leo went about dusting. It was how Iago found him when he arrived in the late afternoon. Leo hoped that due to the timing Iago would do a quick look and leave him. The sooner Iago was gone the better.

“Well, well, what do we have here?” Iago cooed. “Prince Leo cleaning like a common servant?”

Leo raised an eyebrow and continued to dust the bookshelf. “I thought I was labelled a traitor? Do traitors keep their royal titles?”

Iago’s lips twisted and Leo considered it a small victory. He continued to move downwards, dusting. Maybe if he was boring it would add to Iago leaving him faster. However, Iago moved around the tower much like last time and checked what Leo had on the table. Knowing Iago and his comment on cleaning he’d make a snide comment on the cook books too. It didn’t help that Leo had the soup on the stove.

“What’s this? Cooking too?” Iago commented. “You’re really becoming a good servant.”

How predictable and unoriginal. Leo continued to dust and move down until he was back on the ground floor. It was unfortunate but Leo wasn’t going to blatantly avoid Iago. That was giving in. Instead Leo kept his focus on cleaning while minding where Iago was. Shuffling around the table, Leo went to the bookshelf under the side of the ramp and kept dusting. Iago kept his presence around the table and was walking closer to Leo, probably to see the books he was dusting, as if Leo was hiding something while cleaning.

It made Leo’s next choice both gratifying and a mistake.

Pulling at his hair Leo tripped Iago effortlessly all while maintaining his gaze on the bookshelf. Iago squawked like a bird and fell to the floor. Leo hid his smile and kept his voice level.

“Everything all right, Iago?”

Iago fumbled up. Leo could hear the shuffling of robes and looked over finally. Iago raised his hand to hit Leo but Leo ducked at the obvious retaliation.
“What’s wrong?” Leo innocently asked. “You look flustered.”

Iago’s mouth opened a few times before his eyes caught Leo’s hair. Then before Leo could react Iago pulled on Leo’s hair harshly. Leo fell to the ground, wincing at the pain, feeling foolish for forgetting that his hair was a double edged sword.

“You little shit.” Iago pulled Leo closer.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Leo kept his tone innocent through the pain.

The tug on his hair became harsher and Leo felt tears at the corner of his eyes. “Don’t play dumb with me boy.” Iago told him, curling his hands into Leo’s hair. “You should really think about antagonising me. Garon gave explicit orders to not kill you, yes, but he never said anything about teaching you a lesson.”

“Teaching them a lesson”, Leo swallowed. He had been too cocky and forgot about the others. Xander, Leo wasn’t worried about. His older brother had the intimidation factor that would keep Iago a bay. However, Iago’s thoughts were dangerous. What if he thought he could get away with more when visiting Camilla or Elise? Sure, Camilla was strong but what if Iago used magic?

Iago seemed to sense his thoughts. Leo watched in horror as he grinned. “Oh? Thinking about your siblings now?” He shook Leo by the hair and it hurt so much Leo couldn’t help but groan.

“Unfortunately for me your youngest sister is protected.” Iago scoffed, a frown in his voice. “King Garon is a kind man.” Leo had words to say about that but now wasn’t the time. “He let her two idiot retainers join her in exile.”

Those words sent a deep wave of relief in Leo. Effie and Arthur were strong and loyal. They’d sooner put an axe through Iago than let a single hair on Elise’s head be harmed. However, Iago continued.

“But Princess Camilla… she’s docile as a lamb now a days.” Iago told him. “She has so little strength and sleeps so much. It would be so easy to abuse that, wouldn’t you say?”

Leo hissed. “Don’t… touch… Camilla.”

“Oh? And you’ll stop me?” Iago asked yet again. “You can’t do anything in here, Prince Leo. All you have is confinement and too long hair to match your feminine face.”

Leo felt the jab. He wished Iago would leave so he could cut his hair and have his minute of short hair before the curse kicked in. He wanted to tell Iago he was going to bust out and save his siblings but that wasn’t wise.

“I mean,” Iago continued. “You already have the cleaning and cooking part down. You’re already acting like a servant. Want me to teach you a lesson the same way I teach misbehaving servants?”

Iago’s grip on Leo’s hair was tighter and Leo saw stars behind his eyes. Still, with the amount of hair Leo had Iago couldn’t keep his grip forever. Using it to his advantage, Leo swung around even though it hurt and managed to punch Iago in the face. Iago dropped him and Leo fell to the floor, his head aching. He had to get up before Iago did anything else but he wasn’t fast enough. Iago stepped on his hair and pinned Leo to the ground, standing over him.

“You little shit.” Iago hissed, using his free leg to kick Leo in the side. “You think you can defy me or King Garon? You’ll be trapped here for the rest of your miserable life.” Iago kicked Leo in the side again.
Leo had retorts on his lips but he held them back. Instead he waited until Iago was tired from kicking him. Iago was huffing and Leo liked to think that was the most physical exercise the grease ball had in eons. It was moderately satisfying. Sitting up Leo did his best to hide the pain in his side from Iago. Brushing his clothes and hair Leo stared at Iago.

“Are you done with your visit?” He neutrally asked.

The neutral reaction made Iago’s face twist into the best shade of red. “You!! You won’t be so cocky when you hear how my visit with Princess Camilla goes.”

Leo held back a wave of panic and assured himself that Camilla could handle Iago regardless of her state. Iago had given Leo more information by gloating than he probably realised in his agitated state. Camilla’s curse had something to do with being docile and Elise had her retainers. Leo made sure to make a mental note to write it down later.

“I’m sure when I see Camilla again she’ll be delighted to tell me how it went.” Leo smugly told Iago.

Iago let out a sound that resembled a kettle whistling. “When! You’ll never see each other again! I’ll make sure of that!”

“Good bye, Iago.” Leo responded.

Iago left with a puff of smoke and Leo considered it a victory.

~

Leo’s birthday also came and passed and he celebrated silently by making a small (lopsided) cake and eating it alone. In his dreams Leo dreamt of his sibling with him, celebrating with love and affection. Leo woke up with his heart aching.

~

The weather from late June to late August was humid and hit like a wet towel to the face. Leo suddenly realised why the castle was built closer to the north and not by the ocean. With the breeze it was both calming and humid. Leo’s hair stuck to his neck badly in a sweaty, sticky mess and he never felt cool due to the sheer amount of it. Leo did his best though, to wear looser clothes and drink water. He studied the barrier more and had three attempts to escape and break the barrier. Each attempt wasn’t closer than the last but progress meant a ton of errors first. Leo took each failed attempt as a lesson. He had become more efficient with his system of getting down and with his notes Leo was sure he’d be able to break the barrier soon. Hopefully when the weather was cooler. Leo didn’t want to travel under the direct sunlight.

Iago visited again at the end of each month and with nothing to gloat over Leo (especially regarding Camilla) he had been sour, pushing Leo aside a few times and spending less than fifteen minutes inspecting the tower before leaving. It was fortunate as Leo didn’t want Iago knowing what he was doing. That also meant Leo’s escape would have to be in the beginning of the month, giving ample time to escape, find his siblings, and form a plan.

There was no doubt in Leo’s mind that when they escaped they’d have to kill their father (and if at all possible Iago too). It was almost ironic that Leo had never thought of hurting his father (even when Garon had descended into something else, morphing and twisting into a shell of his former self) until banishment. Any other option had faded the moment Garon had immediately trusted a seer and promptly banished and cursed them.

“Self fulfilling prophesy.” Leo muttered to himself as he researched a way to break the barrier.
His notes were so extensive that Leo had begun to hide them in other books and then would stuff them under his mattress. When he worked Leo also hid the notes between pages of a cookbook and a book on braids he permanently had on the table. It was a silly precaution as Iago only visited at the end of the month, but Leo figured a habit was best established early.

Leo worked on theory and experimenting all through the summer and when the tail end of August hit Leo was ready for another test run. His heart spiked and Leo felt his hands shake a little. Was this it? After months of being trapped was this when Leo finally escaped? He swallowed and tried to not dream of seeing his sibling again.

That evening Leo decided to test his escape. It was almost routine to set up and get out of his tower. In a small bag besides his magic tomes, a knife, some food, a map, and his birthday letter to Elise there wasn’t anything else Leo wanted to take. He then fashioned a cloak out of the first grass stained parachute from the first attempt and left the tower.

Once his feet hit the grass Leo raced to the edge of the valley towards the trees. The magic was on the tip of his tongue. Leo hovered his hand to where he knew the barrier was and quietly spoke. The barrier was invisible and when Leo had finished he wasn’t sure if it was actually broken. Swallowing thickly Leo took a step forward, hoping it worked.

It didn’t.

Leo felt the shift of cool night air around him to the warmth of the tower. Grass shifted to wood and the sky became the tower again. Leo cussed and for the first time felt his heart sink a little. Going around the tower, Leo shoved his things away but kept the notes on the barrier with him. Hastily redoing his braid (it now only took Leo twenty minutes to redo the braid) Leo flopped into his bed and reread through the notes he made, trying to find an error. He read until his eyes couldn’t read another word as sleep edged around the corners of his mind.

~

Leo woke to not just Iago in his tower but a couple other mages clearly from the army. Leo sat up abruptly and blinked before scowling.

“What are you doing here?” Leo asked. It hadn’t been a month.

“Oh, sleeping beauty is awake.” Iago croaked. “I merely had a strange feeling.” He then smiled sickly. “Turns out I was right.”

In his hands were Leo’s notes. Leo felt like ice had filled his stomach. Iago laughed and Leo tried to school his expression to something neutral but it was too late.

“We always knew you wouldn’t just sit still but the extent of your work.” Iago mused. “Impressive for an amateur.”

Leo held back a retort that he was easily smarter and better at magic than Iago ever would be but that was stopped when Iago burned his notes. Leo tried to not scramble for them, but his heart sunk as the ashes fell to the ground. Iago then turned to the other two mages. As Iago turned Leo grabbed the small knife he had by his bed side and held it tightly.

“Search the books. See if there are any other notes.”

At this Leo scrambled out of bed. He had to make it sound like those were his only notes. “That won’t be necessary. You won. Those are the only notes I have.”
Iago looked over at him and stared. For a second Leo felt like he had convinced them but then he felt a jolt of electricity over his body. It wasn’t enough to harm him but it was enough to hurt. Leo gasped out and fell to the ground in a pile. Iago laughed and Leo wished he had his magic with him.

“I’m afraid I’m not taking your word as honest.” Iago’s voice sounded oily. Another bolt of electricity came down on Leo. “So just lay there like a good boy.”

Iago was close. Leo used the remainder of his strength to try and slice at him. He hit Iago’s cheek and blood dripped down. The wound was shallow but Leo felt better before Iago lunged and grabbed Leo by the hair again. Leo couldn’t move.

“You’ll regret hurting me.” Iago hissed.

“I regret many interactions with you but hurting you isn’t one of them.” Leo spat out.

Iago slapped him and dropped Leo to the floor. Leo fell in a heap and felt Iago step on his hair again before a sickening crack filled the air. Magic seeped from Iago’s hand as Leo screamed in pain. His leg was at an impossible angle and it hurt. Pain flooded Leo’s vision as Iago laughed.

“Careful little prince.” Iago told him. “I wouldn’t want to injure that leg any more. Or have me break the other one. Sit still and maybe we’ll heal it before we leave.”

Leo had no retort. He could only think about the pain of the break and the electricity that still ghosted across his skin. Tears stained his lips and Leo tasted the salt. Iago left him with another laugh.

Leo wasn’t sure how long they were there but he smelt fire and burning through the entire time. When they left one of the mages muttered something and the leg twisted back to normal but the pain was still there. They then left.

More time passed before Leo could move. His leg ached to walk on and Leo knew that they hadn’t fully healed his leg. He had to rest and not move about for a while. Scowling Leo flopped in a chair after hobbling over. With his leg still aching Leo couldn’t attempt any more escapes. Also, Leo was sure they didn’t heal it properly. If his suspicions were correct he’d have a slight limp in his leg when he walked.

They hadn’t entirely broken him but they did just enough so Leo couldn’t escape with ease. For the first time in months Leo wept long and hard, his hope slightly shattered. His tower smelt of ashes and the shelves were a mess. Leo wasn’t even sure they had only burned his notes. Maybe they burned the books too. Leo was smart but he couldn’t remember all of the things he wrote down.

He felt like a bird with clipped wings.

Leo cried a little harder.

That night Leo hacked away at his hair. He left the fallen locks on the floor, not cleaning up.

The only plus was his diaries were untouched by the fire. Leo held them to his chest and stuffed them under his mattress.
A month passed and autumn was upon them. Leo still walked with a slight limp and when Iago saw he gleefully smiled. Leo commented on Iago being a glorified babysitter and it shut him up.

By the time Leo’s leg was better it was late autumn and the trees had already lost their leaves. The ground was turning brown and the weather was colder. Leo started to bundle himself up at night despite the fact the tower apparently also came with heating spells making it comfortable regardless of the weather outside.

Xander’s birthday arrived a few days before their first snow fall. Leo spent the day writing a letter to Xander and wondering where he was and how he was doing. He wished Xander was beside him to comfort and lend an ear.

Then when the snow fell, light and fluffy on the ground Leo knew he wouldn’t be risking travel. Nohrian winters were nothing to scoff at and without proper shelter Leo would freeze to death before he found his siblings. Sure, it wasn’t as bad as the northern part and where the Ice Tribe was but freezing temperatures didn’t care about how they were graded. They froze everything just with different degrees of freeze.

Camilla’s birthday also came and went. Leo also wrote a letter and tucked it with all the rest of his things. When he escaped those would be one of the first things Leo gave them.

Winter festivals came. Leo couldn’t decorate and it left him feeling a bit hollow inside. The cup of hot cocoa didn’t help and it soon tasted bitter. Leo could remember playing outside with his siblings, throwing snowballs and making snow forts. He could remember opening presents with them and eating elaborate meals in the great hall.

Leo cried again and held himself, wishing he was with his family.

The New Year came and along with it Corrin’s birthday the following day. Leo silently stayed up and counted the seconds for the sun to rise. It warmly dawned on the fresh snow and made everything sparkle like a thousand diamonds were scattered across the ground. It was beautiful.

When spring came and the weather was nicer, the snow gone, Iago broke Leo’s legs, both of them this time. Leo lay on the ground in pain as Iago laughed at him, grabbing him by the hair.

“A reminder to stay put Lord Leo.” Iago told him before throwing Leo on the ground. “I’ll come back and heal those for you. If I remember.”

“Go fuck yourself.” Leo hissed out on the ground.

Iago lightly stepped on Leo’s leg and the pain that blossomed hurt more than the initial breaking. Leo cried out and was glad when Iago left even though he was on the ground in agony.

Iago came back two days later. Leo had managed to move himself around and at least get water and prompt himself in his bed. He healed Leo’s legs and smirked.
“What do you say?” Iago asked.

“Fuck you.” Leo answered.

Leo searched through his shelves and found some books on healing. He then opened them up to the section on mending broken bones.

Time passed. Leo lost track of how many times he tried to escape. He lost track of how many letters he wrote to each of his siblings. His diaries spanned many shelves, each with the date and day precisely written. Leo only knew the passage of time by the seasons, the light, and by his meticulous keeping of days. When it hit 365 days Leo hacked at his hair again, hating the weight and the length. He hated how it was used against him whenever Iago was around. Leo wanted the curse gone and to be reunited with his siblings.

Soon. He told himself. Soon.

More time passed. Leo tried more escapes. They failed. Each failure chipped at Leo’s drive.

Another year passed.

And another.

And another.

Each year piled onto Leo’s breaking of will. Iago frequently broke his legs when the weather was nicer, usually around the first time Leo was caught. Sometimes he came back to heal them. Sometimes Leo had to attempt healing himself. His legs were slowly scarred by the multiple breaks and it hurt to stand for too long. Leo tried to heal himself better but the books were rudimentary and his skill meager.

After healing his legs for the first time that spring Leo fell onto his bed. His will felt fried and he could barely remember what his siblings looked like. He had missed so many of Elise’s birthdays. What did she look like now? What did Xander sound like? How soft and gentle were Camilla’s hands? Where were Corrin’s bright smiles?

Leo cried at the fleeting memories that escaped him. He wanted to hold onto them but his mind wasn’t allowing him to. Confinement took everything from him and it was all Garon’s fault. Leo wished he could stab his father over and over. He fell asleep with those thoughts running through his mind: Garon dead, Iago dead, and Leo reunited with his siblings.

When Leo woke up another year had passed in his confinement. Leo braided his hair in record time and went to make breakfast. He had become good at cooking. Deciding to make pancakes for breakfast Leo was about to pour the batter in the pan when a loud crash came from behind him.

Leo froze. Iago never came with a crash. There was always a tightening in the air and smoke. There was always a slimy, oily feel that filled the room. Whipping his head around Leo looked over at his window.
There, half hanging over the window’s sill were two guys. One of them had stark white hair and an eyepatch. The other had spikey blond hair. Both of them had sticks and leaves sticking to their clothes.

“Greetings!” The blond one said with a grin and a small wave. “Would it be any trouble to inquire for a hand in assisting us inside?”

Leo blinked before he grabbed the first thing he could touch, which was a ladle for the pancake batter, and waved it like a sword.

“Who are you? Why are you here?” Leo asked. “If this is Iago’s idea of a joke it’s very poor. Get out before I kick you out. It’s a very long fall to the ground.”

The white haired man laughed. “Feisty. That’s good.”

“Niles…” The blond one sighed before he looked at Leo. “You have my solemn oath that we have no knowledge or interactions regarding a being named Iago. Please, help us up and we can explain properly.”

Leo eyed them. They were clearly stronger than him since Leo had been confined for so many years but strength wouldn’t hold against magic. Cautiously Leo set the ladle down and grabbed one of the magic tomes. The two looked at him and didn’t try to talk him out of bringing a weapon. Leo then shifted his hair and offered the end to them. That caused some stares. Leo sighed.

“Grab my hair.” Leo said. “I’ll pull you in.”

“It won’t hurt you will it?” The white haired man (Niles, as the other had called him) asked.

“I’ll be fine.” Leo assured. “Hurry before I change my mind.”

The two grabbed his hair and Leo tugged, pulling the rest of their bodies in with a thump. Tugging his hair back, Leo kept his distance and held his tome tightly. The two groaned a bit as they sat up. Leo took a quick note of their appearance. Their clothes were a bit ragged and dirty too. On Niles’s back was a bow and quiver of arrows. The blond had a sword at his side.

“Thank you! Words cannot express the deepest of gratitude in our hearts for assisting us.” The blond prattled. “We had a hell of a time scaling your tower but with the assistance of good old fashioned rope and determination and…”

“Wait rope?” Leo cut him off. “You two climbed the tower? It’s so smooth, like glass.”

“It is?” The blond asked before his eyes lit up. “Maybe only to you? For us it was as simple as scaling a cliff side.”

Leo hadn’t considered that. It somehow made sense. He walked back over to his table to write it in his diary before he paused. What was he doing? For the first time in years he had visitors not Iago or mages working for his father in the tower. He needed answers.

“I helped you so answer my questions.” Leo said. “Who are you? Why are you here?”

“Oops. How rude of me!” The blond straightened his shirt. “I am the one known as Odin Dark! Master of the sword! Fear not my dark aura.”

Did he… strike a pose? Leo looked over at the other one, Niles.
“Don’t mind him. He’s been like that since I met him a year ago.” Niles offered as an explanation. “I’m Niles, as Odin already said earlier.”

“I’m Leo.” Leo said in return.

“We know.” Odin blurted out before Niles elbowed him. “My apologies. Let me answer your other question. We’re here because we’re going to bust you and your siblings out.”

Bust them out. Leo stared at the two of them. He had spent years trying to escape the tower. All the magic Leo had tried on the barrier didn’t work. He had attempted to save himself for years and now suddenly he was being rescued like a story book character?

“Why?” Leo dryly asked. “Why now? I’ve spent five years in this tower. I’ve tried escaping multiple times. I’ve never succeeded. No one has tried to rescue me. So, why now?”

“Well, that’s a long story.” Niles said with a drawl. “Could we discuss it over breakfast? Odin and I haven’t eaten in a while and that looks like pancake batter.”

Leo looked back to his half done breakfast and back to them. Crossing his arms Leo pointed to the window sill. “Leave your weapons there.”

Niles and Odin did as Leo asked without another word. Leo meanwhile tried to still the beating of his heart. It was fluttering and Leo couldn’t help but look around, wondering when Iago would show up and tell him this was all fake, that he was just giving him hope before dashing it.

“Can we sit here?” Odin asked.

“Yes.” Leo immediately responded.

It didn’t matter. He’d entertain them and prepare himself for the reveal. Iago wouldn’t see him cry over this. Cooking the pancakes, Leo hummed to himself and kept an eye on Odin and Niles. They were sitting close together and had their fingers laced for a moment before they parted. Leo felt his heart tug and he turned to finish cooking the pancakes. He plated them and grabbed the syrup, some cutlery, and extra plates.

“Here.” Leo sighed. He couldn’t eat in front of others if they weren’t either. “Help yourselves.”

Odin immediately fell onto them, grabbing four and drowning them in syrup. Niles was a bit slower. Leo waited a moment before he began to eat.

“Thank you so very much!” Odin said between bites of pancake.

“Chew and swallow before speaking.” Niles rolled his eye. “I swear you have the worst manners possible.”

“I don’t!” Odin swallowed thickly. “I was taught proper manners.”

“By who?” Niles asked.

“My mother!” Odin proudly proclaimed like a little kid.

Leo hid a small smile and continued to eat.

Niles rolled his eye and lightly bopped Odin on the head. “My apologies for my comrade. Let me explain why we’re here. No one knew about your confinement until a year ago.”
A year ago? Leo stared. “How did my father manage to hide that for four years?”

“He paid a lot of people to keep silent but rumours spread. At first, they were just rumours but with King Garon’s increased thirst to start fights and ignore negotiations from Hoshido, Ylisse, and even Regna Ferox investigations occurred. No one wants another war.” Niles smoothly explained. “Spies discovered a lack of you and your siblings and the word spread.”

“So, what?” Leo ate a bit more of his pancake. “A year ago, everyone finds out about our confinement and now you’re here to bust us out? My father will just send us back once he hears about this. Plus, we’re all cursed.” Leo pointed to his hair. “Even if we get me past the barrier around this place what next? What if my siblings can’t leave their places? Also, we’re defying my father and as much as I like doing that without a plan we’ll be dead. Or worse, confined again.”

Odin and Niles looked at him before Odin suddenly stood up, his eyes soft. “You’ve been through a lot Prince Leo. This barbaric display,” Odin gestured to the tower and Leo’s hair, “is proof of the lowest form of humanity. King Garon is trying to start a war, mainly with Hoshido. Ylisse and Regna Ferox are getting dragged in despite peace treaties with both nations. Exalt Emmeryn and the Western Khan are doing their best with Queen Mikoto but everyone knows King Garon doesn’t want to listen to them.”

“We came here to see if you still had fight in you.” Niles told him. “Do you want to get revenge on your father? On those who hurt you?”

Leo felt the question pierce through his soul. Did he? He had dreamed of it for five years. “Yes. I do. More than anything.” He whispered. Who cared if this was a farce? Garon already believed they wanted to kill him so it wasn’t anything Iago could report to him like it was news.

Odin then walked over to Leo and stood in front of him. “We didn’t come here without a plan, milord. You are cursed yes, but no curse is unbreakable. If we can get you and your siblings to the Rainbow Sage we can break your curse and you can have that revenge.”

That was their plan. Just bust Leo and his siblings out, go to the Rainbow Sage, and kill his father. Leo hollowly laughed. It was a long shot. They would have to travel far. So many things could go wrong.

“Do you even know where the Rainbow Sage is?” Leo asked the first obvious question.

At this Odin flushed a little and Niles laughed into his hand.

“We, uh do but it’s sort of a long story.” Odin muttered.

Niles coughed. “Six months.”

Odin shot Niles a glare before looking back at Leo. “Milord, I swear to you we’re telling the truth. We aren’t in league with anyone but ourselves. No one knows we’re doing this besides you. All we want is to free you and your siblings and return order to Nohr.”

“We know we only have our word, but please believe us.” Niles added as he stood up.

The two of them then knelt in front of Leo. Leo’s heart fluttered. He hadn’t been treated like a prince in five years and suddenly two people were kneeling in front of him. He stood up abruptly and felt his face flush.

“I...”
“I swear, on my heart, my life, my soul that we’ll help you Lord Leo.” Odin said with a tone so firm and without dramatics it left Leo breathless.

“We’re ready to give our lives up to serve you.” Niles added. “Our lives and hearts are in your hands. Please, accept our vows.”

This couldn’t be a rouse, could it? Leo felt small and big at the same time. Their words were floating in his mind and Leo felt like he needed hours to process but he didn’t have hours. He had to make a choice now.

Steeling himself Leo remembered all the escape attempts and the desire to leave. He had to save his siblings and there was little option but to trust the two in front of him. Making a snap choice Leo spoke.

“I accept. From now on you’ll serve me and help me. You’ll be my weapons and my shields. If you betray me I’ll kill you without a second thought.”

Odin and Niles looked at him and smiled widely. “We wouldn’t have it any other way, Prince Leo.” Niles drawled. “Now, let’s get you out of here.”

Leo felt his heart soar slightly. “Yes, let’s go.”

Chapter End Notes

Ages: Just to clarify at the beginning, Elise is 10, Leo is 18, Camilla is 21, and Xander is 23. I randomly picked the ages and the differences between the siblings. It’s not canon. End of chapter just add 5 to their ages.

Magic hair: It's enchanted to be lighter than hair that length would be so it doesn't strain Leo's neck or shoulders.

Elise's birthday: Canon birthday for her is March 19.

Leo's birthday: Canon birthday for him is June 30.

Xander's birthday: Canon birthday for him is October 27.

Camilla's birthday: Canon birthday for her is November 30.

Corrin's birthday: It isn't canon since they're the avatar, so I made it January 1.

Odin: Since there is no Anankos in this story Odin is still using a sword as his weapon.
Hello everyone! I’m finally done this chapter! Sorry it took so long. I got a new position for my job so I’m super busy with prep work. I may be writing slower than expected but I promise I’ll do my best to keep up and finish this story in a timely manner! A huge thanks to ObscureReference for once again being my sound board and the most amazing friend ever.

I hope you all enjoy this chapter. It’s definitely a lot in Leo’s head and the conversations with Odin and Niles slowly blooming but we’ll get there. Leo has a lot to think about and they need to grow as friends!

As always feel free to leave kudos and comments. Those always make my day and motivate me. Also if you want to check my tumblr out it’s right [here](http://example.com).
“Our ropes are strong and we could take you down with us.”

Leo bit his lip. “I maybe too heavy.” He gestured to his hair. “I can get myself down.”

If that was news to Niles and Odin they didn’t seem to show it. Instead they grinned like Leo had declared the best thing in the world to them. Leo shuffled and felt his leg protest a little. He’d have to check it later and heal it again.

“Very well.” Niles nodded. “I’ll go down first and keep look out.”

Leo wanted to tell Niles that people usually magically teleported to his tower but Niles had already started to go down the tower. Focusing Leo worked on his system. Odin watched him and didn’t say anything, but he did help set up, putting chairs where Leo needed them. Then, like all the other times, Leo went down the tower with his hair. His heart was pounding as he lowered down. Sure, he’d been outside before but what about the barrier? Leo had forgotten about it and he felt bad. He’d mention it the moment they were all on the ground.

Touching down, Leo then pulled his knife out and without another word hacked his hair off. He could feel Niles staring at him curious but nothing more. Sheathing the knife when he was done Leo walked over to Niles.

“You can cut it?” Niles mildly asked.

“The cut hair will disappear in a while,” Leo answered, “and this will regrow in a minute.” He gestured to the hacked edges of his hair.

Niles nodded. Leo felt his hair grow back as he watched Odin scale down. It was a strange sight to witness. Odin was touching parts of the tower that seemed utterly smooth to Leo but clearly weren’t for Odin. When Odin’s feet touched the grass, he retrieved his rope and ran over to them.

“Time to leave!” Odin beamed. “This way.”

Now was as good of time as any. Leo pointed to the trees. “Before we go I have to ask, how did you get through the barrier?”

“Barrier?” Niles asked. “Oh, the magical field?”

Odin smiled and tapped Leo’s shoulder. “Funny you should bring it up, I was going to speak of it earlier but got too excited seeing pancakes.” He then pointed to where the barrier is. “The type of magic keeping you bound here is both complicated and delicate. It is designed to absorb most magic but it isn’t designed to withstand magical weapons. Lucky for us, I have one.”

Odin then pulled a small ornate knife from his belt. The handle was made of silver and had some sort of symbol that was hidden by Odin’s hand. Curving upwards was the blade. It was sharp and glowed blue under the light. It looked expensive.

“But…” Leo stared. “Magical weapons are hard to come by. How did you get that?”

Odin merely smiled. “Let’s go!”

“It’s no use.” Niles sighed as they walked. “Odin has never told me either. My guess is he stole it from someone.”

Odin turned and pouted. “I didn’t steal this. It’s mine.”
For some reason Leo believed him. They fell silent and when they approached the trees Leo gripped his bag tightly. This was it. The place he always failed to pass. His heart was hammering in his chest like a rabbit cowering in the bushes. Would this work? What if he was sent back to the tower and Niles and Odin just left him? Leo couldn’t handle that. He tried to focus on their promise to serve him. (As strange as it was. Why would they pledge their allegiance to a disowned, captive prince?)

“Lord Leo.” Niles’s voice was soft behind him. “Breathe, okay? I promise this will work. We won’t leave you. We swore an oath to you.” His voice grew firmer at the end.

How did he know what Leo was thinking? Leo took a deep breath and didn’t stop clutching his bag.

Odin brought the knife down where the barrier would be and blue light crinkled around the edges, cracking the barrier like a glass jar. Leo stared and watched as Odin cut through, like he was creating an opening for them. He cut downwards and soon there was a space where no part of the barrier touched. Leo could see where the barrier’s perimeter was now thanks to the cracks.

“This won’t last long.” Odin told Leo before offering his hand. “Come on, milord.”

The titles again. Leo still felt a strange tingle in his mind at the title. Odin and Niles were just being polite and it wasn’t their fault Leo had no idea what to do with the title. He’d have to address that later.

Leo reached out and touched Odin’s hand. Odin’s hand was rough from sword training and calloused. It reminded Leo of Xander or what he remembered of his brother. The familiarity grounded him and Leo walked through the broken barrier.

He didn’t bounce back to the tower. Leo gasped out and felt a hysterical giggle worm it’s way through his throat. Odin smiled widely and Niles appeared a second later, his singular eye twinkling. Leo breathed in deeply, like the air past the valley was different somehow. He wanted to savour the moment but now wasn’t the time. They had to move.

“Where to?” Niles asked.

Leo remembered his plan from all those years back when he first escaped the tower. “The ocean. There is an island that belongs to my father. I’m positive one of my siblings is trapped there. It’s the closest.”

“Then, to the ocean we go!” Odin half cheered before walking.

Leo was tugged along and it took him a full minute to realise he was still holding Odin’s hand. Snatching it away with a flush on his cheeks, Leo tried to contain his embarrassment. The warmth from Odin’s hand remained for a long while.

They walked in silence, possibly out of precaution. Leo scanned the forest and wondered when the Nohrian troops would show up with Iago. They’d distract Niles and Odin then Iago would break his legs again and drag him off.

Leo felt like he was about throw up. He couldn’t think like that. He had to remain positive. Niles and Odin said they’d protect him. Leo had to put his trust in them and that also meant building their trust. So, even though Leo was wary, he still spoke. Loud enough so they could hear him but not too loud.

“So, if I may ask, where are you two from?” Leo started off.

Niles slowed down so he was walking beside Leo before he answered. “I’m from Nohr. I suppose I could be from somewhere else but my father left us and my mother died when I was young. I never
got to ask if we were from anywhere else.”

Leo swallowed. “My apologies.”

“No worries.” Niles waved his hand. “I do have good memories growing up. It wasn’t all bad.”

“As for me,” Odin started, also slowing down but still ahead of them, “I come from a small town west of Regna Ferox. It’s so tiny you wouldn’t even have it on a map or know the name.” He laughed softly.

Regna Ferox. Leo’s eyes widened. That was very far away. Leo had never visited but he had read books about it. The place was as cold as Nohr and the land just as unforgiving but the people were vastly different. Leo supposed it had a lot to do with their rulers.

“Why did you come to Nohr?” Leo asked.

“I wanted to travel.” Odin replied. “I became a hired hand for merchants and minor lords. I’d protect them as they traveled. It was profitable situation for us all. The people who hired me received protection and I got to travel the world.”

Travel the world. Leo gave a sad smile. He could only imagine what Odin had seen and done in his lifetime. “That sounds nice.”

Odin stopped walking and turned around, his face stricken. “My apologies if I came off as insensitive, milord.”

The jarring feeling was back. Leo still wasn’t sure what to do with the title (barely had time to breathe properly since the two busted him out) but precaution was key. They couldn’t go around with the habit of calling him “milord” or “Lord Leo” just in case they ran into people. With that in mind Leo ignored the loneliness that had penetrated his entire being at the mention of travel.

“It wasn’t insensitive.” Leo assured Odin. “Also, I’ve been thinking and I want you two to not call me milord or Lord Leo. If we run into anyone and they overhear you it could spell trouble.”

Niles was the first one to speak. “Is this blanket permission to call you Leo?”

The way Niles said his name, cradling it on his tongue cautiously before releasing it into the air made Leo shiver a little and his cheeks flush. Odin had completely stopped walking and was turned around, his clear eyes staring into Leo, waiting for the answer. It felt a bit silly to flush at the suggestion. There was nothing else to call him. Leo was a common name so there was no need for an alias.

“Yes, it is.” Leo decided.

“Very well, Leo.” Niles cracked a smile. “What about your hair though?” He added with a slow, cautious tone.

Leo touched his hair. It was braided but it was a simple braid and the hair still dragged on the ground. Leo knew how to do complex braids that made his hair a bit shorter, though still very long. Looking down at his clothes and slight figure Leo grimaced and remembered what Iago had said many times to him.

“Many people have long hair.” Leo mused, his lips twisting. “When we rest I’ll braid it so it won’t drag. It will still be very long but maybe if I also remain quiet people will think I’m a girl.”
It pained Leo to even suggest it. Not that there was anything wrong with women or being a girl; the idea just sat wrong on his chest. It felt like he was letting Iago win somehow.

Odin, however, frowned. “Not to be rude, but I don’t know how anyone could mistaken you for a woman.”

Leo froze and stared at Odin who was still talking, but Leo couldn’t hear what he was saying. With just a sentence Odin had dismissed the sneers from Iago, the ones he had heard for far too long. It felt like a piece of his person, his identity, had slotted back into place. Leo’s mouth twitched and he held back an embarrassing response.

“I see.” Leo muttered, his mouth forming into a small smile.

“I don’t think we’ll need to worry.” Niles offered up. “It’s been five years since most people have seen you, right? As long as they don’t look long they’ll just assume you’re a regular person.”

He had a point. “Regardless, please, call me Leo so we can avoid detection.”

Odin and Niles nodded and the three of them continued on their way.

When the sky started to darken they stopped under a canopy of trees. Odin went to gather wood for a fire and Niles set some traps. Leo waited until Odin was back and the fire was built before he wordlessly lit it for them, a crackle of magic around his fingertips.

“Oh wow.” Odin sat down, “You conjured magic without a tome.”

Leo flushed a little under the sheer awe in Odin’s tone. “It’s more like holding a spark in my hand. Technically it isn’t magic.”

“Nonsense!” Odin proclaimed. “Holding the embers of flame in your palms is no easy feat.”

The praise caused Leo’s mouth to twitch upwards into a small smile. He couldn’t remember the last time someone praised him. Coughing to hide it, Leo waited until Niles returned with the ensnared rabbits. While he was inexperienced with the preparation, when it came time to cook them, Leo took over. There wasn’t much to season them with, but Leo recognised some plants near by as herbs. Niles and Odin watched him and when the meat was cooked they divided it up.

“Wow.” Odin proclaimed. “This is good.”

Leo bit into his own proportion. It was a bit bland, but the herb helped slightly. “Would have been better if I had time and the ingredients.”

“Nonsense.” Odin proclaimed for the second time that night. “This is fantastic.”

“IT is good.” Niles agreed.

For the second time that night, Leo flushed under the praise. Quickly he finished eating and then when Odin and Niles were discussing a look out schedule, Leo gently took his shoes off and went to inspect his leg.

So far in the travel it wasn’t hurting too much, but Leo had to be careful. Digging into his bag, Leo pulled out one of the healing books he had taken along with him. Finding the page for mending bones was second nature and there was even a bit of an indent in the page’s side from him holding it
for so long.

“Is something troubling you?” Odin was beside him.

Leo held the book out, angling it towards the fire. “Could you help me please? I need to read this.”

Niles turned his head from across the fire and stared. Even with only one eye it was intense. Moving forward, Niles walked over so he was sitting by Odin. Their gazes were focused on Leo’s exposed, scarred legs. Leo wiggled a little under their scrutiny. No one else besides Iago had seen the damage done to his legs.

“Who did this?” Niles’s voice was low, controlled. There was no emotion, merely a factual question. Leo thickly swallowed. “It only looks bad because I’m not the best at healing magic…”

“That’s wrong.” Odin suddenly cut him off. “Healing magic is finicky, yes, but these show signs of being rebroken and healed over and over.” He set the book down. “May I?”

May he what? Leo opened his mouth and shut it a couple times before he numbly nodded. Odin then gently touched Leo’s leg, fingers grazing over the scar. Closing his eyes Odin mumbled something. Leo didn’t understand it but that didn’t matter as his scar slowly faded. It was still present but it was less noticeable. Odin lifted his hand and continued. Meanwhile Niles raised an eyebrow and leaned closer into Odin.

“I didn’t know you knew healing magic.” Niles mused. “Would have been nice to know earlier.” Leo blinked. They had known each other for a year but Odin had never used healing magic? Odin however gave a short guilty chuckle as he continued his work.

“My mother is a healer.” He offered as a sort of explanation. “I never really had the talent to become a full fledged healer, however I watched her for years and picked some things up.” Odin then took his hands off Leo’s legs. “Done.” He proudly proclaimed. “How does it feel?”

Leo bent his knees a little. The scarring had significantly disappeared, but Leo could still see outlines. Touching the skin Leo felt a choked sob fill his throat. Stuffing it away Leo looked at Odin. “Thank you. It feels better.” Odin flashed a toothy grin. “Glad to hear.”

Niles looked at Leo for a little while, like he was contemplating asking his question again, but instead he turned his head to Odin. “I’ll take first watch.” Odin stepped away from Leo. “All right.”

Leo rolled the leg of his pants down and put his shoes back on. His legs still tingled with the remnants of Odin’s healing magic. Smiling softly to himself, Leo grabbed his diary and made a note.

~

Traveling was done in silence.

Or rather it was silent for Leo. Odin and Niles chatted in front of him, teasing each other, lightly poking or leaning against the other. The casualness of their contact and conversation made Leo’s skin crawl and tingle. He couldn’t remember what a friendly touch felt like and the only other conversation and touch he could remember was Iago’s. Leo felt his stomach churn and his mind
A month would be up in two weeks. That wasn’t enough time for them to find his siblings. Iago would know he was gone and the search would be on. Leo shivered. He never wanted to be at Iago’s mercy again. Leo wanted to kill Iago over and over. He wanted to break Iago’s bones before killing him. Leo wanted, not needed some sense of justice…

He bumped into Niles, half hitting the quiver and bow on his back. Leo froze and automatically stepped back. Niles turned around and blinked.

“Are you okay?” Niles asked.

Leo rubbed his face. “Why are we stopping?”

Niles crookedly smiled and reached at his side and handed Leo a waterskin. “We’re having a break. I suppose you were lost in thought?”

Oh. Leo took the waterskin and took a sip, not realising how thirsty he was. When the skin was half full Leo pulled it away and flushed, feeling bad he drank so much. Niles, however, just smiled and took the waterskin back, draining it without a second thought.

“I’m sorry.” Leo still mumbled out an apology.

“For what?” Niles asked. “Being thirsty? We’ve been walking a while. It’s fine.” He then put the empty skin at his hip and walked over to a fallen tree, sitting on the log. “Sit with me?” He patted the space beside him.

Leo swallowed. He hadn’t talked a lot to his companions and he wasn’t sure how to. So far, for five years he hadn’t had to talk to anyone other than to sass them. Still, this was a challenge he had to accept. They couldn’t go through this journey without a word between them.

“Okay.” Leo walked over and sat down, feeling the moss under his palms. “It’s been a while since I’ve felt moss.” Leo mused.

Niles gave a side glance, lips twisting a little. “If you don’t mind me asking, how long?”

He didn’t need to ask the rest. Leo saw Odin stop his stretching off the side and slowly turn so he could hear in. Niles remained frozen, waiting for his response. Leo looked up at the sky, the wide blue sky, the fluffy clouds.

“Forgive me.” Niles said with a soft tone. “I’m prying again…”

“No, wait.” Leo looked at him. “It’s fine. I’m not made of glass.” He tried to give a comforting smile. “It’s been five years, one month, eight days.”

Niles sucked in a breath. “You counted?”

“Every day.” Leo honestly replied. “I wrote diary after diary.” He touched his bag. “I kept the date meticulously.”

“I can’t imagine.” Niles’s voice wasn’t full of pity. It was just full of sorrow, of human decency. “I’m sorry we didn’t know earlier.”

Leo laughed light and hollow. Other words were at the tip of his tongue, but Leo held them back despite the stab in his heart.
“It’s fine. There is no use crying over the past. We must keep pushing forward.” Leo firmly said.
“Now, if you don’t mind me asking, how did you meet?”

Niles glanced at Odin who laughed nervously. “Why don’t you tell him Odin?”

“It’s a tale of misunderstandings and turmoil that exploded at unintended targets and…”

“He was drunk and thought I was up to something so he challenged me to, what did you call it again?” Niles asked, like he was musing. “Ah, yes, a ‘fight to defend and prove my honour and character’ is what you said. You then passed out drunk on top of me and you’re a clingy drunk so responsibility to get you up to your room fell on me.”

Leo snorted and imagined it. He could see the bar and the commotion. A smile filled his face as Odin flushed and flailed his hands. “I apologised in the morning! Profusely! You didn’t accept it so I had to follow you and make it up to you.”

“And I’ve been stuck with you ever since.” Niles finished, but his tone was fond.

“Don’t act like you don’t like my company.” Odin retorted. “We’ve been nothing but the closest of companions since.”

“Yeah, once I learned I couldn’t get rid of you.” Niles muttered.

“Hey…” Odin pouted. “I’m useful.”

“For a distraction.” Niles teased, laughing as he dodged a half hearted attempt from Odin to smack him on the head. “I’m kidding. You’re useful. In combat and in be…”

Odin managed to hit Niles on the head, cheeks burning. “That’s not the sort of thing to go around saying casually!” He hotly yelled.

Leo’s mind easily filled in the blanks. He tilted his head. “You two are lovers?”

Odin screeched and Niles laughed. It was all the confirmation Leo needed.

~

In the evening, when the sun was low they set up camp again. This time Leo insisted on helping with gathering firewood and making the fire. Odin and Niles let him though Leo felt their gazes on him through the entire process. Their gazes weren’t heavy or hot, just there. When Leo lit the fire with magic Odin looked positively radiant. It sent a small flush to Leo’s cheeks as he could feel Odin physically restraining himself from bursting out praise.

They ate quietly and when they were done Odin silently touched Leo’s shoulder. His touch was warm and it lingered only long enough to get Leo’s attention.

“May I see your legs?” Odin asked.

Thoughtful. The term smacked Leo upside the head. When had he last dealt with someone who genuinely cared for his well being? Leo didn’t know and he was tired to trying to think about it. Wordlessly he nodded and took his shoes off so Odin could gently roll his pants up to expose his legs. Like last time, under the fire’s light the scars looked a bit darker but then Odin shifted his legs up and Leo saw how well Odin’s healing magic really was.

“Do your legs hurt?” Odin asked as he performed some more healing magic.
“No, they don’t. Thank you.” Leo replied.

“Good.” Odin dropped his hand. “Let me know if they hurt. I’ll fix it right up.”

The kindness hit Leo squarely over the head and he found it a bit difficult to breathe. Nodding silently again, so he didn’t embarrass himself, Leo unrolled his pant legs and put his shoes back on. Then, he reached for his hair. It had been a day since he had braided it. His hair had been trailing on the ground too. Leo didn’t want to bother anyone with asking to wash it. The simpler option was to cut the hair and let it grow back.

Taking the knife out of his bag, Leo reached around like he always did when he cut his hair when another hand touched his gently. Niles was behind him, his other hand reaching around to Leo’s side.

“Allow me?” He asked lowly.

Leo swallowed. This was different than letting Odin perform healing magic. This was letting someone who was still a stranger to him have a knife where Leo couldn’t see it. His hand tightened on the blade and Leo felt trapped.

Niles must have noticed. He shuffled around so he was in front of Leo. A small smile, almost sheepish filled his face before he reached his hand out again.

“I’m sorry. That was thoughtless of me. If you move your hair over your shoulder I can cut it from here.” Niles offered.

His hand was out for the knife and Leo’s arm was frozen, bent so he could try to cut his hair without a mirror. Though a mirror didn’t help a ton. Leo still cut his hair raggedly regardless of the mirror helping him. Not that it mattered in the end. Still, he hated fly away strands stuck from the hacking. If Niles did it the cut would be clean. Leo dropped his arm and handed Niles the knife.

“One second.” Leo said before he moved his hair to the front, over his shoulder. “Here.”

Niles softly smiled and moved closer so he was sitting in front of Leo. Their knees brushed and Leo swallowed as Niles delicately gathered his hair. Nimble fingers curled briefly in the falling out strands of Leo’s braid before he angled the knife so the sharp end was against the hair.

“Is this close enough?” Niles asked.

The knife was well above the dirty ends but Leo shook his head. “Higher.”

“Higher?” Niles inquired but did as Leo asked, half shuffling over so his reach could make it. “Here?”

The knife was close to Leo’s ear, just a bit down. Niles was now leaning over, his hand brushing Leo’s face as he kept the knife steady. He was so close and Leo felt warm.

“Yes.” Leo managed to respond. “There.”

Without another word Niles cut cleanly through the hair. The braid was limp in his other hand as Niles moved away, settling down. The cut was longer than Leo’s hair was before the curse, but it was shorter than Leo could ever manage to cut himself. He felt a bit silly as his eyes teared just for a second.

“Thank you.” Leo held the water works back.
“You’re welcome.” Niles sat back down. “What do I do with this?”

“It will disappear soon.” Leo told him. “Or if you want you can throw it into the fire. I don’t care.”

Niles quirked a small smile. “The smell of burning hair isn’t pleasant though I’ll keep that option open next time.”

Leo nodded and savoured the fleeting moment of short hair before the curse kicked in. Soon his hair was back to the impossible length. Sighing Leo easily carted his fingers through the hair and began to braid silently. Niles and Odin’s kindness burned through Leo’s core and nestled deeply inside of him.

There was no need to be so kind. First, they had broken him out of his tower and Leo still wasn’t sure why the two decided to do it in the first place. Why were two strangers doing all of this? From what Leo learned the two had just decided to help out of their own free will. They had no connection to any army or government (from what Leo gathered) and this was just done out of the goodness of their hearts.

That type of kindness was both the strongest and scariest.

In a way it didn’t matter. Leo didn’t have the luxury of wondering about their motives. Loyalty was all he needed. The two needed to prove it and in a way, they already had. Odin had healed his legs without a second thought and Niles offered to cut his hair. They also had already risked themselves by breaking Leo out already. Iago was cruel but a plan like this would be considered treason by his father. Leo closed his eyes. He knew how his father worked. Logic and reason had long left him and breaking Leo out, even for the sake of cruelty, would be seen as an act against the Crown. That was why Iago never took him out for five years and broke his legs instead.

Shoving his thoughts aside, Leo finished braiding his hair. He then laid down and stared up at the stars. The air was crisp and cool but comfortable. Closing his eyes, Leo drifted into a light sleep.

They left the following morning as the sun was barely over the horizon. Leo felt like his legs were new as he walked with Niles and Odin. Chatter was light and Leo listened more than contributed. From listening he learned that Niles was better at scouting, Odin better at distracting, and both of them very sure of their plan.

Sniffing the air, Leo realised they were approaching the island and the ocean faster than he had anticipated. A jolt of anticipation and excitement mixed with dread hit Leo. If he was correct one of his siblings was on that island. Leo was still unsure who but his best bet was on either Camilla or Xander. Not that it mattered. Leo wanted to see his siblings to badly he could taste it.

“Leo?”

Niles was at his side. Leo hastily tucked his thoughts away. “My apologies.” Leo said. “I was lost in thought.”

Niles didn’t comment. “We are nearing the ocean. Along the way is a town. Odin and I were discussing avoiding it and continuing on. The harbour is close by and we’ll wait until night before borrowing a fisherman’s boat.”

Just like Leo’s plan all those years ago. Leo opened his mouth to agree, as Niles was obviously asking for approval, when he paused. Even though it wasn’t the end of the month yet people had to be on alert, ready for some sort of monetary award should they report incidents to the soldiers. Leo
bit his lip. What they were lacking was information. He had only assumed his siblings were still imprisoned. What if they had escaped and were merely waiting for a chance to get him or somehow couldn’t make a move?

“No. Let’s not avoid the town.” Leo slowly said. “Of course, it’s best if I don’t go, however we need information. I want to know what’s been happening, what the latest gossip and rumours are.”

Niles cracked a smile. “Good point. Odin and I avoided towns on our journey to you. We’re also out of the loop. Give me three hours.”

“Three hours?” Leo blinked. “You’re going to the town?”

“Yes, I’ll do it.” Niles grinned. “In fact, it’s best this way. I’ll have that information you desire Leo. Meet me by the pier.”

“Safe travels Niles.” Odin calmly said.

“Always.” Niles cheekily replied before heading off.

Leo stared at his back before turning to Odin, who had meandered down the trail they were taking. “Come along Leo. We’ll have to hurry in order to meet Niles. Somehow, I’ve never arrived earlier than him even when he’s scouting.”

Odin then paused, like he felt he had missed something and had to quickly rectify it. “Niles didn’t grow up in the best of places. He has the skills necessary for spy work. I don’t know how he does it but he always retrieves the information needed.”

Just like how Niles didn’t push for more information, despite a small flicker of curiosity in Leo, he didn’t ask more and continued to walk with Odin instead.

“Say,” Odin started as they walked. “I have a question.”

“Yes?” Leo blinked.

“Do you ever wash your hair?” Odin asked without any hint of mockery. “I just thought, you cut it last night and it grew back so quickly. Is it even possible to wash it at full length?”

It was so innocent, asked with the tone of a child. Leo almost laughed. “I do cut it when I wash. If I feel like it. Otherwise I sit in the tub and just move the hair in sections.”

“That sounds like a long time.” Odin commented.

“I’ve grown used to it.” Leo responded. “This hair doesn’t act like normal hair. It’s lighter than hair at the length it’s at. It also doesn’t need to be combed or washed as often.”

“Oh wow.” Odin grinned. “I have a friend that would love it if she didn’t have to comb or wash her hair as often.” He then paused. “Or so I think.”

Leo almost stopped walking but then chided himself. Of course, Odin had other friends than Niles. He said he was traveling. His friends had to be home or perhaps he had friends in towns and visited them when he was by. Leo closed his eyes briefly and tried to imagine such freedom.

“Uh anyways.” Odin seemed to take his silence as something negative. “Let’s keep going. Sorry if I was prying too much.”

“It’s fine.” Leo automatically told Odin. “I’m not upset. In fact, tell me more?”
Odin’s eyes lit and soon the journey was filled with tales.

~

Odin was still chatting, in the middle of a story involving some friends and a curtain rod when they came to the pier. They kept to the trees and bushes that ran along the one side for cover. There, leaning against one of the trees was Niles. He waved jauntily and grinned as they approached. Leo looked at Odin like he’d have an explanation for how Niles beat them but then remembered what Odin had said earlier.

“Took you long enough.” Niles teased. “I was beginning to grow moss.”

Leo stared. How did Niles do it? They weren’t that slow, were they? Odin just laughed.

“Sorry to keep you. Did you find anything out?”

Niles grinned wildly. “Did I find anything out? You’re cute Odin. I did indeed find things out. First, no one is aware of Leo missing. I didn’t hear any gossip about that. The only thing I heard worth note was of some “demon woman” that comes to the town occasionally. She’s rather violent but no deaths, just some wounds.”

Huh. Leo tucked that information away. Who knew if it would be useful or not.

Niles was continuing. “The fishermen finish work before the sun sets and arrive again early morning. We’ll have to row out to the island and return before sunrise.”

That was quite the time crunch. Leo bit his lip and looked at the sky. The sun would slowly set in about an hour. They’d have to wait a while for the fishermen to have a significant distance between them and the pier. Plus, the journey. Leo looked at the sea. From where they were he could see the island. That had to mean it wasn’t too far away, right?

“Do you know how far the island is from here?” Leo asked.

“One hour.” Niles promptly responded. “Though the fishermen have superstition about the island. No one will go there. That’s lucky. No one will go near it and find us there.”

One hour. Leo clutched his hand tightly into a ball. In only a few hours he could see one of his siblings again. His heart pounded harshly against his chest and Leo wanted to leave immediately. He forced the urge down and breathed deeply. Patience. Soon he’d be reunited.

~

Waiting was the hardest part. Leo sat still even when his legs cramped and his back hurt. He only walked when the pain became unbearable. Niles and Odin chatted about a few things but the content of their conversation slipped past Leo. It was awfully rude of him, but Leo couldn’t help it. The anticipation burned hotly inside and drained all his other thoughts away. All Leo could see were his siblings: strong reliable Xander, sweet and caring Camilla, energetic and bubbly Elise, and the warmth and sunshine of Corrin. Their faces and looks had slightly faded in his mind, no real details, especially for Elise, but Leo made do.

Touching his bag Leo remembered all the letters he had written to his siblings. He wondered if they had written similar letters for him. There was so much to say and yet so little. Leo tried to not dwell on his first words to his family in five years and looked out to the sky.
Niles was up in a tree watching but even without the advantage Leo could see the fishermen packing up and leaving. A few were straggling behind, tying their boats to the dock before leaving. Leo wanted them to all hurry up. Time was crawling forward and it almost made Leo scream out.

When the last of the fishermen had left they waited in silence for a good quarter of an hour before Odin moved from the base of the tree Niles was sitting in.

“I think it’s time.” Odin’s voice was low, sure of itself.

Leo’s heart jolted and he watched as Niles nimbly got down from the tree, brushing his clothes off when he was on the ground. Leo wobbly stood up, blood rushing down his legs in icy tingles. This was it. He tried to not lose his balance.

The pier was empty and the sky darkening red and purple hues. Niles easily lead them through a discreet path to a large boat. Settling in was a bit wobbly but once they were in and the rope untied they set off.

Leo had never rowed a boat in his life and it turned out that Odin hadn’t either, if Leo judged him by his motions. Only Niles seemed to know what they were doing and with a quick twist of his lips, Niles instructed them and they were smoothly off.

As they rowed night settled in, cool and dark. Leo kept glancing behind them, expecting to see someone chasing them or yelling at them from the shore. When they were far enough away the fear didn’t stop and Leo kept glancing.

The island was getting bigger and bigger with each stroke of the paddles. Up close Leo could see the vegetation and the greenery on the sides. Tall tropical plants also grew tall and proud. Between some of the green Leo could spot some colourful flowers, but that changed when night truly fell and the world was dark save for the moon.

Angling the boat so it wouldn’t be on the side of the pier, they rowed some more, the choppy waters reflecting the inky blackness of the sky. Leo might have felt sick if he wasn’t already burning with his stomach knotting in circles.

When they arrived closer to the island, Leo saw a tingle of magic, similar to what kept him locked in the area around the tower. Odin moved gingerly to the front and took that knife out again. He wordlessly cut through the barrier and soon they were inside. The tightness in his chest didn’t stop when they finally reached a side they could safely disembark the boat and tie it to. Feeling ground felt a bit weird after the rocking and Leo had to steady himself again.

The side they were on was not as thick with green and trees. There was also some white sand, so fine that Leo knew he could safely take his shoes off and walk around barefoot. However, before he could do that, Niles touched his shoulder.

“We best not leave any footprints.”

“Sorry.” Leo flushed.

“No problem.” Niles gave a crooked smile. “So, any idea where your sibling might be?”

Leo tried to think. There had to be a sort of house here. He remembered the servants talking about one. It faced out to the other side of the ocean, the view unobscured by the pier.

“This way. I think.” Leo pointed.
“Let’s hurry then.” Odin didn’t even question Leo’s statement.

Niles didn’t either. They all ended up going the direction Leo had pointed out. On the island Leo could hear the buzz of some nocturnal insects and the scuttling of some rodents. A few birds moved about and Leo felt on edge. He pressed through the foliage and when they finally reached a clearing, Leo saw it.

On a bit of a hill was the house. It was massive and calling it a house wasn’t accurate. It was more like a mansion, white and pure. The footage of the front alone was larger than Leo’s entire tower. He was sure of it. Swallowing Leo continued his movement to the mansion, taking in the sloped roof, the large doors, and the pathways. The shrubbery around the mansion was nicer, cleaner than the island. It was obviously taken care of. There were even potted plants by the doorway. The door at the front looked like it was made of solid wood.

“Let’s go around back.” Niles stated rather than suggested. “There has to be a door there.”

Right. Taking the front entrance might not be a good idea. Leo forlornly looked but followed Niles to the side of the house. At the back they found a porch with a table and a gazebo. The flowers here were beautiful and landscaped properly to feel like a garden from the palace. Leo heard Niles softly whistle at the sight and even Odin looked impressed.

The back door was smaller than the front but just as sturdy. Niles reached out and tested the knob silently. Obviously locked. He then picked it with ease. Leo would be impressed later. Pressing his sweaty hands against his pants he slowly stepped inside.

They had obviously entered in what was a servant’s entrance. Inside was a kitchen with drying herbs, more potted plants, and every kitchen utensil clean, polished and in the right place. The stove was clean and the fire place not in use though there was some firewood. Leo wanted to examine everything closer but now wasn’t the time.

Across the room was the doorway to the hallway. Leo walked over, ready to open the door when it burst open itself. A scream slipped his throat and the silence was forcibly broken. Something was hurdling towards him and Leo only dodged because he stumbled backwards.

A woman was there, her hair in pigtails. The hair was blue and pink reminding Leo of the spun candy Elise loved during festivals. Her clothes were simple but in her hands was a rather nice lance.

“Mice!” She delightfully said before she tried to stab Leo again.

This time Leo dodged by ducking. Before he could use any magic Odin was running at her, tackling low. He hit the woman’s sternum and they toppled over, falling towards the stove. A loud crash later and some of the utensils fell out of a busted drawer. The woman took it as an opportunity and grabbed a fork. She was about to stab Odin in the arm when Niles threw something at her. That something turned out to be one of the potted plants. Leo watched as the terra cotta pot broke, spilling dirt everywhere.

“You!” The woman whipped her head around. “I’ll stab you and see your intestines and…”

“Peri?” A deep male voice suddenly asked, laced with sleep. “What’s happening?”

Leo felt like the room had sluggishly stopped before speeding up too fast to comprehend. A figure entered the kitchen, features exposed by the moon pouring in by the crack in the door they hadn’t shut properly. Leo didn’t hear the woman’s response. All Leo could see was his older brother.

Xander hadn’t changed much, though there were a few wrinkles around his eyes and on his
forehead. Though, Leo mused, that could be from the expression he was wearing. Xander wasn’t wearing any armour and the clothes were night clothes, loose and simple. His blond curls still were there and his hair short. He was also just as muscular and tall as Leo remembered.

Their eyes met and the room slowly stilled as Xander’s eyes widened. He stepped into the kitchen and for a long moment they just stared at each other.

Then Leo couldn’t stop himself. He hurdled himself at Xander. He collided with such a force that it almost hurt but Leo could care less. Wrapping his arms around his brother’s shoulders, Leo buried his face in Xander’s chest and cried.

Warm hot tears poured down Leo’s face as all the emotions he had bottled up over the years spilled out. His grip tightened and soon he felt Xander return the hug, pulling Leo closer. It only made Leo cry harder.

“Xander, Xander, Xander…” Leo babbled on and on between sobs. “I missed you. I missed you so much. So, so, so much.”

“Leo…” Xander’s voice was thick with relief, warmth, and surprise. “Leo, it’s you.”

Leo wanted to say more but he couldn’t. His body gave out and he kept his grip on Xander tight as they both sagged to the floor of the kitchen.

“How?”

“I…” Leo tried to compose himself. “I was rescued by them.”

“Hello.” Niles responded, his voice soft. “We’re here to rescue you. We don’t have a lot of time to linger.”

Right. Leo sucked in a breath and composed himself as best as he could. Slowly he detangled himself from Xander even though he wanted nothing more than to stay in his brother’s embrace.

“We stole a boat.” Leo informed Xander. “Let’s go.”

Xander didn’t waste time. He nodded and stood up. “Very well. Give me a moment to change into something more appropriate.” He then turned to the woman. “Peri are you coming along?”

The woman, Peri nodded. “I said I’d follow you Lord Xander.”

Peri. How did she get on the island in the first place? Leo held his tongue. Questions like that would have to wait for later. For now, they needed to get off the island. As Xander practically ran down the hallway, Leo tried to think what Xander’s curse was. It clearly wasn’t anything easily seen. It was something he’d have to ask when Xander returned. In the meantime, he watched Niles and Odin raid the kitchen with Peri, who was instructing them to where things were. Xander returned a split moment later, changed so fast that Leo was impressed. He also had a small bag and a sword with him.

“Forgive me for asking this before we go.” Xander said as he looked at Niles and Odin. “But how did you manage to enter with the barrier?”

“Oh!” Odin grinned. “I have a magical weapon.”

Xander blinked. “A magical weapon.”
“Yup. It’s mine.” Odin added despite ownership not being asked.

“That makes you sound suspicious.” Niles pointed out. Odin pouted but Niles cut him off. “While this is nice, we best get going. You can catch up as we row back.”

No arguments from Leo and certainly none from Xander. They all left the mansion and soon were following Niles and Odin back to the boat. Peri hummed and Leo tried to not ask anything as they walked.

Reaching the boat, they quickly climbed inside. As Leo sat down he noticed Xander eyeing the water cautiously, the gaze becoming sharper as they started to move. Leo blinked and pieced two and two together. “You can’t swim.”

Of course, that rang true even without a curse. Xander had never done well at swimming and it was one of the few areas that he didn’t excel in. However, Leo meant it on a deeper level.

“You’re right.” Xander didn’t sound offended. “Or more accurately, I can’t go into water that is up to my collarbones. If I do I’ll fall unconscious and possibly drown.”

Leo swallowed and hoped Xander hadn’t learned this through trial and error.

Xander, however seemed to read Leo’s mind. “I did try escaping once. I made this floatable out of some water proof sheets. I sank but the magical barrier extends under water. I woke up coughing water on the floor of the kitchen.”

That was terrifying. Leo felt his heart sink.

“The wood of this place also disintegrates when touching the water.” Xander continued. “So, I couldn’t make a boat.”

Leo clutched his fight tightly. He could at least attempt escapes. Xander couldn’t at all. Leo couldn’t imagine it. Escaping had kept him going for so long. It was his only hope. Xander hadn’t even received the luxury of that hope.

“If I may ask.” Odin suddenly spoke as he cut the barrier apart with the magical weapon. “How does Peri fit into this?”

Xander half smiled. “She followed them inside.”


“Iago usually teleports but he doesn’t visit me as often.” Xander told Leo. “He sends his goons usually to check up. They don’t have that sort of magic. Peri snuck on board their ship as a stowaway about six months ago. They’ve never discovered her presence here. We’ve become friends.”

“Friends!” Peri agreed. “Lord Xander is the bestest. I heard rumours in town and so I decided to check them out! Too bad I’ve never met the greasy man keeping Lord Xander here. I’d stab him.”

Iago. Leo felt a kinship to Peri’s plight.

“Iago has magical barriers Peri.” Xander reminded her. “He is cautious.”

Leo thought back to when he managed to hurt Iago. That had to be a factor in Iago’s cautious nature visiting them from that point on. Xander had kept in peak physical condition and Leo could see how
he managed that. He had so much space to work with. Xander could walk around and with Peri he could train. It made sense that Iago was more cautious with Xander.

“Speaking of Iago.” Xander mused. “It will be a month soon. He’ll visit and realise we’re gone.”

“That’s why we have to find the others quickly.” Leo said. “I have some ideas to where they might be.”

“Camilla is in the forest.” Xander offered. “I only know this because some of the mages Iago brought along once were carelessly talking.”

Forest. Leo thought back to the map. He didn’t want to bring it out in case he dropped it somehow but Leo knew that was close by. Same with the mountain range. Someone had to be there, either Corrin or Elise.

“That’s near by.” Niles pointed out. “We can head there first.” He then looked at Leo.

“Very well.” Leo agreed. “To the forest first. Then, the mountains. I am sure someone is there.”

Xander smiled and for the first time Leo felt like a part of his life had slotted back into place. Reaching out, Leo curled his hand into Xander’s, feeling the warmth. The letters sat hotly in his bag but Leo could wait to give those in private. For now, he was going to be content that one of his siblings was safe and saved.

They returned the boat to its rightful place and Niles even tied the boat up exactly how it was before they took it. Leo stayed glued to Xander’s side and even though in the past Leo would have hated how needy it looked now he didn’t care. It was five years too long. Xander seemed to be on the save wave length as he didn’t stop Leo. In fact, he too seemed the gravitate closer.

Taking the map out, Leo then directed them to the direction they needed to go. Silently all five of them walked into the forest and as far away from the pier as possible. When they were safely away from any prying eyes they finally set up camp. A fire and food later Leo finally reached into his bag and pulled out the letters for Xander as the other three were cleaning up and discussing guard duty.

“For you.” Leo told Xander.

Xander gently took the stack of letters, his eyes warm and soft. “Thank you, Leo.” He then reached into his small bag. “I know it’s late but these are for you.”

Leo also received a stack of letters. His eyes watered and for the second time in a night Leo began to cry, though this time softly. “Thank you, Xander.”

A strong arm wrapped around Leo’s shoulders and Leo snuggled closer. “I’m sorry.” Xander softly said. “Sorry for not being strong enough.”

“What do you mean?” Leo asked, composing himself quickly. “This isn’t your fault.”

“But…” Xander frowned. “If I was just able to talk sense into father or if I fought harder…”

“Father is beyond reasoning.” Leo told Xander. “Niles and Odin told me what he’s doing.”

“Peri did too.” Xander muttered, but his arm tightened on Leo’s shoulders. “I still… can’t help it. I can see that day in my mind so clearly. I wish I could have stopped this all. All our suffering is
because I wasn’t strong enough to protect you all. I’ve put you through such pain and agony.”

Protect them. Leo swallowed and shifted so he was looking at Xander. Words began to pour out of Leo’s mouth.

“It was painful at first, yes. Every day felt like a stab to my chest. I tried to escape so many times. I got out of that tower but the magic always kept me confined to the area. I could have stayed outside I suppose, went out more often but it always hurt to be outside and know it wasn’t true freedom. I missed so much and I missed all of you.”

Xander’s face slowly cracked. Leo touched his brother’s face and gave a reassuring smile “However, through all that pain and hopelessness you’re the ones who kept me going. You were my drive and always are my drive. It’s how I escaped and kept trying. Even when hope wavered I never blamed you. I never blamed you for a second Xander.”

Leo then pulled Xander into a tight hug. “I blame Father. I blame the seer. I blame Iago and everyone who listened to his orders. I don’t blame you. I’ll never blame you. Ever.”

Xander was silent before he gripped Leo and hugged him tightly. Leo closed his eyes and held onto Xander, feeling his older brother slowly break apart.

“Thank you, Leo. Thank you, thank you.” Xander stroked Leo’s hair. “I spent so many sleepless nights wondering what you’d say to me. Thank you. Thank you. I love you so much Leo.”

“I love you too Xander.”

Leo closed his eyes and stayed in Xander’s warm embrace the entire evening. Something bled out that night, swirling in the air. Everything felt sweet and bitter at the same time. Leo clung to his brother and savoured it all.

Chapter End Notes

Magical weapon: I’ve made them rare in this world and yes, it technically belongs to Odin.

Niles’ past: I just want you all to know I’ve tweaked it a little. I’ll reveal more in later chapters.

Healing magic: I head canon Odin/Owain learned some healing magic from Lissa.

Leo’s hair: It doesn’t act like regular hair. It has to be enchanted because there is no way Leo could have that long hair and have his neck and shoulders not hurt. I extended this to washing as well. It doesn't get dirty as quickly as regular hair does.

Swimming: Canon only Xander cannot swim well. It was fun to use as his curse.

Stowaway: The royal army uses a larger boat to get to the island so it's easy for Peri to hide in.
That night Leo fell asleep on top of Xander, soaking in his warmth and presence. Xander didn’t stop him and curled his arm around Leo’s body, as though he was trying to shelter Leo from the world. If they had a blanket and were cushioned by multiple pillows it would have been exactly how it used to be; Leo falling asleep reading in the library while Xander studied. Things would never go back to how they used to be – Leo wasn’t going to chase nostalgia (it just hurt him), but this moment was perfect regardless.

Morning came too soon and when sunlight broke and woke him up Leo wished he could snuggle under the covers and catch a few more minutes of sleep. However, that was impossible with Odin’s voice booming in the background (“A FINE MORNING TO YOU NILES, PERI!”), Peri’s response (“Morning, morning!!!”), and Niles groaning (“…it is too early for this…”). Leo felt his mind jolt upwards and slam harshly against the side of his skull before it slid down in a gross mess. Xander was shifting and it added to Leo waking up. Opening his eyes, Leo blinked and winced at the sunlight before his vision adjusted.

Odin was already by a fire, cheerfully waving a stick as he drew in the dirt and chatted with Peri. Niles was off the side, back to Odin, but he was leaning against Odin, arms crossed. Some fish was cooking by the fire and it mixed with the smell of burning wood. Leo ambled over and hid a yawn as he plopped down beside Niles. Niles in turn gave a small wave and then crossed his arms again.

“Good morning Leo.” Niles greeted. “Sleep well?”

“I could use more.” Leo honestly replied.

Niles laughed. “I agree. Odin kept me up with his snoring.”

At this Odin broke his conversation with Peri and frowned. “I was not snoring.” He then didn’t give Niles a chance to retort. He looked at Leo and beamed brightly. “A glorious morning to you Leo,
Xander!” His voice bounced off Leo’s ears.

A second later Peri added just as loudly. “Morning, morning!”

“Good… morning.” Leo muttered.

“Good morning.” Xander didn’t sound perturbed. “What were you and Peri discussing?”

“Oh!” Peri immediately brightened. “We’re discussing possible routes! The forest is this way!” Peri took the stick from Odin’s hand and drew a large curved line towards some crudely drawn trees. “But there are blocks this-a-way!” She drew some jagged lines mid way. “So,” She drew the vowel out, “we were discussing going this way!” She then drew another line, this one going all the way around the forest, closer to some triangles. It took Leo a moment to realise the triangles were supposed to represent the mountains.

“By passing the entire forest and going around to the west side is a longer journey.” Niles pointed out. “However, there is a town along the way and if we want to avoid traffic from there it’s the best option.”

Xander hummed and leaned in closer. “That’s a fine option. The month is nearly up. Iago will realise we’re gone.”

Right. Leo thickly swallowed and glanced at his bag. He hadn’t been keeping as meticulous of a journal as he used to, but he had written down the dates at least. They had to keep moving. No doubt once Iago figured out getting to their siblings would be a challenge. At least they weren’t alone but Leo wasn’t going to be overly confident. Being stealthy was key and by passing town was the only way.

“You two keep mentioning this Iago.” Odin mused. “Mind informing us who he is?”

Oh. Leo flushed. That was something he hadn’t thought of. Iago had been an unfortunate consistent in his life for the past five years that he had forgotten others wouldn’t know him. Thankfully Xander answered, on point and without hesitation.

“Iago is one of the senior advisors and mages working for our Father. He’s a sneaky, slimy man. Even though he prefers words and underhanded comments, he’s still not to be taken lightly. He’ll have soldiers and mages at his disposal.”

“I wish I could have stabbed him.” Peri mused thoughtfully, fingers creeping over to her lance. Leo agreed and tried to shove the glorious image away for later. “Regardless, now that we know where Camilla is we shouldn’t waste time. Let’s hurry before Iago figures out we’re gone. From what I know, Camilla’s curse has something to do with her energy.”

“It does?” Xander looked over. “I never found out what was inflicted upon everyone.”

“Me neither.” Leo admitted. “Just Camilla. Iago mentioned it once.”

Xander’s gaze darkened for a moment, as though he knew what context Iago could have mentioned that in. Leo didn’t want to confirm it even if whatever Xander was thinking was correct.

“Fantastic!” Odin brightened. “Now that our battle plans are prepared and waiting we shall break out fast and then continue on our…”

As though summoned by Odin’s words suddenly smoke rose from the fire and into their faces. Leo
whipped his head and saw that half of the fish was still raw while the other half was burning. Sighing Leo leapt towards it and grabbed the sticks, pulling the burnt fish away from the fire. Odin gave a sheepish grin and shrugged.

“You burned it all the way through.” Leo pointed to the charcoal. “There is no saving this.”

“Sorry!” Odin gave another shrug and scrambled up. “I’ll… go get more?”

He didn’t wait for Leo’s response. Odin raced away and soon was out of sight. Leo looked at the fish and the direction Odin had raced off to. They couldn’t leave the fish and risk the potential risk of someone finding it.

“I’ll take those and dump them in the river.” Niles offered, standing up. “Besides, someone has to keep an eye out on Odin.”

“Thank you.” Leo shook his head. “I can do it.”

“No, please, let me.” Niles gently said, snatching the fish. He then leaned in a bit and gave a small smile. “I’m sure you want to spend as much time with Xander as possible.”

The consideration rushed over Leo and he couldn’t retort. Niles gave a knowing smile and walked off, going to where Odin had gone a moment earlier. Leo felt a warmth flush his chest. Niles and Odin really were becoming some of the best things to ever happen to him. Turning to Xander, Leo decided to not waste the kindness Niles had given.

“We can keep watch over the fire.” Leo suggested.

“Oh! Yes!” Peri jumped up, grabbing her spear. “I’ll get more firewood!”

She too raced off and Leo wondered if this was something Odin, Niles, and Peri had discussed while Leo and Xander were still asleep. Leo didn’t know Peri well, but Xander had trusted her for six months and she was willing to give him and Xander privacy. It made Peri more than okay in Leo’s books. Making a note to thank the three individually later, Leo moved so he was sitting beside Xander, shoulders brushing.

“I read a few of your letters last night.” Xander softly spoke. “You picked up cooking?”

Leo laughed. “I had a lot of time on my hands and in a way it’s sort of fun.”

“I did a bit of gardening.” Xander admitted with a smile. “Not a lot, but it was sort of nice, having something that needed my care.”

So that’s why Leo had seen so many flowers and plants around the house. “You did a good job.”

“You think?” Xander sounded a bit pleased. “I admit I made many mistakes early on, but I found a few books around the place. I didn’t have a wide selection, but I made due.”

“Funny.” Leo mused. “I had so many books I didn’t know what to do with them, but I suppose that’s mainly what I did. I read a lot when I wasn’t trying to escape the tower. Not that my attempts worked.”

“You tried and that’s what matters.” Xander firmly told Leo.

Leo numbly nodded and stared out at the fire. “Thanks.”

“Sorry for the melancholy tone.” Xander said. “If you want, later, when this is all behind us, I’d like
to try some of your cooking.”


“We’d have to stop Elise from eating dessert first.” Xander laughed.

“And Camilla from filling our plates when she thinks we aren’t eating enough.” Leo added.

Leo could see it now. A warm room, cozy, not at all like the large dining halls Garon preferred. They’d be snug together around the table, everyone’s favourites and bottles of wine and sparkling juices on the table. Camilla would be fretting over Elise and Corrin. Corrin’s face would be pink from the attention and Elise would be laughing happily. Xander would be off the side, smiling, watching them as Leo sat there too, happy with everyone. The fantasy was too strong, too tangible. Leo wanted to grab and hold it, make it a reality. Except he couldn’t. Not now. It stung a bit to admit it, but instead of a bitter tingle Leo felt hope. They would rescue everyone and never be apart again.

A rustle in the bushes followed by Peri returning jolted Leo out of his thoughts. In her arms was the firewood they needed. She cheerfully waved immediately plopped down beside them, stoking the fire.

“I’m back!” She announced. “Niles and Odin haven’t returned yet?”

She had a point. Where were they? Leo stood up. “I’ll go see what they’re doing.”

He walked in the direction that the two had went, easily following the trail. Leo walked until he came across a river in the clearing. Down by the river sat Odin and Niles. They were both sitting on a large flat rock, chatting as Odin held a crudely made fishing rod. Leo was about to walk out of the trees and address them when Odin suddenly grabbed Niles with one hand and pulled him into a kiss. Leo blinked, flushed, and turned away. Of course, he knew the two were lovers, but romantic displays and affection wasn’t something Leo was used to seeing. Should he leave them to their private moment? It felt like the best option. Quietly Leo backed up and walked quickly back to camp.

“Leo.” Xander broke his conversation with Peri. “Did you find Niles and Odin?”

“I did. They’re still fishing.”

There was no way Leo would mention witnessing them kiss. That was private and no one’s business. Instead, Leo went to his bag and opened his journal. Taking the time to write some things down (minimal in case he lost the journal) Leo was finishing up the short entry when Odin and Niles returned with the fish.

“A thousand apologies for our lengthened departure.” Odin greeted as he sat down. “The fish were slippery this morning, evading capture.”

“Odin’s first fishing rod broke.” Niles blandly stated.

Odin flushed. “Niles... you weren’t supposed to tell them.”

“Too late.” Niles said calmly. “Now let’s gut these. I’m starving.”

Odin grumbled but did as Niles requested.
After eating and cleaning up they left. Even with a later departure their journey ran smoothly. Niles seemed to know the area like the back of his hand and Peri was helpful too. Idle chattered filled their journey but as the day wore on Leo became acutely aware of his hair falling out of his braid and his legs aching. When dusk fell and they set up camp by some large trees and boulders, Leo wanted to plop down and rub his legs, but he instead went to assist Odin with gathering firewood. As they moved away from the others, Leo limped just a touch to ease the ache, hoping to make the pain delay.

“I’ll take a look at your legs after this.” Odin said immediately upon seeing Leo. “You really should sit down.”

“I’m fine.” Leo huffed. “It’s just a dull throb.”

“Any amount of discomfort isn’t preferable.” Odin easily shot back. “That’s what my mother always says. She says pain is there for a reason, to give us warnings that we’re pushing ourselves too hard. I don’t want you doing that.”

Again, Odin’s kindness hit Leo squarely in the chest. Leo felt like he was fumbling with the kindness given and at any moment when he dropped it he’d shatter it completely. Odin however, didn’t waver. He gave another smile and walked over, taking the firewood Leo had gathered into his arms.

“I think this is enough. Let’s go back and once the fire has started I’ll check your legs out.”

Without a retort Leo walked back with Odin. Niles and Xander were sitting side by side as Niles was gutting and cleaning some rabbits he had caught. A few berries were also nestled on a large leaf. Leo recognised them as a very sweet edible berry. His fingers itched for some salt and herbs. Instead he helped Odin with the fire, muttering a spell to start it. The wood crackled and brought warmth. Leo then watched Odin walk over.

“Boots.” Odin said before sitting in front of Leo.

“Right.”

Leo fumbled to kick his boots off gently. Odin helped and with practiced hands Odin rolled Leo’s pant legs up, gently touching Leo’s ankles.

“May I?”

“Sure.” Leo swallowed. By this point he could feel Peri and Xander staring at them.

Odin angled Leo’s legs closer to the fire. The scars were still easily spotted and curled like vines up Leo’s legs. Odin gently balanced one of Leo’s legs in his arm as he raised his other palm over the scars. Muttering some healing spells Odin washed Leo’s legs with a cool light. The ache disappeared and when Leo’s leg felt better Odin moved onto the next leg. When he finished, Odin gently set Leo’s legs down.

“How do they feel?”


Odin, still kneeling at Leo’s feet beamed brightly and something clenched in Leo’s heart. The moment suddenly felt bottled, preserved and Leo suddenly didn’t want it to end.
“If you’re done.” Niles broke the silence. “I’ve finished cleaning and gutting the rabbits.”

Leo knew what Niles was getting at. Tucking the moment away, Leo rolled his pant legs down and hastily put his shoes back on. “I’ll cook these so nothing is wasted.”

“Thank you, Leo.” Niles handed the rabbits, which were on skewers.

“Roasting rabbit is good.” Leo mused. “Though if we had the things a rabbit stew would be nice.”

“Stew?” Odin perked up. “I love stews! Especially when it’s cold.”

Right. Odin grew up in Regna Ferox. “Say, what’s the food like in Regna Ferox?” Leo asked.

Odin brightened. “It’s hearty! Tons of things are added in stews and soups especially in winter. During the summer fresh leeks and corn are common. Meat is also either grilled or is smoked. Some foods are similar to Nohrian dishes, but I’ve noticed your dishes can be creamy and rich.”

“Autumn and winter foods are.” Xander added thoughtfully. “Though there are some seasonal dishes that are creamy regardless of the season.”

Odin launched into a conversation with Xander and Leo was glad. He focused on cooking and tried to ignore, as he cooked, Xander’s eyes lingering softly on his back. Leo knew why. It wasn’t that Leo was trying to hide his legs, but how did that even come up in conversation? Leo couldn’t just start a conversation with it or try to bring the conversation to his legs. In a way, this was the best solution to Xander finding out. Leo wasn’t about to say anything (and certainly Odin and Niles weren’t about to say anything either) so seeing them was the only solution. Mentally making a note to talk to Xander later, Leo busied himself with cooking the rabbit, careful to watch it so nothing burned. When he finished, Leo divided everything up and took a bite. It was good, or at least as good as rabbit could be with the limited ingredients they had. When they finished, Odin and Niles easily took over cleaning up and Peri offered to do first round of guard duty. Once again, the trio had left Xander and Leo to have a private discussion and Leo couldn’t be more grateful to them.

Xander had moved and was sitting beside him, his body heat a warm comforting force. For a while nothing was said as they stared into the crackling fire, the sounds of the forest as background noise. Leo knew Xander was waiting for him, being considerate. It made Leo both happy and frustrated. Bringing the topic up, even when it was blatantly hanging in the air was a challenge, but it was something he wanted to do. He didn’t want Xander in the dark about his condition, worrying over it due to lack of information. Xander would never judge Leo and was there to be his support. With that in mind, Leo snuggled a bit closer to Xander, inhaling deeply, steadying his voice. “I kept trying to escape the tower. I could, but the area around it had a magical barrier. For the first while I was determined to break it with magic. I studied so hard. Then one day Iago dropped by unannounced and upon discovering that I was trying to escape broke my leg.”

Now that he had started, Leo found it easy to continue, like a flood gate was open. Tossing a stick into the fire, Leo stared into it, not wanting to see Xander’s initial expressions.

“I guess it became a tradition of sorts. When the weather was nice Iago would break my legs. Sometimes he’d heal them right away, sometimes he left me for a couple of days. I eventually learned how to heal my legs, but my skill is nowhere close to perfect. Odin however, upon discovering my legs, offered to help. His mother is a healer and he’s been most helpful.”

There. That was all Leo had to say. Silence filled them, just the background noises, before Xander suddenly tugged Leo into a warm hug. Leo half fell off the log as Xander pushed him into his chest,
arms wrapped around his head.

“Leo, you’ve been so incredibly brave.” Xander muttered into Leo’s hair. “So incredibly resilient. You’ve faced hardships that you should have never faced. I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you.”

Xander wasn’t giving an entire speech, nor were his words able to erase the past, but Leo felt his heart swell and a few tears run down his face. Suddenly he was crying softly. Xander pulled him tighter and they sat in their hug for a while. Leo didn’t know how long, but when he felt stable he gently pulled away from Xander. Xander’s expression was weary, haunted with guilt but also pride. Leo gave a soft smile.

“It wasn’t your fault. I’m fine.”

Xander nodded and brushed some of Leo’s hair away from his eyes. “I promise I’ll send Iago to the darkest pit of hell.”

“We’ll do it together.” Leo corrected.

For the first time in a long while Leo heard Xander laugh, full on laugh with mirth. “Indeed, we will.” He managed to say after the laughter faded.

~

The next day around noon they skirted close to the town. Leo glanced at the quaint houses and wanted to see the town. It had been so long since he had seen bustling and people just thriving and living. However, logic won in the end and they kept on going onwards, making a large swoop around the town and towards the forest. As they walked into the late afternoon Leo could already see the tops of the mountains looming over. The air became fresher, clearer, and when they camped for the night Leo spotted a stream flowing downwards from the mountain. Odin once again checked his legs and as he did so Leo saw Xander take a look. It wasn’t full of pity or sorrow. Xander was just looking to know, to understand the damage better. After Odin finished healing his legs, Leo focused on writing in his journal.

The pages weren’t as meticulously kept as he did when he was in the tower, but the dates were written and a few notes were scattered here and there. Leo tapped his quill on the edge before writing a generic statement about his day before setting it back into his bag and pulling a brush out.

His braid was falling apart and Leo needed to fix it soon. The hair didn’t feel greasy or dirty but Leo hoped that the closer to the forest they got they’d find a secluded pond or lake that he could fully wash up in. Undoing the braid took more effort than brushing it. Leo hummed to himself and went about his normal routine of brushing his hair in sections. He was halfway done when he noticed Niles and Odin looking at him. There was something behind their gazes that made Leo stop.

“Yes?” Leo asked hesitantly.

Odin flinched but Niles took it in stride. “I was just thinking how much work your hair is.”

Leo hadn’t thought about that in a while. Sure, it was work but it was work he was used to. “I’ve become used to this.”

Niles clicked his tongue. “I was also wondering if I could braid it for you?”

Braid it for him? Leo blinked and looked down at the hair in his hand and back to Niles. “You want to braid it?”
“Yes.” Niles said. “Well Odin wants to too, but too many people and all.”

Odin pouted a little bit. “Maybe I can do it next time?” He sounded hopeful.

Leo set his brush down and felt a small smile worm its way on his face. “I don’t mind. If you want to do it I’m fine.”

Niles shot him a smile and moved over so he was behind Leo. Gently Niles reached out and took his hair. Leo felt a pleasant shiver run up his scalp and did his best to sit still as Niles worked. His calloused fingers occasionally brushed against Leo’s cheek as he pulled the hair back and Leo felt like his lungs stopped functioning when it happened. Niles tugged his hair back tightly, though slightly clumsy. Leo didn’t comment. He had improved over time and knew how difficult it was to work with his hair. Instead Leo focused on the feeling of someone taking care of him. It was so foreign at this point that Leo had no idea if he should talk and break the silence. The choice was made when Odin slinked over and sat beside Xander and Peri, chatting away about something that wasn’t registering in Leo’s mind. All he could think of was Niles and his fingers moving the hair back.

When Niles finished the braid, it was looser and a bit messier than if Leo had done it himself, but somehow it felt better. Gingerly Leo touched his hair, like he had to make sure there really was a braid before turning to Niles.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Niles responded. “Though it is a bit difficult and I am in awe of your skills.”

“All practice I assure you.” Leo said.

Niles gave a crooked smile. “Next time I’ll do a better job.”

Leo felt a tingle of happiness at those words. “Yes. Next time. I’m looking forward to it.”

~

Soon it became routine for someone to braid Leo’s hair every night. The next night Odin went and his skill was surprisingly higher than expected.

“I have a cousin.” Odin offered as an explanation. “I’ve helped her with her hair a few times.” His fingers then trailed down what he had braided. “I could pick wildflowers and entangle them into your hair.”

“Flowers?” Leo asked. “I’m not so sure about that.”

Odin just laughed with ease. “It’s up to you, Leo.”

Peri did his hair the following night and while it was messier than Niles and Odin’s combined it somehow felt like it was part of some sort of style. Leo didn’t comment and just let Peri finish her work with glee.

Even Xander tried and that meant more to Leo than he thought it would. Xander’s work was slow, slower than everyone else’s but as he worked it reminded Leo of nights after Elise’s bath when she would have Camilla help her with her hair. The faded image sent a stab into Leo’s heart but he didn’t bring it up to Xander. Somehow, he knew Xander was thinking the same thing.

They also covered a ton of ground, the mountains becoming bigger and bigger and the forest denser
and denser. Their circling around was definitely longer but worth the peace of mind. They didn’t run into anyone and the peace of their journey was only shaken when one evening, as Leo was writing while Odin braided his hair the date hit him over the head. It had been a month.

“Shit.” Leo cussed. It had crept up on him despite trying to keep it in the back of his mind. “It’s been a month. Iago will know.”

“He may not know right away.” Xander said with ease. “He always took his time attending to checking up on us.”

Leo nodded but still felt his stomach tense up. Iago knew or would know very shortly. That made their journey a little more pressing. Falling asleep took more time than usual and when Leo woke up the next day he felt his fingers curl around his tome a little harder than normal. Thankfully no one commented and Leo was grateful. He kept his tome near by for the next few days and only loosened up when they made their way around the entire forest and were close to heading inside to check it out.

That night they camped a bit away and were in the midst of cleaning up their dinner when Niles stood up and stretched, grabbing his bow. Leo watched in silence as Niles checked his quivers before turning to him.

“Leo.” Niles started. “I was thinking this morning. The month is up and by now Iago knows of your disappearance. I am going to scout the area, if you’re all right with that?”

It was logical and Leo couldn’t believe he hadn’t thought of it earlier. Perhaps his nerves were more fried than he had believed.

“I’m fine with it.” Leo said. “Come back soon.”

Niles smiled and reached for Leo’s hand, shaking it like he was promising or sealing a deal. “I will.”

He then turned to Odin and boldly walked over, pressing a kiss to Odin’s mouth. Leo saw Peri beam and Xander blink once before absorbing the sight. Odin on the other hand was pink when Niles pulled away, words whispered between them before another soft kiss. Then, with a smile, Niles was off. Odin stood in a daze for a moment before he coughed into his hand.

“My apologies for our bold display of affection. I’ve been speaking to Niles about keeping our touches to a minimum to insure we weren’t making anyone feel uncomfortable.”

Xander gave a small shake of his head as if to tell Odin it was fine. Peri looked like she was about to pounce on Odin to get the details, like a gleeful sibling wanting to tease the other, but Leo could only feel his heart pounding as the display played in his mind. He had seen it before, but this time he had been caught so off guard that averting his gaze hadn’t been an option. It made Leo feel a bit bad, that he had stared so blatantly at their kiss, but then he remembered that Niles had started it willingly with them around. That had to mean Niles was okay with them witnessing. That made Leo’s earlier secrecy at spotting them kissing feel dirty, like he was unconsciously sending the message that he felt it was wrong for them to be open. If Niles and Odin were a couple they didn’t need to feel ashamed.

“It’s fine.” Leo blurted out. “I saw you two together already.”

Odin gave a squeak and whipped his head at Leo. “You… did?”

“I… I didn’t mean to.” Leo jumped to his defense, feeling his cheeks warm. “I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to be awkward about it. Not that there is anything wrong with you and Niles together.” Leo added with a tinge of haste.
“Ah.” Odin’s face was red. “I’m grateful for your kindness and support, Leo.”

Right. That was Leo’s cue to drop the topic. Keeping his mouth shut, Leo let the conversation die and soon it was time for them to sleep. As Leo closed his eyes he could still see Niles and Odin kissing. His heart leapt and Leo tried to shove the image away. At least, thinking about Niles and Odin kiss was far more preferable than worrying over Iago.

~

Niles returned just a little bit after sunrise. Leo wasn’t surprised, as Niles had demonstrated his skill with recon before they went to Xander, but Leo saw Peri openly stare with stars in her eyes. Niles gave a smug, but tired smile before heading over to Leo, kneeling like he was a messenger for the court and he was reporting in. The formality of the gesture was both foreign and flattering.

“I’ve returned, Leo.” Niles said. “I have my report, if I may?”

“Go ahead.” Leo felt awkward saying the words.

“I believe I’ve spotted where Princess Camilla is being held. There are a few mages around the perimeter and I have no doubt that they’ll still be there when we arrive later. I counted only four but I have suspicion that reinforcements will arrive.”

Mages and reinforcements. This confirmed that not only did Iago know of Xander and his escape but he was doing his best to fortify the others and make sure no one else broke out. Iago was also probably hoping to recapture them. Leo bit his lip. It made sense. Niles had stated only four mages were there. That was a pathetic amount for guard duty. Even if reinforcements were arriving Iago had no guarantee they wouldn’t have shown up in the night. So, why…

“Iago must not have told our father.” Xander spoke what Leo was about to say. “Our disappearance, no doubt, is linked to his responsibility. Iago wants to solve this quickly and efficiently. He wants the others secure and us captured.”

Leo nodded. “Reinforcements will arrive but Iago won’t have a lot. Father must be confident over the years. He won’t be sparing soldiers or mages for Iago. Not when he’s trying to goat Hoshido into war. Plus, if Regna Ferox and Ylisse become involved he’ll need the numbers.”

“He’ll also need to move the soldiers to the terrain.” Niles added. “If I may add in one more thing I over heard, the soldiers were pretty loose lipped. The forest is the easiest place for them to arrive. Iago isn’t wasting magic teleporting everyone. It requires too much preparation and it would be suspicious. The soldiers need to also go to the mountains and to the North.”

The mountains. As Leo had suspected all those years ago. Narrowing his eyes, Leo tried to think. If Iago was securing Camilla’s location first it wasn’t just a sign of it being the easiest. He must have also suspected they knew of Camilla’s location and their rough coordinates. With that in mind, going to Camilla first wasn’t smart. Iago was most prepared for her but for the others the least. Leo frowned. He wanted to get to all his siblings, but Camilla felt so close.

“It pains me to say it, but I think we should skip over Camilla for now.” Leo slowly said. “The mountains are also near by. If we go to the mountains first, while Iago is still trying to set up troops, then we’ll have the advantage. That will cause Iago’s troops to panic. It will be easier to take them down if they’re uncoordinated.”

Xander nodded. “I agree. Going to Camilla with them prepared is dangerous.” He then turned to Niles. “Did you happen to hear where in the mountains?”
Niles gave a crooked smile. “I wouldn’t be the best at recon if I hadn’t.”

As they skipped over the forest and headed to the mountains, Leo spotted Niles and Odin. Their fingers were twined together and when they thought no one was looking Leo saw Niles pull Odin’s knuckles to his lips, pressing a kiss to them. Leo’s face flushed and he turned away from the intimate scene. His heart pounded foolishly in his chest and Leo mentally scolded himself. He had no right to keep staring into his companion’s intimacy. Adjusting his bag Leo kept walking and focused on the journey up the mountain.

Traversing the mountain was harder on Leo’s legs, but he was thankful that Odin kept healing them without word. As Odin worked Niles went to Leo’s hair and smoothly braided it, like his fingers couldn’t wait to touch the locks. It made Leo blush at the thought and he shoved it away. Niles and Odin were just being kind to him. Kindness was something he had been deprived of for so many years that Leo was just sensitive to any act of kindness. Pathetic, but Leo vowed once they had saved his siblings he could pester them for the attention they were all craving. Speaking of his siblings, Leo hadn’t had a proper discussion in a while with Xander. Leo made a mental note to just sit with Xander and talk with him later.

“There.” Niles easily secured the braid. “Done.”

“Thank you.” Leo shoved his thoughts away.

“I still think flowers in your hair would be nice.” Odin casually said at Leo’s feet as he finished up his lazy round of healing.

“Let Leo decide if he wants it in his hair.” Niles lightly scolded Odin.

Odin gave a sheepish grin. “Sorry Leo. I’ll drop it.”

Leo nodded and didn’t have the heart to tell Odin he hadn’t thought much of the suggestion. His mind was focused on rescuing his siblings. Glancing over the mountain range Leo tried to think where his sibling could be. It had to be either Elise or Corrin. Regardless of who they found Leo would be reunited with another sibling. Touching his bag Leo checked to see where his letters were. He had them bundled according to sibling and when he saw Elise and Corrin’s he touched them lightly. Soon. He also had the letters from Xander in his bag. Some of them were read but some of them weren’t, saved for when he had privacy. No doubt some of them would make him cry and Leo didn’t want to do that in front of everyone. Shutting his bag, Leo left Odin and Niles and sat beside Xander. Xander let him lean into his side and warmly wrapped his arm around Leo’s shoulder. Leo closed his eyes.

“We’re so close.” Leo muttered. “Soon we’ll see either Elise or Corrin.”

“I wonder how much they’ve changed.” Xander sighed. “I can barely remember how Elise looks.”

Leo’s heart ached. “Me too.” He whispered.

Xander’s hand tightened and he tugged Leo closer. “Regardless, we’ll be reunited and a proper family again.”

“Proper.” Leo agreed. “I cannot wait.”
“Me neither.” Xander softly said.

Niles lead them with confidence early in the morning. The sun was barely up and Leo hated it, yawning behind his hand, but it was necessary. Even if they had the advantage they had to move quickly. As they moved higher Leo started to see how the mountain wasn’t entirely a steep angle, but rather was flattening out, having some trees and wide spaces. Moving along the trees, Leo started to see something in the distance. His heart slowly beat against his rib cage as they came into a clearing. A stream ran and the trees were sparse. Nestled in the side along the rocks was a cottage. It was made entirely of wood, thick logs that were locked together. Leo’s breath was knocked out. There were no mages or soldiers around but he knew it. This was it. His hand trembled and it didn’t stop even when Xander took his hand and held it. Odin, Niles, and Peri were silent off the side, allowing them to move forward while keeping an eye out.

As they approached the cottage Leo’s legs shook and his heart hurt. Odin obscured his view for a second as he broke the magical barrier around the cottage but then the cottage was back in view. Leo couldn’t see inside as there were heavy curtains obscuring the view. The door also looked heavy, with a brass knob and knocker on the door. Leo didn’t have the strength to lift his hand. Xander lifted his hand and firmly took the knocker in his hand before knocking. The sound vibrated through the door and in Leo’s soul. He held his breath and waited. Every second was excruciating and Leo wanted to reach out and rip the door open but then the door opened a tiny crack.

“Look,” A very cross voice came from behind the door, “We kindly ask that you leave us alone and stop antagonising…”

It was Jakob’s voice. Leo nearly fell over. First, it confirmed that the person in the cottage was Corrin, but even knowing it was Corrin, hearing someone else was unexpected. Leo had been so isolated and Xander had been too until Peri arrived. Having Jakob answer the door confirmed that their father had exiled the butler too. If Jakob was here, then who else?

Leo didn’t have time to speculate further. Jakob widely opened the door and just stared at them openly, eyes narrowing.

“If this is your idea of a joke…”

“It isn’t a joke Jakob.” Xander spoke firmly. “It’s us. It’s me and Leo. I promise.”

With anyone else they would have accepted it. Jakob however didn’t budge. “If you really are Prince Xander and Prince Leo, prove it to me.”

Xander didn’t hesitate. He leaned in and said something low, too low for Leo to hear even though he was beside Xander. However, it was enough for Jakob. Leo watched his eyes widen before he stepped aside.

“My apologies, I’ve been cautious for so long.”

“It’s fine Jakob.” Xander said with ease.

“Please, come inside.”

They stepped in and the first thing Leo noticed was the cottage was two stories. Inside it was warm with a fire place going and a homey feel to the sitting room. Jakob lead them inside and Leo sat down on an actual piece of furniture. As he sat down someone else poked their head out. It was Felicia. Leo saw her squeak and nearly drop something. It was only saved by Jakob’s quick reflexes.
That was followed by a glare and whispers. Felicia nodded and proceeded to fly up the stairs. Leo didn’t hide his staring. He watched the stairs with baited breath as soon voices waffled down the stairs.

The first person down was Felicia followed by Gunter. Leo blinked. It appeared their father had banished more than just them. However, he didn’t focus on the two for long. A head of silver hair soon came into view. Leo felt his heart leap. Corrin’s skin was still pale, their eyes red, but it was Corrin. Without another word Leo stood up and with two smooth strides came face to face with Corrin. Behind him Leo could hear Xander moving too. Corrin stopped and stared, hands clenching and unclenching. Eyes widened and soon tears flowed down Corrin’s face. With a cry Corrin flung themselves at Leo. Leo caught Corrin with ease and was pleased to feel that Corrin felt healthy and well. Leo tightened his arms around Corrin and felt the tears stain his shirt. Tears were also flowing down his face and only doubled as Xander joined their hug.

“My little one, my little one…” Xander’s voice was soft, full of love.

“X-Xander… L-Leo…” Corrin babbled. “I-I’m dreaming this?”

“No, you aren’t.” Leo assured firmly. “We are here for you Corrin. Let’s get out of here.”

Corrin babbled into Leo’s shoulder and soon all three of them were collapsing to the floor. Leo gently nudged Corrin half off so Xander could hug them too.

“I-I missed you s-so much. S-So much.” Corrin’s fingers tightened in both Leo’s shit and around Xander’s arm.

“We missed you too little one.” Xander assured.

Corrin took a deep breath and tried to control their crying. Leo gently rubbed circles into Corrin’s back. As the three of them composed themselves, Leo saw Jakob already moving around, gathering things. It made Leo appreciate Jakob. Sure, he was standoffish, but Jakob was always efficient. With a heavy heart Leo was about to pry Corrin off when Corrin unwound their arms from both Leo and Xander. Digging into their pocket, Corrin produced a notebook and pencil. They then quickly wrote something down. Leo didn’t see what Corrin had written before they were standing.

“I-I’ll get changed.” Corrin announced.

“I-I’ll assist you!” Felicia immediately bounced off with Corrin up the stairs.

After they left Leo stood up and looked at Gunter. Gunter had been standing silently but seeing the knight made something untighten in Leo’s heart. Unlike Garon, Gunter had always been there for him, instructing and patient with his training. It felt like seeing a mentor and father figure rolled into one. It made Leo’s heart feel swollen with a mix of emotions.

“Prince Xander, Prince Leo. It’s good to see you in health.”

“Gunter.” Xander was standing straight, “We didn’t realise anyone else would be here.”

“Understandable.” Gunter said. “King Garon banished both me, Felicia, Flora, and Jakob silently, less publicly.”

“Flora too?” Leo glanced around, almost expecting the maid to appear.

“Flora was sent back to the Ice Tribe. Felicia was sent here as collateral for the entire tribe. No doubt if they attempted anything Garon would have had Felicia killed.” Gunter explained.
Made sense. Garon really covered all his bases. Leo felt his anger towards his father grow. “So, you three were also banished with Corrin.”

“It wasn’t just out of necessity or the fact we’ve been with Corrin since the beginning.” Gunter assured with a twist of his lips. “Corrin’s curse is a large factor in our presence here.”

Corrin’s curse. Of course. Leo hadn’t noticed anything but that didn’t mean anything. “What is it?”

“Corrin cannot retain memories for long.” Gunter told them. “Corrin still remembers who we are and their past, but creating new memories is fleeting. Sometimes every day is new to them and they’re terrified as if it’s the first day here. Sometimes they remember for a few days before the cycle continues. They’re always conscious of the memory loss. We’ve taken it upon ourselves to write down everything that happens.”

That explained the notebook. Leo’s heart twisted and sank into the pit of his stomach. Getting used to confinement had been hard but at least the terror of being trapped had dulled. Corrin hadn’t the luxury. Every day was terrifying and knowing that the memories would disappear… Leo wanted to stab his father.

“Thank you for telling us, Gunter.” Xander’s voice was low. “We’ve not just come to free ourselves. We know how to break our curses and we know where Camilla and Elise are.”

“I figured that was the case.” Gunter mused. “In that case, perhaps it’s best if I split from you for a while. Our enemies are great and I’m sure you’re aware of the state Nohr is in.”

State Nohr was in… that was a polite way to saying they were on the brink of war. “We are.” Leo confirmed.

“If I may be so bold to assume, but you’re not going to sit still and watch Nohr go to war.” Gunter firmly looked Xander and Leo in the eyes.

Watch Nohr go to war. Of course, they weren’t, but Leo felt the words hit him. They hadn’t even thought of what else to do after rescuing the others and breaking their curses. It made sense. They couldn’t outrun the army and their father forever.

“We won’t.” Xander at least was calm. “However, before we cross that bridge we’re going to save Camilla and Elise. If you wish to go your own direction I will not stop you. Though, I would like to know what your plans are.”

“Thank you, milord.” Gunter politely said. “My going off on my own will also distract the enemy but also, if you’re going to do something about Nohr you’ll need information and allies. I can do my best to assess the situation in the country.”

Xander thoughtfully nodded. “We can discuss this in greater detail later.”

As if on cue, Corrin walked downstairs dressed and with a bag. Felicia was also dressed a bit more practically than in a maid outfit. Jakob exited the kitchen and had bags filled. Leo appreciated the forethought. Turning to the others, who had been silent, Leo caught Niles and Odin’s gazes.

“Are we off, Leo?” Niles asked though it wasn’t needed.

Leo nodded. “Yes, we are. Let’s get out of here.”

Corrin slowly walked over to Leo and gently touched Leo’s hand. “Yes, let’s go.”
They left the cottage and headed down the mountain with ease. Odin took lead when they got to the magical barrier and broke it. Leo could feel the other’s eyes on Odin as he did it with ease, but nothing was said. Corrin stuck close to Leo and Xander. No words left their lips, but they looked pleased. When they finally set camp up, Jakob took over cooking and Leo was grateful. It allowed him to spend time with Corrin. Now that they were sitting down, Corrin was scribbling in a book and spilling their thoughts. Leo let Corrin tell them light stories (like how Felicia broke some china on their first week in the cottage) before Leo felt Odin and Niles saddle closer to him. Corrin stopped talking and tilted their head.

“I’m sorry.” Corrin flushed. “I never introduced myself.”

“That’s fine.” Niles was smooth. “We never introduced ourselves. I’m Niles. This is Odin. We’re the ones who busted Leo out.”

“You did?” Corrin’s eyes widened. “You saved Leo?”

“Sure did.” Niles smiled. “He threatened us with a soup ladle.”

Corrin choked out laughter. Leo flushed. “I wasn’t sure who you two were. You were suspicious.”

“Odin definitely is, but I’m not.” Niles retorted.

Odin immediately opened his mouth. “I am not suspicious!”

“Right. So that means you’ll finally tell me where you picked up that magical weapon?” Niles shot back.

Odin shut his mouth just as fast as he had opened it before opening his mouth again. “It’s a small detail.” He then whipped his gaze over to Corrin. “Did you meet Peri yet?”

“Peri?” Corrin looked at their group. “The woman with blue and pink hair?”

At that Peri turned her head and waved brightly. Corrin returned the gesture. As Corrin was doing that Leo saw Odin pull out a map and unroll it.

“Now that introductions are over, we should discuss what we’ll do about the forest.”

Leo’s eyes narrowed at the blatant change in conversation but decided it didn’t matter. In a way he suspected Niles also didn’t really care about where the magical weapon came from. He just brought it up because of the mysterious origins. If it really was an issue between them then Niles wouldn’t be so blatant about it. Leo was sure of it. Besides, he didn’t really care either. Odin was helping them and that was all that mattered in the end. If Odin wanted to tell them then he would. For now, they had other issues to attend to. Focusing, Leo waited in silence as Xander brought everyone up to speed about the situation before pointing to the map Odin had out.

“We won’t be able to fully surprise them, as they know we’re coming, but we can have the element of surprise.” Xander stated. “I believe the earlier the better. If we wait too long reinforcements will arrive.”

“An ambush before the rays of morn strike the earth is the perfect strategy.” Odin mused.

Leo’s mouth twiched at Odin’s phrasing but with that their plan was half solidified. With Niles offering to once again scout before they proceeded everyone broke for a rest. Upon their meeting
adjourned, Corrin immediately walked over to Leo and Xander, sitting beside them. Leo moved closer to Corrin and smiled when Corrin leaned into him and Xander.

“I have something for you.” Xander started. “It isn’t much, but these letters are for you.”

Corrin took the letters with wide eyes. Leo smiled and dug into his bag. “Me too.” Leo said, handing the stack to Corrin.

Corrin took Leo’s and their eyes misted over, tears welling in the corners. “Thank you.” Corrin’s voice was thick with emotion. “I… I’m so sorry I don’t have anything for you two. Keeping my thoughts together, keeping my memories intact is so hard. I can barely keep focus some days…”

Their shoulders shook and Leo immediately pulled Corrin into a half hug, along with Xander. Soon they were in a three way hug that resulted in Corrin crying half on Leo and half of Xander for the second time that day.

“Don’t fret over it Corrin.” Xander softly said. “The best gift is you reunited with us.”

Corrin shook as they nodded, eyes wet. They reached into their pocket and pulled out a small handkerchief to wipe their face. “I’m so glad. When Felicia told me, I was shocked.” Corrin then tugged away, reaching for the letters. “Mind if I read some of them?”

“Go ahead.” Leo smiled.

With shaky fingers Corrin opened the first letter, one from Leo. Leo had never sealed them, only folding the flap in, so it was easy for Corrin to open it. Corrin pulled the letter out and even though Leo didn’t know which letter Corrin was reading, the smile that stretched across Corrin’s face was reward enough.

The rest of the evening flew by with Corrin reading the letters. They fell asleep with Corrin’s mirth and happiness drifting in the air.

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Morning arrived with Corrin thrashing and whimpering as they woke. Their elbow jabbed into Leo’s stomach and Leo felt his air escape as he woke abruptly. Xander was up too and cradling most of Corrin’s weight so they didn’t hurt themselves. Corrin’s skin was pale and their eyes scrunched shut. Sweat was beading at their forehead and the sounds escaping from their lips made Leo’s hair stand on edge. However, before he or Xander could do anything Jakob and Felicia were there.

“Is this common?” Leo asked as Jakob gently shook Corrin awake.

“Afraid so.” Jakob answered curtly. “Night terrors are all but common for my liege.”

With that Jakob shook Corrin a little harder. Corrin’s eyes flew open and they gasped as Jakob took his hands off so Xander could hug Corrin to his chest.

“Corrin, Corrin, it’s fine, you’re fine.” Xander’s voice was firm.

Corrin owlishly blinked before pulling away and staring at Xander. “Big… brother?”

Immediately Corrin began to cry, tears hotly and silently flowing down their face. “You’re… here? Really here?” They then spotted Leo and the tears grew steady. “Leo… you too…?”

“Yes, we’re here.” Xander agreed gently.
“We wrote it down for you.” Felicia added helpfully. “In your journal.”

That seemed to calm Corrin down faster than anything else. They thickly stifled their tears and reached into their bag, pulling out a leather journal. Flipping it open, Corrin breathed out heavily and trailed their finger at the page.

“It… it already happened.” Corrin said to themselves, voice firm. “It really already happened. Okay. Good.”

Giving a wobbly smile, Corrin stood up. Jakob was already at their side and busy with some morning routine that Leo didn’t want to interrupt. Memory loss was horrific and it was clear Jakob and Felicia knew how to make Corrin feel comfortable. A routine in the morning was something Leo wasn’t going to interrupt. Instead he looked around their camp. Gunter was talking to Peri who was enthusiastically waving her lance. Odin and Niles were no where to be seen, but Odin’s bag was still there, nestled by a tree.

“I-If you’re wondering about your companions,” Felicia seemed to read his mind, “they went to wash up and catch some fish.”

Leo nodded. “Thank you.”

Deciding to go find Odin and Niles, Leo walked towards where he remembered a stream from earlier. As he walked Leo took a moment to appreciate the sounds of the forest and the scenery. The stream came into view quickly enough but the scene in front of him was once again not something Leo needed to see.

Odin and Niles were in the stream, clearly in states of undress. The water obscured their lower halves, but their chests were on display. Odin seemed to be the more sensible one, with his long vest still over his upper half as he waded through the water with a wooden spear that was clearly for fishing. Sure, Leo could still see his muscles from (no doubt) years of swordsmanship, but he wasn’t fully undressed. Niles however, was fully naked from the waist up.

Leo thickly swallowed. Sure, he had seen people half naked, but that was usually just his family and when they were young. Seeing Odin and Niles, who he was still learning about in this state made Leo’s cheeks warm. As Niles turned, Leo could see some faded scars, raised and white against his skin. Then Niles moved his arms and Leo saw a ripple of muscle and his brain stopped for a moment. All Leo could do was stare for a second before his brain rebooted and he realised how ridiculous this was. There was nothing to stare at and he was being creepy standing off the side watching. Gathering his courage, Leo stepped out, hoping his voice remained steady.

“Odin, Niles.” Good it was.

“Ah! Leo!” Odin looked over and beamed. “We were just attempting to catch breakfast.” He paused. “Well, we already have some fish.” Odin then pointed to a small basket. “Peri had it on her. It collapses and everything. Super compact and easy to use!” He beamed.

“I see.” Leo walked over to the basket. “Are you almost done here? I can tell the others if you are.”

“We should be.” Niles drawled warmly. “You can wait for us if you like. All we need to do is dry off and dress and we’ll be ready.”

Dry off and dress… Leo looked and sure enough by the basket were also two pairs of pants. It confirmed their state of undress even more and Leo turned his head away, trying to focus, not have his heart beat with embarrassment.
“Did you wish for a dip in the stream?” Odin asked. “It’s a bit cool but pleasant.”

Leo’s heart practically broke out of his chest. It was embarrassing enough to find Niles and Odin basically naked, but Leo wasn’t going to add to the embarrassment and undress in front of them. Hurriedly Leo stood up and shook his head.

“I’m fine. I’ll just go back and tell everyone you’ll be back soon.”

He left without waiting for Odin and Niles respond. On the way back, Leo’s heart pounded harshly in his chest and all he could think of for a solid moment was the display of muscle and bare chests witnessed.

It was harder to compose himself than Leo wanted to admit. Embarrassment was always the hardest emotion to surpress. Slapping his cheeks lightly Leo managed to feel more or less together by the time he returned to camp.

“Did you find them?” Peri asked.

“They’ll be here shortly.” Leo said, feeling a sense of déjà vu.

“Excellent.” Xander smiled. “It’s still early.” He then sat down beside Leo and gently touched his hand. “Soon, we’ll see Camilla again.”

Xander’s words helped Leo reground himself entirely. A smile filled his face and Leo reached for Xander’s hand, grabbing it lightly. “Soon. I can’t wait to see Camilla again.”

“Me too Leo.” Xander agreed with a warm voice. “Me too.”

Chapter End Notes

Gardening: I literally have no other reason for having Xander do gardening than I just thought it was a fun hobby for him to pick up.

Braiding: I really like the image of Odin and Niles braiding Leo's hair. Also the flower part is in reference to Tangled with Rapunzel's hair with all the flowers. I also like that image and wanted to add the mention of it here.

Practice: I like to think Odin helped Lucina out with her hair. I think it's cute family bonding time.

Peri: Would be the best sibling for ribbing and teasing. I think.

Jakob, Felicia, Gunter: I debated a lot about the people stuck with Corrin and while Jakob and Felicia were always at 100%, Gunter is someone I debated on for a while. I'm happy with the choice to add him in.

Little One: Because I'm writing Corrin with gender neutral pronouns I'm also writing Xander's endearment of Corrin as gender neutral.

Fishing: I hope you enjoyed it Leo (you're welcome)
Snow and Ribbons

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone!

I am so sorry this chapter took so long! To give a bit of insight, writing this story is a ton of work with all the plot points to make sure I bring up and not to mention how long the chapter word count is. Coupled with me being Very, Very Busy with my job and me finding time to sit down and write about 9-10k chapters takes a ton out of me. However, I will finish this story just not as speedy as I'd like to be @_@.

I hope you enjoy this next chapter. I hit a snag near the end and made some last moment changes but I think it's for the best.

However, I appreciate all the support I've received for this story. Writing long stories takes a ton out of me and reading your feedback makes me very happy. So as always, please feel free to leave kudos and comments.

Also if you want to check my tumblr out or talk to me there please feel free to check it out here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Gunter left in the morning the following day, much to Corrin’s horror. Leo tried to not watch as Gunter calmly spoke to Corrin, strong but wrinkled fingers brushing warmly through silver hair as they said their good byes. Corrin was crying softly, almost musically, as Gunter promised with solemn words he’d return safe, healthy, and sound. The scene felt like a child clinging to their parental figure, scared of the world in front of them, and the parent reluctant to leave. However, they all knew it was for the best, that Gunter wanted to help by gathering information, and the smaller their group, the better it would be to move around. Corrin knew, so once the tears dried and half smiles were given, Gunter pressed a parcel of herbs into Corrin’s hands (Leo guessed it was tea) and left in silence.

The air felt a little heavy after, mainly due to Corrin sitting on a log staring at the parcel as Felicia shot worried looks while Jakob tried to keep her away, for Corrin to have some time alone. Leo busied himself with writing a quick note in his journal before braiding his hair. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Odin pout, like he wanted to braid. Leo held a small smile and vowed to let someone braid his hair soon. Setting his things into his bag, Leo stood up and brushed his pants off before heading towards the forest with the rest.

Odin had bounced ahead, all light chatter as he chatted with Corrin brightly. Jakob hovered near by, gaze sharp, waiting to stop Odin if he stepped over some invisible boundary. Corrin, however, seemed to appreciate Odin’s chatter, as a smile spread across their face and they responded to Odin.

Leo hung in the back a little. Not that he didn’t want to talk to Corrin, but he didn’t want to crowd. Being smothered was not something Leo wanted to inflict on any of his siblings. Instead he walked close to Peri, idly listening to her chat to Niles about baking and desserts. It felt familiar to Leo and soon he added in his thoughts and opinions. Despite the press of their journey, Leo wasn’t feeling the weight of tension crushing him.
As they came closer to the forest, their chatter silenced and Niles softly took the lead. The trees were massive, towering over everyone a hundred times over. The trunks were easily wide enough that with all of them they wouldn’t be able to hug it. Thick, heavy, green leaves adorned the top, the canopy of shade engulfing them. The branches were so high that Leo was sure only creatures of flight could perch on the branches.

Entering the forest was eerie. It felt like a portal to another dimension, one filled with silence and greenery. There was a path, a dirty road beaten into the ground from feet, horses, and carriages, but majority of the forest was covered with dark green grass and bushes. A couple of times there was a shuffle from the bushes, a sound that nearly sent Leo into the air when he first heard it. However, some animal would leap around, like a rabbit or a fox. The sun became obscured by the foliage and soon only trickles of light would seep in, creating a canopy of sun and green dancing on everyone’s skin. Niles still confidently lead them through, his gaze fixed. Leo felt a swell of awe fill him.

The continued in silence for a good twenty minutes before Niles stopped and made a motion for them to duck closer to the trees. Leo did as Niles ordered and pressed himself closer to a tree. He felt Xander follow and soon they were all hidden. Niles then pointed silently in front of them. Leo followed his finger and saw that away, but still within sight, was a clearing.

Light streamed into the clearing and Leo could see a small quaint stream flow by. The land became a little lumpy, like there were small hills, but nothing too major. A cut down tree stump was out front, where people would chop fire wood, but there was no axe nor was there any fire wood. In the middle of the cottage was a cabin. It was made entirely of wood, thick logs that interlocked at the corners, giving it a rustic feel. The slope of the house was made of something dark, almost black in colour. The entire scene reminded Leo of a picture from a fairy tale that they used to read together from a large, heavy book. Swallowing Leo then saw the light change angle and spotted the magical barrier’s perimeter. This had to be where Camilla was.

Leo swallowed and scanned the area. At first, he didn’t spot any mages, but then, off in the corner were two mages dressed in dark robes with purple trimmings. Classic wear for a Nohrian mage in the army. They were chatting, not looking alert. Leo then saw another few off the side, half staring out into the forest and half yawning behind their hands.

This was it. Leo’s fingers itched and he wanted to grab his tome and sneak up, catch them by surprise. Niles, however, gave a coy look and signaled for them to wait. Leo’s hand didn’t fall from his tome, but he watched as Niles easily slunk around, disappearing from sight. Leo’s breath caught as his heart raced. Then, in an instant, a guard went down. Leo saw a flash of struggle, before one of the mages fell to the ground. The partner flailed, hand touching their tome, but they too went down. All of this happened without a sound. Leo whipped his head to the other mages and saw they hadn’t noticed. Gaping, Leo crawled forward ever so slightly before he saw the mages turn their heads, spotting the lack of comrades at their post. Leo saw them rush over, words half reading him, but being caught in the foliage. He then saw Niles, a distance away, closer to them and further from the cabin. He made a motion for them to move.

Doing so, Leo silently darted from tree to tree. Panic was rippling through the guards and they were staring at the ground at their comrades and around, fingers clutching their tomes. As they moved closer, Leo saw that Niles hadn’t killed the two mages, but rather had knocked them out without a hint of blood or injury. His mind clicked to why the mages were panicking, as it appeared their comrades had simply been attacked without notice.

“Hey.” Niles was suddenly beside Leo and it was entirely inappropriate for Leo to notice how warm Niles was beside him. “There are four more guards along the other side. So far, they haven’t moved or been informed to what has happened. Everyone is outside the magical barrier. Let’s split up.
While those two in front are on high alert it’s best to sneak up on them. They’re distracted and wild. I’ll do that. Meanwhile if the other two could be taken out relatively quickly that would be best.”

Quickly. Leo touched his tome. “I can do it. I can take two down.”

“I’ll help.” Odin was beside Leo, surprisingly quiet. “That leave the other two.”

Jakob nodded, hand already touching a throwing knife, but Peri also nodded, her gaze firm. “I’ll get them.” She promised.

Xander touched her shoulder. “No blood.” He told her.

Leo watched Peri wilt for a second before nodding. “No blood.” She agreed.

“The others can stay out front and watch in case any one else arrives.” Niles calmly ordered. “If that’s all right with you, Lord Leo?”

Lord Leo. Again, the title felt strange and Leo didn’t feel like a lord. Niles had come up with a plan and had effectively done most of the leg work. All Leo had was a board set up and calculations predetermined. Still, this was something. He was out of practice and lacked the training. Niles had experience. Leo wasn’t going to get into a pointless contest.

“Your plan is effective. We will carry it out.” Leo firmly said.

Niles shot a smile and then with ease, slunk off. Odin wasted no time, he touched Leo’s arm and lead them in around the right side. Leo saw Jakob and Peri move to the left and soon all he could focus on was their movement. Odin was once again surprisingly quiet as he moved and skirted along the edge of the magical barrier. Leo clutched his tome and watched as the other side came into view. As Niles had stated, there were two pairs of mages. Opening his tome, Leo watched as Odin grabbed his sword, not taking it out of the sheath. No death. Leo flipped his pages.

“On three.” Leo muttered.

“Right.” Odin agreed.

Leo took a further position and watched Odin slink over to the mages. Mentally going through the calculations so he wouldn’t hit Odin, Leo fired a spell, a current of lightning towards the mages, making the current stronger on the mage further away from Odin as Odin pounced. The two never saw them coming and Leo watched as they both fell harshly to the ground like a sack of potatoes. Odin then hit both of them harshly over the head a few times, like he wanted to make sure they’d stay down before he walked over to Leo. Behind him Leo saw the other two mages on the ground and Peri gleefully dancing around while Jakob looked like he had just taken out the dirty laundry to wash.

“That was incredible!” Odin praised as he moved closer to Leo. “You have such precise control over the magical currents at your finger tips!”

Leo flushed and shut the tome. “Thank you. It’s just hard work. Now, let’s return to the others.”

Odin nodded and lightly took Leo’s hand tugging him along. The touch was warm and pulsed with life. Leo flushed but didn’t make a move to break their connection. Circling once again around the magical barrier, they wound up at the front. Niles was sitting on the other two mages, gaze fixed around the area as Xander and Felicia stood protectively around Corrin. Peri and Jakob soon joined them and it left only breaking the barrier to enter.
“My turn.” Odin grinned before grabbing the knife and letting go of Leo’s hand.

Leo tried not to stare at it. Even though it wasn’t important to know, he couldn’t help but wonder about the origins of the weapon. Shaking his thoughts away, he watched as Odin broke through the barrier with a single swipe of the blade. They entered and soon Leo was facing the cabin. Corrin and Xander had gravitated towards him and Leo leaned into them. The others had taken a step back, allowing space for privacy. Leo was thankful.

Walking closer to the cabin, Leo noticed the windows with the shut curtains and the heavy door. It looked homey but isolated. Camilla was inside. Leo’s heart felt like it would burst from his chest.

“Should we knock?” Corrin asked. “Isn’t that polite?”

“Go on, little one.” Xander encouraged. “You can knock and we can enter together.”

Corrin flushed and stepped in front, hand delicately hovering over the door. Knocking softly, so soft that the sound barely echoed, Corrin then gently opened the door. It turned out that gentle was good.

A bucket of something tipped and it was only thanks to Xander’s training and reflexes that he tugged Corrin back. Water spilled from the bucket and a bag of flour tipped and fell. A cloud of flour covered their feet and Leo blinked at the sight. Coughing, Leo fanned his face and waited for the flour to settle before staring inside.

It was dark, but Leo could see Camilla sitting at the table. Her hands were poised behind a fruit bowl and Leo immediately knew she was hiding a weapon. Everything about her was both on alert and sleepy at the same time. Leo could tell by the slouch in her shoulders and the droop in her eyes. He had seen that look before, when she had spent all her energy entertaining people when they had galas or dinner parties.

“Well, well,” Camilla’s voice was smooth. “What sort of trickery do we have here?”

At the sound of her voice and sugar coated niceness, Corrin actually welled up with tears. Leo saw them fall warmly down their face. Leo gently touched Corrin’s shoulders and stepped forward carefully.

“What can we say to prove it’s us?” He asked, not beating around the bush.

That was clearly not the response Camilla was expecting. Leo saw her eyes widen slightly, her lilac hair brush to the side, before her gaze hardened. “My birthday when I turned eighteen, what was my favourite gift?”

Leo saw the trick question. Publicly, Camilla had received a wyvern and that was one of the highlights of the day. She had doted immediately and spent the next week visiting the wyvern and getting used to riding and flying. However, the real present wasn’t her wyvern…

“The painting Elise made for you.” Xander answered for them. “She had spent all of her free time after lessons from the healers painting it. She did it completely in secret, even going so far as to hide it from Arthur and Effie. It was a success. We didn’t see it coming.”

“She gave it to you after tea since we insisted she not drink coffee at that hour or at her age.” Leo added.

Camilla stared at them before she stood up smoothly. A clatter rang from behind the fruit bowl letting Leo know that there was indeed a hidden weapon. She then sauntered over, side stepping some areas, before throwing herself at them. Corrin was engulfed the most, pressed close to Camilla’s
chest, while Leo got a mouthful of her hair and Xander half banging into her forehead. But they were together. They were hugging. Leo curled his hands around Camilla and felt her body shake silently. He knew she was crying, softly, tenderly, and soon Leo felt himself cry along with her. Corrin was the most vocal and soon they had to pull away to wipe Corrin’s eyes less they soak the plain dress Camilla was wearing.

“Oh sweetheart.” Camilla cooed, her voice cracking slightly as she rubbed Corrin’s hair. “Don’t cry. I’m here.”

Leo didn’t hear Corrin’s muffled response, but Camilla warmly smiled and continued to rub Corrin’s hair. As she did that, she leaned into Leo and Xander, showing she was still thinking about them.

“How on earth did you manage to get in here?” Camilla softly asked.

“Odin has this magical weapon.” Leo replied before he paused. “There is a lot to discuss. We should leave.”

Camilla slowly untangled herself from them, though she kept a firm hand on Corrin, reaching into her dress pocket, pulling out a handkerchief. Corrin wiped their eyes and as they cleaned their face, Camilla bustled around the cottage, stuffing extra blankets into the bed, making it look like someone was sleeping there before grabbing an already filled bag. Leo held a smile at the sheer readiness they all were at escaping.

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“Let’s go. Hopefully someone thinks I’m still there.” Camilla mused. “I’ve set a lot of traps around here. Shame to have them go to waste.”

Leo held back a snort at that and even Corrin choked back a laugh. Xander carefully stepped back and Camilla’s eyes twinkled as she walked calmly through the cottage to the door. Leo trailed and soon they were outside. Odin and Niles were keeping an eye out, but Peri immediately waved at them. Jakob and Felicia stood at the side, Felicia giving a smile and Jakob a polite bow.

“Oh my.” Camilla stared. “We seem to have more people than I expected.”

“We can do introductions later.” Xander said. “For now, as Leo said, we need to leave.”

Odin seemed to have heard Xander, or he was just waiting for the moment. He stood up and took out the magical dagger. Then, walking up to the barrier, he cut into it, dragging the blade down. The barrier parted, like had for Leo, Xander, and Corrin. Leo noticed Camilla raise an eyebrow, but she walked through with them, towards the group. Jakob and Felicia gave Camilla once final look before bustling over to Corrin, hovering at their side. They didn’t approach too closely though, as Camilla wasn’t letting them out of her arm’s reach. Leo understood. He wanted to curl up close to his family and just stay there, but they couldn’t stick around. As Xander had stated, they needed to leave.

“Come on.” Leo touched Camilla’s shoulder. “Let’s get out of here before more of Iago’s forces arrive.”

Camilla’s arm tightened around Corrin but she nodded in confirmation.

~

They left the forest and Leo saw Camilla let out a deep breath, her shoulders looking almost lighter. She hadn’t moved from Corrin’s side, but to be fair, Corrin didn’t look like they wanted to move either. Introductions were hastily done as they moved. Camilla politely nodded but Leo could sense after a while she was growing tired. She tried to hide it though, moving along, but when she started to lean a bit too heavy on Corrin, they decided to stop for the night. Niles and Odin gathered the
firewood and when everything was set up, Leo lazily lit the fire, watching the red and orange dance and crackle in the air. Peri went off with Jakob and when they returned there was some food. Leo eyed the carcass of the animal Peri was carrying and didn’t want to question how she had managed to find and kill something so quickly. Some things were best left unknown.

Camilla had to be shaken awake and Leo’s heart sank as he saw her curse dance in her eyes. Leo tightened his grip and gently moved closer to her. Camilla leaned into him and Leo smiled as Corrin and Xander slowly moved in.

It was quiet, everyone else chattering lightly about something. Niles and Odin were together, quite blatantly with Niles half in Odin’s lap. Leo supposed after kissing in front of everyone, sitting on each other was deemed acceptable. As Leo caught their gazes, Niles gave a small smile and Odin beamed. Leo snuggled closer to his family, happy they both had people they loved close to each other.

“So, Elise next?” Corrin softly asked as they ate.

“Yes, little one.” Xander’s hand warmly touched Corrin’s head. “We already have an idea to where she is.”

“Up north.” Leo supplied.

As he said this, Leo saw Felicia stop in her conversation with Peri and turn her head, “North? Like… my home?”

“We believe so.” Leo nodded. “I’m not sure of the exact coordinates…”

“There is this place a bit west of my village.” Felicia interrupted and then flushed. “If you can pardon my, milord?”

“No, go ahead.” Any information was useful.

Felicia coughed before continuing. “This place is a cabin, belonging to King Garon. We usually avoided it, unless there was a need to visit. He didn’t visit us often. If Lady Elise is held somewhere, I believe that is a good spot to start. Also… if I could sneak home…”

Home. Of course, Felicia wanted to go home. Not that Leo had any idea where Flora was, but simply seeing her family and friends again had to be something Felicia had dreamed about. Being punished and cursed wasn’t just affecting them. Jakob and Felicia had lost time, even Gunter. It made Leo’s blood boil and his fingers twitch, wanting to hurt his father.

“Of course, Lady Elise and her safety is more important.” Felicia finished.

Corrin finally shook out from under Camilla’s grasp and slowly half crawled over to Felicia, touching her hand. “No Felicia, your family is just as important.”

Leo saw Felicia’s eyes water and his heart twisted. So much had been taken from them and seeing the rawness in Felicia made Leo want to move quickly.

“There is another issue to discuss.” Niles suddenly spoke up. “The Rainbow Sage. When we find Lady Elise, we should head to him.”

“The Rainbow Sage?”

Everyone’s voices over lapped, except Odin and Niles’s, in varying tones. Leo blinked. “Did we not
mention him to you?"

“No, you haven’t.” Xander confirmed. “However, do enlighten us.”

“I…” Leo turned to Niles and Odin. “They know more than I do.”

“It’s fine.” Niles spoke calmly. “It slipped our minds. Odin and I have been traveling together for about a year. During our time we heard about the Rainbow Sage and figured he’d know how to undo curses. We met him and turns out you need to go to him. We were sort of hoping to have a portable curse breaker or a spell to undo it.”

Leo remembered when Niles and Odin told him their plan. It felt so long ago since he had met them. It wasn’t time wise, but event wise it was. The hope the two were bringing to Leo was spreading and Leo could see it on the faces of everyone else around the fire.

“So then, where is the Rainbow Sage?” Camilla slowly asked.

“He’s beyond the mountains, upwards where you have to navigate a rather large building.” Odin explained. “It’s a tough journey but we can make it. First, we must rescue Lady Elise, correct?”

That was an obvious answer. Leo nodded. “We have to rescue Elise first. Iago must be furious. She’s the only one left and if he thinks he can take his anger out on her…”

Leo’s stomach twisted uncomfortably and he felt like he’d throw up. Leo knew exactly the kind of cruelty Iago was capable of. His legs were proof. Elise was smaller, younger, and less combat experienced. If Iago even thought of hurting Elise… Leo felt his blood boil at the mere possibility.

“We’ll save Elise.” Corrin softly said moving back towards Leo, touching Leo’s hand. “I know we will do so quickly. Felicia knows the north like the back of her hand.” They smiled.

It was as though Corrin had read Leo’s mind. Leo took Corrin’s hand into his own and nodded, feeling a bit of the tension drip from his body. All he had to do was keep an optimistic view and they’d rescue Elise in no time.

“Then, we’ll leave at dawn.” Xander announced.

With that settled, everyone slowly moved into their night routines. Leo sat back with Camilla and Corrin, savouring their warmth. It was still pleasant in the evenings but being beside his family rejuvenated Leo. He even eased into Camilla’s touch as she began to slowly run her hand over his hair, concentrating on the scalp.

Some point in time Xander joined them and even though they were missing Elise, having his siblings beside Leo made the ache of the days separated disappear into nothingness.

~

Leo had fallen asleep amongst his siblings but had woken up earlier than them due to the weight of Corrin on his arm and the pressure of Camilla at his back. Groaning, Leo opened his eyes slowly, adjusting to the barely visible sunlight peaking overhead. Across from him, Leo saw Odin and Niles, clumped together, Niles awake. His hand was stroking Odin’s hair, a soft smile on his face. The entire scene was silent, soft, and intimate. Leo flushed and wanted to turn his head. His heart pounded painfully in his chest and Leo cursed his luck. He had no part in accidentally intruding on a tender moment. It was rude. However, the need to get up and move filled Leo, so with a soft reluctantly, Leo jostled himself out of the pile of his siblings, carefully moving everyone so they’d still snuggle together. As he did so, Leo felt Niles look at him.
“Good morning, Lord Leo.” Niles kept his voice low.

“Good morning.” Leo replied with the same tone. “I’m just taking a walk.”

“All right.” Niles nodded. “Holler if anything happens.”

“I will.”

Leo then ducked out, taking a walk into the woods, having a moment to himself. He didn’t want to stray too far, but when Leo came across a small stream, he thought it best to wash his face at least before returning. Kneeling, Leo cupped the water and was about to splash it on his face when he felt the familiar tingle of magic in the air.

It made his heart twist and sink. Without another thought, Leo threw the water backwards, hearing a satisfying garble of sound. He then tugged his tome out and fired a spell at Iago. The fire missed Iago by a small margin, but it was satisfying to watch his robes smoke and his eyes widen.

“I won’t miss next time.” Leo warned Iago. “Leave.”

“Ah, Lord Leo.” Iago’s voice sounded a bit shaky but he then regained his smirk. “Gained some fight now that you’ve had your little rebellion?”

“I’ve always been rebelling.” Leo fired another fire spell at Iago. This time it hit Iago’s chest. “Stay away.”

The fire however, was absorbed a moment later. Leo frowned slightly. So, Iago had some sort of protective charm. That didn’t matter. Protective charms had a limit. Nothing could withstand a constant flurry of spells forever. Leo opened his mouth.

“Oh Lord Leo, you should be a bit more thoughtful.” Iago’s voice was oily. “If I don’t return, I have instructed the soldiers to kill little Princess Elise.”

Leo’s heart stopped for all of two seconds before he saw red and then pure white before Leo forced cold logic to fill his mind. “You’re bluffing. You couldn’t have possibly brought soldiers up north this quickly. You don’t want King Garon to know about your little mistake. All the soldiers have to manually arrive, no magic.”

Iago’s eye twitched slightly and Leo hoped he had hit the mark in the bullseye.

“Do you want to test me?” Iago’s voice sadly didn’t crack. “You have no proof. So, why don’t you not waste our time and come back to your tower. Don’t make me drag you by your hair.”

Leo fired another spell at Iago, this time lightning. “Stay away from me.”

“Your little spells won’t work.” Iago pointed to his chest, probably where the charm was to protect him. “Don’t fight me, Lord Leo. Or your punishment will be worse. I’ll break your legs and your arms.” Iago warned him. “I’ll watch you writhe in agony and laugh.”

Iago was closing in and Leo’s voice caught in his throat. Iago would do it. Leo could see it, could feel it. He was so foolish for wandering away…

An arrow flew through the air and nearly skewered Iago. Leo jolted and looked over at the trees to where Niles was. Another arrow was cocked on his bow and his eye was dark.

“I won’t miss.” Niles softly warned before he fired another arrow.
Iago twisted to get away, but the arrow pushed deeply into his shoulder. Leo got to hear the satisfying sound of Iago screaming in pain and the sight of Iago crumpling to his knees. Niles notched another arrow, ready to fire but Iago muttered a spell and vanished. A second later the arrow Niles fired hit the ground where Iago had been.

“Lord Leo!” Niles kept his weapon ready as he ran towards him. “Are you injured?”

Leo thickly swallowed and opened his mouth to tell Niles he was fine but felt his voice choke in his throat instead. Leo then felt his body shake and tears run down his face. Niles was here and Leo was safe but his brain kept playing Iago’s words over and over in his mind. His legs… his arms…

“Lord Leo.”

Niles pulled Leo into a warm hug. Leo hit Niles’s chest and inhaled, smelling smoked cider wood and leather. Niles was also warm, running warmer than Leo. Collapsing half into Niles, Leo felt Niles slowly wind his arms around, hugging tightly.

“You’re fine.” Niles told him. “You’re safe.”

He was fine. Leo forced the thought through his head. He was safe. The thoughts slowly wormed into Leo’s mind until it was all he could think of. Niles kept a firm hold on Leo the entire time. Eternity passed and Leo didn’t want to leave the comfort of Niles’s embrace. However, he couldn’t stand still the entire day. With effort Leo pulled away and gave a shaky smile.

“Thank you for saving me. Again.”

“Who was that?” Niles reached out and touched Leo’s hair.

“That was Iago.” Leo informed Niles.

Niles stiffened and Leo felt his hand grow heavy on his head. “That pile of slime was Iago?”

“Yes.”

“I should have put an arrow through his slimy head.”

Leo gave a half laugh mingled with a choke. “Yeah.”

“Next time.” Niles firmly said. “Come, let’s return to the others.”

Leo nodded and they walked back, Niles sticking close to Leo. When they returned Leo saw Odin standing up, his brow furrowed. Everyone else was in stages of waking but Leo saw their expressions of varying worry.

“Lord Leo, Niles.” Odin immediately pounced. “Are you injured?”

“We’re fine.” Leo started before Odin touched his face, turning it lightly. “I’m not injured I swear.”

Odin gave a half hum like he didn’t believe Leo, but he let go of his face. “What happened?”

“I went for a walk. I ran into Iago.” Leo informed everyone.

The reactions from everyone rippled widely of disgust. Leo exhaled slowly. “He was threatening Elise’s safety if I didn’t go with him. I called it as a bluff. I’m sure it is. He couldn’t have managed to get soldiers up north so soon.”
“I wish I put an axe through his head years ago.” Camilla hissed.

“Me too.” Leo honestly replied.

“I believe we all feel the same way.” Xander darkly mused. “For now, this means we need to move quickly. Iago knows we’re on the way north. We’ll have to be careful.”

The tension for their journey suddenly felt very tangible. Leo looked towards the mountains, towards north and hoped they would make it soon.

~

Their pace increased and as the pace increased Leo noticed that within the next two days everyone was gravitating towards him more. Sure, he expected Camilla to practically leech herself to his side, Xander to stick closer, and Corrin to ask if he was fine frequently. But then he had Niles and Odin offering to do more for him and consistently check up on him. Their touches soon became a familiar blur along with his family’s and Leo now almost expected Niles or Odin to brush up to him. It sent a warmth through Leo, their consideration and their worry. However, upon their third day, as they went further and further north, Leo felt a bit of guilt hit him. Odin and Niles were running themselves ragged along with Peri, Jakob, and Felicia. Felicia in particular as their venture up north made her the lead expert for the area.

So, that night when they set up camp, Leo looked Niles and Odin in the eyes. “I want to take a shift of guard duty.”

His voice rang softly through the camp and Leo waited for everyone’s reactions. To his surprise, it was Corrin who spoke first.

“I’d like to join you Leo. If that’s all right?”

A thick silence filled the area before it slightly exploded.

“Are you sure, Lord Leo?” Odin asked.

“We don’t want to burden you.” Niles added.

At the same time Jakob and Felicia’s voices were ringing to Corrin, a mix of “are you sure?” and “we would never force you to.” However, Leo focused on Niles and Odin.

“I’ve been slacking off and letting you two take the brunt harder. Besides you two, only Jakob, Felicia, and Peri are keeping watch. This means you’re uneven and that makes keeping watch uneven. Please, allow me to do this.”

Niles and Odin nodded but Xander suddenly spoke up, his hand warmly touching Leo’s shoulder. “Are you certain Leo? I mean with Iago –”

Leo felt a stab in his heart and he immediately cut Xander off, whirling around. He could see Xander’s frown, the lines on his face. It reminded Leo of the all too close and distant horrors they’d faced separated. However, hearing Xander’s worry cut into Leo. He knew that was all Xander was but the inadequacy of his encounter hit Leo hard.

“I can handle it Xander.” Leo firmly stated, his voice coming out sharper than he anticipated.

Another wave of silence filled the area. Leo felt the tinges of guilt eat at the corner of his heart, but he didn’t waver. Staring at Xander, Leo hoped to convey his feelings in a cold, logical manner.
“I’m not made of glass Xander.” Leo’s voice barely rose but the moment the words left his mouth he regretted them.

Xander gave an almost pained expression but then his face smoothed and his lips set tightly. “Then, if that’s what you wish to do, then I won’t get in your way.”

Leo’s heart dropped just a little bit more, guilt soaking into the nibbled edges of his fraying heart. Swallowing back words, Leo just let Xander walk off and sit beside Peri and Camilla. There were things hanging in the air but Leo wasn’t going to address them at the moment. He needed this. He wanted this. He wanted to feel in control. Flexing his hand, Leo opened his tome and turned to Corrin.

“Ready to spend some of the night with me?”

“Always am.” Corrin replied, scooting closer to Leo.

Night thickly rolled in and soon everyone was settling in for sleep. Niles and Odin shot him a quick glance before they curled together and Leo was appreciating that they weren’t stating anything else or giving advice. Corrin fed another log to the fire and the flames crackled lowly, just enough light for them to see, but not enough to bother anyone sleeping. Leo kept a firm eye out, staring into the darkness, watching the clouds occasionally part and reveal the moonlight. Silence, except for the regular sounds in the forest echoed softly and the guilt eating a bit more at Leo’s heart. Leo did his best to not stare over at Xander’s sleeping form, trying to drive his feelings away.

“Thank you for letting me do this with you.” Corrin suddenly said, voice pitched softly. “I haven’t had a chance to do many things independently for a while.”

Leo felt a bit of warmth in his heart in the cracks where guilt had laid its teeth. “It’s not a problem Corrin. I don’t mind. I like spending time with you.”

“I do too.” Corrin agreed.

Silence once again fell and the fire crackled lowly again. Leo tried his best to focus on Corrin’s words, how Leo was the one letting Corrin feel like they were in control again. This exercise was beyond Leo’s feelings. Corrin also needed to feel important, like they could be trusted. Leo touched his hair and shivered at the idea of Iago actually getting close to him again, touching his hair, dragging him off… Leo clutched his tome so tightly his hand hurt.

“You know, Xander’s worries are out of love.” Corrin suddenly said.

Leo’s thoughts broke and were replaced by the guilt once again worming back into view. “I know.” Leo unclutched his tome painfully, one finger at a time. “I didn’t mean to sound… snappish.”

“We’re all tense.” Corrin wisely stated. “This journey is both freeing and binding. Just… we’re family and we’re finally together again. I don’t want to see us fight.”

Family. Together. Leo let those words wash over him. Corrin was right. Not that Leo was truly upset at Xander, but he had to make sure Xander knew that. In the morning Leo would tell him. Smiling to himself, Leo heavily plopped his hand on Corrin’s head and rubbed his hair affectionately. Leo felt Corrin smile under him and wiggle a bit closer.

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“You’re right Corrin.” Leo looked up at the sky again. “We’re together again. We always will be.”

“I hope Elise is all right.” Corrin added with a light, hopeful tone.
“I do too.” Leo found a bright star in the sky and his heart felt a bit lighter. “I know she is all right. Elise is strong.”

“Yes, she is.”

The rest of their watch passed uneventfully.

~

At the crack of dawn when the sun lit the sky and Xander woke, Leo immediately walked over and pressed himself into Xander’s arms, hugging him. Xander took a full moment to comprehend but once he did, Leo was tightly hugged back.

“Sorry.” Leo muttered into Xander’s shoulder.

“It’s fine Leo.” Xander ran a hand over Leo’s back. “I was just feeling… tense due to recent events.”

“I know. Me too.”

They then parted and Leo ended up following Corrin, Niles, and Odin to the stream for washing up. As Odin proclaimed some of the plant life to Corrin (“This is called DEADLY SUNBEAM!”/ “Wow, really?”) Leo felt Niles walk closer and into his proximity. Turning his head Leo watched Niles wash his face, eyepatch still on.

“Feeling all right?” Niles asked as he wiped his face of water with a cloth.

“I’m fine.” Leo smiled at the concern. “Sorry. That must have been awkward.”

“After all the tense situations I’ve been in?” Niles gave a crooked smile. “That wasn’t coming close. I’m glad you two made up though.” Niles added before he heavily clasped Leo’s shoulder, squeezing it. “Also, it may not seem like it, but I can lend a helpful ear, should you ever want an outside opinion.”

The warmth of Niles’ hand only added to the flush on Leo’s cheeks. How sweet of Niles, how thoughtful of him too. Leo couldn’t pretend they were complete strangers anymore, considering how far they’ve traveled together and how much Niles was giving of himself to Leo. Doing so would be rude to Niles and disrespectful to his actions.

“Thank you.” Leo reached up and clasped Niles’ hand tightly. “I appreciate it. I’m…” Leo thickly swallowed. He felt like a child again, but honesty wasn’t harmful. “I’m glad I have a friend like you.”

“Friend?” Niles looked at him before he smiled widely “I’m honoured to have you as a friend, Lord Leo. Odin is too but don’t tell him now or we’ll hear him wax on and off about ‘tightly woven bonds of friendship spanning through time and destiny’ or something similar to that.”

Leo couldn’t help it. He burst into laughter. It filled his chest and burst out in small bursts of joy. “You two really are a great couple.” Leo commented with mirth. “You replicated Odin’s speech perfectly. I’m glad you two have each other.”

Niles looked at him, possibly aghast that his impression was spot on or possibly in joy at knowing he and Odin were easily seen as close and in love. However, before he could state anything, Odin bounced over.

“What’s this? Lyrical notes in the fair wind my ears plucked from the sky?” Odin asked. “The source
of this joyous sound proclaimed loudly through the throat of our Lord Leo?”

Odin was pressing closer to Leo with each word. Leo felt his face burn but Niles then yanked Odin back by the collar sighing.

“Let’s not be melodramatic here, theater boy.”

Odin wiggled a little. “But, it’s so lovely to hear Lord Leo express his joy. Surely you can agree with me, Niles?”

Niles stared for a second, a bit of pink on his cheeks. “Right.” He let go of Odin. “Let’s get back to camp.”

“I called out the true intentions of your heart.” Odin called out after him. “I’ve seen beyond the darkened veil you wear and…”

Niles firmly clasped a hand over Odin’s mouth. “Let’s go back.” He slowly said.

Leo held back another ring of laughter and went to snatch Corrin to head off with them. As Niles dragged Odin ahead of them, Leo walked slowly with Corrin.

“Sleep well?” Leo asked.

“Yes.” Corrin agreed before smiling. “Odin sure is a bright person.”

“That… he is…” Bright felt like an understatement.

“I wonder why he talks strange.” Corrin mused.

Leo snorted. “I’m not sure. Perhaps he enjoys plays and…”

“No, not that.” Corrin shook their head. “I mean his accent. It’s sort of all over the place sometimes.”

Interesting. Leo stared up at Niles and Odin and shrugged. “Odin said he traveled a lot. I’m sure he’s picked up many different dialects and accents through his journeys.”

“Oh, that’s so cool.” Corrin brightened. “I’ll have to ask him about it later.”

Leo nodded and the topic dropped.

~

As they kept moving the air became colder and colder. Even with Felicia and her knowledge of warmth magic the nights were slowly becoming difficult to sleep through without consistently keeping the fire hotter and higher. However, Leo welcomed the discomfort. That meant they were closer to Elise. When the first layer of snow and frost welcomed them, Leo pushed onwards and tried to keep his mind off the slowly biting cold. Everyone else wasn’t complaining and Leo wouldn’t either. The evenings slowly became a habit of Leo trying to distract himself by braiding his hair again and again. That seemed to remind people of their little obsession and soon almost everyone wanted to try braiding his hair again. Leo didn’t mind and welcomed everyone giving a chance, even Corrin, who did their best and messiest only second to Peri. It helped keep their mind off the cold and that was all that mattered.

However, as they moved closer and closer it became apparent that they couldn’t keep camping
outside. Felicia had nervously stammered her explanation one evening and even though they wanted to keep low, Leo hated that she had points. Hypothermia over being found out weren’t great options to contend with, but hypothermia wasn’t something Leo wanted to deal with. So, the next morning Niles went off with Felicia to scout the area. Thankfully when they returned at noon, they reported some abandoned homes that were relatively in tact that they could spend the night at. The houses were also on the way, so it didn’t affect their journey.

However, the issue with the houses ended up being the cramped nature of them. Naturally, Felicia, Jakob, and Corrin went to one house. With three people being a stretch of space and Leo not wanting to shove Niles and Odin alone with Peri, he let Camilla, Xander, and Peri take another house, leaving him with Niles and Odin in the last house.

After eating a quick meal and creating a fire, Leo curled by it and tried to keep warm. Of course, having shelter was far more preferable to no shelter, but it still was cold. Curling into himself, Leo shivered for a while Leo barely noticed Niles and Odin sitting beside him until he felt their warm sides press against his.

“You’re looking a bit blue.” Niles touched Leo’s fingers. His touch was surprisingly warm.

“I grew up in Regna Ferox.” Odin reminded Leo. “You’re definitely cold.”

“Sorry.” Leo curled a bit closer to them and the fire. “I suppose cold isn’t something I haven’t been exposed to for a while. Nohr is cold but the tower…”

“No apologies.” Niles kept his hand over Leo’s. “We’ll just have to keep close and try to stay warm.”

Leo nodded and closed his eyes, letting the heat wash over him. Niles and Odin weren’t saying anything but they weren’t moving either. Cherishing it, Leo felt himself slowly feel a bit warmer. He hoped in turn Odin and Niles felt warm too. With no hope of a lot of sleep, Leo cracked his eyes open and looked over at Odin and Niles.

“Do you mind telling me a bit more about yourselves?” He asked.

Odin immediately shifted into response. “Not a problem, milord! My life is an epic tale of…”

“Don’t.” Niles huffed.

“Fine…” Odin sighed. “My mother is a cleric. When she was young and, in her youth, a great swordsman came into her life. My mother always wanted to help people in troubled areas. The swordsman accompanied her for protection and soon they fell in love. My father taught me many skills with the sword and to this day I honour the skills he taught me. However, staying in one location was never meant for Odin Dark. I too am called to help other people, just like my mother. I decided to travel and see the world, experience life. It’s how I met Niles and it’s how I’m here today.”

That made a lot of sense. Odin had to learn healing magic from someone. His mother being a cleric was a logical conclusion. “You also learned healing magic from your mother.”

“Sort of.” Odin laughed. “I’m not the best at it but I can do basics.” He then looked at Niles. “What about you? What sorts of secrets are you going to reveal to Lord Leo?”

Niles half laughed. “I have no secrets. I was born to a father who didn’t want me and a mother who died soon after. I was raised by some prostitute who took pity on me. I learned to lie and steal to survive. When I was older, I worked for a gang of thieves, learning the art of killing too. However,
one day I had a realization, as I stole from some noble. Instead of being upset or angry at me, or even looking at me with pity, he just looked at me with understanding. There was no judgement in his eyes. We didn’t say anything and I barely remember what he looked like. I’m sure it was a small incident to that boy, but for me it changed my view. I then decided I could be something better. So, I decided to steal not for myself, but for others. That’s how I lived my life until I met Odin.”

Leo took in Niles’ story. It was certainly sadder than Odin’s story but Niles wasn’t asking for a pity party. Leo was glad Niles found a purpose amidst the sadness in his life. In a way, Leo felt connected to the boy in the story, how he just understood Niles.

“Thank you.”

Leo shuffled. Did this mean he had to share a bit about himself? No doubt they already knew. The political struggle within the castle with the concubines was public news. Tugging on his hair, Leo tried to think of something to add. His heart ached.

“You’re welcome, Lord Leo.” Niles cut through Leo’s thoughts. “Don’t feel pressured in having to share something with us if you’re not ready. Perhaps we should get some rest now?”

Exhaling a breath harshly, Leo nodded and sunk into Odin and Niles, feeling sleep slowly ebb into his body. Even though the room wasn’t exactly warm, Leo felt warm inside. That warmth allowed Leo to drift off by Niles and Odin’s sides.

~

The following morning Leo woke up with Odin and Niles very close to him, almost smothering him. The sensation was welcomed however, in Leo’s touch starved mind. Savouring it for a while, Leo reluctantly jostled them awake so they could keep moving. The air around the place felt different, like the reveal of some secrets had freshened the mood. Leo hadn’t felt at odds with Niles and Odin per say but now he felt closer. Friends, as Leo had said earlier. They were friends.

Greeting everyone outside, they kept on their journey. The snow became thicker but as they kept moving through the day, the sun thankfully in the sky, they came across a huge stretch of land, smooth and covered in thick layers of snow. There, in the middle, was a log cabin. It looked more cozy than huge. Leo’s heart skipped an entire beat. This was it. They had to be at Elise’s location. There was no denying it. Leo wanted to run to the cottage, but he had to wait for Odin to walk up, the magical weapon in hand. Odin kept his steps careful and slow, the knife out in front of him. When the blade sunk into the invisible barrier, Leo watched as it was revealed, like it always was. Cracks formed and soon Odin had cut down the barrier with ease.

“We should be careful.” Camilla mused. “Iago knows we’ve come here. Perhaps there is a trap inside.”

Leo nodded, his heart wanting nothing more than to run to the cabin and rip the doors open, finally seeing Elise. However, his brain cut in, logically trying to sort the situation out. Camilla was right, as much as it pained Leo to admit.

“I’ll check.” Niles said.

He slunk forward and soon Odin followed along with Jakob. Leo kept his eyes open, his hand reaching for his tome. Fingers twitched against it as Leo held his breath. As Niles edged closer to the door he ducked to the side, hand lightly coming to the knob. Giving Odin and Jakob a look, Niles slowly turned the door and pushed it lightly to the side.
At once a lance stabbed at the air. Leo let out his breath in a hiss, his heart jumping to his throat. This was it. Iago had gone after Elise. He had troops inside and his poor sister was injured. Leo saw red and was about to throw out a spell when he saw who was at the door with the lance in hand.

It was Effie.

Leo stared for an entire second, his brain taking in the dusty pink armour, the tight bun of hair, and the massive presence of Effie’s battle aura. For a long moment, no one moved. Leo then broke into a gasp of relief. Effie was there. That meant Arthur was there. That meant not a single hair on Elise’s head had ever been touched. She had been protected all along. Iago was bluffing. There was no way he got past Elise’s retainers.

Tears ran down Leo’s face, relief washing over him in tidal waves. Gasping for air, Leo dropped his hand and raced to the door, his feet not able to move fast enough through the snow. In the background, Leo could hear the rest of his siblings following him. Hitting the door first, Leo stared up at Effie, feeling his heart wildly pound at the proximity he was at. Effie was still staring at them and Leo prayed he didn’t have to prove he was real. Not now, not when his heart was pounding with the realization that Iago had been bluffing the entire time.

“Elise, is she?” Leo couldn’t get the words out fast enough.

Effie’s eyes softened and she stepped back a bit. “Milords, milady. Come inside.” She then turned to look behind her. “Arthur? Lady Elise?”

Leo then watched Effie get out of the doorway. There, beside Arthur, solid, reliable, but unlucky Arthur, stood Elise.

She had grown taller and her hair longer. It was still in two curled pigtails but Leo saw a hint of purple. His heart ached. Perhaps in remembrance of Camilla? A simple dress was on her and a ribbon around her throat. She was staring at them, with wide eyes brimming with tears. She hastily took a step forward and soon they were all running to meet her halfway. Elise collided in with them and Leo felt her tears stain his front. Holding Elise tightly, Leo once again was on the floor with everyone huddled around Elise, holding her tightly to themselves.

“Elise, Elise it’s us. We’re here for you sweetie.” Camilla was cooing.

“Elise, we’re sorry it took us so long.” Xander’s voice mixed with Camilla’s.

Elise shook harder against Leo and Leo felt just as choked as Elise. His voice couldn’t come out and all Leo could do was hold Elise and wait for her shaking to stop. However, as they sat there, Elise in the center, Leo felt Effie slowly approach them, her lips set.

“Milords, milady, if I may explain the situation?”

Leo paused for a second, his brain not comprehending before he remembered. The spell placed on her. Leo pulled away a bit, trying to see if he could spot it. Perhaps it wasn’t a physical curse like his, but something like Corrin’s? Silent and deadly?

“Lady Elise.” Effie looked at her.

It was silent but something seemed to pass between them as Elise looked at Effie. Then, Effie cleared her throat.

“Do you see that ribbon?” Effie asked. “Don’t undo it. Lady Elise is cursed to secrecy. If that ribbon is removed, she’ll tell every single secret she’s ever heard before the spell kills her. As such Lady
Elise has sworn to remain silent so no one talks to her.”

Leo nearly jumped back, his hands flailing at his side. That’s what they did to his sister? They cursed her to essentially be silent, to separate herself from others, to break communications so she’d never be a burden to them. How cruel. How awful.

“That bastard.” Leo hissed. “That utter monster…”

Garon had taken away relationships with Elise. He had taken away conversation and communication. He might as well have cut her tongue out or stolen her voice. Leo wanted to punch something, stab someone, but he held that in.

“I’m so sorry Elise.” Leo touched her head. “I promise we’ll fix everything. We’re here to rescue you and break our curses. Now that we have you, we can do that. Let’s get out of here.”

Elise stared at him before she broke down into silent, wet tears. As she cried her hands shakily began to move in sign language. It wasn’t a lot. Leo knew the basics and Elise wasn’t signing a lot.

“Thank you.” Elise had said.

She then paused and her hands moved again.

“Have a bath.” She added.

Leo stared at her and felt the tension melt away from his figure, just a bit. He laughed. “Very well. I suppose we can take the time to have a proper bath.”

~

Leo went first along with Xander. Elise had a massive bath with a real bath with hot water. Xander wasn’t even going near the tub anyways, barely having a wash cloth and basin to sponge off. It made Leo’s heart ache for a moment, Xander’s run in with drowning deeply affecting his daily life. However, a bath was a bath and Leo was appreciating the chance. Even though he wanted to get out and leave, Leo wasn’t going to waste the opportunity. Even with an entire force on guard the faster they left the better.

“I’m going to kill Garon for this.” Leo hissed. “He’ll get his prophesy fulfilled now.”

“No Leo,” Xander told him. “We’ll kill him together. I’ve been thinking. We need our curses undone. While mine isn’t very hindering, the rest of you need yours broken.”

Leo touched his hair. “Mine isn’t hindering either. We should focus on Camilla, Corrin, and Elise. Theirs first.”

Chopping off his hair as though to show it wasn’t a big deal, Leo quickly dried himself with a puff of magic before his hair grew back, long and complicated as usual. He then stepped out and changed into some clean clothes that somehow Jakob had carried around for them all, stating he had taken the clothes before they left Corrin’s place. Leo was grateful.

Heading out, Leo saw that Peri and Effie were on guard duty with Arthur while everyone else gathered things to take with them. Leo helped out and soon everyone finished having a quick wash off. At least an hour had passed and Leo was beginning to feel the antsy nature of sitting too still fill him. They had to go and he was grateful it was happening so soon.

Elise was bundled up in a coat but Leo could still see the damned ribbon around her throat. His
hands tightened and Leo forced himself to look away from her neck. They’d undo their curses. Then, then their father would get what was coming to him. For now, they had to leave.

As they left, Leo saw Felicia look over at the other direction, no doubt towards her home. Leo felt a pang of sympathy for her. The worry over her sister must be eating at her too, but she was sacrificing it for them and for her sister’s safety.

When they were a far enough distance out and away from the cabin and heading back towards warmer areas, they set up camp in a different abandoned village, this time in a large house that fit all of their party. After the fire was going, Leo sat by Elise and handed her the letters silently. For the first time that night Leo heard Elise’s voice crack in her tears as she took the gift. Leo wrapped an arm around her and allowed himself to settle for now. His entire family was safe and Leo would kill anyone who dared to try take his family away from him again.

That night, as they all sat together in the dingy old house, Leo experienced the best night of his life in five years.

It was bitter sweet.

Chapter End Notes

Leo/Niles/Odin moment: I finally am plopping some in. Don't worry. I have plans for more in the future! :D

The Ribbon: I took a page out of Tell Tale Game's The Wolf Among Us.
Hello everyone!!!

Again, sorry for this taking so long! Work always drains me (and my evenings sometimes... really I do it to myself ahhahaha), and with the holidays I struggled to find time to write this. These chapters always take so long due to their length but I love writing them. I hope you all like this next part.

I've been waiting to write this part for a while. I've had it planned for a long time too and I'm glad to finally write the scenes. After this I'll finally be able to write just Leo, Odin, and Niles for a bit and that will be a huge relief. It's hard to juggle so many characters @_@

As always, feel free to leave kudos and comments. Those really make my day. Also, if you want to check my tumblr out, where sometimes I post snippets of fics, you can check my tumblr out right here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Leo woke to hushed tones and movement. Yawning, Leo stretched and looked at his side. Elise was still curled up, her chest slowly rising with sleep. Camilla was also asleep but the stillness of her body screamed unnatural. A couple fires were going and Leo felt the warmth.

Xander was up along with Niles and Odin, who were chatting and pointing to a map. Peri was rocking by the window of the house, her eyes darting around the area, Effie and Arthur at her side. Felicia was tapping her fingers on her dagger with wild eyes. Jakob stood still close enough to Corrin to be near but not so near that he was smothering them.

Gingerly, Leo untangled himself from Elise and lay her closer to Camilla. Making sure Elise would be warm, Leo then walked over to the group and gently touched Xander’s shoulder.

“Good morning.” Leo kept his voice soft.

“Good morning, Leo.” Xander replied back.

Niles gave a nod and then elbowed Odin who snapped his mouth shut audibly and nodded along. “We were just discussing our plans to go to the Rainbow Sage.”

Leo nodded and then peered over the map. Niles noted and took over, smoothly pointing to a mountainous region. “The Sage is around here. In order to get to his place, you need to get to the top of the mountain and climb up a building to the heavens.”

“We’ll have to skirt near by some towns.” Leo pointed out.

“Yes, we will.” Xander spoke. “We cannot avoid it. This is the quickest route.”

Speed was second important only to caution. Leo knew that it could be a gamble but at this point they didn't have a lot of options. Iago would be desperate to hide his blunder before Garon found
out. However, if they kept travelling and with their group size they could be spotted and that would lead to rumours. Eventually the truth would squeak out and then they’d really be in trouble. If Garon truly wanted to, he could easily rally troops and they’d be outnumbered in a heartbeat. Then Leo was certain they’d be killed. Garon wouldn’t waste time locking them back up or even making a public spectacle out of them. He’d kill them on the spot.

Leo’s throat tightened. He wouldn’t allow any harm to befall his family. Not again. Curling his hand into a fist, Leo resisted the urge to look over at Elise and Camilla. They were safe now. He had to focus.

“If we keep travelling at our rate, we’ll reach the Rainbow Sage in a week or so. Optimistically.” Niles said. “Then we can break your curses.”

Their curses. Leo lightly touched his hair. That felt like a dream that was just out of his grasp. His brain couldn’t comprehend that it was obtainable. Swallowing, Leo shoved those thoughts aside. Niles and Odin had been with him since the beginning of their travels. They weren’t lying and they were here to help.

“We’ll break our curses.” Leo repeated Niles’ words and turned to look at him and Odin. “Right?”

Niles cracked a small smile and gently touched Leo’s shoulder. His touch was warm and it sent a jolt through Leo. “Yes, you will. You all will. I promise.”

“We’re here to help.” Odin added, also touching Leo’s shoulder. His touch also warm and sent another jolt through Leo’s body.

Smiling from his heart at the words, Leo gently reached both Niles and Odin’s hands. They jerked slightly under the touch but didn’t pull away.

~

They left an hour later, their presence expertly erased by Niles who just gave a mysterious smile when asked how he did it. Leo laughed to himself as Corrin looked with awe at Niles, their eyes practically sparkling. Niles didn’t seem to mind the extra attention from Corrin and didn’t brush Corrin away when they brought up questions every so often.

“Corrin is very lively.” Niles said later when they were taking a break.

“I’m glad.” Leo stretched his legs as he sat down on a fallen tree trunk. “It’s nice to see Corrin happy.”

Niles plopped down by Leo and curled closer, “It’s nice to see you happy too.”

Flushing at the words, Leo turned and saw that Niles was a bit closer than he had anticipated. Up close Leo could see the varying shades of blue in Niles’ single eye. He could also see the gleam of sweat and flush of blood on his cheeks. Niles tilted his head a little and the way his hair fell made Leo suddenly very aware of exactly how Niles could be a thief.

“Did I take your breath away?” Niles teased before he leaned back a little bit.

His breath away? It took Leo’s brain too long to try and compute what Niles was hinting. Before Leo could say anything, Niles continued on.

“I imagine compliments weren’t abundant?” He asked neutrally, not accusing or pushing too hard.
Compliments. Right. That’s what Niles meant by breath being taking away. Not that Leo could think of any other way. Or more accurately, deep down Leo didn’t want to dive deeper into a meaning that could ultimately be him just reading too much into it.

“No, not really.” Leo managed to say, voice composed.

“Well then,” Niles smiled and reached out, brushing Leo’s hair. “I’ll be sure to compliment you more.”

Leo flushed heavily and Niles dropped his hand. He didn’t move from Leo though, and they sat together in silence, letting the moment of rest wash over them. Leo’s heart was pounding in his chest and he wondered if this was how it was like being around people, besides his family, that cared about his well being. If it was, Leo really liked the warmth.

A long moment passed and as Leo suspected their rest was coming to an end Odin appeared, bouncing over. He stopped in front of them and grinned brightly.

“The time has arrived for us to depart from our location.”

Odin then extended both of his hands. Leo stared at it but Niles easily took Odin’s hand and allowed the swordsman to pull him up. Both of them then looked at Leo before they both extended their hands.

“Come on, let’s get going, Lord Leo.” Odin urged, taking Leo’s hand himself.

“We don’t want to stay here for too long.” Niles reminded him.

Leo swallowed and took Niles’ hand as well. The two of them pulled Leo up with enough force for Leo to bump into their chests. He flushed at the blunder but the two of them didn’t seem to mind. Letting go of Leo’s hand the two of them turned to start leaving. Leo followed and ignored how cold his hands felt.

~

When they set up camp for the evening Leo watched, as he stoked the fire, Odin slowly practice, wielding his sheathed sword. His foot work was astonishing and the way Odin moved felt calculated and practiced but at the same time adapted. He had clearly learned from masters but he had also experienced real conflict and battle.

“That’s an interesting form.” Xander commented as Odin paused to take a break. “I’ve never seen one quite like it.”

Odin laughed and grabbed his waterskin, taking a long sip before he responded. “It’s sort of a mix. I lived in Regna Ferox but I’ve travelled all around Ylisse and now Nohr. You’re bound to pick up some moves from others.”

“Interesting. I’m only familiar with Nohrian styles.” Xander continued. “I’d like to learn more though.”

“Well, I’m not the best teacher.” Odin admitted as he set his waterskin down. “However, if you want to join me at any point in time, I’d like that. I only know the Nohrian style based on experience.”

“I could teach you some of the Nohrian styles.” Xander nodded. “Just not the royal style. I could show it just not pass it on.”
Odin’s eyes widened and he shook his hands, a flush on his cheeks. “Oh, no, Lord Xander, I would never make such an impossible request. I understand that it’s bound specifically to lineage. I would never dream of trampling upon such a legacy.”

Lord Xander. That also had an unfamiliar ring in Leo’s ears, but it was appropriate. Xander must have felt the same way Leo was. He flushed for a small second but then recovered with ease.

“Thank you for your understanding. I could show you a bit now, if you like?”

“I’d be honoured, milord.” Odin stepped slightly to the side, so he was facing Xander. “Impart on me your wisdom.”

Xander stood up and walked over to Odin, pulling his sword out, keeping it sheathed just like Odin. He then moved and began to talk. Leo watched as Odin mimicked Xander and began to ask questions as Xander spoke. The scene was familiar and Leo distantly remembered watching Xander practice out in the fields, back when he was too young to start training with swords. Leo could hear Gunter’s patient but stern words and see the furrow of concentration on Xander’s brows. Leo could also feel the tingle in his hands, as though he was missing the ghost weight of a sword. Swallowing Leo clutched his hand into a fist and turned so the practice was in his peripheral vision. Instead he watched Camilla talk with Corrin and Elise. They all smiled at him and Leo knew if he wanted, he could go over and sit with them. He decided to not; it was their time and he didn’t have to insert himself in every conversation with them. Instead, Leo added another stick to the fire and poked a bit at it with another stick.

“You wanna try a weapon.”

Leo nearly jumped as Peri sat down beside him with an unceremonious flop. Her dual toned hair bounced and looked darker in the fire’s light. She smiled a bit too widely and then grabbed a stick to poke the fire with him.

“You want to what?” Leo recovered from her abrupt introduction.

“You wanna fight and use a weapon.” Peri continued, her voice light. “Want me to find you a sword? I could find you the perfect pointy sword.” Her voice got a bit lighter.

A sword. Just like Xander and Odin. Leo remembered that before he was imprisoned, he had tried using a sword but never shone like Xander. It merely felt like he was a cheap imitation. That was why he focused his attention on magic studies with a feverish devotion. Did Leo want to return to trying to master using a sword? He knew that he wasn’t Xander and Xander would never stop him from trying to master the use of a sword. However, if Leo decided to pick up a melee weapon again, did he truly want to try a sword?

“Or, perhaps you want to try a lance?” Peri’s eyes were wild and she giggled. “I love lances! They’re pointy and sharp and can have more reach than a sword and…”

Leo slowly backed away. The look Peri was giving him was a bit off putting. Not that he thought Peri would hurt him. He knew she was just… enthusiastic.

“Uh… perhaps I’ll give some thought?” Leo bargained. “No need to rush decisions.”

Peri stopped giggling but she still was smiling widely. “I understand! Take your time! And if you ever want to learn how to use a lance you can ask me.”

She stood up and then walked off, sitting by Arthur and Effie. Leo watched her retreating back before he looked into the fire, Peri’s words bouncing lightly in the back of his mind.
They made great progress through the next few days. Leo watched as the snow resided and soon, they were back in areas with more and more green. The roads began to shift as well, going from bumpy and uneven to slightly well travelled, to well travelled. It sent a small jolt of panic in Leo’s heart but he knew that eventually they’d have to pass by towns. That meant well travelled roads. Their routes still kept off the main roads, taking sides roads, but it was only a small comfort.

Xander and Odin kept training and practicing at night. Sometimes Peri joined in along with Effie. Sometimes Niles went off the side to practice shooting at trees. His aim was always perfect and Leo liked watching Niles practice. The desire to practice filled Leo but with the potential for accidents and causing fires, Leo minimized his practice to lighting their camp fires and by rivers when he washed up. Especially when Leo burned his hair.

Keeping up with washing his hair wasn’t possible so whenever it became too dirty, he’d cut it all while it was in a braid and then quickly submerge his head and wash the short, uneven locks before the rest grew back. Sometimes Leo didn’t work quick enough and he’d come up with dripping, wet hair. That usually forced him to use more magic to dry it. Leo disliked using magic for such a small task but if he didn’t, he’d soak all of his clothes and then he’d be cold and miserable.

So, when Leo managed to not wash his hair in time and sat up, dripping wet, he sighed. The morning sun was barely up and it was still cool. The wind picked up, as though it wanted to remind him. Shivering, Leo cast the familiar spell, drying his body and hair off. Dressing quickly, Leo walked back to camp, his hair trailing behind him as he did so.

“Leo, my goodness.”

Camilla bustled over to him and ran her fingers through his hair. Leo sat down and sighed. “I know, it’s a bit messy. I had to dry it with magic and…”

“You must allow me to braid this.” Camilla cut him off.

Leo opened his mouth but then shut it. They had the time and it would be nice to just sit and have someone pay attention to him. Especially if it was his family.

“Okay.” Leo closed his eyes.

Camilla’s fingers were nimble and skilled. Leo almost fell asleep under her magic. However, when she finished, Camilla gently nudged him. Leo opened his eyes and felt the braid with his hand. It was a slightly more complicated one, one that was favourable amongst royalty in the court. The style wasn’t too noticeable. Someone would have to know a lot about the inner workings of the Nohrian court. Leo was also sure that the styles had changed through the years and his braid could be outdated but having something that was so specific to who he was, a Nohrian royal, made Leo choke back a small sob. Leo may hate the length of his hair and the curse but Camilla’s gesture to remind him of who they were wasn’t going unappreciated.

“Thank you, Camilla.”

“You’re welcome.”

As predicted, they skirted near a few towns. Most of them were small towns, so they passed them within moments. The relief Leo felt every time they passed a town with no one out and about was
almost palpable. However, their luck couldn’t last and the following morning they drew near a fairly large town. Leo took a look at it, through the trees, and off the side. Even though Leo couldn’t see the finer details of the town from the distance, he tried to imagine what the town was like. He could barely remember the bustling and the movement of towns. They were merely blurs; faded colour and impressions in his brain.

“I think we should take a moment to get some stuff from this town.”

Xander’s suggestion made Leo hastily draw his attention to his brother. A counter argument, that they should really keep pressing on towards the Rainbow Sage fell from Leo’s lips. They had lived the past little while from the stuff they took from Elise’s place and from hunting. However, those things couldn’t always last or be relied upon.

“We’d surely be noticed, wouldn’t we?” Corrin asked, a bit of a nervous edge tinting their voice.

“That’s not a problem!” Peri assured brightly. “If anyone follows us, I’ll stab them.” She sweetly twirled her lance.

“We won’t be stabbing people at random.” Xander automatically replied with such speed it left Leo a bit dizzy. “And the entirety of our group need not go. Just a few to gather supplies. I believe if we’re cautious no harm or trouble should arise.”

Xander let his suggestion sink in. Leo scanned their group. Despite the dirty and unkept nature of them, they were travellers. Leo was sure the guards and people had seen worse. They wouldn’t draw attention if they did as Xander suggested. The real question was, if they could take the risk. No doubt people like Niles, Odin, and Peri, who were relatively unknown could escape with a bit less scrutiny. (Though Peri’s hair was rather memorable.) However, the rest of them… Leo would rather die then put his family in danger.

“If I may speak, milord,” Odin slowly started, his voice level, “I am of the opinion that your plan is a well thought one. I volunteer to go and gather the supplies we need.”

Xander gave a small smile. “Thank you, Odin.”

“If Odin’s going, I am too.” Niles stated.

“If I may, I’d like to journey into the town as well.” Jakob said, though his gaze was directed on Corrin.

That was three people. Leo looked at Effie and Arthur who were signing with Elise. Leo then saw Elise shake her head and that seemed to solidify their choice. Camilla didn’t look too sure and with her curse causing her bouts of sleepiness if she fell asleep in the middle of town that would draw unwanted attention. Xander, even though he had been locked up, was Crown Prince. That added another layer of someone possibly recognizing him.

“I’d like to go too.” Corrin suddenly said. “If… that’s all right?” Jakob looked like he was about to shoot the idea down immediately but Corrin kept talking. “I mean… I was locked up even before this… I’m sure no one knows who I am.”

Their words punched Leo in the gut and silenced any other arguments he could come up with. Glancing at Xander and Camilla, who had a small furrow in their brows, Leo then looked at Jakob. Jakob was always loyal to Corrin. If anything happened Jakob would protect Corrin with his life.

“I promise I’ll behave and I’ll stick to Jakob’s side.” Corrin seemed to read Leo’s mind.
“I will protect Corrin with my life.” Jakob also seemed to read Leo’s mind.

Corrin kept looking at them. Leo glanced again over at Xander and Camilla. A beat of silence passed before Leo felt Niles gently touch Leo’s shoulder.

“We’ll be in town too, milord. If anything did happen it’s not like this is a massive, sprawling city. We can always come to their aid.”

Niles had a point. Leo nodded. “I trust you and Odin.”

“Excellent.” Niles smiled. “Then we’ll be off.”

He then rather boldly turned Leo around. Spluttering, Leo jerked himself to a stop. Niles paused and looked at him with a small frown on his face. “Leo?”

“What are you doing?” Leo asked, soft but slightly sharp.

“You’re coming with us.” Niles stated rather than asked. “I mean, I just made the assumption you’d join Odin and I.”

The assumption. Leo wanted to tell Niles that his assumption was rather brazen of him but before he could get anything out Xander and Camilla both gave him smiles and nodded their heads, as though his inclusion was a foregone conclusion.

“Have fun.” Camilla said with a tone that Leo couldn’t place. “Take care of our Leo.”

“We shall defend our lord with our lives!” Odin brightly announced. “I swear on my sword hand.”

Leo flushed at the wording of Odin’s sentence. “Did you ever think I may not want to go?”

Odin visibly deflated and Leo certainly didn’t feel a tinge in his heart. “You don’t want to join us on our journey into this glorious town?”

Niles looked at him and his posture seemed normal enough but Leo couldn’t read his face. Another tinge filled Leo with an unnameable emotion and Leo sighed.

“Fine, I’ll join you.”

Odin perked up immediately and the shift was almost jarring. “Excellent! Then, we shall be off!”

The most nerve wracking part was passing the guards at the entrance of the town. However, they barely bat an eyelash at them and after Niles smoothly talked to them, they were inside. Drawing the hood around his body, Leo followed after Odin and Niles before walking side by side.

Corrin and Jakob would come later and Leo had no doubt they’d be fine. There was nothing to worry about. Instead, Leo glanced around the town. People were out and about, either in groups or as families or single. The buildings were well kept and Leo saw many bustling businesses and shops open. Everything felt light and welcoming. No one stared at them and Leo felt as though he were just another face in the crowd. It helped calm him down further.

Their first stop was at the market, where Leo took a moment to stare at all the stalls. A variety of things were being sold. Leo spotted food (fruit, vegetables, meat, fish etc.) as well as goods, such as canned or preserved food, clothing, jewelry, art, weapons, and shoes. Leo didn’t have time to stare at everything. They had a job to do.
“Here, let’s get some food first.” Odin was beside Leo, hand extended.

Delicately taking it, Leo allowed Odin to drag him around the stalls. He and Niles seemed to know what to get and Leo just stood there as Niles and Odin picked things up and bargained for prices. A few bags were tossed to him to hold but other than that Leo was just there to enjoy the atmosphere of the town. It almost felt wasted on him. Why should Leo be the one to receive the joy of the town when his siblings deserved it as well? Leo tried to keep his thoughts neutral. Xander and Camilla had all but urged him to go and Elise didn’t seem upset by not going into town. Leo should enjoy the experience for his siblings and bring back stories.

With a lighter heart, Leo began to examine and categorize the stalls by the ones he felt were the most exciting to talk about later. That continued until Niles and Odin seemed satisfied by their purchases. Whatever mental list they had been going down it was fulfilled. Time had flown by and Leo felt like they had barely made it into the town. Mentally preparing himself to leave, Leo almost turned to walk away when Niles grabbed his hand.

“Errands are done. We can take a little while to look around.” He said simply.

“Some sight seeing is always fun.” Odin agreed beside Niles.

Leo had a feeling they were doing this for his sake. The two of them had easily been in more towns than Leo ever had but their consideration warmed him.

“Okay. Let’s look around.” Leo agreed.

They ended up aimlessly walking around the stalls. Leo took a polite interest in some stalls and as they were finished up walking down the rows, Leo spotted a stall that was selling weapons. Staring at them for a moment, Leo remembered Xander and his sword practice with Odin. The weapons at the stall looked sturdy to Leo, but he wasn’t a weapons expert regarding melee weapons.

All he had was his tome and Leo knew that if anything happened to his tome, he’d be rather defenseless. Peri’s suggestion wormed in Leo’s mind and he paused to look over at the spears. Some were intricate and some were clearly more naginata in style. Some were in Ylissian style as well.

“Thinking of taking up a melee weapon?” Odin asked beside Leo, “I could help you out if you choose a sword. Xander did tell me you have some background with a sword.”

A sword. Just like Xander. Leo swallowed. He couldn’t really be picky. Xander would never think of it as Leo imitating him and, in a life and death situation no one cared. Except Leo cared. It was foolish but the more Leo thought about it on the spot he didn’t want to use a sword.

“I don’t think I want to use a sword.” Leo honestly told Odin.

“Oh?” Odin didn’t sound perturbed, “Then something else? Ranged? Close combat?”

Leo looked at Odin who then blushed and sheepishly smiled. “Xander may have mentioned having a back up plan is always good for mages. I think that was his hint for me to inquire.”

That made sense. Leo hummed. “I see.”

“You’re not upset?”

“Why would I be?” Leo asked with a shrug. “Xander cares and I appreciate his concern.” He then smiled. “Still, I don’t know what I want to use and we don’t have a ton of money. I don’t want to buy something on a whim.”
“Understandable.” Odin replied. “Just keep the options in the back of your thoughts.”

“Right.” Leo agreed.

~

Their journey continued and the supplies bought helped out immensely. Part of the things they bought were clothes. Leo gratefully washed up and changed. That lightened up their load and soon their trail was riddled with rockier trails and soon mountains in the distance. The air was crisper due to the altitude but similar to Elise, the change reminded Leo they were close to their destination.

Soon his nights, snuggled with his siblings was littered with Leo just lying there, staring at the starry sky, touching his hair. They truly were going to be free from their curses. Their burdens would be lifted and then… what? Leo never could come up with a straightforward answer. Would they head back to Nohr and kill their father? That would be foolish, considering the size of the Nohrian army. In the end, Leo would fall asleep without a clear answer.

When their travels were closer to the mountain Leo began to scan their surroundings more, as though at any moment Iago or some troops would arrive and they’d be stopped. Leo tried to keep those dark thoughts to himself and kept pressing on. They’d make it to the Rainbow Sage and then work everything else out after.

~

“Could I talk to you, Leo?”

Leo looked up from his braiding and saw Xander standing by him. At his side was Camilla, Elise, and Corrin. Everyone else was standing guard or resting. Leo finished off his braid and tied off the end.

“All right.” Leo stood up. “What is it?”

“Let’s sit here.”

Xander lead them to a space just a bit off, still in the glow and warmth of the fire but it gave the illusion of being private. Leo sat down, feeling Elise nestle at his side. Thought to what Xander could walk to talk about so privately ranged from family matters to something personal.

“I was giving some thought.” Xander started slowly. “And I believe that after our curses are lifted it would be best for us to go our separate ways.”

This wasn’t what Leo was expecting. He felt Elise stiffen beside him and heard Corrin’s little gasp of sorrow. Camilla looked stony in the light and Leo wished he knew what she was thinking.

“Xander…” Leo started.

“Hear me out.” Xander stopped him softly. “I don’t mean we should never see each other again. My intentions come from the reality that war is brewing. We all know what our father is doing.

Odin and Niles had informed him earlier. If Nohr was going to go into battle it would be with Hoshido first. Leo wasn’t sure how many smaller tribes and places had been taken over by his father in their absence but Leo wasn’t going to act naïve and say none.

“I’m suggesting that after our curses are lifted, we gather allies.” Xander concluded.
Xander’s voice was still kept at a low tone but Leo felt like they were shouted loudly for all to hear. Gather allies. Xander was suggesting they wage battle and war against their father. That wasn’t what shocked Leo. Ever since he’d been imprisoned, he wanted to kill Garon. However, Leo had never considered the details to achieving the goal. Clearly, Xander had given more thought other wise he wouldn’t suggest his plan.

“Gather allies?” Camilla’s tone took a slightly sharp tone. “You’ve already thought out who we should go to.”

“I have.” Xander nodded. “However, I first wanted to run my idea with all of you. I don’t want to burden you with my plan. If we fail…’”

They’d truly be dead. Not that Garon hadn’t already tried that. He had cast them away and locked them up. That was his mistake. Xander’s plan could be the second mistake. Leo thickly swallowed and thought their situation through. Xander’s plan was their only option. Even after their curses were lifted what else could they do besides stand up to their father? Running away to another country could only give security for a limited amount of time. Given their father’s thirst for conquest soon wherever they were hiding would be thrown into battle.

“We either stand up now or we will die hiding.” Corrin softly spoke, their eyes narrowed. “I’m done hiding.”

“I am too.” Camilla agreed. “We’ve been nothing but helpless these past few years. It’s time we changed that.”

Elise nodded and that left Leo to respond. It wasn’t a challenge. He gripped Elise’s hand and looked the rest of his family in the eyes. “Let’s fulfil father’s prophesy.”

The relief on Xander’s face was clear. It made the choice that much easier to accept.

~

Informing everyone of the plans was the easy part. Odin and Niles looked like they were stating the obvious when Xander started talking and the gleam in Peri’s eyes was frightening. No one else said anything but Leo knew their silence was acceptance.

Informing where everyone would go was another tricky situation.

“I’ll travel to Hoshido.” Xander stated.

Obvious choice. Leo knew that as Crown Prince Xander travelling to Hoshido was the most logical. If they succeeded and Xander took the throne back as his birthright then Hoshido would be the country they would deal with the most frequently.

“I’d also like Elise to come with me.” Xander continued.

Hoshido was also the fastest to travel to and one of the safest. That choice was obvious as well.

“I was thinking Corrin should also come with me.”

One look from Corrin and Leo knew that things would slowly sink downhill in their conversation.

“Xander, while I appreciate it, I think I should go to the Ice Tribe with Jakob and Felicia.”

The fire cracked and Leo watched a small frown fill Xander’s face. “Corrin…”
“I’m not someone who needs to be sheltered.” Corrin continued. “That’s all I’ve been, all my life. If I can help out in some way, please allow me. Felicia and Jakob will be with me.”

“What if the Ice Tribe follows Nohrian orders?” Xander countered gently. “You could be walking into a trap.”

The point hit home. The Ice Tribe, unlike Hoshido, didn’t have the forces or the resources to keep resisting Nohr if Nohr was very persistent.

“Then we might as well only ask Hoshido and Ylisse for assistance.” Corrin countered. “Come on Xander, we have to try the other tribes around Nohr. The more, the better.”

“If it is a trap and you walk into the Ice Tribe expecting a welcome but are ultimately rejected and turned on then it’s just you, Jakob, and Felicia.” Xander continued. “I’m not putting you in a situation that could easily sour. Please, Corrin, come to Hoshido with me.”

Corrin frowned. “Xander… we cannot confirm if the Ice Tribe has been compromised.”

Everyone turned their heads towards Effie and Arthur. Both shrugged with a pained expression.

“Our most sincere and deepest apologies, milords and ladies.” Arthur spoke boisterously despite the grave situation. “Our information was lacking greatly while Lady Elise was confined. Our guess is as good as anyone else’s.”

“We’re sorry.” Effie added.

“We’re also not sure.” Niles added. “Even though Odin and I travelled far we haven’t heard news about the Ice Tribe.”

Xander had a look of finality and Corrin was looking at their lap. Leo gently touched Corrin’s hand and looked at Xander. “So, if you, Elise, and Corrin are heading to Hoshido, what about me and Camilla?”

“Logically if the Ice Tribe has been taken over other tribes could be in the same situation.” Camilla summed up. “Is that the line of thought we’re going with? In that case, Corrin is correct and we’ll just have to hope Hoshido, Ylisse, and possibly Regna Ferox side with us.”

“Camilla…”

“What if we did this?” Camilla suggested, “We have to take chances or we’ll never succeed. I could go with Corrin to the Ice Tribe and then the Wind Tribe.”

Xander opened his mouth but Camilla pressed on.

“There have to be other people who aren’t happy with our father as well. Perhaps we’ll meet people along the way. We aren’t isolated and we have to take chances.”

Leo frowned. Camilla and Xander had points. They couldn’t afford not asking for assistance from anyone. Chances had to be taken. The issue of security was everywhere. What if Hoshido refused Xander entry? What if the other smaller nations were already taken over? What if they travelled to Ylisse and Regna Ferox and were turned away? Danger was everywhere and they couldn’t afford to waste time worrying over what and how danger came to them.

“Camilla’s right.” Leo decided. “Splitting up is already risky but as we’ve stated earlier, time is of the essence. We need to gather allies and quickly.”
“Please, Xander.” Corrin begged. “At least consider our suggestion.”

There was a dip in Xander’s mouth and brow. Leo’s heart squeezed and he knew he wasn’t the only one in their family feeling a similar emotion. Uncertainty was going to kill them but they were facing uncertainty all the time. Being split apart would hurt, especially since they were finally together again, but their country needed them.

“I will.” Xander finally relented. “That just leaves Ylisse and Regna Ferox.” He then shifted his gaze towards Odin and Niles. “I was hoping to ask the two of you and Leo to journey there.”

Odin stared, his eyes widening slightly before he exhaled slowly. “I had my suspicions, the world whispering them in my ears and heart, that this would be where you wished for my being to travel to.” He gave a small smile. “Very well. I will go back to Ylisse.”

“We’ll do our best.” Niles added.

“Leo?” Xander then looked at him.

The choice to agree was obvious but it still hurt to nod and agree. Still, Leo did it.

~

Morning arrived and Leo felt exhausted. Their conversation the night before lingered and as he went to wash up, Leo saw Xander sitting quietly on the side. A part of Leo wanted to go over to Xander and comfort him. A part of Leo knew that Xander would figure things out himself.

Leo left towards the stream to wash his face. Niles and Odin were already there, talking quietly but upon seeing him they both smiled.

“Good morning, Leo.” Niles greeted.

“Greetings on this fine morn!” Odin chirped.

“Good morning.” Leo replied. “Did you sleep well?”

“As well as you can when travelling.” Niles replied with a smile. “Though we’ll be doing a lot more on the way to Ylisse.”

Ylisse. Leo only had books to go on. He turned to Odin. “Could you tell me a bit about Ylisse later?”

“Of course! I am more than honoured to impart my wisdom unto you!” Odin gave a very wide smile. “However, we’ll have to go to Regna Ferox first.”

Right. Leo knew that. Due to the geography, it made sense to go to Regna Ferox first. “I understand.”

“I’ll still inform you about all the intricacies of Regna Ferox before we arrive to our destination.” Odin vowed.

Leo smiled. “Thank you. I’m afraid I don’t know a lot about Regna Ferox.”

“I don’t either.” Niles hummed. “I suppose we’ll both learn something new.”

Interesting. Leo blinked. He had expected Niles to know due to travelling with Odin and being lovers with Odin.
“Odin hasn’t parted details about Regna Ferox or Ylisse to me.” Niles supplied, probably reading Leo’s face. “It’s as mysterious as his magical dagger.”

Odin pouted. “For the last time, it truly belongs to me.”

Leo laughed a bit as Odin continued to pout. “Just stating the obvious.”

“Not you too, Lord Leo.” Odin groaned. “I endure enough teasing from Niles.”

“You do?” Niles asked immediately. “And here I thought I was behaving so well…”

Odin blushed and whipped his head around so he wouldn’t have to look at Niles. “Yeah, well keep it that way.” He then coughed. “Lord Leo, please wash up. We’ll keep an eye out.”

Niles leaned in to whisper something but Leo went to wash his face so he missed whatever it was. When he finished, Leo saw that Odin and Niles were patiently waiting for him, their conversation over.

Heading back to camp, Leo saw Xander talking with Corrin, his hand on their shoulder, holding Corrin close. Whatever they were discussing, Leo assumed it was about their conversation the night before. It was also not his business, at least at this point in time.

They reached the mountain trail to the Rainbow Sage’s in the afternoon. Leo watched as Niles and Odin took the lead. At once everyone tensed as Niles and Odin readied their weapons. With the high mountain pass and the thinning of the trees only felt more ominous. Leo took his tome out and gripped the book tighter. The air tasted different, almost ashy and coated in earth. Silence filled their group and every out of place sound, no matter how silent, was ominous.

Leo wondered if Nohrian troops were around. Not that they had any suspicions of being followed but surely Iago had concluded their destination. Swallowing, Leo ignored the earthy taste in his mouth and pressed forward.

They were just about to reach the higher peak when Leo saw movement from the side. He fell to the ground automatically and saw a rock fly over his head, landing harshly on the ground. Whipping his head around, Leo saw grotesque green monsters, with iron masks and chains that swung as they shambled over. A putrid smell filled the area and Leo gagged as the monstrosity only multiplied with more following.

“W-What are those?” Felicia stammered out.

“No idea, but we can’t sit around like ducks.” Effie scolded her. “It’s time to fight.”

She grabbed her spear and stabbed the monster where the heart would be. Black sludge spilled down in staccato pulses. It smelt horrible, like rotting pig’s blood mixed with sewage. Leo was glad he hadn’t eaten a lot because the smell was enough to have his gag reflex wanting to empty his stomach. Still, the monster fell, but then another one just wobbled in place.

“Whatever foul being these are, they reek of death.” Odin sliced one open. “Sort of like Risen.”

“Risen?” Leo dizzily asked, trying to control his reflexes as the smell.

“Later.” Odin promised as he swung his sword around. “I believe these beings are monsters conjured from dark magic and rituals. They’re not alive, merely walking corpses.”
That made sense. Iago wasn’t sending any troops after them in fear of thinning his numbers. Best to send shambling creatures from dark spells after them. Opening his tome, Leo cast a spell and the battle continued. The smell of death and decay filled the area to the point that Leo couldn’t really tell any other smell. It helped with their attacks.

As the number of monsters kept falling and more kept spawning, Leo hoped there would be an end. There had to be. Unless there was some mage near by that continued to spawn the creatures. Wiping his brow, Leo glanced around the rock formations that spanned all around their narrow passage up to the mountain and the building they had to climb.

If he was a mage spawning monsters, he’d be near by so he could see how the progress was going but he’d be hidden. The higher or lower the vantage point the best. People generally looked at eye level and missed when things were higher or lower. Breaking away from the group, Leo began to scan the area around them.

“What are you doing?!” That was Niles.

Leo didn’t register why Niles was shouting until he saw an arrow buried deep in the skull of a monster and Niles running over to him. Warm hands gripped Leo’s shoulders tightly.

“That was close.” Niles chided him. “What are you thinking?”

“I think there is some mage around here that’s conjuring these monsters up. If we keep attacking them, we’ll just exhaust ourselves. We need to cut the source.”

Niles stared at him before he huffed. “And you thought the best way was to almost walk into one of those monstrosities?”

“Sorry.” Leo muttered before he gripped Niles back. “But I’ll be fine if you watch my back. Please? I need to locate that mage.”

“You…” Niles huffed. “Fine. Of course, I’ll protect you. That’s what I vowed.” Niles then lightly shoved Leo away. “Go, I have your back.”

“Thank you.”

Leo opened his tome and scanned the area, looking up at the trees. There had to be something. Either in the trees or on the ground. Somewhere… Frantically Leo did his best to look for something off, something odd. A hint of clothing or hair or anything.

He spotted all of his family fighting. Camilla had an axe and while she was fighting well, Leo saw her yawning and slowing down. If that was her curse and she fell asleep in the middle of battle… Elise was also unable to fight. Arthur and Effie were around her but they were looking worse for wear. Odin was right beside Xander and Peri.

Leo needed to hurry. He kept scanning the area. If the person wasn’t in a higher place or lower place then his idea was shot and he had no other ideas…

“Think!” Leo scolded himself. “If they’re not higher or lower then where are they? What would you do?”

He’d… He’d… Leo stopped. He’d cluster himself around the monsters. If he could create as many as he could and at the height, they were towering over a regular person then he’d never be spotted. In that case.
“I need to get to higher ground.” Leo shouted, hoping Niles heard him. “Please, keep covering for me.”

Without listening to Niles’ response, Leo scrambled towards a ledge that he could climb. Closing his tome, Leo prayed that nothing hit him. The back of his neck tingled with anticipation of an injury. His hands were sweaty, but Leo kept moving until he was up high. Then, he ran, opening his tome, racing towards where he felt the concentration of monsters was the densest.

“Please be right.” Leo chanted to himself. “Please be right…”

There! Leo nearly skidded to a halt. In the middle of the monsters was a mage. They also didn’t look alive, with an almost pale tone to their skin that glowed purple and contrasted to their dark robe. Leo didn’t care. If he killed a person who was threatening his family it was to protect them.

Shouting a spell, Leo directed his blast to soar quickly into the middle of the monsters. If his presence was discovered the element of surprise would be lost and he’d have a harder time.

“Please hit.” Leo muttered a moment before the spell hit the center.

It was loud, the sound of his spell also hit some of the monsters and they soon fell to the ground. Leo gripped his tome and waited, wondering if the mage would stand up and fire something back at him. Smoke filled the area and Leo’s heart pounded hotly in his chest. The wind picked up and Leo readied himself to fire another spell.

However, as the smoke cleared Leo saw the mage was on the ground, the body causing the smoke. There was no way the person was conscious. Perhaps they were dead. Leo didn’t care. The monsters soon vanished and the area was devoid of battle. Gasping out, Leo felt relief hit him like a truck. He tumbled to the ground, sitting harshly on the rock. They were fine. Everyone was fine. Leo laughed to himself and tried to stand up but couldn’t. His legs felt wobbly and disconnected from his body.

“You!”

Leo felt warm arms tug him up, slinging them over a shoulder. “Thanks Niles.”

“You’re going to give me a heart attack.” Niles muttered as he helped Leo walk. “Though I imagine your family will chew you out better than I could.”

Leo weakly laughed at that statement. “I don’t doubt it.”

~

The rest of their journey to the tower was done in silence. Leo was scolded, just as Niles had predicted. Even as feeling returned to his legs, Leo leaned against Niles for just a bit longer, savouring his heat. Niles didn’t seem to mind and when Leo finally parted from Niles, he felt a tinge of sadness.

In front of them a building soon appeared. Leo looked up and saw that he couldn’t see the top of it due to the clouds and fog lingering higher. Niles and Odin walked a bit forward, cautious. Leo scanned the area. Did Iago send more troops and they were hiding in the building? Everything was silent but Leo knew that could change in a heartbeat.

“Is the Rainbow Sage on the top floor?” Corrin asked beside Leo.

Their hair was messy and their skin sporting a few nicks and bruises but other than that Corrin was in better shape than Leo felt.
“I think so.” Leo mused. “I’m not sure.”

“I’m just worried that there are troops inside.” Felicia voiced Leo’s thoughts.

Niles and Odin were slowly opening the door to the building and staying off the sides in case of an attack. Leo waited and braced himself, opening his tome. A long moment passed and when nothing happened Niles carefully poked his head into the building.

Nothing.

Leo exhaled slowly. It was safe, for now. They had to be careful. There could very well be an ambush. Gingerly Leo walked with the others into the building.

Inside the building was well lit, which was a bit of a surprise. From the outside Leo couldn’t see any lights. Stairs were in corners, forcing people to keep zig zagging across the room to get to the next flight. It was a common defense tactic and Leo made note of how many floors they went up. Each floor Leo waited for something to fly at them or attack them but there was nothing.

When they reached the final floor there was a large door at the end. The door was large, towering over them, and was wooden. Intricate designs were carved on the wood from the top to the bottom. The handles were heavy and made of iron. Leo stared and as they moved in closer, he could see magic and spells carved into the wood. Placing his hand on the wood, Leo felt the warmth of the door.

The Rainbow Sage had to be beyond this door. He was sure of it.

“Are we waiting for some cosmic flare or signal?” Odin gently asked beside Leo. “Let’s fling open the doors to breaking the curses.”

Leo nodded, not able to comprehend how he felt. His mind couldn’t keep up with the idea that this was it. Battle had still exhausted him. Still, this was it. Pushing the door carefully, Leo saw the rest of his siblings helping him. Together, all five of them pushed the door open.

Inside it was bright and Leo was blinded for a moment. Then, he saw the interior. It was soft, pastels and warmth. Orange and pink tones took the ground and formed in shapes that reminded Leo of clouds. In the background was the trickle of a stream, water flowing in the room.

In the middle of the room was an old man, a long beard and cane with him. Leo stared and then realized this had to be it. Truly it. He turned to Niles and Odin to thank them but the old man spoke.

“You’re here, Nohrian siblings. I’ve been waiting.”

“Are you the Rainbow Sage?” Corrin asked.

“I am indeed.” The man replied. “We need no introductions though. I welcome you to my abode. Rest assured the only people who can open my door are those with pure intentions. You’re safe.”

Safe. Leo hadn’t felt that in a while. He exhaled and watched as the Rainbow Sage walked over to them. Leo wasn’t sure if he should bow or shake hands but the Sage made the choice by bowing to them.

“Your curses are heavy weights on all of you. The magic is very ancient. Your journey, however, is not in vain. Wash up and eat. We can discuss how to break your curses over food.”

~
The Sage lead them towards some baths that were separate from his sisters. Leo saw that somehow there were clothes, soap, and towels neatly piled by the water. Not wasting any time, Leo stripped regardless of who was there and carefully stepped into the water.

It was hot, like the hot springs in Hoshido, but not so hot it burned Leo. The heat was comfortable. Leo sunk in and groaned, allowing his hair to float in the water as he just sat there. Niles and Odin were entering on the side, their splashes upon entering sounding distant. Leo closed his eyes.

Time passed and when Leo opened his eyes, he saw Xander in as well as Jakob and Arthur. Deciding to finally wash up, Leo began to work, not worrying about his hair. It would be chopped off soon. Short. Leo couldn’t wait. The magic of the springs didn’t show the dirt and grime he was washing off and Leo considered that a very good thing.

When he finished, Leo stepped out and dried off as best as he could, before he used magic on his hair to dry it. Changing, Leo walked around, hoping to find the Sage.

The sage was at a table with plates of food on it. Leo sat down and soon everyone else began to follow, sitting down, all washed and in clean clothes. Odin sat beside him and elbowed Leo lightly before grabbing his plate and filling it up. Leo took a bite of food and found himself eating a bit quicker than he had anticipated.

“I hope you all enjoyed the spring.” The Sage spoke once everyone had a chance to start eating. “Please, enjoy the food. You’ve travelled far.”

“Thank you, we appreciate your hospitality.” Xander said.

The Sage nodded. “Now, to get to your curses. I’ve taken the time to study them.”

This was it. Leo waited to hear what the Sage would say. He set his plate aside.

“First, your curses are all bound tightly to your beings. They’re very specific so there isn’t a single spell I can use to break them all in one go. To do this, we’ll have to tackle each curse individually.”

The Sage then pulled some ribbon out of his robes. The ribbon was a dark purple and made of silk.

“If you could come here, Princess Elise.”

Elise looked at them before she stood up and did as the Sage asked. The sage then pressed the ribbon into her hands.

“Could you tie this ribbon around your neck please? Just loosely around the other one.”

Silently Elise did as he asked. The purple stood starkly on Elise’s neck, covering the other ribbon. The Sage then pulled out a small ornate knife with an elaborate handle and smooth blade that looked rather sharp. Leo jolted just a bit at the presence of the knife but the Sage very gently reached his hand out to Elise.

“If you could sit down?”

She did as he asked and Leo watched as the Sage very carefully turned to the table, to a bowl of water Leo hadn’t noticed before. The water seemed to glow, almost a robin’s egg blue. He dipped the blade into the water.

“This water is blessed. By dipping the blade into the water, the blade is cleansed and blessed.” The Sage told them, “In order to undo Princess Elise’s curse, we need to cut through the ribbon.” He
turn to Elise. “This will take a moment. I know it’s scary but please, stay still for a moment.”

Leo held his breath and watched as the Sage very carefully took the blade to Elise’s neck. Every instinct in Leo was screaming to pull his sister away but he trusted the Sage. Elise did too as she sat absolutely still through the process. The blade carefully went under the ribbon and with a flick of the Sage’s wrist, both of the ribbon fell to the ground.

A moment of silence passed. The Sage pulled away from Elise and set the blade into the bowl of water. Elise’s fingers shakily touched her neck. No sound escaped her lips. No forced words or secrets spilling out. Her hand shakily fell and Leo saw tears run down Elise’s face.

At once Leo bolted out of his seat, forgoing the food, and went to Elise’s side. He saw the rest of his siblings as well as Elise’s retainers join him in pulling Elise into a hug. Her body shook against Leo’s arms and she began to cry.

“We’re here for you Elise.” Camilla cooed. “We have you.”

“C-Camilla…”

Elise’s voice was raspy with disuse, small and weak, but it was there. Leo saw Arthur burst into tears and Effie give a small, sad but happy smile. It was Xander who pulled away first, looking at the Sage.

“Thank you. Thank you so much. We are in your debt.”

“Nonsense. You’ve suffered enough.” The Sage replied. “Speaking of, let’s return to breaking those curses, shall we?” He then smiled. “We’ll continue with Lady Camilla, if you will?”

Camilla’s turn. Leo watched as the Sage procured a small vial of a liquid that was a light pink. He handed it to Camilla.

“Your curse is based upon dreams and sleep. The only way to break it is to consume something from the dream realm. This liquid was made from flowers picked within a dream. You’ll need to drink it.”

Leo watched Camilla not hesitate in opening the vial, drinking the contents. There was no visible change, but Leo saw Camilla straighten up, her eyes wide, as though for the first time she wasn’t feeling exhaustion course through her veins.

“Thank you.” Camilla simply said, her voice clear.

“Now, Corrin.”

The Sage produced a small necklace with a thin chain and a pendant that curled in an almost flower shape. In the center was a blue stone that looked rather dull. Corrin turned the necklace around, staring at it for a moment.

“If you could put that on please.” The Sage instructed.

Corrin did as the Sage said and then looked at him. Smiling the Sage beckoned Corrin over. “Your curse deals with memories and the loss of them. To break your curse, you need something that grounds you. For your case, it’s your family and retainers. If you could all touch the necklace?”

Leo immediately did as the Sage asked before allowing his family, as well as Jakob and Felicia, to touch the necklace. As they did what the Sage requested, Leo saw the stone in the center start to glow. Energy seemed to swirl within the stone, forever a pulse of magic and life. The Sage then
touched the stone and muttered something. The light of the stone burned a bit brighter before fading. However, the stone now looked alive, like it had been cut and polished professionally.

“The magic of your family and retainers, who stood by your side while you were imprisoned has broken your curse. You’ll need to keep that necklace with you. Whenever you feel a bit lost and aren’t sure of who you are or your memories, simply hold that necklace and all will return to you.”

Corrin’s fingers brushed the necklace and tears rolled down their cheeks. Leo watched Felicia scramble to hand a handkerchief while Jakob immediately handed one. Elise sunk into Corrin, hugging them and Xander ruffled Corrin’s hair.

“Thank you.” Corrin whispered through their tears.

“Now, Lord Leo.” The Sage beckoned him over.

His turn. Leo’s heart twisted a bit and his mind fluttered. The Sage was taking the knife, the same one that broke Elise’s curse, out of the water. He ran a finger over the blade this time, muttering. Runes ran up the blade in a yellow light before fading. The Sage then handed the knife to Leo.

“I believe you know what to do.” The Sage said as he pressed the hilt of the blade into Leo’s hand.

Swallowing, Leo looked at his hair, his long, long hair. It wasn’t in a braid, so it would take a bit of time to cut it all. Lifting his hand, Leo went to press the knife to his hair when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

Xander was behind him. “One second Leo.”

Leo dropped his hand and watched Xander gather his hair up, pulling it onto a single lump. Camilla then took a ribbon from her own pocket and tied his hair into a low ponytail. Exhaling, Leo gave them a smile, not trusting himself to speak without his voice cracking, and lifted his hair, angling the knife so it was as high as he could cut it himself. Then, with precise movements, familiar ones, Leo cut his hair.

Stray blond locks fell to the ground and scattered. Leo then dropped the majority of his hair and almost dropped the knife had Xander not gently touched his hand, steadying it, taking the knife, and handing it back to the Rainbow Sage.

A full minute passed. Leo waited for his hair to grow back like it always had done. Instead, he felt a breeze on the back of his neck and some of the locks, still a bit long, tickle his skin. Leo didn’t realize he was crying until Camilla and Corrin pulled him into a warm hug. Leo sunk into them and tried to stifle his crying.

His curse was broken. Leo’s heart felt light. Composing himself, Leo forced his tears aside and looked at the Rainbow Sage.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” The Sage gave a smile. “Now, Lord Xander.”

Leo untangled himself from Camilla and Corrin’s embrace and watched as the Sage walked away from the table and over to Xander.

“Your curse is linked to water. In order to break it we must have you embrace the element. If you could follow me?”
Xander shot a glance at them. “Could my family come?”

“If they wish.” The Sage replied. “We’ll be going back to the springs.”

There was no question to what they’d do. Leo immediately walked with the rest, away from the table, and towards the springs. This time though, instead of going to the springs they had bathed in, the Sage took them up some stairs, to another layer of the reality they were inhabiting.

On the next floor was a massive spring. This one had a running water fall and flowers floating in the water. Steam rose from the surface but the air didn’t feel humid.

“You’ll need to submerge yourself completely in the water for a few seconds.” The Sage told Xander. “This water is blessed and will remove the curse from your body.”

Like Elise’s curse, Leo felt a tingle of fear hit him. Xander’s curse was the deadliest in the right situations. Xander had also nearly drowned because of his curse. Submersion was a challenging task to ask of Xander. Leo saw Xander’s jaw tighten before he slowly took his shirt and shoes off. Xander left his pants on though and without another word he walked into the water, not pausing. As he waded in the water was deeper and deeper. When Xander was up to his shoulders in water Leo watched him take a huge breath and sink down.

For the briefest of moments Leo felt the fingers of panic fill him. What if Xander’s curse kept him under, not allowing him to swim up? What if they couldn’t pull him out due to the curse and then he’d die and…

Xander came up with a splash, inhaling air like he had been swimming for hours. Leo jolted to race in but he saw Xander stand up with ease, clearly the bottom wasn’t out of his reach. Water dripped down his face and hair before somehow magically evaporating, leaving his head completely dry. Xander then waded back out towards them. As he moved Leo watched the water magically evaporate off Xander until he was out of the water and was completely dry. A beat passed before Corrin flung themselves at Xander, hugging him tightly. Soon Elise followed and then they were all hugging Xander.

Relief was hot and ran warmly through Leo’s veins. He couldn’t breathe as he wept with joy. Their curses were broken. All of them. They were free. No more fear of sleep for Camilla. No more fear of talking for Elise. No more fear of water for Xander. No more fear of memory loss for Corrin. No more fear of his image.

Leo pulled Xander in just a bit tighter and in the seclusion of the springs, cried hotly and happily into his sibling’s embrace. They were all free.

Chapter End Notes

Compliments: Is Niles... flirting with Leo? You betcha.

Sword styles: I love the idea of region specific sword styles

Royal style: Just like in Magi I adore the idea of royalty having a signature style of fighting only they can learn. Of course, Xander knows the Nohrian Royal style (... and Odin knows the Ylissian one :D)
Spear/Lance: Okay, I'm going to say it out right here. I'm going to write Leo using a spear/lance in future chapters. I have given it a ton of thought and while I know in canon he can learn how to use a sword, I decided for this story to go a different route. Don't read too much into it as in "oh weapon triangle advantage over swords" or what not. No, my reasoning is... I rewatched Puella Magi Madoka Magica and while I love all their weapons, Kyoko's weapon is one of my favourites (aside from Madoka's).

Town: Oh look, a town date!

Hot Springs: Based on onsen

Curse breaking: I've given a ton of thought into how the curses would be broken. It was really hard to pick Camilla and Elise's but I hope you like them. Leo and Corrin's had been picked right from the start and Xander's came around shortly. I'm happy with the choices I made for each of the curses and how they were broken.
Arrival to Regna Ferox

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone!!! Happy Valentine's Day!!!

I've had so many scenes in this chapter planned for months. I also had scenes that came out of no where but I am so glad they happened.

I hope you like this installment of the series. Thank you for all the support. Sorry this took so long. Between work and me playing KH3 I didn't have a lot to time to sit and write.

As always, feel free to leave kudos and comments as those really motivate me. Also if you want to check my tumblr out it's right here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After their tears were dried, they all returned back to the table and dinner. Leo sat back down by Niles and Odin and continued to eat. Now that their curses were broken Leo found eating easier. A weight he had carried around for so many years had been lifted. Leo felt like he could take on the world. Sure, there were things they had to do but for the moment Leo wanted to savour the feeling of ease he hadn’t felt in years.

Eating silently, Leo watched his siblings. Elise showed the most shift in her character and Leo felt his heart warm. She was trying to chat as much as she could, babbling softly to Effie and Arthur. Corrin also looked more animated, a joy radiating from them.

“You’re all welcome to stay the night here.” The Rainbow Sage said, drawing Leo from his thoughts.

“We appreciate your hospitality.” Xander said for them all. “Thank you.”

“Think nothing of it. There are rooms down by the hot springs.”

With that the Rainbow Sage walked away from them, leaving everyone to their own devices. Leo finished eating and touched his hair again. His mind still swirled with the realization that his curse was gone. Sure, Leo knew the ends were ragged and uneven from how he cut his hair but he’d worry about that later. For now, he had his family safe and comrades who he trusted.

Life was finally looking up for him and his family.

~

That night Leo lay in bed and stared up at the ceiling. For the first time in years his hair wasn’t heavily laying beside him, uncomfortable with every turn of his body. Leo kept moving his hand in the empty space out of habit, as though he would somehow catch the stray strands and his hair would be long again. However, there was nothing but empty space. Leo savoured the feel of nothing between his fingers, smiling to himself in the dark. Turning onto his side, Leo looked across the room. Corrin was nestled with Elise. Xander was close by and Camilla was curled under the covers. Leo saw her move a little bit and he knew instantly what light sleep looked like. The realization that
tingled in the back of his brain hurt for just a moment before Leo tried to drop it. Camilla was safe and so was the rest of his family. They’d continue to be safe even when separated. Leo had to believe those things, otherwise, come tomorrow, he’d be a mess.

Xander was right; they needed allies and splitting up to gather them was the best option. That option just hurt. They had been separated for so long and now that they were together again, Leo didn’t want to let go of his family. However, logic stated that he had to. For the sake of his country. Once the country was at peace, then they could spend as long as they wanted with each other.

Until then, Leo had to focus. He was going off to Ylisse and Regna Ferox, countries that Leo had no idea what were like. The only knowledge he had was from a limited selection of books and the unknown of the situation was eating slightly at Leo’s mind. What if he messed up? His family was counting on him to make a good impression. What if the Exalt of Ylisse and the Khans of Regna Ferox said no? Then what? Would Leo be the one to turn up empty handed?

No. Leo exhaled sharply and closed his eyes. He’d do fine. He was smart, he was capable and more importantly, his family trusted him. He could do this. Nestling into his pillow, Leo allowed himself to become comfortable. Who knew when he’d be able to sleep in a proper bed again?

\~

In the morning Leo ate breakfast as normally as he could with his family. Elise’s voice was still stained with disuse but some form of magic had to be used to allow her to speak so fluently so soon. She chatted non stop during breakfast, tugging on everyone’s hands to gain their attention as she spoke. Elise talked until she coughed, her voice and throat sore. When water was offered to her, she gulped it down quickly before speaking again, as though she was afraid if silence filled her lungs and throat her voice would vanish.

Leo didn’t blame her. They were all still recovering. Camilla looked like she hadn’t slept well and he caught Xander staring in the direction of the bath earlier, a glazed look with a hint of fear marring the edges. Xander ended up just washing off quickly in the shallowest springs. He also caught Corrin’s fingers tangled in the pendant on their neck, their other hand resting on their journal. Leo himself kept moving to brush his hair away, only to find nothing. The cut was crude and looked awful. Leo saw it in the mirror, but he didn’t care. The mere sight of his hair short never failed to fill him with hope. If Elise chatting and Corrin holding into their objects of comfort allowed them to feel safer then Leo would never stop them.

As breakfast ended, Leo saw Xander make his way over to Corrin. A brief pause of silence passed before Xander touched Corrin’s shoulder lightly.

“I apologise for my stubborn words earlier.” Xander’s voice was soft but clear and firm. “I don’t think I’ll never stop worrying about my family, but you are right. We need to take a chance. I’ll just have to trust in you, your retainers, and Camilla as you go off to the Ice and Wind tribes.”

Corrin stared at Xander for a second, before the words registered in their mind, and they smiled widely. Jumping up, Corrin hugged Xander tightly, holding him close to their body. Xander automatically hugged Corrin back.

“Thank you.” Corrin muttered into Xander’s chest. “Thank you, Xander.”

“It’s no problem, Little One.” Xander’s grip tightened a little.

Off the side, Leo saw Camilla smile and he saw Felicia let out a small breath. No doubt she was hoping to return home. How long had it been since she’d seen her sister? Leo sympathized and he
knew that Felicia was hoping for a perfect reunion with her sister. Leo hoped it went well.

“Though I do have one question.” Corrin said as they parted from Xander’s embrace. Apparently, the hug was over and Leo hadn’t noticed. “Once we have our allies, where should we meet?”

A good question. Leo felt a bit silly that he hadn’t thought of that earlier but Corrin was bringing up a good point. Meeting somewhere in Nohr could easily be compromised but they couldn’t just suggest another place in case relations went south. They also had to consider travel and how long it would take for people to arrive.

“If I may,” The Rainbow Sage suddenly spoke. Leo nearly jumped. He hadn’t seen the Sage arrive, “my place is always open to you. If you like, you can come back here.”

“Are you sure?” Camilla automatically asked. “We wouldn’t want to trouble you.”

“Nonsense. This place is a dimension in itself and can shift and mold depending on what’s needed.” The Sage told them. “At least, consider my offer.”

It was a good offer too. Leo could see more benefits than cons. Still… “Are you supposed to be hidden from the world?”

“Changing how to arrive at my place is easy.” The Sage replied. “Though if you’re worried about me, I need not make an appearance. Let the others believe you just know of a magical plane of existence.”

A bit too convenient of an explanation but Leo supposed they’d have other issues to worry over. They’d be fools to not at least accept the offer and hold onto it. Xander seemed to think so too. He nodded and then reached out to offer a handshake to the Sage.

“Thank you for your consideration and generosity. We will take it into consideration.”

The Rainbow Sage nodded before he shook Xander’s hand. He then pulled out of his pocket some necklaces. The necklaces were made of leather string and a smooth, round opaque white stone that was curled and held in place by a thin wire of silver.

“These are protective charms.” The Sage told Xander. “It isn’t much but I would like to gift these to you.”

Xander took the necklaces. It seemed that the Sage thought of everyone. There were enough for all. “Thank you very much.”

Xander then handed the necklaces around. As Leo took his, he saw that the stone, up close, wasn’t entirely white. It was shot through with soft colours, pastel and pale. Leo put the necklace on. It felt warm. In the distance, he heard Odin exclaim something about “a Divine Gift of Protection and Warding from Evil” that gained a laugh from Corrin and Elise.

“I will pray for a safe journey for all.” The Sage then said with a bow. “The exit will take you to where you want to go and to the direction you wish.”

Right. Leo hoisted his bag a little higher over his shoulder. With this, they had a journey to start. Walking over to his family, Leo looked at them. It would be a while until he saw them again.

“Be safe.” Xander told Leo as he pulled Leo into the first hug.

“I will.”
“Take care of yourself.” Camilla added, joining their hug.

“I always do.” Leo tried to assure Camilla and sound firm. He only sounded sad.

“I’ll miss you.” Corrin softly into Leo’s shoulder.

“I will too.” Leo told Corrin. “You be careful out there.”

“I’ll miss you too!” Elise added, her voice marred with sobs.

“We won’t be separated for long.” Leo tried to console Elise.

Leo tried to hug all of his siblings but he wasn’t able to. Instead he melted in their warmth and their love. Even if they were apart, Leo knew his heart would always have them inside and he’d always be in their hearts.

It was that warm thought that allowed Leo depart his siblings, Niles and Odin at his side.

As the Rainbow Sage had said, the exits took them in the direction they wanted to go. First, when they had arrived at the Rainbow Sage’s they had entered at the top of a mountain. This time, they were in a forest, and Leo could smell the ocean.

The added fact that Odin looked around with a nod further proved it to Leo. Niles, however, gave a raised eyebrow. Odin responded by pointing to a plant.

“See that? It’s a common plant that only grows near and around Regna Ferox. I suppose that’s where we’ll head off first.”

“Are you sure?” Niles asked, not harshly.

“Yes.” Odin didn’t take offense. “My mother is a healer. I’m well versed in plants. That particular plant is good for burn wounds.”


Odin hummed. “I’ll explain as we walk. We first need to get to the Port Town. They have regular ships that leave for Regna Ferox and Ylisse. With magic propelling the ships they only take a few days to reach land.”

A clear destination. Leo hefted his bag over his shoulder. This was it. Touching his necklace briefly, Leo gave one last thought of fortune towards his family before they began to walk. Odin was in front but Niles slowed down, sticking closer to Leo.

“Regna Ferox is a harsh land.” Odin began to explain. “The philosophy of the land is one built upon strength and stability. A good leader must be strong and must be stable. They are called Khans, one for the West and one for the East. Every year they hold a tournament with their selected champions to determine who will be in charge. Last time I was there it was the Western Khan in charge. Who knows now?” Odin looked over his shoulder and laughed.

“I take it, regardless of who’s in charge I’ll be speaking to both of them?” Leo asked.

“Yes, you will.” Odin agreed. “The Western Khan is named Basilio. The Eastern Khan is named Flavia.”
“Basilio and Flavia.” Leo tested the names on his tongue. “What are they like?”

Odin paused for a moment and Leo could sense that Odin was thinking hard. Perhaps Odin didn’t really know the Khans all too well.

“Basilio is a jovial man, a bit hardhead and can act before thinking. He is however, a very skilled warrior and a smart man. Flavia is a bit sterner than Basilio, more prone to thinking through her actions. She is however not a pushover.”

“Interesting.” Niles commented. “Do you know them well?”

“Everyone knows the Khans.” Odin replied. “They’re the kind of leaders that are with their troops, getting in the action. They say the Khan is the first to a battle and the last to leave one. Leader is their title and role but it isn’t one they lord over others.”

That was interesting. Not the kind of dynamic Leo was used to when thinking of a leader. It was refreshing. “So, what else can you tell us about Regna Ferox?”

“Well at this time of year it’s pretty warm so we won’t have to worry about the cold. However, Regna Ferox has harsh winters. They’re quite the thing.” Odin laughed. “Other than that, there is little I think is important to mention… maybe the food? It’s rather hearty and can be rich. So, if that doesn’t settle with your stomach you should be careful.”

“Oh?” Niles asked, poking Odin’s shoulder. “Nohr can have quite rich food too.”

Odin blushed a bit. “Sorry. I have a friend who’s sensitive to rich food. I’m used to thinking about food and warnings to others.”

Leo smiled. That was the first time he had heard Odin mention any friends or relations to someone beyond Niles. He wanted to ask Odin more but this wasn’t the time. Leo had other things to inquire.

“What about Ylisse? What’s it like?”

“Ylisse is a very bright country. The Exalt is in the capital, Ylisstol. The people are friendly and welcoming to travellers.”

The Exalt. Leo’s mind narrowed in. That was the person he was going to have to talk to. “Tell me more about the Exalt? What are they like?”

Odin paused and this time, unlike Regna Ferox, for a longer period of time. Leo felt his heart spike in his chest, pattering harshly. Was this some sort of sign? Odin had seemed slightly reluctant in being tasked to going back home. Was there something Odin was keeping from them? Perhaps, was Odin worried they wouldn’t be met with welcome? Even though he was talking favourably about Regna Ferox and Ylisse, perhaps Odin had hidden fears that Leo wasn’t aware of?

“The Exalt is named Emmeryn. She’s a very compassionate, kind woman who advocates for peace. Her brother, Chrom, is in charge of The Shepherds, a group that fights for the people and helps out when they can. He’s a brave man, with a strong moral compass. Finally, there’s Lissa who focuses on helping the local people.”

“They sound very down to earth too.” Leo mused. “Have you met them?”

For a second, it appeared that Odin was choking on something, his posture ridged. Leo was about to ask Niles to go help Odin when Odin suddenly coughed. “I’ve met them. They do help out the common folk frequently.”
“That’s good then.” Niles mused. “They sound like they’ll listen to people without a lot of pomp and circumstance in order to get to them.”

Odin nodded and somehow Leo felt like again, he wasn’t saying something. However, once again, Leo let it slide.

~

A couple days later they ended up near a small town, one that was bustling enough that they’d blend into the crowd. It was made easier with Leo’s hair not dragging to the floor, a noticeable feature. He still stuck close to Niles and Odin as they weaved through the crowd, towards the market. Odin and Niles were talking softly to each other and when they came across persevered food or other useful items the two talked to the owners with expertise. Leo just stood back and allowed them to do the work. As they haggled, Leo saw a weapon stand and his eyes fell on the spears and lances.

He had never concluded as to if he would use a lance or spear. Leo’s fingers twitched and he tried to imagine the weight of the lance in his hand, the movements he had seen others perform. His palm tingled.

“Leo?” Niles was softly speaking beside him.

Leo jolted. “Yes?”

“I was thinking, if it isn’t too presumptuous, I could buy a pair of scissors?”

Scissors? Leo blinked. “What?”

“To cut your hair properly.” Niles clarified. “That is, if you want me to? Rest assured, I’m fairly decent at cutting hair.” He gave a crooked smile.

Leo’s heart warmed. He knew his hair was horrible with how he had cut it but it hadn’t mattered to him. Now that Niles was offering, Leo couldn’t see a reason why he would say no.

“Thank you. I appreciate it.”

Niles gave a smile and Leo felt his heart jump a little at the sight. “It will be my pleasure to assist you.”

Leo flushed a little and Niles sauntered off towards a stall where the scissors most likely were. Leo trailed after, a bit away, his cheeks still warm from the consideration from Niles.

~

Evening was descending upon them in a thick veil of darkness and stars by the time they had time for Niles to fix Leo’s hair. Leo sat back on a weather worn log and felt Niles run his fingers smoothly through his hair. The hair was still a bit long and the ends ragged, uneven. The feeling of Niles’ fingers in his hair sent a pleasant shiver down Leo’s spine. His heart was beating and Leo found himself clutching his pants, his palms a bit sweaty.

“Relax.” Niles gently said, his breath tickling Leo’s ear. “I will go slowly, if that makes you comfortable.” His fingers carted through Leo’s hair again and Leo couldn’t help but bite his lip, his heart pounding harder.

“Niles is a fantastic hair dresser.” Odin added from the other side of the fire as he threw another log in. “He’s helped me with my hair.”
Leo saw the image of Niles hovering behind Odin, doing the same thing he was doing at the moment. That made Leo flush again. It was an attractive image, one that spoke of trust and intimacy. Was that Leo right now? Trusting Niles in an intimate way? It was a bit ridiculous to be nervous; Leo was trusting Niles and Odin with his life and safety already. However, his heart wasn’t listening and just kept fluttering in his chest.

“Take a deep breath and let it out.” Niles instructed. “You need to relax or this will be difficult to proceed.”

Relax. Leo forced a breath in and out, willing his shoulders to loosen and his stance to be less ridged. The first sound of the scissors snipping hair almost made Leo jump, but Niles steadied him with one hand on his shoulder. The snipping continued and Leo found himself relaxing under the rhythm and repetition of the actions. By the time Niles was finished, Leo was finding himself slightly sleepy. It took Niles gently shaking him to alert Leo.

“I’m almost done.” Niles told Leo. “I hope I did a good job. Let me know if there is anything to fix in a second. I just have your bangs. Unless you don’t want them?”

Leo always had bangs, long ones that, in his opinion, looked better than him not having them. “Please.”

A second later Leo realized the error of his choice as Niles moved from behind to in front of Leo, kneeling close. With expertise, Niles pulled the hair that would become the bangs in front of Leo, obscuring his vision. Gently, Leo felt the scissors press against his forehead, before Niles moved and began to cut. As he cut away the hair, Leo noticed how close they were. He could see the sweat and the gleam on Niles. He could smell the fire that clung to all of their skin and he could also smell earth and wood. Leo could see the singular piercing blue eye that was so signature to Niles, Leo was starting to associate the colour with him.

The scissors made their final snip but all Leo could see was Niles. He suddenly became very conscious of their proximity and the smell of Niles that seemed to cling to him. Leo swallowed and saw Niles’s lips part for a breath, glistening in the light. For a moment, a very brief moment, Leo imagined them on his own, pressing into a kiss.

His heart spiked and Leo wasn’t sure what was happening anymore. Then, Niles pulled away and the moment burst in a harsh snap of wind. Leo looked down, his face pink with embarrassment. He was caught between being elated that his hair was cut and staying short and confused as to what had just happened.

“Looking good.” Niles spoke, his voice even. “What do you think, Odin?”

“I think our lord looks divine.” Odin replied. “A true prince emerging from the ashes and gleam of metal.”

Odin. Right. He and Niles were a couple. Leo suddenly felt ashamed that he had even considered kissing Niles. Those two were together and Leo couldn’t desire either of them. He was just touch starved. That had to be it. Leo nodded to himself and shoved his thoughts away. That was all there was to it. He was touch starved and he had to control himself.

“Thank you.” Niles was speaking, probably in response to Odin’s compliment. “I have a small mirror if you want to see?”

“Sure.” At least Leo’s voice was steady.
Niles pulled a mirror from his bag, a small circular one, and handed it to Leo. Leo angled himself so the fire was giving enough light. There, in the reflection, was Leo, a version of him that had been all but lost all those years ago. A version of him that was a prince.

“Thank you.” Leo spoke and found that he was sobbing.

“You’re most welcome.” Came the reply before Niles, warm and nice smelling Niles, pulled Leo into a hug. “I’m glad you like it.”

“Me too!”

Odin joined in and soon, Leo found himself engulfed in a hug from both of them. It tugged at his heart and Leo wished he was strong enough, not as touch starved, to pull away from their embrace. He didn’t. He sunk in and savoured it.

~

In his dreams, the hair cut went a bit differently. Leo dreamt of himself sitting on the log and Niles cutting his hair but then the dream angled itself and shifted into Niles pressing him against his body, kissing him roughly. Hands tangled in Leo’s short hair and the heat of the kiss resonated in Leo’s soul. When they parted, Odin was in front of Leo and soon they were kissing.

In the morning when Leo woke up, his cheeks were flushed, his pants slightly uncomfortable, and his lips were tingling with the ghost sensation of being kissed. He groaned to himself in frustration and with grace, excused himself. He needed a cold river to dunk himself in.

~

Later that morning they arrived at the port town. Odin immediately bustled over to the docks and began talking to someone from a ship. Part way through, Leo distantly heard Odin change from speaking in Nohrian to something a bit more flowy, a bit more musical. It had to be Ylissian.

Niles was hovering close to Leo but not too close and Leo was grateful. His dream from the night was lingering loudly in his head and Leo wanted nothing more than to expel it from his mind. It was because of the dream Leo suddenly didn’t want to look Niles or Odin in the eyes.

He really hated his brain.

“Feeling all right?” Niles suddenly asked. “You’ve been awfully quiet.”

Shoot. Leo scrambled for an answer. “Just… nerves.”

“I see.” Niles mused. “Ever been on a ship this big before?”

“No.” Leo answered. It was easy to talk about this, distract himself from his dream. “However, I’ve read that with the magic they take away that rocking feeling that causes sea sickness.”

“They do indeed.” Odin had interrupted, walking over to them. “It’s very marvelous magic to experience.” He then waved a piece of paper. “The man says they’re always taking passengers over to and from Regna Ferox. We’ll be able to leave tomorrow morning. In the mean time I suggest we find an inn and then look around.”

The next day. Leo swallowed. In perhaps five days time he’d be in Regna Ferox and hoping everything would go well. For now, he had to take one step at a time.
“All right. Let’s go then.”

They ended up walking around for a bit longer than anticipated, particularly after Odin found a small shop that sold a type of steamed bun that they made in Regna Ferox. Leo tried it and found that it was absolutely delicious, soft and warm with meat inside.

The inn they found was clean, made entirely of wood, had a pub in the basement, but was extremely full. Leo dodged the crowds as he walked in with Odin and Niles towards the front desk. The woman behind the desk looked stern but welcoming.

“Welcome! What can I do for you gentlemen?”

“We were wondering if you had a room for the night?” Niles asked, leaning a bit on the desk.

“For the three of you?” The woman asked as she flipped open a book. “Let me see…” Her finger trailed down. “We’re booked solid. It’s the time of the week when the sailors all come back from fishing and the people who go to and from Regna Ferox and here are back.” She then hummed. “However, we do have a room open. It does, however, only have one large bed.”

One large bed was better than no bed in Leo’s opinion. Niles and Odin seemed to take the same stance as him. “We’ll take it.”

“Very well.”

They paid and soon they were given the keys to the room. Walking up with Niles and Odin to the room, they opened it. Sure enough, the room had only one large bed. It looked big enough to fit all three of them but Leo knew someone would take the floor. He didn’t want to intrude on Niles and Odin.

“I can take the floor.” Leo offered as soon as they walked inside.

“You are doing what now?” Niles asked blankly.

“You’re not taking the floor.” Odin protested. “I believe the bed is big enough for all three of our bodies.” He then paused. “Unless you’re uncomfortable with Niles and me? In that case, we can take the floor.”

Leo swallowed, his dream deciding now was the best time to pop back into his mind. He could feel his cheeks heating up slightly and Leo tried his best to focus, to shove his dream aside. There was no reason a single dream, driven from his obvious touch starved nature, was going to ruin everything he ever did with Niles and Odin. It would be rude to kick Niles and Odin on the floor and Odin was right; the bed was big enough for the three of them. It was rather shocking that the inn had a bed that big but in the end that was their situation and Leo had to respond to Odin before he got the wrong idea.

“No, no it’s fine. I just didn’t want to crowd you two.” Leo said.

“It’s fine. We don’t mind a bit of crowding.” Niles answered with a cheeky grin.

“Niles…” Odin huffed before he looked at Leo with a half smile. “Now that we have this all settled, shall we go out for a stroll around this town?”

Leo almost said yes but then he remembered about Iago and his father’s troops. “Will it be safe?”

Niles and Odin caught on quickly. “I’m sure it will be fine.” Odin assured. “Your hair is cut and so
many people come in and out of this town that we’ll be lost in the crowds.”

“Besides, we’re here to protect and watch over you.” Niles added.

Leo flushed at that. “Thank you.”

“Now, let’s exit this establishment and go on a grand adventure!” Odin proclaimed before he reached for Niles. Their hands entangled. “Come on!”

It was hard to not stare at their hands, to see the contrast of Niles’ naturally darker skin and Odin’s slightly suntanned tone. Leo swallowed and knew that their hands were warm. His own palms tingled.

“Something the matter?” Niles asked.

“Nothing.” Leo assured. He was being ridiculous.

“Then, let’s be off.” Niles said.

They exited the hotel, back out into the sunny day. Leo soaked it in, soaking in the town and the atmosphere. He had no idea where to go next, but Leo didn’t care. So long as he was able to walk around and enjoy being outside.

“Where to first?” Leo asked.

“Maybe we can just wander around and see what comes up?” Niles suggested. “I’ve never been here before so your guess is as good as mine.”

Before Leo could respond to Niles, he suddenly felt a warm hand touch his own gently. Glancing over, Leo saw Odin beaming at him, hand outstretched. “Well? We won’t be able to go on our journey if we’re standing around.”

Leo looked at his hand and swallowed. In the end, he supposed he didn’t mind (strange dream aside). Nodding his head, Leo allowed Odin to hold his hand (his hand was warm). Odin gave a smile and soon they were off.

Odin didn’t let go and Leo’s hand was warm the entire time.

~

When they returned to the hotel room and they were nestled in bed, Leo felt the warmth from both Niles and Odin. He tried to close his eyes and relax into the sheets, but all he could feel was their heat, the weight beside him as he tried to sleep. Turning a little, Leo tried one last time to fall asleep. He ended up staring at the wall, feeling Niles and Odin’s heat behind him.

~

Leo woke up early, earlier than Niles and Odin, and found that during the night he had shifted over. His face was pressed to the broad span of Niles’ back. Niles was still asleep, his back rising and falling with sleep. Leo flushed hotly and slowly pulled away, at once mourning the loss of heat. Turning onto his side, away from Niles, Leo pressed his hand to his chest and exhaled sharply.

~

As they arrived at the pier, Leo yawned loudly. The night and how he woke up in the morning swirled at curled in his mind, on constant loop. All Leo’s mind could think was how he had shared a
bed with Niles and Odin and how he had woken up pressed to Niles. It was very distracting and the image wasn’t going away. The only saving grace was the fact Leo managed to pretend to be asleep as Niles and Odin woke, so the two of them hopefully had no idea what had transpired.

The ship was already bustling with people and the dock was alive. Odin broke away from them and beelined towards the man he had chatted with the day before. As that transpired, Leo took a moment to distract himself and look around the town. It would be a while before he returned. Leo stared at the town and the people slowly milling around, the fishermen and the sailors, the families in the distance and the shops that were beginning to open. Leo took it all in and inhaled, smelling the salt of the sea and the bustle of the town.

“Ready to leave?” Niles asked, his voice warm.

Leo swallowed, made his brain shut down and not think of the night before, and looked at Niles. “I am. I need to go and help out my family and my country.”

Niles gave a crooked smile. “Good answer. Mourning things is fine but it shouldn’t rule us. We’ll return soon.”

“You’re right.”

Odin at this point returned, jogging up to them. “We can board. They’re going to be leaving shortly. Do we have everything?”

Leo didn’t have a lot. Niles didn’t either. They both nodded.

“Then, let’s embark on our adventure!” Odin proclaimed.

They walked onto the ship and Leo noticed how it was more spacious up close. Clearly this ship specialized in ferrying people around. Leo wished he knew how the magic of the ship worked, how the mechanics functioned in order for it to move so swiftly. He knew, however, that he wouldn’t learn in this trip. Maybe some other time.

Odin seemed to know what they were doing and took them over to a cabin that had the number 6 on it. He opened the door and inside were small accommodations. Leo noted that there were three small beds but no doubt Niles and Odin were going to shove theirs together to be closer. Leo took the one that felt like the odd one out and sat on it.

“If you don’t mind?” Leo asked them.

“Not at all.” Odin said as he threw his bag onto one of the other beds. “Want to go outside and watch us leave port?”

Leo bit his lip. Leaving. Now that he was on the ship, he remembered that he had never been on one before. Anticipation to his reaction suddenly surged. What if he got sea sick?

“I don’t know… I mean… does the magic on this ship truly help ease sea sickness?” Leo asked.

Odin hummed. “It should? They claim it does but I don’t know. I’ve never really been affected by motion.” He then reached his hand out. “But we’ll be with you. So, if you feel sick, we’ll be there to assist you.”

Leo eyed Odin’s hand. He remembered how warm it felt when they were out and about in town. He then remembered what had just happened in the morning and he found it hard to breathe. Odin tilted his head, hand still outstretched.
“Leo?”

“I’m fine.” Leo automatically replied. He was acting ridiculous. “Thanks. I’d love to watch the ship leave.”

He firmly took Odin’s hand and allowed Odin to pull him up and off the bed. Leo also allowed Odin to drag him out to the deck, to watch as the ship prepared for disembarking. The crew were bustling around and when the anchor was raised, Leo saw a shimmer of magic around the ship, thin and sort of a yellow. The ship then seemed to glide easily through the water, like it was sort of hovering, pushing the water aside rather than actually floating in the water. Leo stared more down at the ship, trying to analyze how the waves were rolling around the base of the ship, how the magic curled around the entire ship, not just the bottom, and how their speed soon picked up. They were going faster than Leo had ever expected to travel by vehicle. A sense of warmth, excitement, curled and burst in his chest. Curiosity burned and Leo hoped that if he studied it for the few days they were on the boat (maybe even asking a crew member) he could gain a general understanding.

Whipping his head up, to look at the port town that was disappearing swiftly behind them, Leo caught a glimpse of Niles and Odin. Their hands were laced together and Odin was leaning into Niles, his head half on Niles’ shoulder. Their intimacy stung and Leo felt everything from earlier rush back. It was like a pendulum. Leo hated it. It burned in his mind, shaking his soul from its comfort zone.

“I’m going to explore the ship.” Leo announced to Niles and Odin, his voice sounding off.

“Oh? Do you want us to join you?” Niles asked.

“No, no it’s fine.” Leo continued, his voice feeling disjointed from his mind.

If there was something off in Leo’s voice they weren’t noticing. At least, Leo hoped so. He didn’t stick around to figure it out or hear an answer.

The ship was fascinating, with many areas to explore. They had the obvious places: a few places to eat, a place to sit and hang out, sheltered inside, a large room that appeared to be a dance hall, a medical bay, and other cabins. The ship also had some places Leo hadn’t expected, like a few shops, a public bath similar to what Hoshido had, and even a small library. Leo spotted other rooms that he didn’t want to intrude or walk in on. He took his time examining the places he could easily walk into and was done with it.

By the time Leo finished looking, he found himself drawn back to examining the ship, trying to figure out how the magic worked. Unfortunately, not a single worker walked by him so Leo had no opportunities to ask further details, but Leo managed to gather some basic information.

The ship had a magical system that seemed to repel water. The ship was in the water, but the magic pushed the water away, giving less resistance. This meant they could travel faster. Of course, there had to be another source of power (wind magic?) that helped boost the ship to travel at the speeds they were going. Leo made a few mental notes to himself and then decided to go to the library.

No one else was inside and the silence felt too familiar, too lonely. Leo shivered and browsed, picking up book after book. That action in the silent, isolated setting also felt too real. Leo’s mind flashed to his confinement and suddenly all Leo wanted to do was get out of the library, go out where there were people. Grabbing the first book he his hands touched, Leo raced out, slamming the door behind him. Once he was outside and the sun beamed down on him, Leo shivered a full body
shiver. He hadn’t realized he was freezing. Clutching the book, Leo walked away from the library and into the crowded areas, where people were looking at the ocean or chatting to others. Leo forced the sound to wash over him and it helped. He wasn’t isolated. He wasn’t alone. He wasn’t confined.

Sitting down, along one of the benches on the side of the ship, Leo opened the book and read, despite the sun glaring down and making it difficult. Leo did his best but after a while it was just an excuse for him to sit out in public, so he could be surrounded by people. The words didn’t even make sense to him, his brain not stringing the words together.

Leo sat out there until the sun began to dim, to set, and his stomach growled. People were slowly moving in to eat and Leo supposed now was the best time to find Niles and Odin. Standing up and stretching, his body protesting and aching from sitting for so long, Leo made his way back to their cabin.

“Odin? Niles?” Leo asked as he opened the door.

At first, Leo wasn’t sure if they were inside, the room dark. However, he then saw them. Odin and Niles were curled in bed, their beds pushed together as Leo suspected they’d do. They were fast asleep but as Odin shifted Leo saw his shoulders were bare. He immediately flushed. Not that Leo had a problem with Odin and Niles being… well a couple, but the blatancy made his heart sting just a little bit.

Being touch starved was horrible.

Leo tossed the book onto his bed and with a clumsy accuracy and then left, shutting the door. As Leo made his way over to eat, he felt his heart ache and burn in his chest.

It hurt. Leo hated it.

He distracted himself by eating supper, sitting off in the corner to eat, watching the other people chat and be merry. When Leo finished eating, he sat for a little while, not really wanting to return to their cabin.

It was foolish but Leo didn’t mind being foolish for just a bit longer.

Leo waited until the place started to slowly die down before he left. It was a bit concerning that Odin and Niles hadn’t showed up, but it wasn’t so foolish to assume their journey had taken a toll and the two were just catching up on sleep. Clutching the book in his hands, Leo slowly made his way back to the cabin. Hopefully, Odin and Niles were awake. At the rate they were going, they would be awake all through the night.

Stopping in front of the cabin door, Leo stared at it, the wooden rectangle that separated him from Odin and Niles felt ominous. The scene from earlier tried to pop up in Leo’s brain, but he effectively shoved it down and pressed forward, opening the door.

Inside, Leo saw Odin and Niles sitting up. For one brief moment, he felt a wave of relief, that his companions were awake. That relief fled and turned into embarrassment when he saw what they were doing. Granted, at least Niles had some pants on and Odin was hidden from view, blankets around his waist, but that didn’t stop seeing them kiss send a blush hotly down Leo’s neck. His face burned and Leo almost turned around and slammed the door to escape, but it was too late.

Niles pulled away from the kiss and looked over at Leo, turning slightly. At the angle he was at the light bounced off his shoulders and face in an alluring way. His hair was messy and his single eye bright. Leo swallowed and didn’t look away, afraid that if he did his eyes would roam and he didn’t
want that.

His wish was ruined when Odin shifted and the sound made Leo automatically turn to look. It was both a good and bad thing. Odin had clear marks on his neck and down his collar bones. His bare skin looked warm and flushed. He also more naked than Niles. Whatever underwear Odin was wearing, it was dark and rolled up his legs.

It was too much for Leo to deal with.

“I’m sorry.” Leo managed to squeak out. “I’ll just… leave you two.”

“Wait –!” Odin started.

Leo didn’t want to wait around. He turned swiftly and went to grab the door, to open it and flee but the sound of bare feet hitting the floor and bed sheets shifting was faster. Suddenly warmth, overbearing, untameable warmth was at his back and thick arms, ones that were used to pulling back strings on bows was holding the door. Leo thickly swallowed and found himself trapped between the door and Niles’ half naked, heat radiating body.

“Leo.” Niles’ voice was husky with sleep (and probably from other things. Leo didn’t want to guess or imagine what).

“You two need privacy.” Leo forced himself to talk. “It was wrong of me to make you two feel you had to have me share a room as well. I saw many cabins during my exploring. I’ll find a crew member and talk to them about –”

“Leo. It’s us who should apologise.” Niles cut him off. “We shouldn’t have…” Niles paused. “Look, I know how this appears. Odin and I just…” He stopped. “Never mind. What matters is we should have waited and not made you feel awkward.”

“Is it too late to beg for your forgiveness?” Odin added, his voice growing closer. “We should have waited for utmost privacy. I am aware. It’s just…”

“It’s just Odin is really hot.” Niles finished with a laugh that Leo felt vibrate down his arm and spine.

Niles probably was hoping to diffuse the situation by making a blunt comment, but all Leo’s brain could do was agree. Odin was hot. He had this smile and that laugh and suddenly Leo was the protagonist in those romance novels that Elise enjoyed. All the blood was rushing to Leo’s head and his heart pumped and ached with realisation.

If it was just him being touch starved, simple hand holding or hugs or even ruffles of his hair would be all he wanted. Instead, Leo was hit with a sudden enlightening thought. He wasn’t flushing because he found Niles and Odin in a suggestive situation.

He was flushing because he could imagine it and the image of it was hot. He found Niles and Odin attractive.

Leo’s brain shut down. He had to get out of the room and fast.

“It’s fine.” Leo had to remain calm. “You’re forgiven. I’m not upset. I’ll just… be out and about. You two should go and eat before they shut down.”

Niles’ arm was relaxing and it allowed Leo to open the door and flee before they could say or do anything. Rushing down the deck and away from their cabin, Leo went to the first place he could think of, the library.
Thankfully, there were people inside so he didn’t have to feel isolated. Leo sat down on one of the couches and exhaled sharply. Pressing his hand to his chest, Leo waited until his heart rate calmed down before he got up and picked another book off the shelf. Nestling back down into the couch, Leo began to read.

He read until the words blurred and darkness overtook him.

~

Leo woke alone in a dark room, surrounded by a warm couch and the smell of books and leather. He shifted and his brain also shifted, sliding into the realm of the past. The book in his hands suddenly felt heavy, like an iron weight taking him down. Suddenly Leo’s head was heavy from the weight of his hair and suddenly the isolation of the past seeped and dragged at his ankles and mind. Leo thrashed, trying to stand up, trying to breathe. The room spun and churned and Leo couldn’t think. He was alone. He was trapped. Desperately, Leo tried to move his hands, to touch at his hair, to feel the short length, to ground himself in reality.

Instead, his knees buckled and Leo sunk to the ground. His lungs burned and burst and Leo needed air. He needed to get out of the library. He was so foolish going inside in the first place and…

“Leo.”

Leo felt Odin’s hands, calloused in ways Niles’ never were, simply due to him wielding a sword. Odin also smelt like metal and lightning, sharp and natural. Leo found himself collapsing into Odin, exhaling sharply and deeply at a rapid pace.

“We got you.”

Niles was behind Leo and his hands were on Leo’s shoulders, steadying him. Leo could smell nature and earth from Niles. He relaxed under their touch, but only a little.


Odin began to set a rhythm for Leo to follow. As Leo’s chest rose up and down at the same pace as Odin’s he felt the rush of oxygen soothe him, ease his mind back into reality.

“S-sorry.” Leo stammered out. “How l-long was I out?”

“No apologising.” Odin firmly said.

“Only about an hour. We ate quickly and then figured you’d be in the library. We saw the last people leave and they said you fell asleep. No one wanted to disturb you.” Niles answered.

“Oh.” Leo felt a bit foolish now that he was in Niles and Odin’s embraces.

“Let’s go.”

They didn’t let Leo stand up. Odin easily hoisted Leo into his arms and carried him, like those fairy tale stories of princes and princesses, and walked back to their cabin. Leo curled closer, the embarrassment of being carried like a small child only outweighed by the fact hardly anyone was out. That and Leo was sure his legs would collapse under him if he tried to stand.

When they were back in their cabin, Odin gently set Leo on his bed and stepped back only to sit down on the edge. “Feeling all right?” Odin asked.
“I’m fine.” Leo answered. “Thanks.”

“Are you sure?” Niles gently pressed. “You were having a panic attack in the library. I’ve found that, if you want, talking about it can help.”

Leo’s heart fluttered at their concern. He curled up a little bit more. “Thank you.” Leo closed his eyes. “I just thought of the tower. Being alone with nothing but books and myself.”

Both Niles and Odin sucked in a breath so sharply that Leo heard it audibly. “If I could go back and put a sword through your father I would.” Odin stated firmly.

“I’d do that and an arrow through Iago as well.” Niles added.

“Yeah, that too.”

Leo smiled to himself, chuckling a bit, “Thank you. I appreciate this.”

“Great. Now the we have this settled, perhaps we could discuss about earlier?”

Did Niles have to bring it up again? Leo shifted on the bed and bit his lip. He almost wanted to childishly whine but Leo held it in. Perhaps all Niles wanted to do was apologise again because of what had just happened.

Those dreams were crushed by Niles’ next sentence. “I don’t mean to be blunt, but I’m afraid if I’m not we’ll dance around this.” Niles said. “Leo, are you attracted to me and Odin?”

A pin drop could have been heard.

Leo flushed hard, his heart suddenly pounding like a million out of control horses. What was he going to say? Leo had only discovered his little crush and being called out was sending a huge wave of anxiety. Why was Niles asking? Was he upset? Did he want to tell Leo to not crush on him and Odin? That made sense. They were a couple and Leo, he was just the strange outsider that they had taken pity on. Something warm rolled down Leo’s face and it took him a moment to realise he was crying. A wave of panic and embarrassment filled Leo and he tried to stop himself. His hands numbly wiped at his face but it wasn’t helping.

“I’m sorry.” Niles was suddenly in front of Leo, touching his hands. “I knew this was a bad idea.” He added, sounding like he was talking more to himself than anyone else.

“You were too blunt.” Odin accused.

“Hey…” Niles drew the word out. “Let’s discuss my technique later.”

“Right.” Odin was suddenly beside Leo too. “Leo, please, allow us to explain. We’re not upset.”

That helped. Leo felt a bit of his anxiety and hysteria die. “You aren’t?”

“No, we aren’t.” Odin firmly said. “Hey, let’s just look up, okay?”

With warm hands Odin pulled Leo’s hands away from his face gently and waited until Leo was looking at him. “There.” Odin smiled. “No need to tears. I’m not sure where to start but maybe the beginning?”

Leo nodded. The beginning felt like a good place to start. Composing himself, Leo waited for Odin to begin but once again, everything was cut off by Niles.
“To frame this story the bottom line is, we’re attracted to you.” Niles said.

Out of all the things for Niles to say, that wasn’t what Leo was expecting. It shocked all the emotions out of Leo, leaving him staring blankly. “I beg your pardon?”

“We like you.” Niles firmly repeated. “We like you a lot. It wasn’t at first. I mean, we liked you as a person. We also realised you needed time to recover, to see your family. However, we just found ourselves liking you more and more each day.”

“I think it’s because of your undying and enduring spirit, your passion, your intuition, and quick thinking.” Odin added. “It’s because you’re strong and kind and witty. You make me smile and laugh. You challenge all obstacles with grace and poise. It became hard to not think about you along with Niles.”

“I couldn’t echo Odin more.” Niles said. “We sort of were taking the time in the cabin to not just… be together, but to also talk about you. We thought we would have more time to be composed and give you more time to think about this, not make you feel like we’re pushing you.”

“Because we aren’t.” Odin added with a hurried tone. “We want you to be comfortable and if considering anything more than companions and friends is too much for you, we’ll back down. I swear.”

“We can be the ones to move out too.” Niles added. “We won’t be insulted.”

Leo found the strength to finally look at Niles and Odin. They were close and hovering but not touching him. They were his companions. Leo knew them. They wouldn’t shove themselves on him. They were being honest and truthful. This wasn’t an emotion born from pity. If it was, they would have tried to push something on him earlier. Swallowing, Leo tried to think. He had never been in a relationship before and now he had two people who wanted him, people who were in a relationship already. This was something unknown and scary for Leo and he could sense it was the same for Niles and Odin.

Risks and safety. Pros and cons. Leo’s brain swirled around all of them, in conflict with each other. He could say that he wanted time to think and consider. Leo could spend the next few days on the ship in contemplation, running around in circles until he came up with an answer.

Suddenly, Niles’ blunt approach didn’t feel so silly or rash.

Leo remembered back at the hotel just a day ago. He could remember thinking about kissing Niles and he could remember the warmth from Niles, both from the morning and just recently. Leo could imagine the warmth again and he could imagine Odin’s warmth too.

The choice felt clear. Really, the signs had been there for a while. Leo’s brain flashed to seeing Niles and Odin in the river washing up when they were travelling. He saw it in a new light.

“I don’t need time.” Leo said, clarity rushing through. He had been on a bumpy ride this evening but now Leo felt in control, the calm settling after the storm. “I know my answer.”

Niles and Odin waited, not speaking. Leo took the leap.

“I want you two. Kiss me.”

As if he had broken some sort of spell with his words, Leo watched as Niles groaned, like he was relishing the words, savouring them, before he dived in. Grabbing Leo’s face with both hands, warm and rough, Niles looked him in the eyes.
“I’ve been wanting this.” Niles warned before he kissed Leo.

Niles kissed with passion, with warmth, like he had swallowed a sun and it was bursting across his lips and finger tips. He pulled Leo seamlessly and smoothly into his embrace, gently prying Leo’s lips open. Their tongues swirled and Leo was trapped happily against Niles’ chest. When they finally parted, saliva sticking to their lips, Leo felt warm and tingly. That feeling only kept up when Odin gently pulled at Leo.

“If I may?” Odin asked.

“Please.” Leo’s voice was hoarse with the kiss from Niles and he loved it.

Odin kissed with a tinge of roughness that came from over excitement, like he was an oversized puppy that didn’t know his own strength. He pressed a bit too hard but also not hard enough. He kissed like Leo was a treasure that needed to be protected but also one he wanted to unravel completely. Leo melted into the kiss and when they pulled away, he felt dizzy, heated, and never in his life did Leo want more.

“How are you feeling?” Odin asked as he held Leo gently.

Leo touched his lips with his free hand and looked Odin and Niles squarely. “Kiss me again.”

They didn’t need to be told twice.

~

Falling into a tentative relationship with Niles and Odin was thrilling and scary all mixed into one. After they had kissed each other breathless, they all pushed their beds together and cuddled, Leo in the middle. The warmth from Odin and Niles was perfection and Leo drifted asleep with ease.

The next day, Leo couldn’t stay away from their sides. Or maybe they couldn’t stay away from his. They all ate breakfast together, huddled in a warm triangle and they spent their time on the ship with each other.

Leo learned a few things about them in that short time span. He learned that Niles had a crisscrossing scar on his shoulder that was only visible up close. He saw some other raised scars on Odin’s body, obviously from melee weapons. Leo also learned that letting Odin look at his legs (even though they hadn’t been bothering him in a while, despite the lightning pattern like scars) was a thousand times more sensitive now that they were sort of falling into a relationship.

Then, on their final day aboard the ship, Leo noticed that Odin was pacing just a little bit more, his eyes darting around, scanning the ocean. When land started to come distantly into view, he looked a bit sick. Leo wasn’t sure what was wrong and it sent a bit of fear inside of him. Maybe Odin was worried over their mission. Having their feelings out in the open had clouded Leo from their true purpose and the anticipation burned inside of Leo. Maybe Odin was worried they’d be denied. That possibility was one Leo had thought before and it came back in full force.

“It will go well.” Niles firmly said when Leo voiced his thoughts over dinner that evening. “We cannot influence the future; we just have to move towards it.”

“You’re right.” Leo stabbed a carrot with his fork. “We can do this.”

That evening they slept a little less fitfully than normal. The next morning, they were approaching Regna Ferox and the port. When they docked, Leo took a glance at Odin. He looked calm, but the same way an ocean looked calm before a storm, Odin looked like he was about to burst at any
Leo hoped that wasn’t a sign of bad things to come.

Once they were on land and passed the guards, Odin moved with ease, almost like he was doing things on instinct. “We’ll reach the main base of Regna Ferox by this evening if we manage to get some horses and don’t run into any troubles.”

“All right. Lead the way.” Leo felt his heart almost burst.

As they walked through the town and towards some stable that clearly allowed people to hire rides to and from places, Leo took a look around the town. It was different and similar at the same time. The architecture was bit different, looking heavy and hearty, built for chilly winds and storms. Streets were wider and the clothes people wore looked heavier and warmer. The language that was spoken was a bit jilted, angular, and sharp. It was as precise as a sword’s edge. Leo also noticed the writing, angular and straight, made mostly of lines, very few curls and circles.

Odin spoke fluently, a bit stiff, but soon he seemed to find his cadence. He talked with the owner of the rental shop and soon a man, easily older than all of them, came out and began to talk to Odin more. Some coins were exchanged and the man left.

“We’ll be accompanied by one of the workers.” Odin told Niles and Leo in the span of silence. “We should arrive by early evening. Do you know how to ride a horse?”

That question was obviously angled at Leo. “I do. I learned when I was young. It’s been a while though.”

“Then you can ride with me or Niles.” Odin nodded. “It doesn’t matter who you pick.”

“I wouldn’t mind the company.” Niles offered. “Besides, you may need to talk to others and get off an on horses.”

“All right.”

The man then came out with the horses and Leo felt a flutter as he tried to remember how horse riding was done. Thankfully, he didn’t make an embarrassment out of himself as he got on. Once they were set, they began to move, travelling through the town.

Once they left, Leo took in the scenery. It was a bit similar to Nohr, with pine trees, and a bit rockier terrain, but Regna Ferox was greener and lusher. It wasn’t barren and Leo spotted many plants and animals he was unfamiliar with. There were also some mountains in the distance but they only made the scenery feel bigger and grander, rather than boxed in.

“Say,” Niles suddenly said, “Odin must really be worried about this.”

“Oh?” Leo hugged Niles a bit tighter.

“His shoulders have been hunched and he’s been running his palms together over and over.” Niles stated. “He also has this look in his eyes.”

“You said we can’t worry about what will happen next.” Leo pointed out. “I have to believe things will go well.”

Niles paused. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to make you feel insecure. I’m just worried about Odin. It’s rather odd to see him so quiet.”
“I know what you mean. I remember how you two introduced yourselves.”

Niles laughed. “We made quite the entrance. To be far, you made quite the impression.”

Leo laughed, remembering. “I suppose I did.”

Their conversation then drifted, to food and to mundane things. When they took breaks, Leo looked at Odin who was pacing around, muttering to himself. It made Leo feel a bit worried but he held onto Niles’ words and pressed on.

By the time dusk was setting lightly, they were clearly reaching a fortress. It was massive and Leo stared at the looming structure. It was made entirely of stone and the surrounding was made with thick logs, creating a spiked gate.

“We’re here.” Odin announced as they reached the main path up to the gate.

This was it. Leo got off the horse and watched as Odin chatted with the man that accompanied them. A bit more coin was passed and soon Odin was back with them. “He’ll be able to get shelter in the village but for us, we’re going to take a different path.”

It wasn’t a surprise that there was a settlement in the fortress. What surprised Leo was hearing they were taking a different path. Odin seemed to know where he was going. He walked around and towards a side entrance that had some guards posted. The moment the guards spotted them, they stared, their weapons going slack in their hands. Leo watched as Odin seemed to freeze before he kept pushing them towards the entrance.

Up close, Leo could see the guards were definitely not people anyone would want to mess with. The woman was buff and she probably could bench press a mountain. Her companion was slightly smaller but just as bulky. She too could probably bench press a mountain and some. Not that it mattered; their expressions up close looked like people who had seen a ghost.

Odin said something and the taller one snapped to attention and soon was calling someone inside. A beat passed. Leo shifted a little. He felt Niles shift too. What was going on? Leo wanted to ask but he wasn’t sure if speaking would help. What if the guards thought they were plotting something? Best to keep his questions to himself.

“They’re here.” Odin suddenly said.

They turned out to be a tall dark skinned man with an eye patch and who was entirely bald. His outfit was minimal but Leo could see he was built. An axe was at his side. The woman who followed had pale hair, dark skin, and a sword at her side. She also had armour on that looked heavy yet she moved with ease. These had to be the Khans. What did he say? Leo opened his mouth, wanting to find something to say when the man took one look at Odin and raced over towards him.

Whatever Leo expected the man to do, the last thing he expected was the man to smack Odin upside the head, like Odin was a misbehaving child, and proceed to grab his ear, again, like he was a misbehaving child.

“You!!!” Basilio, as Leo remembered correctly, “You have some nerve, boy!”

The shock of understanding Basilio only was overwritten by Odin’s response.

“I can explain…”

“Zip it!” Basilio thundered, dragging Odin inside. “I cannot believe the stunt you have pulled. Do
you realise how much I’ve been hounded and poked at?” He sent a glare at Odin. “They’re all blaming me! ME!” He exclaimed. “I know I’ve told stories about running off with travelling troops but THIS!” Basilio broke his sentence off. “We’re the ones who had to hear ALL of it from your parents!”

They were now moving at a rather fast pace. Leo tried to keep up with them. No one seemed to pay any attention to him and Niles but the guards seemed to realise they were with Odin, so it didn’t seem like an issue.

Odin was gaping, his words coming out in broken thoughts. “But you –”

“Why would you take after Basilio in any capacity?” Flavia finally spoke, cutting Odin off this time. “What was running through your thick head?” She also proceeded to smack Odin upside the head, all while Basilio was still tugging on his ear.

“Ow…” Odin groaned. “Look, if I could explain and introduce –”

“You’re not saying another WORD.” Flavia snapped.

“I kept telling them that I’ve TOLD you that you’re supposed to do as I say not as I DO.” Basilio’s voice was overlapping with Flavia’s voice.

“If I could –” Odin was still trying.

Basilio and Flavia shot Odin a strong glare and all but manhandled him inside. They kept walking down a large torchlit hallway. Other guards stared at their group, but Basilio and Flavia moved like they were on a mission. They practically barrelled down anyone in their path and when they finally were in a private room, Basilio all but threw Odin down into a chair. He and Flavia circled him, like the most disappointed parents on the planet.

“I went off for a good, noble purpose.” Odin finally got a sentence in. “I was able to save –”

“I told you to ZIP IT!” Basilio thundered. “You are not going to defend your actions, young man. Months! Months of us being blamed! We were supposed to watch you, we’re supposed to be like your guardians even if you’re technically an adult.” It sounded like Basilio was quoting someone else.

“We had to endure being treated like we were the ones in the wrong for months. Flavia added with a cold tone. “You, are in a world of trouble.”

“I’m sorry.” Odin finally tumbled out. “I –”

“Oh, you’ll be sorry all right.” Flavia calmly but deathly stated. “Starting with the extra duties you’re going to do effective immediately.”

“Extra –” Odin started to protest.

“No back talk, young man.” Basilio snapped. “As of this moment, you’re effectively GROUNDED.”

Leo stared. Grounded? Like a small child? Like… a misbehaving child? No leader would treat their soldier like a child. Odin had to stand up for himself, prove that he couldn’t be pushed around and talked down like…

“All right.”
“Good.” Flavia and Basilio said at the same time. “Now, GO TO YOUR ROOM.” Their voices echoed in unison.

And Odin, to Leo’s utter confusion, stood up, nodded, and gave Leo and Niles one long look. “I’ll…”

“Oh no you don’t. Save your explanations to them for later.” Flavia stopped him. “Room. Now.” Odin began to move but Basilio grabbed his shoulder. “Before you go, what do you say to us?”

Odin looked at Leo and Niles quickly before he looked at Basilio and Flavia.

“I’m sorry, Uncle Basilio, Aunt Flavia.” His voice dropped. “For all the trouble I’ve caused.”

“Thank you. Now, go to your room.” Flavia repeated.

“And start your duties by cleaning your room. It’s dusty and filthy.” Basilio added.

Odin, capable, strong Odin who Leo was feeling like the image of was crumbling to pieces stood up, nodded and left the room. He called the Khans Uncle and Aunt. He knew them more than he had let on earlier. Leo knew nothing about the Khans and their families but if Odin really was related to them then Leo had been travelling with someone with political power for a long while. He had kissed…

“Now that he’s taken care of.” Flavia’s tone was perfectly calm. “We can have our discussion. Sorry, that’s been building for months. I’m Flavia the Eastern Khan. This is Basilio, the Western Khan.”

“You’re Odin’s uncle and aunt?” Leo found himself blurtling out. Not the first words he expected to say.

“Odin?” The two of them blinked before they shrugged. “We’re his godparents.” Basilio clarified. “His father was one of my Champions. We’ve known him since he was a little tot.”

“We can discuss that later.” Flavia assured. “For now, if we had to take a guess, you’re Prince Leo of Nohr, right?”

She was deadly. Leo suddenly realised that she wasn’t a leader just because of her physical skills in battle. She was smart and calculating. Leo hadn’t been in the spotlight for years and she immediately knew who he was.

“I am.” Leo had no reason to hide it. “It’s an honour to meet you.”

“Like wise.” Basilio grinned before he and Flavia sat down, upright and strong. “So, tell us, Prince Leo of Nohr, why have you ventured to our gracious land of Regna Ferox along with our wayward godson?”

This was it. The moment of truth. Leo gathered all of his energy and shoved the baffling interaction with Odin to the side. “We, as in my siblings and I, want to take down our father and restore Nohr to it’s former glory. We’ve travelled here to ask for your aid, in your battle prowess and assistance on the battle field.”

Chapter End Notes
Returning to the Sage's place: Sorry I legit racked my brain to think of better place but couldn't. To me though, it makes sense, the Rainbow Sage's place to me transcends space and time and I think appears when it needs to appear to the right people. Also explains why the exits can be wherever they desire.

Knowing the Khans: Well, Odin isn't technically lying.

Knowing the Exalt: I laughed when writing that line.

Niles as a hair dresser: I just see him being a good hair cutter?

Leo's dream: Apparently nothing to Leo is hotter than having short hair and making out with Niles and Odin and like I can respect that.

And There Was Only One (1) Bed: I am allowed one hotel cliche in my fanfics thank you very much.

Boat: I just imagined with all their magic and whatnot that they can invent some magical boats and such. It just frustrates me in fantasy worlds where they can summon lightning but can't figure out how to make some transport more efficient is all I'm saying here. That being said I had them use horses to get to Regna Ferox because holding onto someone when on a horse is the best imagery 10/10.

Panic attack: I imagine that Leo can't be alone in libraries any more. It's too similar to his tower.

Kiss: I debated a lot if I should have them kiss this early and it won in the end.

Basilio and Flavia and Grounding Odin: I cannot tell you how long I've had that scene planned out. I was so excited to write it!!!
Family and Alliances

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone!!!

Sorry for this chapter being so late! Honestly, this was a very difficult chapter to write. I had a lot of scenes that didn't flow the way I wanted them. Plus, I've hit the part where my planning is less clear. I had very solid scenes planned up until this point so I had to take a step back and think a bit more. However, I hope you like this chapter as I did enjoy writing it.

I don't have a lot to say other than I do have a note regarding Lucina at the bottom that may clear things up for you in case something is missed. I'll touch on that in the story proper later.

As always feel free to leave kudos and comments. Those always make my day. Also if you want you can check my tumblr out/ask me things regarding this fic at the link here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Part Three: Truth and Battles

Silence, thick and warm was threatening to settle into the cracks between Leo’s words and the response from the Khans. However, before silence could even trickle into the air, Basilio slapped the table and laughed merrily.

“About time someone officially asks us.” He roared between his laughter. “No need to be so formal, boy.”

Flavia pursed her lips for a moment before she nodded with a hint of a smile on her face. “King Garon has been violating treaty rights sneakily and it’s starting to piss us off. It's time for action beyond simple negotiation. Those have all fallen through or have been outright denied anyway. We’ll assist you.”

“Damn right we will.”

Leo waited for the other shoe to drop, some sort of conditional agreement from the two, but they merely grinned again and stood up, chairs scraping against the floor.

“We’ll discuss in more detail later. Right now, it looks like you need some rest and a bath.” Flavia said, “Please, allow us to escort you to a room. You’re our honoured guests and once you have a bath and some rest, we’ll send someone to grab you for dinner.”

The ease at which they had accepted Leo’s proposal made his head spin. All the arguments and words he had thought up were useless, evaporated into the wind. Scrambling, Leo bowed, remembering his manners. Being caught off guard wasn’t an excuse to be rude to his host and hostess.

“Your hospitality is much appreciated.”
Basilio nodded back along with Flavia.

“We’re honoured to have you here. Please, follow us. Regna Ferox can be a bit tricky to navigate.”

They were led through stone hallways lit with torches. Leo made a small note of the turns they took, despite everything looking relatively the same. There were a few doors along the way on either side and Leo made a small note of how many they passed. When they reached the end of the hallway, they took a staircase up. The second floor was similar to the bottom floor but they didn’t walk as long. A few moments later they were in front of a large wooden door. Basilio opened the door and revealed a bedroom. The bedroom was modest in size with a comfortable looking bed, a small vanity, and small bathroom for refreshing.

“This is your guest room.” Basilio told them. “You’re welcome to come and go as you please. Though we do suggest if you end up lost to ask a soldier. They’d be more than happy to assist you. If you’re up to it, food is always served until the late hours of the morning in the mess hall. Just ask one of the guards for directions.”

“Also, as a forewarning, Odin will be doing chores for us until tomorrow evening. If you want to talk to him after, that’s up to you three.” Flavia added.

Odin. Leo had shoved that tidbit to the back of his mind. Now that he wasn’t overwhelmed with asking Basilio and Flavia for assistance, Leo needed to tackle the strangeness of what had happened.

“You grounded him like a child,” Leo pointed out blandly, “and he agreed. That’s a rather unorthodox method of discipline.”

Flavia looked at Basilio who laughed. “He’s our godson.”

“He’s your soldier too.” Niles sharply added. “That doesn’t help credibility.”

Basilio and Flavia’s eyes hardened. Leo didn’t back down and looked directly at them.

“Joking aside,” Flavia started, “we’re aware of what our order appears to an outsider’s perspective. However, before he was our soldier, Odin is our godson. We didn’t send him to his room because he disobeyed orders as a soldier. We sent him away because he’s our godson, we love him, and were worried about him for far too long. Odin understood this and that’s why he obeyed us.”

“We’d never think of tarnishing Odin’s reputation for laughs.” Basilio added. “We specifically made light of it because we figured Odin trusts you two. He wasn’t humiliated or embarrassed. It’s because, I’d wager, he trusts you two. Odin trusts you know him intimately enough that our treatment was understood by the two of you. To Odin, his reputation wasn’t tarnished or in jeopardy, I assure you.”

“So, that brings us to the question of the evening.” Flavia continued. “Did our treatment of Odin tarnish the image of him you already have?”

Leo exhaled, his mind swimming. That level of care and love Flavia and Basilio must feel towards Odin. Flavia said it first; Odin was their godson before he was their soldier. That meant their love for Odin came before any order. It pained Leo internally, a small jab in his chest. Odin had grown up with love from parental figures. Leo couldn’t remember that.

“You need not answer us.” Basilio softly muttered. “We’ll leave you two to your devices.”

The two left, leaving Leo and Niles at the door of the guest room. Leo clutched the door’s frame with tight fingers and stared at the Khan’s retreating backs. Everything felt a bit out of place.
“Leo.” Niles was beside him, touching his shoulder. “Breathe. Let’s wash up and figure out what to do next after. One thing at a time.”

“Right.”

Leo let go of the door and walked into the room. Shutting the door behind them, Leo noticed that they also had a window. He immediately went to open it, looking out at the vast courtyard below.

“Do you want some privacy?” Niles asked. “I can request a separate room if you wish.”

The sheer thought of being alone in an unfamiliar place, even if that place that was friendly to them, sent a full-bodied shiver down Leo’s spine.

“No, please stay with me.”

“Of course.” Niles agreed. “Now, let's figure out how the bath in this room works.”

After the bath (a nice hot, refreshing bath), Leo found he had zero energy to even consider eating. Instead, he half flopped into the bed, wearing some loose Regna Ferox style clothes found in the closet, and crawled under the covers. Leo had drifted off but hadn’t truly fallen asleep when Niles appeared, crawling gingerly into the bed.

“Sorry. I’m not making you uncomfortable, am I?” Niles asked, keeping distance.

Leo would have scoffed if he had the energy. They had kissed multiple times and had cuddled afterwards before. Instead, Leo scooted over and into Niles’s arms. The archer immediately wrapped them around Leo and Leo curled into Niles. The direct contact soothed the ache that had long burned in Leo’s soul and heart.

“You’ll never make me uncomfortable.” Was what Leo wanted to say. Except his mouth couldn’t move and his eyes barely wanted to open. Snuggling closer into Niles, Leo shut his eyes, feeling gravity tug his eyelids down.

“Hold me.” Leo ended up requesting.

“Of course.” Niles responded and kissed the top of Leo’s head.

Sleep gobbled Leo up a second later, taking him under with Niles’s warmth as company.

~

Morning arrived with a bright flare of light and warmth. Leo snuggled under the covers of a proper bed and felt the heat from Niles wash over him. Wiggling a bit, Leo opened his eyes and saw Niles, still asleep, lying beside him. Their bodies were entangled and Leo found himself not wanting to move to wake Niles up. Instead, he lay in bed for a little while longer and pressed his head against Niles’s chest, listening to his heart beat. The rhythm was comforting but internally Leo knew he was missing someone.

Odin. Leo softly exhaled. The conversation with Basilio and Flavia floated in his mind. Their question had been left unanswered but Leo knew his answer. He also suspected Basilio and Flavia knew it as well.

“Good morning. Someone’s thoughts are loud.” Niles muttered against Leo’s hair, hand brushing the nape of Leo’s neck.
“Good morning.” Leo moved so he was looking at Niles properly. “Did I wake you?”

“No, but you’re not an unpleasant person to wake up to.” Niles immediately responded with a smile.

Leo flushed at the compliment and swiftly changed the subject. “I was thinking about Odin.”

“I figured.” Niles kept playing with the nape of Leo’s neck. “I keep replaying how I met Odin and now the realization of how little I actually knew about him until now. It’s a hollow feeling. Would Odin have ever told us if we didn’t have to come here to Regna Ferox? How do you feel?”

Immediately Leo thought of when he first met Odin, how he had boldly proclaimed he was going to help. Leo thought of how Odin had sworn loyalty and then proceeded to be beside Leo through the journey of finding his siblings. Odin, who had healed Leo’s legs, Odin who had accepted Leo. Yet, Niles had a point. When was Odin going to tell them? Sure, Leo was new to Odin but Odin had known Niles for an entire year. They were close enough to start a relationship yet not close enough for Odin to tell Niles the truth. However, without Odin to clarify Leo was just going to run his mind around in circles.

Leo exhaled. “I’m not sure. I don’t think we can make a judgement before talking to Odin ourselves. I cannot speak for you, and I imagine your time with Odin before meeting me is influencing your thoughts. However, I think regardless of what Odin has or hasn’t said we need to find him.”

Niles hummed and dropped his hand from the nape of Leo’s neck. “You have a valid point. I’ll withhold my judgement for now, until we can see Odin later on today.”

That sealed that train of thought. Leo slowly sat up and stretched, feeling his stomach rumble. “I don’t know about you, but all this talking has made me hungry.”

“Same.” Niles sat up. “We didn’t eat last night. Let’s see if we can find someone to show us to the dining hall.”

Washing up rather quickly and changing into a clean set of clothes, Leo and Niles left their room and went down the stairs. True to Flavia and Basilio’s words, there were a few guards who, when asked, were more than eager to show them to the dining hall.

The dining hall consisted of long heavy wooden tables and low rafters. There were some windows as well, but they were shut. Still, natural light soaked into the room, giving a warm white tone to the entire setting. A few people were mingling around, sitting and chatting. Leo didn’t recognize anyone but no one batted an eyelash at them. Leo appreciated it. After grabbing some food, Leo sat down with Niles and began to eat. Regna Ferox food was hearty but not heavy in the way Nohrian food was. Leo found himself enjoying the whole grain bread, the warm stewed vegetables, and the sausages. He was just polishing off his plate when Flavia walked in, sitting down right next to him with a heavy sound due to the armour she was wearing.

“Good morning.” She greeted. “Sleep well?”

“We did, thank you.” Leo politely replied.

“Glad to hear it.” She eyed them before she leaned back. “Any ideas what you want to do for the day?”

Leo looked at Niles and then back at Flavia. “I thought we were going to have a discussion?”

“We will.” Flavia assured Leo. “As soon as the envoy from Ylisse arrives.”
An envoy from Ylisse? “I didn’t know people from Ylisse were arriving.”

“My apologies.” Flavia replied. “We didn’t intend to keep that information a secret. We thought it best to not overwhelm you with information. This envoy from Ylisse is arriving not because of you. They’ve been on their way for the past few days to discuss what to do about the potential threat of Nohr. You arriving on our doorstep was a happy coincidence.”

“I see.” Leo bit his lip. That made sense.

“You’ll be welcomed in our discussions.” Flavia needlessly assured him. “However, in the meantime, perhaps I can suggest a few things to keep you occupied? We have an extensive library that’s open to all. The training fields and grounds are also open to you. You can even explore beyond the fortress if you wish, just ask for a guide.”

Leo’s feet immediately protested at walking to the town and he had sat in more than enough libraries (though he wanted to check it out later). “Maybe the training field?”

“Good idea.” Flavia smiled and her teeth gleamed. “A warrior must always be ready. I can take you to the training field right now if you wish.”

Well, Leo was done his breakfast. “I’d appreciate that.”

Flavia stood up and Leo followed her along with Niles. They passed others down a hall until they ended up outside. Once Leo’s eyes adjusted to the shift in light, he saw how the grounds were divided up. There were large circular pits of dirt for people to practice in teams or groups. There were sections for individual practice as well. People of all sorts with all kinds of practice weapons walked around. Off the side was an archery gallery that Leo saw Niles immediately narrow in on.

“Welcome, to training ground one.” Flavia told them. “We have another one indoors in case of poor weather. You can pick up a practice weapon in the storage there.” She pointed to a small building off the side that Leo hadn’t noticed.

“Thank you.” Niles moved first, casting Leo a look.

“Have fun.” Leo bid him farewell.

Niles looked at Leo like he wanted to say something more but he left. No doubt he was going to go to the archery range.

“So, what weapon do you use?” Flavia asked Leo.

“Magic.” Leo replied still looking at Niles and his retreating back for a moment before turning his gaze back to Flavia.

“Magic is a good weapon.” Flavia hummed. “Though I know most mages have a secondary weapon.”

That was the golden question. Leo swallowed. His sword lessons with Gunter felt too far away and too distant. His mind then flashed to the lances and spears he’d been seeing around recently. Leo’s fingers itched. He could use a sword just like Xander. However, that felt wrong. Leo hadn’t really pondered using a lance beyond a few times but now, in the field of Regna Ferox, Leo made up his mind.

“I think maybe I want to learn how to use a lance or spear.” Leo said aloud. The words immediately clicked into the air, solid and warm.
“A spear or lance huh?” Flavia mused. “Well, we have some experts around here somewhere. I can go grab one and you can start. No time like the present, right?”

Leo found a smile worming on his face. “You’re right.”

The expert Flavia found for Leo was a quiet man named Ren that spoke with such authority that Leo found himself immediately respecting him. The basic exercises were challenging, as Leo hadn’t had as much physical practice in years, but Ren was patient. After what felt like hours, but really couldn’t have been more than one hour, Leo was told to take a break.

“It’s best to build up stamina rather than push yourself too hard too fast.” Ren told Leo. “I’ll be here in the morning tomorrow. If you’re free you’re welcome to join.”

“Thank you.” Leo said, wiping his brow. “I appreciate it.”

Leaving the field, Leo went to search for Niles. He easily found Niles, surrounded by some soldiers that were looking at Niles with wide eyes. Leo smiled to himself. It was easy to be star struck by Niles and his abilities. Hanging back, Leo was going to let Niles finish up but then the archer turned to Leo and that all changed. Niles smiled before smoothly walking away from the soldiers surround him and to Leo’s side, touching his hair gently.

“Leo, you’re finished with practice?” Niles asked.

“I am.” Leo replied.

“Then, let’s go have a bath together.” Niles easily said before he linked their hands together.

Leo looked at their hands and flushed a bit when Niles whisked them away from the crowd. It was only when they were inside that Niles spoke.

“My apologies if I was too blunt out there. I don’t mind attention but some were hanging off me a bit too much.”

They were? Leo cocked his head. “I didn’t notice.”

“You didn’t see it.” Niles supplied. “I figured it was best to show them I’m taken.”

Taken. By him and Odin. Leo felt a warm flutter in his chest. “That’s fine. I don’t mind.”

“Good.”

They ended up back in their room and had a quick bath. After their bath, Leo and Niles at in the mess hall again. There were a few more people and their voices melded together stronger, but Leo still enjoyed the atmosphere, the life that the mess hall brought.

“What do you want to do after?” Niles asked. “Some magic training?”

Leo sipped his soup. “I was advised to take things easy since I’m still building up my muscle. However, some simple magic might be nice as a work out.”

“Then, let’s find a place.” Niles replied.

Together was strongly implied and Leo felt a flutter in his heart. “Okay.”
They ended up in a small empty room by their quarters. The room was made entirely of stone, no windows, and had a thin layer of dust on some of the chests and abandoned items stacked in the corners haphazardly. Leo cast a spell to remove the dust and then a spell to move objects around. He cleaned up the room and then when things were in order, Leo found some candles and absentmindedly practiced lighting them and extinguishing them. Niles just lay on the floor and occasionally showed off his flexibility by stretching in varying ways.

By the time they finished Leo was exhausted and his stomach was grumbling. The room was clean however, minus the smell of candles and fire waffling in the air.

“Time to eat?” Leo asked. “I wonder what time it is.”

“Who knows?” Niles smoothly got off the floor in a way that didn’t use his hands. Leo stared. “Let’s go and check.”

Walking out of the room, Leo saw it was still fairly light outside. It couldn’t be close to supper time. Perhaps he didn’t waste as much time cleaning the room as he thought he had. Niles however, smoothly lay an arm around Leo’s shoulder, his warmth seeping into Leo.

“I’ll ask for a snack and then we can check that library I know you’ll want to check out some time.”

Leo flushed. “You’re right.”

Niles managed to procure a pot of tea and some cookies. Leo munched on one as they walked towards the library. Entering, Leo saw all the shelves and the books on them. He saw the tables and immediately walked inside, the tea and cookies forgotten. Trailing his hands lightly over the covers, Leo wiped them hastily before grabbing a book titled *Regna Ferox: The Complete Restoration History*. Some point in time, Niles poured Leo some tea and passed it to him, but Leo barely remembered what kind of tea he was drinking. The book was thankfully written in a common language and Leo found himself only losing the finer details in a few parts.

He was half way through another book (his third or fourth book?) when the door to the library opened. For a moment, Leo didn’t look up but he heard Niles stand up. Tearing his eyes away from the pages, Leo saw Odin standing in the entry way.

Odin was dressed differently. He had a coat that was yellow with some fur lining. His pants looked a bit heavier and his boots too. A thick leather belt was around his waist with a small red tassel for decoration. His sword wasn’t strapped to his back, but Leo saw the workings of the belt meant to hold a sword in place. Leather arm guards ran from his elbow to his hand, only showing his palms and not the back of his hand.

His eyes were also wide and his skin a bit pale. Odin’s mouth opened a few times, shutting the same amount of times, before he stepped inside with a large stride.

“I figured you’d be here.” Odin’s voice was low, smooth, not loud and warm. It sent Leo’s skin shivering in the wrong way.

“You guessed right.” Niles replied, his voice neutral.

“I—” Odin started before he exhaled softly. “I owe you two an apology.”

Leo opened his mouth to speak but Niles beat him to it.

“You owe us an explanation as well.”
“I do.” Odin replied automatically, though Leo saw him flinch. “Let’s sit down?”

That was more addressed to Niles. Leo saw Niles narrow his eye before he sat down beside Leo. Odin took the long way around the table and sat on the other side. Leo swallowed and was glad Odin was on the other side, where they could see him.

“I’m not too sure where to start.” Odin softly said.

“Start with why you kept being the godson of the Khans a secret.” Leo suggested though he already half had the answer in his mind.

“Mainly political reasons.” Odin easily answered what Leo was thinking. “Nohr and Regna Ferox weren’t on stable political terms when I left a year ago and I didn’t want to stir any trouble when I was in Nohr. I’m sorry. I suppose my paranoia bled into even you Niles.” Odin looked directly at the archer. “I always meant to tell you and now that you’re here.” Odin exhaled heavily. “I want to tell the truth. I’m sorry I kept so much hidden. I have other things I need to tell you.”

Odin reached at his waist and dug around in his belt before pulling out the magical dagger. Leo stared at the blade. It appeared to be a regular dagger when sheathed but Leo knew that the blade glowed. The hilt was still covered by Odin’s hand as he gripped it tightly.

“So, you’re going to finally tell us where you procured that?” Niles asked.

Odin exhaled very sharply and opened his mouth, only for the doors to the library to open up loudly. He wildly turned his head and Leo saw his face pale. Looking at the door, Leo saw two figures. One was a man with short dark hair and wearing an outfit similar to Odin’s just blue. The other was a woman with long blonde hair that curled slightly. She was wearing a dress that was the same shade of yellow as Odin’s outfit. A headband that appeared to be buttons was around her head, keeping the stray hair in place.

The sound that left Odin’s mouth was akin to a steam valve being opened and the steam hissing as it escaped. He stood up, clutching the magical dagger tightly in his hand. A half a beat of silence passed before the woman marched up to Odin and pulled him into a hug. She only measured up to Odin’s collar bones, but she easily tugged Odin down into a half hug.

“M-Mother.” Odin stammered out. “F-Father. I thought you weren’t going to be here until tomorrow.”

Leo blinked and the image slotted into place, the strangers easily filling the gaps.

Odin’s mother clutched him tightly before pulling him away, her face contorted with a mix of emotions that swirled like a thick cloud of rain and lightning.

“What were you thinking?!” She yelled at him. “Did you even THINK about how your father and I would feel? How your Uncle and Aunt would feel?”

“I…” Odin gaped. “We talked about the…”

“Oh?!” Odin’s mother hissed. “So, it’s ‘we’ now, is it? You two were in on it then, weren’t you? At least my niece has the decency to SEND LETTERS HOME EXPLAINING WHERE SHE IS.”

Leo could have heard a pin drop.

“Oh.”
“Oh indeed.” Odin’s father walked up and placed a hand on his wife’s shoulder. “You put your Uncle Basilio and Aunt Flavia in a very unfavourable position both personally and politically. Your disappearance act had to be kept very quiet.”

“And!!” Odin’s mother wiggled around and grabbed Odin’s hand. “To top it all off, you stole from the Family Treasury.”

Family Treasury? Leo’s eyes darted to the dagger. The Magical Dagger was just sitting in Odin’s Family Treasury? Just what kind of family did Odin come from?

“I didn’t steal!” Odin protested. “It’s called The Family Treasury for a reason.”

“That is no excuse for taking without permission.” Odin’s father sternly and rather coldly told Odin.

“I know…” Odin wiggled. “However, I can explain.”

“Oh, you will.” Odin’s mother replied very sharply. “You’ll explain to your Uncle too.”

Odin swallowed. “Oh… he’s here?” He then shifted and looked at Leo and Niles. “I know I cannot ask for a favour but I was going to explain to—”

“Your explanations can be for us all.” Odin’s mother firmly shut him down. “As I’m sure your explanations to them are going to be the same as for us.”

“Yes, but I haven’t even told them—” Odin started.

The door to the library once again opened and this time, another man walked in. He was tall with blue hair and bright eyes. He was dressed casually, nothing too flashy, but Leo saw the sword at his side and the mark on his arm.

Falchion and the Mark of the Exalt. This wasn’t the current Exalt, Emmeryn, but Prince Chrom. Leo straightened up. That meant the envoy from Ylisse had arrived. If that was the case, then Odin’s parents were living in Ylisse…

Then, Chrom spoke and everything shattered in a way Leo couldn’t have predicted.

“There you are.” Chrom walked over and patted Odin’s mother on the head. “I see you found your wayward son.” He then looked directly at Odin. “Hello, Owain. I hope you’re ready to explain the things Lucina hasn’t said in her letters to us.”

Owain. Odin wasn’t even his real name. Leo looked at Niles, who was still, frozen on the spot.

Then Odin or Owain spoke and the layers of lies and unspoken truths were exposed, raw and pulsing.

“I will do my best.”

“Good.” Odin’s mother growled lowly. “And?”

Odin exhaled and looked over at Leo and Niles, his expression torn, his eyes exposed and raw. Leo felt the unspoken apology to them, as though he had to apologize to them explicitly, before he looked at his parents. Just like with Basilio and Flavia earlier, Odin apologized.

“I’m sorry Mom, Dad, Uncle Chrom.”

Leo didn’t remember the next few minutes. The world slowly cracked around Odin and everything
Leo thought he knew about Odin (which, admittedly, wasn’t a lot) tumbled further out of existence. All Leo’s mind did was swirl around the words “Uncle Chrom”. Odin wasn’t Odin but Owain. Odin wasn’t just a simple traveler. He was a Prince. That meant that the woman Odin called mother was Princess Lissa. All the pieces clicked audibly in Leo’s mind, why Odin called Basilio and Flavia “Uncle” and “Aunt”. Why his disappearance would cause an issue.

Prince Owain.

Leo’s tongue felt heavy with the phrase. His blinked, trying to shake the feeling off and felt Niles’s hand on his shoulder. Whipping his head around, Leo looked at the archer, who was staring intently at Odin. Leo’s heart constricted and he wanted to touch Niles’s face, ask him what he was feeling.

Odin or Owain did that for them. He turned his head and Leo caught the raw emotion on his face. It danced like a crinkled piece of paper along the wind, caught up in a draft, unable to escape. Something bled behind Odin’s eyes, something viscous and dark. Leo opened his mouth and tasted the bitter salt of Odin’s heart, seeping and radiating off him.

“If I may,” Odin suddenly broke the silence, his voice quiet, soft, “I’d like a moment alone with Leo and Niles.”

Lissa opened her mouth but Leo saw Chrom place a firm hand on her shoulder. Her mouth shut and Leo saw something bleed from her form, slumping her posture. She suddenly looked worn, thin, a mere puppet on the last threads of fabric. Leo saw hollowness and pain curl in the emptiness of her body before she regained her posture, her eyes still bleeding the hollowness. Leo’s heart stopped for a moment and he wondered what it was like to have a mother figure with the unconditional love that was pouring from Lissa to Odin.

“Very well.” Lissa’s voice was also soft. “We’ll be in the main meeting room.”

They left, Lissa first, Odin’s father next, followed by Chrom. Chrom shot one last look at Leo and Niles, his expression open and curious, before he too was gone.

Odin stared at the door before he turned around. Leo saw his hands balled into fists and his mask break. For a second, Leo saw the true pulsing of Odin’s turmoil, curling like a snake trying to eat Odin out alive.

“I’m sorry.” Odin bit out so quickly the words almost stung Leo and Niles. “I swear, I swear I was going to come clean—” Odin cut himself off, “this isn’t how I wanted it.” His voice dropped and Leo tasted his tears. “I wanted to tell you on my own, no conditions, no pressure but my mother and father were here and—”

“What else have you hidden from us?” Niles cut Odin off effectively, neutrally. “Any other secrets before we’re thrust into a discussion with no idea who is on our side? Do we even know you?”

Odin full on flinched, everything open and exposed. He then looked up at Niles. His gaze hardened like an ice cube melting slowly from the inside. “I’m Prince Owain, son of Princess Lissa and Basilio’s Champion, Lon’qu. I decided to travel to Nohr after hearing about the turmoil and unfair treatment of the royal family’s heirs. I went under the guise of Odin Dark for protection. Odin and Owain aren’t different people. I know I should have said something earlier. I should have come clean. I have no excuses. I’m sorry.”

“You’re right.” Niles’s voice cracked. “You have no excuses. I thought we were a team, both partners and lovers. Was I mistaken?”
Odin opened his mouth, shut it, and then opened it again. “I want to say you are mistaken, that we are a team and that I love you. However, I know that’s wishful and not taking into account your feelings. I’ve hurt you. I’ve hurt you too, Leo.”

“Just, please,” Odin continued, “please trust me for a little while longer. Trust me when we talk at this meeting. Trust I’ll be your support for this conversation. Afterwards, you two can decide how to feel about me.”

Leo’s heart twisted and burned. His late arrival into the mess of his relationship with Odin and Niles made his feelings challenging. Odin had a point. Niles had a point. Leo was stuck in the middle. Lies and truth always intermingled and right now, Leo didn’t have the energy or time to doubt Odin.

“All right.” Leo made the choice. “I’m going to trust you for this meeting.”

“I appreciate it.” Odin simply replied. “Niles?”

Niles huffed and crossed his arms. “I’ll do what Lord Leo says, Odin.”

His emphasis wasn’t lost. Leo saw Odin bit his lip before he turned around. “Then, let’s go to this meeting.”

~

Unlike their last meeting, where it was in a smaller room, this meeting was held in a larger room. Upon arrival it was clear they were the last people present. Everyone was sitting around a circular table, Odin’s parents were side by side followed by Chrom, then Basilio and Flavia. They were lightly chatting but Leo felt their gazes heavily upon him. However, there was another person Leo wasn’t familiar with sitting beside Chrom, a man with blue armour and a stern expression. The last three chairs were side by side. Odin bit his lip at this, but he walked in and eventually sat down, taking the seat closest to Basilio. Leo stared at the seat beside Odin before he took it. Niles didn’t protest and when he sat down beside Leo, Leo swore he leaned in a bit at Leo’s side in gratitude. A bundle of knots wormed into Leo’s stomach and he swallowed down his words. They’d sort their feelings for Odin out later.

“Now that we’re all here, let’s start.” Basilio said, half standing up. “I assume formal introductions haven’t been done yet?”

“Not exactly.” Chrom replied. “My sincere apologies.” He looked directly at Leo and Niles, his expression warm. “I’m Prince Chrom of Ylisse. This is Frederick, an Ylissian Knight and one of my closest friends.”

“Greetings.” Frederick stiffly responded.

“I’m Princess Lissa.” Owain’s mother continued the introductions. “This is Lon’qu.”

Owain’s father gave a curt nod. Leo remembered how Basilio stated he was once his Champion. Marrying the Princess of Ylisse was a good reason to stop working for someone.

“You already know us.” Flavia hinted.

Leo swallowed. His turn. “I’m Prince Leo of Nohr.” Leo then looked at Niles. Should he introduce Niles as well?

Niles made the choice for Leo. “I’m Niles.”
“It’s an honour to meet you, Prince Leo.” Chrom took over. “I’ve heard only rumours however, I believe you can help paint a clearer picture of the situation in Nohr.”

Chrom was casual but it wasn’t stopping the pounding in Leo’s heart. This was it. He had to make a good impression. Everyone was counting on him.

“It was five years ago and my father—” Leo paused, “I mean King Garon received a prophesy that one of his heirs would kill him. He then cursed and locked us away. I only recently escaped with the help of Niles and…” Leo stopped and looked at Odin. Which name was he to use? Probably his proper name. “…Owain.” Leo saw Odin’s eyes widen at the use of his proper name. “I’m afraid to say I’m not sure of the state of Nohr beyond rumours. I heard King Garon was creating conflicts and strife with the neighbouring countries and meeting everyone here has made the situation a little clearer for me.”

Leo exhaled. “King Garon needs to be stopped. It’s why we arrived here, to ask for your support. We wish to end the conflict with King Garon in any way that’s necessary. I know I don’t have a lot to offer but I still ask for your assistance.”

Silence. Then Chrom spoke. “You said you were locked away. The rumours only leaked about a year ago. That’s when Owain disappeared.”

Owain swallowed audibly. “I wanted to help.” His voice barely hit Leo’s ears.

“So, you left without telling us, took the magical dagger from the Family Treasury, and traversed over to Nohr.” Lon’qu spoke flatly, stating the facts.

“You also managed to convince Lucina to go off.” Chrom added.

At this Odin pouted. “I most certainly didn’t convince Lucina to go. She’s the one who suggested in the first place.”

“Owain…” Lissa started.

“I’m serious, mother.” Odin cut in. “I know you’re upset with me and we can discuss that at a later time. You wish to know the state of Nohr? It’s dying. Commerce, economics, trade, it’s all dying. Jobs are being lost and people are starving. Death is sweeping through and along with desperation comes bandits and theft. King Garon’s actions display that he’s focused on war and conflict rather than helping his country. Even if he wasn’t threatening our treaties, Nohr needs assistance and it wouldn’t have assistance if we didn’t do something.”

Odin’s voice was increasingly becoming louder and Leo’s heart stopped at his words. Odin was defending Nohr. Odin wasn’t asking for glory or fame. He ran off to help Leo’s country in the way he could. Sure, he left without a word and given his position that was a terrible choice but Odin’s intentions were pure.

“So, let’s stop pretending we’re thinking about helping Nohr.” Odin continued. “We obviously are, especially since our peace is being threatened. Everyone is suffering and we cannot sit idly by.”

They were going to help him. Leo’s heart twisted in unspoken gratitude. Everyone seemed to soak Odin’s words up, a small smile gracing Basilio and Flavia’s faces.

“Owain is correct. Action is what’s needed. Diplomacy has been compromised. We cannot afford to wait. Lucina’s messages stated that Hoshido is feeling the most pressure and skirmishes have broken frequently.”
Wait. Lucina, as in Princess Lucina was in Hoshido? Leo looked at Odin. There was barely a twitch in his face at the news. He knew. Leo bit his lip and wondered if he had thought about Lucina when Xander stated he was going to Hoshido. Now wasn’t the time to worry. Turning to the group, Leo steeled himself.

Plans were made over the course of two hours. The main crux being, Ylisse and Regna Ferox needing to prepare and then meet them. With time being crucial, Leo did not have the luxury of waiting around. He had to return to the Rainbow Sage and report their alliance with Regna Ferox and Ylisse. That meant he had to travel back.

Travel back with Niles and Odin.

It was the natural suggestion and Leo couldn’t argue due to petty reasons. He could see Niles holding his tongue as well. When the meeting ended, Odin was swept up by his parents and Leo wasn’t going to get in the way with that. Stepping out, he headed back to the guest room. Dinner could be served but Leo wasn’t feeling hungry. All the thoughts of the afternoon spilled into his mind uncontrollably and Leo wanted a second to himself.

Shutting the door to the room, Leo flopped on the bed and stared up at the ceiling. Odin’s identity curled and lapped at Leo’s mind, reminding Leo of Odin’s lies. He had lied so brilliantly, so brightly. Not knowing Odin for long only made Leo’s stomach twist. What else was Odin keeping to himself? He had kept Lucina a secret for obvious reasons but Niles’s point flooded Leo’s mind. Niles was Odin’s partner. Surely, if they had known each other for a year and in that year, Odin could trust Niles with his secret, right?

Leo wasn’t sure. He closed his eyes and lay on the bed, his mind static. A while later, maybe only half an hour, the door opened and Niles walked in. He looked sweaty, a gleam on his brow and his hair stuck a bit to the side of his face.

“Archery range.” Niles told Leo in explanation.

“I see.” Leo sat up, biting his lip. “Niles…”

“I’m fine.” Niles cut in.

“You’re not.” Leo challenged. “I’m here to listen if you want.”

Niles’s lip twitched into a smile. “Thanks, Leo. Maybe later. I’m gross again and I’m taking advantage of having warm water easily at our disposal.”

“Right.” Leo nodded. “I’ll be here.”

Niles gave another smile and for a moment that was enough for Leo.

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The next morning with little time to spare, Leo started making preparations for leaving. Bags were packed and items given. Regna Ferox was generous and Leo wished he had more than just his words of gratitude. Basilio and Flavia waved them off but Leo still hoped in the future he could repay them.

Niles didn’t speak about Odin again after his shower. He instead brought them food from the dining hall and ate with Leo on the bed. Then, he curled into Leo, holding him tightly as they drifted asleep. Leo didn’t push and savoured the bed and Niles’s affections. When Leo woke up, Niles was already half dressed and out of bed. He left with a mention that he was going to the archery range again. Leo didn’t stop him and Niles smiled softly at that. He then kissed Leo very tenderly. They hadn’t kissed
since the ship over to Regna Ferox and Leo found himself melting into the affections further.

With bags packed and their journey starting back up in a few days, Leo took his time to really explore Regna Ferox, walking into all the rooms that were open and accessible to him. Leo then ended up out in the field for training. Deciding to continue practice with lance techniques, Leo found Ren and began to work out.

Time slipped past Leo and when he was thoroughly exhausted from the practice, he excused himself, ready to head inside, eat, and then wash up. However, a detour was taken through the gardens. From bushes to hedges, to flowers and trees: the garden had everything. Leo looked at some of the familiar and unfamiliar plants. Becoming lost in the array of flowers, Leo almost missed Lissa and Lon’qu if not for the flash of yellow out of the corner of his eyes.

For a moment, Leo thought he had run into Odin. Then, the dress came fully into view and Leo saw Lissa. Now that he wasn’t in a room talking about politics and strategy, Leo could study Lissa more.

She was shorter than Odin and Lon’qu but that wasn’t changing her disposition. Lissa stood tall and upright, both physically and internally. There was a gleam in her eyes, one that spoke of experience and weariness. A muted glow surrounded her and Leo couldn’t help but wonder if that glow had dimmed thanks to Odin’s disappearance. The love she held for Odin was foreign and made Leo’s skin prickle. He didn’t like thinking about it.

“Greetings.” Leo politely said to Lissa.

“Hello, Leo.” Lissa responded. “Just taking a stroll?”

“I am heading inside.” Leo told her.

“You’re not busy?” Lissa asked.

Leo stopped for a second.

“I’m not.”

“If you don’t mind then, could I have a moment of your time?” Lissa asked.

Leo looked at Lon’qu who stood impassively beside his wife. Biting his lip Leo looked at Lissa who had a soft, almost sad smile on her face. There was no reason for Leo to say no and the look Lissa was giving compelled Leo to move forward.

“I don’t mind.” Leo assured Lissa. “Perhaps you can tell me about some of these plants?”

Lissa’s smile became a bit less sad though still soft. “I can try. I’m more familiar with medical plants.”

Right. Leo remembered what Odin had said with what felt like eons ago. “You’re a healer.” He said without thinking.

Lissa paused, her eyes widening a bit before she spoke. “Owain told you, didn’t he?”

“He did.”

“Tell me,” Lissa continued, “what was Owain like? What impression do you have of him?”

Impression of Odin, huh? Leo looked at the flowers and suddenly wished he had declined Lissa’s request. His mind was still swirling with thoughts on Odin but not answering Lissa would be rude.
She was his mother and she had the right to know what her son had been up to. Leo wasn’t sure how much Odin would have told his own parents.

“He burst into my tower without hesitation.” Leo said. “He was very eager to help me and has been a faithful companion. Without Odin and Niles, I would still be in the tower. My hope was fading. Perhaps I would have given up.”

A burst of warmth filled Leo’s heart. He had been saved by them. When he really thought about it, Odin and Niles had given him hope. They had freed him and also travelled with him. They had been his faithful companions up to this point and Leo suddenly felt like that wouldn’t change.

“Odin, huh?” Lon’qu suddenly spoke.

Leo flushed and shoved his thoughts away. “I mean Owain. My apologies. He introduced himself to me as Odin and it’s a habit now.”

Lon’qu looked at Leo for a moment before he snorted. “No need to apologize. My son has always held an imaginative mind.”

“I just cannot believe he used such an old alias.” Lissa mused with a small snort. “Odin Dark, remember that, dear?”

A soft light in Lon’qu’s eyes spoke of days that had long passed but still occupied a space in the man’s heart. “I do.”

The information perked Leo’s ears. “Old alias?”

“Oh!” Lissa suddenly shifted, a sly smile filling her face. “Do you want to know?” She then saddled closer to Leo. “Tell me this first, what is your relationship with my son?”

Leo spluttered, his face burning a touch. “I… I suppose…”

Did he know the answer? Leo’s mind scrambled. Sure, they had kissed, but was that indicating more? They had kissed, all three of them. Leo’s mind burned and he wondered if Lissa and Lon’qu could smell the fumes.

“I see.” Leo flailed. Was it written on his face? “You’re close to Owain. He considers you special, just like that silent, but brooding archer… Niles, yes?”

Brooding was the right word for Niles presently. Leo hadn’t thought it but hearing Lissa label him as such made him laugh. “I suppose that’s a word for Niles at the moment. He’s taking Odin’s true identity in his own way.”

“I don’t blame him.” Lissa muttered.

There were many things unspoken. Leo tasted a bit, the salt of sadness and the bitterness of tears.

“I believe you three can work things out.” Lissa then said with confidence. “Now, if you want to learn a bit more about Owain, why don’t you tell me a bit more about your journey here?”

Information exchange. In Nohr if this occurred Leo would have read it as someone merely using him for her own gains. However, here, with Lissa and in Regna Ferox, Leo knew that she was sincere.

“Very well. I can do that.”

“Excellent. Let’s sit down and get a pot of tea. I have a feeling we’ll be a while.”
Lissa was in the middle of telling Leo a rather involved story with a cat, horse, and a leek, when Odin walked up to them. Leo had sat for the better half of an hour listening to tales of Odin as a child, about the antics he had found himself in. They painted a vivid and bright picture of Odin. If Leo could associate a colour with Odin’s life it would be yellow. It was filled with joy, with warmth, with love. Leo’s own heart ached at the tales but worrying over his experiences wasn’t going to change anything.

However, seeing Odin stumble into them made the love his parents felt burn a bit hotter. Leo saw the pause in all three of their faces before Lissa continued boldly on. Leo couldn’t hear her words. He looked at Odin’s reddening face and pinkening ears.

“Mother!”


“I—” Odin started. “No… I just… could I speak to Leo in private?”

“You can ask him yourself, Owain.” Lon’qu reminded Odin at the same time Lissa said “Owain, you’re being rude. Leo is right here.”

Leo saw Odin’s ears turn darker in colour. He turned to Leo. “If I could speak to you in private?”

This was what Leo wanted. To hear Odin’s story. He still had to pause and look at Lissa and Lon’qu who both gave nods (Lon’qu’s a bit more discreet than Lissa’s), as though Leo needed encouraging.

“Very well.” Leo responded, not missing the exhale from Odin and the relaxation of his shoulders. “Let’s head inside.”

They walked in and Leo suddenly wasn’t too sure where to talk to Odin. Was going back to the room the right option? Should he try to find Niles? Odin, however, made the choice. He led Leo down the hall to an empty room. It had a table and some miscellaneous items lying around. Leo gingerly sat in the chair and watched Odin walk around. The table was small and circular so their hands could touch if Leo leaned in too far.

“Do you—” Odin started. “Do you want something to eat or drink?”

“I’m fine.”

“Or maybe a shower?” Odin asked.

Leo looked at Odin. “Are you hesitating?”


Honesty. Leo bit his tongue at commenting about how honesty was refreshing.

“I thought I would start with an apology but then I realize I’ve done that a lot lately.” Odin mused. “I’m not sure what to say. Maybe I should remain silent and listen to your feelings?”

Leo looked at Odin, directly in the eyes. Odin looked pale, like he wasn’t sleeping well and he was fidgeting, his hands curling into themselves, his eyes wide. There was fear, floating like a layer of fat in a soup’s stock that wasn’t skimming away. The easy answer was to tell Odin he was disappointed and angry. The secrets had piled too high and Leo wasn’t sure what to think of Odin. However, that
was a barrier. Just like mindless and continuous apologies from Odin was a barrier. How else could Leo relearn who Odin was if they didn’t try to break through the barriers they had set up?

Leaning forward, Leo grabbed Odin’s hands rather boldly across the table. Odin jumped but Leo held firm.

“Odin…” Leo started. “To be honest I’m a mix of emotions. I haven’t known you for as long but the secrets you kept really changed the perspective of who you are. You deliberately kept your identity a secret. I understand your reasoning and I understand if you didn’t wish to inform me. However, Niles is really the person you should discuss the impact of keeping such a monumental secret from.”

Odin tensed under Leo’s touch. Leo continued, gently rubbing his thumb over Odin’s hand.

“It’s going to take some time but your apologies and my feelings about your identity are merely barriers. However, if we’re going to break this barrier you need to promise me something.”

“Yes?”

“Promise you’ll never lie so blatantly to me again. Promise that we’ll try to be more open. Your secret isn’t the wedge between us but rather how we found out. If I’m your Lord and your…” Leo cut himself off. He wasn’t sure what his intimate relationship with Odin could be called. “…never mind…” Leo muttered. “Anyways, if we want a relationship, we need to be open. Can you promise that?”

Odin looked at Leo, his eyes holding Leo’s gaze before he nodded. “I promise. I won’t keep a secret as important as my identity and I won’t have you discover it in a crass manner. I was very rude in having you find out through others.”

“Thank you.” Leo breathed out.

He felt Odin squeeze his hand tighter. Leo sat there, holding Odin’s hand, squeezing back before Odin coughed. “So… I’m sort of at a loss to what topic we should converse.”

“Why don’t you tell me more about yourself?” Leo suggested. “I was only listening to stories from your parent’s perspective.”

Odin blanched. “You’re joking.”

“I’m not.”

Odin blanched further. “Oh no…”

“Don’t worry.” Leo hoped he sounded reassuring. “It wasn’t anything too embarrassing.”

“Especially with my mother, I can assure you, the tales are embarrassing.” Odin dully told Leo before sighing. “I best tell you something positive, less you think I was a wild child.”

“You weren’t?” Leo asked, just to tease.

Odin opened his mouth and then shut it before opening it again.

“Okay maybe I was.” He conceded.

Leo laughed a little. Soon, Odin joined him.
Time slipped in the room. Leo heard all about Odin’s life, his childhood, and his friends. The tales were bright, warm, and spoke of love and compassion. Leo’s heart ached a bit to hear them but he held his feelings inside. No one was at fault for Leo’s life taking a downhill turn except for Garon.

By the time they finished Leo was sorely wanting a bath and Odin seemed to sense it. Cutting off his story about a fishing rod, a bucket, and some lightning magic, Odin stood up and tugged Leo along. They hadn’t let go of their hands. It was only mildly embarrassing but with Odin’s bright smile at their locked palms, Leo felt the embarrassment fade.

They left the room and walked to the guest room Leo and Niles were staying. Odin walked with confidence so Leo assumed the guest rooms and their location were common knowledge. Stepping inside, however, Leo saw Niles was already in the room. He was lying on the bed but sat up when Leo and Odin walked in. His eye narrowed in on their hands and Leo almost felt like he was scalded. Niles didn’t look at Leo but looked at Odin. Leo fidgeted, his hand feeling hot, before he sighed.

Niles had every right to be annoyed at Odin but silence wasn’t going to solve their issues.

Leo let go of Odin’s hand and walked towards the bathroom. “I’m having a bath. You two can talk this over. I know I may not be much of a Prince but I would appreciate not having to order you two to discuss this like adults.”

“I—” Odin started. “I understand.”

“Of course.” Niles replied automatically.

Leo swallowed. The tension was practically choking him. “Remember, we can’t heal if we don’t break the barriers formed between us. That means we need to talk. Your relationship is your own to discuss. You two need some time to sort things out without me.”

The two didn’t say anything to Leo, but Leo knew they were listening. Stepping into the bathroom, Leo knew they were waiting until the water was running before talking. Touching his heart, Leo hoped his choice to allow them to discuss without him was the right one. Sure, Leo was part of their relationship but they had a stronger bond and needed to sort just the two of them. It was for the best, Leo firmly told himself before he turned the tub on, loudly filling the tub with water.

Chapter End Notes

Basilio and Flavia's explanation: I hope it makes sense. Basically, Odin trusts that Leo and Niles know him well enough. He wasn't concerned about some reputation. Also, Basilio and Flavia's love for Odin trumps him as a soldier any day.

Lon'qu: I usually default to making him Owain's father

Niles: I hope it makes sense that Niles is more hung up over Odin's identity than Leo. He's been with Odin longer and has a very intimate relationship with Odin.

Lance: Oh look I finally got Leo to use a lance!

Lucina: I don't get into it very much in this chapter but know that Lucina has been in Hoshido about the same time as Owain in Nohr. The difference being, Lucina wasn't
able to keep her identity a secret from the Royal Family and thus gained their trust and the ability to keep regular updates easier than Owain.
Hello everyone!!!

I want to thank everyone for being so patient. This is the final chapter in this AU. I had a difficult time finishing this chapter. First, my personal life was very busy but secondly, this chapter didn't want to be written. My brain kept telling me I was "done". I really had to work hard but I think it was worth it in the end, both for the chapter and the entire fic.

This chapter alone is 13k. Did I manage to get everything I wanted in? No. I could have written more of the siblings or even the Hoshido Royal Family more but it all boiled down to: I wasn't interested. Could I write a side story for some stuff? Yes, I could. Will I soon? No, I won't. I need a break from this.

This fic was a huge undertaking for me. Thank you for all the support. Your kudos, bookmarks, but especially your kind comments really fueled me and helped keep me going with this story. Just in case anyone is wondering, this fic is over 83k and is 177 pages on my Microsoft Word Document.

I'd also like to thank, once again, my amazing friend, ObscureReference. Truly, without your support and helping me bounce ideas (even with our massive time difference) this fic wouldn't be done.

I hope you all like this final chapter. In the end, I'm happy with it and I think that's all that matters in the end. As always, please feel free to leave kudos and comments. Those really do make my day and encourage me to keep writing. And, if you wish to check my tumblr out the link is right here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hiding in the bathroom could only stretch so far. Leo sat in the steaming water until it was cold to the touch. As he sat in the tub, pretending to wash up, he tried to strain his ears to hear Niles and Odin talking. Either the bathroom had amazing soundproof (maybe even some magic laid in with the stone work), they were talking very quietly, or the worst outcome: they weren’t talking at all. Or maybe they left and were talking somewhere privately. Leo could only hope the outcome was involving “talking”. Splashing as he stood up, Leo dried himself off, dressed, and carefully opened the door.

Niles and Odin were still in the room. Leo breathed out slowly. Niles was still on the bed and Odin was sitting on the desk. The space between them was so thick they might as well have been on different continents. Upon walking in, both of them looked up at Leo.

“We’ll be leaving tomorrow morning.” Odin broke the silence.

Leo glanced at Niles and back to Odin. Odin’s face was smooth and Niles wasn’t moving. Nothing was betrayed. The space between Niles and Odin was slowly becoming more defined and Leo saw the landscape. There were thousands of egg shells, beige, crème, ivory, white, and brown. Leo frowned.
“This won’t do.” Leo huffed, moving between Odin and Niles. “We’re not doing this.”

“No doing what, Leo?” Niles sat up straighter as he spoke.

“This.” Leo gestured to the space between Odin and Niles. “These… eggshells. We’re not walking on eggshells the entire trip back. So, tell me, did you two talk it out or not?”

“Eggshells?” Niles muttered

“We talked.” Odin said over top of Niles, voice coming out in a rush.

Leo raised an eyebrow. Odin flushed and coughed into his hand politely. “I mean, we discussed some issues surrounding my being. In a civil manner, of course.”

“Civil doesn’t mean you two didn’t end in an argument.” Leo noted. Both Odin and Niles flinched. “However,” Leo continued, “so long as we can travel together without issue tomorrow, I’m not going to press.”

“We will.” Niles assured at the same time Odin gave a nod of his head.

“Good.” Leo sighed out and sat down roughly on the chair by the desk.

Odin rubbed his head and slowly edged towards the door. “Well, if we’ve settled that I better make sure everything is in order.” He gave a small smile. “I’ll see you two tomorrow.”

He whizzed out of the door before Leo could say anything. Staring at the shut door for a moment, Leo then turned his head towards Niles. Niles hadn’t moved from the bed and his expression was blank. Leo stood up and walked towards Niles, sitting on the bed. Niles didn’t move so Leo boldly reached out and grabbed Niles’s hand.

“You two didn’t argue, did you?”

Niles roughly exhaled. “We exchanged heated words that’s leaving both of us stewing a little.”

“Just stewing?” Leo asked mildly, stroking Niles’s hand with his fingers.

“I wasn’t lying when I said we’ll behave perfectly when travelling.” Niles turned to Leo. “Hurt feelings aside, we’ll be going back into Nohr. We will be in constant danger and bickering over Odin’s identity will only get us killed.”

“Yes, but that only speaks of companionship.” Leo muttered. “What about—?”

“Us?” Niles filled in, cutting Leo off smoothly. “I’m not sure where it leaves us regarding Odin, but as for you and me…” Niles reached out and touched Leo’s hair. “I’d like to think we’re more than just friends.”

Leo shivered as Niles gently trailed his rough fingers through. “All right. I’m glad.”

“I am too.” Niles leaned in. “May I?”

The answer swelled in Leo’s mind. He automatically leaned in. Their lips pressed lightly and warmly. Leo melted into Niles, savouring the warmth. When they parted, their lips were shiny and Leo’s heart was pounding.
They left with little ceremony.

Basilio and Flavia were there to see them off, along with Lissa, Lon’qu, and Chrom. Their plans danced fleetingly in Leo’s mind. He shook it away when he saw Odin walk up to them. Leo tried to not stare as they all took Odin into their arms, whispering different things, holding him tightly. Niles was off the side and also wasn’t looking.

Daylight had barely broken over the horizon, a thin trail of yellow in the pale blue sky, like a broken yolk bleeding. Leo adjusted his bag over his shoulder. The morning air was crisp and he could see his breath when he breathed out. Tugging the cloak that Basilio and Flavia gave him, Leo turned the horse sharply and continued on. The horses were only going to get them to the pier. Taking them across on the boat wasn’t a possibility. Leo’s feet ghost ached with the anticipation of walking, but such was the way things went. Speed had to be sacrificed for stealth. Having horses would only create more of a trail.

Their ride down to the pier was silent, save only for the clopping of the horses, the rustling of the trees, and the sounds of animals stirring. When they arrived at the town Leo watched as businesses opened. People were walking to work, life already stirring silently and quietly. Peaceful and tranquil. Leo breathed it in and held the feeling to his chest.

The pier wasn’t fully opened, but Odin rode on ahead, got off his horse, and walked over to someone, chatting softly. After a few minutes, Odin nodded and turned towards them, gesturing for them to come over.

“The boat will be ready soon. We’re going to take a smaller, more private boat. Basilio and Flavia arranged it. We can leave the horses here. Someone will take them back.”

“Thank you.” Leo gingerly got off the horse. “I appreciate you facilitating this.”

“It’s not a problem.” Odin scratched his head. “In the mean time, you can look around here for a bit.”

Leo stared off at the pier and then back towards the town. There were a few shops slowly opening up by the pier. The smell of bread was slowly wafting in the air and the sun was slowly settling into the sky. Few more people were slowly emerging from their homes. Now was the time for Leo to look around if he wanted. He wouldn’t receive that luxury once he was back in Nohr.

“I’ll be back in a moment.” Leo informed them.

“I’ll join you.” Niles added.

He walked over to Leo and took Leo’s hand in his. Leo looked down at their interlaced fingers and then over to Odin.

“Have fun. I’ll stick around here.” Odin waved them off.

Leo opened his mouth but Niles gently tugged him. “Come on, before we have to leave.”

“Right.” Leo shut his mouth with an audible click. “We’ll be back shortly.”

“Take your time.” Odin added.

Niles then tugged Leo a little harder and soon they were off towards the shops. The first shop was a bakery and it was an obvious choice to visit. Stepping inside, Leo inhaled the smell of fresh bread and charcoal fires. The baker looked up at them and greeted with a smile.
“Welcome. Anything in particular you two are looking for?”

“Just browsing.” Leo said the same time Niles said “Something that could keep for a couple of days.”

The baker shot a smile filled with soft laughter at them. “I have just the thing if you want something that could keep.” He then gestured to some of the buns and loaves of bread.

“Thank you.” Niles walked over to the displays. “I’ll take five of those and three of those.” He pointed to the selection.

“Right away, sir.” The baker reached for the items. “So, you two are heading off somewhere?”

“Yes.” Niles replied. “We’re just passing through.”

“I see. Well I do hope you’re not going the direction of Nohr.”

Leo froze on the spot. There was no way the baker knew who he was, still Leo shot his gaze towards the exit and towards Niles, making a mental note. “What do you mean?”

“It’s just, I’ve heard rumours from some of the sailors. Things are worsening. Lack of food, more robberies and beatings. Murder. They say King Garon is readying for war. Regardless if that’s true or not, turmoil is in the country. Heading there is asking for troubles.”

Leo’s heart twisted.

Niles gripped Leo’s hand a bit tighter. “I see. We’ll head your advice.” He then gave some coins to the baker. “Keep the change.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The bag of baking was handed to Niles. Niles took it and exited the shop. Leo looked at the brown paper bag and felt his stomach twist.

“Everything will be all right, Leo.” Niles gently said as they kept walking down the pier. “Rumours hold truth but also some fabrication.”

“Thanks.” Leo’s stomach didn’t stop twisting but it did lighten. “I appreciate it. Let’s just… look at shops, okay?” Even if the reprieve was for a moment.

“Okay.” Niles agreed.

They continued to walk down the pier.

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Their boat ride was uneventful. Leo spent majority of the time staring out into the ocean or reading some of the books provided. All of the books were about Ylisse and Regna Ferox. Odin helped with adding to some gaps in knowledge and Leo vowed once things had settled to return and visit properly. He’d definitely be able to see more and interact more with the people. Perhaps wishful thinking but Leo wanted to remain positive. Him surviving this gamble against his father and talking to the people of Regna Ferox felt more likely than getting conversation out of his current company.

Odin and Niles were civil as promised but that was about it. Leo couldn’t remember the last time they smiled at each other or cracked a joke. He couldn’t remember the last time the two had touched each other, casually or otherwise. All of those were directed towards Leo. Leo wished he had the
strength to stop being their (literal) middle man. However, whenever Leo attempted to bring up their distance, they’d offer reassurances and then gently hold him. Leo against his will would feel their touch on his skin and hair and could only sink into their physical attention.

Upon arriving on Nohr’s shores, Leo’s skin prickled and he tugged his cloak around his shoulders tighter. A heavy, almost dense atmosphere filled his lungs. A dim quality to the town lingered as they disembarked and walked towards end of town. The pier was silent with few workers. The streets had few people out and Leo didn’t smell any food from vendors or animals going back and forth for trade. Nohr really was dying. Leo tugged his cloak around his shoulders tighter and continued walking.

“Where to first?” Niles broke their silence once they were out of earshot from anyone in town.

“I believe we need to go back to where we exited when we left the Rainbow Sage.” Leo muttered. “This way.”

Even with the thick forests and the bushes littering every meter as far as the eye could see, Leo found the area familiar. There was a dip in the road and rock formations that began to creep up naturally. The smell of the ocean remained strong, a crisp salt and brine that lingered in the back of Leo’s mouth. He kept moving and soon Leo spotted a pair of trees that glimmered just a bit too brightly in the sun. He hadn’t noticed before, but Leo knew instinctively that they were close.

However, before Leo could say anything to Niles and Odin, the ground started to bubble a toxic purple so dark it looked black. A foul smell, one of rotting flesh, decomposing eggs, and dirt filled the area. Leo gagged and coughed, trying to reach for his tome. A second slipped and suddenly Leo felt rough hands tug on his cloak, pulling him to the side. The sound of an arrow whizzing through the air pierced Leo’s ears before the dull thunk of the arrow hitting flesh. Blinking, Leo felt Odin behind him, warm and solid.

“Are you all right?”

“I’m fine.” Leo tugged his tome out and gagged once more at the smell. “Faceless?”

“Naturally.” Odin grimaced. “I’m sure they were sent from a caster too far away to locate. Your orders?”

Leo frowned. They couldn’t feasibly take out the caster. “Then we’ll have to fight until the caster runs out of magic. We’re not leading Iago or anyone else my father sends to the Sage.”

“As you wish.” Odin let go of Leo’s cloak. “Let’s do this!” His sword gleamed in the light.

“Already doing it.” Niles shouted back, firing another arrow. “Focus, Odin.”

Leo noticed Odin’s shoulders tense before he ran towards a Faceless, sinking the blade into the rotting flesh. Purple black gunk spilled from the flesh and steam rose from it as it plopped thickly and wetly to the ground.

“I am focused!” Odin shouted.

“I’d believe you, if you weren’t standing around gawking.”

Odin hacked at another Faceless and more gunk spilled to the ground. “You’re one to talk—”

Leo groaned. “You two can argue when we are done here.” Bile rose deep inside Leo at the smell but he forced himself to utter a spell that took down a couple Faceless.
Both Odin and Niles opened their mouths to speak but soon more Faceless appeared, emerging from the ground. The putrid smell was stronger. Leo cast another spell but it was apparent when a few more popped up that they couldn’t keep fighting. They’d be overwhelmed. Leo glanced back at the trees, to where the shimmering ones were. Retreat wasn’t the best option, especially hinting at the Rainbow Sage, but what other choice did they have?

Leo cast another spell and located Odin and Niles. “Come here!” Leo yelled.

The two of them didn’t pause in their attacks but they did gravitate towards Leo. Leo kept himself away from the mass of Faceless as best as he could and met them halfway.

“What is it?” Niles asked as he fired another arrow.

“We won’t win like this.” Leo gasped out. “They are sending reinforcements too quickly and with far greater numbers than we have. We have to retreat.”

“Retreat?” Niles repeated. “Where to?”

“Those shimmering trees are where the Rainbow Sage’s entrance is.” Leo muttered. “I’ll cast a spell to blind the Faceless.”

“They can’t follow us inside.” Odin mused.

“Leo wants them distracted, obviously.” Niles shot back.

“This isn’t the time.” Leo growled. “Didn’t you two say you’d be civil and not affect this mission?”

Both opened their mouths to (hopefully) apologize. Leo cut them off by casting the brightest spells he knew. However, what came out wasn’t lightning but fire. Leo blinked and watched as the fire caught the Faceless and some of the dead Faceless on the ground. They burned and the flames around them lasted a while. Leo stared and looked down at what he’d assumed was blood on the ground. Was it possible the liquid was flammable?

Deciding there was no time like the present, Leo cast another spell. The Faceless immediately were engulfed in flames and soon the fire caught majority of them. Heat and a sickening smell from the Faceless as they burned filled the area, almost worse than their smell from before.

After a solid minute, the Faceless fell to the ground, charred and burnt to a crisp. The other ones were stumbling around but majority were dead. Niles fired a few more arrows and soon they clearing was empty. A beat passed and Leo noted how horrible he smelled and how the gunk had mainly splattered all over Odin. He wrinkled his nose.

“How did you know?” Niles asked once the last Faceless fell.

“I just noticed they were burning for quite a while.” Leo clutched his tome tightly. “It was a hunch.”

“A hunch? I suppose you can use your brain for something.”

Leo froze and his stomach churned. Niles set another arrow and Odin clutched his sword tightly and swung the blade around. In front of them was Iago. The smug smirk on his face made Leo want to punch it. Niles moved swifter and fired an arrow. It sadly went right through Iago. A projection.

“How quaint to see violence is how you solve your problems.” Iago cooed.

“How quaint to see you’re a coward who hides behind magic.” Niles shot back.
“Strategy.” Iago replied. “I’m not here to pick a fight.”

“Says the man who sent Faceless after us.” Odin replied.

Leo stepped in front of Odin and Niles to look Iago directly in the eyes. The man who had been his only form of human contact and torment was still insufferable as a projection but Leo wasn’t beating around any bushes.

“What do you want? You aren’t wasting magic to taunt us.”

“Oh, I just thought I’d see what you and your little family were up to. It’s so strange that you’re alone with some rogue peasants.”

“I’m sure that’s all you wanted.” Leo narrowed his eyes. “Let’s see, I’m sure my disappearance, the escape of my siblings, and your failure to capture us has reached Garon’s ears. He must be thrilled. You’re grasping at straws now. Desperate.”

It was Iago’s turn to narrow his eyes. “You and your siblings are fools thinking you can defy King Garon. I’ll be happy to watch your suffering before you die.”

“Spit threats all you want.” Leo replied. “You can now slink back and report to Garon.”

“Like a rat.” Niles added under his breath.

Iago glared but disappeared with a puff of smoke. Leo stared at the space that Iago had been and waited a moment. When Iago didn’t reappear, Leo turned to Niles and Odin. No one was injured or at least from what Leo could see.

“You two all right?”

“I’m fine.”

“I’m good.” Odin answered. “I suppose that was bound to happen sooner or later.”

“You’re right.” Leo roughly sighed. “We can’t worry about Garon right now. Let’s keep going.”

The trees were still shimmering so Leo took it as a good sign. Stepping forward he walked towards them, Niles and Odin in tow, towards the Rainbow Sage.

Upon entering the separate plane where the Rainbow Sage was Leo noted how only the Sage was there to greet them. The Sage gave a warm smile and stepped forward.

“Welcome back. It appears you three are the first ones to return.”

Suspicions confirmed. “Do you know where everyone else is now?”

“I’m afraid I only have a bare hint at their whereabouts. I can share what I know but first you three are welcome to have a bath.”

That was the polite way to put it. “Thank you.” Leo bowed. “We’ll take you up on that offer.”

The way to the baths was easy to remember and Leo was grateful. As he walked towards them, he heard squishing and wet sounds that were generally uncomfortable. The smell was starting to become worse and Leo wanted to wash up promptly, change into clean clothes, and burn the ones he was wearing. Entering the bathroom, Leo immediately started to take his clothes off. However, as he peeled his shirt off, Leo stopped and turned.
Niles and Owain were standing as far apart as they could in the dressing room and were stripping silently. Leo dropped his shirt to the floor and wished the humidity of the baths off the side wasn’t the only stifling aspect of the room.

“Something wrong?” Niles gently asked as he too dropped his shirt to the floor. “We’re not making you uncomfortable, are we?”

Leo flushed and shook his head, taking Niles’s form in. He had only seen Niles undressed a few times and the only time he had paid attention was on the ship over to Regna Ferox. Niles had a plethora of scars, some small, some long, all of them white and raised. Leo stared at his legs, still covered by the ruined pants, and exhaled slowly.

“Then, I’ll see you on the other side.”

Niles took the rest of his clothes off, grabbed a towel, and walked into the baths. A brief second of steam billowing out engulfed the room. Then, the door closed and Leo was left with Owain. Owain was more undressed than Leo but Leo could see his movements slow, languid. Waiting a moment, Leo saw Owain shift around, grab a towel but made no motions to move. Leo looked at himself and sighed. Owain wasn’t going anywhere. They couldn’t stand here until Niles was done. Swiftly undoing his pants, Leo kicked them off, ignoring the raised lines of his own scars, and grabbed a towel.

“Like taking off bandages.” Leo muttered before raising his voice. “Let’s go.”

They walked in together. Niles had already washed up on the side and was soaking in the tub. How Niles was so swift, Leo wasn’t too sure. Sitting down, Leo set his towel on the side, so it wouldn’t be soaked, and washed up. Slow and precise, Leo savoured the feeling of short hair and water running down his bare back, no hair to stream down with the flow of water. For a long moment the water ran completely brown and red. Leo wrinkled his nose. Taking the soap, Leo then washed himself thoroughly, until the water ran clear. Shutting the water off, Leo then walked over to the tub and dipped himself in.

The heat was welcoming and Leo exhaled slowly. Leaning against the edge, Leo stared at the ceiling, watching the steam disappear into parts unknown. Lifting his hand, Leo felt the hot water drip down his forearms, and he tried to reach up to grab the steam, stop it from going into the unknown. The task was impossible. The steam was on a course set and determined by nature. Leo allowed his hand to plop wetly into the water.

“What are you thinking about?”

Niles was at Leo’s side, warm, wet, clean. Leo turned to him. “Just thinking about the steam.”

“The steam?”

“How it’s on a course set out by nature.” Leo answered, splashing the water a bit.

“Nature, huh?” Niles leaned back, sitting beside Leo. “Everything moves due to nature or behaviours. Humans move because of their plans and that too is simply a part of human nature.” Niles then looked over at Leo and Leo noted that his eyepatch was still on. “Does this frighten you?”

Moving due to nature? Leo closed his eyes a moment. If behaviour was nature then humans always moved because it was in their nature to make plans. It was a part of their behaviour to adapt and change, make plans. Plans were made to better chances of their happiness. If humans didn’t create plans for their happiness then maybe.
“Maybe in another universe my father didn’t receive a prophesy. Maybe then we wouldn’t have been
cursed and locked away.” Leo muttered. “Maybe he was still cruel to us. Maybe we lived in fear in
the castle and Corrin was always locked away. Maybe one day we would have rebelled. Or maybe
not. Maybe we would be on the other side, ready to go to war. Maybe we’d be on Nohr’s side.
Maybe not.”

“Do those endless possibilities make you upset because they’ll never come to fruition?” Owain
asked, moving to the other side of Leo.

Leo opened his eyes. “What’s the point in crying about things that can’t possibly happen? The past is
in the past. I cannot change what my father has done. I cannot undo the hurt or the pain. I can only
move forward and attempt to fix past mistakes.”

“You’re so wise and a better man than me.”

Leo turned to Niles and half splashed him. “It’s never too late to let some of the hurt go and try to
move on.”

“Move on, huh?” Niles splashed Leo back. “Words of wisdom.” He then looked over at Owain.
“You’re an utter idiot.”

“I know.”

“We’re going to spar later.” Niles warned. “I’m going to kick your ass.”

“I’ll put up a fight then.” Owain replied.

“I have many things to say to you.”

“I expect you’ll be screaming them at me?”

“Of course.” Niles answered.

That night Leo lay in bed and distantly heard Niles and Odin’s voices, carried and vibrating all
through the walls. Leo wasn’t able to make out their words but he could make out the clang of metal
and the sound of a brawl. Rolling to his side, Leo closed his eyes and waited, the sound almost
becoming background noise. His eyes drooped and the feeling of the bed escaped him before, in a
hazy, Leo felt the bed dip and two warm bodies climb inside, sandwiching him between them.
Smiling into the pillow, Leo relaxed and fell asleep.

The next day Xander and Elise (along with Peri, Effie, and Arthur) arrived with a few people from
Hoshido. Leo took in the people from Hoshido. The first person was obvious. Even if Leo hadn’t
been locked up, he’d recognize the Crown prince of Hoshido. The next person, just a bit behind
Ryoma was a woman dressed as a ninja. No doubt she was Ryoma’s retainer. The man beside
Ryoma was an older man, with a bit of stubble and round glasses. The final person was a young girl
with long blue hair. Leo saw her posture stiffen and her gaze cast downward as she spotted Leo,
Niles, and Odin.

“Prince Leo.” Ryoma was the one to break the silence. He stepped forward and gave a respectful
bow.
“Prince Ryoma.” Leo returned the gesture. “It’s an honour to meet you.”

“Likewise.” Ryoma stood upright. “I know my condolences pale in comparison to the suffering you’ve endured, however I wish to express them. I’m truly sorry for the wrongs King Garon has placed upon you.”

Leo’s mouth quirked into a small smile. “I appreciate your thoughtful words as well as your allied support.”

“If I may.” Ryoma half turned to the two people by him. “This is my retainer and guard, Kagero. This man is Yukimura, one of our tacticians and retainer to my mother.” Ryoma then trailed off.

The girl finally raised her head and Leo immediately saw why Ryoma wasn’t introducing her and instead allowing her to do the introductions herself. Her eyes were blue, almost crystal and clearly the Brand of the Exalt was displayed. Leo’s breath jolted. It was one thing to hear the Khans speak of Lucina in Hoshido but seeing her in person, as an actual being, helped put a name to a face.

“I’m Lucina.” She introduced herself clearly. “It’s an honour to meet you.”

She lifted her hand for a handshake. Leo took it. As their hands parted, Leo spotted Lucina’s gaze dart over towards Odin. Odin shifted and looked downwards. Words, silent and heavy were exchanged but their meaning was lost on Leo.

“This is Niles.” Leo took Ryoma’s lead and continued with the introductions. “And this is…” How to introduce Odin? Probably in their best interests to be honest and clear. “…Owain.”

Leo noticed Xander and Ryoma raise their eyebrows. A second later Odin shuffled again, barely meeting everyone’s eyes. Unspoken and unanswered questions seeped into the air before Ryoma spoke.

“Now that our introductions are over if you’d pardon us?”

“Of course, Prince Ryoma.” Xander spoke. “We’ll discuss battle strategies once our other allies have arrived.”

Ryoma and his group politely bowed before they walked towards the rooms and the baths. Leo stepped aside and watched their retreating backs for a moment before he turned to Xander and Elise. Elise wasted no time launching herself at Leo, hugging him tightly. Leo took a step back in response to the force of her hug.

“Leo! I missed you!” Elise hugged him tighter. “I have so many things to tell you about Hoshido!”

“I’m looking forward to it.” Leo hugged her back. “Welcome back, Elise.”

She hugged him one final time before stepping back. Xander gently touched Elise’s shoulder and looked at Leo. “Leo.”

“Xander.” Leo stepped forward and hugged Xander. “Welcome back.”

“It’s good to be back.” Xander gave a small smile. “I have to admit, you’re back earlier than I expected. Did you manage to travel to Ylisse and Regna Ferox in such a timely manner?”

“Uh, not quite.”

Leo glanced over at Odin who was talking in low tones to Lucina. When he felt Leo’s gaze, Odin
looked up and soon Lucina followed. Xander spotted Leo’s line of sight and stepped back a little.

“Forgive me, I was being rather rude.”

“That’s fine.” Lucina said turning towards Xander. “I was catching up with Owain.”

“Owain.” Xander tested the name. “The name Odin was a pseudonym?”

“Forgive me.” Odin softly spoke. “I merely was exercising precautions. I’m Prince Owain of Ylisse.”

“Interesting.” Xander’s breath hitched for only a second. “So, this is the cousin you spoke of.”

Lucina flushed. “Yes, this is my cousin.”

“All is understood. Times are challenging and spies are everywhere.” Xander took the news with barely a flinch. “Don’t allow us to hold you two at ceremony. I’m sure you have many things you wish to discuss.”

“Of course. Thank you.” Lucina half bowed. “If you’ll excuse us?”

She then exited along with Odin, who shot Leo a small glance before he disappeared off with Lucina. Leo didn’t have a chance to ponder. Elise grabbed his hand and tugged with a giggle.

“Enough of that face.” She chastised. “I want to tell you everything that happened in Hoshido!”

“Ah, wait, before that.” Leo spluttered. “The negotiations—”

Xander pressed a finger to his own lips. “We can discuss politics later. For now, I want to spend time with my family.”

Elise cheered and Leo blushed, warmth spreading in his heart. “All right.”

~

For the next two days no one arrived and they were playing the waiting game. Elise and Xander spent evenings with Leo, Elise chatting about all sorts of things she was up to while in Hoshido. Amidst all the tears, hugs, and laughter, Leo had taken what little time they had and practiced his lance techniques. The Rainbow Sage’s had many areas that were open, clearly inviting spars and practice. It was better than sitting and waiting to see if someone had shown up. Plus, Leo couldn’t spend all of his time cooped up reading battle strategies.

Swinging his lance around, Leo remembered the minimal techniques he had been taught in Regna Ferox. Practicing his swings, Leo allowed the burn of his muscles and the sweat on his brow and hands glide through the practice. Swing after swing, it all coursed blood pumping and aches in his arms. No other sound echoed in the area beyond the sounds he was creating. After a few more rounds, Leo paused and stretched, going to grab some water. He was halfway downing an entire canteen of water when he noticed someone approaching him. Leo set the canteen down and watched as Ryoma walked into the area.

“Greetings, Prince Leo.” Ryoma gave a small wave. “How goes the practice?”

“It’s going well.” Leo replied. “Or as well as someone who’s new to spears and lances.”

Ryoma’s eyes sparked. “Not your usual weapon of choice?”
“Magic.” Leo supplied. “However, a back up is always a smart strategy.”

“Very wise.” Ryoma nodded. “I know a few lance techniques myself. Perhaps, you don’t mind?”

Leo blinked at the offer before he felt a warm flush spread across his face. “I don’t mind.”

Ryoma walked over and gently reached out. “If I may?”

“It’s fine.”

Ryoma’s hands were warm and calloused. They also had some white scars on the tips, like Ryoma had dipped his fingers into lightning. The scars ebbed upwards towards his knuckles before fading into the tanned skin.

“I only know some techniques from Hoshido and some are more for naginata but if you grip the lance like this…”

Ryoma arranged Leo’s hands on the lance before he stepped back and nodded. “Now, if you take a stance like so.”

Carefully Leo copied Ryoma to the best of his abilities. Ryoma held the pose for a little while before he stepped back and ran his gaze over Leo’s stance.

“Yes, like that.” Ryoma muttered, though your legs should be a bit more apart…” Leo adjusted his stance. “Perfect. Now this technique is used to brace yourself against faster foes. You use their speed against them and then…” Ryoma swiftly moved his arms, mimicking the motion. “You catch them in the chest or abdomen and wind them.”

Leo swallowed. “Right.” He turned forward and envisioning Ryoma’s motions, he swung the lance. “How was that?”

“Good for a first try.” Ryoma answered, a smile on his face. “Now, try again.”

Leo nodded and resumed his position. The afternoon blurred into practice and listening to Ryoma’s advice. When Leo’s arms were aching and his legs quivering, Ryoma stepped away and the session ended.

“Thank you for the help.” Leo half panted as he walked to get some water.

“It’s not a problem. I hope I helped. I’ve been using swords for a while so my lance skills may be a bit rusty.”

Leo shook his head. “Your advice is invaluable. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Ryoma replied before he turned and looked at Leo for a long moment. Leo’s skin prickled and he waited for Ryoma to continue speaking.

“My apologies.” Ryoma turned his gaze slightly. “I was wondering, that swordsman with you, Owain, he’s also Ylissian royalty, isn’t he?”

Leo nodded automatically. “He is.”

“I figured. He has similar features to the Exalt.” Odin did? Leo stored the information for later. “Ylisse is truly a compassionate country. Princess Lucina was with us for a while.”

‘Princess Lucina was in Hoshido?”
“Yes, she stayed with us for almost a year. Her presence wasn’t hidden as I suspect Prince Owain’s was.” Ryoma gave a small wiry smile. “That advisor from Nohr wasn’t pleased when he found out.”

Advisor from Nohr? Leo raised an eyebrow. “Iago?”

“That’s the name.” Ryoma nodded. “I suppose it was a fruitless endeavour for us to consider negotiations with Nohr but that’s hindsight.”

So, Iago was sent on a diplomatic mission. Leo’s lips curled. “Iago is as slimy and greasy as they come.”

Ryoma snorted. “That’s one way to put it.”

Leo flushed. “My apologies it’s just—”

“You need not explain yourself to me.” Ryoma gently cut Leo off. “There is history I’m not aware of and you’re allowed to feel the emotions you’re feeling.”

“Thank you.” Leo exhaled out softly, his fingers almost brushing his legs.

“I look forward to going with you in battle, Prince Leo.” Ryoma gave a small bow. “If you’ll excuse me.”

Ryoma left quietly. Leo gathered his things and left a moment after, desperately wanting a bath.

~

Night time found Niles and Odin already in bed before Leo entered the room. He stopped abruptly in the doorway and stared at the scene. Silence was palpable but in a less bitter and sour way than before. It was still stale, still a bit unwanted, but Leo took that over a negative alternative. Crawling into bed, Leo pulled Odin and Niles closer, savouring their heat. Warm arms wrapped around Leo and soon they were a massive pile under the covers. The nature of their relationship and the patchwork that Niles and Odin were going through was unclear to Leo. However, it could wait. Personal worries were on the backburner.

“Your’re thinking too hard.” Odin muttered.

“Sorry.” Leo curled a little closer. “It’s nothing.”

“You’re worrying over something.” Niles pipped up. “Don’t make us guess or create false conclusions.”

Leo bit his lip lightly. “I was just wondering about us, again. It’s not a huge issue.”

“Us?” Niles asked. “Do you wish for something concrete to call what we have?” His voice was kind. “This isn’t the first time you’ve brought this up.”

“I—” Leo started carefully. “I would like a label on what we are, however it’s something that can wait.”

Niles hummed but Odin spoke. “Do you like us, Leo?”

The soft bluntness of Odin’s words made Leo’s heart jump in his chest violently before settling down a second later. “I do.”

“Then why are we beating around any bushes?” Odin turned so he was facing both Leo and Niles.
“I’ve learned my lesson in hiding the truth. I’m enamoured with you, Leo. Your resilience, your strength, and your compassion: it’s akin to a small flame out in a snow storm. You’ve been battered and worn down. You’ve nearly snuffed out, but you keep pressing forward. I admire that quality. You are very… cool.”

“Cool.” Niles snorted lightly. “You were so poetic. Can’t find another word?”

“You try then.” Odin pouted.

“There’s this flower in Nohr, called purple midnight—”

“Wait isn’t that a weed?” Odin cut in.

“Shut it.” Niles gave Odin a look. “Anyways, it’s called purple midnight. People used to cultivate it due to its magical properties for medicine and spells. However, over time the plant over took many other valuable plants so people tried to get rid of it. The plant was too powerful and, in the end, many areas cannot fully get rid of the plant. You’re like that plant, Leo. King Garon tried to get rid of you because he feared you. He feared your magical potential and he feared one day you’d take over. You haven’t crumbled or fallen to King Garon’s attempts and you’re here today, strong and proud.”

“You basically said the exact thing I just said…”

“Yes, but I used a better metaphor.”

“Did not.”

Leo laughed and felt his chest tighten. A full second passed before Leo noticed wetness trailing down his cheeks. Then, a sob escaped his throat and soon Leo’s brain shut down, only circulating the words Odin and Niles had spoken.

“I’m sorry…” Leo managed. “I don’t mean to cry—”

“It’s all right.” Niles and Odin said in unison before pulling Leo into a warm hug.

“We got you.” Odin replied.

“T-thanks.”

“We’ve been an emotional mess lately.” Niles mused. “All of us. If we’re like this now imagine our first date.”

Date? Leo half swallowed. “Like a real date? With flowers and dinner?”

“If that’s what you wish.” Niles replied. “Say, let’s make that a promise. We’ll go on a proper date after the war. We’ll take the day off and do whatever we like. If that includes flowers and dinner, I’m on board.”

A promise for an actual date. A date that could be public or at the very least, his siblings knowing. Leo swallowed and half remembered that he hadn’t said anything to his family yet about dating Niles and Odin. He’d have to fix that, even if he could hear the cooing and light teasing.

“A date sounds like an adventure!” Odin proclaimed. “An adventure I will keep looking forward to.”

“I’d like that.” Leo muttered. “Thank you, you two.”

“Not a problem.” They once again were in unison.
Leo hastily wiped his eyes and then shut them, allowing sleep to take him away.

~

The following day Camilla and Corrin arrived. With them, they also brought a new guest Fuga, the Wind Tribe’s chief. Leo instantly saw silent power, thrumming and powerfully coursing through the upright nature of his posture.

Now that everyone had arrived though, it was time for discussion. Leo followed silently into a large room, complete with a circular table and chairs. Sitting down, Leo waited for their meeting to begin, adjusting himself in the seat, mentally mapping out his ideas and thoughts. He couldn’t prepare for everything but he’d do his best.

“I’d like to thank everyone for coming here and supporting us. This means more than words can express. However, there is no need for us to stand on ceremony, let’s start discussing battle plans.” Xander took charge.

And so, their meeting continued.

~

“What will you do once we’re done the battle?” Corrin asked, pressing against Leo’s side.

Leo hugged Corrin tightly in a one-armed hug and leaned into the bed. “I am not sure. Probably rest for a day. Then I’d go and see how much the castle has and hasn’t changed. You?”

“I’ll explore the castle I never got to step foot in.” Corrin replied. “I’ll spend hours memorizing the layout.”

“I can join you!” Elise piped up at Corrin’s other side.

“You will?” Corrin asked, affectionately, “What do you wish to do once this battle is over?”

“I’m going to gorge myself on food.” Elise replied. “I’ll have a picnic made for us all and we can eat it outside, together.”

“That sounds lovely, dear.” Camilla beamed, stroking Elise’s head. “We can set blankets out and have a feast.”

Leo smiled. “As long as there are sandwiches.”

“Of course!” Elise nodded enthusiastically. “Sandwiches and all sorts of delicious foods!”

“It would be wonderful. A break no doubt, from all the paperwork and the other work we’ll have to face.” Xander muttered.

“Paperwork.” Elise made a face. “Have a bit of positivity, Xander.”

“I am.” Xander protested, a light flush on his face.

Camilla laughed and lightly patted Xander’s shoulder. “Our dear brother, it would be good to relax and think of enjoyable activities once in a while. How else will you ever find someone who will want to be with you?”

“Be with me?” Xander raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t realize discussing what we wish to do after this battle resulted in discussion of my personal life.”
“Why not?” Camilla gave a sly smile. “Happiness can come in all sorts of forms. We can hold galas and parties. Perhaps you’ll meet someone there. You two can dance the night away.”

“Maybe all I want in life is to see my family happy and safe.” Xander retorted but his cheeks were a touch pink.

“Of course, Xander.” Camilla let the subject drop. “As for me, I cannot wait to take to the skies again. I miss the feel of wind at my face.”

Leo shut his eyes. So many things they’d missed. So many opportunities open to them. The world was so close to opening up to them. Ahead all they had were obstacles but together, together they’d overcome everything.

Leo knew it.

~

As Leo changed for battle, he noted the opaque protection charm the Sage had gifted them. Touching the stone, Leo held it to his chest. It wasn’t warm though it was very smooth. It glittered and gleamed light in an array of milky colours. Putting it on, Leo tucked it under his armour and continued with his preparations.

~

Adjusting his tome one final time, Leo gazed out into the scenery. Morning had fallen softly upon them, like the curtain opening to an opera. Daylight broke evenly across the sky. Below the peak, Leo could spot the dotting of mountains, forests, and towns. Beyond the stretch of land Leo could see lay conflict and battle. He tightened his grip on the reigns of his horse.

“Are you ready?”

Leo glanced at Camilla who was sitting upright on her horse. Her hair was braided tightly and her armour black and solid. Leo hadn’t asked where she procured it and Camilla wasn’t saying. At her side was an axe, a gleaming, sharp axe. After today it wouldn’t be gleaming cleanly.

“I’m ready.” Leo replied.

“Remember to come back to me alive.”

“I always will.” Leo gave a small smile.

Camilla nodded and touched her chest before she rode off to her assigned side. Leo looked around at their troops. He had missed when some of their allied troops had arrived (via the Rainbow Sage’s magic) but Leo knew there were more. Battle plans danced in his mind. Focus.

“Are you prepared, milord?” Odin rode up to Leo.

Hearing Odin’s address, Leo bit his lip. “You’re royalty too.”

“Yes?” Odin tilted his head. “I also swore my allegiance to you. I’m yours to command.”

His. Leo shrunk, feeling his mind and body disjoint. “I’m no prince. I was forgotten and not fit to lead. I am not sure how.”

“No one is one hundred percent sure how to lead.” Odin answered. “All we can do is move in our convictions and hope others move with us.”
A twisting in Leo’s heart he hadn’t noticed stopped. “You’re awfully wise.”

“I can go back to spewing poetic nonsense later.” Odin assured Leo. “Now, milord, are you prepared?”

Leo glanced out a final time towards their destination and nodded. “Yes.”

“We’ll split up.” Ryoma said, pointing to a map on the table. “King Garon’s forces are split but they’ll keep a core group at their most vital spots. We’re not suggesting to immediately engage the bulk of his army. We’re going to attack the smaller flanks and cause disruption among the troops.”

“They’re so focused on areas where the bigger towns and cities are,” Xander added, “that even if it takes us a little longer in taking out their side troops, it will cause mild panic. Hence why we need a fast squad.”

“The faster the better.” Fuga agreed. “A fewer members of our forces. I volunteer.”

“Then, if you’ll head east…”

Leo continued down the path closer towards the forest. Silence was deadly and suffocating. Every twitch of sound, every crack in the branches sent a shiver down Leo’s spine. Urging his horse forward, Leo scanned the area that he was supposed to head towards. The map stood strongly and clearly in Leo’s mind.

“This way.” Leo told Niles and Odin. “Regna Ferox should be arriving around here.” Hopefully. Leo didn’t want to imagine any complications.

“Should be? Don’t you mean already here?”

Leo whipped his head around and saw Flavia and a few soldiers walk towards them. An instant flood cool relief hit Leo’s blood stream so quickly it left him dizzy.

“Aunt Flavia.” Odin greeted. “Was the journey here filled security and safety?”

“As secure and safe as a journey into battle can be.” She dryly replied. “I cannot promise we didn’t run into a few undead soldiers.”

“Faceless.” Niles muttered. “So far out here?”

“It appears.” Flavia answered. “Regardless, we’re here and await to hear your battle strategy.”

She eyed Leo and his throat dried. Still, Leo knew what their plans were. He couldn’t act uncertain. That wasn’t fair to the soldiers awaiting orders.

“Leo, you’ll take Corrin and meet up with Regna Ferox and Ylisse. Guide them towards the next port town towards the capital. We will meet you there. The port town’s defenses are so focused on sea-based attacks that their ground army lacks.” Xander spoke, pointing once again to the map.

“They have a massive wall and automated magical artillery so do be careful.” Camilla added. “Still, that’s their reliance and their downfall.”
“We’ll have to move swiftly.” Lucina added her brow furrowed. “They may be sea-based in defense and offense, but they are close to some smaller towns. Even a few dozen back up troops could be trouble.”

“Especially if they have a mage that can summon Faceless.” Niles grimaced.

They were halfway to the town when the ground bubbled the acidic purple. Leo swiftly pulled his tome out, casting a fire spell before the Faceless could reach the surface. Guttural screaming and moans filled the air and Leo shivered roughly. Wailing like dead spirits set to destroy the earth, Leo covered his ears with one hand as he fired another spell. More Faceless popped up but Leo distinctly heard a battle cry from the Regna Ferox troops and soon the forest was chaos. Dodging most of the close-range battle, Leo focused on firing long range. Beside him, Leo heard arrows fire and Niles cuss under his breath. The familiar voice eased the churning in Leo’s stomach.

“Keep pushing forward!” Flavia yelled. “We must reach our destination! Don’t leave any of them alive!”

“Sir!” A hundred voices seemed to echo the word at once.

Leo fired another spell. They’d make it to the town, even if he had to burn everything in his wake to ashes.

Everyone convened by sundown. Leo by this time was caked in blood, mud, and gunk. His hair matted, his arms sore, and his entire body aching. No one looked better than him. Leo wasn’t sure if that was a good sign or not. Climbing bowlegged off his horse, Leo stretched and groaned as things popped that shouldn’t pop.

“We’ll camp here for tonight.” Corrin informed Leo, brushing their hand soothingly along Leo’s back. “At this point, there is no use in trying to hide our advances given the size of our army.”

Corrin was right. Leo returned the pat. “You doing all right?”

“As fine as I can with us going to war with King Garon.” Corrin replied, fingers brushing along their neck. Leo noted the opaque gleam of the talisman at their throat. “We’ll win.”

Leo had been harbouring the thought deep at night, with no one else around (or Odin and Niles). Years and years had passed with those words merely treason at best and fantasy at worst. Hearing the words spoken, crisply forming in the air with a quiet wave of confidence, jolted Leo. The jolt was sharp at first, stinging at his back, before spreading warmly and hotly along his spine.

Leo smiled thinly but with all his heart and strength. “We will.”

As the words left his lips, Leo felt a weight from his chest lift. A weight he hadn’t noticed before. His heart wavered in the air a little, hovering just a bit higher.

“Once we meet in the port town it’s straight on through to King Garon.” Ryoma muttered, finger trailing on the paper. “We’ll be greeted with a great number of soldiers and Faceless.”

“We’ll have to take sides and dwindle their numbers.” Fuga added. “We won’t be able to take them
all out. What we'll need is a distraction.”

“A distraction so we can reach Garon.” Xander added.

Leo didn’t need to know who the “we” in Xander’s sentence was.

They made it to the town the following day. The streets were empty, only dirt packed roads and weeds springing along the sides of the buildings. Everywhere had only whisperings of life: smithies with cold furnaces, inns silent, and the market stalls empty. Wind picked up and dust blew gently along the road in a cloud. The image disconnected with the expectation. Leo adjusted his tome and noted out of the corner of his eye Niles and Odin grip their weapons with white knuckles. A sharp note of silence covered the area, thickly coating everything in a blanket of wool and dust.

Carefully, as though the town itself was constructed of glass, Leo continued into the town. Each crunch of dirt and gravel under his feet left Leo’s ears ringing as though a canon had gone off. Each shuffle of the horse’s hooves and shift in body weight made Leo’s skin jump and crawl.

The silence might as well be a trumpet’s blast, leaving hearing disorientated for too many jarring minutes.

Leo opened his mouth, his voice wishing to push through the barrier of silence, crack, and break it. His jaw snapped shut. Leo’s gaze darted, taking in each small wooden house, each shut window, and each firmly shut door. Nothing stirred, nothing moved. The silence was slowly seeping into Leo’s body, eroding him from the inside with its screeching.

“Something is very wrong.” Owain muttered beside Leo.

Jumping, Leo’s heart skyrocketed in his chest. Owain’s voice was barely above a whisper but it was a clap of thunder to Leo’s ears.

“You think so?” Leo heard Flavia’s almost dry tone, except her gaze was too sharp and her posture tense. “Check one of the houses.” She turned to one of the Regna Ferox soldiers.

“Sir!”

Leo swallowed, his heart pounding harder. His mind screamed to tell the soldier and Flavia to not look inside. Anticipation blinded Leo and the moment hang on a precipice, dangling on a spider’s thread. A crystal-clear moment of pure ignorance glimmered before Leo’s eyes before shattering beautifully.

The body tumbled out the moment the soldier opened the door, as though it had been prompted behind. Leo’s mind flashed with a vision of the person’s last moments of life, of shutting the door, of trying to barricade themselves inside. In the light, Leo could see ragged slashes, skin torn in a brutal manner. Clearly, not attacked by a human. Blood, still a bit wet trailed from the body. Leo stared as the red leaked into the ground, mixing and becoming muddied. The soldier jumped back soundlessly and looked at their feet before back towards them. Flavia’s lips were thinned. Leo forced his brain to kick into gear. Logic stated that if the blood was still wet and running either the enemy wasn’t too far or…

“Faceless.” Leo’s voice sounded foreign to his ears. “Faceless.” He spoke a bit louder. “A mage could be near by.” He whipped his head around to survey the area. “We could be—”

A blinding spell circled the area before the familiar stench of putrid flesh, acid, and molding filled the
area. Leo jumped back and saw the ground bubble purple as Faceless slowly rose.

“Still not sending their own men, huh?” Flavia hissed. “Cowards.”

“Cowardly or not,” Odin swung his sword and pierced the side of a Faceless, “We have to take them out and find justice for this slaughtered town.”

Flavia’s response was lost on Leo in favour of Odin’s words. The slaughtered town. Odin was right. There were only two options: either some of the villagers escaped or they were killed. Leo’s stomach churned. This village was a port town with a defense system, not an offense system. They were barely a blip on the map if not for their center of sea-based trade. King Garon had no reason to attack the port village other than send a message.

A message to them.

Leo’s blood ran hot. “We’ll reduce the enemy to ashes. They’ll be nothing but cinders.”

Attacking the Faceless this time was easier. With Regna Ferox’s forces in action, Leo witnessed why they were feared. Their attacks were smooth, coordinated, and brutal. Within moments the Faceless were gone and the village was once again silent.

“How disgusting.” Niles gently ran a hand over Leo’s shoulder. “These monsters just spawn and attack whoever is in front of them. The villagers had no chance.”

“That’s what they were banking on.” Owain sighed.

Corrin gasped somewhere near Leo. “That’s—That’s horrible. These people were innocent.”

Leo’s heart ached and he wanted to pull Corrin into his arms. Not now. “We’ll just have to, as Odin said, get justice for this village.”

“Aw, is someone upset by a measly village’s demise?”

That oily voice. Leo hissed and shot a spell in the direction of the voice. Iago laughed and Leo’s blood immediately turned icy. “Can’t even show up properly to face us? Coward.”

“Cowards live another day.” Iago replied, or at least the projection of him did. “Your rebellion will be crushed and you’ll wish you stayed in your little tower.”

Leo shot another spell at Iago. “Go back snivelling to King Garon like the cockroach you are.”

Iago’s eyes narrowed. “You’ll regret insulting me, Lord Leo. I’ll snap your legs over and over before I kill you personally. You’ll be begging for mercy.”

“I’d never beg you for anything.” Leo coldly replied.

Iago’s hissed but vanished once more. Leo stared at the empty space and saw Iago’s bloodied body. It made him feel only marginally better. Putting his tome away, Leo looked ahead. Soon, when Xander, Camilla, and Ryoma’s forces were with them they’d move.

Everyone else arrived within the hour. During that time, they had investigated the homes, finding the bodies, creating their own memorial site. When the war was over Leo hoped that they’d be able to give the village a proper burial. The business of investigating the homes only helped with the new atmosphere that had spread among everyone. Leo tasted the itch in the air. Calm before the storm.

His heart strangely had stopped pounding and now all Leo could see was their goal in front of him.
Soon, everything would be over. For better or for worse.

~

“Ready?”

Leo half laughed. “I’ve been hearing that question too many times recently.”

“Sorry.” Xander’s lips twisted into a half smile.

“No, don’t apologize.” Leo gazed towards the direction of the castle. “It’s been so long since we were anywhere near the castle.”

“It has changed, no doubt.” Camilla added, placing a warm arm on Leo’s shoulders in a half hug.

“We have changed too.” Elise pipped up before her voice was soft. “Do you think… Father hasn’t changed?”

Father. Leo’s lips felt sour just from hearing the word. “He changed the moment he accepted the prophesy from that blasted seer.”

“Or perhaps he had changed slowly and we didn’t realize until it was too late.” Corrin muttered.

“Regardless,” Xander gently pulled Corrin into a hug. “We’re here to fulfil that prophesy and kill King Garon.”

“It would be rude to not meet the King’s expectations.” Camilla sweetly said.

Leo snorted. “In the end, it was a self-fulfilling prophesy. King Garon signed his fate the moment he cursed and sent us away.”

~

Their trek up towards the castle was an utter blur to Leo. At some point some speeches were made about resilience and justice. Perhaps words such as “victory”, “honour”, and “freedom” were added in.

Leo couldn’t remember. All his brain could focus on was the castle looming ahead. Brick by brick, stone by stone, the castle soon emerged from the dense forest, like a beast in a fairy tale. The trees knotted, twisted, and bare towards the castle and all the place needed were some thorny bushes and a fire breathing dragon.

Along the perimeter of the castle Leo could spot the forces for Garon, all waiting and still. They were a mass of dullness that sucked all the life from the area. It sent a full-bodied shiver down Leo’s spine. He gripped his tome tightly. Stopping just on the slight uphill from the castle, Leo exhaled.

“This is it.” Niles said beside Leo, gently touching his hand. “Ready?”

“Is everyone in position?” Leo muttered out of the side of his mouth.

“You know the answer to that.” Odin added. “We’re surrounding them. It’s just a matter of moments now. Ready to go take down King Garon?”

Leo glanced once more at the troops around the base of the castle. They’re be more inside.

“We’ll still go on a date after this, right?” Leo half muttered.
“Of course, I’d never go back on my word.” Niles replied.

“I said we’d go on adventures and that’s what we’ll do.” Odin answered.

Leo looked at Niles and Odin. They looked the same as they did when Leo first met them: courageous, bright, and his ray of hope. Stepping into their personal space without a word, Leo leaned in and pressed a kiss to Niles’s lips. The kiss was gentle, warm, a butterfly in the wind. Parting, Leo then pressed another one to Odin, who gave a rather high squeak, complete with pink on his cheeks.

“Was I too bold?” Leo asked as he pulled away.

“No.” Odin breathed out, touching his lips. “Just… Aunt Flavia probably saw.” He flushed harder.

“She already has guessed the nature of our relationship, no doubt.” Niles told Odin.

“Yes, but it’s the principle of the matter—”

Niles leaned in and kissed Odin roughly. When they pulled away, Odin had a brighter blush on his cheeks.

“You…”

“Let’s kick ass so Leo can get to King Garon and end this battle.” Niles smoothly said.

“For our freedom.” Leo muttered before finding Flavia off the side. She gave a wink.

“Let’s go.” Leo raised his voice.

The battle broke out, complete with a cry. Chaos engulfed the land. Leo raced down the hill on his horse, spells flying and weapons singing in violence. Odin moved on ahead with the Regna Ferox troops and soon he was lost in the sea of people. Niles then gave Leo a smile before he moved around towards the trees. Leo bit his lip before he focused on his goal: the castle’s gate.

“Clear the path!” Flavia’s voice reached the entire area. “Our objective is still the same, men!”

Soon, Leo noticed flying units soar overhead, more battle happening above. Somewhere up there, was Camilla, flying towards the castle. The stomping and storming of horses also joined and Leo knew Xander and Elise were in the throng of them. Soldiers raced on foot, weapons raised and Leo knew Corrin was with them too. All of them were moving towards the castle.

Casting another spell, Leo kept pushing through the chaos, through the attacks on all sides, to the entrance. Just a little further. Urging his horse, Leo kept his eye out for soldiers. A small platoon of Regna Ferox soldiers were within Leo’s peripheral and with each stroke of their weapons they helped clear the way for Leo.

It was probably why Leo didn’t see the Faceless start to spawn under him until too late. His horse reared and Leo half fell off. Gripping the reigns, Leo shot a fire spell at the ground and urged his horse to both calm down and push onward.

Luck wasn’t on his side. His horse was soon caught in the miasma in the ground. Leo’s heart sank as he fired another spell. Whining, the horse tried to buck Leo off, but Leo automatically gripped the reigns, keeping himself on.

“Shush girl, shush.” Leo muttered. “We have to keep moving.”
An arrow whizzed by Leo and he saw a Faceless go down. Leo’s heart pounded and Niles flashed in his mind. Pressing onward, Leo managed to coax his horse out of the miasma and around it, towards the gate.

“Good girl, good girl.” Leo chanted like a spell.

The gate was now within a good two hundred meters. Leo kept moving, kept low, and heard the sound of war all around him. Another spell, another body down. Leo urged onward. If he could just…

A spell came out of nowhere and nearly hit Leo. It grazed the side of his horse and gravity pulled Leo to the ground harshly. His horse was off somewhere, either running rider-less or collapsing within the sea of people. Leo swallowed and his heart ached but he didn’t have time to mourn over the potential death of his horse. Glancing upward, Leo saw Iago at the foot of the castle, Faceless around him. The sun glinted off Iago and shadows were cast. He had to be real.

Leo ran along the crowds and mentally calculated his distance. There was no indication to where his siblings were or if they were fine. Adrenaline and belief fueled Leo and when he fired a fire spell so huge it engulfed three Faceless at once, Leo rolled onto the steps and closer to Iago.

“You pest.” Iago hissed. “You think you’re so clever with your allies. We’ll crush them all! We’ll kill them all! The world will be Nohr and King Garon’s mercy.”

“Think again, Iago.” Leo fired a spell. “There are no illusions, no barriers between us. My family and I are advancing and you’re not stopping us.”

“Foolish boy, you’ll never win against me.”

Leo wanted to roll his eyes at Iago but the spell fired at him was very real. Dodging in a half roll, Leo attempted to move up the steps but Iago fired spells faster than Leo could scramble away from them and stand up. Iago let out a cackle.

“Look at you, just like a little monkey, scrambling around. You should die like the pathetic worm that you are.”

“You…” Leo panted as he tried to fire a spell at Iago. “Should keep your animal comparisons the same.”

Iago fired another spell and Leo toppled to the side, groaning.

“Smart. You always thought you were so smart, talking back to me all those years. I’ll kill you now and silence you forever like the—”

A swoop of wind cut Iago off. Leo looked and saw Fuga standing at the bottom of the stairs with Corrin, Xander, and Elise. Leo scrambled properly to his feet and watched as above Camilla landed, almost on top of Iago, but the oily man had managed to evade her.

“Leo!” Elise rushed to him, her staff out. A warm light filled Leo.

“Thanks.” Leo stood up with less pain than anticipated.

“Let’s end him.” Camilla cooed. “He’s in our way.”

Corrin gripped their sword and Elise’s brow furrowed. Leo looked up at Iago who was opening his book and chanting. Purple began to bubble at their feet.
“Crap. Faceless.” Leo raced up the stairs.

The distance between Leo and Iago was great. The force of the spell kept pushing Leo back and soon Corrin, Xander, Camilla, and Elise weren’t able to move. Iago cackled again.

“You, fools! Do you think numbers will make the odds in your favour? I’m too powerful for you to handle. You’ll die here and then King Garon will—”

Leo saw an axe fly towards Iago. The object jolted Iago, the spell breaking. A second later he screamed out as the axe buried into his shoulder. Out of the corner of Leo’s eyes he saw Camilla grin widely, weaponless. Taking the window open, Leo raced up the steps and cast a spell, disarming Iago. The purple at their feet vanished and soon Iago was on the ground, Leo towering over him. His siblings soon joined and Iago was caged. Leo kicked at him and watched Iago scream and gasp, his hand wetly touching the axe in his shoulder.

“You… you… you’ll PAY FOR THIS!”

“We’ve paid more than enough for this damn country.” Xander answered. “We’re taking it back.”

“That seer was RIGHT!” Iago raved at them. “You barbarians should have been killed!”

Leo almost leaned down but Camilla did and pressed her axe further into Iago. He gasped and screamed. She then leaned in closer. “Shame you won’t be alive to see the prophesy fulfilled then.”

She pulled the axe out and blood pooled around Iago at an alarming rate. He’d die of blood loss soon. As Iago became paler and paler Leo’s hand itched to hurt him more, give more pain to the man who for so many years tormented him. But…

“You’re not worth me dirtying my hands.” Leo muttered, kicking Iago a bit as he opened the tome up. “Don’t worry, you’ll see King Garon soon enough.”

He then fired a spell and Iago was no more.

~

Stone walls cast deep shadows as the torches on the walls glimmered brightly. Inside the castle was silent, a world cut off from the carnage outside. No guards, no servants, nothing greeted them. Just empty halls filled with stone and fire. To the side, Leo spotted the grand stair case and the smaller stair cases. He saw the windows and the rooms off the sides. Everything was shut, unmoving, hollowed out.

The throne room was straight ahead. As they moved in closer the ceiling became higher and higher and soon crystal chandeliers dangled brightly and warmly at impossible heights. It was like the last casting of life at the end of a crypt.

“Is everyone all right?” Elise asked as they moved. “I can heal you if you need it.”

“No thanks, Elise.” Corrin sighed.

“Something wrong?” Camilla immediately caught.

“It’s just… I thought I’d see Gunter at the battle.”

Leo bit his lip. “Perhaps he’s mixed in the crowds? I’m sure he’s fine, where ever he is.”

“We’ll find him once we’re done here, Little One.” Xander gave a small smile that vanished
immediately. “We’re here.”

In front of them were the impossible doors to the throne room. They were heavy and made of solid wood, complete with elegant wood carvings that spiraled all the way upwards towards the ceiling. Leo exhaled and stared at the doors. Beyond this door was the throne room. King Garon had to be inside.

Xander touched the door and immediately pushed onwards. There was no light, no pause in time. There was simply when the door was shut and when the door was open. Reality didn’t slip or jumble. Time kept moving.

King Garon sat on his throne. He had more grey hairs than Leo remembered but his armour was still dark and polished. The Crown on his head still gleamed wickedly in the light and the long cape around his shoulders was pristine. His eyes were dull and blank, nothing filtering through.

“Children,” He boomed. “So nice to pay a visit to your father.”

“You’re not our father.” Leo automatically replied. “We’re not your children. You changed that when you cursed and locked us away.”

“I should have killed you instead.” Garon spat at Leo. “I showed you mercy.”

“Mercy?” Leo choked on the word.

He thought it was a mercy? Leo’s brain flashed to the Tower. He gripped his tome. Rage, burning, hot, molten welled inside Leo. He ripped his tome open and formed words to attack but Garon stood up and dark magic swelled at his finger tips, cutting Leo’s spell off immediately.

“You insolent children!” Garon bellowed. “You came here, just like that Seer told me. I was foolish in allowing you to live. I won’t make that same mistake again!”

Garon attacked and Leo was blown over; one moment standing, the next on the ground. All around him, Leo saw his siblings on the ground too. Garon towered over them and laughed, looking up the ceiling. Madness swirled in clouds over Garon’s eyes.

“They were right! This power! This magic! I’ll crush my enemies! I’ll destroy you all!”

For a moment, Leo heard a distortion in Garon’s voice, almost like something else was speaking through him. Then, Garon’s form distorted just a touch and Leo swore he saw the outline of dragon wings. It vanished a second later.

“You cannot defeat me.” Garon gloated. “I’ll enjoy killing you and ending the prophesy.”

Defeat them? Leo wrangled himself to his feet and glared at Garon, his tome in hand. Soon, his siblings stood up and they all looked at Garon. Numbers for taking down Garon didn’t matter. They just needed an open window of opportunity. Leo glanced around and then spotted the chandeliers on the ceiling.

“Fire!” Leo shot at the lights.

They tumbled downwards, crashing mainly by Garon. The dust and the disorientation from the attack allowed Xander and Camilla to rush at Garon, weapons in hand. Metal met metal and Leo watched as Garon somehow managed to avoid most of the remains of the chandeliers. In his hands were two swords.
“You’re going to pay for what you’ve done.” Camilla told Garon, whaling on him with her axe. “For locking us up, for splitting us up.”

“For the village we saw along the way, for the people you’ve stepped on for power.” Xander added.

“For those who were suffering under your rule.” Corrin added, racing towards Garon, sword in hand. “We’re going to end you.”

Leo’s heart warmed at the display of resolve of his siblings. Wobbling to his feet, Leo raced closer to cast his spell. Garon roared, the sound of his voice similar to a wild animal. Everyone steadied their stance but Garon began to glow with light.

“You UNGRATEFUL FOOLS.” Garon’s voice rang through the entire hall. “YOU WILL BEG ME FOR MERCY! YOU’LL WISH YOU DIED A THOUSAND DEATHS BEFORE I KILL YOU.”

Leo glanced at Elise who was wobbling, holding her staff tightly in her hands, muttering healing spells off the side. Tears streaked down her face. Xander was sweating and Corrin was wobbling with exertion. They had to end this now. Leo opened his mouth to cast the spell, Leo was half way done when Garon sent a shock wave of magic at them. They all toppled to the ground, panting and wheezing. Leo tasted blood in his mouth and spat it out. His tome had flown across the room. Making himself stand up, Leo’s vision blurred. The smell of blood filled his nose. Leo touched his face and felt the wetness of blood at his finger tips. He needed a weapon. One that he could pick up without running to it.

“GIVE UP!” Garon drew his swords. “I’LL END YOU NOW. STARTING WITH YOU.”

He began to stalk over towards Corrin. Leo gasped out, blood freezing. His legs gave out but Leo had to help Corrin. He had to do something rather than just lie on the ground. Half crawling using his arms, Leo reached out for Corrin. Garon reached Corrin and grabbed them by the arm, roughly hauling them to their feet. Corrin dangled off the ground and cried out.

“Corrin!” Their voices all merged into one.

“I should have done this years ago.” Garon half shouted at Corrin. “You’ve caused me nothing but grief. You’re a blight on this country. It’s why Gunter is dead.”

The strangled cry out of Corrin’s lips broke Leo’s heart. Garon laughed loudly.

“You didn’t know?” He mocked, “Poor Gunter, coming here thinking he could take me on. We met him before he even arrived at the castle. He was tossed off the edge of the Bottomless Canyon. Shame. He was a good soldier and a worthy pawn.” Garon shook Corrin harshly. “Gunter died because of you and your actions. You’ll join him soon enough!”

No! Leo kept pushing himself forward. He had to grab something anything…

A clang at Leo’s side jolted his thoughts. There, in the corner, usually for decoration, was a suit of armour. It had toppled over from the fighting, laying in pieces. Most of the pieces were too heavy or too small for anything but there, lying under the breast plate was a lance.

Leo picked it up without hesitation. It was longer but lighter than any lance he’d practiced with before. The shaft was made of wood but the spear head was long, thin. Leo stared. He had no knowledge of how lances worked but any weapon could be thrown if someone tried hard enough…
Standing to his feet, using the lance as a crutch, Leo half leaned against the wall. He had to do this. Gasping, Leo saw Garon’s hand move over to Corrin’s throat, ready to strangle them. Raising the lance was impossible. Leo’s legs wobbled and ached along with a dull throb in his head but Leo had to save Corrin. Xander and Camilla were wavering and Elise wouldn’t make it in time or be effective with just a healing staff…

“We got you.”

A warm, soft voice filled Leo’s ears. He felt Niles’s calloused hand touch his own and soon Odin’s joined him. Gasping, Leo turned to see Niles and Odin half against the wall, smiling at him. Leo opened his mouth.

“Throne rooms always have sneaky side entrances, milord.” Niles muttered.

“Let’s throw this.” Odin added.

Turning to Garon, who was still staring at Corrin’s struggling form, Leo lifted the lance with all his might, feeling Niles and Odin’s firm support behind him.

“We’ll aim for his hand.” Niles muttered, “Allow me to help.”

Niles directed Leo’s hand at the angle. Leo breathed out and then he then threw the lance.

It sailed through the air and into Garon’s hand. Garon screamed and dropped Corrin. Xander and Camilla got to their feet and raced over. Corrin, coughing on the ground, grabbed one of Garon’s swords and thrust. The sword pierced Garon’s shoulder. Blood poured out, similar to Iago. The joint breaks for the armour were doing nothing at the close angle. Leo felt Niles and Odin shove him gently towards Garon. Leo ungracefully half ran towards Garon. Xander and Camilla got to him first. Camilla dragged Corrin away and Leo saw Elise racing towards them, staff glowing. Xander held the other of Garon’s swords and pressed it close to Garon’s throat. Leo half fell forward and grabbed the lance he had thrown and ripped it out of Garon’s hand.

“You!!” Garon half panted. “You’ll… pay…”

“It looks like you were right, King Garon.” Xander clearly stated.

“Or perhaps the Seer was half right.” Camilla joined Xander, her axe pointed at him.

“Or you made it reality.” Leo added. “Either way, this is farewell. Go rot in the underworld.”

Then, their weapons moved and King Garon toppled to the ground, dead before his body even hit the floor. A long moment of silence hit Leo’s ears before he too fell back to the ground.

“Woah, easy there!” Odin caught him.


“Servant’s entrance.” Niles gave a small, weary smile. “Best not dally around. Show that we’ve won. That will stop the fighting outside.”

Xander glanced at Garon’s body and then to his sword. “It must be done. I ask you make sure Elise doesn’t watch.”

“Elise, come here.” Camilla gave Xander a nod.

Leo turned to Niles and Odin, who were kneeling beside him. They shot Leo a smile. Leo leaned
into their bodies. “ Seriously, that was reckless, coming in here.”

“We helped you and that’s what matters.” Niles curled an arm around Leo’s shoulders. “Even if we were almost late. Kind of like the last-minute reinforcements.”

“It makes us epic heroes!” Odin added, beaming.

Leo laughed. “Last-minute heroes, huh?” He looked up at the ceiling of the throne room. “I suppose your arrival in any other reality would be cheesy but I can’t complain since I’m alive and we won.”

“That’s right, no complaints.” Odin pouted. “Just hugs, kisses, and dates from here on out.”

That earned another round of laughter from Leo. “I suppose so. This is finally over.”

“Dating our brother?” Xander mildly asked, his one hand half behind his back so Leo didn’t have to see first hand. The blood dripping sort of gave it away though. Leo didn’t look at Garon’s body. “We can discuss that later. I’ll... be back.”

“I can join you.” Leo tried to stand up.

Xander shook his head. “Please, allow me to be the only one burdened with this gruesome sight.”

He then left while concealing his one arm artfully. Leo wasn’t sure how Xander managed it. He wasn’t going to ask. Flopping onto the ground, Leo closed his eyes. The journey to rebuilding was going to be a long one but with his family, Niles, and Odin by his side, things were finally looking up.

Leo didn’t need a prophesy to make his future become a reality.

Chapter End Notes

Burning of Faceless: I just like the idea of Faceless being flammable.

Niles and Odin making up: I had an entire fight with them planned and then when I got to the bath scene I just... felt like it would be too... boring? The usual you'd see in any shonen anime? So, I decided to make their sort of making up quiet and a little more subdued.

Lucina: She was in Hoshido while Odin was in Nohr. The difference is, Lucina was immediately recognized by the Hoshido Royal family. They housed her on pretense of her being there for "diplomatic" reasons. Lucina was just harder to hide and pretend she's just someone common is what I was thinking. Basically, the exact opposite of Owain.

Ryoma: Sorry I only managed to write Ryoma and not the other Hoshido Royals. I was just so swamped with characters that I sort of felt I had to focus on who was most important.

Ryoma and lance techniques: I thought Ryoma knowing lance techniques was a fun nod to A) Shiro knowing lance techniques and B) Ryoma’s Hot Spring Alt in Heroes.

Lightning scars: From Raijinto
Purple midnight: I made that flower/weed up myself.

Fuga: I really like him as a character and I am sad I didn't get to write him more. Next time?

Sandwiches: In reference to Leo's Picnic Alt in Heroes

Gunter: I forgot about him until the very last moment so I wrote something a little more canon based happening to him. Is Gunter dead? Well, I mean canonically, falling into the Bottomless Canyon wasn't the worst thing ever so...

What Xander was doing at the end: Um... he uh... cut Garon's head off... ew.

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