Shattered Reflection

by Natzo

Summary

In one world, Robin died abandoned by those she thought friends, with the sword of her lover driven into her chest. In another world, a young man with no memories of his past was trusted to guide Ylisse in war. Given a new chance, the broken queen will make sure this young tactician survived, no matter the cost.
There were no windows in her cell, and only the light of the bolted torches pushed back the shadows around her. The cold metal of the shackles chafed at her wrists and ankles, biting deeply into her flesh. Her dimeritium bindings gave a faint glow as they stopped the magic from leaving her body, preventing from casting any spell that could help her escape.

Not like she had the will to try.

Robin had lost count of the amount of time she had spent in this cell. Was it the same cell? She remembered small glimpses of movement—a boat, maybe? — but she couldn't get a clear memory due to the cloudiness in her head. The meager rations of food and water she received every day did little to help. The former Grandmaster of Ylisse's body was beaten and her spirit broke. She didn't know why she bothered to draw another breath every passing second.

Things hadn't always been like this for her. Only a few weeks –months? – back she had been sharing meals and stories with her then-comrades. The people she had protected for years of blood and sweat, whom she shared so much of her new life.

The very same people that turned against her.

The Shepherds hadn't even bothered to listen to her when she had pleaded with them. Robin had never wanted the cursed blood that flowed through her veins. Why couldn't they believe she would never have given Validar the Fire Emblem if she had control of her own free will?

But it didn't matter to them. As soon as the future princess had told them of the betrayer, she had been chief suspect. When Validar took control of her and forced her to steal the Fire Emblem, they hadn't wasted any time putting her in chains and locking her up, cementing the destruction of their bonds.

Stahl, Lissa, and Olivia had averted their gazes when she was marched by in chains, offering no support or words of comfort. Virion and Sumia, who had helped her so much and been her closest confidants, instantly turned their backs on her and stood with the rest. Those devout to Naga desired her head on a spike while calling her every slanderous name and slur they could think of, only kept at bay from physical violence and punishment by fear.

Would her death result in the increase of the power of Future Grima? Did both of them have to be killed at the same time? Only pragmatism and paranoia had spared her life this long.

The surviving children despised her utterly, for they saw her as the source of their misery and loss. Only four of them remained, the others lost to the Risen and her future counterpart's machinations. The suffering they endured only served to fuel the hatred and rejection coming from their parents.

And yet it was Lucina the one that hurts the most, for she was living proof that the owner of her heart would never be hers.

Frederick felt vindicated on his past suspicions. It honestly didn't surprise her when he stated he should have killed her in that field so long ago. Seizing the role of tactician from her, the knight took tactical command and led the Shepherds through the skirmishes from Plegia to Mount Prism and back. However, his zeal and hatred did not translate to tactical talent, only recklessness and death.
Poor choices and orders had led to many of her erstwhile comrades falling on the battlefield, and the blame had been summarily pinned onto her.

Henry with his stomach sliced open as he protected Owain. Cordelia's corpse riddled with arrows. Donnel, Tharja, Kellam... Lost in battle atop Mount Prism as the Risen fell on them.

Laying alone in her prison, it was easy for the memories of the Shepherds' accusations to mix with the insidious whispers in her heart.

' Liar! Traitor! '

' They never trusted you... The Fell Dragon has no friends... '

' Filthy Plegian! '

' They only used you... The Fell Dragon has no family... '

' You're a monster! '

' You can only trust me... The Fell Dragon has no children... '

' I'll end you myself! '

' He never loved you... The Fell Dragon has no lovers...'

Robin drew a sharp breath, shivering.

Chrom's rejection had been the one that hurt the most. She had willingly given him everything she had. Worked herself to the bone to help him rebuild the halidom and being there after Emmeryn's death. Had the situation called for it she would have laid down her life for him, the man who had given her a life. Robin would have to be blind to not notice the bond they had shared and her growing feelings for her prince. A prince saving lost girl and falling in love? A fairy tale through and through.

But life was no fairy tale. Whatever possible relationship she could've had with Chrom was destroyed as the princess from the future recounted stories of her own mother, a village maiden that Chrom had loved above all else. And since the battle with Validar, he had only eyed his tactician with distrust, any semblance of friendship long gone.

That hurt worse than any injury she had suffered in her life.

The darkness that surrounded her grew colder, the little flames from the torch doing little for her comfort. Grima's voice— her voice— kept whispering in her head as her only companion during her imprisonment, until it had fallen abruptly silent not long ago.

She should be thankful for the silence. Robin had ignored its whispers for as long as she could, and its absence was a welcome respite in her moments of lucidity. Then her own treacherous thoughts took its place, echoing Grima's poisonous words. Now, in those rare moments of lucidity, she felt cold rage flowing through her veins.

' Why!? Why wouldn't they listen to me? If I were truly Grima's thrall I wouldn't have just stopped at the Emblem! In my position, I could have easily disposed of all of them if I so desired! I know them better than they know themselves— '

But just as quick as it came, the anger was replaced by depression and defeat.
Robin remained silent in both body and mind for a while after that, her head free from any thoughts.

An unknown amount of time passed before the door to her prison suddenly grated open. The sound of footsteps broke and dispelled the monotonous silence that had pressed at her mind.

"Robin."

That voice has painfully familiar to her. Mustering what meager strength she had left, Robin lifted her head to see Chrom walk into her cell. As she had expected, his expression was devoid of emotion. The Exalted Falchion, infused with Naga's flames, shone brightly on his hip.

"Grima is defeated," he stated emotionlessly, watching her closely.

'Well, that certainly explained Grima's silence,' was Robin's first thought.

"Gregor, Miriel, Lon'qu, and Ricken fell in the final battle."

And just like that, any feeling of victory she felt crumpled under the overwhelming feeling of guilt towards the newly fallen. Despite knowing their deaths were not her fault but the newly instated knight-tactician's, she couldn't help but feel responsible for their demise.

Still, casualties aside, she didn't understand why he came to tell her this. To rub it in her face that they didn't need her help to beat a god? To tell her they can put her down just as easily? At this point, she just didn't care anymore. Her head hung back down again as she sighed tonelessly.

"…What now? Do you come to torture me? Parade me as a trophy? Give me to Lucina to let her get some sick revenge?" Robin looked at the ground, eyes closed in defeat. She felt bitter, but she didn't care.

"…No. I suppose I still have some…" Robin couldn't decipher the look on his face. "...respect for the bonds I think we shared, so I've decided, you won't spend a lifetime imprisoned here."

Something stirred in her heart. Hope, maybe? Could it be? Maybe a trial? Would he be willing to listen to her now that there was no impending threat from the now slumbering Fell Dragon?

Once more, she lifted her head with a hopeful look in her eyes, just as the gleaming length of the Exalted Falchion pierce her chest.

A sickening squelch reached her ears, and suddenly she could no longer feel anything but a white-hot burning sensation incinerating the small hope she had held in her heart.

"Kah-!?"

She coughed as shock took hold of her, droplets of blood flecking the edge of the sword. Trickles of the same crimson liquid leaked out of the corners of her mouth.

"W-wha–" She saw the stony determination on Chrom's face. "C-Chro..." Robin gasped.

A flood of ichor forced its way out of her mouth, leaving her body far weaker as she began to slump over the blade. Dredging up the last of her strength, she forced out a hoarse whisper. The sole question that pounded through her disbelieving mind.

"Why?"
The Exalt's eyes locked with her own, cold and dead, as he violently twisted the holy blade, rendering her chest a gory mess.

"As long as you live," he stated, emotionlessly as if reading from a report, "that cursed bloodline can continue. With your demise, Grima will no longer set foot into this world again. **Begone, Fellblood.**"

Robin's face twisted in despair and betrayal, anguish filling the crevice her heart had once occupied. She had predicted that this might happen, but it was another thing to actually experience it. She had felt foolish hope at the chance for forgiveness and paid for it.

Her white hair was stained red, and a river of crimson poured out of the wound in her chest to collect in a puddle on the floor. Choking on her own blood trying to take one more breath, her last thoughts were of the sound of rustling metal as Falchion was pulled from her body. Exalted fire mixed with its Fell antithesis that manifested from her body and engulfed her, overpowering the dimeritium. Flesh cracked like ceramic before turning to black dust.

The last vestiges of life fled her as her body crumbled away.

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Robin could feel her soul moving through space, traveling to whatever afterlife and judgment laid in waiting for her when a cold grasp stopped her movements. Pushing through the pain she felt at the actions of the man she had once loved, the tactician opened her violet eyes just to meet a pair of red ones glowing with rage.

Grima stood before her, a wound equal to her own in her chest. Both bloody wounds burned with the azure flames of Naga, with the only thing holding it back being their own purple flames.

The two counterparts were floating high above in the sky, their bodies a mirror image of one another. The void around them was eerily silent as if awaiting the outcome of their meeting.

"**So, your so-called friend finally killed you?**" Grima finally began, visibly trying to ignore the pain from her wound. Her stolen face was twisted into a mocking sneer as she looked over the similarly broken form of her Avatar. "**My foolish mortal side still believed in them, you know? Took enough control back from me to allow the foolish Exalt to deliver the final blow. And this is how they repay her? By murdering her past self a few days later? Hilarious.**"

Silence.

"**I also find it curious that he stabbed you right where he stabbed my body.**" Grima gestured to the cavity in her chest. "**Is this a universal mark for women who are too stupid to let go of their useless bonds?**"

Robin was still too emotionally broken to answer, and Grima took it as an invitation to continue.

"**But I know you're different that your future self. I can feel the darkness in your heart. You desire revenge, no? To inflict pain on them for mocking your sacrifices? Don't deny it, I can tell. After all, we are one and the same.**" Grima leaned closer to Robin, lovingly tracing circles on her cheek. "**I can grant you the retribution your heart desires,**" the dragon whispered, lips almost touching her ear. "**We're meant to remake this world anew in our image. Why do you care for bonds with such insects, when others are willing to treat you like the goddess you are?**"

As much as she hated to admit it, the dragon was right. Why did she keep fighting for them? Why not crush them as they had crushed her heart and bonds? Make them regret ever turning on her!
Robin looked down, shadows covering her eyes.

"Together we still have enough power to manifest once more. Join me and become what we were meant to be. Why not take that which you deserve over the corpses of those that wronged you?" Grima continued to seduce the tactician with promises of vengeance, trying taking advantage of her fragile state of mind.

'Because you're better than that,' her conscience challenged.

Robin blinked. Then she gave her mirror image a wry smile. A painful smile.

"You're right. We are one and the same," the tactician stated, much to the glee of the Fell Dragon. Grima pulled away as black flames engulfed Robin's form and power flowed through her soul. Their power became one as the tactician's eyes glowed red, the knowledge of the Dragon flowing into her mind. Slowly, Robin placed her hand on Grima's chest, feeling her future self's heartbeat, resonating and merging with her own.

"And that means…" A black bolt of tainted Thoron magic shot out of her hand, point blank, piercing through the Fell Dragon's back, "We are meant to die together."

Grima's face was one of shock as she felt against her past self's chest, a new fatal wound next to the one inflicted by the Exalt.

"There is, perchance, a power that could end Grima," Robin recited quietly, feeling a sharp lance of pain shoot through her own chest as well as she slumped forward a little, most of her strength fleeing her body. "However… 'Twould be her own..."

"WHY?!" snarled Grima, her black blood spilling from her mouth as her strength left her. The Fell Dragon tried to rise, but her body wouldn't respond; Her dormant, mortal half had taken back enough control to freeze her body once again, "After all this, why do you still resist me?! Why do you BOTH still resist me!?"

"They do have every right to hate us. And us to hate them. Maybe I should hate them," Robin conceded, feeling her existence crumbling away for the second time. "I gave everything for them, from my loyalty to my life'. 'For him' remained unsaid as their bodies were engulfed by flames. "I hope they knew I would never have done this by my own free will. But this world shouldn't suffer because of my weakness."

"Y-you…fool…you were always…my weaker half." Grima's life force seemed to flicker in her eyes as their crimson glow slowly dimmed, before vanishing altogether, leaving behind only a deep, dead purple.

"For the first time in my life, I'm glad we're part of the same being." Robin was mildly pleased her theory on their bond was proven true. She had dreams in which Naga had spoken with Chrom about Grima's immortality, only to mention that Grima could only die by her own hand.

"Now... I am finally... free..." she murmured softly.

As their forms faded, dissolving into motes of light, Robin accepted her fate, glad to finally end the misery of both her present and future self.

Unknown to her, this was just the start of another chapter in her life.
Chrom gazed at the ashes of the woman that had once held his heart, her expression forever burned into his mind. He closed his eyes, but her face, her visage of raw grief and suffering, was still as vivid as the real thing and would be for a long time. He allowed himself to feel grief as his stoic facade crumbled away.

'Whatever feelings I had for her no longer matter… It was not meant to be, anyway. Lucina is proof of that. Robin was not her mother. She was the Fell Dragon, the one meant to destroy the world.'

The Exalt remembered the private talks he had with Lucina. How her mother had been a village girl that had captured his heart. She knew next to nothing about Robin, other than her exploits for the tactician left Ylisstol after the war. Or at least that's what she swore. Robin must have distanced herself after he had broken off their relationship in the future.

'Had I been with her, would anything have changed? She may have resisted…'

He shook his head, gritting his teeth. It didn't matter now. He had made his choice to guarantee a future for the entire world. The Exalt could now focus on rebuilding his kingdom and maybe try to finally meet the girl who would become Lucina's mother. Ylisse would flourish, now that it was no longer threatened by Valm, Plegia, the Risen, or Grima.

Even if Robin had been innocent, as long as she lived she could continue the tainted Fell bloodline. Eventually, another one who would bear Grima would have been born. As such, no one from that lineage could be trusted. She had already been manipulated once, almost costing them the Fire Emblem.

In a way, it was a mercy.

'My actions were justified… right? The loss of a possible host will severely hamper Grima's eventual reawakening…

He walked out of the cell in the boat they used to reach the island that Grima hovered. Speaking of which, her draconic form's corpse was still visible lying on the side of the mountain, where it would remain rotting forever as a sick reminder of her existence, just like the skeletal remains outside Castle Plegia.

Here he saw the surviving Shepherds assembled, awaiting his word. His daughter ran to him, anxious to hear the news.

"Father! Is it done? Is it finally over?" Lucina asked, desperately wanting to hear confirmation of her source of suffering's demise.

"Yes, Lucina… It's over," Chrom said through a slightly strained smile as he was engulfed in a tearful embrace. Despite his inner turmoil, he was glad to give his daughter what she needed to finally rest easy. He hoped this was the beginning of an era of peace and prosperity.

But in time, he would find out that all actions have consequences.

Between each realm laid a void, like a sea of darkness that exists between life and death. In this space floated a mass of divine power surrounding two broken, shattered souls.

The power of a dead god clung to the tortured shards of both the present and future selves of the Ylissean tactician.

The same soul of two different times and a power that cannot be destroyed. With the Fell Dragon's
immortal consciousness gone for good, the draconic energy needed a new master to contain it. But in this vast ocean of nothingness, the only souls that could have handled it laid damaged before it. The essence immediately began working on instinct, looking for their combined survival.

The twin souls were surrounded by the flames of Grima, forging and fusing them to a stable state once more. As the purple fire melded their souls, memories from both of their lives flashed before their eyes before sinking into the whirlpool of their collective consciousness.

**A tactician walking to the capital to offer their services to the crown.**

**A young woman waking up in a field with no memories, grasping the hand of a handsome prince.**

**A test of skill to prove their worth.**

**A meeting with the defenders of the country.**

**An assassin crippling the prince, weakening him for life.**

**Two assassinations thwarted, saving the heirs of Ylisse.**

**Sweet Emmeryn beheaded in her room.**

**Glorious Emmeryn falling to her death.**

**A royal wedding, joining tactician and Exalt into a new life.**

**The man that she loved growing distant at the words of Marth.**

**The birth of her blue-haired daughter, carrying the mark of the Exalt into her eye.**

**A future princess; the daughter of a nameless woman, destroying a relationship before it bloomed.**

**The Conqueror raging for years of war, thousands dead on his foolish quest.**

**The Valmese Empire defeated in a year, never to march on the eastern continent.**

**A set of twins born in peace.**

**A twisted father forcing her to betray her friends.**

**Chrom dying at her hands, forgiving her for her actions.**

**The Shepherds cursing her Fell Blood as old bonds were broken by a legacy she never wanted.**

**A prisoner in her own body; twisting the corpses of her friends and subjects into soldiers of darkness.**

**Chained in a cell by the friends that no longer trusted her.**

**A holy sword ending a lifetime of misery.**

**A blade piercing a broken heart.**

A dark pulse of energy starting a new chapter in her life.

Two lifetimes joined together, their memories and torment crashed to form a vessel for the broken
woman. The pain she felt was immeasurable flesh and bone weaved into existence. Her heart beat once more, pumping the Fellblood through her new veins. The black fire had subsided, returning to her soul, utterly spent. Remnants of the flame still covered her being, a shadowy aura indicating her new status as the new Fell Dragon.

Her body was reformed anew, though scars remained in her flesh were the flames of the two dragons had clashed. Her wrists and ankles bore the marks of the dimeritium shackles while her breast would forever carry the mark were Falchion pierced through. The Mark of Grima was gone from her hand, and in its place there was a new brand—a serpentine dragon eating its own tail.

Robin, the new Fell Dragon, opened her eyes only to see darkness. The tactician knew this place from her memories of her time as Grima. This was the void where Grima slumbered after the First Exalt defeated them, neither alive nor dead. She couldn't see, for there was nothing there, but the oppressive feeling was familiar all the same. Robin tried to move, but all her strength was gone.

Memories replayed over and over, like a play of her torment written to torture for eternity. All her failures in both lives to be forever burned into her memory. Robin was aware of the mixed memories of both timelines. The accusations and threats. The insults from her former comrades. Her actions in the future. Her rampages against the world. The Shepherds falling to her tactics used against them. Her children running from the Risen she sent after them. Her friends turning on her until the man she loved pierced her heart with his blade.

Rage surged through her veins once as she screamed to the uncaring void, demanding a reason for her suffering. "Why did you do this to me?! I gave everything for you! Why couldn't you trust me!?”

As if answering her previous question more memories replayed. This time only of the future she destroyed. Of playing with her children and those of the Shepherds, only to later send their parent's corpses as soldiers against them. The Fell Dragon sat and tried to process her memories.

Lucina was her daughter, but she denied it to her face. Did she hate her so much to ensure Chrom married someone else? What about Morgan and Marc? Her darling twins must have died since they weren't with their sister.

"Ha…I'm such a horrible friend and mother… too weak to protect them…”

This place had to be her personal hell. Forever trapped replaying her failures. Robin couldn't help it—she laughed.

She threw her head back to let out a pained laugh. The harsh sound escaped her throat as bitter tears streamed down her face. As if answering her distress, the flames of Ignis manifested likes a coat around her skin. Weakened, bit still there.

"Hahaha… I can feel it… Grima's power… My power…haha… All that talk, and in the end, I am the Fell Dragon."

Robin just sat in the void until her tears ran out. She had no idea how long she spent floating there. Time was meaningless here. Eventually, she calmed herself enough to think of everything. No matter if it was against her will, Robin still felt responsible for whatever actions Grima performed with her body.

She had no way to fix the horrors her weakness brought. No matter how much she wanted to do something to mend the suffering her existence cause, she was trapped in this void. Not like there was anything she could do to repair the damage. This was all she could look forward to. An eternity of
solitude, with only her depressing memories as her company. A fitting punishment, in her opinion.

"Do you truly wish to stay here for eternity?"

The voice startled the tactician out of her stupor. Robin prepared for battle, gathering her remaining power into her hands. A purple flame manifested on her fingertips, ready to incinerate whatever being invaded her prison. No one should be here, no one else could even survive this void but herself.

"Who's there!? Show yourself!" Robin looked around, but only the void was visible.

"Is that the way to greet a visitor? It matters not who I am is not important, but what I can offer you is," the voice spoke again, only infuriating the tactician.

"Stop with riddles and speak clearly!" she asked as her mind ran through the possible scenarios. 'Is it Grima? No. The damned lizard is dead and it didn't sound like it. I obtained Grima's power, so who could it be?'

The voice replied once more, its androgynous tone only irking the tactician, "As you wish, Fellblood. I have a proposition for you. Do you wish for redemption?"

Robin froze at the words. It felt like a cruel joke to offer her such a thing. "...What do you mean? Is this a joke?! There is no redemption for me! My failures ended countless lives!" Blood boiled in rage at the insult. How dare this voice taunt her like this! "Why would I trust anything I hear from someone who won't even show me their face!?"

If the voice had any reservations to her attitude, it didn't express them. "I don't have a face to show you, for I am not here. As for redemption, you might not be able to fix your world, but you can help another."

"...That's it. I've finally gone mad. Figures." Robin released her magic and just sat down, her head on her hands.

"...Is it that hard to believe that there is atonement for you?" The voice asked before it continued, "During your travels, you came across the Outrealms, correct?"

"...Yes. They were memories and echoes of times long past... And I'm talking to myself," Robin snarked towards the void.

"That's where you're wrong. Outrealms are gates to other worlds, as real as yours," the voice corrected, catching her curiosity. "The exalted princess used the gate with the help of her timeline's Naga to travel to the past."

She flinched at the mention of her daughter. "And how do you know that?"

"I know because I'm not some figment of madness. I've come from one myself, seeking help for my realm."

Robin's eyes widened at the proclamation, but if what this being said was true, it still didn't make sense. "What does this have to do with me?"

"My world is a reflection of your original timeline, with minor permutations. But one thing remains the same—it has already fallen to the Fell Dragon. But just like yours, our exalted
princess has traveled to the past to end the threat before it starts."

"Who are you, really? I can't think of a being that could do all this, except Naga herself."

"…That's not far from the truth. Isn't that right, Naga?"

"Indeed," a new, familiar voice replied. Robin's head snapped around. Standing there was the Divine Dragon, Naga. The divine figure gave her a smile before she spoke to the disembodied voice."Save your energy and rest. I will explain everything to her."

"Very well," the voice replied as their presence dimmed, leaving Naga and a startled Robin alone.

Looking closely, Robin saw that Naga’s appearance didn't match even her worst future memories. Naga's visage was no longer the elegant one portrayed in all the paintings. Her stomach had deep gashes with brilliant blood flowing from the wounds as the divine fire did it's best to heal the damage. Claw marks and burns were scattered across her skin, signs of a lost battle. Even when she was Grima, she had never managed to hurt Naga this much.

"Naga? W-what happened to you?"

The goddess gave the tactician a smile, seemingly ignoring her wounds. "A gift from our Grima before he departed to the past."

Robin blinked. "He?"

"As my companion said, there are slight permutations. In our realm, Grima's vessel is male. Your brother to be precise," Naga clarified.

Robin sputtered at that comment. "My brother? What are you talking about!? My brother died in the womb!" Now that she could recall both her lives, Robin remembered her mother's lessons on their lineage. Twins in the Grimleal bloodline were common, as was the case with her. But her brother did not survive, leaving her alone.

The Divine Dragon nodded, as if aware of her thoughts. "In our world, your brother survived, but your counterpart was sacrificed to Grima in a blood ritual moments after birth. An offering, Validar said." Naga explained, much to Robin's horror. "Your mother still called her child Robin, so he shares your name."

"My brother, huh?" Robin mumbled to herself before a ghost of a smile painted itself on her face. She remembered what her mother told her about her pregnancy and how much she wished she had a sibling to play during her childhood. "Heh… well, not exactly weirder than anything else so far," she said wryly, letting a little chuckle out. "So you're not my Naga, huh?" A thought occurred to her. Narrowing her eyes, she turned to the goddess. "Wait, how do you know so much about me, then?"

A shrug was her answer, something she never expected from the demi-goddess. "It's not hard to glance into the history of a world when your spirit is no longer bound by mortality. Grima mortally wounded me and I barely managed to send the scions of the Shepherds back in time."

Robin grimaced at the image. "Grima left our Naga in that dead future after following the kids to the past. Not sure what fate is worse."

"Still, I fear my efforts will not be enough to defeat him. He has grown more powerful and
"ruthless than in your world. You brother and his comrades won't be able to handle him as they are."

"And who better to help them than their own Fell Dragon," Robin surmised.

Naga smiled at her and nodded, before continuing on a more somber tone. "We need someone that can help prevent this catastrophe. I fear that your brother might face a fate worse than yours."

Robin stood silently for a few moments, going over everything she had heard. While the situation was going way too fast for comfort, a tactician must be able to adapt to such changes. Finally having a brother. Helping him and his world would certainly help ease the weight of her sins, but at the same time, she remembered how she got to this position and couldn’t stop the bitterness from burning in her heart.

"...Why me, though? If everything you said is true, why ask the help of a broken woman? Surely there are worlds with better options than me. I have already failed my world... My friends turned on me... And now you want me to go help a parallel version of my and his own Shepherds? They will just turn on him and kill him too," Robin said bitterly.

Naga rested her scarred hand on Robin's shoulder. "All the more reason for you to help him. I believe you can achieve a better outcome and earn the atonement you desire. Is it not better than spending eternity here?"

Robin mulled over the words. While interacting with the Shepherds—any Shepherds— would certainly only lead to pain, she had the chance to spare her brother from a similar fate. Robin had a chance to make things better for someone, and that had to count for something.

"It matters not in the end if he is my brother or just some unlucky soul, I'll help him escape such a fate... And maybe I will find some peace for myself. It is better than sitting here alone in self-pity."

Robin stated, much to the deity's delight.

"Thank you, Robin."

"I will need to be careful with my interference, though. If I change too much my knowledge will be rendered obsolete. Then again, I doubt I will be able to remain in the shadows forever. I doubt I can prevent the war in Valm, though I may be able to prepare Ylisse earlier and help the rebellion," she thought out loud, as she latched on to the opportunity. Her mind was running all the possible scenarios. It was a familiar and conformable feeling for the tactician. Much better than drawing in despair. "When and where will you be sending me?"

"We shall send you about two years before your brother loses his memories. That should give you plenty of time to prepare," said Naga, pleased with her choice. "I shall warn you, though. Your body and magic might be much stronger than before, being reformed with to suit your draconic strength, but you’re not invincible. It will take years for you to be able to cast the most powerful spells in Grima's arsenal, which is why I'm sending you this far back."

Robin nodded, clenching her hand and feeling the magic tingling across her skin. "I can tell. This feeling… I need to recuperate from the wound from Exalted Falchion and learn to properly wield this power on my own," she said. They gave herself a once over. Despite her ugly scars, her body was in prime condition. "I feel better than ever, though. My body is stronger and my mind sharper. I can easily rely on my natural skills like this."
"Don't be overconfident," Naga warned her. "We don't know what will happen to you should you die in your current state. You might die for good and your power disperse, or it could go to this world's Grima. Or you could fall into slumber and become an easy target for him."

Robin cringed at the possibilities. "If he were to devour my power, he would be invincible. Not even Falchion would be able to defeat him this time." She then gave Naga a tight look. "You would be taking an awfully large risk by sending me there."

"Our options are limited, but I'm sure you're up to the challenge. And fear not, for you will not be ill-equipped," Naga said as she rose in the air, channeling her remaining magic above her head. Space warped like a ripple in water as a breeze rushed into the void. From the magical portal, an enormous fang came out, easily the size of a small house.

Robin recognized the magical signature on the broken bone. "That is one of Grima's fangs!"

Naga nodded. "We shall use it to forge a new blade--A counterpart to Falchion. I need you to focus the remnants of your Fell power into the fang, and I shall do the rest."

Robin did as asked. The embers that remained across her skin surged to life once more. The dark flame was different than she remembered. It was still Ignis, but now it shone with a rich purple color instead of Grima's pitch black. The fire flowed across the surface of the fang, engulfing it completely. Naga called a bolt of lightning to strike the bone. It cracked, before imploding into a ball of fire and light.

Opening her eyes, Robin looked in wonder at the new blade floating in the air. It was a one-handed sword, similar to a saber. The hilt was comprised of four prongs encasing a cylinder made of a ruby-like material. The blade itself was wider than the standard saber but not as broad as Falchion. It was black with a purple tint and dark red accents.

"I forged it using the same method as Falchion," Naga explained as she handed Robin the new blade. "It has the same indestructible blessing as Falchion, though it's linked to you instead of I. Those of your direct bloodline will be able to use its full power, or else its edge shall blunt."

"I doubt that will be an issue. I don't have plans of having other children. I assume it has the same capacity to harm Grima as Falchion?"

"I believe so, though we shall only know for sure once the deed is done. I believe this should be our last resort should Chrom or your counterpart fall in battle, as we can't ensure of its success," Naga suggested, to which Rose nodded in agreement. "When Grima arrives at the timeline, his power should still be stronger than you. I suggest not trying to engage him unless you can use your full strength to power the blade."

Robin took the nameless weapon, feeling its weight. "Wouldn't it be dangerous if Grima obtains it?"

Naga shook her head. "This blade is connected to you alone. You do not share the same source of power, so there is no link between the two of you other than your nature. Only you can release this blade's power."

Robin frowned as she thought of what this blade could accomplish. "If I were to kill Grima with this… would by brother be spared? Or would he die alongside Grima?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm not certain. Something like this has never been attempted before," the
dragon said apologetically, "This is another reason to leave its use as a last resort."

Understanding the consequences, the woman strengthened her grip on the blade. "I understand. I shall do my best to help him in his time of need."

Naga smiled at the tactician, happy that she was moving on. "I know you will. Do take into consideration that he is not as experienced or as strong as you."

A sigh escaped the tactician, but she couldn't restrain her smile, "No surprise there. He is just starting his journey. It seems like I've got my work cut out for me, but I've always wanted to be a protective big sister. I'll do my best."

"I ask one more thing of you," the ancient figure said, looking at her in the eyes to convey her request. "Please remember that these Shepherds are not the ones that turned on you. don't blame them for something they haven't done," she pleaded. "Do not allow grief to cloud your judgment and jeopardize the fate of this world."

Robin looked hesitant at the request. Her hand went instinctively to the scar on her breast as she thought of the request. "I... know you're right, but the wounds are still too raw. Maybe time will allow me to move on and heal, but it's too early to tell."

Naga just nodded solemnly, "That's all I can ask. Now, I doubt you want to be walking around like that, so let me give you something to wear," she said with a hint of mirth, and Robin swore she heard the other voice giggle.

The young woman frowned at that, before looking down at her body and realizing she had been naked the whole time. Pale skin turned a deep red, trying in vain to cover herself and save some modesty. "I...would appreciate that."

Smiling, Naga channeled some magic around the woman's body. In a flash of light, Robin was donning an outfit similar to the one she had used as Grandmaster of Ylisse. She was wearing a replica of her gauntlets, greaves, and chest plate, made of black metal with silver engravings.

But what she loved the most was the familiar weight of her mother's coat. It gave her a sense of safety, calming her nerves despite the Grimleal symbols embroidered on it. The shoulder guards that symbolized her rank completed her ensemble. Robin gave a sad smile, recalling how Chrom had given it to her as a symbol of loyalty and dedication to the Halidom.

Not allowing herself to fall into depression once more, she turned to Naga. "Thank you for this opportunity. I'm ready. I'll succeed in this task."

"I wish you good luck, Robin." To Robin's surprise, Naga engulfed her into a hug and whispered, "And while I am not my counterpart, I just want to say that I'm sorry we couldn't have helped you in your time of need."

Robin returned the hug, glad to hear that at least someone felt genuine compassion for her. "There is nothing to apologize for, but thank you. And farewell."

Letting her go, Naga used the last of her strength and a white light engulfed the tactician. As the lights dimmed, the dragon stood alone. Her form started to flicker at her low energy. She closed her eyes and spoke to the void. ".Are you sure this is the best course of action? She has suffered enough."
"The Fellbloods will need each other to succeed on their trials," the disembodied voice replied. "She desires atonement and has the strength necessary for the task ahead. You're well aware she was already involved in this anyways, given the circumstances. All this was never supposed to happen. Both of them were to succeed alone, and yet the situation has turned for the worse! This is all wrong! But she can fix it; I have confidence in her."

"And yet, you didn't even give her your name. You don't trust her," Naga pointed out, a hint of disappointment in her voice.

"I trust that she will accomplish her goal," the voice corrected. "And you know why I can't speak or reveal my identity. He still has a hold of me... Even if it was my fault. If he were to catch even a glimpse of her memories..."

Naga sighed. "Very well, I shall leave this to your judgment. I just hope she can fix this situation." With that, the Divine Dragon vanished, finally leaving this world.

The voice's reply was barely a whisper, "...So do I."

Northeast of Mount Prism laid Navola Village. A small farming community that trades with the Port Warren, Port Galder, and the March of Lefcandith. An older woman stood on the porch of a small farmhouse at the edge of town, watching as her white-haired son worked the fields.

"All right, Robin, supper is ready! It's bear stew, your favorite!" Morgana shouted, cleaning her hands on her apron.

"Coming, mother!" yelled the young man, voice happy at the prospect of his favorite meal. Running back into his house, he never noticed the young woman watching from the top of a nearby hill.

The Fell Dragon Robin watched the interaction with a small smile on her face. "It's good to see you again, mum," she said, her whisper lost in the wind. The desire to run and hug the woman was clearly visible in her eyes. She focused on her twin, her voice full of conviction. "I promise you both, I will protect you."

Taking one last look at her childhood home, Robin walked into the forests of northern Ylisse.

'Well now, no time to waste.'

Chapter End Notes

A Map of this world: http://fav.me/dd8o8ej

You can see a FE Style portrait I made of Rose and Morgana. Checking Summer Robin on Heroes, turns out F!Robin is quite busty. http://fav.me/dd0nkoo
Two years later

The Shepherds could be having a better time. It should've been a simple trip. Just talk to the Khan and get their support against Plegia, maybe throw in some trade agreements along the way to convince them. But apparently, the gods enjoyed making life difficult for the amnesiac tactician. It seemed Gangrel had sent various parties claiming to be Ylisseans — and more than one impostor posing as the Prince Chrom of Ylisse—which had put the Feroxi on edge. The cold was not doing them any favors either, as the Feroxi garrison was clearly in their element and most of the Shepherds were not equipped for the cold weather that was assaulting them.

It was a miracle that no one had yet died of frostbite.

Robin flattened his body against the great wall of the Longfort, trying to evade the arrows raining down upon them. He was thankful there were no machicolations on this part of the fort or they would've been turned into pincushions by now.

As he tried to warm himself with his thick cloak, Robin analyzed the situation at hand. The month since awakening in that field had been filled with excitement and a few battles, but it was nothing like attacking a fort manned by a professional military. Normally, attacking a fortress such as the Longfort with just a small squad would be suicide, but for some reason, the Feroxi had decided to open the gate for them. From what he recalled of the Feroxi, they were a warrior people, so it was likely that they didn't consider them enough of a threat and saw a chance to test their mettle.

Joy.

Strategies started forming in his head, looking for the best way to disable the guards of Regna Ferox. Killing them would do little for their cause, but he couldn't risk the lives of his new comrades to spare those of his opponents. A conundrum he promised to overcome.

He needed to succeed here. Chrom had given him an opportunity that he couldn't waste. Waking up in a field with no memories and only the clothes on his back and his name, he had no other paths to take. He would succeed in every mission his Lord gave him.

Taking inspiration from Sumia's rescue of the prince, he started issuing orders, pairing people to increase their battle potential. "Sumia! Take Miriel with you and start taking out the archers with long-range magic! Keep moving and use wind spells to repel the projectiles! Do not kill the guards or our efforts will be for naught! Vaike and Sully will take the right staircase while Frederick charges through the left one. Anna and Lissa will heal the wounded while Stahl and Donnel cover their backs! Virion, aim for disabling shots! Chrom! You and I will take on their general. If we're lucky and manage to disable her, we can force the enemy soldiers to stand down."

"What about me, Robin?"

"Ahh!" Robin jumped back, taking out his Thunder tome, ready to fight. "Who are you?!"

"Um, I'm Kellam, a Shepherd," explained the knight. "We've met before, in the capital."

The situation was salvaged by Chrom. "Kellam! When did you get here?!"
"...The same time as you. I've been with you all along," Kellam said in a dejected tone. "Er, I am still a Shepherd, right? It's quite an honor, after all. I'd hate to lose it. Sometimes I—"

"Of course, Kellam. Forgive me," Chrom answered sheepishly, scratching his head in embarrassment. "You're just so... quiet that I completely—"

"Quite all right, sir, quite all right. I've been told I'm easy to miss," the knight replied, in sudden good cheer.

Chrom chuckled, despite the recent close call with death. "I'm just glad the Feroxi didn't find you first!" The prince turned to his new tactician, who was watching the interaction in apprehension. "Robin, it's OK. He's with us."

The tactician relaxed a bit, taking in the new heavily armored knight. "Right... Okay, you'll go with Frederick. Support him against archers with your shield, but beware of any mages or hammer-wielders; they can turn your insides to paste. Come on, Chrom! We need to end this, fast!" Sully and Vaike hesitated only a moment, before reluctantly following his orders.

The Shepherds fought with skill and coordination rarely seen in a militia. Robin's pairing proved to be extremely effective, with the pairs covering each others' weaknesses. Robin and Chrom fought like a well-oiled machine, with Robin's magic complimenting Chrom's brute strength. The Feroxi were fierce, but they fought individually, making it the only real challenge not to kill them.

They finally reached the top of the bailey and the entrance to the castle that connected to the land beyond. Waiting for them stood Raimi, the captain of the Guard, with a mage and a warrior flanking her sides.

"I must compliment you. You fight very well for Plegian dogs. It's almost a shame to kill you, but we won't tolerate this insolence any longer!" Not giving them the opportunity to speak, she shouted at her guards, "Take them out!"

Robin engaged the mage, a tall woman with thick robes. She didn't waste any time before she started sending fireballs at tactician barely dodged the attacks, feeling the hot air far too close for his comfort. Focusing on his Thunder tome, he let go of a bolt of golden electricity towards the floor close to the mage. Without the incantation to guide it, the magic exploded the stone at her feet, sending her flying with a startling cry.

He took a moment to catch his breath and saw that Chrom had already knocked-out the warrior and was now engaging Raimi. Robin was about to help the prince when another fireball flew wide past him. The mage had managed to recover and stood shakily through pure anger. It was only her tired condition that made stopped the rage-filled spell from hitting him.

Forgoing the incantation once more, Robin launched a weak bolt of electricity towards the woman's hand as his tome burned out. Both spells clashed, exploding outwards, and sending both combatants flying. Robin hit the stone floor, knocking his breath out, just as his opponent hit the opposite wall with a sickening crack. Crawling shakily to his feet to take a closer look, he was glad to see she was still breathing, but most certainly broke something.

Turning around, Robin froze as he saw Chrom lose his footing on the frozen stone. Raimi bashed her shield against the prince's chest. Chrom hit the floor, with Falchion slipping out of his grasp. The tactician could only watch in horror as Raimi pinned his friend down with her boot on his chest, preparing her spear to deliver the finishing blow.
Time froze for Chrom, as he saw the knight rise her spear up, aiming directly at his heart.

'I can't fall here! Ylisse needs my help! I can't fail Lissa and Emmeryn!' he thought in desperation.

Raimi looked at the fallen prince with contempt. "Goodbye, your majesty!" she said, his title dripping with heated sarcasm.

Unable to free himself, and backup too far away, Chrom could only steel himself for the blow that was to end his life. Chrom gritted his teeth, and couldn't believe this would be his end. 'I'm sorry, everyone...'

The blow never came, for a gale of magical wind slammed against the armored woman, sending her flying across the stone floor with a startled cry. Sparks flew as her armor scratched the surface, her weapon lying far from her reach.

Chrom greedily filled his lungs with the cold air, trying to calm his nerves. Looking up, he saw a familiar purple cloak slowly crossing his field of vision, hood covering their features. 'Robin? No... It can't be! He was back there...' Turning his head to the side, he confirmed that his tactician was indeed on the other side. Chrom's face was a mixture of relief and confusion at this sudden turn of events.

Raimi's voice broke him out of his daze. "You?! What's the meaning of this?! What are you doing here, sellsword?!!"

The wind made it so that the prince could barely catch the voice of his savior.

"Stand down, Raimi. These really are the Shepherds, and that--" the newcomer said, pointing at the fallen prince. "--Truly is Prince Chrom Lowell of Ylisse. Look closely at the glow in his brand."

Raimi's eyes widened at the statement, taking a closer look at the brand. She finally noticed that his brand glowed slightly, taking on the texture of a dragon scale. Not a mere tattoo or painted fake could replicate the effect. She froze, as she realized the mistake she made.

"Let them pass. They must have important business with the Khan if they are willing to risk their lives against a heavily fortified gate," the newcomer said.

Raimi grimaced and nodded. She took a horn from her ship and blew it. The sound was soon followed by her own bellow. "EVERYONE! STAND DOWN! THESE TRULY ARE WHO THEY CLAIM TO BE."

The sound of fighting finally stopped, and Raimi moved to pull him up to his feet. "My apologies, Prince Chrom, I thought--"

"It's alright. Truly," he said with a shaky smile. "You were only doing your duty. I'm just thankful you didn't kill us right away."

The woman grimaced at that but nodded. "I will check there are no casualties on either side. Wait here while I gather some medics."

Chrom nodded and watched her leave.

The figure moved closer to the fallen prince, who kept his eyes on them at all times. The figure just kept walking forward towards the gate to the tower, not paying Chrom any mind. Stopping at the door, they spoke without bothering to face the royal. Their tone was cold and carried some emotion he could not discern.
"…You should consider armor and boots made for fighting in this weather, your majesty."

With that sentence, they disappeared into the fortress leaving behind a dumbfounded prince.

Robin slowly made his way to his friend when Lissa blew past him in a rush, barely stopping herself from tackling her brother. Her face was pale and her hands trembling as she looked over her brother.

"Chrom! Are you okay?! Oh gods, you almost died! You idiot!" she fired off quickly, waving her staff around.

The prince stood shakily, using the recovered Falchion to support himself and his aching ribs. "Y-yeah… It was close, but that stranger saved me," he said while letting the healing magic of his sister wash over him.

Robin frowned. His mind kept wandering to the person with robes far too similar to his own. Another tactician just appeared and saved him? It was a bizarre coincidence.

Frederick came from behind them with the rest of the Shepherds. "Are you sure you don't know them? Their cloak is quite similar to yours, Robin," the knight commented. His eyes then narrowed with suspicion towards the tactician. "It's awfully convenient that they just--."

"Frederick!" shouted Chrom. He did not like the accusations being thrown at his new friend.

Robin returned the glare, a scowl firmly in place. "Are you insinuating something?"

The Great Knight stared impassibly. "Just that the situation is awfully suspicious. First, we find a so-called amnesiac in the fields and welcome him into our flock, and as soon as our Lord is in danger, another tactician shows up? Don't think that I haven't noticed the Plegian symbols on your cloak."

The tactician gritted his teeth at the accusation. He already had enough pressure on his shoulder without any accusations. Chrom granted him a chance at life when he didn't have to, and Robin would repay that kindness with his life. He knew the militia's trust was tentative unlike that of Chrom and Lissa. Sully, Frederick, and Vaike were quite vocal about their reluctance to him due to his apparent connection to Plegia.

"That's enough, Frederick! Robin has done nothing but proven his loyalty since he joined us. He had multiple opportunities to lead us to our deaths if he had worked for Plegia. I won't hear more baseless accusation!" Chrom's tone brooked no argument, his worth as a prince shining through. Robin truly appreciated the trust Chrom had in him, and he would not disappoint the prince.

Frederick wilted slightly at the anger of his liege. "My apologies, sir, but I only have the best intentions when I look out for House Lowell." Bowing his head, he left to tend to their mounts and gear, not wanting to upset the prince any further.

A clank of armor alerted them of Raimi's return, spear and shield firmly on her back. She stood before them before bowing to the bluenette. "Once more, a thousand apologies, Prince Chrom, Princess Lissa."

Chrom relaxed, glad that the fighting was over. "There is nothing for you to apologize for. These are dangerous times, and Gangrel is not above using dirty tricks to achieve his goals. You did what you thought was best. What about your troops? Are they alright?"

"We have some injuries, but nothing serious," Raimi assured her, giving her a polite smile. "Thank you for healing them, Princess Lissa."
The princess smiled back. "No problem! If there are more injuries, I'm here to help!"

Raimi chuckled and smiled. "Thank you, but I already called for the healers stationed here. I will send word of your arrival to the Aurelis, and escort you to the Khan personally."

"That would be most appreciated, thank you," Chrom said.

Raimi nodded and took her leave to make preparations for their departure.

Robin couldn't keep the surprise from his voice. "Amazing. Her whole demeanor changed. I guess it's just as Miriel said. 'In Ferox, strength speaks louder than words.' We should have known better than to overestimate the value of diplomacy here..."

"That's true. I really should've paid more attention to my tutors when they spoke about Regna Ferox politics. I always enjoyed the warfare lesson more," Chrom admitted sheepishly.

Giving a snort at that confession, Robin then turned to see that the Shepherds were helping the wounded Feroxi and that there was no bad blood between them. Thankfully, the injuries were nothing serious and they were being easily patched up by Anna and Lissa, who were helping despite Raimi's assurances. Some were even laughing now that they knew the truth, confessing they enjoyed the fight.

He should probably apologize to that mage once she wakes up...

That line of thought brought him back to the near-death of his friend. He made the plan, missed key factors like proper equipment and the terrain. They might not have expected to fight the Feroxi, but it was his responsibility to plan for everything. They both could have died had it not been for that unexpected savior.

Raising his head, he directed his gaze at Chrom, self-deprecation clear in his voice. "Chrom... I'm sorry, I almost got us killed. I was supposed to have your back, and yet I failed you. I——"

Whatever he wanted to say was silenced when the prince put a firm hand on his shoulder. "You have nothing to apologize for," Chrom assured him. "The fault is mine. I was overconfident. And our preparations for this climate were for traveling, not fighting. That's on me."

That didn't sit well with the amnesiac. "But I was supposed to watch your back! What kind of tactician would let their commander fall?!"

"Enough. You don't have to be so hard on yourself," Chrom said with a tone of finality. "You got blasted into a wall to keep that mage at bay. I wouldn't have been able to handle all of them without you. If you still feel bad, just learn from this, as I did."

As the prince walked away, Robin thought about those words. He could learn from this and improve. He would not fail them when again. A tug on his arm broke him out of his introspection. Glancing to his side, he saw the concerned look on Princess Lissa.

"Hey, don't look so gloomy!" she said, giving him a bright smile that he tried to reciprocate. "I can tell you're worried. You always try so hard to keep us safe but take care of yourself too, ok? We are a team, so there is no need for you to shoulder all the blame."

"I... will try." He was still a little depressed at his performance but was also happy his only friends were not angry at him. He didn't know what he would do if they abandoned him, or blamed him for something.
While the politics of the kingdom were not Chrom's favorite topics, he could recall quite a lot about ancient history and castle construction. That made it easy for him to see the echoes of ages past when this was still the capital of the Kingdom of Aurelis. Changes had certainly been done to the stonework through the ages, but remnants of the past were still present.

Those changes, though, had turned Aurelis into a veritable fortress.

The outer city was small but still protected by a tall wall. The inner castle had all of this defenses along a deep motte and multiple baileys that would smash any army that attacked its gates. Both layers of defense were lined with towers filled with artillery, murder holes, and machicolations that would make an assault against it or the inner castle a massacre.

It only made him realize how poorly managed were the defenses of his capital. Even the marches and dukedom they passed on the way had stronger defenses due to being close to the borders with both Plegia and Regna Ferox, but even they paled to this single castle.

Crossing the deathtrap they called gatehouse certainly drove the point home. He would've to discuss this with Robin and Emmeryn later. They need to be ready.

The interior of the castle was quite different from Ylisstol's. It carried an air of practicality instead of extravagance. Plain stone walls were adorned with paintings of great battles instead of mere pretty artworks. Pelts were hung on the walls, along with trophies from past victories. A fitting chamber for a ruler of the warrior people of Regna Ferox.

Raimi addressed the crowd that followed her. "Prince Chrom, please wait here while I summon the khan."

Chrom nodded in approval, glad that things were moving forward. "Of course."

"The khan is away?" Robin probably was expecting for them to receive their audience immediately, as had happened with Emmeryn.

"He must be out training, I'd wager. The khans of Ferox prefer battle to politics. Or rather, battle is their politics," Chrom said, ruefully.

If the look on his face was anything to go by, Robin's mind was forming an image of the ruler of Ferox. "A warrior-ruler, eh? I can picture him now… A giant of a man of unparalleled thew, his broad chest covered in hair, heh..."

"Am I now? ...Please, do go on!" A woman's voice interrupted, spearing right through Robin's train of thought.

"Huh?" The tactician eloquently expressed the collective confusion of the group.

"You're the—?! Er, that is to say... The khan, I presume?" The prince managed to muster all his royal education to try to maintain a modicum of decorum.

A tall woman entered the room, her dark skin and blonde hair glistening with sweat. She was covered in red armor, carrying an engraved broadsword and a tall shield. The Khan was clearly
amused at their reaction if the smug smirk on her face was any clue.

It was like putting Sully on Emmeryn's position. A terrifying thought. One that he will take with him to the grave.

"One of them, yes—the East-Khan. My name is Flavia. I apologize for the troubles at the border, Prince Chrom. You are welcome in Regna Ferox." Flavia introduced herself, taking a measuring look over her guests. Her eyes lingered for a moment on the tactician, raising an eyebrow in curiosity.

Gathering his wits, Chrom accepted the apology with grace. "Thank you, but I'm confident we can put that misunderstanding behind us. Is it true bandits posing as Ylisseans have been ransacking your borders?"

Flavia didn't bother to hide her snarl. "Yes. Those Plegian dogs! We found documents proving as much on the corpse of one of their leaders. Plegia must see some benefit in raising tensions between our kingdoms. They haven't attacked the western gate, but they have been sailing smuggling parties on the edge of the easter wall."

"Damn them! I... Forgive me, Your Grace. That was... indelicately put." Emmeryn and Maribelle would kill him if they had heard that.

To his surprise, Flavia threw her head back and laughed. "Ha! Damn delicacy and fuck those dogs! Here in Ferox, we appreciate plain speech."

"In that case, you should have words about dealing with these damn dastards..."

"...Ha ha! Now that's Feroxi diplomacy! Yes, I like you already. I know why you have come, Prince. But regrettably, I cannot provide any Feroxi troops for Ylisse at the moment."

"What?! Why not?!" Lissa shouted, afraid of the implications.

"I lack the authority," the Khan explained simply.

"Forgive me, but I don't understand. Aren't you the Khan?" Chrom asked, confused at the situation.

Flavia nodded, "As I said, I am one of the khans. In Ferox, the khans of east and west hold a tournament every few years. The victor acquires total sovereignty over both kingdoms, though for the most we each ruler our regions West-Khan won the last tournament, you see, and that means they have the final say when it comes to forging alliances"

Chrom's face fell, dread growing in his chest. "So we are to receive no aid at all?"

"Not if you always give up so easily!" The Khan reprimanded him. "The next tournament is nigh, you see, and I expect my champion to win."

The prince frowned. "What does that have to do with us?"

"The captain of my border guard informs me your Shepherds are quite the formidable team. I already have a capable champion, but if you can beat them I would have a better fighter on the ring. And if you win the tournament, I would become ruling khan and could grant your alliance. It would certainly help impress the rest of Ferox, too. A motivated army that respects the strength of their commander is a deadly force," Flavia explained.

"I would have assumed Ylisseans had no place in such Feroxi traditions," Chrom said.
He really didn't want to cause a diplomatic incident.

"Ha! On the contrary. The khans themselves do not fight—they choose champions to represent them. Otherwise, our land would be rife with blood feuds and dead khans! We don't involve comrades or kin for the same reason."

Chrom grimaced at that. "Yes... Powerful houses and families can hold grudges for ages. Ylisse has its fare share of internal disputes."

"Indeed. That's why over time, it was decided that the tournament should be fought by outsiders or people with no attachments to the khans. They are granted the chance for glory, prestige, and gold, and we avoid such political shit," Flavia said as if it was such a simple solution. She then frowned in thought. "Although the outsiders have never included foreign royalty... That I know of! Ha! Regardless, it is your choice to make."

Chrom thought over her words. If he won and impressed the Feroxi, he would earn not only their swords and but also their respect. That would help him when the time comes for him to lead them. The reasoning was sound. Looking over to his tactician, he received a nod of encouragement. That was all it took to make his decision.

"There is no choice, East-Khan. My people are desperate. We face not only Plegia's constant attacks but now the added threat of the Risen. If your victory in the tournament is the quickest way to an alliance, then we need to ensure the best fighter is in the ring," he said, his voice filled with conviction.

"Ha ha! Oh, I like you, Prince Chrom. Come, I'll show you my personal arena. Guards! Go fetch my champion!" The guards saluted and left the chamber. Flavia looked at Chrom with a smirk. "Be wary, prince. None of my warriors—not even me—have won a single fight against this mercenary."

The prince's face showed his determination. "Any obstacle shall be defeated by Ylisse's necessity."

"Well-spoken again—I look forward to seeing if you're equally skilled with a blade as with words!"

The stands of the small arena were host to a very nervous group of Ylisseans. One of the two fighters would be the one to decide the fate of Ylisse. Ylisse needed the Feroxi troops. Their military simply didn't have the numbers to match the Plegian army without leaving all their territories undefended. It would be safer for them if Chrom is the Champion. They knew his strength and could trust him. Just like construction they have seen in Ferox so far, the arena was pragmatic in design. It consisted of a simple ring about ten meters deep, with the spectator seats along the edge. Chrom stood at the center of the arena, waiting for his opponent.

No one could interfere in the fight, but they at least had a nice view of the incoming fight.

Flavia sat with them, eager to observe the battle. A gong rang across the chamber, signaling the arrival of the champion. "Be ready, Prince Chrom! Here comes your opponent!"

The gate on the other side of the ring opened for the Khan's champion. Despite the situation, the Shepherds couldn't contain their excitement. They were eager to watch this champion fight one of their strongest members.

A hooded figure finally entered the field, their metal grieves resonating with the stone floor. The person stood as tall as the Prince, with an intricate sword held on their hands. Their body was protected by a black chest-plate with silver engraving, with matching greaves and gauntlets. The rest
of their visible armor was composed of boiled leather and chainmail. A red sash across their waist held a tome and scabbard. The hood of a familiar purple cloak with gold details covered their face.

The Shepherds were shocked by the similar attire to Robin's making them wonder if there was a connection between the two. Robin himself was conflicted at the sight. The person didn't stir any lost memories, even now that he had a closer look, so he didn't want to get his hopes up. They didn't react to his presence at the Longfort, after all.

"You! You were the one that saved me at the gate!" Chrom shouted in surprise. "I didn't have the opportunity to thank you for saving my life. I owe you my gratitude."

His opponent just tilted their head in acknowledgment, but Flavia interrupted before they could utter a single word. "Oy! Leave the chit-chat for later! This is an arena, not a tea house! Let's see some fighting!"

"Ah. Yes, of course. We can continue this later," the prince said with finality, as both combatants took their spots on the field.

Robin looked at the contestants with worried eyes. Since his first battle in Southtown, he could always gauge the strength of his opponents with almost supernatural efficiency, and what he saw worried him.

The champion carried themselves with confidence, strength, and experience. The tome and sword indicated that they were proficient in both magic and swordsmanship, just like himself. Certainly a tougher opponent than the untrained bandits or the mindless Risen they fought so far.

The only thing they could now was to place their faith in their prince.

The prince stood ready, his hands gripping Falchion with conviction. 'No ice slip nor cold to slow me down. That armor must slow him down, and the hood will reduce his visibility. My speed will be the key to victory here. I need to win here, even if I owe them my life.'

Flavia stood and shouted the rules of the match. "Alright! As per Feroxi traditions, as long as there is no outside interference, everything goes! Killing is allowed, but no killing a disabled opponent. If one contestant surrenders, the fighting stops immediately! And I clear?" The prince could see that his comrades wanted to protest the killing rule.

"The rules are acceptable." His command silenced their objections, but clearly not easing their minds. "Really, trust in my skills," he said through a smile. His opponent just tilted their head, apparently not impressed at the dismissal of their strength. "Can we agree to refrain from killing?"

A polite nod was his answer.

The combatants took their stances, hands firmly on their blades. The world faded away as both fighters focused entirely on one another.

The sound of the gong was his only warning to prepare as his opponent exploded forward, closing the distance in an instant.

'Fast!'

Instinct took hold of him as he blocked the strike with his holy blade. It was probably the only thing saving him from being bisected, as the strength behind the blow was enough to push him back.
Chrom was hard-pressed to defend himself against the barrage of slashes and thrusts launched against him. The prince tried to muster as much strength as he could to push back, but the hooded warrior was like a boulder. In an unexpected move, his opponent grabbed Falchion by the hole on its hilt, locking them in place. He barely had time to grit his teeth before an armored knee was rammed into his stomach. Bending over at the loss of breath, he received a head-butt, breaking any focus he had.

Feeling a warm liquid dripping from his nose, he knew first blood had been drawn. Shaking his head to clear the pain, Chrom was surprised to see his opponent a few feet away, waiting in a relaxed stance. He gritted his teeth at the thought of being dismissed so easily, but he could respect the strength they had to back up their confidence.

"Your strength is truly impressive. I can certainly see how you defeated all the other contestants," the royal praised despite his pain. "I haven't fought a man such as you before. You truly are a man worthy of admiration." Maybe he was laying it a bit thick, but he felt they had earned it.

The champion tensed, the grip on their blade tightening. A snarl appeared on their lips and he could almost hear their teeth grind together. The prince was surprised by this reaction. 'Did I say something wrong?'

His opponent lifted their hood slightly, Chrom could see their face a little better. Violet eyes glared at him, filled with an unexpected amount of hostility.

"I am a woman, asshole," a clearly feminine voice snarled, soft and sharp at the same time.

The prince sputtered at that. "Wha—?" Taking a closer look at his opponent he felt like an idiot. The chest plate was slightly wider at the front to accommodate for her breasts. Her cloak and armor hid a lot, but if he looked closely he could see the clear feminine contour of her if he could only see their mouth, her lips and chin were too soft and narrow to be a man's. 'Oh, gods.'

'First Flavia and now her? Am I cursed to offend every warrior woman in Ferox?' He heard someone face-palm at his blunder, only for the sound to be swallowed by the collective laughter of Flavia, Sully, and Vaike.

Chrom didn't need to look to know Frederick was leveling a disappointed glare at him, indicating another lesson in etiquette was scheduled in the near future. Maybe he could salvage the situation?

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean it as an insult! It's just that...you're clearly an impressive fighter, and you don't move like any lady I know." As soon as the words left his mouth he knew he made the situation worse. 'Dammit! I know I'm getting an earful later…'

A scoff interrupted his mental reproach as the champion took a relaxed stance.

"Really, Prince Chrom. I expected more from one of such noble lineage," she said, giving him a once-over. She pursed her lips, the rest of her face hidden once more. "Maybe you should quit and let win this tournament. You don't want me to ruin that pretty face of yours. Your looks and title are clearly your only strong points with women. Clearly, it ain't skill or charisma."

The prince frowned at the insult. "That was uncalled for."

"Is it? Because so far, what I'm not impressed with what I've seen." Taking her stance once more, the champion spoke a challenge. "So far, I only see a little prince and his friends playing soldiers."

Now she was crossing the line. He could take some harsh words, not insults against the efforts of his comrades. "We've been defending Ylisse for years! I will not be talked down by a sellsword!"
A bitter laugh escaped her lips. "You think killing bandits and practicing with your friends is enough? With this level of skill, you wouldn't even be a challenge to the Plegian veterans in the oncoming war."

"How do you know there is a war coming?" he asked warily.

"You are here to recruit an army," she pointed out in a tone that made him feel foolish. "Anyone paying attention can see that war is on the horizon. And you still have much to learn if you want to win this war. If you win this army, are you prepared to use them? To lead them in battle knowing many will not survive? Both Ylissean and Feroxi lives will be in your hands."

This was not how he expected this interaction to go. There was some truth to her words. He was inexperienced leading armies and his people unprepared for the upcoming conflict. The peace his sister had brought to the country had weakened their might. The Ylissean Army barely qualified such, existing only on paper. While the cities could defend themselves, they couldn't mobilize without leaving them heavily undermanned.

Only the Shepherds and few patrols were the protectors of the Halidom's outer towns. It wasn't normally a problem, but bandit raids had increased as of late. He himself had experience against bandits, but they weren't the toughest opponents. The Risen weren't the smartest of threats either. Plegia had an organized army that never disbanded, and a lot of people thirsting for vengeance against Ylisse. He needed not only experienced warriors, but to get experience himself.

Still, he had to wonder why she was talking this. "Why are you telling me this?"

She tensed slightly and remained silent for a moment before replying, "...Does it matter? I'll allow you the first move, and I'll show you how much you still have to grow before you can protect your country."

Chrom accepted the challenge and steeled himself. This was an opportunity to learn and prince charged forward, his swift slash easily blocked. Increasing the pressure, he continued to attack relentlessly, but it was no use. It was like she knew everything about his fighting style.

She either blocked with surprising strength or dodged with astonishing grace. A deadly combination what pushed him back. He was getting angry and anger at his lack of progress made him reckless. Something he inherited from his father.

'I need to end this now!'

He leapt back from the blade lock and jump into the air. At the apex of his jump, he started spinning down, using the momentum to increase the strength of his attack. His blade crashed forward, but it didn't impact metal or flesh. The stone floor cracked under the weight of the attack. The surprise on his face was replaced by pain as a kick smashed against his ribs.

"Flashy and predictable."

Rolling with the attack, Chrom stood using Falchion as support, panting in pain and exertion. He took a moment to look at the stands and saw the worried and angry looks of his companions. This distraction proved to be a mistake when an armored fist slammed into his windpipe, making him lose hold of his weapon.

"You need proper armor."

Choking on his own saliva, he couldn't block the next kick to his midsection or the barrage of punches that followed, slowly pushing him back. The attacks were brutal, the adrenaline doing
nothing to cushion the blows. One last kick hit him in the chest with the force of war-hammer sent him crashing against the wall of the arena. He watched through bleary eyes as the cloaked woman rushed towards him, blade pointed at his face.

"Checkmate!"

The situation was horribly familiar. Once again, he couldn't do anything against his opponent. Closing his eyes in reflex, he could still clearly hear the shouts of horror from the Shepherds resounding through the arena. To his surprise, the only pain was from a small wound on his cheek as the blade pierced the stone at the side of his head.

Opening his eyes, the prince saw a pair of violet eyes piercing his blue ones. He could've sworn her eyes glowed an eerie red for a moment before she leaned forward to speak into his ear, "I didn't save your life just to end myself." He almost shuddered at her icy tone, carrying a hint of something he couldn't place. It felt like anger and scorn, but he couldn't understand why. "You're unarmed and at my mercy. Any action you take will only end in your defeat or death. You can't always expect someone to save you. There is a place for valor, just like there is one for caution. Concede defeat, there is no shame in losing to a superior opponent."

Once more, stubbornness reared its head, as he struggled through pain and exhaustion to no avail. "We need those troops. I can't fail my kingdom," he said, looking at her directly in the eyes.

"You will fail them if you die recklessly." The finality of her tone hit him like a slap to the face. "Some harsh words and your mind was clouded by rage, making you sloppier and more prone to errors. Gangrel would only have to insult you and you would run straight into his trap. Cut the head and the body will dumble. You die and the entire army falls apart. You need to master your emotions in combat or you will only lead others to their deaths."

With those words, he knew he had lost. If he led his soldiers with anger and stubbornness he would only get them killed, and he couldn't do that.

He would not become his father.

Swallowing his pride, he gritted out his answer. "I concede defeat." The gong rang, signaling the end of the battle.

"A wise choice. The first I saw from you today. Maybe there is still a chance for you," she said, sheathing her blade. "I apologize for the harsh words, but clearly they were necessary." With a polite bow, she began walking away.

"Hey! I didn't catch your name!"

The champion stopped, barely turning her head to look at him. "My name is Rose Sustrai. Thank you for the workout, your majesty. I wish you good luck with your campaign."

Robin's heart was hammering in his chest. The rest of the Shepherds looked ready to leap into the arena if it were not for the guards ready to stop them. Stahl was holding Sully back, just like Frederick was doing with Vaike. Both were snarling like rabid dogs held by their master. Sumia looked ready to cry, her nerves shaking at the sight of the beatdown laid on her lord. Even Miriel looked very conflicted. They all had taken lives before but never had they witnessed one of their own be so easily outmatched.

He still couldn't believe how easily this woman took Chrom apart. He was one of the most
impressive swordsmen Ylisse had, and nothing he did worked on her. It was like she knew him inside and out.

They were all angered at her words. But then he understood that was part of her plan. By angering the prince she made him reckless and sloppier. All to teach him a lesson.

'A few mind-games and she played you like a flute.'

She was smart, experienced and well informed, and he could respect that. Breaking from the introspection, he saw their prince making his way towards them. His shaky smile did nothing to hide the pain of defeat on his face.

Lissa was the first at his side. "Chrom! Are you ok!? Are you hurt!?"

Chrom tried to shrug, only to wince in pain. "Mainly bruises, nothing broken. What hurts the most is my pride." As Lissa used her staff to mend his wounds, Chrom swept his gaze over his comrades, each of them showing worry in their own way.

Robin knew he had to ask the tough question. "Chrom, what are we going to do now? We need those troops."

The prince looked at him with a broken expression. "I don't know, Robin. We don't have many options le--"

"Stop with the pity party. Who said anything about not giving you your troops?" Flavia's exuberant voice broke through the gloomy atmosphere.

Robin and Chrom almost gave themselves whiplash at the proclamation. "What?! But you said we needed to win to get the troops!" the tactician almost shouted.

Flavia raised an eyebrow at that. "No. I said that if you beat her, that would mean I have a better fighter for the tournament and a better chance of becoming ruling Khan. This only means Rose is still my best bet. As long as she wins the tournament, I will still be able to help you. There is no way we're letting Gangrel have his way." She patted the prince in the back, making him flinch in pain,

"After being put flat on my ass, I think your chances of getting the title are pretty high..." Chrom begrudgingly admitted.

"I know, right?! But if it makes you feel better, you still lasted longer against her than any of my warriors. She made a stew out of them," the Khan praised.

"Huh, that does make my wounded ego feel a little better..." Chrom mussed.

Flavia snorted before taking a more serious tone. "She's right, you know? Had you continued to fight, I would have reconsidered my offer. We Feroxi like a good fight, but I won't throw away Feroxi lives in recklessness." The prince flinched at the tone, glad he swallowed his pride and accepted defeat. "You're still young, so accept the lesson and learn from it. It's better to live to fight another day than to die in a lost battle."

Robin could appreciate the irony. The same words the prince gave him earlier were now being thrown back at him twice in a few minutes.

"I will. I might not have commanded a large army before, but I won't waste the lives entrusted to me recklessly."
"That's good to hear. Now rest, my guards will escort you to the guest rooms, and tomorrow we depart for the Feroxi Arena. The trip will take a few days, but you can watch the tournament." With that, the Khan made her exit, leaving the Shepherds talking among themselves.

Robin saw Chrom grip Falchion tightly, with his face twisted by conflicting thoughts. Glancing at the gate in the arena, his thoughts were on the mysterious woman. Robin could only hope that she won the tournament, for the good of his new home.

She slammed shut the doors of her chambers. With shaking hands, she took off her cloak and armor. The monotonous motions only soothed her emotions for a short time as the adrenaline left her system.

Soon, her mask of confidence broke away. Her body started to shake as bitter tears came out of her eyes. Her fist slammed against the stone wall, cracking the sturdy rock as Ignis flowed through her muscles in response to her distress. Blood dripped for a moment before it flowed back into the wounds, healing them in an instant. The pain only proved a momentary distraction from her inner turmoil.

Changing her name and building a new identity for herself had not helped as much as the Fell Dragon had hoped.

"Dammit, dammit, DAMMIT! I thought I was ready to face them!" Rose nearly shouted through gritted teeth. "Two damned years preparing for this moment, and it's still painful to see them!"

She only wanted to use this fight to teach him a few lessons early. Better to learn them here than to cost others their lives.

But as the battle progressed, her bottled resentment boiled over. Each blow fueled by old anger that now had an outlet. After all this time, she couldn't move forward. It took all her will to keep her cool and not crumble and demand answers as soon as she saw him. Rose knew this Chrom was not responsible for her past. Hell, she didn't even exist in this world.

A bitter smile formed on her lips. "Tsk, the same insensitive idiot I remember… Somethings must be constant in all worlds."

Looking at her reflection in the mirror, she could see her glowing red eyes glaring back at her. Willing their color back to normal, she took a deep breath to calm her nerves. "I need to get a hold of myself. I can't let my anger jeopardize everything I've worked for by taking it out on a… innocent."

Glancing at the window, she saw the outline of the Feroxi Grand Arena on the distance, "It matters not. another piece is in place. Soon, we shall face each other, Marth. I wonder, what will your reaction to me be? You might have my daughter's face, but that won't stop me from achieving victory."

It might have been petty. Chrom might win in this world too, but she couldn't risk it. Basilio could still side with Ylisse, or he could decide to face Plegia alone. He was more willful that even Flavia. Better to ensure that the variables remain the same.

With that thought, Rose went to get some rest, wishing for a dreamless sleep.
Rose is a broken woman and each timeline is a separate world. Even the futures are "separate" from their own pasts. F!Robin/Robin has a stronger body thanks to her rebirth and Ignis. Ignis transform some physical strength into magic and vice versa. Here, she can use it creatively. She also has multiple wars and years of experience over this Chrom, in addition to her familiarity with his style. He really didn't stand a chance.

Thanks to robotortoise, Shipping Rates Apply, and Victory3114 for their assistance editing the chapter.
Chrom strolled through the royal gardens on his way to his chambers, eager to see his wife and child. Longing to be with the two of the most important people in his life, the Exalt ended court for the day an hour earlier than normal. Frederick was sure to make a fuss about it, but he didn't care. Lucina was just a baby, barely four months old and was always crying for one of her parents, so he felt it was his duty to be with her over another boring harvest report.

He entered the room to find his dear wife rocking their crying daughter, trying to calm her down. He made his way to his wife, rewarded with a surprised moan as he tenderly kissed her neck. The queen laid the little princess down in her crib, before reciprocating the gesture, pushing their lips together into a passionate kiss.

Breaking the kiss, the Exalt looked at his crying daughter with a worried smile, "I just wish I knew why she cried so much…"

"Oh, I already know why she cries so much, my love," Robin said, still clinging to his embrace.

"Really, why is it?" asked Chrom, eager to know how to help his darling daughter.

His wife looked up to him, giving him the sweetest smile he had seen, "She's crying for you, dear."

"…What?"

That would get his answer a moment later, as his wife's hand pierced through his chest and ripped out his heart. The Exalt didn't have time to scream as shock overcame him and he dropped to the floor, life slowly leaving him.

"Now my love, you know how I felt when you pierced my chest with your sword and broke my heart," Robin said as she dropped the still beating heart in the floor, crushing it under her heel. The queen licked her fingers, the blood in her lips matching the glowing crimson of her eyes, before turning to her daughter. Lucina cried harder as her mother softly sang a dark tune to her child.

A cruel smile appeared on her face, "Don't cry, my Little Light. You will be seeing daddy again very soon."

Little Lucina kept crying, but not for much longer. As her mother's hand descended one more time, silence overcame the room.

Rose awoke with a silent scream, cold sweat drenching her skin. Small wisps of dark fire ran across her fingertips, ready to take on any threat. Realizing she was safe, she clutched her chest, trying to calm her rapidly beating heart.

"Ah… Ah… Tch! So much for a restful sleep…” She moved to her bathroom; the water from the day before still resting in its container. Washing her face, she glanced to her reflection, once again having to will her eyes to their original purple shade. Shaking the last remnants of sleep she thought back at her dream, "Like what really happened wasn't horrible enough, now these nightmares try and make it worse. Must be the effect of meeting Chrom…” Looking at the sun's position she guessed it must be around seven in the morning. "It would be easier if I could see the clock tower."

The tactician used a simple spell to light up the wood under the bathtub, heating up the water to a comfortable temperature. Moving her naked body into a comfortable position, she enjoyed a relaxing
bath. "Mmm… I should get some bath salts… No reason not to spoil myself every now and then." She glanced at the window while scrubbing her long, white hair, "The tournament is at midday, so I got time for breakfast and some warmup." A small smirk crept on her face, "I wonder how the little prince is doing this fine morning."

"She totally kicked your ass, Chrom."

"I know."

The prince wasn't doing too well this morning.

"Yeah, she totally wiped the floor with you."

"I know."

"She took you to school almost as good as Teach would!"

"I know, ok! I was there!" Chrom gritted out through broken patience and sore muscles. Sully and Vaike had been grilling him about his fight all morning. Yesterday they looked ready to tear Rose apart, but today they found the entire display way to entertaining. Lissa even found it funny to just heal some of his bruises and going to Anna would mean ending with far less gold that he went in with.

Most of the Shepherds were still upset at the champion's words, but they had to admit that they lacked experience against stronger opponents and organized armies. They were a militia, dealing mainly with bandits and small threats. They weren't prepared to fight the Plegian army. Even with the Ylissian Guard and volunteers that knew what was coming bolstering their ranks, Plegia still vastly outnumbered them. They couldn't just order the reformation of the army or issue a conscription decree; that would destroy everything Emmeryn had been working towards during her reign. That didn't mean they weren't training hard, far from it, but maybe some additional measures to catch up their newest members would be necessary.

"I must admit, her style was quite interesting. The way she moved remind me a little of our good tactician's sword style, but much more refined." Robin perked up at that. "She used the Ylissian azure-sword style and Plegia's dark-blade style, but she also included forms from foreign styles," commented Virion, gaining the attention of the group. "I recognized styles from Valm, Chon'sin and Ferox; even Rosanne's elegant fencing was mixed in there. She's quite the experienced little vixen."

"How in the blue blazes did you figure all that out?" Sully asked, astonished at the knowledge of the noblest of archers.

A smug expression appeared in the noble's face, as he dramatically put a hand over his heart, "My dearest Sully, you wound me! I'm a man of the world, so it's only natural that I would know of such things!" Virion finished with a dazzling smile, failing to amuse the cavalier.

Before she could start bickering with him, Donnel dropped his two copper, "A'yup. A real butt-kicker, that Miss Rose. She ain't gone and changed a single bit." He was too busy nodding to himself to notice the incredulous looks of his comrades.

"Wait, you know her?" Stahl asked, voicing the confusion of the group.

The farm boy blinked, before confirming his words, "Darn tootin’ I do. She saved my pa and ma from some bandits. She also killed that dastard, Rodrick. He was the head honcho of those dastards that ya'll help us with before I joined ya."
Robin kept staring at the farm boy, unamused, "You didn't think it prudent to tell us this before she wiped the floor with Chrom?"

"Hey!"

Donnel scratched his head sheepishly, "Well, ya see. I didn't know she was his Majesty's opponent until the fight started…"

Robin blinked at that, before conceding, "Ah, fair enough… So what can you tell us about her?" For some reason, he was really interested in learning more about this tactician.

"Well, as y'all saw she's mighty strong. She was inside Old Lady Gumbert's tavern when the leader busted in. The good-fer-nothin' tried to kill my pa fer defendin' my ma, but Miss Rose sent him flyin' through the window with one kick, right into the pig's pen. She then killed the dastard with one of them magic spells. The rest of his gang tried to kill her, but she ended the lot of them with some scary magic. The rest of the cowards skedaddled before she got them. A few of the ones ya guys helped us with were part of that gang," the farm boy said, earning a whistle from Stahl and deep thought from the rest.

Chrom thought back at his fight and could now tell he was entirely over his head. It a blow to his pride, but that woman was talented in both swordsmanship and sorcery, and quite capable is she was able to take on a bandit gang alone. He would be the first to admit that he lacked experience against magic users; Miriel and Robin could only help so much as magic is not something you can reduce to sparring levels without losing potency. If she traveled a lot she must have fought many opponents all across the world while he had been limited to a peaceful Ylisse almost all his life; something he looked forward in correcting in the future.

Frederick frowned, refraining from scoffing, "I sincerely doubt a mercenary did that out of the goodness of her heart. Such people only care about gold."

"That's where you is wrong, Sir Frederick," Donnel said, shaking his head. "She didn't take a single coin from us, even when the mayor insisted. Miss Rose said that since she did it outside of a contract, we weren't needed to pay her. In the end she stayed with us for two weeks and trained some of the villagers to use weapons along with setting traps and defenses in exchange for the gold. She's the reason we held long enough until yer Majesty arrived."

The Prince felt a new respect for this woman. At first he thought she was just a sellsword trying to make some coin but, according to Donnel and his experience, she was more than that. Though this only added more questions about this person. Why did she try to teach him a lesson? Why participate in this tournament if coin is not her aim? Why save him? And he couldn't help but wonder if she had any relationship with his amnesiac friend, after seeing the similarities between the two.

Unknown to him, the same thoughts were running through the young plegian's head.

The Shepherds kept talking through the breakfast, talking about the fight and the oncoming war, when the door of the kitchen opened. Robin and the rest saw the subject of their conversation walk into the room. Rose was missing her armor, her casual outfit almost an exact replica of Robin's. The mercenary was wearing a tanned, low-cut shirt with black hems, fingerless black gloves, baggy pants, and knee-high leather boots. The red sash still held her blade, and her coat's hood still covering her face. She noticed their presence, but only gave a nod of acknowledgment and a curt "Good morning." before leaving the room.

Curiosity finally overwhelmed Robin as he ran out of the chamber, leaving behind his startled
comrades. He noticed that Chrom followed him, probably after requesting the group to stay put. The two finally caught up with the champion as she reached the gate to the courtyard.

"Please wait!" Robin shouted between panted breaths.

Rose froze at the shout. Slowly turning, hand resting on the hilt of her blade, she glanced at the source. Upon seeing who it was, she relaxed a little, thought she still looked wary.

Robin panted slightly—a clear contrast to the physically-fit prince— before he finally asked, "I—we wanted to ask a couple of questions if you wouldn't mind." Chrom nodded in agreement, as he also had questions for her.

The woman crossed her arms giving both a once over. Her eyes lingered on the tactician for a moment longer. Robin could almost feel her eyebrow rise, probably at their similar choice of attire if her smirk is anything to go by.

"I need to get ready for the tournament, but I can spare a few moments, sir…" she trailed off and Robin almost slapped himself.

"Of course, pardon my lack of decorum. My name is Robin, tactician of the Shepherds," he introduced himself, with a slight bow, "And you already know Prince Chrom Lowell of House Ylisse," he motioned towards the prince.

The champion nodded in acknowledgment. "I'm Rose Sustrai. A pleasure to make the acquaintance of a fellow tactician," she greeted politely with a small smile, before turning at the prince, "I hope you're feeling well this day, your Majesty. It wasn't my intention to harm you, but I might have let myself get overwhelmed by the heat of the moment. I apologize for my actions if they caused you any trouble."

The bluenette waved it off, "No harm done, just a few bruises, mainly to my pride." He gave her a wry smile, "Though I'm sure you could've done much worse in a real fight. You were holding back, didn't you? You didn't use any magic like at the gate and one of our members, Donnel, mentioned how you saved his village with magic."

"So little Donny joined the Shepherds, huh?" The smirk returned to the hooded woman's face, "As for the battle…" She just shrugged, "I would hardly go to the trouble to save your life just to immolate you in front of your friends and the Khan. Having a Plegian kill the Prince of Ylisse in the Feroxi Arena would be more that is needed to start this war."

Both men were shocked by her admission. "You're Plegian?!" Chrom shouted, hand instinctively moving to grasp Falchion.

Her muscles tensed, as her own had gripped the hilt of her own blade. "Yes, I would've thought the coat was a clue." Robin flinched, thinking back at Frederick's accusations. He didn't need to see her face to know she narrowed her eyes, "Is that a problem?"

Robin intervened before another battle started between the two. He was unarmed and knew Chrom couldn't win in his condition. The rest of the Shepherds were not close enough to provide help. But most of all, he didn't want unnecessary conflict. Resting a hand on Chrom's arm, trying to de-escalate the situation. The prince blinked and relaxed, realizing what he was doing, "I… My apologies. To both of you." He let go of Falchion, bowing his head in embarrassment, before glancing at his friend. "I trust Robin, despite his possible ties to Plegia, so I shouldn't have reacted that way to you." He apologized before continuing, "But if you're Plegian then why did you help us?"
"Not all Plegians worship Grima or follow Gangrel, Ylissian. Nor are we all barbarians or monsters that I'm sure many in Ylisse make us up to be," Rose said, releasing her grasp on her blade, but not completely relaxing.

"That's not what I meant," Chrom retorted. "But this are tense times, and it's very suspicious that a Plegian saved Ylissian royalty, when it would it be more beneficial to their country to let them die."

"Please understand our situation," Robin added, a more diplomatic tone taking hold of his voice. "It's worrying for us that gaining the support of the Feroxi army depends on a Plegian whose allegiance is unknown to us."

"If you're afraid that I'm going to throw the match, don't be. Had my intention be to harm Ylisse's war effort, I would've let Raimi kill you and throw your corpses into a shallow grave." The matter-of-fact tone she used sent shivers through their spines, "I've my own reasons to win this tournament, so it's in both our best interests for me to win. As for helping you... Well, I hold no love for Gangrel or the Grimleal. In fact, I believe Plegia would be much better without them. This war would benefit only them, not Plegia as a whole."

The white haired man frowned at a thought, "I would think a mercenary would love war times. It means easy coin," Robin commented in confusion.

"I understand why you would think that," Rose admitted with a nod. "It's true that in war a mercenary can make a lot coin, but it's also more likely to kill you and your employer who might see you just as fodder. Working for someone like Gangrel would mean an early death, yet many fools are throwing their lives away for a man that cares not for them." She gazed at the prince once more, "I saved you because while I believe in what Exalt Emmeryn preaches, Gangrel will never accept peace, even if it means a mountain of Plegian corpses. So I might as well prepare Ylisse by giving their commander a little lesson and hope this war don't last long. As long as Ylisse respects Emmeryn's vision and don't pursue vengeance, the Ylisse's victory is the best outcome." She gave a small shrug, "Plus, there are always contracts to take, so money is not a problem."

"You're not worried about the effects of the war in your country if they lose?" Robin was trying to get a reading on the mercenary, but he couldn't figure out her motivations. Something about her was nagging at the back of his head, but the answer remained beyond his grasp.

"It all depends on how this war ends. If the war ends fast, Plegia has the gold to rebuild much faster than Ylisse. As long as the new monarch is willing to compromise for peace and the people are willing to lay down their weapons, there shouldn't be much damage."

Chrom nodded, "Emmeryn hopes to achieve peace, but as long as Gangrel remains I doubt that will be a possibility."

"He will need to lose support first, and many of the Plegian just see you as Exalt Augustus' children. That's why you need to get better control of your emotions, Prince Chrom. If you go running in looking for a fight after Gangrel provokes you, and he will, the Plegians will see you as just another Naga fanatic wanting Plegia's demise and will fight harder."

"But that's not true!" Chrom protested. He hated the idea of becoming like his father.

"It doesn't have to be. Gangrel will tell his people want they need to hear to justify this war. You must remain steadfast to Emmeryn's beliefs if you want to maintain the moral high ground." Rose turned to look at the window, checking the sun's position, "Now, I gotta go prepare for the battle, so is there anything else I can do for you before I go?"
"Actually, yes. But this is a bit more personal." Robin answered, surprising Chrom slightly. Rose just stood there, waiting for him to continue. "I… don't have any memories prior to the last month, other than my name, tactics and combat skills. The only thing I've as clue is this Plegian coat, which as you might've guessed doesn't endear me to a lot of people. I wanted to ask if maybe we had met before, as our outfits and fighting styles are similar, maybe in an academy or unit. But since you introduced yourself and didn't recognize me…"

"…Amnesia, huh?" Rose gave him a long look before sighing, "I'm sorry to say that this is the first time we have met. While I'm Plegian by birth, I've no part in the Plegian military nor did I grew up there. I learned the culture from my mother as we traveled the land. This coat belonged to her and she taught me almost everything I know tactics and sorcery. I don't recall you from any of the groups I served as tactician for." Robin couldn't sense any deception from her words, and was disheartened at another dead end. "But I'll contact some people and see if they heard anything about a missing person with your description. Anything I find I can forward to you at Ylisse's barracks."

Robin was surprised at the generosity, but smiled none the less, "That would be much appreciated."

Rose returned the smile, "I'm glad to help." She turned to Chrom, who looked like he had his own question, "And you, your Majesty? Anything else I can do for you?"

"Pardon my curiosity, but why hide your face?" The prince asked the small question that had been bothering since yesterday.

"If you wanted to see more of my, skin you could at least buy me dinner first, Prince Chrom," she teased with a mischievous smile, giving a once over to the royal and earning a blush from him. Call it intuition, but they thought she really enjoyed watching him squirm, "I tease, don't worry. The reason I hide my face is very personal. I have… trust issues, so I like to keep certain things to myself. I hope you understand." A nod was her answer, "I'm glad you do. Now then, I shall go prepare for battle. Farewell, Sir Robin. Prince Chrom, I look forward to dueling you again." The champion left for her quarters to prepare, leaving behind the two men to their thoughts.

"Welcome, one and all, to the main event of the bi-yearly Khan Championship!" The announcer shouted thought the enchanted voice amplifier, eliciting cheers from the crowd. The arena was packed, its stone stands filled with Feroxi people. The arena was beautiful, with stone statues carved around the edge of the walls. The cold breeze flowed through the open ceiling, with torches and pyres around the arena warming the crowd and accentuating the Feroxi’ barbarian roots. The Shepherds were sitting in the Eastern balconies with Khan Flavia, who was sporting an arrogant smirk as she gazed at Khan Basilio across the arena.

Flavia was surprised to see Lon'qu next to the Khan. Her smirk returned, as she chuckled to herself, "Well, well, you big oaf. It seems I'm not the only one with surprises this day."

The statement confused her guests, a sentiment voiced by the prince, "What do you mean, Khan Flavia?"

"That man next to Basilio is Lon'qu, his champion. He should be inside the gate, but since he's there that means Basilio also got himself a new champion; one strong enough to best Lon'qu."

A worried grimace appeared on Chrom's face, "Well, I'm sure Rose will be fine. This will certainly be an interesting match."

"Oh, of that I've no doubt."
Rose stood inside the eastern gate, thinking about her talk with her kind-of twin brother. 'He has amnesia, so that means Grima has already traveled in time. If there was any doubt of which timeline I'm on, then it's gone. So far everything is moving the same, meaning Marth will be my opponent.' She frowned as her thought's moved to the third Chrom she had met, 'Still naïve and impulsive. Will you become like my husband or my killer.' She shook her head to clear her thoughts, 'Bah, no time for that. Let's see what this Lucina has to offer.' A stray though appeared in Rose's mind, causing her to frown, 'Thinking about it, why she's even participating in the tournament?'

Lucina waited inside the western gate alongside the men Basilio had assigned as her team. Two knights, two warriors, and two mages stood by her side. She was ready to face her father and the Shepherds in battle. This way, Lon'qu would not be injured and he would join the war earlier, hopefully saving more lives. The fact that she could measure up against her father and prove herself to him was another, more selfish reason for her participation. Demonstrating her worth would help her gain their trust to prevent Emmeryn's assassination.

At least that's what she hoped.

"Representing the West in the name of Khan Basilio, we have a surprising new contestant replacing the favorite Lon'qu! Let's hear it for the mysterious Marth!"

Lucina adjusted her mask and walked into the arena. Her team flanked her and walked tall, imposing and ready for battle, receiving cheers from the audience. They shouldn't be much of a challenge to the Shepherds, but they didn't have to be. As long as her father won and she could fight him she would be happy.

She glanced at the opposing gate, looking up to the balcony and her heart nearly stopped when she saw her father and the Shepherds sitting next to Khan Flavia.

'What are they doing there!? They're supposed to be down here!' Panic ran across her face, luckily covered under the mask and hidden from the public. She recognized all the Shepherds, her family, sitting there with her father. The announcer interrupted her thoughts as he announced the entrance of her opponent.

"And now, we got another surprise! Representing the East in the name of Khan Flavia, a force of nature that defeated all her opponents in the trials! This flower is not without her thorns! I present you the fearsome mercenary, Rose Sustrai!"

The roar from the crowd was lost to Lucina, as her mind had only one thought.

'Who!?' The eastern gate opened and a single cloaked figure walked out. The public quieted down, confused at the absence of more fighters, but none more so than the Ylissean guests.

"Why is she alone?!" exclaimed Chrom, highly bewildered at the situation. "I know she is strong, but she can't so arrogant to take seven heavily armed career soldiers!"

Flavia just shrugged, amused at their reactions, "I wanted to use the Shepherds as her back up, but she declined. She said she was enough for this and I was inclined to believe her. Plus, I think the show will be much more entertaining this way."

"It is indeed a big risk, but I think she must have a plan. Rose herself said she had a stake in this," Robin commented, using his hooded cloak to warm himself. The arena was pretty cold, despite all
the people and torches surrounding the arena. "I doubt she would take this gamble if she wasn't sure of her victory. She said she wouldn't jeopardize our chances of getting the army. Rose doesn't strike me as someone make moves without being sure of her victory." He then glanced at the western champion, 'So that's the so-called Marth that saved Lissa, huh? Interesting...'

"Hoi! Can we really trust the Plegian? The Vaike doesn't think that's a bright idea."

"Damn. If Vaike thinks something is stupid, then it must be a terrible idea." Sully commented to Stahl, who chuckled before being silenced by a glare from Frederick.

"I must agree, sir. It wasn't prudent to put our trust in another Plegian. We've already taken many risks with Robin."

"We're not having this conversation again, Frederick. Drop it." The prince's tone was one of finality, not even turning to look at his knight.

"I...yes, milord," the knight's tone was anything but pleased.

Trying to move past the conflict, Sumia tried to change the subject, "Still, I'm kind of excited to see what she will do. She was very impressive in her fight with Prince Chrom." She released a small sigh, before whispering to herself, "I wish I was a strong woman like her..."

"I'm sure we all can learn something from this," commented Stahl, his normally mellow demeanor giving way to his warrior side.

Miriel nodded, adjusting her glasses as she stared at the arena, "Indeed. A display of skill would be most beneficial educational."

"This should be fun," agreed Kellam, startling his comrades.

"Darn it, Kellam! When did ya get here?!" Donnel said between calming breaths.

"I've been sitting next to you the whole time..."

'This is wrong. It's not supposed to happen like this.'

Her opponent moved into the arena, a distinctive purple cloak moving with the cold breeze. The garment was familiar to Lucina, having seen it her whole childhood, always at her father's side.

'But that can't be!' Looking at the balcony, she confirmed her doubts. Another purple cloak sat next to her father, where it should be. 'Two tacticians? But there should only be one! Who is the other one?!' Confusion and worry kept nagging at her mind, 'Did we change so much already by coming back? Did the changes go so far back?'

' Another Lucina, from a world where I don't exist...' Rose thought as she looked at the masked princess in the other side of the arena. Her butterfly mask hiding a mirror image of her daughter's face. 'What does it say about my worth as a mother, if she will be Chrom's daughter no matter which village harlot he marries?' she thought in bitter self-deprecation, hiding it all behind an indifferent expression.

Looking around she saw her opponents looking confused, trying to see if there was anyone else behind her.
"Oi, girly! Ain't ya missing some people?" One of the mages yelled at her.

"Yeah, does Flavia wants to lose too badly that she sent only one cheap mercenary?"

Her opponents kept taunting her, even as Marth stood still. 'Probably in shock that Chrom isn't here.'

"Look, just go back and pick some of those Eastern guards, we don't want to disappoint the crowd with you falling in one strike!" The biggest knight called, earning a laugh his fellow warriors.

'Oo ho... They want to play? Let's have some fun with them, before the main event.' Rose sighted dramatically, putting on a show for the crowd. "Oh woe! Oh mercy! I'm vastly outnumbered! How could things go so wrong, fighting against such examples of virility?" she drawled theatrically, earning a laugh from the public, and rage from her opponents.

"Hey bitch, are you mocking us?! Do you really want to die so eagerly?!!"

She exaggerated a frown, scolding the warrior like a little child, "Now, now, there is no need for name calling. You will give a bad name to former-High Khan Basilio." Her proclamation to the title earned cheers and yells from the crowd, and a laugh from her sponsor. "I expected to fight Lon'qu and his warriors, so color me surprised when the Basilio sent his second-rate team into the arena."

One of the knights snarled at her derisive comments, "That's it! We tried to be nice! Hey, announcer! Start this fight!"

"You heard them, folks! They all seem eager to fight! All fighters get ready! Once the gong sounds the fight will start!"

The warriors and knights stood in formation, protecting the mages and their leader.

The masked princess spoke up, trying to regain control of the situation, "Don't underestimate her! She wouldn't be here alone if she wasn't sure of her victory!"

"Bah, don't worry, Marth. We will humiliate her and then feast like champions," boasted one of the knights.

Rose reached inside her robe and taking out her personal grimoire, containing an assortment of spells she had collected from her time as Grima as well as her travels. The tome had a purple cover, with her new mark branded on the cover. Magic was leaking from it, eager to run wild.

"Well now, it's not a good move to start outnumbered. It would certainly hurt my pride as a tactician to lose to such an oversight, so how about we change that?" She said in an arrogant tone, as magic gathered across the fingers.

The gong rang, signaling the start. The physical fighters charged forward, each wanting the credit for the victory. The cheers of the crowd accompanied them as they closed the distance.

Rose stood as she as her magic flowed freely from her body, a wicked smile forming in her lips, "It's time to tip the scales!"

Golden light gathered in her hands, glowing with an intensity that betrayed their power. Wild arcs escaped her hands, cracking the stone floor. The knights slowed down, now wary of the power of their opponent.

"Surge forward and strike, Thoron!"
Two bolts of golden lightning exploded forward, slicing through the floor like a hot knife and slamming into the armored knights. They tried to protect themselves, their shields enchanted to resist basic magic, but it did little to slow down the powerful spell. The current engulfed their bodies, only to be enhanced by the conductive metal of their suits. They screamed as their skin burned from the electricity, only to drop to the floor, muscles twitching and barely alive.

The two remaining warriors stood frozen, now cautious about engaging the woman after this turn of events. Rose certainly demonstrated that she was not to be trifled with. The knights represented the defense of their team and they were taken out in one spell, so the offensive will have to change their tactics.

"It seems like the fools walked right into the dragon's den," Rose's voice echoed through the arena, the crowd still in shock at the magical display. She put her tome away and took a step forward, just to jump back as a fireball flew past her.

The mages were the first to regain their composure and were not losing time. One of the warriors tried to rush her, but Rose moved inside his stance, grabbing his arm and stopping his hammer mid-swing. The brute tried to break away but, much to his shock, couldn't overcome her physical strength. She twisted his main arm as she trusted her open palm against his elbow. The joint snapped backwards, bending the arm in an unnatural angle. His hammer fell to the ground as he clutched his broken limb, just as her fist impacted his nose.

As Rose turned to watch the remaining warrior, who took a defensive stance, a flash of light at the corner of her eye got her attention. Another fireball came towards her, as one of the mages tried to force her back. Fast as lightning, she grabbed the fallen warrior by the neck and used him as a shield from the attack just as the small fireball slammed into his back. The flame burned his unarmored skin, leaving burnt muscle exposed to the cold air and his throat raw from the screams of pain.

In a show of astonishing physical strength, the Eastern champion picked him up and threw him towards the remaining physical fighter, knocking both to the floor. Closing the distance, Rose slammed her armored foot against the leg of the healthiest warrior, snapping his femur in half. She silenced his scream by slamming her boot on his head, knocking him out. The Plegian repeated the action with the other warrior as a small act of mercy to spare him the pain.

The knights tried to power through their injuries, but the mercenary wasn't about to give them the chance. She pulled her tome once again, as the cold wind swirled around each of the fallen contestants.

"How about you guys leave the arena now? Here, let me give you a hand." Her tome glowed again, this time with a green aura as the wind gained speed, "Blow them away, Rexcalibur!" The four contestants were picked up by the magical wind, sending them crashing against the wall of the arena, eliminating them from the competition. Only Lucina and the two mages remained standing, one cautious and the others enraged.

"What the fuck is with the crazy bitch?!” One of the mages shouted, both anger and fear oozing from his body.

"I don't know, but I'm not losing this fight! There's no way she still got the strength to fight after using those spells! Samuel, let's get her!" As they channeled power into the fire tomes they grew more confident and stepped forward, ready to face the powerful mercenary.

Lucina once again tried to get them in line, "Don't be idiots, we've to play this smart!"

"We're not taking orders from some rookie! Thomas! Hit her with everything you got!"
They each pulled a red tome with silver marking across the cover; a common spell book used by experienced wizards. They pooled their magic power into a single spot, combining their magic into one spell. The fire burned brightly as a fireball four times the size of the previous ones appeared into the air. The mages pushed forward, launching the attack in hopes to end the match.

"Arcfire? Now, that won't do," Rose shook her head in disappointment. "Let me show you a real fire spell. Writhe in the fires of Bolganone!"

Her tome shone with an angry red light as a pillar of fire rose from the floor, rushing towards the incoming attack. Both flames clashed against one another, before the pillar overpowered the fireball, devouring its energy and increasing in size before exploding in a terrifying display of power. Too close to run, the mages could do nothing but use their magic to try to cushion the blast, but it wasn't enough. The pair was blown away as their unconscious burned bodies fell at the edge of the arena. Still feeling merciful, Rose casted a quick wind spell, gathering snow and snuffing the remaining flames.

The crowd stood in silence at the brutal spectacle, before bursting into cheers. Even the Western Feroxi were cheering, always happy to get a good fight, whatever one-sided. Chants for "Marth!" and "Rose!" resounded through the arena, awaiting the battle between champions.

"Chrom… she really took it easy on you," said Lissa in awe at the display. Her brother could only nod along, cringing as looked at the defeated contestants.

"Those spells…” Miriel murmured to herself, eyes still wide in shock at the display of sorcery; an uncommon look on the sorceress.

Stahl looked at his comrade in confusion, "What about them, Mir?"

"Those are highly advanced spells she used," the bespectacled mage commented.

"Really? How so?"

"We categorize spell in a ranking from E to A, weakest to strongest. E-class tomes allow the user to cast simple, but weak spells like Fire and Thunder. As the rank increases so does the difficulty and the prowess necessary to cast them. There are few mages in Ylisse's forces that can use C or even B rank spells." She explained to her comrades, at least the ones that showed interest.

"So what rank were those spells?" Robin was curious at this new information. He was thinking of increasing his arsenal of spells and this might give him a clue on where to start.

"Those were B rank spells. But what confounds me is the ease that she casted them with," Miriel said as she adjusted her glasses once again. "Normally one requires a dedicated tome and much focus to cast such spells, otherwise the spell matrix will not form accurately. And yet this woman used her personal tome to cast the spells without much effort. I would dare say she can cast A rank spells with some exertion, indicating she is highly experienced in the magical arts. I would love to get her opinion in some of my theorems. This will require further study."

A whistle escaped Robin's lips, once again impressed by his fellow tactician's strength. 'I wonder I can gain such strength.'

"Now that the distractions are out of the way I think I'll go easy on the magic. We don't want to end this too fast for the audience, right Marth?" Rose addressed her opponent as she put her tome away and drew her sword.
"Who are you?" Lucina asked, as she pulled out Parallel Falchion and get into her own stance.

"I should be the one asking you that. Why use the name of the Hero King? Why hide your face with that mask? Although… that would hypocritical of me, I guess," she gave the Future Exalt a coy smile, not giving out her inner turmoil at seeing her not-daughter, birthed by another woman with the man she once loved.

She wasn't bitter at all.

Lucina didn't relax her stance, ready to attack at the first opening.

'Caution. Good, she has her father's prowess at least.' Rose took a loose stance, not serious, but ready to attack all the same. "You know, I was hoping to fight Lon'qu. I heard so many things about the reigning champion. So imagine my surprise when I see a young man, dressed up as a mythological hero, standing in front of me as my opponent. I really hope you can give me a challenge if you bested Lon'qu. The people will be very disappointed if you go down too quickly."

The former queen got some small pleasure as she saw Lucina's mouth twitch at her certainty on her defeat. The Exalt didn't waste time and closed the distance in an instance, almost a replay of her fight with Chrom. But Rose didn't survive so long by being unprepared. Her muscles tensed, as her sword intercepted the strike.

"Nice sword. It's identical to the Falchion the Exalted bloodline uses, but it can't be. There is only one and it's resting in the stands," her comment was punctuated by kicking the bluenette away. Strike after strike, Lucina tried to break her guard, but to avail. She simply lacked the experience against more experienced opponents, let alone one familiar with her style. 'Lon'qu must have instinctively sensed her gender, otherwise there is no way she could have bested him. She should be stronger.'

"Please don't tell me that's all you can do, or else I'll very disappointed," the Plegian taunted, but to her slight surprise Lucina's anger didn't overcome her like her father. 'Her experience at least amounts to playing it smart and controlling her emotions. That's good. Hopefully, she will be more open minded than my Lucina. Otherwise, she will present a problem to be dealt with.' "Come on, I think you can do better than that. Who taught you how to fight, anyways?"

Lucina broke away, putting more distance between them, before leaping into the air. "My father!" she shouted before she started spinning toward Rose, just like Chrom did.

This time Falchion did struck, but not the target the Exalt hoped. Lucina's eyes widened behind her mask as the tactician intercept her attack with her own blade, stopping it in its tracks. Cracks formed underneath Rose's feet, a testament to the power of the strike.

"Nice! But sadly for you, Thorn isn't a cheap blade you can break easily." With a might push, Rose sent the princess flying back. Lucina managed to land on her feet, panting from the exertion.

"That's impossible!" Chrom jumped to his feet, checking his side to confirm that Falchion was indeed there. "How can Marth possess his own Falchion?!!"

"There should only be one… Even if there was another, only those chosen from the Exalted bloodline can use it," Lissa observed, equally surprised as her brother. "Chrom, you don't think father…?"

"I wouldn't worry much, milady," Frederick interrupted her question with the best intentions. "Your father may not have been perfect, but Exalt Augustus was forever faithful to Queen Elissa. Of that, I'm sure."
Lissa only nodded, not entirely sure. *Maybe he was disappointed in me, for not having the Mark of the Exalt?*

Chrom didn't like watching his sister suffer, but word wouldn't work this time. He ended up just putting a comforting hand on her shoulder, showing his support. *We can ask him later. I have my own questions for him. This, his rescue... It's all too strange.*

"Indeed. Not only that, but his style is almost identical to yours," the tactician commented, before chuckling, "Heh, and Rose has a more refined version of my style. It's like watching a fight between you and me, if I had more skill." Robin was one to admit his own weakness, even going so far to put himself down. He hated to admit it but he lacked confidence, always doubting himself and worrying if his plans will kill his only friends.

"I sure you will reach that level someday, my friend. Still, this whole trip has been very bizarre," Chrom said as he shook his head.

The future Exalt was desperate. None of her attacks, not even her father's special move managed to scratch the Eastern champion, while she sported multiple shallow cuts. That sword was easily a match for Falchion, for it didn't even chip from the blows of the bigger blade. Lucina gritted her teeth in frustration, as blood and sweat dripped through her wounded body. This no longer was a fight to earn respect for now it was a matter of pride. She wouldn't be bested here, regardless of whoever her opponent was. She would have to convince Khan Basilio to give his support, which she was sure he would do anyways, so she decided to go all out and earn her victory.

Forgoing all pretense of subtlety, she called the power coursing through her blood. Azure fire started to gather on her hands, as the Flame of Naga engulfed the sacred blade.

Rose let out a whistle of admiration at her attack, "Oh, nice trick."

*I won't lose!* Lucina thought before she rushed forward for her final strike.

Sadly, tunnel vision prevented her from seeing the smirk on her opponent's face. She didn't hear the last comment from the tactician, as the wind rushing through her east silenced the low voice. *But that won't be enough.*

Rose exploded forward once more, taking her own stance just as Thorn was engulfed into purple flames. The flames radiated wild power, melting the stone as the Plegian dragged the sword through the ground. The champions of the East and the West clashed in the middle of the arena, as both blades clashed forward.

"Aether!"

"Ignis!"

Fallen and Exalted blood resonated in their veins, as the flames exploded outwards in a fight for dominance. The audience was shouting in excitement at the most impressive display of swordsmanship and sorcery that had every graced their arena. Eventually, the purple fire proved superior, as it consumed the azure flames. An explosion rocked the arena, engulfing the contestants in a cloud of smoke. The spectators were at the edge of their seats, silently waiting for the result. They got it once the blue lord was sent flying through the air and crashing into the flood, Falchion ripped from her grasp.

Lucina tried to push herself up, but she didn't have the strength. It was a miracle her hair and mask remained intact, since the blast burned her clothes, leaving her cape in tatters. She saw through her
mask as Rose walked out of the smoke. Her coat was slightly singed, but otherwise she was in excellent condition.

The Plegian moved forward, and took Parallel Falchion from the ground. She couldn't wield it though, for she lacked the Exalted blood. That didn't calm Lucina's thoughts as the dull blade was raised above her head, ready to strike her down. The audience was thirsting for blood, and the judge looked ready to stop the fight, but he wasn't fast enough. Falchion came down and the Exalt could only close her eyes, preparing for the blow.

The pain never came, though. Lucina opened her eyes once she heard the blade pierce the rock next to her head, inches from being a fatal blow. Even while dull, Falchion was pushed with such force that is embedded itself in the stone. Lucina turned to see the violet eyes of her opponent looking at her with an expression of longing and conflict, which banished almost instantly.

"Yield." Rose's tone was commanding, like one worthy of a queen.

Lucina dropped her head in defeat, unable to put up a fight any longer.

"I yield."

"Girl, I'm gonna adopt you and keep you as my champion forever!" Flavia guffawed as she slapped Rose in the back, making her flinch in slight pain.

"Thanks?" The tactician grunted. Durable as she was, Flavia has some mean arm strength.

The victory party was going in full force. The eastern guards were celebrating with barrels of ale, sharing with Vaike and Sully. They looked happy to finally getting on up on the West. Looking around, Rose saw Chrom in a corner, a frown on his face.

'Seems he did notice Lucina's blade and attack. No surprise there. Only those with the Exalted blood can use Aether, so it must be eating him inside.'

She remained next to Khan Flavia, drinking and celebrating. Not that alcohol did much to her new body, which she considered unfortunate. This continued until some of the Shepherds made their way towards them.

"Congratulations on your victory, Rose. It was certainly an impressive display," Robin praised her, showing genuine respect.

"You were so cool!" Lissa was bouncing on her feet, still excited from the fight.

Frederick only grunted, watching her warily.

"It was certainly exciting. It made me feel a little better about losing against you," The royal cringed, remembering all the broken bones and severe burns from the other contestants. "Even so, was it necessary to be so… brutal?"

She shrugged, "They knew what to expect when they entered the arena. If a single person is confident enough to challenge a whole group, they're either bluffing or a serious threat. They called it wrong and paid the price."

"She speaks the truth. In a fight, you never underestimate an opponent," a deep voice commented behind them, startling the Shepherd's duo. Khan Basilio entered the room, accompanied by Lon'qu.
"You big oaf! So nice of you to come and give me the title in person!" If Flavia's grin grew any bigger, it would split her face.

"Yeah, yeah... I knew I shouldn't have put so much confidence into that Marth guy, but he did best Lon'qu. I didn't expect you to have your own trump card, though." He took a look at new champion, "So this is Rose, huh? You certainly deserve the victory after such demonstration."

Rose bowed in respect of the Khan, "Thank you for your kind words, Khan Basilio. I apologize if anything I said in the arena offended you."

The one-eyed man just waved it off, "Bah! Think nothing of it. Thrash talking is all good in the arena. I'm just glad all the injuries are treatable, those were some good men, however rough. A few scars will help them with the ladies."

"Then why are you still single?" snarked Flavia, earning a glare from her counterpart.

Chrom cleared his throat, gaining the attention of the Khans, "I'm sorry to interrupt, but I just want to make sure of something Khan Flavia. We will still get your troops support?"

The High-Khan just waved him off, "Don't you worry about it; I'm a woman of my word. Raimi is already organizing the army to march. We will send an initial force of a 2,000 soldiers with you, and the rest should arrive in the coming weeks. It should be enough to reinforce your border fortresses and increase Ylisse's security. I'll leave 25,000 soldiers in our side of the Plegian border, while the other 20,000 march into Ylisse. Can't spare much more than that without leaving out own territory up for the taking. Just you wait, soon we will kick those Plegians like the dogs they are."

"Ahem!" Rose cleared her throat, giving her sponsor a pointed look.

Flavia gave her a cheeky grin, "Present company excluded, of course." Rose just rolled her eyes in good humor, while the Khan directed her attention back to the Ylisseans, "Still, while we do have many more warriors, this is what we have registered into the army right now. I'll issue an order for rearmament and gather more troops."

"That's also why I'm here," Basilio interjected. "As you should know, I'm Basilio, Khan of the West. I came here to show my support for you cause. You know, I would've helped you guys anyways even if I had won, so you didn't need to worry. My own people had been preparing to move against Plegia for their harassments. So I'm going to do something more to show my support." He motioned his champion forward, "This is Lon'qu, my former champion. Not much for talking, mind you, but he's peerless with a sword. As good as Marth, in my mind. To be honest, I can't figure out how Marth bested him so quickly."

"Marth beat him? But he looks so big and strong..." Lissa approached the man, who looked panicked for a moment.

"Away, woman!" The swordsman yelled, taking a step back.

The princess jumped back at his outburst, "Hey! Wh-what did I say?!

Basilio gave a hearty laugh, "Bahaha! Let's just say that ladies tend to put Lon'qu on edge." Unheard by him Rose snorted, earning a glare from the swordsman. "Nonetheless, he is capable. Perhaps he even has the makings of a khan. Consider him West Ferox's contribution to the Ylissean cause."

Chrom and Robin looked a little uncertain about the situation, "You're certain about this?"

The West Khan just nodded, "Yes, yes. He's your man now."
Chrom "And Lon'qu? You have no objections?"

The man from Chon'sin gave him a stony look, "You gives orders. I stab people. I think our roles are clear."

"...All right then. Welcome aboard. Speaking of Marth, where is he? I don't see him anywhere and I've some questions for him," Chrom said while looking around for his fellow bluenette.

Basilio grunted in annoyance, "Who knows. He crawled out of the arena, refusing aid and left. Brat was lucky to be able to walk. Bah, it doesn't matter. In the end you're the real winner, prince. You got your troops."

Lissa recovered easily, ecstatic at all the help they were getting, "This is fantastic! Emmeryn will be so happy! Thank you so much for your help!" She bowed to the Khans.

"It's much better than we hoped. If we spread them carefully, we can secure our territory and still have forces for the main army. Ylisse only has about 1500 troops across our land, just enough for the guard, along with the 600 clerics of Naga," Robin's mind seemed to have kicked overdrive, coming to the same conclusions Rose did long ago. "With this we should be able to meet Plegia on even ground. If I remember correctly they have about 55,000 troops, so it would be pretty even."

"Plegia has around 43,000 warriors, 5,000 horse riders, 8,000 dark mages and 2,000 wyvern riders. But that's without taking into consideration possible conscriptions, hidden units and the navy," Rose added to his thoughts, earning the attention of the group. She just shrugged again, "You gather information in my line of work. You will need to fortify your ports, though. Otherwise Plegia will use its navy to land troops in the south or even the west and overwhelm you while you focus on a land invasion through the north. But I wouldn't worry too much, it's not like you will fight all of them, they also can't leave their land unprotected, nor move so many men easily through the desert."

Robin took the information like a fish to the water, starting planning and unknowingly making his sister proud, "Hmm, we still only have about 400 Pegasus knights, so they have air dominance. We do have an advantage on Clerics and Sages ready to assist the main army as healers and support..."

"Well, it seems you got a nice tactician in your hands, Chrom," Flavia observed with amusement as the boy muttered to himself, thinking of plans and logistics.

"Yes I do, and I trust him with my life. We only know each other for a short time, but I couldn't ask for a better friend," the prince replied with a smile, sending a small stab of pain into Rose's heart. She remembered when both Chrom's she fell for said those words to her, only for her to lose both in the future.

'Not again. He will not suffer like I did.'

"So, Rose. What will the champion of Ferox do now?" Flavia asked, curious about her next step.

Another shrug was her answer, "I'm not sure, really. My victory already dealt with a personal issue I had, so I don't have anything pending. I'm sure after my display I won't be short on contracts."

Chrom and Robin looked at each other, seemingly sharing the same thought.

"Actually, we have a proposition for you," Chrom said, looking at her directly.

"Oh? What would it be?" her voice was perceptibly curious, as if this wasn't part of her plan.

"We would like to contract your services for our campaign," Robin said, earning a surprised look
from Frederick and Lissa.

She tried very hard not show a self-satisfied smirk, 'And so they took the bait.'

She pretended to think about, "I'm not sure... Even though I'm not in favor of Gangrel, would your troops accept my presence?" She directed her gaze to Frederick, who remained silent, but tense, "I can tell some people have their reservations."

"It won't be a problem. You've earned a lot of respect with your fight and you saving my life also helps. We will pay you reasonably for your service, don't worry."

Finally getting a foothold, Frederick interrupted, "But sir! She's not only Plegian, but a mercenary! What is to say she won't betray us for more coin?"

The woman gave him a dirty look, "Many reasons, sir knight. As of now, I have the title of champion of Ferox, meaning I'm known by many. If I betray a contract it will ruin my reputation and earn me scorn of Ferox. Integrity is important in this line of work, for no one will hire a mercenary that will easily break their contracts."

Both warriors emitted an aura of defiance, one clearly saying 'I don't trust you, Plegian' while the other simply said 'Piss off.'

Robin tried to convince her again, "Please, it could also show people that not all Plegians are evil and are willing to work with Ylisse for the good of both."

Rose gave him a skeptical look, "I'm not sure me being paid to be there will issue that message." She paused for a moment, "But all right, I'll accept. You will find my rates to be very reasonable, so I'm sure you can afford it. We can have a contract drafted and signed later tomorrow, with Khan Flavia as witness. I just ask that you respect my privacy and we won't have any issues."

Both the commander and the tactician looked very pleased with her acceptance. "That will be no problem! I'm sure we can learn a lot from you," Robin said with a big grin.

Rose nodded, smiling slightly at her twin's enthusiasm, "I'm looking forward to it."

"Come, we shall introduce you to the rest of the Shepherds," both men moved to gather their comrades. She moved to follow them, pleased her plans were moving forward.

As she crossed paths with Frederick, he gave her a warning, "I'll be watching you Plegian. My lord might trust you, but I do not. Plegian or not, your kind only needs a few coins to sell their souls.

She didn't bother to look at him, "Worry not, sir knight, for I'm a woman of my word. I'll fulfill this contract to the best of my abilities."

The knight frowned, not convinced, "We shall see. We don't need a wolf among our herd."

She gave him dry smile, not intimidated by his glare, "A wolf? Funny, I consider myself more of a dragon."
The Exalt and the King

The march back to Ylisstol was an interesting experience. It wasn't like the first two times she did so. In the original timeline, Rose had volunteered her services as a professional after helping the Southtown Guard repel the bandit attack, which was much easier when she wasn't suffering an existential crisis thanks to memory loss. The second, after being found in that field with no memories and taking the hand of friendship from her future killer, was much less pleasant thanks to said existential crisis. Southtown paid the price as she was unconscious instead of helping them and she couldn't intervene this time otherwise it might have prevented her brother from earning his place.

Both times she had to prove her worth to the Shepherds in order to earn their trust; otherwise, they wouldn't put their lives in her hands or trust her strategies. This time, though, it wasn't her direct responsibility. She was just a sellsword hired to help train their troops and act as a bodyguard. She agreed to help as she already knew which paths would be best for each of their members.

And by Naga did they need the help. These weren't the veterans of the Plegian and Valmese wars that stood against Grima's hordes. Lissa still got shivers at the sight of blood, Sumia still tripped on her own feet—not that that changed much—, Donnel was still using that old bronze lance...

They needed help and fast. Sure, they would still succeed if everything played out the same, but it was depressing to see all this potential just waiting to be used while lives were being lost. Chrom and her brother seemed to think so too, so she was relegated to protecting Lissa and make observations which she would relay to Robin—and did it still felt weird calling her brother by her own, real name—and he could put them in practice while the Shepherds trained.

These early battles weren't as intense as what is to come, but they needed the experience and what better way to earn it than cutting through packs of Risen and bandits. It will help the least experienced members of their group to desensitize from killing men and accept the fact that they were also fighting walking rotten corpses, so they didn't felt it prudent to have her torch the entire battlefield and call it a day. After all, they all need to grow stronger for the upcoming war and her contract was over. At least, Lon'qu and Frederick were still more powerful than the rest, which made dueling them a nice warm up in the future.

And if she got some pleasure from watching Frederick struggle to push her back then that was fine too.

Some were nice to her, which only brought back some painful memories and guilt to the surface. Rose was polite enough, and tried not to be cold, but she wasn't about to become close friends with them again. No matter how much she wanted to. But it didn't end up well her first two tries and she wasn't willing to risk heartbreak once again. The former queen will try to prove that they could trust her, but if they turned on her brother she would be ready to fight to the bitter end.

And yet they still tried. Sumia and Stahl attempted to bring her into the fold while others were like Vaike were more cautious about her Plegian roots. Nothing she didn't expect so far. Miriel was expectedly curious about her arcane arts and eyed her tome with poorly concealed interest.

Still, all this observations and interactions led to one revelation; something that she couldn't believe she omitted in all the years she knew these people.

'Everyone in this army is insane. How did I never noticed this before?'

Well, that wasn't entirely true. Rose knew they weren't exactly normal people, but watching Robin
and Vaike escape from Sully's horse, Lissa and Stahl hunting butterflies, Miriel staring unblinkingly at Kellam while Sully ran Virion ragged, or Sumia falling over her own feet into Frederick's hands while he pinned was working helped her come to this conclusion. It was much easier to realize and accept when you were an outsider and not in the middle of the madness.

It was much more entertaining too as it wasn't happening to her.

Rose watched as Chrom ran through the tents, face red as Cordelia's hair, ripping out the posters Frederick had made in his image — which she could attest were anatomically correct. Rose almost laughed, but found it inappropriate to do so when she was still new to the group.

She still wasn't comfortable spending time with them, as painful memories tended to manifest in the forefront of her mind at every conversation that wasn't training-related. Watching Sumia talk to her Pegasus brought up memories of an older rider being feed to Plegian Wyverns as she pleaded for mercy and of a former friend accusing her of lying about their friendship and getting her daughter killed. All the Shepherds brought such memories; one a set of death while the other of abandonment and betrayal. Rose thought dealing with Chrom was bad enough, but each smile and greeting she received was a stab to the heart.

It hurts.

Why were they being nice to her? A Plegian with a sketchy background. One that in another life killed them all. This might not be that timeline, but it did nothing to make Rose feel better. She thought she had already dealt with this in Ferox and the past years, but it still kept coming back. She might be getting better at dealing with it, but the pain wasn't getting any better. Rose couldn't keep feeling pity for herself, so she decided to try and focus solely on her given tasks for now. A tired body didn't have time to be depressed.

At least now she was in a position to prepare them for the wars and to guide Robin not to make the same mistake she did. If he saw it fit to help the Shepherds, she won't interfere. But that didn't mean she couldn't interfere in other ways.

They were still two days away from the capital when she entered the tactician's tent to find Robin in a game of strategy against Virion. A small smile appeared on her face as she recalled the many times she faced the Duke of Rosanne and how he defeated her with ruthless strategies. The grandmaster knew that behind all the flirting and flamboyancy there was a shrewd mind worth of his title. She owed him a lot for helping her grow as a tactician and a lady of the court and considered him one of her closest friends in both her previous lives.

She blamed herself for his death in the original timeline, as she did for all the Shepherds, and yet liked to believe that that Virion didn't hate her. Somewhere in her heart, she held the hope that the original Shepherds knew she was not in control. Which made the pain worse when he didn't bother to try and defend her in second life. Maybe it was justified for leaving poor Gerome without his parents. Virion and Cherche had every right to hate her; everyone did. She just wished they had, at least, heard her apologize.

Robin's voice broke through her musings as he dropped his head into his hands, "Blast and blast again! Why can't I beat you?!"

"It seems my cravat is vindicated," Virion said with a smug smirk only a noble can perfect.

Her brother grimaced, still looking at his fallen commander, "I'll not speak to your fashion sense, but you have a real knack for strategy, Virion. I don't feel so confident with my skills..." He released a
sigh, running a hand through his hair as he commented in a self-deprecating tone, "Perhaps you should be giving orders instead of me."

A frown formed on Rose's face. She really didn't like the way he talked about himself. She didn't like losing either, that much was obvious for any tactician, but when Virion defeated her she used the experience to learn and not make those mistakes in the field. He seemed to just defeat himself with doubt and fear. 'Maybe he subconsciously remembers some of the future after the failed merge? Not that strange compared to everything else going on... Regardless, he will have to grow out of that to reach his potential.'

Virion seemed to share her thoughts. "Inadvisable, my dear lad. I fear we'd never last the war. Spare a second glance at the board and tell me: Who has more soldiers left alive?"

Robin took a look at the board and saw what he meant. "Ah..." He still had more than three-fourths of his pieces, but the commander was beaten which was the point of the game. Meanwhile, the Duke's forces suffered heavy casualties to achieve victory, with less than a third of the forces still standing.

The tone of the Duke's voice was strangely somber, probably remembering the early incursions from Walhart into his lands, "I won, yes, but at what cost? Half the moves I make in this game could never be used in a real battle. My own men would have my head on a pike before the enemy even reached me. No, this army needs a tactician who loathes the sacrifice of even a single man. It needs you."

"He says the truth, Sir Robin," her voice startled both men, giving her some inner, childish satisfaction. "People need someone to inspire confidence and loyalty in them for them to fight the hardest. Some that cares for them as people and not pawns. Don't be so hard on yourself. You're young and still coping with this great responsibility. You only need to find the right strategies and any obstacle can be overcome."

"Rose! I'm sorry, I didn't saw you there," her brother was quick to apologize.

She waved her finger playfully at him while keeping her stoic façade, "You got to be aware of your surroundings." She turned to the duke, "Sir Virion, right? Would you mind to entertain me with a game?"

"Just Virion is fine, sweet Rose. It would be a pleasure to contest with such a mysterious and fierce lady," the duke mustered all his charm into his smile, which would have worked on any young village girl.

He missed the brief sinister smirk that appeared on her face.

"Checkmate."

Moving the last piece, Rose eliminated the commander of Virion's army. Her army was mostly intact, with light losses, while his was broken and beaten. The duke had a stupefied look on his face while Robin was drinking all the moves like water for a thirsty man.

"I-wha..." the noble eloquently said.

"You tried to sacrifice a large force in a central assault while they rest circled to kill the commander. Your cavalry would need space to charge and my knights held the line against their advance with superior armor, allowing me to surround your forces and robbing you of your main advantage – charging in open space. Then I used a reserve force to counter your circling force while an elite team broke through and eliminated your commander, which you left lightly defended, taking advantage of
the disarray. It was a nice strategy, sacrifice a lot of bodies to score a win, if callous. But as you said, no sane army would follow such orders."

'It only took me a few years and two wars to find a perfect counter, but he doesn't need to know that.'

"That was brilliant! Using a small army to surround a bigger one, robbing it of mobility and most of its numbers! You wouldn't need to fight the bulk of the enemy force since they are trapped by their own comrades while your archers have free shots to their immobilized troops!" Robin's eyes shimmered as he burned the strategy into his memory. He stopped as a detail caught his attention, "Although I don't understand why you placed the commander and tactician in the center of the formation along with the knights? Isn't that a risk?"

"Morale. According to the rules of the game, the commander and tactician increase the strength of the surrounding units. Just like in real life, a commander that sticks with his troops will inspire them not to break the line."

Virion didn't look convinced, thinking back at the early incursions from Valm, "It's too risky. If they fall, then the army would be in disarray. What kind of tactician would place themselves at the forefront of the battle?"

"One that is confident in her victory." She tried not to sound smug. Rose turned to see her sibling with a thoughtful frown, "I know what you're thinking and the answer is no; I wouldn't be a better option for a tactician than you."

Robin looked at her in surprise at how easy she read him, "But you're more talented! Certainly more experienced. You could guarantee our triumph!"

A bitter laugh broke through her mask, "How do you think I got so good? I made mistakes- costly mistakes. I failed and learned from them. I worked hard to protect people I cared about." 'And I failed them' she thought bitterly, "I don't have strong bonds with the Shepherds for I'm just a sellsword — and a plegian one at that. But you; you're forming those bonds that force you to do your best for them. That, I can tell. With me, the trust would not be there and that is what pushes armies to fight at their fullest. You care for them no?"

"I… Yes, they're all I have," the young man affirmed, a vulnerable look on his face. "I had no memories and only the clothes at my back, and yet they took me in during such dangerous times. I owe Chrom and everyone so much for even granting me a speck of trust, so I will do all I can to repay them. I'm just not confident in my skills. This is a war, not just small skirmishes. Many people will count on me and I can't help but fear I'll fail them."

Rose nodded, sympathizing with his plight, for it was her own, "Then work hard and do your best. I can tell you can and will do all to ensure their survival. Ylisse will need a tactician that cares for its people, not some broken mercenary passing through."

"…Broken?" asked Virion, intrigued on her manner of speech.

Inwardly cursing at her slip of tongue Rose continued, "…I had some problems in the past. It's one of the reasons I work alone now, regardless of my experience with group tactics. That's all I'm gonna say on that topic."

"Thankfully the duke didn't pursue the topic. Turning back to her counterpart she continued, "I'm not saying it's gonna be simple and that friendship will do all the work. This is a big war. You will lose people. You will order deaths on both sides. It's a burden all tacticians and commanders carry, with the hope those sacrifices weren't in vain."

"…I have a lot to think about. Thank you for the talk, I really appreciate it," Robin thanked with a
grateful smile, some warm returning to his features. "I got a lot to do before we arrive at Ylisstol, but would you care for a game later? I'm sure there is a lot I can learn from you."

The draconic goddess smiled back, "Anytime, Sir Robin. What good are knowledge and experience if it's not shared?"

Robin bowed his head and left his tent to meet with Chrom, leaving the duke and the former queen alone.

"That was quite the speech, milady. You certainly seem invested into helping our leaders grow into their roles," his tone was more curious than accusatory, but she knew better than to underestimate the noble's sharp mind.

Deciding to put another plan in motion, she continued her conversation as she organized the pieces in the board. Grabbing the commander piece from her side, she gave a glance at the archer, "I think it's in everyone's best interests that we have a competent leadership. I fear this isn't won't be the last war we're going to have in the next few years. Wouldn't you agree, Duke Virion?"

The effect was instantaneous. Virion's gaze sharpened as if she turned into a target in front of his bow, "So, you're aware of my identity?"

The woman nodded, "I've done contracts in Chon'sin, Valm, Rosanne… I've traveled quite a lot and it's prudent to be aware of who are the rulers of the lands you travel."

Virion looked at her with an appreciative look, "I did notice your sword-style has forms from all over the world."

"Product of experience. But back on topic. I had seen you during my time in Rosanne. I will admit, I didn't expect to find you here. Is the situation with Valm that dire, for you to leave your lands in the midst of Valmese attacks?" Rose questioned. Her informants might have missed something important from the other continent.

His gaze hardened at the topic, "I see you're well informed. Any particular reason for you interest?"

She just shrugged in response, "You've to be in my line of work, and I would say keeping my freedom is a nice motivation, but you didn't answer my question."

They stared at each other in silence for a while, before the duke relented his information, "…The Conqueror has made quite a few incursion in our territory. Chon'sin has held with surprising strength. I've been informed by one of my retainers that a plot to assassinate their rulers was exposed. I'm here to gather allies, but the situation here is already quite dire." Virion closed his eyes and sighed, "I'm afraid I can't ask this of them at the moment."

The queen took all of this in, trying to piece the picture of their neighboring continent. She was pleased that the information she leaked to Chon'sin was taken seriously, but she wasn't arrogant enough to think that everything would work perfectly. Valm was a delicate theater, one that could be altered more extensively since Grima should have his gaze focused on Ylisse, "You said Chon'sin is holding, no? An alliance between them, Rosanne and any other free states would be most beneficial move."

"You speak the truth. Alas, the situation is not as simple. They say Walhart possess a half a million men under his command and the free-states have barely half of that. Only through sabotage and thanks to the winter currently stopping his advance is that I could come to this continent. I hoped to get allies from Ferox to the southern ports and counter his attack, convincing the undecided states to
join our cause. The Valmese cavalry is the strongest in the world, and there is nothing we could do if we faced him in open combat."

Rose swept her hand above the board, "I wouldn't say 'nothing.'" The strategy Virion used against her was one that Walhart employed during his incursions, albeit less brutal on his men. The Conqueror always fought in the front lines with his men, which coupled with his skill, made his army fiercely loyal and fanatical but not invincible. She broke them twice, and she sure her brother would too. But that didn't mean she wasn't going to stack the deck in their favor. Still, his attack certainly made an impact on the archer, for him to use this strategy to see if he could have done anything differently.

"I'll keep your secret, Duke Virion. I just ask that you forward me all the information you get from Valm." This caught the attention of the man, who was focused on the board analyzing the strategy once again. Understanding his confusion, she clarified, "Just like with Gangrel, I don't look forward to living under the rule of a tyrant. I'll see what I can do to help your continent. I'm not sure revealing the situation right now would do much for the morale of our companions, but we can suggest anti-cavalry tactics and other countermeasures, and maybe we can prepare the prince and our tactician for what is to come."

She knew he would need a stronger push to get out of his inaction. "I would recommend contacting your people and talking with Khan Flavia about refugees and troops. Give your people updates on the situation here so they don't believe you deserted them. I wouldn't be surprised if Walhart is aware of your absence, but doesn't consider you a threat with this war in the horizon." Rose hoped this suggestions alleviated some of his burdens. That is if he listened to them. "There's still things I need to do around camp, so I bid you a good afternoon." She spared once last glance at the noble, who was now looking deeply at his commander piece. With that, she left the tent with hopes that her plans were moving forward.

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They arrived at Ylisstol just before sunset, after dealing with some bandits that were harassing one of the outer villages. It was worrying that they were bold enough to pillage so close to the capital. It was as if they were taunting the Ylisseans for their lack of manpower.

'Well, they're in for a surprise' thought Robin with determination, as his mind worked overtime in the best ways to utilize the Feroxi to push back the bandit's and fortify Ylisse's position.

The smell of the local cuisine reached his nose and the tactician took a moment to appreciate the beautiful city that had become his home.

'Home…' It felt weird to call Ylisstol as such after living here for only a few days at a time before moving to deal with other threats, but it was the only place he could associate with the word. There was still no information on him and no one had come forward looking for him. The sight of a couple walking along with their children almost drove him into another bout of depression, which he made sure to hide from his comrades. It wouldn't do for the tactician to not have confidence in himself, and yet he could help his depressing thoughts, 'Do I have a family? Parents? A wife? A child? At least friends? Was I such a dastard that everyone was happy to get rid of me?'

His thoughts moved to the Shepherds that had become his family. What right had he to stand with them? Nobles and knights fighting for their kingdom and the people. Even Donnel had the spirit of a knight inside him. They were all strong and trustworthy people. Why are they putting their lives in the hands of a sketchy amnesiac that didn't even trust himself?

His brooding was interrupted by a voice at his side, one that he has grown familiar in the past few days. "It's been a while since I saw Ylisstol. It's… good to see it hasn't changed," Rose commented
as she looked around before her gaze focused on the castle. It seemed to Robin like she was looking at the structure with a sense of longing before it vanished in an instant.

"I guess I shouldn't be surprised that you've been here before," he commented.

"Of course, capitals cities are always a good place to find employment, even if they don't exactly love Plegians here," the woman commented as she kept looking around, a wistful expression on her visible face.

'Ah yes, their nationality. A problem for both of them, it seems.' Surely it wouldn't be easy to get work for her in Ylisse with tensions at an all-time high. He expected that some guards and nobles will make a fuzz about her inclusion, just like they did for him, probably suspecting them of having some ulterior motive.

Robin looked at his fellow tactician once again. There was something about her that was nagging at the back of his mind. He didn't suspect her of having bad intentions towards Ylisse and the Shepherds, as she already mentioned he had better opportunities to get rid of them, but he couldn't help but feel something was off. Their meeting was strange, maybe too much to be a coincidence.

He just couldn't figure her out. She helped him a lot with strategy and suggestions, even talked about helping him with sorcery and swordsmanship – which he would be first to admit he needed to keep up with his comrades since all his reading left him in poor shape – while being distant and politely cold to the rest of the Shepherds. Rose helped when she was needed to but only went out of her way to help him. Robin had his suspicions that she knew him, but her body language and voice showed sincerity when she said that they had never met before.

The tactician wanted to figure this puzzle out, but it will have to wait. They were almost at the castle and he had a war to prepare for.

"...Then Regna Ferox will support Ylisse? Thank you, Chrom. I knew sending you was the right choice," Emmeryn said with a relieved tone as she walked with her brother the next morning. They didn't have time to speak the day before, as both of them had too much work to do or too tired to speak.

"You should see Ferox's warriors! They are all incredibly talented! But you've to meet our two newest members." Her brother said with childlike enthusiasm. The Exalt was happy that her brother still held the spirits to get excited about things. She had lost much of that fire during her reign, as the weight of the kingdom fell on her shoulders.

"Oh? Did you get new members for the Shepherds? You're increasing your militia's strength every other day, it seems."

Chrom gave a hearty laugh at her comments, "Not a bad thing sister! The more people help us protect Ylisse the better."

"Tell me about them, I'm curious about these new recruits of yours." Emmeryn might be a pleasant and benevolent ruler, but she would be foolish not to learn about those that her brother entrusted with his and Lissa's lives.

"Well, you already know about Donnel and Anna who we recruited before departing. There is Lon'qu, a man from Chon'sin who was the previous champion of Khan Basilio. He is incredibly talented with that curved sword of his, a 'Killer Edge' I think was the translation. Anyways, I have trained with him a few times during our way back and saw him fighting bandits and Risen and I have
to say he is one of the most skilled swordsmen I've met. A little quiet and has problems dealing with women, but I'm glad he joined us."

"Problems with women? You did not recruit a womanized did you?" The last thing they needed was a scandal.

Her brother shook his head, trying to ease her worries, "Nothing of the sorts. From what I've managed to piece together, he had a traumatic experience in the past that made him afraid of being close to women. It has not been a problem during combat and can work with the women of our team, but it's something I hope we can help him overcome."

Emmeryn released a relieved breath, "Well I'm glad for that. You also mentioned another recruit, right?"

She couldn't place the look on her brother's face when he spoke, but he seemed reluctant to speak, "Yes. Her name is Rose Sustrai, the champion of the East Khan and a Plegian mercenary and tactician."

The Exalt's eyes widened at the statement. She had met Robin and could tell he was honest about his amnesia and his intentions, so she had little reservations about including him into their service. He had proven himself in the little time he had been with them. But a mercenary? And a Plegian at that? Emmeryn was not one to hate Plegians, as their grievances were more than justified, but the risks were still present when dealing with unknowns.

"Chrom, are you sure we can trust her?" she ask worriedly.

"She saved my life sister," the prince revealed with a serious tone, looking her straight in the eye. "You almost died?"

"She saved my life sister," the prince revealed with a serious tone, looking her straight in the eye. "You almost died?" Emmeryn's voice was full of fear at the thought of losing her little brother.

Chrom nodded somberly, "The Feroxi thought I was an impostor and had me a moment away from death when she saved my life. Later, I fought her for the right of champion and she defeated me with little effort. She even had the right to kill me as established by the rules of dueling in Regna Ferox, and yet she spared me and even lectured me on my actions and fighting style." He gave a chuckle at the memory, "Looking back, it was like being back with my tutors. She's very private and doesn't like to show her face, but has proven reliable."

Emmeryn was curious about this woman. 'A Plegian mercenary saving the prince of Ylisse? I can already hear the nobles of the court suspecting some kind of plot.' Yet, a hopeful smile manifested on her face, 'But maybe this means that there can be peace between our people.'

"I think I would like to meet these new Shepherds if that's fine with you."

She received a bright grin in response. "Of course! I'm sur—" His words were interrupted by the sound of clashing steel coming from the training grounds. "Well, I think we're in luck. There seems to be a match going on. Let's go."

The royal siblings arrived at the training ring to see a couple of the Shepherds watching the newest members' fights.

"Prince Chrom! And Lady Emmeryn! A pleasure to see you this morning," Sumia greeted them warmly as she rubbed ointment into a nasty bruise in her head. It didn't look like the one she normally got from her tripping.

"Good morning to you too, Lady Sumia," the Exalt greeted back, before frowning at her injuries.
"Are you alright? That is a rather large bruise."

The Pegasus Knight waved her hands hastily, "It's nothing serious, your majesty; just the product of sparing. Ms. Sustrai and Mr. Lon'qu are tough opponents."

"You fought Rose and Lon'qu?" asked Chrom, interested on the information.

"We both did, your majesties," answered Stahl, who had a bag of ice—courtesy of Miriel—pressed against his forehead. "We thought it would be a good way for us to measure against foreign opponents and fighting styles," he winced in pain. "Really should've taken them more seriously after watching their fights with you and Frederick."

Lissa appeared from behind him, ignoring her siblings as she already saw them at breakfast, "You really should let me heal that. I can go get my staff and fix it in an instant!"

"Don't worry, Princess Lissa. As Frederick would say it will toughen us up. We should be able to handle some bruises. But thank you," the green knight responded with a smile.

Miriel interjected into the conversation, looking up from her notes and adjusting her glasses, "I must say I'm impressed with these foreign warriors. Both individuals showcase an astonishing amount of skill in the usage of the blade. Rose is more acrobatic and has a nimble body that does nothing to reduce her spectacular physical strength. Lon'qu is the opposite. For a man of his bulk, he's surprisingly flexible. Both sword styles are very adaptable. While Rose prefers a one-handed style, probably to cast magic with her free arm, Lon'qu is more proficient with a two-handed style. I would recommend incorporating parts of both styles into our troops training regimen to increase their versatility."

Chrom nodded in agreement, "Noted, Miriel. I shall speak with Robin and Frederick about it later today."

Moving closer to the arena, the Exalt observed both opponents trade blows. Their attires did nothing to hide their places of origin and their movements were different from those of her brother.

The man—Lon'qu if she recalled correctly—stroke with a downward slash and his training sword slammed into the Plegian's own weapon, sinking her heels into the ground. The man had sweat dripping across his face, while the woman had a slightly labored breath visible under her tactician's cloak, showing that they had been in combat for a while. Displaying astonishing strength, she pushed him away before retaliating with a horizontal slash. Blocking with the speed only a veteran warrior has, he intercepted the attack, even if the steel of the blades groaned from the force as the edges dulled further. Returning the favor, he pushed her back and tried to strike her midsection. In a surprising move, Rose dropped to the floor, rolling on her back and evading the attack. Fast as the wind, the foreign tactician used her free hand as support before propelling a kick into the swordsman's stomach, knocking his breath out. In an instant, the mercenary was on her feet, knocking the sword out of his hands and placing the tip of her sword on his throat.

"My win," The Plegian states, earning an affirmative grunt from her opponent. "Good fight, Lon'qu-san. You certainly deserve the title of Western Champion. I haven't had someone pressure me that much."

Emmeryn saw the surprised expression from the brown haired man, "It's been a long time since I'm been called with such honorifics."

The hooded woman bowed her head slightly, moving a hand to her chest, "I apologize if I overstepped any bounds. I just thought it was the polite way of speaking in Chon'sin."
'He looks distinctly uncomfortable, most likely a product of the gynophobia Chrom mentioned' though Emmeryn as she saw the man inch away from his opponent now that the fight was over.

"It's…okay, I'm just more used to the Feroxi way of speaking. I left Chon'sin a long time ago. Anyways, it was a good fight. You've certainly demonstrated why Khan Flavia picked you." He looked a little conflicted about what he was about to say, "I… wouldn't mind more sparring in the future."

Looking closely, the Exalt noted a flicker of some emotion she couldn't place ran across the Plegian's face, before disappearing behind an impassive mask, "I think it would be beneficial for the both of us. One should never stop honing their skills."

The Exalt decided to make her presence known as both seem to still be into their combat mindset, "An impressive display of swordsmanship, I'm certainly glad you're on my brother's side."

She watched slightly amused as both individual's heads whipped around to meet her gaze. Her eyes caught the Plegian's and for a moment, she could see pain flash in her eyes. 'Strange. Do I remind her of anyone she knows?'

The woman regained control of her emotions before she and her opponent bowed to her. "Exalt Emmeryn! My apologies, we didn't see you there. Allow me to introduce myself, I'm Rose Sustrai and I'm currently under the employment of your brother."

"I'm Lon'qu, part of West Ferox's support to the war effort," the man responded with a gruff voice, standing respectfully in front of the Exalt.

"A pleasure to meet both of you. It's good to have you strength helping Ylisse," Emmeryn said with a pleasant smile. "I must admit, though, that I didn't expect a Plegian and a Valmese to you join our ranks."

The swordsman was the first to answer, "I consider myself Feroxi. I follow Khan Basilio's orders and so I shall give my blade to your cause. Nothing more, Your Grace."

The woman's posture betrayed nothing, remind Emmeryn of some of the more season nobles and negotiators in the kingdom, "I hold no allegiance for Gangrel or the Grimleal. In fact, I despise the two, so I have no problem being under your employment for the duration of the war. I feel that between you or them, Ylisse is the best option for everyone involved. I hope you understand that not all Plegians desire war or vengeance. Many are just looking for an outlet for their pain and hardships."

"Your actions speak for themselves, Lady Rose. You saved my brother and are willing to fight your countrymen, even if it's under a contract. You've earned my thanks for that, but do you truly have no problems fighting them?"

Rose remained silent for a moment before she answered, "Many of them don't deserve to die, but are still serving a king that will bring this continent to ruin should he succeed. While it's regrettable, and I hope we achieve the peace your desire, I'm willing to spill warrior blood to spare civilian casualties. It's a sad fact of life that sometimes such actions are necessary." She looked at the Exalt straight to the eyes, her gaze showing both pain and experience that made Emmeryn wonder what she had gone through to get such eyes, "For their sake and our own, I hope that you succeed in your negotiations, but I fear that will be impossible."

Before Emmeryn could respond they were interrupted by a panicked Phila running into the Courtyard, earning the attention of the royal siblings.
"Your Grace! Milord! Forgive me, but I bring alarming news!" The Pegasus rider panted through labored breaths.

Emmeryn moved to calm her long-time friend, "Phila! Slow down, please! What's happened?"

Philia's expression was one of worry, "Plegian soldiers have been sighted inside our southwest border! They attacked a village in Themis and abducted the duke's daughter."

"B-but that would be...Maribelle! Chrom, we have to do something!" Lissa exclaimed, worried for her best friend.

The captain looked at the younger princess, "There's more: King Gangrel of Plegia claims Lady Maribelle invaded his country. He demands we pay reparations for this 'insult'."

Chrom was livid at the accusation, instinctively gripping Falchion tightly, "And we're to believe a dastard like the Mad King of Plegia?"

"Peace, Chrom. We must keep our wits about us," the elder reprimanded him.

"We should put a sword in his gut and be done with it! The Mad King has been trying to provoke a war with Ylisse at every step! He won't stop until he drags this whole continent to hell with him!" The prince nearly snarled before remembering who he was talking to.

Phila nodded her head, "I agree with the prince, Your Grace. We must demonstrate to Plegia that such actions have consequences."

Emmeryn put a hand on her brother's shoulders, trying to calm him down. In her opinion, he was still too hot-headed for his own good, "I understand your feelings, Chrom. Truly I do. But if we give him the war he wants, then we lose, no matter what the outcome. Our last conflict nearly ruined the halidom. It left Ylissians homeless and starving. We cannot repeat that mistake." Emmeryn closed her eyes before continuing, "I will offer parley with King Gangrel."

Her little sister was the first to protest, "Emm, no! You can't!"

"Please reconsider, Your Grace. He cannot be trusted to act in good faith!" Philia pleaded of her.

The Exalt looked at her crown with the conviction only a ruler has, "So either we choose to march to war or leave Lady Maribelle to die? No. I will not accept that."

"...Forgive me, Your Grace. I spoke out of turn. I know you will stand always by your own principles. Pray, allow the pegasus knights to accompany you, though," Phila conceded to her ruler.

Chrom looked at her with serious determination, "I'm going too. Someone has to save you from your good intentions."

"And I want to be there for you and Maribelle!" Lissa stated.

Knowing it as pointless to resist, Emmeryn smiled at her siblings, "As you wish. Thank you all. Your strength will be mine."

Chrom nodded before turning to his Shepherds, "Sumia, Stahl, and Lon'qu. Go the clerics to get healed and prepare for departure. Rose, please find Robin and Frederick and inform them of the situation. Miriel, you shall gather the rest of our comrades."

"At once, your majesty," The tactician answered before moving, being followed by the rest of the
They arrived at the border after a long march with little rest. Luckily, Gangrel remained with his prisoner at the border in order to gather his price. The border was located inside a wide canyon with a slope coming down from the Plegian side. This was where Chrom saw Gangrel stand alongside a woman in revealing attire. He absentmindedly noted Rose tense at the sight of them but was too angry to comment.

The Mad king looked at them like one would look at spoiled food, "What's this, then? The Exalt herself, in all her radiance? I fear I must shield my eyes! Bwa ha ha ha!"

Emmeryn stepped forward, looking at her Plegian counterpart, "King Gangrel, I've come for the truth of this unfortunate incident between us."

The witch at his side spoke with a condescending tone, "The truth? I can give you the truth."

"Perhaps milady might first share her name?" His sister asked.

"You may call me Aversa," the woman said arrogantly.

Emmeryn nodded with more respect she deserved, in Chrom's opinion, "Very well, Aversa. Is Maribelle unharmed?"

"Who? Oh yes, that little blonde brat," Gangrel said before snapping his fingers. "Bring her here!"

"Unhand me, you gutter-born troglodyte!" Maribelle's voice ran across the air as a Plegian soldier dragged her with little care.

"Maribelle!" his younger sister cried as she saw her friend, who was slightly bruised in the face, her normally pristine appearance marred by defeat. Chrom wanted nothing more gut the man that held her prisoner.

The noble looked up to them, her eyes regaining the fire they were used to, "Lissa? Darling, is that you?"

Aversa spoke as she pointed to their prisoner, "This girl crossed the Plegian border without our consent. And what's more... She wounded the brave Plegian soldiers who sought only to escort her safely home."

"LIES! You speak nothing but lies, hag! Did they not teach the meaning of the word "truth" in wretched-crone school?!" Maribelle snarled in a rather unladylike fashion.

"...You see? No manners at all. Such a nasty little bird simply had to be caged."

"Such a violent temper speaks to her guilt. This will call for a weighty punishment. And if she were to later confess to being a Ylissean spy? My goodness! It would take an act of considerable good faith to repair our relations," The Mad King drawled theatrically, only making the prince's blood boil.

"I have done nothing wrong! It is they who should confess! They are the ones who invaded Ylisse. They razed an entire village! When I attempted to intervene, they took me and dragged me across the border. Let the plundered shops and charred homes of that village serve as my proof!"

Gangrel made a show of looking at his disgustingly long nails as he spoke, "That would only prove Ylisse has a bandit problem—something I hear oft of late... But indeed, tonight I shall weep salty
tears into my pillow for your dead villagers."

"Your Grace, please!" Maribelle pleaded of her ruler.

"Peace, Maribelle. I believe you. King Gangrel, I request that you release this woman at once. Surely you and I can sort out these affairs without the need of hostages." Naga bless his sister for trying to negotiate with this savages. Gods know he could never do it.

"Without so much as an apology? Why should I even bother with parley? I'm within my rights to have her head this instant and be home in time for supper."

Chrom's patience snapped at the threat, "You black-hearted devil!"

The king barely paid him any mind, "Control your dog, my dear, before he gets someone hurt."

"Rrgh..." Chrom growled as his knuckles turned white from his grip on Falchion, ready to draw it and end this madness.

Gangrel snorted before looking at Emmeryn once more, "Now then, Your Graceliness. Perhaps we can arrange a trade? You give me the Fire Emblem, and I return Mari Contrary here in one piece."

The group was taken aback by the request. This madman couldn't seriously believe they will have such sacred relic to the followers of Grima, did he? His sister seemed to have similar thoughts.

"You would ask for Ylisse's royal treasure? But why?" she asked, confused by the request.

The Plegian King's madness seemed to shine through his eyes for an instant as he started ranting, "Because I know the legend! The Fire Emblem is the key to having all one's wishes realized. I have desired it for years. YEARS! ...Yet my birthday comes and goes each year, and nothing from Ylisse. Heheh..."

Emmeryn could only shake her head, "The Emblem's power is meant for a single purpose, King Gangrel; to save the world and its people at their hour of most desperate need. Would you claim a more noble wish?"

The king looked at her with burning hate in his eyes, "I want what every Plegian wants—a grisly end for every last Ylissean! What could be nobler than that?"

Emmeryn had a horrified expression on her face as she couldn't believe his words, "What?"

Gangrel sneered at her, "Surely you have not forgotten what the last Exalt did to my people? Your father named us heathens! His "crusade" across Plegia butchered countless of my subjects and my kin!"

Chrom took a moment to look at his comrades and could tell Robin was slightly uncomfortable with the topic, even if he wasn't fighting in Plegia's side. In the back Rose was tense but otherwise had an impassive expression.

"...I have never denied Ylisse's past wrongdoings. But I have sworn to never repeat those mistakes. Ours is now a realm of peace," Emmeryn insisted, once again trying to deescalate the situation.

"Yours is now a haven of hypocrisy! Now give me the Fire Emblem!" Gangrel snarled, losing all pretense of sanity.

Maribelle wasn't having any of it. "No, Your Grace! I'd sooner die than act as a bargaining chip for
"This filthy reprobate!" She declared as she fought against her bonds.

"No, Maribelle..." the Exalt pleaded.

"Ugh... Taaaaaalk-talk-talk-talk. It's time to speak louder than words! This negotiation is over, Your Luminosity! I shall have the Emblem if I have to pry it from your shiny dead hands!" Gangrel then signaled his warriors to move forward towards the royals.

One of the brigands ran towards Emmeryn, his axe ready to strike before Chrom drew Falchion and slashed his unprotected chest. The man screamed, dropping his weapon before the prince ran the blade through his stomach.

"Stay back! Or you'll all suffer the same fate!" He exclaimed as he pushed his sister back into the convoy.

Gangrel got a predatory smile on his face, certainly pleased with the outcome, "Now that's a declaration of war if I've ever heard one... A big, messy war that will bleed you Ylisseans dry. Bwa ha ha!"

Chrom watched as Aversa moved towards Maribelle with a knife ready to strike, "Poor, stupid girl... Are you really worth fighting a war over? Years from now, you'll be remembered only as she who destroyed House Ylisse."

The blonde had a shocked expression in her face as the taunting took effect, "No... That's not... Oh, Lissa... Please, no..."

The prince was ready to rush forward but, before he could move, a blast of wind knocked Aversa and the soldiers away from Maribelle.

"Ricken!?" Chrom shouted, an action repeated by Maribelle. He had no time to pay attention as Gangrel started ordering his troops to attack.

"Dammit! Rose, I need you and Lon'qu to protect Emmeryn! Move her towards the fort in our side of the border and protect them."

"At once, prince!" Rose exclaimed as she and Lon'qu escorted Emmeryn towards where the Pegasus knight's.

The prince wasted no time "Robin! We need to mobilize now! The young man in robes is in our side, we need to get him and Maribelle out of here!"

"Ahead of you Chrom!" True to his word, the tactician already had the Shepherds and Ylissean troops organized and ready to clash with the Plegian assault.

Chrom drew his blade, ready to continue the war his father started.

"Tsk, so much for controlling his emotions," Rose commented as she cut down another brigand that got in her way before grabbing Emmeryn's hand and guiding her forward.

"W-what do you mean, Lady Sustrai?" Emmeryn said with a shaky voice. She might have studied as a cleric and a sage, but even in the worst times of her reign, she never witnessed the act of cutting someone down in combat.

Rose spared her a glance, before focusing in the road ahead, "Gangrel never had intentions of peace
or negotiations. He knew Chrom or someone in our side would attack at the threat towards Lady Maribelle. The Man King knew you would never give him the Fire Emblem without a fight, not like he wanted you to. He's after blood and left us no choice other than to strike and ignite this war. He played your brother like a violin."

"I see… I guess it was foolish of me to hope for peace between Ylisse and Plegia." Rose couldn't help the guilt that she felt as she heard Emmeryn utter those words. They were never close, but she always seemed so strong and confident in her beliefs.

"There is nothing foolish in wanting peace for you and your neighbors, Your Grace. I consider it one of your most admirable traits. Please, don't give up. Look at me and know what not all Plegian's agree with Gangrel. I know I'm just a mercenary and my words hold little weight, but your vision is one I would love to become a reality in my homeland."

She hoped Emmeryn heard the sincerity in her voice. From the smile in her face, it seemed it did.

"Thank you, Lady Sustria. It fills me with hope to hear you say that," she replied with a smile.

"Glad to help. Sadly before we can do that, we need to survive this and get rid of Gangrel. I know you hate war, but now it's the time to be the leader your people need," the former queen said, drawing from her own experiences to fill her conviction. Rose noted a wyvern about to swoop down on them. Used a wind spell, she knocked him out of his mount and into the canyon's floor where he slammed with a sickening sound. "Sometimes the way for peace is covered in blood."

"…You're a strange woman, though not in a bad way. You spill the blood of your countrymen while protecting those that made you suffer before. I would like to get to you know a little better, if that is ok with you Lady Sustrai?"

She gave her alternate sister-in-law a small smile. Emmeryn was one she didn't have an ounce of resentment towards and she wouldn't mind getting to know the real Exalt behind that mask. "Please call me Rose, your majesty. I have no objections to speaking in the future, but I doubt your guards and council will be happy with the Plegian mercenary talking with you."

"Don't worry, I'm used to dealing with them," Emmeryn said smiling back as they kept running.

"We shall—GET DOWN!"

Rose pushed Emmeryn down just as an arrow missed her head. Not wasting time the tactician placed a hand in her tome, channeling its power through the blade. A lightning bolt flew from the tip of the blade, piercing the skull of the archer at the top of the canyon. She spared a moment to see Lon'qu engaging Plegian swordsman.

The grandmaster didn't have the chance to help him as a knight approached her with a spear ready to attack. Pushing the Exalt behind a rock formation, Rose moved to engage the enemy.

"That robe… You bitch! Why is a Plegian fighting for Ylisse!?" The man snarled, trying to pierce her with his iron spear.

"There is no need for you to know that," she answered as she parried one blow after another.

He was strong, she will give him that, but not on the level of Frederick or Raimi. The brute attacked with strength alone, no finesse behind his blows. He was too slow, but his armor granted him decent protection. Unfortunately for him, her blade Thorn was fashioned to be effective against armor. But Rose wasn't one to do things halfway. The woman channeled her dragon flames into the blade, a familiar heat coursing through her veins. Ignis burned through the edge of the sword, the purple
flames roaring with heat they grew brighter.

Ducking under his attack, she stabbed her sword through his chest. The flaming blade melted the armor with ease, pushed by her superior strength, allowing her to slice upwards destroying his heart and killing him instantly. The blade escaped through his shoulder, cauterizing the wounds and leaving the corpse with a horrible hole bifurcating his torso.

Rose turned and saw Emmeryn looking at her fallen opponent with a saddened expression. 'She feels compassion even for her enemies. She truly is a great leader. I promise you Emmeryn, you won't die at the hands of this madmen.'

"Just like your father..." Orton, the Plegian captain, spat as he tried to keep his insides from spilling out the gash in his stomach. "This matters not. Soon war will be upon...your soil... Heh heh... The war... you... started... prince..." he said with his last breath.

"Just like father?" Chrom whispered to himself.

Robin could see the words made an impact on the prince. He had checked finished checking on Maribelle and the wounded. They lost some soldiers, which didn't make it any easier for him to offer support, but he owed to his friend. Pushing back the guilt he felt for his fallen he, he moved closer to his friend.

The tactician put a hand on his friends shoulder, "You're not your father, Chrom." The prince looked at him, his inner turmoil plain on his face. Robin pressed forward, "I know I didn't know him, but you did this to protect your people from Plegian aggression, not to start a crusade. I doubt you're about to go in a crazy crusade."

Chrom looked at his feet, silent for a minute, before looking at his tactician with a smile.

"Thank you, my friend. I needed to hear that," the prince said with a smile that Robin reciprocated.

"Anytime, boss. Now, let's go check on your sister."

They rejoined their forces, who finished gathering the wounded and fallen. As they prepared to depart, Robin saw the young mage that saved Maribelle looking at some of the bodies of their fallen soldiers with a sorrowful expression.

"Ricken!" shouted Chrom when he noticed the boy.

"C-Chrom! I'm sorry I disobeyed your orders, but I couldn't jus—" Whatever he wanted to say was silenced by Chrom's hand.

"Peace, Ricken. You're not in trouble. In fact, I'm glad you disobeyed my order and saved Maribelle's life," the prince stated, earning a surprised look from the young man. Chrom gave him a smile, "I guess I shouldn't treat you as a child. You're not that much younger than Maribelle or Lissa, after all."

"I… THANK YOU!" Ricken started bowing, vibrating with excitement.

"Don't thank me yet. This war is just starting. Are you sure you will want to participate after seeing this?" Chrom asked dead serious.

Ricken looked around, cringing slightly at the sight of dead bodies, "I... Yes. Yes, I can. I know I'm young, but I want to protect my country!" the mage declared resolutely.
The prince looked at him for a moment before nodding, "Very well, report to Robin tomorrow for your assignment."

"You will not regret it, Chrom!" he exclaimed, before running to speak with Maribelle.

"Are you sure that is a good idea? He's very young," Robin asked his friend.

Chrom sighed, rubbing his forehead trying to make his headache go away, "I hope so. He's too eager and I prefer to keep him where we can, at least, have an eye on him."

"I see. Very well, I'll take care of it. Maybe Miriel and Rose can help him with his magic, he seemed very proficient with wind spells..." the tactician started brainstorming as they walked with the troops.

The march towards the fort was silent. They saw the multiple bodies of fallen Plegian's in the canyon's floor, which thankfully was free of Ylissean bodies.

'It seems our newest members are every ounce as deadly as we thought. I'm glad they are in our side."

As the approached the fort, a squad of Pegasus Knights flanked them for protection. Someone must have alerted Emmeryn of their arrival since she was at the gate waiting to welcome them.

"Forgive me, Emm. I acted rashly," Chrom blurted out instantly, his head hanging in shame. To his surprise, he felt a pair of arms embracing him tightly.

"It's all right, Chrom. King Gangrel is the one at fault here. You were only protecting me," Emmeryn said, hugging her brother. "I'm just glad everyone is okay."

Frederick stepped forward, having finished talking with the scouts, "Not everyone, Your Grace. We suffered some losses, but we sadly don't have time to lose. The Mad King will be rallying his forces if they have not mobilized already. I suggest we make haste back to Ylisstol and discuss our strategy. Emmeryn nodded somberly, as Robin could tell she accepted the reality of the situation, "Of course, Frederick. It seems war is upon us. We must protect the Ylissean people at all costs."

The tactician agreed, hoping he was up to the task.

It was the night when they reached the city of Themis. The guards were still on high alert, their ranks bolstered by the Feroxi warriors, ready for another incursion. The Shepherds could see the bodies put to the side, ready to be buried the next day. They were still finding bodies in the rubble, which only made their commander angrier and their Exalt depressed. The royals went with Frederick, Phila and Maribelle to the Duke's state to report their success and rest there for the night, while the militia rested in the barracks and prepared for the march back to Ylisstol.

Rose was cooking in the barracks as it was her turn tonight. It was late and they didn't want to bother making the cooks come down all the way from the Duke's state since many had lost family and friends to the raid. It was a nice way to take her mind off things anyways.

She was preparing some simple stew when she heard someone enter the kitchen. The former grandmaster turned to see the Prince standing behind her, a frown on his face.

"You should be resting, your majesty. You took fought plenty today," she stated as she returned to her cooking, stirring the stew with a wooden spoon.
"I could say the same to you." Chrom closed the distance, before stopping close to her. "I already spoke with Lon'qu, but I wanted to thank you personally for protecting my sister."

She smiled under her hood, "Just fulfilling my contract, your majesty. I can't have those that pay for my food die on my watch."

Chrom gave an unrefined snort at that, "Sure, sure. Still, thank you for that."

They remained in silence for a while. Rose gathered some herbs and spice to add to her mix before she spoke again.

"He was playing you, you know?" Chrom's head snapped towards her. She hated to break the comfortable silence but he needed to hear this, "Gangrel might be a madman, but he's not stupid. He knew Emmeryn would never give him the Fire Emblem, so he set everything up to get us there to either eliminate us or make it look like we started this war."

Chrom was taken aback by that statement, "But the soldiers know we only retaliated against his aggression!"

"That's not the story that will be told in Plegia. They will speak of the son of Exalt Augustus striking an innocent Plegian soldier during negotiations."

"That's not what happened! They were going to attack Emmeryn!" the prince nearly shouted.

Rose kept her patience as she threw some carrots into the stew. It was interesting to watch the contrasting reactions from him and his sister to the same statements, "It doesn't matter what happened, what it matter's is what it looks like happened. I bet all those soldiers were loyal to Gangrel and knew of his plan. There is no shortage of Plegians that want war. Now the people will have their hatred for Ylisse reignited as this soldiers spin their tale to the masses, with you as the face they will hate."

"I... dammit, I played right into his hands, didn't I? It's like you said, I let my emotions get the best of me and now the war is inevitable." Chrom slumped against the wall.

"Don't be so hard on yourself, the deck was stacked against you. Had it not been you, someone else would have delivered the blow and taken the blame. You just were the most desirable target for them."

Another snort escaped the prince, as he ran his hand through his hair, "It doesn't exactly make me feel better."

"I'm sorry, but that's the real world. Not everyone will fight honorably and propaganda is as much a weapon as any sword."

Chrom sighed, leaning back into the counter, "I still have much to learn, right?"

Rose spared the prince a smile. He was still young, making it harder for her to compare her to the other two Chrom she knew. No reason not to be helpful for now, "Yes, but we all do. There is always more to learn. About the world and ourselves. Even a small hobby can open new horizons and help you understand other people better. You had a sheltered life, but you have the opportunity to expand your horizons and become a better ruler."

"Is that why you got so many skills? You're a great sword-fighter and mage, a great tactician from what I heard from Robin, and you are quite politically savvy." He said, before pointing at her concoction, "And now a cook? You're full of surprises."
"Well, I used to cook for a group of friends and comrades. My first attempts were almost inedible, but I've gotten better." Some of the few memories that remained intact flickered in her mind; of eating with her friends after a long march, sharing stories about their battles. "I may not look like it, but I've done everything from being a cook to a field commander. Just because I'm a lady doesn't mean I don't know how to cook or clean as well as fight. One should never stop improving themselves," Rose replied pleasantly.

"Oh, hmm…" she heard Chrom said, causing her to turn and face him.

"…What?" she asked, stopping mixing her stew. Something about this situation was uncomfortably familiar to her, which shouldn't be that much of a surprise.

Chrom gave her a measuring look, before answering with as much tact as Vaike would, "I guess I just never saw you as a lady."

The spoon in her hand snapped.
Foreseer

Chrom sucked in a breath through gritted teeth, nursing the bruises he got from his "sparring match" with Rose. He had the slight suspicion that she might have taken offense to his comment about her lady-like qualities, but let it be known he has learned not to assume things without sufficient evidence. He learned that lesson very well.

He continued his walk through the halls of the castle when he saw the door to Robin's chambers open. Deciding to place a visit to his friend, the prince walked in to see his tactician pacing the room, muttering to himself. The prince saw all the maps strewed across the floor, other pinned against the walls with notes written all over them. The amnesiac hadn't wasted any time on making this his room, much to the amusement of the bluenette.

"Copper for your thoughts?" Chrom said, snapping the tactician out of his revere.

"Oh, hey Chrom. I was just thinking about some stuff," Robin answered after calming his surprise.

Rolling his eyes, the prince crossed the room and sat at the desk with arms crossed. "Yeah, I can see that. You practically got smoke coming out of your ears. What's bothering you?"

Robin seemed to pause for a moment, before relenting. "…I was thinking about politics," he said, making Chrom regret ever coming into the room. "Virion and Rose have commented during our sessions that this war will be more complicated than just winning and I'm trying to see all the angles so we don't get taken by surprise."

Now that caught the prince's attention. Despite what many thought, he wasn't stupid or ignorant when it came to politics, he just wished everything was simpler to solve. Better if it involved a bit of well-intentioned violence and smashing walls.

"Rose did mention something like that the other night." The pain of his bruises acted up, but he ignored them, "The idea of becoming the face of their hatred is certainly not appealing."

"I can imagine," Robin said dryly, "And that makes me wonder if we could've done things differently back then. Maybe there was something that would've prevented this war."

Chrom grumbled a little, looking at the ceiling, "I think if we had killed Gangrel right then and there, this would have ended instantly."

This made the tactician pause. Virion and Rose had drilled into him to think of politics as another battlefield for tactics and to see every outcome with the information he has. "Wouldn't have work. At this moment, it would've made the situation worse."

This answer surprised the prince, "What makes you say that?"

Robin pointed at the map he had on the wall, with drawings of the key figures pinned to it, "Think about it. Killing one soldier was enough to rally the Plegian army against foreign aggression, now that Gangrel is spinning his tale about an unprovoked attack. Killing their king? It would've rallied all of Plegia against us, not making them surrender. Gangrel may not be loved by everyone, but he did restore their country after the last war. His madness is a recent thing from what I understand, but people still remember what he did for them. If we kill him just like that, someone else will take over and use him as a martyr—a better martyr than a nameless soldier—to rally everyone against us. Right now Gangrel is not the source of Plegia's strength, it's their commanders and whoever is acting as general. We've to take them out if we want to win by strength alone."
Chrom tried to think of a way to deny it, but he thought what would happen if they had killed Emmeryn right there. He would've taken the army and raze Plegia to the ground, most likely killing everyone there. The most devout of Naga's followers along with Emmeryn supporters would have followed, some even thinking his father was right. He would've rallied Ylisse under his sister's banner as a conqueror, no different than Gangrel or his own father.

The prince ran a hand through his hair as no answer came, "I…damn. If that's the situation, then what can we do?"

His tactician looked at the notes all over his desk, "I can think of two options: One is to completely crush Plegia's military strength and leadership, but that will guarantee that there is never a good relationship between us. The people will hate us—your own subjects will see it as a continuation of your father's legacy and everything Emmeryn has worked for will be destroyed." Robin paused for a moment as he saw the conflict in Chrom's face. "The other is to defeat them just enough to force them into a negotiation and reduce the amount of bloodshed, at the risk of them attacking in a later date and forcing us to permanently rearm as a deterrent. Here we could play the self-defense card and plead for peace if we are in a prominent position, claiming to be 'even'. Of course, I can't really say how people will react to the reformation of the Ylissean army."

The blunette cringed at both outcomes, "Neither of those outcomes sounds pleasant."

"Indeed," Robin said drily before sighing. "I can't think of an outcome in which this doesn't end up messed up. Something big has to change the hearts of the Plegians for them to stop their campaign and move towards peace."

Chrom placed a hand on the tactician's shoulders, noticing how tense they were. "Don't worry, my friend. We will figure this out together. Focus on keeping out people alive and let Emmeryn and I deal with the politics. Ok?"

Robin chuckled, giving Chrom a small smile, "I guess. I just… I want to help you guys. I owe so much and I want to prove that you can trust me and I'm not some Plegian sleeper agent."

"I already trust you. Your strategies have gotten us through many perils. I think most of the Shepherds have come around already and the rest shall soon. Trust me on this, alright?"

"Heh, alright boss. I'll try," Robin said with a better mood before he cringed at the bruises he finally noticed. "You should have Lissa heal your jaw, that's a nasty bruise you got there. What happened?"

The prince just waved a hand dismissively. "Oh, you know. I decided to train with Rose. It's only natural to get some bruises to toughen yourself up," He said trying and failing to make it sound like a planned outcome.

"…She's still angry at your comment, right?"

"…Yeah"

"How bad?"

"…Absolutely livid."

"I see."

The morning light shone through the leaves of the perfectly kept trees in the royal garden. It was a beautiful place to meditate, which is why Rose sat there with her eyes closed. The castle was no
different than in the other timelines, down to the cracks Chrom had made on its walls. She always loved to rest here with a good book, sometimes reading to Lucina and the twins, or just resting with one of those trashy erotic novels she will forever deny enjoying.

It was one of those precious moments of tranquility she manages to get, between all the planning and fighting, but she needed to talk with someone. She couldn't keep holding in all the feelings she had. It was not healthy, but more importantly, it was distracting. Rose couldn't keep avoiding the Shepherds even if she only wanted to help her brother. They were an important part of her plans.

Rose couldn't kidnap Robin when he lost his memories, as much as she wanted to do just that. She knew Grima could find him if he gathered enough strength and, while she may match him, he would have the entire Plegian army at his call. The Shepherds could keep him safe and allow him to build a life while she gathered her strength to kill her counterpart. She hoped that Thorn would do the job without killing her brother.

What else could she do? She didn't plan on sticking in this timeline once everything was over and keep babysitting Robin—he would never grow up to his potential otherwise. Valm was still a wild card and getting close to Walhart was the impossible due to his paranoia. Too many variables to consider. This and the stress of dealing with the Shepherds was making her an emotional mess. She needed to speak with someone.

Pulling out a small drop-like jewel from her pocket, the grandmaster crossed her legs and place the jewel against her tome. Gathering the ambient magic, she closed her eyes and let her mind fly. The world took a different shade, like a perpetual twilight with stars shining through the sky. Like a bird flying at great speed, her mind flew across the continents to speak with the one being that could offer guidance. She didn't have the strength to talk with Naga, but there was still someone she could confide in.

"Hello Robin, it's good to see you're doing well," a pleasant voice rang as the visage of a beautiful green-haired woman appeared before her.

A smile appeared in her astral form. "It's Rose now, Tiki. Don't want to be confused with my twin," the white-haired woman greeted. "I'm glad you answered, it's been a while and I need someone to talk to."

The Voice of Naga returned the smile, "That it has. I thought you would've contacted me sooner, once you were better situated in Akaneia."

"It's called Ylisse now, try to keep up old timer," she jested, earning a playful glare from the manakete. "But you're right. It's just that I've been preoccupied with many things. Which reminds me, I heard Chon'sin is still holding strong. Is that correct?"

The Voice nodded, "Indeed, your plan was successful so far. Chon'sin took heed of my warning, managing to unravel the assassination conspiracy and rally some city-states under their banner. So far they have managed to slow down Valm, even while outnumbered."

Rose release a breath she didn't realize she could hold in astral form, "I'm glad to hear that. I was nervous they would ignore it. With this, we can keep Vert out of Walhart's hands. I don't want to give Grima any chance of getting even close to the gems in case he does things differently. I just need to get my hands on Sable and we can deal a real blow. I just need to make it seem as a consequence of his own actions."

"I still don't understand why you haven't killed Gangrel and Walhart and taken the gemstones if you want to prevent this whole chain of events," Tiki asked, not understanding her decisions.
Shaking her head, Rose looked at the manakete, "Just like Grima, I'm not at full power yet, Tiki. Infiltration is not my forte and their castles are shielded against teleportation spells. In addition, these events need to happen one way or another as they are problems that needed to be solved. Even without Grima, those two would still invade and I can't take on an army alone, at least for now. I need preparation for big spells and that leaves me drained and vulnerable. One mistake and I could die, be sent into slumber and everything would collapse."

"Many people will die in this war," Tiki stated, not pleased with the bloodshed.

Rose grimaced before smoothing her features, "Sacrifices must be made in wars—such is the burden of a tactician. I can change Valm since, if things play out the same, it will be a while before Grima moves into Valm and so he will attribute the changes to his and Lucina's interference as long as my presence remains unknown. I'm not arrogant enough to believe Grima will never notice me, but I need to stretch it until the Shepherds are ready. If I change too much I won't be able to predict his actions and could jeopardize everything. At least, at first, he won't think 'it must be my alternate dimension good counterpart trying to defeat me!'"

"You could change a lot of things for the better," Tiki pointed out.

"Or for worse, we don't know. What if I could destroy Plegian and Valm? If I made sure my brother never joined the Shepherds and lived as a teacher? There are so many factors, but the more I deviate, the less I can control. It's not optimal, but I think it will work out." Rose still had her doubts, but she thought manipulating even with a scalpel would be more prudent than smashing them with a hammer. "I'm still not sure I could kill Grima without killing my brother. He needs to have strong bonds to this world along with a life of his own to survive. If that wasn't the case I would have ripped out Grima's heart as soon as he appeared. Even then he might still have possessed him. But don't worry, I do plan on dealing some huge blows to Grima pretty soon."

Tiki seemed to understand her reasoning, though not totally pleased, "Well, you're the tactician here, so I'll leave it to your judgment. I must admit I have my doubts about this plan of yours, but I'm glad mother is very convincing during our sessions, like she was during our first meeting," Tiki commented, remembering their first and only meeting in person.

"Heh, there certainly are worse first encounters."

The wind blew through the canopy of the Mila Tree, resonating with a calming aura. In the shire at the top rested the Voice of Naga, Tiki. The daughter of the divine dragon rested, doing her usual meditation when she felt a strange and powerful presence that made her skin crawl making her way towards her location. Opening her eyes, she moved to grab her dragonstone. Even if her power was sealed she could still put up some fight.

Looking at the steps, she saw a figure covered by a purple cloak with gold accents. The eyes of Grima were patterned into the sleeves, with a sword hanging at her side. Tiki focused on the stranger, gathering her power to transform when their eyes met. Her own widened as she felt the power more clearly.

The power of a dragon.

"You've power just like mine," the manakete stated in surprise.

"This person is not a threat to you, my daughter," a voice rang through her head.

Shock ran through Tiki's face as her mother's voice defended this person. "But mother! This
"Don’t worry, she’s on our side and needs our help. My shared memories have showed me her life. Give her a chance, she has suffered a lot."

Tiki just nodded, putting her dragonstone away and closing the distance. Her steps didn’t make a sound as they made contact with the warm floor, silence only broken by the dancing wind. The stranger removed her hood, showing a tired face of a young woman with fair skin and snow-white hair, with her violet eyes showing an exhausted spirit.

"...I take it Naga vouched for me?" the woman asked, looking curiously at the Voice.

"Yes, but she was very vague with her words."

The woman chuckled, softening her expression, "I can imagine. Divine figures tend to be like that, even those that insist they aren’t gods."

"You speak like you know her." It wasn’t an accusation, just an observation of her way of speaking.

"I would like to say I do. I owe her a lot," the woman said somberly. "But please excuse my lack manners, Lady Tiki. Allow me to introduce myself, I’m Robin Surana and as you said I’ve power just like yours."

Tiki was surprised by the statement, with a small hope of having found kin burning in her heart, "You’re a manakete?"

Robin sighed and her shoulders slumped slightly, "If only it was that simple. I guess there is no beating around the bush, but please understand that I mean you no harm."

Tiki crossed her arms as she spoke, "Mother spoke in your favor, so you’ve my word that I’ll hear you out."

A frown marred Robin’s face, disappearing as she nodded, "Very well. I’m the Ava— No. That is no longer correct. I am the Fell Dragon Grima. Or at least, a version of her."

Robin’s eyes flashed red with the pupils turning into slits as shadowy flames ran across her body.

Tiki’s eyes widened in fear, hand reaching for her stone once again, "Please child, don’t act rashly. Her intentions are noble and her heart is in the right place. Listen to her story before passing judgment."

The manakete relaxed slightly, embarrassed at her broken promise but still wary of the woman in front of her, who had dispelled her power, "I... My apologies, it seems I was to act on instinct, but please understand my caution."

A hollow chuckle was Robin’s answer, "Don’t worry, it’s not the worst reaction I’ve gotten."

Tiki tilted her head in confusion, "I still don’t understand, though. Grima is still in deep slumber and I would’ve felt his awakening should he be back into this world."

Robin nodded, "This world’s Grima is, but I come from an Outrealm... Or am in one, if you see from my perspective."

"...Why would you come here? What is your goal?" Tiki questioned, trying to understand this strange turn of events.
"Redemption if I'm lucky," Robin said in a small voice. "I'm a strange case, so let me tell you the short version of my story. My soul is composed of two iterations of itself, my past and future self if you will. In one timeline Grima was successful in using me as her Avatar and destroyed the world while I was powerless to do anything. Naga sent the children of my fallen comrades to the past in order to stop my ascension. This, in turn, caused my companions in the past to turn on me in fear and hate, even if I had yet to do anything. I never wanted to merge with Grima, but it was never a choice. I managed to kill Grima, ending her threat and gaining her power before I was stroke down by someone I trusted." Robin paused to see the shock in Tiki's face at the summary of the event, "I've come here to prevent the same fate from befalling on my counterpart."

Regaining her composure, Tiki motioned her to a small part stone bench, "I… think you should sit down and tell me the whole story."

And so she did. No secret or event was left out. The wars, the key events, the apocalypse, the time travel, the betrayal, and her future plans — everything about both timelines was explained.

Tiki remained in solemn silence all the while, each event filling her with pity for this woman. Once Robin finished her tale she just sat awaiting an answer. Much to the grandmaster's surprise, she received it in the form of a tight hug from the manakete.

"It wasn't your fault and I'll do my best to help your, Robin," Tiki whispered in her ear.

Robin returned the embrace in earnest, crying happily that someone else believed her.

"Crossing from Ylisse to Valm to meet with you was a long and lonely journey. I was nervous that you would not believe me, but I'm glad you did. Knowing that I have a friend out there make this easier to bear," Rose admitted.

Tiki gave her a soft, sad smile, "I know why you contacted me and it wasn't just for an update. I'm actually surprised it took you this long to reach your breaking point."

Rose looked away, "I haven't broken yet, but I do feel close to that point and I felt talking would do me well," clarified the tactician. "There is only so much I can hide behind the 'cold mercenary' mask. My brother does bring out my soft side."

The manakete gave her a sympathetic look, "You know you don’t have to lie to them. You could've joined the Shepherds in a more honest fashion and develop new bonds and be more open with your brother. Remember that they are not neither the past or future versions of your comrades, they're their own people. Maybe they will be accepting."

A snort escaped the tactician, "Oh sure, 'Hey, I'm the alternate version of Grima that came from an Outrealm to prevent my kind-of-brother from becoming the Fell Dragon Reborn. Oh hey Chrom, I'm your future wife in a parallel world that you stabbed in the past.'"

"Well, when you put it like that…” Tiki deadpanned.

Rose sighed, "They’re strangers wearing the faces of both friends I killed and friends that abandoned me when I needed them the most. Even if they believed me, what if things go wrong again? I can’t go through that again. I'll do my best to protect them, but my brother takes priority."

"I understand that you’re hurt and bitter, believe I do. I've lived a long time to earn my share of regrets, so let me tell you. Do try to move on."

Rose closed her eyes and took a deep breath, "I know you're right, but it's not easy…"
"Moving on never is."

"What if things go bad again?"

"You'll never know unless you try. Give them a chance."

"I…" Rose exhaled in defeat, she knew Tiki had a point, "I will try. I supposed I can be a little more civil with them, but I'm not going out of my way to try and replicate the same bond I had with the others. It wouldn't be fair to anyone if I just try to make replacements."

Tiki didn't look all that pleased with the solution, but took it anyways, "I supposed that's as good as I could hope. Do me a favor and take some time and enjoy yourself. You've been working hard for so long that it will only burn you out."

"…I do miss some of my hobbies. It's going to be a few years until books I haven't read before is published, so I could retake cooking."

"Then do so. Maybe with one of the Shepherds. Try to make a life of your own too, ok?" Tiki only had the best intentions, but Rose is a stubborn woman.

"Not sure that is possible for me any longer, but who knows? Maybe someday I can settle as a teacher in some Outrealm." Rose always liked working with children, especially teaching them all she knew.

"That's all I can ask," Tiki conceded. "What do you plan to do now?"

"Tonight there will be an assassination attempt on Emmeryn and Chrom. I need that to happen so Lucina can warn them about the future, making it easier for them to believe the whole 'Grima' debacle."

Rose would rather stop this mess entirely, but she needed them to realize the identity of the traitors in their court along with preparing defenses for Ylissstol. They were short in manpower and she had no means to make them realize the danger without the assassination conspiracy.

"The fall of Ylissstol was a huge blow, and if I can keep Emmeryn alive the countries might reach a more solid peace. Defeating the invading army might make Gangrel act rashly and succumb to his madness and show Plegia that we're the good ones. Then we can kill Gangrel and reach peace with fewer casualties. It should help slow down Grimleal influence on Plegia." At least, that's what she hoped.

"Risky, but you know best." Tiki glanced at the sky with a frown, "We should end this conversation. I can sense it's strenuous for you to keep this link up. I'll contact you if anything of interest happens."

"I'll do the same. Take care, Tiki," Rose said as they embraced one more time.

"Farewell, my friend." With those parting words, she vanished, leaving Rose to return to her body.

Opening her eyes, Rose stood and pondered what to do. If things played the same, the assassination attempt should be later that night, so she had to be in top shape in case Lucina or Validar did something different. In the meantime, she could try some— ugh— bonding. Maybe talk about magic with Miriel or throw figs at Lon'qu — that was always fun.

Rose saw Maribelle walking throw the hallways. Her attitude was still pretty stuck up if she remember correctly, but maybe she could try being nice to her? She had pulled in court so she might make things easier for her and Robin. They were relatively cordial to one another when she was
Queen, even if she was one of the most vocal about her execution the second time around. Their eyes met for a moment before Maribelle stuck her nose in the air and kept walking.

Maybe she could do this whole 'moving on' thing tomorrow…

As Rose moved through the hallways, thinking about doing some training, she ran into her twin. Robin saw her and smiled, a gesture she reciprocated.

"Good day, Rose. How are things going?" Her twin greeted pleasantly.

"Doing fine, Robin. I was just thinking about getting some extra training. Care to join me?" she asked.

Robin seemed to ponder for a moment, "Not sure, I was planning on eating something."

She poked his slightly flabby stomach, making him flinch, "Yeah because that's what you need."

Robin was comfortable enough with her—as a friend after the past weeks—to poke her back. Maybe it was the sibling bond between them if you discount all the dimensional technicalities. Of course, he met resistance against her rock-hard abs. Years of combat and dragon blood had made wonders for her body that made Sully jealous. Deciding she had destroyed enough of her brother's pride, Rose refrained from commenting on how adorable his pout was.

"…I think it would do me well to get into shape," he grumbled in defeat, remembering how out of breath he got after some fights.

Rose smiled, pleased on having something productive to do before the mess that would be tonight and getting some more sibling bonding time—even if Robin was unaware of it. "Splendid. We can do a light workout to start with and then some light sparring."

Robin agreed, "That sounds good."

Robin regretted all the events that lead to spending his afternoon "training" with Rose. He wanted to show her a dictionary to confirm their definition of "light" was the same. That woman had some inhuman stamina to be able to stand that insane workout of hers. His muscles burned, but he had to admit it felt kinda good. It was more intense—but not as painful—as Frederick's training. If he kept it up he should improve his shape and make him more useful. Sadly, sitting all day reading and strategizing doesn't do much for one's fitness.

At least, Rose commended on his growth of skill when he demonstrated prowess in learning new spell and sword forms. Robin was pleased with his own growth—he would hate to become a burden for the Shepherds.

The tactician kept walking through the halls until he reached the courtyard. It was already dark and he was surprised to see Chrom standing thoughtfully in front of a statue of his father.

"Chrom? What are you doing out so late?"

The prince was startled out of his daze, "Oh, hi, Robin. Just... dueling with some unpleasant thoughts... Tomorrow we march to Ferox to request additional soldiers. But there's something you should know first. ...Like we talked earlier, you know my father waged a terrible war against Plegia."

Robin nodded, "The history books don't really paint him in a great light, but I guess that's not all that
bothers you?"

His friend averted his gaze, "The violence... It was a brutal campaign, ending only with his death 15 years ago. Plegia rightfully remembers their suffering, but his war was no kinder to his own people. The consequences we spoke of earlier reminded me of that." Chrom ran a hand through his hair, trying to clear his head, "As the fighting dragged on, our army became more and more diminished. Farmers who could barely wield a pitchfork were conscripted and sent to their deaths. Soon there was no food at all, and the kingdom began to collapse. I was young, but I remember those dark times. ...I know how they affected Emmeryn."

"Such an experience would change anyone," stated Robin. He was certainly afraid of the weight of the army's lives on his hands.

"Indeed," Chrom agreed. "When our father died before her 10th year, he left her quite the legacy... Plegia's desire for vengeance... Our own people's unbridled rage... My sister became a target for blame on all sides. Her own subjects began to hurl insults—and stones. She still bears the scar from one... But she never let them see her pain. Only Lissa and I understood."

"I knew she worked hard for peace, but I was unaware of this treatment..." He felt foolish for bringing up those ideas earlier that day, they certainly affected his friend.

Chrom sighed in frustration, "I cannot claim to know how she does it, Robin. I could not greet such hostility with warmth and patience. While our people mocked and vilified her, she reached out and healed them. She brought soldiers home to their families. She ended the war. And when Ylisse's spirit was mended and the people 'forgave' her? She never resented them for it," he shook his head, "She represents the best part of the halidom—the part most worth protecting. She is peace. But some men would take advantage of that. Men like King Gangrel. I understand killing him earlier would've been problematic, but I think this won't end until he is dead. The day he understands peace will be the day death gives it to him. So perhaps I must be death's agent. Emmeryn would never order him killed, nor would I wish her to."

"Well spoken, sir," a voice said, startling both men into reaching for their weapons. They say a familiar figure walks from behind a tree.

"Marth..." Chrom said in surprise.

Marth nodded in acknowledgment, his gaze lingering on Robin for a moment. "Good evening to you."

"How did you get here?" Chrom asked with narrowed eyes, which flickered to the sword at the masked man's hip. Robin knew he had many questions for the intruder.

A smirk appeared on Marth's face, "The cleft in the castle wall, behind the maple grove."

"There? But how would you...? Ugh." Chrom's hand hit his forehead, surprising Robin.

"You know the place, Chrom?"

Chrom smiled sheepishly, "Yes. I bashed in part of the wall while training the Shepherds. It's only a small hole, and I'd thought it well concealed, but..."

His excuse was interrupted by their guest, "Your secret is safe with me. I come here only to warn you."

Both men were on alert, sore muscles forgotten. "Warn us?" asked the prince.
"The Exalt's life is in danger," Marth said seriously.

Chrom was left dumbfounded by the statement, "What, Emmeryn? That's absurd. She's guarded at all hours."

Marth looked at the side and bit his lip, "What if... What if I told you I have seen the future? Would you believe me? A future where Emmeryn is killed. Here. Tonight."

"Seen the future? Have you lost your wits?" The prince's respect for this warrior was wavering at the mad words he was speaking.

Marth sighed, "Yes, I expected you wouldn't believe me." His expression grew serious as he drew his blade. Both men reached for their own weapons "So allow me to prove it! I'm about to save your life..." He dashed forward past the men and yelled "...From him!"

An assassin —Plegia, Robin dared to guess— bursted from the bushes, charging at Marth. Not wasting time, Marth tossed his blade into the air and then leaps after it, catching it as he started to spin. Robin took a moment to realize that Rose was right, it was showy and impractical. If another person was around they might have knocked the sword and leaving Marth vulnerable.

"I trust this proof will suffice?" Marth asked with confidence.

Chrom relaxed his stance slightly as he looked at the fallen man, "...Yeah."

Any more conversation was interrupted as another assassin leapt from the shadows, surprising Marth and Chrom. The masked swordsman turned to intercept the attack but tripped over the fallen assassin's blade. The second assailant missed his killing blow but managed to split Marth's mask in two. Chrom wasted no time in driving Falchion through the assassin's chest and ending his life.

Both turned back to check on Marth, but what they say shocked them both. Standing before them was a young woman with long, blue hair the same shade as Chrom's. She couldn't be older than sixteen if Robin were to guess.

"Wait, you're— You're a woman?!" Chrom exclaimed in surprise.

"And quite the actress, too. Honestly, I'm surprised you didn't figure it out until just now," Marth deadpanned, adjusting her now-free hair.

"He's not very good at guessing genders," Robin snarked.

"Hey! You didn't notice either!" Chrom said indignantly.

"Irrelevant," defended Robin, sniffing and not interested in defending himself.

Marth seemed ready to break their argument when a body came crashing down from the balcony above. The man splattered on the floor, his blood splashing the nearby flowers and startling all those present. Looking up, they saw Rose leaning against the railing.

"Hey! What the fuck are you doing standing there?! We got assassins all over the castle! You can paint your nails later, ladies! Get your asses moving!!" She yelled at them before running back inside. Robin barely registered the conflicted look on Marth's face as her eyes flickered between him and the balcony.

"Come on! We need to get to Lissa and Emmeryn and regroup with the others!" Chrom said before turning to Marth, "Can we count on your help?"
"That's why I'm here," Marth said with determination.

"Thank you," he said, turning to Robin, "Let's go!"

"Right behind you, boss!"

'Things are progressing nicely', thought Rose. Sure, some guards had to die to allow the assassins into the castle, but she consider it an acceptable sacrifice. Many would consider her use of human lives as pieces on a board callous but when you were trying to prevent an apocalypse many actions were justified. Panne and Gaius were on board which was perfect—they were key members of the Shepherds and their skills were indispensable. She still wasn't sure what to do about Nowi, Tharja, and Gregor since she planned on stopping Emmeryn's execution. Henry would join anyways, she guessed, since he loved bloodshed. 'Eh, I will cross that bridge when I get there, we might still met them in our march.'

The grandmaster cut down another assassin that tried to break past her. Her robes were covered in Grimleal blood, but she didn't feel any pity for them—they were willing to die for Grima, so she was allowed to take their lives without complaint.

Rose glanced to the safe room and was pleased to that that Emmeryn and Lissa were being protected by Lucina, Ricken, Panne, and Phila. Frederick was with Gaius to keep an eye on him, but she knew he would stay once sugar was mixed into the equation.

Looking through the window, Rose saw her brother and Chrom making way for Validar. Her knuckles turned white under her gauntlets as her fists clenched at the sight and was ready to make her move. She glanced at Stahl, "I'm going to the gardens. I think they could be coming from the same place Marth did. I'll check if any are hiding, waiting to strike when we lower our guards. If you can, try to have Sully or Frederick do the same on the eastern wing."

Stahl looked at her with a measuring look. They weren't close by any means in this timeline, but she had proven herself reliable so far. He nodded and gave a tight smile, "Alright, but be careful. I know you're strong but don't take unnecessary risks."

"Don't worry. All my risks are measured."

Robin stood in front of the leader of the assassins. The bodies of his soldiers laid on puddles of their own blood, mixing with that of the Ylissean guards they killed. The sorcerer was a tall man covered in fine robes and golden jewelry. The invader had an air of arrogance about him with a face that, in Robin's opinion, screamed 'evil'. The man turned to look at him and when he saw the tactician a flash of recognition flashed across his eyes.

The man laughed, a dark and disgusting sound that could barely be called that, "Well, well... Ha ha ha! Oh, I know you..."

Robin froze. This man knew him. He finally had a lead on his identity and it was in the form of the leader of the assassins after his friend's lives.

"Who are you?! How do you know me?!" He snarled, surprising the prince at his side.

The disgusting smirk on his face didn't do anything for Robin's spirits. "Foolish little boy. Submit to me, and perhaps I might honor you with the truth!"

Rage filled the tactician. No matter who he was before or what information this man had, he was no
traitor, "Never! I don't know who you're, but I'll not betray my friends!"

The man snarled, "I'll just drag your broken carcass back to Plegia along with the heads of Naga's brats and the Fire Emblem!"

Chrom didn't waste any time talking, he just dashed forward ready to behead the man. The sorcerer launched bolts of dark magic at the prince, who weaved between them and parried the odd bolt that got too close. Getting closer, he was blasted back by a strong dark wind.

Robin didn't stand idle during this. He didn't have time to grab a tome, but he still had his sword. He was not the best or fastest swordsman, but he did improve after the thrashings he received from Rose and Frederick.

Fighting a sorcerer was tricky. They don't have the armor of a knight but they clothes, like his coat, are enchanted to resist damage. That, along with defensive hexes, could make their skin as though as metal. The downside was that such spells required concentration and were normally broken when they were casting another spell— just like he was doing while facing Chrom.

The man prepared to deliver a finishing blow to the fallen prince, but he never got the chance as Robin's blade pierce his side. The shock of the attack turned into rage as the man expelled enough magic to push the tactician back.

"No... This is... all wrong... How could... you have known the plan..." Mustering whatever energy he had left, he tried to flee opening a portal. Shakily, the man fell through it and out of the reach of the Shepherds.

"Dastard!" snarled Robin, stabbing his bloodied sword in the ground. "Chrom! Are you ok!?

"I'm fine, thank you. Did you get him?" Chrom asked.

Robin replied with a shake of his head and pointed at the pool of blood, "I wounded him, but he teleported out of my reach."

"The amount of blood... he won't last long, not even with a healer's help. He's a dead man. Good work." Chrom noticed the conflicted expression of his friend, "What's the matter?"

"...He knew me. He was Grimleal and he knew me," Robin said through gritted teeth.

"Hey. It doesn't matter," Chrom said as he placed

"How can you say that?!" the tactician said in disbelief. "He was my only lead to my past and he tried to kill you! I could be a Grimleal too!"

Chrom's eyes grew hard and Robin fought every instinct that tried to make him shrink. "You fought to protect Ylisse and my family tonight. Whatever man you used to be, the man in front of me has my friendship and my gratitude." It was moments like this that reminded Robin of how good a leader Chrom was.

"I… guess." He didn't feel particularly well, but he was grateful for the comforting words.

The price's gaze softened and motioned towards the castle, "Come, let's check on the others."

The made their way back to the safe room. Plegian blood flowed through the stone floor, their former bodies piled to the side as a makeshift barrier to slow down more attacked. Many of the decorations will need to be replaced, as they laid broken of tainted with blood. Robin saw the royal sisters
speaking with the strange furred woman that helped them tonight.

"Emmeryn! Lissa! Thank the gods you're safe!" exclaimed Chrom, happy that his sisters were safe.

Emmeryn smiled at her brother, "It is you we have to thank, Chrom."

"I beg your forgiveness, milord!" Phila interrupted, bowing her head in shame, "I failed in my duty. They should never have made it into the castle in the first place."

Chrom motioned for the captain to raise, "Peace, Phila. You couldn't have known what was coming. Only Marth could..."

"...Marth? You mean the blue-haired swordswoman?" Asked Emmeryn.

Her brother nodded. "Yes, I would speak more with... Um... Robin, where's Marth?" Chrom asked, not finding her anywhere looked around for the girl. Robin knew he wanted to ask about her Falchion.

Robin glanced around, looking at all the soldiers moving bodies and making rounds, trying to find the mysterious savior, "Hmm... An excellent question. She was here when we left..."

Chrom groaned in an exasperated tone, "Not again!"

Validar dragged his broken body through the forest. His wound had been cauterized with a fire spell but it took all of his willpower to make it this far. He was a dead man and he knew it. Soon, he would be food for the vultures.

"Nngh... How?! My purpose is too significant... to be thwarted... here... Aaargh..."

His complaints were silenced as the air rippled in front of him. Shadows parted and a figure manifested in front of him. It looked just like that pathetic son of his, but this specter exuded power. His glowing red eyes met Validar's and he saw the depth of power, even if it was just a projection.

"Validar," The voice spoke with power.

The man fell to his knees, too weak to stand. "What? Who are you... Where did you... come from?" he ask through laborious breaths.

"I am the power that compels you. You will not perish here. It is not written. You must live on to author a destiny greater than you know." Magic gathered in the palm of his hand. It was a familiar feeling, the same he felt on his rituals, and yet it was more powerful than anything he ever felt before.

"I-impossible! It can't be you! It can't be..." he exclaimed in shock and glee.

"I am the wings of despair. I am the breath of ruin. I am—"

"An annoyance."

Validar's eyes widened as a blade covered in dark fire pierced through the vision, shattering it into a million pieces. Another person, a woman from the sound of her voice, stepped out of the shadows. The same coat covered her body, but the air had another sort of pressure to it.

It was anger.
Grima recoiled as the connection with his spectral form was severed. Rage burning in his eyes as the spell on his hands dissipated.

"Who dares!?” he snarled, looking at his burned hand. It was healing much more slowly that it should, "$That feeling… it was dragon fire! It must have been Naga's brat!" He screamed and launched a bolt of lightning and shattering on of the pillars of his temple in frustration. "$So little Lucina is around and looking for Validar... This whore will pay for messing with my plans. No one can stop the future. Only Grima can shape this world!"

Rose looks at her father's broken body and couldn't help the pleasure of watching this pathetic man suffer.

"Validar Calim, head of the Grimleal bloodline. I've been waiting to meet you for a long time."

"Who...are you, whore...to interrupt Lord Grima's will!?” The snarl was impressive for a man with one foot in the grave.

"Now, now. I would've thought you would recognize your own blood, father." Rose removed her hood and showed her face to her father. His eyes flashed in recognition at the ghost that stood before him.

"You look... like that harlot, Morgana...and the brat...No... Impossible... I drove the knife into you myself!" he screamed his denials.

Her blood boiled at the thought of her counterpart's death—a meaningless sacrifice for baptism of blood. She kicked his wound, driving her metal heel deep into his wound and enjoying the cry of pain from the vermin at her feet, "I'm so glad you remember me."

"What's...the meaning of this..." Another kick, this one to his face, silenced his rant.

"You'll speak when spoken too, insect." Rose stabbed him in his shoulder and cut his hand earning more screams from the leader of the Grimleal. She walked around his body, like a predator stalking their meal. "$You've been a pain in my ass for a long time. You're the cause of so much pain for me, mother and my brother and I can no longer allow it."

Dark fire covered her body and her eyes gained their draconic appearance. The power of the Fell Dragon enveloped her once again and she knew Validar would recognize it.

"Y-you..." The fear of standing between his god was music to her ears.

"You pledged your soul to the darkness. That means it belongs to me, for I am the Fell Dragon!"

Her blade pierced his chest and Ignis ran free. His screams of pain were something she dreamed of hearing every day. The flames burned his body as she judged his soul unworthy. The pain was horrible, as every ounce of hate she had for him burning through his soul. His eyeballs boiled as his lungs burned trying to scream. His body slowly turned to ashes even as his silent screams continued. But she wasn't done with him, not by a long shot.

The Fell Dragon had control over the souls of his subjects, and so did she. His twisted soul was sucked into Thorn, trapped to be burned by her flame in perpetual agony until she had a use for it.

A glint on the floor gained her attention. The pendant he always carried as the head of the Grimleal lied in the grown, the black jewel at its center radiating power.
It was Sable.

"How arrogant of you, Validar, to carry such an important item with you instead of leaving it at the
temple. But it's an acceptable offer for your god."

She pressed Sable against Thorn and watches as the gemstone disappeared inside the blade.

"Now then, there is still something else to do tonight."

Rose released her power and felt a drain on her magical reserves. She couldn't maintain her ascended
form for very long still but she no longer needed it. Gathering ambient magic she opened a portal and
walked through it.

She reappeared outside the castle's wall and saw the subject of her search.

"So eager to leave already, Marth?"

The princess turned ready to strike. Her stance didn't relax once she saw the Plegian coat.

"At ease. It's me, Rose. I'm hurt. Did you forget me already?"

Lucina narrowed her eyes, barely relaxing but removing her hand from Falchion's grip.

"It would be hard to forget the woman that bested you in front of a country," Marth replied.

Rose couldn't help the smirk from forming on her lips, "I hope you don't have hard feeling about
that."

Lucina widened her eyes before shaking her head "Please pardon my tone, milady, but this has been
an exciting night," the princess apologized. She maintained her decorum with admirable poise.

"Don't apologize, I understand. Trying to save your father's life must be very strenuous," Rose said
nonchalantly.

Shock ran through the princess's body at the proclamation, "Wh—How did you—?!"

Rose pretended to check her hand for dirt, which was unnecessary with the amount of blood they
had, "Naga spoke of you. She explained to me your situation and your mission. Admirable, to travel
through time to protect a loved one and save the world. I say we have a lot in common. We both
have the desire to stop Grima, and from what I've seen you're willing to do much for your family and
their future."

Lucina remained silent for a moment, body rigid as a board, before she asked, "What do you know
about me? My mission? About my family and my comrades?"

"I know that you're Lucina Lowell, Chrom's future daughter, the last Exalt of Ylisse, and survivor of
the apocalypse that came to set things right." Rose had to contain the vile on her throat at the next
words, trying to dissociate this stranger from her daughter. She ignored the tension of Lucina's
body as she continued, "I've no idea who your mother is—"Probably some village harlot trying to
get into the royal family," she couldn't help but think,"—or if you've siblings, cousins, or lovers. I
know Emmeryn was meant to die tonight and Chrom was to be injured. I don't how many others
from the future are here with you right now — time travel is tricky like that." Rose shrugged, "Nor
do I care. I'm talking to you for one reason."

Moving in an instant, she disarmed Lucina, throwing Falchion far away and slamming the princess
against the wall. Her hand held Lucina by the throat as she desperately tried to free herself.

"I'm here, doing all this, to protect my brother. I've been working with Naga for a long time to prepare for this oncoming wars since she contacted me years ago, so let me make something very clear for you. You're not the only one willing to do anything for her family. If any action you take endangers Robin's, I will end you. Am I clear?"

Tears gathered in Lucina's eyes at the fear and the lack of air. Rose released her grip and the princess fell to the ground.

"I'm glad you understand." Rose threw a roll of parchment at the princess' feet. "Those are rumors and leads of people meeting the descriptions Naga gave me of some of your companions. Consider it a reward for being a good girl and listening to your elders. Gather them as soon as possible, for the Shepherds will need all the help they can get. Don't worry about your father or aunts, I'll protect them too."

"Why do you do all this? Why did Naga tell you all this?" Lucina asked, still gasping for air. She looked at the mercenary with a hurt and confused expression, "First you threaten me and then you help me find my friends?"

"...I've met people with good intentions before and they have made others suffer— I've done so myself. You might be willing to do a lot to protect your father and the future, but I'm willing to do the same for my brother. For now, we're both on the same side, and I would rather keep it that way. But I won't tolerate someone thinking of my brother as dispensable. I'll kill Grima myself if it means keeping him safe and Naga knows it."

"Brother? Wait! Please… listen… that's not wha—" Lucina tried to plead, but a raised hand silenced her.

"There is nothing more to speak of. I've much work to do to waste time here any longer. Farewell, princess. I wish you good luck finding your friends." With those final words, Rose departed, leaving the princess alone under the moonless night.
“It will take time to investigate how this assassination plot got so far. We have no leads at present,” Phila reported. Her stance exuded shame at the fact that she had failed in her duty to protect the castle.

Frederick wasn’t doing much better, but he managed to distract himself by directing the Shepherds and guards to clean up the bodies of the dead lining the halls. Robin noticed that some of the sentries were wounded and lacked armor. No surprise there, since most of them had been asleep just before the attack.

Chrom slammed his fist against the stone wall, barely restraining a feral snarl. “It was Plegia! I’m certain of it. Gangrel has made it clear he’d do anything for the Emblem.” The prince turned to his eldest sister and, restraining his anger for the moment, pleaded, “Emm, you can’t stay here. Come to Ferox where it’s safe.”

Shaking her head, Emmeryn returned her gaze from the fallen to her brother, “And leave our people undefended? War is at our borders, Chrom. Do you expect Ylisse to be able to stand against Plegia without a leader? They must know that their Exalt stands with them.”

“But what if something happens to you? What then?” The prince evidently wasn’t pleased with his sister’s stubbornness.

“Your Grace, perhaps you might wish to relocate to the eastern palace for the time being? The other kingdoms would know nothing of it. You would be safer there.” Frederick suggested, trying to ease the tension between the siblings.

That suggestion seemed to please the prince. “Yes, please. At the very least please do that. I can’t stand leaving for Ferox with you right in harm's way.”

Emmeryn mulled it over for a moment. “...Hmm. Very w–”

“Let’s not make rash decisions, your Grace.”

Those present turned to watch their resident Plegian mercenary walk towards them. Robin took notice of her attire’s state: her cloak and armor were covered in blood, but judging by her lithe and unhindered stance the ichor wasn’t hers.

“Where were you, Plegian?” Phila snarled as she glared at her. The surrounding nobles instantly radiated hostility towards Rose, and to lesser extent Robin; they probably suspected the mercenary or the tactician of being complicit in this assassination attempt.

The mercenary gave the Wing Commander a measured look before replying flippantly, “Clearing the kitchen of intruders. You can verify with Sir Stahl that I informed him of my whereabouts.” She then looked at Emmeryn before bowing and suggesting, “I would recommend throwing all the food away, Your Grace. We don’t know whether or not they managed to poison some of it before I reached the kitchen.”

The mercenary turned to the prince and tactician. Reaching into one of the inner pockets of her cloak, making Phila suddenly stiffen in vigilance, Rose pulled out an envelope that she presented to the prince. “Prince Chrom, during my search for more intruders I ran into Lady Marth. She gave me this letter for you and asked that you read it only amongst yourself, your sister and sir Robin.”
The price took the letter and gave it a brief look before handing it to Robin. The tactician checked it over and noted that the seal was still unbroken, which meant Rose hadn’t tampered with or opened the letter.

“Did she mention anything else? Like the reason for her sudden departure?” Chrom asked. He still had too many unanswered questions for their mysterious savior.

The Plegian woman shook her head. “No, milord. Only that it was for you three’s eyes only.”

Robin didn’t like how Marth tended to disappear. First she had saved Lissa, then fought against them in the tournament for Basilio, and finally helped them again tonight. Her motives just didn’t seem to match up. Many things didn’t make sense to him and as a tactician, he hated being lacking in information. The farseer’s knowledge of the future, if proven to reliable, could very well be the turning point of this war and she refused to share it.

“Frederick and I will escort the Exalt to her chambers, your majesty,” Phila eventually stated after a slightly awkward silence, bowing towards her rulers.

Chrom nodded at the Wing Commander, then turned to address his sister. “Go and rest, Emm. We shall speak of a course of action on the morning.”

“Very well, Chrom. Don’t forget to rest too.” With that, the Exalt left the room flanked by her two knights.

Rose bowed before the prince, “I shall check the grounds and retire for the night if that is alright with you, Prince Chrom.”

The prince nodded, acceding to her request. “Go ahead, and thank you for your help. The guards will take care of the rest of the cleanup. I shall debrief you and the rest of the Shepherds in the morning.”

“By yo–”

“Stop naggin’! The Vaike is fine!”

A loud shout grabbed the attention of both present. Turning to the source, they saw Vaike swatting away the staff of an exasperated Lissa.

“You’re not fine! You can barely stand!” scolded the youngest princess.

The warrior shrugged, “Bah! I barely got scratched in this fight!” He pointed to a shallow cut on his arm. “That’s not enough to take down the Vaike!” He then tried to stand, only to wobble and fall onto his behind.

“You wouldn’t have gotten scratched if you hadn’t kept on insisting on not wearing armor!”

Rose quickly made her way towards them. She grabbed Vaike’s face hard, jerking it in her direction so their eyes met.

“What do you think are y–”

“Dilated pupils. Can’t focus.” Her eyes flicked towards his injured arm. “Bruising around the cut.”

The Plegian released the fighter’s face, much to his relief. Vaike glared at her. “You’re envenomed. The blade that cut you must have been coated with…” She sniffed the air. “Nightshade venom, a very common toxin in Plegia.” She looked around, scanning the corpses on the floor. “Which of this
men did it? His corpse should have the antidote in case he got cut by his own blade.”

“And how do you know that?” Vaike growled. “Because you were told about it by the assassins!”

It was no secret that he disliked her just as much as Frederick and Sully. Both her and Robin’s Plegian roots were a sour topic amongst them, especially since they didn’t like the amount of trust Chrom placed on them.

Lissa was mortified by the accusation against two of her newest comrades. “Vaike!”

“...” Rose remained impassive, proceeding to just shrug off the accusation. “It’s not the first time I’ve run into Plegian assassins, nor nightshade venom. You can take my advice or die a painful death before morning. Your choice.”

The mercenary tactician bowed to the princess and left the hallway in the direction of the barracks and her own room. As soon as she was out of both sight and hearing, Lissa whirled around and smacked Vaike with her staff.

“Ouch! You’re supposed to be healing me, not giving me a headache!” the man complained, grabbing his head to soothe the pain.

“Why do you keep antagonizing her!? All she does is help us and you guys just keep acting hostile towards her and Robin!”

The fighter scoffed. “I don’t trust Plegians, especially Plegian mercenaries! For all we know she or the nerd could have helped the assassins gain entrance to the castle! Even if she’s not a traitor, she’s just a sellsword who only fights for gold.”

Robin sighed and turned away, not missing some of the uncomfortable looks some of the Shepherds gave him.

“And how would they have been able to do that!? Robin and Rose were near Chrom, in the back gardens, the whole time up till the attack! And they helped us fend the assassin's off tonight when they had the chance to turn on us!”

Vaike just glared at the wall in silence, unable to find a proper rebuttal to basic logic. “…Just heal this thing,” he finally grunted.

“Not until we find that antidote,” declared the princess, much to Vaike’s chagrin.

A firm hand gripped the tacticians shoulder. Turning, the amnesiac saw Chrom giving him a sympathetic look. “Don’t let it get to you.”

“I’m sorry to say I’ve already gotten used to it at this point,” Robin mumbled.

“They will come around. You’ve already earned my trust and it’s only a matter of time before they realize you’re not the enemy that they expect you to be.” Chrom removed his hand and walked to speak with Stahl and Sumia, leaving Robin to his thoughts.

For some strange reason, those words or reassurance didn’t do much to assuage his doubts.

‘That man tonight. He knew me… Do I have any link to him and the Grimleal?’

Robin looked at the letter in his hand and sighed.

He would have to deal with this later. For now, there was still much to do.
Breakfast was never a quiet affair for the Shepherds and despite the assassination attempt this morning certainly wasn’t any different. Everyone, from the guards to the maids, was talking about the attack. The news had spread fast and was already widely known by the general population.

Their reaction was to be expected – they were terrified. To think the Grimleal could gain access to Ylissotol castle and almost kill the Exalt! The only thing helping their morale was that their attack was repelled in its entirety, and none of the intended targets had died.

Sumia poked forlornly at her breakfast, wishing Cordelia was here to talk with her. She had always been strong, just like Sully and Rose. Not weak and clumsy like her.

Sumia sighed. She knew she shouldn’t be jealous of them, but seeing women like Rose tearing her way through the enemy made her wonder why she was even among the Shepherds. She had only just graduated from basic Pegasus knight’s training; she shouldn’t be considered among Ylisse’s elite.

“Mind if I sit down here?” A voice asked from her right, causing Sumia to look up in surprise.

“You’re that thief from last night!” Indeed, it was the thief that had broke into the hallway and helped them fight off the assassins. It had certainly been a surprising and slightly disbelievable turn of events that he would help them for just the candy that Chrom was carrying, but he turned out to be true to his word.

“Yep. That’s me. Gaius Thomas at your service, Stumbles,” Gaius said, plopping down with his tray of food and offering her his hand. Sumia noticed the giant sack at his side, candy almost spilling out of it seams.

Her polite nature eventually overcame her shock and forced her to present herself. “Sumia Trevelyan, Pegasus Knight of the Shepherds.” She smiled and shook his hand before she processed his words. “Wait… Stumbles?”

The orange-haired man nodded, sucking on his lollipop. “Yeah. Saw you trip a few times in your way in. And when you were picking your food. Name fits you.”

‘Oh fantastic, even the new guy knows I’m is a mess.’ Sumia was mortified and instantly tried to change the subject.

“I mean no offense to you, but I’m surprised you aren’t in jail after last night,” she asked cautiously.

“The Lady Exalt and Blue said they would forgive my past misdeeds if I offered my services to the Shepherds.” The man shrugged, biting the candy in his mouth. “Beats living in a hole in the wall. I get steady pay, a warm meal, and a comfortable bed as long as I work. Very stable job.” Picking another candy from the bag he was carrying, he popped it in his mouth. “Plus, I’ve no desire to hurt the Exalt; she is a nice lady.”

She didn’t detect any lies in his words, so the rider smiled at her new comrade. “Well, you do sound sincere. I’m sure you will be a great addition to the team.” Sumia was always positive when it came to other people and she trusted Chrom’s judgment. So far, he hasn’t been wrong about Robin and Rose, so she decided to give Gaius the benefit of a doubt as well.

The thief smirked, finally starting to eat his breakfast. “Well, thank you kindly. I really didn’t expect a warm welcome, but it’s nice to make friends with new people.”

“I agree with that. I’m sure you will enjoy being part of the Shepherds. You know, aside from the
whole war business.”

Both ate their breakfast in silence, simply enjoying each other’s company. Sumia noticed Vaike and Sully walking out of the room together, but not before they threw a dirty look at the back of their resident Plegian mercenary, who was reading a book and eating her breakfast in a corner.

This made her feel slightly ashamed of their behavior. Why couldn’t they just all get along?

Finally finishing his breakfast, Gaius started another topic of conversation. “So… what’s the deal with Snowflake?”

Sumia tilted her head in confusion. “Snowflake?” She looked around and saw that they were alone in the mess hall save for some of the castle staff finishing their meals. Most of the Shepherds had already left to fulfill their duties or to train.

“The white-haired girl wearing the hood with the whole ‘ice-queen’ vibe over there.”

‘White haired?’ Sumia turned to look in the direction Gaius was pointing and was surprised to see him pointing at Rose. Pegasus knights need to have great eyesight to fly their steeds, and now if Sumia focused she could indeed see the wisps of white hair peeking out of Rose’s hood. She really hadn’t noticed that before.

“You mean Rose?” she asked, making sure she was correct in her assumption.

“Yes. I saw the reaction of some of my new companions last night when they looked at her and Bubbles, throwing accusations and glares and whatnot.” Gaius flicked his head towards the door. “I also didn’t miss the looks those two just gave her.”

“Bubbles?”

“The white-haired, scrawny guy that is glued to the prince’s side like sticky candy.”

“Oh! You mean our tactician, Robin.” She figured the thief must have nicknames for everyone, she thought it was better to go with the flow. “Well, both of them are Plegian. Robin was found with no memory near Southtown a few weeks ago and Rose is a mercenary and current Feroxi Champion, whom we encountered and recruited in Regna Ferox. Their nationality doesn’t really endear them to some of our members.” Sumia wriggled her hands to calm her nerves before she hastily added. “Not me, though! I personally have no issues with them, I think they are both valuable members of our team.”

“Hey, it would be hypocritical of me to judge anyone here by their background,” Gaius said, wryly referring to his former profession. “So is there any reason she wears that hood?”

Sumia thought about that for a moment. So far, they had never really seen her face fully. “Well, both of them are Plegian. Robin was found with no memory near Southtown a few weeks ago and Rose is a mercenary and current Feroxi Champion, whom we encountered and recruited in Regna Ferox. Their nationality doesn’t really endear them to some of our members.” Sumia wriggled her hands to calm her nerves before she hastily added. “Not me, though! I personally have no issues with them, I think they are both valuable members of our team.”

“The white-haired, scrawny guy that is glued to the prince’s side like sticky candy.”

“Now you’ve made me curious,” Gaius said as he slowly stood up, not making a sound.

“What are you doing?” asked Sumia, a feeling in her stomach telling her she would not like the answer.

“I’m gonna pull down her hood and see what she looks like,” he said nonchalantly.

The Pegasus Knight was wondering how this man survived so long in his line of business if he is
willing to take such stupid risks. She still remembered the beatings Rose had given some of the recruits and guardsmen during training the past few days, including herself.

Sumia bit her lip as she glanced at the hooded girl, who didn’t seem to notice anything around her. “That doesn’t sound like a good idea…”

“What’s the worst that could happen? She gets a little angry and I just pull out my devilish-rogue charm.” He flashed her a smile that, while did make her blush, didn’t assuage her fears at all.

Like a shadow, he slowly made his way towards the grandmaster. His steps were as quiet as a wraith, the solid stone floor and the sound of the kitchen masking any possible noises he made. Slowly, he extended his hand, fingers almost grasping the hood and his mind already thinking of a lie to explain his actions.

Then it all went to hell.

“Do that, thief, and I’ll tie you to a bed, melt down your candy and pour it all over your genitals.” Rose voice was smooth as a blade, its edge as sharp as the promise of pain that would follow, despite sounding just as nonchalant as if she had only commented on the weather. She didn’t even bother to look up from her book as she continued to eat her breakfast, taking a sip of her juice to help it in the way down.

Purposefully loud steps moving away was her answer.

“Smart choice.”

Sumia stared at Rose’s back, wondering just how she had sensed Gaius’s approach, only breaking away from it to see said thief sit down next to her, his smirk now frozen on his pale, sweaty face.

“She seems nice,” He said, visibly trying to shake the dreadful feeling that he got from his little prank. He look as if he stood before a god’s judgment. Not something a criminal ever wanted to experience if Sumia had to guess.

Shaking her head, Sumia gave him a dry smile. “You’re lucky. She could break you in half without much trouble, just like she did with some of the Feroxi that challenged her.”

Gaius chuckled at the joke. “Heh, very funny.”

Sumia just stared silently at him, making him sweat a little. “Uh, You are joking, right?”

The Pegasus rider then proceeded to inform him of the events in Ferox, making Gaius whistle in respect of her strength. He wouldn’t admit it out loud, but now he was relieved beyond words that he didn’t have to fight against them last night. She had been about to tell him how Rose picked Kellam in full armor and threw him into a pile of hay when Frederick came up behind them, clearing his throat to get their attention.

“You are Gaius, right? The thief?” Frederick gave him a stern once-over, clearly not happy of yet another suspicious character in the midst of their militia.

The thief just nodded, his survival instincts deciding it was a good time to sober up. Furthermore, they told him it wouldn’t be a good idea to joke with this man, period.

“Please come with me. Prince Chrom has requested your presence. He said he has need of your skills.”
That certainly earned the attention of both Shepherds, making them wonder if whatever Chrom was asking them for had anything to do with last night’s events.

The atmosphere in the council room was tense. The few nobles who were present in the castle were still on edge after the previous night’s fiasco, worried about the future course of the war. Battle high had finally dissipated and it was clear that they needed to decide on a safe and rational course of action as soon as possible.

Robin sat beside Chrom, who was rigidly watching his sister and her surroundings, not willing to take his eyes off of her anytime soon. Both men had been wound up all morning since they had read the letter from Marth. Chrom hadn’t want to believe its contents but Robin had insisted it would be foolish not to follow her advice after remembering the evidence from last night. They then shared the information with Emmeryn, who, after an intensely emotional denial, reluctantly agreed to their plan.

The contents of the letter, if they proved to be true, could very well change the course of this war.

Dear Prince Chrom.

I write this letter as I do not have time to explain the situation in full. My presence is required elsewhere. It is my hope that this knowledge imparted to me by Naga will help you prevent the fall of Ylisse and any harm to its people. While we manage to prevent the first assassination the timeline has still changed slightly. The Divine Dragon has blessed me with knowledge about what is to come.

You may not want to believe it, but the one responsible for the near-success of last night’s attempted assassination of your sister is Hierarch Seymour Howe.

The tactician looked at the man in question, who was seated calmly next to the Exalt. Seymour was an old man in green robes with a face that wouldn’t be out of place in a library or church. According to Chrom, he had been a stalwart mentor to Emmeryn since she took the throne at a young age. After learning of this accusation, Emmeryn had done a great job in masking her emotional turmoil at the thought of her most trusted advisor plotting her death.

The prince stood and spoke with firm conviction, capturing the attention of the nobles present. ”I’m sure you’re all aware of last night’s events. We’re still investigating the source of the infiltration, but for now, we will decide our next move.” His swept his gaze across the small sea of faces, noting the various reactions of those present. “I suggest moving my sister to the eastern palace for her safety. We can’t afford to lose our Exalt or the faith of the people will crumble.”

I’m aware of the severity of this accusation, but please bear with me. I shall tell you exactly what will happen in your council the next morning. To start, please move forward with your original proposition of moving the Exalt to the eastern palace. The Hierarch will then suggest taking the Breakneck Pass as the safest route with him as a guide while also trying to discredit your tactician with his heritage.

Like clockwork, the old man nodded in approval. “I agree with the prince. Lady Emmeryn is too important to risk losing. However, I suggest we march through the Breakneck Pass, as the canyon will provide us with cover. I know the place well enough to guide us.” He said before looking towards the tactician and narrowing his eyes. “But are you sure it’s prudent to have a Plegian here, your highness? For all we know, he was part of the attempt on your life!”

This proposal is a trap. Here there will be a Plegian ambush waiting for you. They will be made aware of it by the Hierarch after you propose your plan. By the time you reach the Pass four days from now, Ylisstol would have already have fallen to a Plegian sneak attack. This is part of a
backup plan Plegia established with the Hierarch in case the initial assassination failed. Say what you will about their tactician but she doesn’t leave anything to chance.

Robin did his best not to bristle at the accusation but was luckily spared when Chrom leaped immediately to his defense.

“Robin fought by my side last night. As I keep telling our soldiers, he had plenty of opportunities to eliminate us and turn traitor but has always stood by our side. I’ll not tolerate accusations towards someone that has bled and fought together with me.”

The Hierarch evidently wasn’t pleased with his answers, but he recovered smoothly. “My apologies, prince. I spoke out of order.” He gave smile Robin knew was insincere. “You’re right. This young man has helped you. I’m just still on edge about how close they were to assassinating your dear sister.”

Robin met Chrom’s gaze, both aware that the letter had been accurate so far. Still, there was something else they were waiting for to be able to legally arrest the man without looking like mad tyrants.

They didn’t need to wait long, though. Moments later, Frederick entered the room and silently handed the prince a folder. Chrom raised his hand to silence any questions and proceeded to read the contents. After a few moments of scanning, he closed his eyes in disappointment and nodded towards his sister.

Her face slowly fell into one of heartbreak.

You shall find evidence of treason in quarters of the Hierarch. There are enough letters in his safety box between him and Plegia that should be enough evidence for you to legally arrest him. But I want you to be sure for yourself that I have knowledge of the future and that this information is not planted.

“But you see, Howe, we’re not foolish enough to not to be aware that there could be traitors among our people.” Chrom said, handing the documents over to his sister and watching the suddenly guarded expression on the Hierarch’s face. “Those that would take advantage of my sister’s kindness for their own profit.”

The elder man didn’t notice Sully and Stahl standing behind him. The nobles that did were wise enough not to make any overt movements, waiting with baited breath to see how this situation played out.

“You see, last night we received a tip from a trustable source about the attempt moments before it happened, which was why we were able to assemble just in time. They also gave us information about where we could gather evidence of treason amongst our people. Like letter between one of our advisors and Plegia, promising rewards and a position of power in their court for the life of the Exalt.”

The accusation earned gasps among the nobles, finally understanding exactly what was being implied. They couldn’t believe that Seymour Howe could betray their halidom for power.

The old man’s eyes grew wide in panic as he finally noticed the two armed Shepherds at his side.

“I… Lady Emmeryn, you surely can’t believe I-!” His words died in his throat as he saw the devastated expression on his ruler’s face.

“Why?” she asked in a pained voice.
The man felt the heavy gloves of the knights on his shoulder, keeping him in place and then visibly realized there was no way out of this. Knowing he was caught, Seymour looked at Emmeryn with hard eyes she hadn’t seen in ages.

“Emmeryn, I served your father and Ylisse all my life. I wanted to believe you had the best intentions for our people.” He gritted his teeth, slamming his fist on the table and earning a tighter hold. “But look at us now! We depend on a foreign power to protect us! We have no army to protect our people and our main fighting force is a small ragtag militia!” His face fell into regret. “If by sacrificing you I could save Ylisse, using my influence in their court to spare them the worst, I would gladly do it.”

“You’ve always taught me that peace was the way.”

“I wish I hadn’t been that naïve in the past, Emmeryn. For now, I can only hope you can protect our people.”

“…Your trial will be held tomorrow by me and the council.” Emmeryn said, looking away from a man that was once like a grandfather to her. “Guards, take him away.”

The knights escorted the old man to his cell, leaving the chamber in silence.

“It all makes sense now,” said the tactician. “How they knew where to strike, the patrol times, the best hiding spots. Gaius did tell us that they came from the old emergency passages only the Royal Family and their advisors know of.”

Maribelle, representing her state, voiced the next logical question. “What know, Prince Chrom? We can’t wait for Plegia to make the next move!”

I suggest that as soon as your meeting is over, you make haste towards the Feroxi army that should still be at least five days away from the capital. You will need to reach them fast and then make haste toward Ylisstol to reinforce the garrison. Trying to send the Exalt to Ferox is a risk as many assassination parties will be ready to intercept you. The Plegians will come from the south by the sea with a force of 7,000 soldiers, so you won’t be able to intercept them in time. The eastern castle will have fallen by the time you reach it, so please don’t risk the Exalt. Fortifying Ylisstol is the best tactical option.

“For now, we need to march towards the Feroxi army and help them speed up their approach towards the capital,” Chrom said with determination. “We can no longer risk going to the eastern palace, that place could already be compromised.”

Nodding in agreement, Robin continued the line of thought. “So far, all the information we have gotten has been reliable. We know that in four days Plegia will attack the capital with a force of 7,000 soldiers.” Gasps of fear echoes through the room but the tactician didn’t stop. “They will move assassination teams near the border with Ferox and probably have them already placed in the eastern palace.” The Hierarch might have heard of this plan before the meeting and already notified his Plegian contact, so this plan was busted. “We don’t know if there are any more spies amongst our staff, but for now, our best hope is to fortify Ylisstol. We shall ask for volunteers among our people and try to evacuate as many non-combatants as we can towards the inner walls.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to send as many people as we can away?” asked a portly noble, weighting the value of the suggestion. “We don’t want people in the crossfire.”

“Unless you want to use the civilians as bait to divide their forces, our best bet is to keep them within the inner walls of Ylisstol and prepare traps, using our knowledge of the territory to our advantage.” The noble blanched at the suggestion. Robin pressed on, not letting the nerves of the situation get the
better of him. “We don’t have the forces to guard them on their way to another location. Or even somewhere safer to place them in. As it is right now, we have sufficient food, water, and manpower in the city. The walls will protect us during a siege. We’ve got a total force of 1,600 soldiers in the city and our closest towns. We can issue a recall for the troops we sent to reinforce the outer garrisons, but that’s a gamble since I can’t be sure they won’t send forces to those places. We can hold and hope that we receive reinforcements in time.”

No one else spoke up because no one had a better plan. Despite their misgivings over his nationality, they knew the tactician was right. Sending people away was a risk since they lacked the soldiers to protect them and such an act would only weaken their current forces.

The Exalt eventually decided it was time for action, “We shall proceed with your plan. I shall stay in the city with my people and help in any way I can.”

Robin nodded, already expecting her decision. Chrom wasn’t happy about it, but even he understood that they had little options right now. “Very well, Your Grace. Here is what we have planned…”

The next few hours were spent discussing their next actions. Robin hoped that with this plan the final warning in the letter didn’t come true.

*Should they capture the Exalt, Gangrel would have her transported to Plegia for a public execution.*

*Do not let any of this happen.*

*Good luck,*

*Marth.*

Gathering the Shepherds was an easy affair. Most were already waiting for an update on the situation. Amongst the warriors present in the barracks were also the representatives of various divisions of the Feroxi Army and Ylissean Knights, ready to spread the orders to their soldiers.

“So the Hierarch was the traitor?”

“Greedy Ol’ bastard. Who knew he was playing Emmeryn for so long? She trusted him and he could’ve sold her out.”

“I heard that we are outnumbered eight to one!”

“Bah, we will show those Plegian dogs that a Feroxi is worth ten of them!”

Rose blocked out all the chatter, more focused on her leader’s announcement. The demi-goddess hoped that the letter she wrote under Marth’s name would be enough to get the military moving and organizing a better defense for the capital. In the other timelines, Ylissot’s fall was devastating and there were heavy casualties during the invasion and subsequent occupation. The damage done to the city and the surrounding area was extensive and would hurt Ylisse’s economy for years to come, even with the riches taken from Plegia as spoils of war. Rose wouldn’t risk it happening again. They will need much help against Grima and his minions. Sure, things might still work out, but that was no reason not to stack the odds in her favor.

The Plegian mercenary rested by a pillar away from the crowd until Chrom finally walked into the stage, followed closely by her twin brother. They both looked tired, but there was clear determination in their stances, as if ready to stop the storm with their bare hands.
“Thank you all for coming. I shall keep this short as time is of the essence,” greeted the prince. “As some might already hear, we expect a force of 7,000 Plegians to assault the capital in four days time. The Feroxi army at it’s current pace won’t make it in time.”

It was a testament to their discipline that the general reaction was stoic acceptance. Even the inexperienced soldiers knew this was a possibility, something their commanders drilled into their skulls since the start of the war.

“It is of the uttermost importance that the army reaches the capital as soon as possible. For that reason I will personally lead a small team to meet them and increase their pace.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to send a messenger, milord? Or a few Pegasus knights?” asked the leader of the clerics in clear worry. “I don’t personally like the idea of risking your life in such a manner.”

“We anticipate that is what they expect us to do and have teams ready to deal with such forces,” explained Chrom with shake of his head. “No, this is too important to risk. I shall do so myself. My tactician shall come with me to help organize their troops in the best way possible.” The cleric didn’t look appeased at all. “I understand your worry, but what kind of prince would I be if I’m not willing to risk my life for my people?” That silenced any protest at his decision.

“Who will lead the city forces during your absence, Sir?” asked one of the Pegasus knights.

Chrom looked like expected such question and was certainly prepared for it. “We discussed it and we’ve come to the conclusion to put one of our best strategic minds on the job.”

Rose was thinking of all the people that fitted as candidates. She hoped that it would be someone that will listen to her suggestions. ‘Maybe Virion? Frederick, and Phila could present problems, but I might be able to work something out. Not bad choices but they lack experience with bigger armies… Wait, what did he just sai–’

“Lady Rose Sustrai shall work as temporary tactician of the defender’s of Ylisstol,” Chrom announced, shocking her and many of those present. “She has demonstrated a cunning mind and experience in tactics that will surely prove an advantage in countering the Plegian offensive. Her suggestions to our tactician and her displays in combat prove this.”

Well, Rose certainly could say she didn’t saw this coming. She expected maybe one of the generals of the Feroxi Army or a retired Ylissean commander from the last war, but not for him to push the position on her.

It wasn’t a bad choice, though. Rose had more than enough experience and many plans she could execute. She spent many nights were thinking on how she prevented the fall of the city had she been here.

But he didn’t know that.

Stumbling a little with her words, she spoke her own doubts. “I… milord, I understand your reasoning and I will do my best if you believe it’s the right choice, but as you can see…” She motioned to some of the Ylisseans present already voicing their disagreement. “My nationality might be a problem amongst the troops.”

Surprisingly it was Lon’qu who spoke in her favor. “The Feroxi respect your strength. Your fight in the arena earned you that much. They will follow your orders without question.”

“I understand that there is some… distrust amongst my comrades,” the prince said, struggling to find a nice word.
'Well, that was a polite way of putting it,’ she thought sarcastically.

“For that reason, we decided to divide the Shepherds into two groups. Sumia, Lissa, Frederick, Sully, Vaike, Ricken, Virion, Gaius and Panne shall come with me to the Feroxi army.”

“Of the Shepherds, we shall leave those that we feel will follow your orders with little problem. Stahl, Miriel, Maribelle-” ‘Seriously? Her? Following my orders?’ “…Lon’qu, Anna and Donnel-”

“What about me Captain?” as voice interrupted

“… and Kellam shall stay and work under you. Is that acceptable?”

Knowing this was the best course of action, Rose accepted the position. Standing straight, she saluted her commander. “Very well, your majesty. As long as they agree to follow my orders, I shall do my best.”

Stahl was the first to voice his agreement, “You’ve got my trust. We shall protect Ylisstol from any enemy.”

Adjusting her classes, Miriel stepped forwards. “I do look forward to seeing your full potential, both in the field and leading troops. It will make for an informative thesis.”

“Hmmm, I do hope you prove this faith is not misplaced,” Maribelle added.

Lon’qu grunted, nodding slightly as a sign of support. “Just point me at the enemy.”

“Well, if the city falls it will cut into my profits, so I shall help.” Anna might have used gold as an excuse, but she loved the city as much as any Ylissean.

“Ya know I got yer back, Miss Rose! We shall kick them all the way back to the desert!” Donnel stated with conviction.

“As long as you remember to count me in your plans, I don’t think we shall have any issues,” Kellam said, remind them he was there.

Rose did her best to control her emotions. Her mouth was dry and her heart beating fast against her chest. She never expected to earn support from this people again, but it wouldn’t do for her to lose her composure. “I shall do all in my power to make sure your trust isn’t misplaced.”

Chrom smiled, pleased to see the support for their mercenary. “I know you will.”

Robin fastened the saddle of his horse and proceeded to check his provisions one last time. The ride will be tiresome but there was no time to waste. Little rest will be available to them until they reach the army and every second counted. The rest of his team were almost ready, just doing last minute inspections on their gear.

“Make sure to take enough water with you.” Rose’s voice said from behind him. To Robin’s credit, this time he didn’t jump too high.

“I know, I know. It’s already packed in an enchanted waterskin,” He said, clutching his chest. He frowned a little, worry painted on his face. “Are you ok? We did spring this on you. I was worried you would reject the position”

Rose patted his shoulder, growing solemn. “ I’ll admit I had half a mind to do just that, but I understand that it’s the best course of action available to us. Virion won’t take the position, the others
lack the knack to adapt to the changing battlefield and the experienced generals aren’t present. Don’t worry, I shall protect this city to my last breath.”

“Quite the devotion for a hired sword,” he couldn’t help but tease.

An unladylike snort escaped the woman. “What can I say? I’m worth the price of my contract.”


The mercenary smiled wryly at the compliment. “Give it time. One day you may surpass me, but don’t think I’ll make it easy,” she said in a playful tone. After a moment, she reached inside her coat and pulled a long object covered in cloth. “Here. I was gonna sell this to Anna, but I think it will serve you better.”

Opening the gift, Robin was presented with the sight of a Levin Sword. The enchanted blade vibrated with electricity, eager to run free from the confines of the runes.

“I can’t accept this! This is a rare sword! It must cost a fortune!” Robin exclaimed, trying to return the blade to its original owner.

The female tactician just pushed the sword back into his hands. “Just take the damn thing. As a gift for your vote of trust.” She crossed her arms, looking slightly away. “We Plegian tactician’s have watch each others backs.”

Robin frowned in thought, understanding where she was coming from. Trust was a hard thing to earn and he still struggled to earn it from some of the Shepherds. Tightening his hold on the blade, he then secured it to his side. “I… Thank you,” he said sincerely. “For all the support you’ve give us.”

Rose just offered a nod and a smile. “Take care of yourself. I expect you back in one piece.”

“I expect the same from you,” Robin said, hoping this wouldn’t be the last conversation he had with his mysterious friend.
Preparations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A mix of emotions boiled in the pit of Emmeryn’s stomach. The Exalt’s day had been nothing short of hectic. Howe’s trial had merely been a formality, as his cold confession in the council chambers, along with the evidence Chrom had gathered, had been more than enough to prosecute him. Treason was not something that could be easily forgiven.

But in the end, the decision was taken from her hands. During the trial, Howe had dropped dead on the floor, foam coming out of his mouth. No one knew how he had gotten his hands on the poison, but after his death the information was irrelevant. The Hierarch had decided to take his own life, escaping whatever punishment the court would have decided for him. Some felt a lack of justice had been served, others felt the man had gotten what he deserved.

Emmeryn just felt an emptiness at the lack of closure.

She still couldn’t understand why Howe would turn on her. Was her dream of peace simply so foolish that her eldest advisor had lost his faith in her?

The Exalt looked at her city from the top of the castle walls. It seemed peaceful now, but soon the capital would be under siege, and the streets would be flooded with the blood of friends and foes alike. Even now, she could feel a slight air of tension.

Emmeryn had always hated the idea of people suffering. She felt like she had failed her citizens, knowing that the Plegian army was marching towards them with the intent of bloodshed. But she couldn’t show that weakness right now. Her people needed a strong leader.

She had to give them that much, at least.

The sound of the gates opening captured the Exalt’s attention, and she gripped the hilt of the dagger she had hidden in her robes. Despite her pacifist tendencies, the ruler of Ylisse was no fool. Long ago, she had asked Phila teach her how to wield a knife in case someone had ever tried to hurt her or her family, and got close enough to attempt the deed. She hated even thinking about fighting, but she wouldn’t leave herself totally unprepared. Emmeryn would’ve preferred a tome but it would’ve been too bulky to carry in her robes.

Something she might need to change soon.

Her fears were unfounded, however, for it was only the current head-tactician of the city’s defenses who stood at the door, with a look of mild surprise visible on her face.

“My apologies for intruding, Your Grace. I didn’t expect to find anyone up here.” Rose quickly apologized, moving back to the door. “I’ll leave you to your thoughts.”

“Oh! There’s no need for that, Lady Rose. You are not intruding,” Emmeryn said with a genuine smile as she motioned the tactician to her side. “I like coming up here to think.”

“I can see why,” commented the tactician, as she moved closer, seemingly enjoying the sight of the city’s skyline. “Ylisstol is a beautiful city, Milady, and it’s in no small part thanks to your efforts.”

“You’re too kind, but it’s the people that make this place great,” said the Exalt, trying to downplay
her role, though still smiling politely at the compliment. "I just try to give them the chance."

"Do not belittle your role, Milady," Rose chastised lightly. "Your dedication to your ideals and the ideals themselves have won the hearts of Ylisse and many others. Even on the road, I have heard many people speak fondly of your efforts."

"It warms my heart to hear such words, to know that my work has reached the hearts of others. But enough about me," Emmeryn said, as she turned to the Plegian woman. "How are you feeling, Lady Rose?"

The tactician tilted her head in confusion. "What do you mean, Your Grace?"

"All this," clarified the Exalt as she motioned to the camp full of soldiers directly below the balcony. "Leading the army, managing our defenses, planning stratagems... It’s a great responsibility, and I was worried this entire situation would prove overwhelming to you," explained the Exalt with an apologetic tone. "I dislike having to ask another to help fix my father’s mistakes."

A look of understanding flashed through Rose’s face as she finally understood what the Exalt meant. "It has been a surprising turn of events, I’ll admit. When your brother hired me, I initially thought I would only work as a soldier, perhaps maybe as an advisor at times.” Rose gave a small chuckle, much to Emmeryn’s surprise. “I certainly didn’t expect to be put in charge of such a large force ever again, let alone a full army. It’s been awhile since my last time commanding, so I’m still working the rust off.” The grandmaster’s voice took a deadly serious tone at this point. “But I’m up to the challenge. I hate losing, so I plan to give it my best. This city will not fall under my watch.”

Emmeryn couldn’t stop her relieved smile from breaking out on her face. “I can see why my brother and Sir Robin insisted that you be given the role. I appreciate your conviction, and I’m glad that we have someone like you on our side, Lady Rose.”

Raising her hand in a placating manner, Rose spoke with a noticeable blush on what was visible of her face. “Please, Your Grace. I told you to call me Rose. I lack any formal title to be referred to by, especially from someone of your station.”

A chuckle escaped the Exalt’s lips, which she tried in vain to cover up with a faked cough. “My apologies. It’s hard to break years of etiquette training.”

"If I may be so bold, your brother has no such issues. Quite the opposite, in fact.”

“Something which I’m glad for,” said the Exalt with a pleased smile. “I’ve dedicated my life to making sure Chrom and Lissa have the freedom to choose their own paths. That they would be able to bond with others, and enjoy the simpler joys of life, unburdened by the responsibilities of the position of Exalt.”

A strange look flashed across Rose’s features. It was over in an instant, so Emmeryn couldn’t discern its meaning. “But what about you, Lady Emmeryn? Don’t you want to have such bonds, too?”

“Oh, please do not misunderstand. I do enjoy being able to call Phila my friend, along with many of the castle staff that have been at my side during my reign.” Emmeryn’s voice took a more sorrowful tone, and a rare hint of frustration when she continued. “And before last night, I thought I could include Howe amongst them. I still don’t understand why people cannot just talk things out. I know there are many issues that have deep roots, but I still believe we should never give up looking for a peaceful solution. Resorting to violence so quickly-”

“He was foolish.” That response surprised Emmeryn, which didn’t go unnoticed by the tactician.
“My apologies, Your Grace, but it’s true. Plegia was more than likely going to kill him after their invasion. Why would Gangrel trust a man that betrayed his previous ruler? And a Ylissean, at that! Does Gangrel not wish for a grisly end for *all* Ylissians?” Rose shook her head. “No. Plegia played the man for his usefulness. They never had an intention of allowing him to step a single foot in their court, or even letting him live. He would have been executed the instant he entered their custody.”

“Then why? That’s what I don’t understand. Why not simply come to me with those doubts? We could have found a solution. We have already managed to acquire assistance from Ferox, and the Shepherds have gained some very promising members. How could he go as far as plotting the downfall of our entire halidom, without looking for a better alternative?” The Exalt’s tone was almost pleading. She wanted answers to appease the hurt she still felt deep inside.

Rose regarded her silently for a few moments.

“Fear and desperation make people do foolish things, Lady Emmeryn.” She finally spoke. “Sometimes, people are in situations where they don’t know how to react, and their judgment is clouded if they think they can get a semblance of control. And sometimes…” Rose’s voice took a distant tone. “Sometimes bad things simply just happen.”

“…Perhaps it really is just as simple as that…” Emmeryn said.

Rose looked conflicted for a moment as if having an internal debate. “I understand your pain, milady,” the tactician said reluctantly, gaining Emmeryn’s attention. Sighing in apparent resignation, Rose looked at Emmeryn with a sad smile, though her gaze was distant. “I once was part of a team, not that different from the Shepherds. I thought I could trust them. They were my family, they took me in when I had nothing. I even went so far as to fall in love with my commander.” Her tone grew colder as her eyes hardened. “But someone spread distrust towards me amongst their ranks, thanks to my Plegian lineage. They feared I would turn out like my bastard of a father, and become yet another mindless Grimleal fanatic.”

Emmeryn could hear the scorn in her voice at the mention of her father. It was clear she had no love for the man – something she could relate with. But what Rose said next shook her to the core, especially the way she mentioned it so casually.

“And so the man that I loved stabbed me through the chest and left me to die. But it seemed fate had other plans for me. A punishment, or perhaps redemption. Atonement.”

“What do you mean?”

“He was not my first love. I was once married to a wonderful man. We had three beautiful children: two girls and a boy. Indeed, there were problems here and there, but we were, at the very least, happy.”

Her tone grew flat upon her next words.

“But it turned out I was cursed by my father. He used a spell to control me through our bloodline, and forced me to kill my husband as revenge for defying him.”

Emmeryn’s’ hands flew to her mouth. Rose only continued on, as if she had not noticed.

“His dying words were to reassure me it wasn’t my fault. He was always so thoughtful. That sweet, foolish man deserved better than a cursed wife…”

“Dear Naga…” Emmeryn felt sick. The amount of pain her past had brought her over the years couldn’t have even begun to compare to the mercenary tactician’s twisted history of suffering. “Your
children... Your son and daughters. What happened to them?”

“...They are lost to me.”

Emmeryn didn’t have the heart to inquire any further. It was clearly a painful topic.

Rose closed her eyes as she continued. “Maybe it’s for the best that they’ll never see or hear of me again. That way, my cursed luck won’t follow them. Even though I eventually hunted down and turned my father into a pile of ashes, I can no longer trust myself to be close to people I care about. I can only hope that they are safe, even if they loathe my very existence. I don’t think I could blame them if they did… Once they learned of my history, that past contributed to the discord with the team I mentioned earlier. Those are some of the many reasons, among others, why I prefer to work alone, or in short contracts. There’s less chance of building trust with people that might eventually betray you. Besides, mercenary contracts are not the best way to build relationships.”

“Though you seem rather close to Sir Robin.”

“I see a lot of myself in him. Maybe it’s because we’re both of Plegian heritage, or that we’re both tacticians by trade, or because I know what it’s like to be taken in by another when you have nothing,” Rose averted her gaze, avoiding Emmeryn’s concerned expression. “The Shepherds remind me of my... stab-happy former friends. I guess I just don’t want him to be hurt like I was. You’ve seen how certain people treat us, just because of our roots.”

“I’m so sorry. I had no idea,” apologized Emmeryn, still worried about touching such a delicate topic. “It wasn’t my intention to make you relive such painful memories.”

“Do not concern yourself; I did not expect you to,” Rose soothed, trying to calm the Exalt. “My apologies. It seems I have soured the mood. I just hope you don’t think less of me, or my abilities, because of my tale. I know that hearing my illustrious story mustn’t have inspired confidence.”

The Exalt shook her head, denying her statement. “If anything, this has only increased the respect I have for your fortitude and strength of mind.” Emmeryn tapped her cheek for a moment, pondering something. Her face lit up as a thought occurred to her. “How about this, then? I will call you Rose if you call me Emmeryn.”

The tactician was taken aback by the offer. “I- Milady, I don’t think that’s appropriate for someone of my station! I’m just a mercenary.”

“You are working hard to defend my people. I think you’ve earned the right for a little informality.”

“I’m not sure I want to burden you with my cursed luck. I do not think-”

“Rose, as Exalt, my life is always in danger. Let me take a few risks.” Emmeryn gave a reassuring smile that caused the last of Rose’s defenses to crumble away.

“I- well… If you insist, your Gra-” The tactician stopped herself for a moment, grinning slightly at her habit. “Emmeryn.”

Both women shared a laugh, glad to have formed a new blooming friendship, despite the misgivings one of them may have had.

One whose counterpart had been cut painfully short in another time and place.

“Well, the information I requested from our scouts should be arriving soon. I’ll be in the barracks if you have need of me.” Rose bowed to her new friend, still showing due respect.
The Exalt nodded, understanding that time was of the essence. “I, too, will need to return to my duties soon. Take care, Rose.”

Emmeryn received a sincere smile in return. “You too, Emmeryn.”

“I don’t trust her.”

“I heard you the first fifty times already, Sully.”

The red-haired knight only snorted, deciding to just glare pointedly at her commander.

The ride towards the Feroxi forces had been fast paced, and the Shepherds were taking a small rest near a creek. They would never make it on time if their horses dropped dead from exhaustion, or if they were ambushed and tired, so they made time for a break. Currently, the Shepherds were checking their provisions and gear, making sure everything was in order.

“Then why aren’t we marching back and putting Phila or Frederick in charge?!” Sully gritted out in frustration. “Every minute we spend wasting here is another blasted minute that woman gets to poke holes in our defenses!

The prince stopped checking his armor for dents and faced the red-haired cavalier with a stern gaze. “Look. I understand that you don’t trust our Plegian members, but I don’t feel this distrust and hostility is warranted. They have fought by our side twice already, and they have yet to do anything to prove the trust we placed in them was misplaced.”

The cavalier grunted disbelievingly at the response. “Mercenaries have no honor, Chrom. My whole life I’ve followed the code of a Ylissean knight, and that code is pretty clear that accepting coin for taking a life is the calling of the lowest of the low,” Sully explained with furrowed brows, crossing her arms and not backing down. “Not only that, but my family has always been devout followers of Naga, so excuse me if I don’t trust a Plegian sellsword who wears a Grimleal robe!”

“There’s more to this, isn’t there?” Chrom asked seriously.

Sully would have sneered at any other person for pointing out the obvious, but refrained from doing so now, as Chrom had earned her respect long ago. “Don’t you think it’s weird that we’ve managed to meet two Plegians in matching robes within less than a month of one another? One with a convenient case of amnesia and another who just happens to be in Ferox, where we were heading?”

“After we found Robin, we saw Marth fall from a portal in the sky, just before we fought a horde of undead abominations.” Chrom paused for a moment, only now actually thinking about what he just said, then just shrugging it off. “Stranger things have happened.”

“Fair enough,” Sully grumbled, conceding the point, but still clearly not satisfied. “I still don’t get why you put her in charge of all our defenses. There are plenty of Feroxi or Ylisseans that know how to deal with an army.”

“She’s smart. Rose has shown capabilities in tactics that Virion and Robin have praised. I’ve been present for some of their strategic practice sessions and even tried playing against her once. She decimated every single one of us with few losses. Even if she doesn’t share it, it’s clear she has experience leading big groups. She’s pragmatic, but also takes cares of those under her command, shown by her low casualty rates. I believe she was the best choice for the role.” His gaze grew hard with determination, suddenly showing some of the traits that were part of the reason people followed
him as their leader. “But don’t take me for a blindly trusting fool, Sully. The Feroxi and Ylissean captains still remain in the city, and they won’t follow orders that could jeopardize their soldiers or chances of victory. If she really has good intentions, which I believe, then the captains should see no issues with her orders, as long as they prove sensible. She’s not alone and has many people watching her moves. But I don’t believe the respect of the Feroxi is unfounded, so I’m sure everything will work out.”

The unusually analytical and pragmatic statement took the cavalier by surprise. “I… You’ve really thought this out.”

Chrom snorted, losing the stony look and giving her a wry smile. “I feel that I should be offended. You think so little of me.”

Sully chuckled in response, not passing the chance to tease her friend now that her fears were assuaged. “Sorry, boss, but sometimes I forget you have a brain behind that ‘pretty boy’ face you have.”

“Gee, thanks,” replied the prince, with a sarcastic tone.

“Look, I can’t speak for the others, but I’ll guess I’ll try to give her the benefit of the doubt. But if she turns on us, I’ll hold you responsible. The same goes for the brainiac over there.”

Chrom nodded, accepting her answer. “An understandable sentiment. But I really do feel I’ve nothing to worry about.”

“You really think she can handle the situation in the capital?” The redhead couldn’t keep the doubt from her voice.

The prince nodded with confidence. “I’m sure she’ll do fine. She has some of Ylisse’s finest at her side.”

Rose glared at the inventory list as if it had personally offended her. The intensity of her scowl could have withered an entire farm’s worth of crops before incinerating it with pure hateful emotion alone. The poor messenger that had carried the report was sweating arrows and looked like she was currently fighting every primal instinct to run for safety whenever the tactician directed her fury in the messenger’s direction.

At the very least, the messenger had discipline.

“What do you mean ‘this is all we have’?” growled the Plegian mercenary, with a dangerous edge to her words.

Managing to find her voice, the messenger answered hesitantly. “W-well ma’am… We really didn’t have much armor or weapons in our armory, after the last war. When Lady Emmeryn demilitarized Ylisse, we sold most of our gear to Ferox in order to help pay the reparation to our people…”

“So you’re telling me that all we have is 114 old bronze armors, 143 bronze swords, 153 bronze axes, 122 bronze lances and 113 bows to equip our guards and militia with against a force of 7000 fully-armed Plegian soldiers?”

The disparity was starting to hurt her brain. No wonder Ylisstol had fallen so easily in both of her previous timelines. They had nothing to defend themselves with.
Cautiously, the girl nodded assent. “Y-yes ma’am.”

“It says here that our elite Pegasus knights use iron lances? Just iron lances? Am I reading this correctly?”

Nervously, the messenger nodded again. “That’s what Captain Phila stated, ma’am.”

“Not even steel?” Rose was aware that her tone was almost equal parts disbelieving and whining. Not that she would ever admit it.

The girl shook her head this time. “No, ma’am.”

“Frederick has a silver lance! Surely if we have such a small militia, we can equip them with good gear!”

“That lance was a birthday gift from Prince Chrom if I’m not mistaken. Sir Frederick wouldn’t stop talking about it for a fortnight.”

Rose was close to ripping her hair out.

“What about magic tomes? Or staves? Do we have any that we can spare?”

The girl seemed to shrink under Rose’s glare as she considered the wisdom of giving a truthful answer. “A-All tomes and staves are procured personally by every spellcaster in service of the crown. We have extra staves from the clinics, but few tomes have not been altered or personalized by their current owners.”

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Rose took a deep breath and counted to ten. It wouldn’t do for her to accidentally incinerate this girl just because she lost her cool. Not to mention that it wouldn’t earn her any points with the rest of the soldiers if she killed the messenger.

On the bright side, this time they had the vanguard of the Feroxi army on the city with them, fully equipped and ready to fight.

“And to finish this magnificent batch of good news…” the tactician drawled while pointing at the various marks on her map. “Our perimeter defenses consist of only eighteen catapults and sixteen ballistae for the entirety of Ylisstol’s walls?”

The brave, foolish girl seemed to have an internal battle as she shifted side to side. Her eyes darted around, searching for an escape route before offering one last piece of information along with what could possibly be her life. “F-Fifteen ballistae, ma’am,” she gulped. “Some of the squires broke one when they tried to move it.”

Rose growled.

The messenger whimpered.

Confusion was plainly visible on Stahl’s face. Looking around the old rundown district around him, he still couldn’t understand why his presence was required, along with that of two dozen guardsmen pulling the empty carts behind them.

Finally gathering the courage to ask, he tapped Rose on the shoulder to get her attention. A dangerous move, since she had been irritated all morning, which was further evidenced by the way
she growled in response.

“Hey, Rose. What are we doing here?”

“We’re getting gear for our troops,” she responded shortly, not bothering to look at him as she surveyed the surrounding area.

Stahl mimicked her action, trying to find anything worth his attention among the dilapidated streets. “In this old district? Why? There are no stores or blacksmiths in this part of Ylisse.”

“…No wonder crime happens under your noses. Just keep quiet and let me do the talking.”

The knight felt he should have been offended by that statement, but wisely chose not to voice it. It never did any good to create animosity between teammates, especially in such tense times, so he decided to just trust that tactician knew what she was doing. Though in the end, her comment still left him just as confused as he was before.

They stopped in front of what appeared to be an abandoned warehouse if the illegible signs and boarded-up windows were of any indication. Before he could ask any questions, Rose kicked the door to the warehouse with her monstrous strength. It flew right off its hinges, exploding into a shower of splinters against the dusty floor, making some of the younger guards jump in surprise.

Stahl followed her as she stomped inside the building, his hand firmly set on the hilt of his sword. Then he watched as Rose took a deep breath before shouting at the top of her lungs. “SAMUEL! I KNOW YOU’RE IN HERE!”

A sound of something falling alerted the Ylissean knight to the fact that they weren’t alone. With a hand sign, eight of the guards took their positions at his side.

From the shadows along the walls emerged five armed men, though they looked taken aback when they saw the Exalt’s soldiers present. Following them came an old and portly man, with a white beard and a bald head. He was leaning heavily on a cane and the way he moved indicated that he had a problem with his right leg.

The old man squinted at the two Shepherds, only to groan in recognition when his eyes focused on the mercenary tactician. “Ah shit. It’s you.”

“Good to see you again, Samuel.” Rose greeted flippantly, completely ignoring the tension in the room. “How’s your leg doing, you old fossil?”

Samuel’s face turned red in fury but he refrained from doing anything rash in front of the armed soldiers. “Terrible! I have to put the darn thing in hot water every day just to make the pain manageable, you crazy broad! Walking feels like I have glass stabbing me all the time!”

“Well then, maybe you shouldn’t have groped my ass.” The temperature in the room seemed to drop together with the temperature of her voice. In the corner of his eye, Stahl could see frost gathering on the edges of the windows.

The feeling was over as fast as it had started, however, and Rose continued on without a hitch. “But if you need a reminder of why that was a bad idea, I can always repeat the lesson.”

She cracked her knuckles, making the viridian knight cringe at the idea of being on the receiving end of a beating from a pissed-off Rose fueled by effeminate fury. Training was already a painful experience and she wasn’t ever serious during their fights. A fight caused by her wounded feminine
pride would have been most definitely fatal.

Sensing the fine edge he was walking and taking a step back, the old man put his hands up in surrender. “OK, OK! Damned woman… What do you want from me?”

The tactician pointed at one of the many crates on the floor. “Your merchandise.”

The old man eyed the guardsmen and snorted derisively. “…Somehow, I get the feeling you’re not here as a paying customer.”

“You’re not as dumb as you look, fossil.” The viridian knight watched as Rose pulled a scroll out of her robe and made a show of clearing her throat. “Under the authority of Exalt Emmeryn Lowell, Ruler of Ylisse, we’re confiscating this illegal contraband for the use of the Ylissean people in their war effort against the Theocracy of Plegia.”

The old man sputtered, almost losing the grip on his cane and toppling over. “You-! Wha-! All of it? You can't just do that!”

If it wasn’t for her hood, Stahl would have seen the condescending eyebrow the tactician raised at his denials. “In case you haven’t noticed, I have an entire platoon of guardsmen along with a certified knight of Ylisse at my side. We outnumber you and, let’s be honest here,” Rose said as she tapped the hilt of her sword. “You know what I’m capable of.”

“This will ruin my business!” Samuel shouted at the unfazed tactician.

“My heart bleeds for you, it really does.” In Stahl’s opinion, Rose couldn't have sounded less sincere if she had tried with all her might. “But you’re in luck! Right now we don’t have the time to be bothered prosecuting you and your underlings.” Rose exclaimed, uncharacteristically cheerful, much to the knights surprise. “Furthermore, I just washed my coat, and I really don’t feel like staining it with your blood. Getting rid of your corpses would be more work that it’s worth. So, in my infinite and generous mercy, I’ll cut you a deal. You guys can leave the city right now, no questions asked. We get to keep the merchandise, and you don’t find out what your pain threshold is for kidney removal. Okay?”

“I-! You-!” In any other situation, Stahl would’ve found the old man’s rapid change of expression amusing. Now, it was just plain sad. “Fine… We’ve your word that we can leave the city without any problems?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just don’t make trouble on your way out, and you can continue your little arms operation elsewhere.”

“Grrr…” Samuel ground his teeth in a barely concealed fury before reluctantly looking at his subordinates. “Men! We’re leaving!”

The guards didn’t move to stop them from leaving, too confused by the situation.

“Pleasure doing business with you! Hope to see you again!” Rose shouted, rubbing the verbal boiling acid into the festering wound. She received an irate response in the form of very colorful profanities as the speaker disappeared down the street.

Finally gathering his wits, Stahl asked the question that was on everyone's mind. “Okay, what just happened?”

Rose paused her scan of the room and looked at him in confusion. “Hmm? Oh! That? That was Samuel. He’s a weapons smuggler that deals in contraband between Ferox, Ylisse, and Valm.” Stahl
and the guards could only stare with open mouths at the ease with which she spoke of crime in their supposedly pure city. “Luckily for us, he doesn’t make deals with Plegia, since Gangrel wants him crucified. Don’t ask me why. I personally think it would just be a waste of perfectly good wood and nails.”

“There’s a smuggling operation here in Ylisstol?!” one of the guardsmen shouted.

The look he received was so pitying that it could have made Miriel feel inadequate. “Oh please. There are smuggling operations everywhere. Plus, we’re hitting six more sites today, so you’d better get used to the idea. Why do you think I had you bring so many carts? Weren’t you all listening to me?”

Stahl wisely refrained from mentioning the fact that she hadn’t shared her plans with them at all and had only ordered them to follow her.

“Why didn’t you report them to the authorities? Or had them arrested?” the knight asked.

“A Plegian walking into Ylisstol to report a crime ring?” The men could practically feel her rolling her eyes as she spoke, her tone dripping with sarcasm. “Yeah, I’m sure that won’t get me thrown in the dungeon under suspicion of complicity.”

Well, didn’t he feel stupid when she pointed that out.

“Eh, alright, alright, I get your point,” Stahl blandly placated as he scratched his head in embarrassment.

“Well, in hindsight I suppose I could’ve dropped a letter or something, but these illegal idiots have their uses. For the most part, they keep the undesirables of your society under control so as not to gather the attention of the authorities. They care about efficiency and profits, so they have a tight leash on the worst criminals.” The woman shrugged. “And in response to your second question, we have more important things to deal with right now rather than wasting time arresting some two-bit criminals. Posting guards on them mean fewer people contributing to the war effort.”

“Speaking of the war, when did you get Lady Emmeryn to write that letter?”

“What? Ah! You mean this? It’s a copy of the shopping list for the kitchen staff.” A satisfied grin stole its way into her face. “But he didn’t know that,” she explained, leaving a bemused Stahl staring at her. “So it really doesn’t matter. Sir Kellam, please help me move these crates.”

“A-at once, Lady Rose!” came a reply.

Stahl jumped at the sound of a voice coming from his side before finally noticing the hulking armored figure of his fellow knight. “Kellam?! When did you get here?!”

Rose answered before Kellam could open his mouth. “He’s been here the entire time.”

The men just watched, stupefied, as she ripped open one of the crates with her bare hands. From inside, Rose pulled out a longsword. It looked pretty high quality if the sheen of its blade was anything to go by. As she rubbed her cheek against its length, Stahl could almost hear the smile in her voice.

“Hello there, beautiful. We’re going to have lots of fun together~”
Cordelia dropped onto one of the benches in the barracks. She was completely exhausted. The recall order for most of the Pegasus knights was a surprise, but orders are orders. The only ones left behind were scouts and those that were setting traps on the abandoned forts and roads that were on the way to the capital from the expected assault points. Some had already reported the sight of small vanguard groups of Plegian soldier scouting the roads. As much as the knights wanted to prevent them from reaching the city, they knew it would be a doomed effort. They would be overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the Plegian Army. They left for the capital on orders of Prince Chrom, ready to assist in its defense.

The prodigal knight sighed as she remembered she missed the chance to see her crush. Chrom had left only a few hours before she arrived in the city. Not that I would’ve made any difference. She always froze and became a stuttering mess when she tried to speak to him.

“Cordelia Tiamo, correct?” Cordelia nearly jumped out of her skin as a voice spoke from her side. Looking up, she came face to face with the temporary head tactician of Ylisse. She’d heard rumors of her strength, and was surprised a Plegian mercenary was given control of Ylisstol’s defense, but it wasn’t her place to question the Crown’s decision.

Standing to her feet, the Pegasus Knight saluted her superior with proper respect. “Ah! Yes, ma’am! How may I assist you?”

“I’ll get to the point. I heard you’re one of the most promising members of the Pegasus Knights. A genius, some say. Would you consider this a truthful statement?”

Cordelia frowned slightly at the praise. Oh, how she hated being called a genius. “I don’t consider myself above anyone, ma’am. We’re all important in our individual roles. I’m just very hardworking, but that doesn’t mean I don’t have my own weaknesses.”

The tactician stared at her for a few moments in silence, as if assessing her. Then she nodded with a satisfied smile. “I appreciate your honesty. It’s nice to work with people that have a good idea of their abilities.” Rose took a sealed letter from robes and handed it to the redhead. “Please report to Sir Stahl Abiven for your new gear. Give him this letter, and he shall give you access to our special equipment. You will also receive a sub-captain position in your squad, working directly under Captain Summers. Please make sure that your squad is properly equipped for the oncoming confrontations.”

The knight was surprised at her sudden assignment. “No disrespect, ma’am, but I’m sure there are better-qualified veterans for that role.”

Rose sighed, shaking her head in denial. “We’re stretched thin as is, so we’re having to promote a lot of people to temporary positions.” The Plegian gazed at the rider with a stern expression. “I trust that you’ll fulfill this duty to the best of your abilities. Do you accept?”

“Y-yes. I’ll do it, ma’am! I won’t fail the people of Ylisstol!” Cordelia saluted once more, understanding the direness of the situation.

The tactician nodded in approval. “Good. If you prove competent in your role, I shall speak with Prince Chrom for a possible reassignment to the Shepherds. We could use another flying unit. You’re dismissed.”

Cordelia had to reign her face from grinning like an idiot at the idea of being closer to her crush. But this wasn’t the time for such thoughts. The redhead made her way to the armory and was surprised to see a group of soldiers moving a lot of heavy-looking crates.
“Stahl? Are you in here?” she called out to her acquaintance, not seeing him in the room.

“Cordelia?” came the voice of Stahl from the back of the room. The man came out from behind a stack of crates, a smile on his face as he greeted the redhead. “Hey! I haven’t seen you in a while. What’s up?”

“It’s good to see you too, Stahl,” she greeted back with a smile. It quickly was replaced by a serious expression as she continued. “Sadly, this isn’t a casual visit. The tactician gave me a letter for you, and told me to meet with you to get new gear.”

“Oh, so you’ve met Rose. Scary girl, let me tell you.” Stahl smile faltered for a moment at the memories. “Anyways, let me see that.” Stahl took the letter and read it in silence, nodding along as she proceeded. “Ah, perfect. I have a crate ready with all this already. One moment.”

The redhead watched as the viridian knight checked many of the crates, looking for one in particular. “So what’s this about ‘special equipment’?”

“You could say we went shopping. But that’s not important.” Cordelia pursed her lips in displeasure at the lack of an answer. With a grunt, Stahl pushed a crate towards her and opened it to check the contents. “Here we go! Twelve silver lances, with two Brave lances for you and Captain Summers. You will need to go to the armorer to have your new armor fitted.”

Cordelia’s eyes almost popped out of her head at the sight of such high-quality gear. “Silver lances? Brave lances? New armor? Where did you find all of this, Stahl?”

The man’s lips twitched in amusement at her loss of composure. “Let’s just say once this war is over, we’ll need to do some hard sleuthing on smuggling rings,” he answered cryptically, as he left the room.

“Smuggling rings? What ar– wait! Don’t leave without explaining! Stahl!”

Standing in the doorway, Rose turned her gaze away from the friendly interaction. It brought up bad memories. Her talk with Emmeryn certainly didn’t help, and without her brother to distract her, Rose had to take the role that she dreaded. Now, the former queen was forced to interact directly with many of the people she swore not to get close to. Rose’s possessed body wasn’t present when her Risen had killed Stahl and Cordelia in the original timeline, but she did remember Stahl’s visit to her cell when Cordelia had perished after her incarceration.

Where was she? She was in a cell, that much she knew; but they couldn’t have been in camp. A fort? That would make sense. Robin tried to remember how she got there, but her head couldn’t focus through the lack of nourishment.

How long had it been since she last had a drop of water? Or enough food to push the hunger away for more than a few minutes? The former tactician couldn’t remember, more focused on trying to distract herself from the feeling of her own stomach trying to eat itself. She was close to eating the flesh from the inside of her mouth and drink the blood that would pour from the wound when the door to her cell creaked open.

A tray with a bowl of raw meat and a small water-skin was dropped in front of her. Moving quickly before the food was taken from her, Robin moved her chained hands and pushed the food into her mouth. Some might have found the meat disgusting, but to Robin, it was the most delicious meal she’d ever had.
Washing the blood away with the little water she had, Robin finally looked at the person that had given it to her. The green armor was a dead giveaway, but she couldn’t recognize the face of the man that should be wearing it. Stahl’s eyes were dead, his gaze distant as he watched her eat. It was strange seeing him without his easygoing smile, but she was used to being on the receiving end of such expressions at this point.

It had been a while since she had any interaction with anyone. Most didn’t stay long after dropping her meals if they bothered delivering them in the first place. She needed the interaction if just to cling to her remaining sanity. “Thank you, Stahl. I kno-”

“Don’t.” The cold tone of his voice made her flinch. “We have orders not to let you die until we have dealt with Grima. That’s all.”

Robin knew it was a lost cause to try to reason with the Shepherds, for they had already made their choice. Still, she couldn’t help but foolishly cling to whatever hope might still exist.

“Stahl, please! You know me! You have to know I don’t want to hurt anyone! I was controlled by Validar against my will!”

“I thought I did, and I wish I could believe that.” The knight picked up the tray, moving towards the door. He spoke without looking back at her. “Cordelia died in battle.”

That felt like a stab to the heart. Another fallen friend to be blamed on her. Stahl’s wife, who he had spent so long courting, and had managed to make Cordelia love him more than she did Chrom.

“We managed to recover her body.” He gave her an empty smile, tears threatening to spill from his eyes. “Turns out she was pregnant. A girl, according to Lissa. Cordy was keeping it a secret, trying not to worry me... We had planned on calling our child Severa, if she was a girl, in honor of Cordelia’s mother.”

Robin didn’t bother to stop her own tears from running free. “Stahl... I’m so sorry...”

His voice was barely above a whisper as he responded with the voice of a man with nothing left to live for.

“So am I.”

Rose shook her head from the depressing memories. The tactician made her way to the barracks in order to continue her rounds. Scanning the room she just entered she found the two Shepherds that were next on her list.

“Donnel. Miriel. Anna. Do you have an update for me?” Rose inquired.

Miriel looked up from her notes and adjusted her glass. “We do.” She opened the journal she had on her hands and proceeded with her report. “The construction of new defenses is going according to plan. The engineers and blacksmiths are working hard to make new siege gear and is fortifying our defenses. The recall orders have been answered, and many of our troops are making their way to the capital as we speak. Evacuation of the outer villages seems to be going smoothly, but we think that Plegia will ignore them in order to focus their entire might against us.”

“That would be the logical course of action. Once you cut the head, the rest will fall easily,” she answered with a scowl. “But we won’t fall.”
The spectacled-woman nodded in agreement. “Well spoken, Lady Rose.”

The farm-boy raised his hand to gain the tactician’s attention. “I also got some news. I managed to gather some volunteers and started teachin’ ‘em how to make some simple traps. It might not be much, but we can give ‘em Plegians a few surprises once they enter the woods and alleys.”

“Make sure to take note of the location of the traps, and inform the leaders of each squad. The last thing we need is to lose soldiers to our own traps.”

“Speaking of such measures, I brainstormed with some of the mages and we have a couple of ideas that we could use.” The mage produced a scroll from her robes, handing it to the tactician. “Please read this and inform us if we have your authorization for their implementation.”

Unrolling the scroll, Rose’s eyes grew wide as she read on. It didn’t take long before a wicked smile grew on her lips. “Can you really do this?”

“Absolutely. All the theories are sound, and we have tested it in one of the training grounds,” Miriel replied with certainty.

“Take two of the crates of tomes we recovered from the warehouse and processed with production. Once you’re done, we will speak of their placement,” commanded Rose.

Miriel nodded with a small satisfied smile. “I shall proceed immediately. By your leave.”

Donnel scratched his head as Miriel departed. “I gotta say, something about this gives me the jeebees.”

“It should. If it works, the Plegian army will get a nasty surprise.” The tactician then gave the farm boy a once over, pursing her lips at the sight. “Donny? Do me a favor, and please get an actual helmet. We’ve gathered enough gear for you to be properly equipped. And get some armor while you’re at it. I don’t want to go to your mom with your corpse because someone cleaved your skull.”

“Heh heh... I kinda like this bucket, Miss Rose,” he replied sheepishly.

“Donnel,” she said seriously.

“Aww… Alright. I’ll get going...” He hung his head as he walked away in defeat.

Rose then looked at the mass-produced merchant. “Anna? Did you manage to get any of what I asked for?”

Said merchant puffed her chest with pride. “Of course. I wouldn’t be the secret seller if I couldn’t,” the merchant said, sniffing the air theatrically. “It wasn’t cheap though ~ ” she singsonged, wiggling her eyebrows.

The mercenary tactician didn’t bother to hide the roll of her eyes. “Well, good thing the crown is picking up the tab,” she snarked. Her expression grew hard. “But enough of that. What do you have for me?”

The redhead took a more serious look, understanding it wasn’t the time for games. “I managed to secure twelve Levin Swords, twenty Arcfire tomes, sixteen Arcwind tomes, fifteen Killer Spears and ten Killer Edges. Sadly, I couldn’t get more tomes or enchanted weapons. There seems to be trouble importing anything from Valm. Something must be happening there, but no one can give me an update.”
‘That’s putting it mildly.’ Rose snarked inwardly. “Make sure the Feroxi Elite is properly equipped, then. All that gold will mean nothing if you and your clients are dead.”

“You got it, boss!” she answered, far too cheerfully, before skipping to her destination, leaving Rose alone.

“Lady Tactician?” a familiar voice called from behind. Turning, the former queen came face to face with the serene expression of the priest Libra. She cooled her expressions, trying not to think of the accusations she had received from the devout of Naga in her last life.

“Yes, Sir Priest? How may I help you?” Rose asked in a professional tone. She was never particularly close to Libra, even if he did preside over her wedding, and his devotion made him one of her most vocal accusers.

The priest replied with a pleasant smile, unaware of her inner conflict. “My name is Libra. I’m representing the Clerics and War Priests, and was sent here to inform you of the state of our work.”

Business talk. Good. She could deal with that. “Please proceed.”

“Of course. We have seen various medical camps across the city, and have gathered all the staves and medicine we have available,” explained the War Priest.

Rose nodded in approval. Things were finally getting back on track. “Very good. Have you received the Steel Axes we sent you?”

“We have indeed. They will prove very valuable protecting our medical camps. We’re also leaving a small contingent to protect the Exalt at all time,” Libra stated with no small amount of determination. At she could count on him for this task.

“Excellent work. Please continue and inform me or Phila of any new developments.”

Libra bowed to the Plegian and replied, “Will do. Naga be with you, Lady Tactician.”

Rose laughed internally at that comment. ‘Heh, if only he knew.’

Lady Maribelle Ducret was the daughter of the Duke of Themis. She was used to dealing with even the most annoying nobles, and she could say she had the patience to deal with difficult people if the situation called for it.

But even she had her limits.

“Is this the best you can do?! Any Plegian would drop dead from laughing if they saw this performance! And you! I haven’t said to stop running! Come on! They won’t wait for you to catch your breath before they cut you down!”

Maribelle was sick of the Plegian’s voice but was too out of breath to express her discontent. Why did she have to do these exercises with the rest of the brutes? She was a Troubadour, not some dirty barbarian! So why did she have to listen to some sellsword harlot’s order?! She was a random commoner, not even a Ylissean, at that, and yet she was put in charge of the city by the Prince, with the backing of the Exalt!

Now here she was, ordering Maribelle and the other recruits into a training regime to loosen their bodies for the oncoming engagement. Her normally perfect curls were disheveled and glued with sweat to her skin. Her clothing was replaced with some bland garments, covered in dirt and sweat,
some which she was sure belonged to their previous owner. Surely a horse rider like herself shouldn’t have to waste her time doing useless exercises like push-ups, right?

Apparently, Phila and Rose disagreed with her. The Wing commander suggested that Maribelle was placed on the “breaking” of the newest Pegasus Knights, right under the tactician’s gaze.

“What’s the matter, ladies?! Afraid to break a nail!? I’ll be sure to write that in your tombs before I spit on them!”

“Plegian strumpet,” Maribelle muttered under her breath, unable to help herself.

Unfortunately for her, the tactician apparently had unnaturally sharp ears.

“What’s that, recruit Maribelle?! You think we need to train harder?! Maribelle’s eyes grew wide at the statement. “Great idea! I’m glad you’re so eager to defend Ylisstol, dear recruit! To share this motivation, all of you will give me 300 push-ups on my count.” Groans were heard. “The first one to give up will be given the task of cleaning the stables, alone! I hope you all have the same enthusiasm as Maribelle over here!”

A chill ran through her spine as she felt the hateful glares from her fellow trainees burning on the back of her head.

“Come on! With me!” Rose dropped to the floor with the recruits and positioned herself ready to do a push-up, much to the recruits’ surprise. “No one here is above anyone. Noble or commoner. Knight or mercenary. Ylissean or Feroxi. Everyone bleeds the same. Everyone is here because they’re willing to fight and die for Ylisse. It’s my job that you live long enough to see the fruit of your efforts, and if I need to sweat and bleed with you, so be it!”

As they progressed with the exercise, Maribelle had to admit she was impressed with the stamina and determination demonstrated by the tactician. It was as if something other than gold was pushing her interests. Maybe – just maybe– she wasn’t so bad for a Plegian commoner.

Those thoughts would change once the noble’s hand slipped on her own sweat, sending Maribelle crashing on the unforgiving ground.

“I expect those stables to be sparkling by the end of the day, recruit Maribelle.”

A very unladylike choice of words remained at the tip of the noble’s tongue.

Logistics were a nightmare. Moving a huge army on such short notice is no easy task, especially when you were working against the clock. The Shepherds arrived at the army’s location with few problems, aside from a small confrontation with a pack of Risen. The real complication started when Robin had to organize all the soldiers that were marching to Ylisstol. Keeping everything organized and timed well was a real challenge, but Robin didn’t let that discourage him. He made good progress and was sure they could make it in time to the capital if everything proceeded as planned.

The tactician heard a familiar set of footsteps coming from behind him. Turning, he saw his commander standing with a concerned expression. “How are the preparations for the march, Robin?” Chrom asked his friend.

Robin frowned slightly until he gave a resigned nod. “As good as they can be on such short notice. I’ve messengers running around, issuing orders, and preparing the troops as best as they can. I’m not sure when we’ll clash with the Plegian army, so it’s best to be ready. I don’t know if the situation has changed much at all. Even if Marth gave us information from the future, the timeline has already
changed, and permutations are bound to happen. We could reach the capital with enough time to intercept them, or we could be too late. We lack too much information to make an educated guess. It could be a trap, or—” the amnesiac trailed off with a nearly desperate tone.

Chrom shook him slightly, regaining his attention. “Hey! Don’t start panicking on me now. I need you strong. Besides, Rose is in charge, along with Phila and many Feroxi veterans. I’m sure they will be able to handle the situation until we arrive.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” the tactician agreed with a chuckle. “This exhaustion is affecting my nerves.”

The prince nodded in agreement. “Then take some rest. We will depart in four hours, and you can’t ride completely exhausted.”

“I… Alright, I guess I can take a break,” Robin admitted.

Slinging an arm around his friend’s shoulders, Chrom guided him to one of the fires. “Good, now come with me, let’s have something to eat.”

The remaining days passed quickly as Ylisstol prepared their defense. Phila was proud of the work her people had put into defending their capital. She could see how much confidence it inspired in the population that Emmeryn stood at their side, not leaving for safety. The wing commander didn’t like the risk, but couldn’t argue against the results.

“We’re as ready as we can be. The traps are set, the siege weapons are loaded, and our troops are properly equipped. Our latest update indicates that the Plegian army is still a day away, so we can implement some additional measures,” Phila informed the tactician as she finished her report. The Wing Commander might still have had her reservations about the Plegian, but she couldn’t deny the tactician had done an admirable job organizing the defenses.

Rose nodded in understanding. “Any word from the Shepherds and the Feroxi Army?”

“None yet. We expect them to arrive in the morning. They might arrive just in time to clash with the Plegian army if they don’t run into any inconveniences.” Phila hated the lack of information they currently had. Much of what they had to work with was incomplete information and guessing.

“All right. Nothing we can do about it, at this point. I want you to make sure the Exalt is safe once the battle starts. Then you’ll join the other riders in battle. We have some griffins and wyvern riders amongst the Feroxi, so that will bolster our forces. And since Plegia won’t be able to move many wyverns on such short notice, we should be even in the skies, now that we’ve recalled the other Pegasus Knights. Land combat will be our main priority.” The mercenary tactician turned her gaze to the present representatives. “The rest of you: All of you have your instructions. Relay them to your teams. I expect everyone to give it your best.” Rose slammed her fist on the table, cracking the hardened wood with sheer strength. “And curses on whoever decides to die with a clean sword!”

The soldiers cheered and dispersed to their stations. Phila had to admit, this woman had skill in leading and motivating an army. She wondered where she learned and practiced such skills. Surely such a tactician would’ve earned at least some fame. Phila observed as Rose started to move to the main observatory when a messenger came running to her with a distressed expression.

“Ma’am! We have spotted the Plegian army! They are getting close to the walls!”

That was like a bucket of cold water being dropped on both the tactician and commander. “What?! What’s the meaning of this?! I was just told they were still a day ahead! How did they sneak the entire army past our scouts!” Rose shouted at the messenger.
“We don’t k-!“

Whatever the messenger was going to say was silenced as an explosion rocked the castle.

A/N: I think the biggest problem I’ve had with this fic is figuring out the numbers for troops. Too big, like 250k and the Shepherds wouldn’t feel like they should have such a big role. Too small and it doesn’t seem like a big conflict. Same problem I’ve with my potential Mass Effect Fic. Fleet sizes. Too small and there is no point in trying to fight the Reapers. Too big and it’s a logistical and economical nightmare the more you think about. But space it’s huge to police with 8 or so ships per system...

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Chapter End Notes

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The Battle of Ylisstol

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The explosion was a beautiful sight for Aversa. Thinking about how the death of their commanders will leave the defenders in disarray and make the invasion a walk in the park made the woman all tingly inside. The illusion spell they used to mask their arrival had worked wonderfully. It was based on the one protecting the Mirage Village if she recalled correctly. At least, that is what the Hierophant told her. It was irrelevant, though. It was time to earn her place in the history books.

Bringing Ylisse to its knees will certainly earn her due fame in Plegia. Lord Grima will certainly be pleased when he awakens from his slumber.

“Vasto,” the Dark Flier called the man behind her.

A young man kneeled before the tactician, awaiting her commands. “Yes, milady? What are your orders?” Queried the Wyvern Commander.

Aversa didn't spare him a glance as she continued her watch over the battlefield. “What’s the status of the siege weapons?”

“Ready to deploy, ma’am.”

“Perfect,” the woman purred in delight. “Breach the walls. Once they’re down, march the army and take the city. Do try to capture the Exalt alive, yes? We need to make an example of her.”

Vasto chuckled. “Of course, milady. Ylisse shall pay for their sins.”

“Yes, they will,” Aversa agreed with the man, internally scoffing at how little he knew about the true purpose of this war. “Oh, and remember to plant our banner on the tomb of Exalt Augustus. It would be only polite to pay our respects to the man responsible.”

A wicked grin spread through Vasto’s face. “As you desire.”

Rose scrambled to her feet, trying to regain her balance after the sudden attack. She gripped Thorn's hilt and coiled her body ready to fight anything that came her way. The tactician glanced at the room, seeing all the soldiers doing the same. “What’s going on?! I need an update right now!”

“The explosion came from the eastern side!” yelled a Feroxi man, pointing towards the window where smoke was visible.

Wasting no time, Rose ran out of the room and was quickly followed by the rest of the soldiers. The hallway was filled with smoke that they had to be careful not to breathe. She was moving swiftly through the corridors when one of the doors busted open, revealing a hooded figure wielding a wicked looking knife.

The man charged at her with hatred in his eyes, “For Plegia! For Grim–!”

He didn’t get to finish his battle cry as Rose sliced off his arm and then slammed his head against the stone walls, producing a sickening crunch indicating a broken skull and neck. The corpse fell to the group with a thud, allowing the tactician to see the gear the man wearing. A dark ensemble with a
hook and rope for climbing walls.

Around her the rest of the soldiers made quick work of the other assassins that came out of their hiding spots, gathering no injuries on their side. A testament to the skill of these warriors.

“Infilitrators,” Rose snarled as she kicked the corpse of the fallen assassin. Her mind raced as she spoke her thoughts aloud, “Eight men. A small team trying to take out the chain of command by blowing the central tower. But we were in the barracks. Outdated information. No mages were present.” The pieces finally clicked into place as she understood what happened. “They must have sneakied in with explosives! But how!? We closed all the passages and screened the castle staff! Unless… The explosives were already here! Damn it all! They must have brought them during the attempt and hidden them! We killed them before they could detonate them, but the next team must have known of their location! Shit!”

Damn that bitch of a sister, Aversa. So that’s how they managed to conquer Ylisstol in the other timelines. As much as she hated to admit it, Rose had to respect her ruthlessness. They must have killed or wounded most of the command chain with that explosion. And with Phila escorting Emmeryn alongside the Shepherds, there was no one to take command, making quick work of whatever defenses were in the city. Lucky for them, she had to move the meeting to a bigger space to fit all the officers. Aversa must not have been able to adapt to this new parameters, but didn’t waste the chance to try. A risky move that could have worked.

“You and Lon’qu make sure that the Exalt is safe. I wouldn’t put it past them to try to assassinate her again and we don’t know if the war clerics will be enough. Once you verify it, I want you to rendezvous with the other Pegasus Knights and keep our skies clear.”

“Miriel! Go to the Arcanum and activate the countermeasures.” Rose glanced at the back of the formation, “Kellam, you will accompany her.” The Shepherds’ heads whipped around to see the armored knight, surprised and ashamed that they didn't notice him again. “No offense, but we can use the fact that people ignore you to get them the drop on them if they try to get close to her. Her long range magic and your close range capabilities will complement each other.”

“Got it,” replied the man as he held his shield and spear.

“Stahl,” she spoke to the knight, who stood at the ready. “Organize the central guardsmen and be ready to respond to the side that needs more help. We still do not know where the bulk of the attacking force will break through. You will also make sure that the evacuation of civilians proceeds to the safe zones according to plan.”

“Yes, Ma’am!” the cavalier saluted and departed in haste to gather his team.

“Donnel, Anna, and Maribelle. You will assist the central medical camp in moving and protecting the wounded. Follow the orders of the central”

“What about you, Rose?” Questioned Anna.

“I will take care of the southern side like I had planned from the start. While I can’t sure yet, I’m confident that is where the invasion will hit the hardest.” As Rose started running she yelled one final message. “Do try not to die! I don't want to hear the prince's whining if that happens!”
“Gee... Thanks for your concern,” deadpanned the secret seller as she and her fellow Shepherds moved to their stations.

Fastening her helmet, Cordelia quickly climbed the saddle of her trusty steed, Perseus, ready to take off. The strong stallion was geared for battle, with light armor plating protecting him. The silver armor they managed to find will help the Pegasus Knights in the upcoming skirmishes.

Trotting to the courtyard, the redhead stood with the rest of her squad, awaiting the orders from their superior officer. They didn’t have to wait long as another figure descended in front of them. Captain Eleanor Summers was a veteran of the last Plegian War and it could be argued that there were few soldiers that loved Ylisse more than her. The older woman gave a quick glance to her squad, assessing their status and apparently deeming them ready.

The Squad Captain didn’t waste them in useless greeting and got to the heart of the issue. “Listen, soldiers! Our squad is going to protect the skies above the central section while the other engage their air forces in other theaters. Any stragglers either on land or air will be dealt with at once! We can’t let them reach the castle or central camps! We’re the last line of defense! Am I clear!?”

“Yes, sir!” chorused the eleven soldiers. They all were ready to fight and die for their kingdom.

Summers nodded, pleased with their conviction. “Good! Now move!” The captain took off, quickly followed by the rest of the squad.

Now that she was in the sky, Cordelia could see how the sudden engagement was affecting Ylisstol. Catapults and trebuchets unload their payload on the oncoming horde of Plegian soldiers. Arrows, boulders, and spells pierced the air with the intent to kill. Flames and smoke were visible all across the capital.

It was a massacre.

A shrill cry snapped her back into attention as a trio of Wyvern Riders appeared from below their formation.

“Dammit! Move! Prepare to flank them! We will fly around and div–”

Summers couldn’t continue issuing her orders for she suddenly plummeted to the ground with an arrow lodged deeply in her neck.

“CAPTAIN!” One of the younger recruits panicked and tried to grab the falling knight, but was hit by a wind spell, knocking her out of her mount and crashing head first into a tiled roof, killing her instantly.

Cordelia could only watch in horror as her comrades were killed before her eyes. Her hands gripped the reins of Perseus in panic. She could hear the other knights scrambling to dodge the sudden barrage of attacks all around her. Training kicked into effect for the redhead as she took control of the situation since she was now the highest ranking member of the squad. She was entrusted with leading her team and was mentally prepared to do so. Time to see if she was the genius everyone said she was.

“QUICK! USE THE TOWERS AS COVER!” she shouted at the top of her lungs, trying to make her voice overpower the rushing wind and hoping that her comrades followed her into cover. The Wyverns followed them closely behind, seemingly confident that the Pegasus Knights were an easy target now that the death of their captain left them in disarray.
Cordelia wasn’t about to let that happen. Putting into action the strategies Sir Robin and Lady Rose had pushed on the army, the new captain sprang into action.

“PAIR UP! FORMATION B!” Cordelia bellowed her order.

Discipline was something was beaten into every recruit by Phila since the moment they joined the academy. The knights reacted and paired with their closest comrade. The pairs gave a sharp turn and, now that they were out of range of the Plegian support, were able to fight at their full ability.

One from each pair flew straight forward while the other dived under their opponents. The Wyvern Knights must not have been very experienced as the move took them by surprise. Hooves stroke against the scaly hide of the wyvern’s head as Ylissean spears clashed with Plegian axes.

While the riders clashed against one another, their partners did not lose time. Striking from below, their spears met the soft scales from the Wyverns underbelly. Even though the strikes were not fatal, they managed to make the draconic beasts cry in pain, losing focus and giving the knights the chance to end the skirmish.

The redhead would later than Stahl and the tactician for giving them these new weapons. Silver is normally a soft metal, but when tempered with magical fire its tensile strength became much greater, capable of easily piercing steel.

Steel like the one that made the armors and weapons of the Wyvern Riders.

The spears pierced armor and flesh or cleaved axes as they reached their wielders. The three Plegians screamed as life left them, quickly joined by their draconic mounts when their scales were fatally pierced one last time.

As the invaders fell to the ground the redhead guided her team in search of shelter. They managed to land in a safe spot atop the towers of the central cathedral. Perseus’ hooves touched the roof, quickly followed by the remaining steeds.

“Status report!” she ordered her squad, who was coming down from their combat high and were getting overwhelmed by the recent events. Trained as they were, this was the biggest, and for some first, battle they ever took part in. “NOW!” she shouted once no one responded.

“Two w-wounded and t-three dead, including Captain Summers, ma’am,” stammered one of the newest members. Caroline, if Cordelia remembered correctly.

“Shit.” Cordelia cursed her luck. That was nearly half their squad dead. Things were taking a turn for the worse and the battle was just starting. “Ok… Ok, put the wounded inside the tower and lock it up.” The redhead gave an overview to the wounded members. “Their wounds aren’t lethal, but they can’t fight. Leave then crossbows and bolts to defend themselves and a first aid kit to patch their wounds. Sadly, we can’t spend more time here.”

“What do we do now, Cordelia?” asked Samantha, one of the members that joined with her upon graduation from the academy.

It was strange that her battle-sisters were looking to her for guidance. Normally they joked about her status as a genius or proved difficult to work with. But it seems now they understood it wasn’t the time to be petty.

Biting her lip Cordelia looked around the cityscape. “Going our original route is suicide. I don’t know how but they managed to sneak anti-air units too close to our stables. They were ready for us.”
“Maybe the Hierarch gave them the information? Or another spy?” a rookie named Anise proposed.

“Or maybe they sneaking in as refugees!” Elsa, another veteran, exclaimed her doubts. “Who knows how many more sneaked in!”

The redhead needed to keep her squad on topic or they will lose valuable time. “It’s irrelevant right now. Let’s focus on getting our butts out of the fire.” An idea struck the prodigal knight like a lightning bolt. “Fire… Sorano! You’re good with magic, correct?”

The girl in question nodded, not understanding the point of the question. “A little. I have a fire tome with me, but I’m no Dark Flier. I’m not ready to use spells in combat.”

The redhead could feel the smile tugging at the edge of her lips despite their dire situation. “Do not worry, that’s just perfect. Remember the signal for calling support that we practiced last month in our joint exercises with the guards?”

“Yeah, it was three bursts four seconds apart, but I don’t--” Sorano replied uncertainly until the revelation hit her. “OH! You want them to attack the anti-air units on land so we can retake the skies! Just like we practiced!”

“That’s correct. We can’t really do much as long as they have can attack us at a distance,” explained Cordelia, pleased that her team was finally understanding her idea. “If we can reach the Wyvern Squads their long range support won’t be able to attack us freely without risking hitting their own troops.”

“What if we run into another ambush?” asked Samantha nervously, looking over her shoulder as if expecting such attack.

“We will fly low, using the buildings as cover and striking fast on any squads we see. Pair up! Once we end the signal!” Musterling all the leadership skill she could find in herself, the redhead issued her orders. “We all took an oath! To give our lives for our people if necessary! Our kingdom is counting on us! Ylisstol will not fall on our watch!” Cordelia raised her spear towards the sky in determination, the sun glinting on its sharp edge. “For the Exalt! For Ylisse!”

More spears joined hers in the air, all held with equal conviction. “For Ylisse!”

Emmeryn barely had time to drop to react to the explosion when an assassin broke into her room. The man had no intentions of hiding or playing it safe. Discarding all pretense of stealth, he charged with his blade ready only to be intercepted by the swift ax of a battle priest. They battled with ferocity as the Exalt was forced to hide behind a shelf. The pained cry of the priest as the blade pierced his heart made Emmeryn stumble back. The Plegian silenced the dying priest with a stab to the throat with a look of sick pleasure on his face.

“You will die for your family's sins!” snarled the assassin as he slowly stalked toward the Exalt, murder clear in his eyes.

The man would not complete his mission as a spear sliced the air and pierced his chest. Emmeryn could see the surprise on his as the light left his eyes. The spear remained logged on his back until it was roughly pulled out by Phila, who had just run into the room quickly followed by one of the Shepherds Chrom left behind.

“Your Grace! Are you hurt?!” asked Phila in concern as the swordsman moved to guard the door. “We need to move you to a safer place! Come on!”
Emmeryn didn’t answer. She walked towards the fallen and mutilated body of the battle priest. She closed his eyes and placed a nearby sheet over his body. As the Exalt watched the cloth soak in the blood of the man, she was filled with pain and uncertainty.

Another person dying for her family’s foolishness.

“Your Grace?” Emmeryn was barely aware of Phila’s concerned voice.

Why did he have to die? Why couldn’t her father’s sins cease to hurt others? Since she was little and given the crown, Emmeryn had called her a fool for her dreams of peace and understanding. As long as others desired conflict her dreams will never come true. One side will always desire revenge on the other, leading only to more pain and hate. And yet it seemed like no one else could see it.

But should she give up?

“No,” she whispered to herself, unaware of the confused looks on her guard’s faces.

Others, like the man dead at her feet, were willing to die for that dream. They believed her words. The Exalt was aware that for her dream to become a reality she was hard to achieve, but that didn’t mean she should stop trying. She might not be able to lead the army or wield a sword, but there are still things she could do for her people.

“...Emmeryn?” Asked Phila once more.

The Exalt stood once more. Her stance was filled with conviction as she finally understood what her role was meant to be in this situation.

The royal remembered her talk with Rose. The tactician managed to overcome all the tragedies that ruined her life and yet she moved forward despite the pair. She was fighting for a city that was not her own with a fervor that the Ylissean ruler knew was not fueled by a mere contract, doing all she could for the people.

What kind of Exalt was Emmeryn if she did any less?

“Miriel! Wait!” the hulking form of Kellam shouted as he tried to keep up with his lighter comrade.

“Yes, Kellam? Speak your query,” Miriel said, not slowing down or bothering to look at him as she conjured a fire spell to one of the invaders on their way. Well, at least, she was now aware of his presence.

“Care to explain what we’re doing?” the easily-ignored man asked while he bashed his shield on a Plegian assassin’s head, following by stabbing him with his new spear.

“I shall be brief. We shall implement a set of countermeasures developed by my fellow Arcanists and I prepared in the past few days with zealous rigor.”

“Countermeasures?” asked the confused knight. He hadn’t heard anything about this.

“Speaking plainly, we have rigged modified spell tomes to overload and detonate in a controlled set of explosions with the intention of breaking the Plegian formation and causing confusion in their chain of command,” Miriel explained as simply as she could, adjusting her glasses as she looked at her companion. “We hoped to connect and detonate them once we had the army in sight in an organized fashion for maximum output, but that part of the process will have to be adapted due to the sudden change in variables.”
“...So we are detonating bombs at random?” Kellam asked for a clarification.

“In layman’s term, yes,” Miriel answered with slight distaste in her voice. She must not like dumbing down her information. “We shall proceed to the Arcanum across the city. It is my estimate that if we succeed, she would deplete 22.6% of the attacking force.”

“Eh… Right.” Seeing no point in debating with the mage, Kellam gave a resigned shrug. “Lead the way.”

“Milady! Please come back inside!” pleaded Phila, internally debating if she should commit treason and knock out her ruler to drag her back to safety. That idea became more appealing with every passing second.

“No.” Emmeryn’s determined tone surprised Phila, giving the Wing Commander pause.

“What do you mean ‘no’?!” the rider shouted. Decorum be damned, she would not let Emmeryn get hurt!

“I will not hide while my people pay for my father’s foolishness.”

Taking hold of her queen’s wrist, the knight stopped her advance. “Emm. Please! You need to c–”

“Look out!” a voice shouted, stopping the women on their tracks.

It all happened in an instant.

The women turned to see a pair of Plegian soldiers engaging two Ylissean guards. One of the invaders was quickly dispatched, but not before injuring his opponent. The other guard was not as lucky and was sent to the group by a pommel strike from the surviving Plegian. The assassin was poised to strike down the fallen soldier when something unexpected happened.

Before Phila could react, Emmeryn snatched a tome from the hands of the closest mage and powered her spell.

It was in that moment that the Ylisseans and Plegians were reminded that Emmeryn was trained as a Sage.

“Arcwind!” A powerful gust of wind burst forward and slammed the Plegian assassin with all its might as Emmeryn finished her chant-less spell. The man flew across the courtyard, crashing against a tree with a dull crack and falling unconscious.

Those present stared wide-eyed at their ruler, holding a glowing tome in her hands and a hard expression they had never seen before.

“Guardsmen, secure that man. I do not want him running free. Clerics, bring the wounded to me, I shall treat them myself.” Emmeryn’s orders cut through the shock, pushing the clerics and soldiers to resume their duties, though that didn’t stop them from stealing glances at their leader. “Phila, I will entrust you to oversee his processing before you depart.”

“Emmeryn...” Phila whispered in awe at the sight of her Exalt. “You… The spell...”

The Exalt closed her eyes as she addressed her subordinate. “I may hate violence, but that does not mean I will sit idle while my people die when I can something about it!” Emmeryn clenched her fists. When she opened her eyes, the azure flames of Naga seemed to burn with passion behind those orbs.
The eyes worthy of a queen. “I could not do anything when my father started this conflict. I could not persuade Gangrel. I cannot lead my armies! But… But if there is something I can do to help my people I will not hesitate to act!”

Emmeryn’s outburst shocked not only the Pegasus Knight’s Commander, but also all those that heard her.

The Wing Commander felt pride swell in her chest as she watched Emmeryn grab a staff and started healing one of the wounded soldiers, gripping his hand tightly in comfort as she let her healing spell wash over his body, mending his wounds. Even from a few feet away, Phila could feel the gentle nature of Emmeryn’s magic warming her skin.

“Well spoken,” Lon’qu grunted out, much to the surprise of the present Shepherds. From what Phila gathered, he normally he avoided speaking with women at all, and here he was offering the ruler of Ylisse support. “Your people are lucky having such a dedicated leader guiding them,” he added. The swordsman noticed the stunned gazes of his fellow Shepherds. “What?”

“Nothing!” They all answered at once, earning a grunt from the swordsman.

As much as she wanted to stay, Phila had her own duties to perform. Her gaze met with the Feroxi. “I trust you will protect the Exalt with your life?”

“Of course. I shall stand guard and make sure no one makes it inside,” replied Lon’qu as he took a stance, ready for anything that would come their way.

“You have my thanks, swordsman.” Phila moved to depart when a hand gripped her wrist. She turned to see who was responsible, just to meet Emmeryn’s eyes. Her bloodied hands and robes did nothing to distract her from the intense look of concern on her face.

“I cannot bear to lose another friend. Please. Take care, Phila,” the Exalt pleaded of her friend.

The Wing Commander gave her what she hoped was a reassuring smile, touched to hear Emmeryn calling her a friend. “You too, Emmeryn.”

“I know you’re scared, but please move in an orderly fashion!” a guard shouted to the panicked crowd. Trying to keep order in the middle of the invasion was a daunting task.

Watching the scared and hurt families clinging to each other, hoping to reach safety together, was a heartbreaking sight for Stahl. One of the reasons he became a knight was to provide for his family and help his people, just like his brother did with his apothecary. All his family wanted was to help their people, and yet he felt there wasn't much he could do for his countrymen during this war. He was just one man and not even a special one.

A flash of something in the corner of his eye caught Stahl’s attention. Looking up, he saw a fire spell coming from the cathedral. Then it was followed by another set of fireballs in a familiar pattern. He recognized it as the Pegasus Knights’ signal for requesting assistance.

“Green Squad with me! The Pegasus Knights require support near the cathedral!” The knight shouted to his subordinates.

As the soldiers galloped across the streets, evading fleeing civilians, they could hear the sounds of a battle getting closer. The Plegian army was making their way inside, slowly but steady.

Stahl had no illusions about their situation: Ylisstol was stalling until the Feroxi arrived and Plegia
He might be a mellow and cheerful man, but the knight was not one to fool himself. Stahl had always been very observant and he could see the way the tide was going. Even with their new gear, new artillery, the volunteer militia and the strategies made by Rose and the other commanders, they would still be swallowed by the superior numbers of the Plegian Army.

That was the sad truth. Ylisstol used to have a higher population in the past, not that different from those countries in Valm, but the last decade had been harsh for Ylisse and Plegia. Their populations had been depleted and devastated by the zealous war started by Chrom’s dad. Thousands of orphans died of hunger and disease, just as their parents died in the field. Conscription hadn’t helped at all and only robbed families from their capable hands, sending farmers and workers to die with cheap weapons in their hands. Farms had been ravaged and the tentative trade with Plegia stopped altogether.

The Ylissean army that used to number the 100,000 reduced to just 5,500 guardsmen for the entirety of Ylisse.

Ylisse’s demilitarization and the suffering of its people pushed away many possible recruits from joining the guard, not wanting to be associated with the tainted legacy. Stahl won’t disagree with Emmeryn’s decision of dissolving the army, but they certainly could’ve been better prepared. Even Ferox hadn’t been left unscathed and had their army’s numbers halved. Plegia suffered the worst, though, and the size of their army indicated that a lot of their people desired vengeance.

And they certainly were fighting for it.

While Ylisstol had to divert troops to protect civilians and secure their capital, the Plegians only focused on killing the Ylisseans and destroying, much to their advantage.

Shaking his head back into focus, the green-armored knight focused on the invaders squad at the end of the street. “Stay strong men! Our comrades need us!” Stahl yelled as he and his squad charged towards the Plegian formation, prepared to clash against those threatening their home. As Ylissean and Plegian weapons clashed in the bloodstained streets, the knight prayed to the gods that their reinforcements arrived before the situation turned worse.

Until then, Plegia would bleed for every inch they took.

Aversa frowned as she oversaw the invasion. It wasn't going as smoothly as she hoped. They had lost Validar and the Grimleal squad sent with him. The loss of the High Priest of Grima was a heavy blow, but a blessing in disguise. The Dark Flier took control of the church at the same time she played that fool of a Mad King. The idiot still thought he was in control.

He was just a pawn in a bigger game.

And now she had more pieces on the board. The Ylissean Hierarch proved to be another useful pawn, allowing the access inside the castle and the record of the army. The Plegian army was ready to take the city with overwhelming force.

But things weren't going as planned. Even when the Plegian Army arrived ahead of schedule, the Ylisseans were surprisingly prepared to take on their forces. And if things weren't complicated enough, the Prince’s little militia departed to get reinforcements. The Feroxi Army might arrive before they secured the city.

Annoying, but not catastrophic.
Aversa wouldn’t be a good tactician if she had no backup plans.

A dark spell flew from her hand towards the sky. The signal was reciprocated as dozen more spells came from inside the city and the surrounding countryside, going all the way into the distance towards the Feroxi army.

A smug smirk grew on her lips.

It was time to see if the spells the Hierophant gave them were worth the praise.

The march was coming along nicely. Robin was pleased with the pace they were keeping, despite the extreme hurry they had to reach the capital. If all their information was correct, they should arrive at Ylisstol just in time to intercept the Plegian Army. With the nearly 3,000 soldiers in Ylisstol along with the 12,000 they currently had in the main army, it should have a slight numerical advantage. The tactician would've preferred to have a bigger force to crush the Plegians swiftly or force them into surrender to respect the Exalt’s ideals.

Sadly, they were forced to send part of the Feroxi force to various points across the land to cut off reinforcements and escape routes for the Plegian armada. While Ylisstol was certainly going to be the main theater, there were many other targets of value that might be attacked by unexpected forces. The farmlands on Themis or the ports on the Casper Sea… Too many things to consider for the young tactician.

Robin kept moving submerged in his thoughts until a rush of wind startled him, almost making him fall down. Turning to the side, he saw that the one responsible was Sumia, who landed her steed next to him with surprising grace.

The Pegasus knight matched her pace to the tactician’s, looking at him with concerned eyes. “Hey, Robin. Are you ok? You’ve been distracted for a while.”

The young Plegian blinked in confusion before realizing someone was talking to him. ‘Shaking his head, he responded to ease his comrades’ concern. “Oh, hello there Sumia. It’s nothing, I’m just worried about Ylisstol.” He tried to smile, though it felt half-hearted to him. “Sorry if I worried you.”

Sumia shook her head in denial. “It’s ok, you’re not the only one worried,” the clumsy knight reassured him. “But I’m sure everything will be fine. We left the city in capable hands and we have stopped each of Plegia’s attempts. This will be no different,” she said with a confident smile.

Robin pursed his lips, not entirely appeased. “Still… I feel bad about dropping all this on Rose and Phila. I hope they don’t kill each other,” he stated, cringing at the thought. “They don’t seem to like each other very much.”

“Well… Phila is stern but not mean. She’s just worried about the Exalt’s safety like all of us, so she is. As long as Ro–” Sumia trailed off as something seemed to have caught her eye. “Hey, what’s that in the sky?”

“Huh?” Robin turned his attention to where Sumia was pointing, directed his gaze towards a flare of dark magic flying up in the distance.

“That’s the signal,” a Grimleal knight stated to his superior.

The Grimleal Priest looked at the object in his hands. A simple silver box with the Mark of Grima, reeking with black magic. The priest gazed across the plain, other boxes glowed with the same
ominous light, waiting at the hands of his underlings for the moment to unleash their cursed power.

A moment that had just come in the form of a magical flare.

The zealot looked at his underlings and uttered his order with a wicked grin. “Open the boxes.”

“What th–” The ground shook, stopping Robin’s comment as well as the army’s march. Confusion ran through their ranks, only for the soldiers to grow anxious at the snarling sounds coming from below. A sound many of the Shepherds recognized.

“Robin! Get up here!” Sumia shouted to the tactician, who proceeded to scramble towards the steed.

Sitting behind Sumia, they flew towards the Shepherd formation, with Robin shouting his orders to the soldiers with the use of a megaphone tome. “FALL BACK AND SET A DEFENSIVE FORMATION! KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE GROUND! WE GOT RISEN INCOMING!”

His warning came just in time. The earth cracked and split apart as thousands of rotting hands bursting from the soil. For many, it was their first time fighting the Risen, let alone watching their cursed forms come back to life.

These Risen were different from the ones they had been fighting, though. Most of the undead the Shepherds had engaged in the past used to be bandits or villagers, who had their bodies twisted into these cursed troops. Not these. The monsters that crawled from under the earth were clad in various styles of armor, from axemen to generals. Some were riding undead horses, pegasi, and wyverns, with cursed mages and archers also filling their ranks.

The symbols of the Ylissean and Plegian armies were clearly visible on their battle standards.

The tactician racked his brain for anything to explain these. A name appeared at the forefront of his mind: The Battle of Hallem Plains. The land they were currently was a battlefield in the last war. It was soaked with the blood of thousands of soldiers from both sides. Their corpses left to rot and eventually taken back by the earth.

Taking a look at his position on the sky Robin saw cloaked forms on the hills, barely visible, but clearly there. If there was any doubt that Plegia was behind the Risen, this insult certainly dispelled it.

A perfect place to raise an undead army. An army composed of the soldiers killed in the last war. This was a terrible problem. If the Risen kept the skill they had when alive, their army would face a monstrous opponent.

Robin took a quick look at the oncoming charge. Their numbers should be even, but that’s not useful against an enemy with no regards for their own survival. A strategy popped into his mind, one he says his fellow tactician use against the archest of archers.

“Sumia! Contact the messenger and relay these orders! The legions on the back will keep on reserve, the central legion will remain in place while the side legions encircle the main formation,” the tactician ordered once he dismounted the Pegasus and took his place with the Shepherds. “Our Aerial units will counter theirs with the help of the archers and mages. We can’t let them start a mounted charge at us. The Risen Cavalry outnumbers us! Move! There is no time to lose!”

“Right away, Sir!!” The Pegasus rider replied professionally and took off to fulfill her orders.

At his side, Chrom drew Falchion and took his stance, not taking his eyes of the Risen forces. “Ready to do this, Robin?”
“It will be a nice warmup for Ylisstol, I suppose,” the tactician snarked as he drew his Levin Sword and prepared for his biggest battle so far.

Rushing through the streets, Rose was running through all her options. That flare moments before couldn’t mean anything good. No matter how prepared, no plan survived contact with the enemy. She will need to adapt her strategies since she never got a clear picture of the fall of Ylisstol in her timelines as most of the ranking officers died. The tactician had to reach the southern outpost and command her troops accordingly.

The sound of footsteps alerted her of an incoming force. A Plegian squad came as they turned on the street. The fourth she had to fight since she left the castle.

“Ah! Grimleal we were sent to rendezvous with. Good, want to join us and make some Ylisseans suffer?” A woman in sorcerer robes asked. She must have assumed Rose was part of their entourage and an ally.

Her last mistake.

“Sorry, you seem to have taken the wrong turn.” In an instant, Rose jumped back and pulled out her tome. The grimoire glowed with power and a giant ball of fire flew forward, smashing into the squad. Their screams lasted for a few seconds as the flames devoured their flesh, melting their armor and killing them soon after. The only survivors were two axemen that were thrown away from the spell’s explosion.

“What! You traitorous bitch!” One of the men snarled. Burns marked his skin, eliciting winces of pain as he took his stance, hands gripping his axe tightly. His comrade was in the not better state, but both were relatively fit to fight.

The surviving soldiers rushed the tactician in hopes of eliminating her, no doubt making her suffer for her supposed ‘betrayal’.

Rose almost laughed at the irony.

“Don’t let the cloak fool you. I was never on your side!”

Lightning flew from Rose’s fingertips as the bolt of magical energy flew towards her target. Both dodged, well aware of the power of her spells. Sadly, that meant dropping their guards and allowing the tactician to behead one of the soldiers with a swift strike. Muscle and bone did nothing to slow down the blade and the man’s corpse fell to the floor.

“What is it with axe wielders and their hatred for armor?” the tactician wondered out loud as she left the headless corpse behind, turning to face her last opponent.

On the other side of the country, Vaike sneezed. The sudden movement affected his swing and allowed him to deflect an incoming attack and split his Risen opponent in two.

One attack that would’ve grievously wounded him and affected his combat capabilities for the rest of his life.

Vaike would continue to fight, unaware how the female Plegian tactician had inadvertently saved his life.
“Stupid morons,” Rose muttered as she cut down the last soldier in sight with a stab to the heart.

Her breathing had become laborious. Even with her strength and magic, her body still had limits. Cutting down dozens of heavily armed men attacking from the shadows was more challenging than battling in an arena or eliminating a bandit camp. Add to that evading enemy artillery and assisting whatever soldiers she ran into was starting to take a toll on her. Luckily, this squad was easy to dispatch as they didn’t expect her to attack them, but the spell still took quite a bit of energy to cast without saying the chant.

A growl resonated through the street, catching her attention. From the shadows of the alley a shape stalked forward. Red eyes glowed with hate. Prowling in four legs, a massive Risen wolf stepped into the light. Its hair was glued to its rotten flesh with dried blood, stinking with a putrid smell that would make most people nauseous. Its fangs dripping with drool and blood, no doubt from its latest victim.

Soon, more growls came forward and four more wolves, albeit smaller, stood at the side of their alpha.

Rose stared at her new opponents. The use of such animals as troops was something her Grima never considered.

“Well… that’s new.”

An axe almost took Sumia’s head, only evaded by pure instinct. Strands of her hair flew away in the winds just as she dived down to drive her spear into the head of the Risen Wyvern. The mount dropped to the ground along with its rider, granting the knight a moment of respite.

Things could be going better, but the army was holding its own. The encircling strategy Robin had used was working on reducing the maneuverability of the Risen horde, robbing them of their numbers as the majority was trapped in the center. The reserves switched with the tired units as needed, allowing them to keep their soldiers fresh and reducing casualties due to exhaustion at least. The Feroxi army was working its way in, but the Risen had no qualms in sacrificing their numbers to take down as many living humans as they could. Launching spells that burned human and Risen alike, or charging into the Feroxi formation with suicidal intent.

Soldiers that could eventually be converted into Risen.

Sumia pushed away the horrible thoughts of might await her friends and family in Ylisstol if she were to fall here. She certainly wasn’t looking forward to becoming a zombie and eating her family.

The clumsy knight regained focus just in time to see a Risen Falcon Knight closing in on her position. Sumia readied herself to clash with the undead when an arrow hit the Risen mount, making it flinch. At least, the beast still felt pain to a small degree. Not wasting the opening, Sumia took one of her javelins and threw it with deadly accuracy, piercing the chest of the rider and throwing her rotten body out of her seat.

Taking a moment to look at her savior, she spotted the ginger-haired thief lowering his bow, giving her a two-finger salute from the back of the formation. Nodding in gratitude, Sumia took to the skies once more, ready to resume her battle.

‘I hope Cordelia is having an easier time in Ylisstol.’

“PEGASUS SHIT!” Cordelia snarled as she clashed spear against the Plegian Wyvern Rider. “Why
won’t you die already!?” The red head broke away from the stalemate as she was forced to dodge the fangs of the wyvern.

“What’s the matter, Red? Can’t deal with the pressure?!” Taunted the Plegian soldier as he twirled his axe. “You know, I was supposed to capture the Exalt when that useless pig of a Hierarch tricked her into the Breakneck Pass, but this? Capturing and make her watch as we burn her city? Songs will be written about this!

“The only song you will listen is Ylisse’s hymn when we celebrate the defeat of your miserable forces!” Cordelia shot back as she tightened the grip on her lance.

“Brave words, wench,” snarled Vasto as he readied for another bout. “Your city is in ruins. Your people are burning and you still stand defiant. Admirable, if foolish.” He then grinned mockingly at the Pegasus Knight. “You should be honored! You will die at the hands of Vasto, Commander of Wyvern Riders!”

“Shut up, you narcissistic dastard!” Shouted Cordelia as she dashed for another clash.

The situation was bad for the redhead. Cordelia was forced away from her squad when they clashed against a Wyvern Squad. As luck would have it, it was the squad under the Commander of the Plegian Wyvern Riders, ready to attack the heart of the castle, no doubt with the intent of capturing the Exalt.

Not something they would allow.

The knights clashed in the sky for a while. None could pierce the other’s defense, their skills evenly match. Their mounts were idle as they too tried to beat their counterpart. Hooves and fangs tried to overcome their opponent, meeting equal resistance.

“Enough! Just die, Ylissean whore!” Shouted Vasto, whipping the reins of his mount in a pattern

The wyvern’s jaw snapped forward, catching the armored neck of Cordelia’s steed in its deadly grip, making Perseus cry in pain. The armor was barely holding, but it gave Vasto the opening he desired. He swung his axe to Cordelia with all the intent to split her in two, but the redhead didn’t earn her status as a genius for nothing. In a quick motion, she placed the shaft of her spear between the handle and blade of Vasto’s axe. With a twist, she disarmed the rider, much to his surprise. Taking advantage, Cordelia slammed her spear against his head, sending the commander off from his seat and crashing into a roof.

The wyvern didn’t stop, though. Cordelia stabbed her lance between the scaled of its neck. Its cry of pain joining Perseus’. The draconic beast whipped around in pain, dragging the Pegasus with it as they fell to the ground.

Cordelia was forced to jump just before she was crushed under the weight of both beasts. Scrambling to her feet, the redhead discarded her dented helmet and took her fallen spear. Cordelia made her way to the fallen mounts, carefully paying attention to any sudden movements. The wyvern was dead, its neck twisted from the fall with its jaws wide open. Her Pegasus, though...

“Perseus!” It was no use. The Pegasus was on its last breaths. His front legs were broken and its wings twisted at an unnatural angle. Blood flowed from the gashes on his neck. The stallion gave a pitiful whine, locking hid wide eyes with his trusted rider. Cordelia’s heart broke at the sight of her trusted friend, a proud stallion, broken beyond salvation. She knew what she had to do. Cordelia placed his head on her lap and fuzzed his mane one last time, speaking through her tears, “Thank you for everything, my friend. I will never forget you.” The redhead then unsheathed the knife on
her boot and in a swift movement ended the life of her Pegasus companion.

A sound drew her attention to the end of the alley. There, crawling his way towards the street was the broken and bleeding Vasto. Anger roared in Cordelia’s blood. She wiped her tears and stood through pure willpower. Gripping her weapon, the knight stalked forward towards the invader. Vasto took notice of her, his gaze defiant. He snarled at her, flashing her his bloodied teeth, but couldn't do much more.

“Y-You doves think you have won!? We will burn this city t-” Cordelia didn’t care to let him finish his last words and stabbed the blade of her spear right through his face. The gruesome action didn’t disturb the knight, too angry and battered to care about things like honor and disgust. She dropped to her knees in exhaustion, taking deep breaths of dirty air in an attempt to calm her beating heart.

Slow footsteps came from behind her. Cordelia took her spear once more and glanced. The sight of Ylissean and Feroxi armors calmed her for a moment, but something was wrong. Through the eye-holes on their helmets shone an eerie crimson glow. The shambling steps did nothing to ease her worries.

“H-Hello? Do you need assist-?” Cordelia jumped to her feet as the soldier roared and began running to her. She took a shaky stance and stabbed the first one that came close right in the heart. Sadly, she wasn't fast enough to pull out her spear and the other attacker was already upon her. Bracing herself for the blow, Cordelia was surprised when a green blur slammed into the creature. A green blur that she easily recognized.

The redhead watched as Stahl slammed the flat of his blade against the shaft of the cursed one’s spear. Sliding it downwards, the knight sliced the fingers off from the rotting hand of the cursed corpse. The undead roared in anger or pain, the knights couldn’t tell, but his strength loosened enough to giving Stahl the opening he needed to remove his head from the body.

Stahl expression softened as he finally could drop his guard. “You okay there, Cordelia?”

“Y-Yeah. Thank you, Stahl,” she thanked “Were those the Risen you spoke of?”

The cavalier’s eyes widened, clicking his tongue in realization. “Ah! I guess this is the first time you fought one of them. Yes, those were Risen. I didn't expect any in the city, but it seems they used to be our comrade before they were twisted into these creatures,” Stahl commented with a frown as he looked at the fallen bodies of his former allies. “I think there is no longer any doubt that Plegia is behind their appearance.” The cavalier shook his head back into focus and helped Cordelia back into her feet. “We can talk more about this later. Let's rendezvous with my unit first. I left my mare a few streets away. The rubble blocked my path and had to climb it to reach you.”

“Wait. What of my squad?” The Pegasus knight asked in concern, worry etched on her face.

Stahl gently squeezed her hand in reassurance. “When I left, they were finishing off their opponents with my squad giving them ground support. They should be getting their wound patched up as we speak.”

Cordelia released a relieved breath at the good news. “I see. You have my thanks.”

The cavalier gave her a reassuring smile. “Don’t mention it. Can you walk?”

The redhead nodded. “Yeah. I’m tired but still fit to fight. Come, le-” A deep, guttural growl from behind them made Cordelia close her eyes and grit her teeth.

“What now!?” Screamed Cordelia, sick and tired of her situation turning worse at every moment.
The constant fighting, the attacks and all their plans crumbled to dust before her eyes. The day was far from over and Cordelia was just done.

Her answer came in a form that made her regret asking the question. A shambling abomination stood nearly double the height of the knights. Its body was composed of multiple rotting corpses. The faces of men, women and children were twisted across its skin like a sick mockery of their former appearance. Dozens of hands reached from its back, with its four main limbs being disproportionately large, like one of those gorillas native from Valm.

“For fuck's sake! This is not my day!” Cordelia snarled, discarding all politeness in front of her friend in favor of releasing her stress with curse words. She ignored the startled expression her friend got at her language. No surprise, she mused in the back of her head. She always was polite and the perfect image of devoted knight.

Stahl gave a hollow chuckle, turning and not removing his eyes from the monster. “Ready for this, Cordelia?” Asked the cavalier, taking his sword andreadying himself for the next battle.

Ignoring the protests of her body and letting adrenaline dull the pain, Cordelia grasped her spear with all her strength. “I got your back, Stahl,” the Pegasus knight replied, taking her place at his side.

The disintegrating corpses of the Risen wolves littered the streets. Rose’s breaths were labored as she glared at the alpha. It didn’t matter how strong she was, even she had her limits. But worse than that was how the alpha wolf didn’t bother to attack her while she slaughtered his pack. She was deeply aware of the extent of intelligence the Risen had, but this was insulting.

Finally stalking forward the wolf opened his maw, ready to devour the tactician.

The Fell Dragon wasn’t about to die to a rotten mutt, though.

As soon as he was close the former queen grabbed his front leg, disturbing his trajectory and slamming him against the floor with her remaining strength, and nearly snapping the bone at its joint. The beast ignored the injury, intelligently shifting its weight and jumping once more. Rose was forced to drop her blade and take hold of his jaws with her armored hands. The monster was surprisingly strong, slowly pushing her back with its strength. Gritting her teeth, Rose pulled. The jaws were snapped in an unnatural angle, and finally eliciting a howl of pain from the undead beast. In an instant, Rose jumped on the wolf’s back and wrapped her arms around his neck. With a quick, strong twist, she snapped his neck and pulled the rotten muscle apart to ensure its demise.

As the Risen blood evaporated from her body along with the corpse, the tactician recovered her weapon. Rose leaned against a wall to recover her breath and strength. This should have been easier, but it seems her power hadn’t recovered enough to feed her stamina indefinitely. Rose would have to work on that if she wanted to succeed in her quest.

A slow, mocking clap started behind her. Rose closed her eyes, hoping against hope it was some stupid child having fun. She was too tired to take fate’s shit. Much to her disappointment, the source was a group of Grimleal fanatics, around a dozen in number. Rose was exhausted, too much magic and running finally took their toll. While she might be able to take them all alone, she would be running on fumes for the rest of the invasion. Taking a moment to study their faces, the Fell Dragon recognized the man leading them as Ardri; one of Grima’s most devout servants.

“My, my. I had heard of the Shepherds’ tactician and his skill, but you truly are impressive for such a young man,” the Grimleal Priest in charge praised with a hint of sarcasm.
Rose’s eye twitched.

“Wrong person,” she answered coldly, glaring daggers at the Grimleal with the hope that they would spontaneously combust.

“Ah, a woman,” the man at the lead drawled, sadly not burning in hateful fire. “Pardon. I was confused by your outfit. So you must be the one that eliminated Tamara’s squad.” The man kicked the charred corpse of the Grimleal woman, before shrugging dismissively. “It doesn’t matter. Just another corpse in the pile. One that you will be joining soon.” He waved his hand at the men to his left. “You five, deal with her. The rest of you will secure this checkpoint.”

Said men walked towards the tired woman, wicked grins plastered on their faces, no doubt thinking about the atrocities they wanted to perform on her body.

“Now, come here girl. We ca-” The man barely raised his blade to block Rose’s strike.

“Sorry, you’re not my type,” Rose snarked through her exhaustion and summoned Ignis on her blade. The flame strengthened her blade, melting the Plegian steel as she cleaved through his armor and pierced his heart.

“Jonas! You will pay for that! Nosferatu!” shouted a dark mage in rage, sending the dark spell towards the tactician and draining the tactician of the few energy she had remaining.

Rose couldn’t dodge in time, too tired to move coherently. The spell hit her in the chest, sending her rolling through the floor. Strength left her, empowering the spell caster as he sucked her energy. Her muscles weakened, as well as he magical reserved.

“Damn woman. You have some strong and dark energy there,” the mage said in awe as he felt her power through the vampiric spell.

Gathering her strength, the tactician used a strategy she had developed for such occasion. “You... want... my magic?” Rose breathed while she gathered magic on her hands. “Here! Have more! Arcthunder!”

Using the connection between them, Rose sent the bolt of lightning through the magic path between them, feeding on the magic and moving straight to the magician.

“Wh-” The man was cut off as he gave a silent scream. The spell hit true, right through the heart of the sorcerer and killing him instantly.

“T-two down...” Rose managed to say before a big man roughly grabbed her and smashed her against the wall.

“Those were my friends, whore!” the man snarled with hatred, pushing his face close to hers and locking eyes with the tactician. “I'm going to make your death sl-”

Continuing her tried-and-true strategy of attacking her enemies in the middle of their monologues, Rose bit on his nose with all her strength, ripping it off his face. Blood sprayed her face as she spat out the disgusting bit of flesh. The man dropped her as he howled in pain, clutching his face in a futile attempt to stop the bleeding. Finishing what she started, Rose pulled a knife from her cloak and stabbed them man in the neck, eliminating another threat.

Rose recovered Thorn, but she didn’t have the time to gather her breath before she was smashed into a building by the heavy blow of a war hammer. She crashed into the wooden door, breaking it and rolling inside, only stopping as she smashed against a table. Rose couldn’t help it; she screamed in
pain. Her arm was broken and she could feel the twisted metal of her chest plate biting into her flesh. The tactician tried to stand, but she made the mistake of putting weight on her broken arm. The pain shot through her body and made her fall once more. Rose was lucky, a small part of her brain mused. Her reinforced body was the only thing saving her life. Her strength was drained with dark magic, while her magic had been spent fighting. A normal person, lacking her robust psychology, would have died from blunt trauma.

Rose never let of Thorn through all these, as if it represented her will to live and fight. She wasn’t going to lose and die to some no-name Grimleal.

The mere idea was insulting.

“Serves those idiots right for playing around before securing their target,” the brute sneered as dropped his hammer and moves towards the fallen woman. He kicked her broken ribs, making Rose scream once more.

“Not so tough now, huh?” the man mocked, then turning to address his last surviving companion. “Hey, Jahad! Do you want to have a go with the bitch?”

The last man, a dark knight scowled at the sight, “Do what you want Kosha. Some of us have standards.”

Kosha chuckled. “Heh, your loss.” The brute then took a better look at the fallen tactician, finally noticing her cloak “Those Grimleal Robes… A deserter? Disgusting,” he spat in her direction. “I don't know what you planned to do by joining Ylisse, you traitorous harlot, but you failed!”

‘Failed?’ The word shocked Rose to the core.

She couldn’t fail. Too much was at risk. Too much had been lost and sacrificed for her to die in such a pathetic way.

She was supposed to protect her brother.

Save her mother.

Prevent Emmeryn’s death.

Earn her redemption.

She would not fail!

Something in her soul snapped. Under her gauntlet, her serpentine mark glowed with righteous intensity. Her blood sang with power, waiting to be released on the unworthy scum that dared defy a goddess. Why was she holding back so much? She was a goddess! She could rule this w-

No.

No, she wouldn’t let this power control her again.

Grima was gone.

Robin Lowell née Surana no longer existed.

Only Rose Sustrai remained.
And she was in control of this power.

Ignis changed. It no longer raged with scorching heat. Now, an icy coldness radiated from the draconic flames. The flames began crawling through her arm, engulfing it and s. And yet they didn’t hurt her. Not like they did in the moment of her death when mixed with Exalted fire.

Power she hadn’t felt in years flowed through her body.

Broken bone mended back into place.

Torn muscle was sown anew.

Skin closed, stopping the flow of liquid life force.

The disgusting man licked his lips as he crouched over the fallen body, seemingly ignoring the magical flame. “You’re pretty for a traitorous harlot. I’m sure we can have some fu-”

The flaming-armored hand shot out in an instant, snaring the man’s throat in a vicious grip. The Fell Dragon closed her fist with monstrous strength and crushed his neck with impunity. The force was such that the head was separated from his body, only remaining connected by small tendrils of skin and muscle. Blood spurted from torn blood vessels, splashing against the former Grandmaster and tainting her skin and clothes.

The dark knight that was waiting for his comrade didn’t have time to react as the flaming sword cleaved through his armor and sliced his body in two. His expression remained frozen into one of surprise at his sudden demise. Rose made sure that the last thing he saw as life left him was the metallic heel of her boot coming down on his head.

“Where are they?” Ardri grumbled out, bothered by his underlings delays. How hard was it to kill a woman with foot in the grave?

One of his men scoffed at his mild concern, waving a hand in dismissal. “Bah. You know how Kosha. When he gets a fight with a feisty woman, he can’t help himse-”

A monstrous roar shook the air. The temperature seemed to drop in as the sound passed through them. Their breaths became visible as they exhaled the air.

“What in Grima’s name was that!!” yelled one of the mages, looking around for the source of the sound, unaware of the irony of his statement.

“IN GRIMA’S NAME IS I!”

The headless body of their comrade came flying through the hole, crashing on the floor in front of the shocked zealots. Blood splattered the Plegians, only adding to the demonic atmosphere as an unnatural voice rang through the streets once more, drowning the sounds of battle and leaving the men in their own world.

“So you call for the Fell Dragon!?”

The tactician stepped out of the crumbled building, her body shrouded in malevolent shadows. The cold fire raged through her body with unnatural power visible as the wood and stone around her froze as she passed. Stepping over one of the corpses of the Grimleal, the tactician crushed their skull under her heel. Frozen blood and bone were left behind with every step she took towards her prey.
“You know what they say...”

One of the archers panicked and tried to nock an arrow on his bow. He wasn’t finished pulling the string when a bolt of lightning vaporized his upper body.

The men froze at the sight and felt an icy grip take hold of their hearts as her glowing red eyes glared at them with pure, unrestrained hatred.

The most primal of emotions flowed through their veins.

Fear.

”BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR!”

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: A Dragon's Wrath

Regarding Ylisse's demilitarization and Plegia's attack:

Garrus: So... I guess nobody ever really ever gets their act together.  
Javik: The Synril claimed to have found the path to eternal peace.  
Garrus: What happened?  
Javik: The Ditakur preferred war and wiped them out.  
Garrus: ...I hope you guys had alcohol.  

A/N: It's un-beta'd but they both are busy so I'll fix it later. I was worried about this chapter. Too much going on and it was hard to portray all without blotting it too much. The part with Rose fights was the problem. I have portrayed her too strong, but I wanted to show that even she tires and can be taken down by numbers. Same reason Grima didn't burn Ylissotl when he traveled in time and his power was in slumber. Her Dragon power has been mostly dormant. Falchion sends Grima to sleep, so it's a miracle she is even awake enough to fight. Wanted to give Cordelia and Stahl something to do while showing the battles across the city and how this Grima is different than Rose's. More will be explained next chapter, like how the sudden increase in enemies is affecting the invasion.
A Dragon’s Wrath

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Grimleal men remained frozen in place. The sheer presence the tactician, who mere moments ago had been on the brink of death, was exuding had evolved to a whole new level. The sight of their comrades – fellow faithful servants of the Fell Dragon – being vaporized and torn apart with such ease erased all sense of assured victory from their minds. Their arrogance was instead replaced by an ever-growing sense of dread from the unnaturally cold aura the tactician emanated.

“W-What is the meaning of this!?” Ardri stammered as he took a step back and tightened the grip on his tome as if it were a safety blanket. His nerves quickly got the better of him as he began to shiver uncontrollably, his instincts registering a clear sense of danger.

“It has been a while since I felt this energized.”

Her voice was unnatural, hissing as if wrapped in darkness.

“Admittedly, not a power I’m particularly fond of...but I won’t deny that it is useful in this situation.” The woman slowly prowled towards the group, letting the tip of Thorn carve a small groove into the street. If the trail of frozen stone left behind by the tip of her blade was meant to intimidate, it was doing a magnificent job. The wounds she had had before were no longer visible even though the metal of her armor remained dented and twisted, still stained with blood.

‘Is that her blood? Or is it from the men she killed?’ They all wondered. The brutal state their comrade’s corpse was in, as well as the splattering around it, indicated the ichor must have been the latter.

“Now then, little mortals... you should be thankful. Your goddess has deemed you worthy of being graced with her presence.” Her voice managed to be some twisted combination of both a guttural growl and a playful, mocking tone. The spectral woman shrugged only to spit her words disdainfully as she leveled a deadly glare in their direction. “Alas, she has found you wanting.”

The Grimleal couldn’t make sense of the meaning behind her words, but they couldn’t have missed the meaning behind her next move.

Dark purple fire engulfed the woman’s arm and blade, roaring and snarling as if it had a life of its own. The tactician swung and the flames exploded towards the Grimleal formation.

The two Grimleal Knights rushed forward and slammed their shields into the ground in an attempt to block and disperse the fire. Sadly for them, the enchantment on their shields couldn’t stop the raw power of the Fell Dragon’s magic.

The conflagration engulfed their bodies, causing the men to bellow blood-curdling screams as the magic ripped through their enchanted armor like rice paper. All that remained scant moments later were a pair of blackened corpses, both burned and frozen at the same time. Frostbite encrusted whatever part of their flesh that had survived being melted away whilst black ice clung to the metal of their armor and weapons, leaving the bodies standing in place with their gaunt faces forever frozen in a twisted visage of pain and terror.

Ardri stumbled back onto his backside, pointing a shaking finger at the monster in human flesh in
front of them while scooting away as quickly as he could.

“W-What are you waiting for?!” He screamed. All pretense of calmness had long been discarded. “K-Kill her!”

The remaining soldiers hesitated, their instinct informing them of the presence of a natural predator, but months of training eventually prevailed. They charged at her with intent to kill, but they would never even come close to their goal as the woman in front of them uttered a single word:

“Extinction.”

With that single command, dozens of thin spears made of blackened spectral ice manifested under the Plegians before ripping through the pavement, impaling the soldiers with impunity. Each one aimed at a lethal point, every spike met their mark, killing almost all of the Plegians instantly.

Those were the lucky ones.

But Ardri did not have luck on his side. The ice skewered his feet and thighs, making it impossible for him to move. The pain was horrible, making him drop his tome as he tried to writhe in pain. The priest could feel the ice eating away at his skin, leaving behind a cursed form of frostbite as it began to devour his flesh.

“W-Who… W-what are y-you?!” Ardri managed to wheeze out through the sudden vicious grip on his throat. His head was forced to face the woman and was met with the sight of a set of draconic eyes glowing with a shining crimson hue that was both unearthly beautiful and unearthly terrifying.

“For someone who claims to be a priest of my religion, you cannot even recognize your deity? ”

A wicked smile plastered itself over her face. “For shame, little man.”

The priest’s eyes widened in both understanding and horror, finally realizing exactly who and what was standing in front of him. Adri belatedly thought he should have been happy to be blessed with her presence but the only thing he really felt was an all-encompassing terror.

The terror of imminent death.

“N-no…!” The priest babbled, both in awe and in total fear. “I-Impossible-!”

“I see you’ve figured it out. Yes, I am the Fell Dragon,” the dark goddess cooed as the grip on his throat tightened and her eyes shined brighter. “And by my divine right, your life belongs to me!”

Ardri couldn’t do anything. He couldn’t think, he couldn’t protest, he couldn’t pray. He wanted to plead for mercy; to ask why he was being punished, and why his god was fighting for Ylisse. But in the end, the priest couldn’t do any more than give a silent, tortured scream as felt as his soul was ripped from his mortal container.

The flames of the Fell Dragon devoured his body completely, reducing his flesh to frozen cinder.

A blade of wind cut down the Risen warrior closest to him. Ricken shook in apprehension as he watched the rotten flesh dissolve into black mist. Even if they weren’t actual living humans, the sight of flesh being cut and black blood pouring from rotten veins was not exactly pleasant.

He couldn’t afford to back down from this fight, however. Not only was the name of his family on the line, but so were the lives of everyone in Ylisstol, and possibly the ultimate fate of Ylisse as a
whole. Ricken may have been young and inexperienced, but he still wanted to help as much as he could. After all, a noble’s duty was to help and protect his people as they lived their days in peace. And he knew that to be true from the bottom of his heart, having been taught the ideals since childhood.

Suddenly, a bone-chilling shriek shook the young mage’s attention, along with that of his surrounding allies. He couldn’t see the source of the horrible noise but when heard the screams of his fellow warriors, he turned towards the direction from which they came from.

Ricken witnessed dozens of broken bodies sent flying through the air—both human and Risen alike. Even the most battle-hardened warriors froze at the sight of the thing in front of them that had done the deed: a golem with unnaturally long limbs, made from a grotesque amalgamation of human and animal corpses, their flesh twisted into sickening patterns. Its head—if it could be called that—was a horrible pastiche of mouths and eyes, all which were looking around for its targets. The nightmare extended its tentacle-like claw and grabbed a cavalier along with its mount, crushing them under its grip.

Fear pumped into the mage’s heart and body, freezing him in place. This indecision almost cost him his life when the monster took the opportunity and, with another horrible shriek, threw the crushed remains of the Feroxi calvary towards Ricken’s location.

The young man couldn’t move through the fear and was trying to brace himself when a furry creature snatched him up and sprinted off without a second to spare. Ricken could feel the trailing blood of the fleshy projectile splash against his face as it whizzed by.

Looking at his savior, he saw a big rabbit glow and transform into the tribal woman that had assisted in protecting Lady Emmeryn during the assassination. Panne was her name if he remembered correctly.

“All attention, man-spawn,” the rabbit woman looked at him with an unimpressed gaze. “The battlefield is no place for children. More so if they can’t fight on their own.”

“I-I know that!” Ricken shouted, much to his and Panne’s surprise. The young mage clutched his tome with all his strength. “But I didn’t come here to hide behind others! Ylisse is my home too, and I want to protect it!”

The rabbit woman regarded him silently, before glancing at the undead golem.

“... You have spirit. Pray that that is enough,” was all the woman said before transforming back into her rabbit form and jumping into battle once more, darting around the creature and harassing it to keep it distracted.

A firm hand suddenly grabbed his shoulder, startling Ricken into yelping. Turning around, he saw Chrom covered in sweat and blackened blood but determined to fight despite the concerned frown on his face.

“Ricken! Are you hurt?” asked Chrom, no doubt worried sick about their youngest member, sparing glances at the undead creature engaging their taguel ally and the rest of the soldiers that were trying to take it down.

The mage shook his head in response.

“I’m fine, Chrom. I can still fight.” The prince gave a slightly relieved smile to the young man.

“I’m glad to hear it. I’m afraid we will need all the help we can get to take down this monster.”
Chrom took his stance, turning to face the abomination. “But don’t take unnecessary risks. You don’t have to prove anything. You’ve done more than you ought to have already.”

“To think Plegia had this level of magic in their hands. Quite the terrifying weapon.” Robin commented from behind the two Shepherds as he approached, his Levin sword crackling with electricity. “Focus on the battle, both of you. I fear the trouble is just beginning. Chrom, I want you to try and slice its limbs. Hopefully, they still need whatever they have that passes for tendons to move. Ricken, use your wind magic to keep it off balance and deflect his blows away from Chrom and Panne. You will run interference.”

The tactician’s crisp orders earned a smirk and a nod from his commander before he charged towards the golem.

“Yes, sir!” exclaimed Ricken as he opened his tome, glad to finally be taken seriously and be ready to fight as an equal with his fellow Shepherds.

Stahl dodged the monster’s attack by, jumping to the side and rolling out of the way—a feat that wasn’t easy in plate armor. He and Cordelia tried to get close and deliver what they hoped were fatal blows but the monster was surprisingly nimble for its size, countering and evading every attempt they made. The fact that its monstrous strength could crush stone with a single swing of its mismatched appendage didn’t help the knights at all. The creature quickly dove towards them with the intent of crushing the two Ylisseans under its own weight. Luckily for them, they were fast enough to easily dodge the attack.

“This… is not… working…” Cordelia panted, breathing hard to fill her burning lungs with fresh air. Stahl was one of the few that knew the prodigy knight was a lousy runner. Not like he was any better, though. Both knights were used to mounted combat, constantly on the move atop their steeds. But with Cordelia’s pegasus dead and his own mare on the other side of the rubble, they were forced to fight on foot.

‘It’s not like we have much space to ride or fly in here, anyway.’ Stahl thought when inspiration struck.

“It's legs! Don’t aim for the body, we don’t even know if it needs whatever organs are in there! Focus on the legs and hinder his mobility!” Stahl exclaimed to his partner, analyzing the structure of the monster's body. “Once we cut them, we move to the arms and finally the head! Eliminate its movement and offense!”

“Ok… Ok, good. We finally got a plan.” Cordelia nodded with a relieved smile, tightening her grip on her spear.

“That we do.” The cavalier took the shield strapped to his back and secured it to this forearm. “Hopefully, it will be enough. Ready?”

“Ready!”

Both knights dashed forward, aiming to cripple the beast in front of them. The monster swung its malformed limb with the intent to smash the knights into a gory paste, but they were fast enough to dodge the attack despite their fatigue. The attack missed and the monster’s malformed arm slammed into a nearby wall then drove itself into the ground like a post. Despite its strength, the creature struggled to pull its arm from the ground, creating an opening for the knightly duo.

Cordelia quickly jammed her spear into what looked like the joint of its back leg and used the shaft
as leverage to yank and free it, taking a large chunk of flesh off. Meanwhile, the cavalier sliced off a chunk of flesh from the trapped limb, taking advantage of the opportunity, as he rushed under the beast to attack the other leg. The abomination roared in anger and used its free arm to swat Cordelia away and sent her tumbling down the cobblestone street.

“Cordelia!” Stahl shouted, afraid that she was grievously injured from the attack. He didn’t have the chance to check on her as the creature was finally able to break free and aimed it’s released him towards him with the intent to kill. The knight raised his shield to deflect the blow but the force was too much for him to resist and was sent crashing against the broken wall of a nearby store.

Stahl was sure that he had a bruised, if not broken, set of ribs. His arm was miraculously not broken thanks to the superior quality of his equipment but that was a poor comfort now that he was at the mercy of the creature. Stahl eyed the former axe from the Wyvern Rider Cordelia had slain earlier laying on the ground just a few feet away but the monster was almost on top of him. The cavalier moved his battered shield in front of him in a pathetic attempt to slow down the inevitable.

A battle cry startled the abomination and allowed Stahl to witness the most amazing –and if he were to be honest with himself, *inappropriately attractive*– sight of his life. Cordelia jumped on the creature’s back with his discarded sword in her hands. Her hair whipped in the air with the sun shining through it and reflecting against her armor making her look like a warrior goddess in his eyes. With a mighty yell, the redhead planted the sword deep into the creature’s back until the blade was almost to the hilt. The creature roared and thrashed, trying to remove the knight on its back but Cordelia remained firm. Using her weight to drag the edge down, the sword ripped through its back as it oozed putrid blood.

Taking advantage of the creature stopping its attack, Stahl took the battle axe and using all his strength, swung the weapon overhead and brought it down on its neck, effectively beheading it. The multi-eyed head rolled on the dirty and bloodstained street yet its eyes still moved in sporadic directions despite no longer being attached to the body.

Cordelia landed on her back. With a groan, she stood strong with Stahl’s sword in hand. The green knight met her halfway and took his sword from her hand. Cordelia, in turn, gave him a soft smile as a gesture of thanks. The redhead breathed hard until her voice turned to a relieved laugh, running a hand through his hair; his helmet long since having been lost.

“Ha… ha… we… did it… ha...” Cordelia was exhausted to the point that she thought she still held her spear and tried using it for support, only to lean on the cavalier instead.

Stahl blushed but chuckled in agreement, putting an arm over her shoulder as support.

“Yeah…heh… man, that wa–”

A strange sound interrupted their celebration. The Ylissean knights turned with dread to the fallen creature and much to their horror, were witnessing something straight out of a madman’s nightmare. The mass of undead flesh warped and twisted onto itself. The faces covering its flesh gave a horrible scream of unnatural pain as the flesh reformed. Tendrils of dark magic poured from its mouth, snaring the corpses of the fallen soldiers and mounts that littered the streets. For a moment, the cavalier could have sworn that he saw a flash of a silver box emitting a purple glow inside the main body, before being covered by the undead flesh. Stahl heard Cordelia’s horrified cry as they watched her fallen steed being ripped apart and fused with the rest of the creature.

The nightmare grew bigger as it incorporated the corpses of the wyvern and pegasus with the mass of human flesh. Its new head was a mix of equine, draconic and human features, with its limbs having grown longer than before – a sight Stahl was sure he was never going to forget.
“No way...” whispered Cordelia, her voice worn down by exhaustion, now filled with absolute dread.

“You’ve got to be kidding me...” said Stahl, feeling his knees go weak from fear and exhaustion. But when the monsters turned its eyes to them, he felt every drop of adrenaline on his body coming to life. Grabbing Cordelia’s arm, he started pulling her towards the alleys while shouting to get her into action.

“Run!”

Despite the fatigue from the constant fighting, Frederick swung his spear and used its elongated blade to slice the leg of an undead steed. With the Risen cavalryman sent flying from its fallen horse, Sully quickly followed suit by slicing the undead rider in half while it was still in the air. He had to admit, the encircling strategy Robin devised worked spectacularly. It certainly gave them the advantage to overcome the surprise attack from the unholy army.

That was until the undead began too transformed into cursed abominations. As quickly as they appeared, they began smashing through the defensive formation that used to be able to stop the undead army in its tracks. They used their corrupted limbs and supernatural speed to outmaneuver and overpower the human forces. None of the Feroxi had any experience in slaying Risen before this battle. They fought in such an inhuman way that there was no basic way to defeat them. Some looked like malformed humans while other mimicked animals or were an amalgamation of both.

Riding on the outskirts of the broken formation, the mounted knights were eliminating all the stragglers while the Shepherds made their way to reunite with their commander.

At his side Sully stopped for a moment when Sumia landed next to them, stabbing her spear on a Risen that was sneaking up from behind. Her pegasus was missing some feathers and had fresh cuts on her body, but she still looked ready to fly. Sumia took a deep breath and shouted:

“Frederick! Sully! Robin’s orders! We need you to keep the hordes of Risen away from our squads while we engage the creatures! We can’t fight two battles at once! All aerial units will focus on the flying enemies! Find a squad and keep our perimeter clear!”

Sully looked hesitant for a moment but nodded. She was, after all, still skeptical about their young tactician. Meanwhile, Frederick chose to comply with Robin’s orders. They were knights of honor and discipline and they wouldn’t dare let their pride and suspicion cloud their judgment. He might have earned the moniker of “Frederick the Wary”, but he could never say that Robin failed them since he joined.

He could grant him some leeway, he thought. After all, the battlefield is a place for action, not doubt.

The Arcanum was the main gathering hall for all the spellcasters in Ylisstol. As both an academy and research center, it housed some of the most powerful and knowledgeable spellcasters in service to the crown.

That’s why it was no surprise to Miriel to find it besieged by Plegian forces.

Just as it was equally expected when dozens of powerful thunderbolts and fireballs slammed into the invading force, vaporizing the majority of them in an instant and halting their offensive.

Nodding in approval of her fellow academic’s preparations, Miriel ran towards the structure through the nearby alleyways. While the structure was enclosed and heavily fortified thanks to thick walls
and multiple enchantments, the mages also prepared multiple secret entrances and escape routes.

It paid off that many of the most eccentric academics were also very paranoid.

Just as the mage ran out into an open street she was knocked down by something heavy crashing into her. Recovering her bearings, Miriel’s eyes widened behind her glasses as a Risen Bear heaved itself off the ground where it had thrown itself and prowled towards her downed form.

The mage tried to cast a spell but she, much to her own horror, lost her tome in the fall.

The massive undead beast was ready to crush the mage, rearing back on its hind legs when the hulking form of Kellam intercepted the attack with his tower showed. Miriel had absolutely forgotten he was with her, but she was glad for his timely interference.

Both physical powerhouses engaged in a test of strength until Kellam gritted his teeth and roared. By inclining his shield until most of the beast’s weight fell on him, the man tilted the giant metal plate, pushed, and threw the undead beast off balance. Now with his weapon hand free, Kellam stabbed the bear’s skull with his lance, ending his threat and leaving the streets clear.

“You okay there, Miriel?” Kellam asked the mage, who stood and recovered her tome and securing it once again on possession.

“Indeed. Thank you, Kellam. Your assistance is much appreciated. Now, let us proceed to our target,” the bespectacled woman stated as she moved towards an inconspicuous wall and, with a flare of magic, pushed it open revealing a tunnel inside.

Miriel heard Kellam take a step back in surprise. “Woah! Since when does Ylisstol has hidden passages?”

“Since the previous Exalt’s crusade. Augustus was a paranoid man and feared the day Plegia would push back. So, he commissioned multiple secret passages towards many of the important buildings in the capital, only known to those in charge of their care and their trusted subordinates, like myself.” Miriel explained, adjusting her glasses and walking into the passage lit by enchanted crystals. “While years late, it seems that Exalt Augustus cautiousness paid off.”

The large knight just nodded dumbly, “Huh… I guess…”

The odd pair of Shepherds continued their trek in silence, having closed the entry behind them. They made their way through the tunnel until they reached a spiral staircase carved into the reinforced stone. At the end of their climb, Miriel placed her hand on the stone and once again flared her magic.

The duo stepped through the opening, only to be greeted by more than a dozen mages prepared to fry them. Kellam was about to step in front of his companion, only to be saved by the voice of an elderly man.

“Halt your attack!” The sage stepped forward past the nervous scholars and his face switched to an elated expression once he saw who it was. “Oh thank heavens it’s you, Miriel? Is it time?”

“Indeed it is, Tobias,” Miriel said, nodding. “Due to the situation at hand, you should have activated them already. Did Senior Enchanter Amell not order its activation?”

“…H-he was outside with his family when the attack started. We haven’t heard from him since.” the old man commented with a sad tone. “While we can’t confirm anything, we are to assume that Amell did not survive. As of this moment, you are in command of this project.”

“I see…” Miriel said through her shock. Amell had been her mentor. The idea of him perishing--No.
Not now, there were more important matters at hand. “Very well. Gather our fellows and prepare to activate the ignition spell. There is no time to lose.”

As the mages moved to prepare, Tobias took Miriel aside to explain their current situation.

“We thought we had one more day. The students only managed set enough charges on the eastern plain and the expected siege deployment sites. Thankfully the Plegians avoided passing through the northern mountains, but we couldn’t set anything up on the western front because of the dam and we lacked the educated manpower to finish up the southern side.”

“I’m not particular to performing without the proper preparations either, Tobias, but the situation is dire,” the bespectacled woman countered with a frown.

The pair stood at the window, looking through it to the east and seeing the strong army awaiting behind the wall. The defenders on the walls were performing admirably, just barely managing to repel the enemy and keep them from gaining access by raising the eastern bridge and closing the gate before the Plegians entered the city.

However, it wouldn’t be enough. They would be overwhelmed eventually.

“There is no time to reevaluate our calculations. Detonate.”

Tobias hesitated, but nodded and gave the signal. Through the windows, those inside the Arcanum could see the magical explosions on the distance. The condensed magic of dozens of tomes stacked together and unleashed at once lead to devastating explosions, no doubt decimating the Plegian cavalry.

But the Ylissian mages were nothing but through. A set of controlled explosions on the closest edges of the mountains detonated as well, creating a rockslide that fell outside the wall and away from their field of view. It would not block the gate, should the need arise to use it, but it would certainly inflict much damage on the Plegian backline.

“The performance was within acceptable parameters,” Miriel praised her senior.

“All thanks to your calculations my dear,” Samuel replied well naturally. A flash of dark magic crashing against the barrier of the building reminded them of the invaders just outside. “Now, let’s kick these vagrants off our front lawn!”

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“This is a mess”, Robin thought as he watched the undead monsters reform again, consuming the bodies of the fallen Feroxi that they had managed to slay to rebuild themselves. The sight was already horrible enough for Robin since he was the one responsible for the decision to engage this monsters. These men had died following his command and he couldn't help but blame himself for leading them to their deaths.

If only he had been more prepared, more skillful, he could’ve prevented these deaths.

“I should have seen this ambush coming! It was obvious that Plegia was behind the Risen! It was too much of a coincidence! Now those men are dead because of you! Why did Chrom put a no-name amnesiac in charge of this army?! What right do I have to stand with these warriors?!”

Had he had his hand uncovered, the tactician would’ve seen the mark on his hand glow a wicked purple as it attacked his willpower and self-esteem.

But before he was overwhelmed by his own inadequacy, something Rose had said to him days ago
appeared on the forefront of his mind which broke him away from the path of self-doubt.

‘This is a big war. You will lose people. You will order deaths on both sides. It’s a burden all tacticians and commanders carry, with the hope those sacrifices weren’t in vain.’

Robin let out a deep breath, raising his gaze to look at the field of strewn corpses and the shambling monstrosity among them.

She was right. He didn’t have time to doubt himself. He needed to prove Chrom didn’t make the wrong choice and that his men didn’t die for nothing.

If he didn’t, even more, would die.

Robin focused his attention on the creature and, with a clearer mind, noticed something he didn’t before: The flesh bulged the most on a specific spot on the creature’s abdomen, quivering as if it was slightly more fragile than the rest of it. Testing his hypothesis, Robin channeled the power of his Elthunder tome through his Levin sword and sent a bolt of lightning towards the spot.

The attack struck true and the creature spasmed from the electricity surging through its decaying nerves, but that wasn’t what caught the tactician’s attention. The flesh of a pustule sizzled and ripped apart, opening a hole and allowing the tactician to look inside.

A wooden box reeking of cursed magic was there for all to see, the undead’s body clearly drawing its power from it. The tactician’s gut told him that item needed to be eliminated. Trusting that instinct, Robin whipped around to the Duke of Rosanne, who just happened to be nearby, and shouted an almost hysterical command.

“Virion! Hit that box now!”

The archer didn’t question the order and let an arrow fly. The projectile pierced through the air and hit its mark, shattering the box into a thousand pieces.

The monster screamed as its body collapsed under its own weight. The allied soldiers watched as the creature and a few of the surrounding Risen disintegrated into black mist, momentarily silencing the surrounding battlefield.

Robin was the first to recover as a hope pierced through all his doubts.

“Everyone we need only to destroy the boxes within their bodies! Mages and infantry, focus on making openings in their flesh! Archers and anyone who sees the opportunity will then destroy the boxes! Cavalrymen will keep the stragglers away from them! Spread these orders to the others!” The tactician shouted, raising his sword in defiance. The cheers of his comrades were music to his ears.

“Let’s show Gangrel that we are not to be messed with!”

“Disgusting vermin,” Rose spat, crushing the frozen flesh of the PLEGIAN priest under her heel.

The Fell Dragon curled the fingers on her healed hand, testing its mobility. She took a deep breath and took a moment to let her magic course through her magic coils.

The tactician felt fantastic. All the fatigue and damage from her earlier battles had left her body, leaving only healed flesh and powerful magical energy behind.

Still, as exhilarating as the power felt, Rose couldn’t disassociate this power with all the atrocities she
had been complicit in committing while using it. Indeed, she felt disgusted at how she felt whole, now that she had access to it again.

However, the tactician wasn’t fooled; this surge of energy was just a temporary thing. Her original magic reserves were still sealed away due to the final blow by the other Chrom’s Falchion and the soul merge afterward. This was just how much she had recovered in the time between then and now, and it would slip away from her grasp again soon enough.

But for the time being while she still had access to it, Rose wasn’t arrogant enough to throw away such a useful resource. This was more than enough to repel the invasion force, so why not put this power to good use?

Still, she felt strange. Like all her inhibitions were removed. She felt free walking amongst these insignificant mortal ants, her power unrestrained and unchained.

_Huh._

As she made her way to the Southern gate with those thoughts in mind, a Plegian squad came out of a nearby ransacked building. A Plegian mage, most likely the one in command of this forces, raised her voice with a commanding tone, “Halt! Surrender your weapons and you sh—”

With a tap to her grimoire and a swing of her blade, the ignorant woman that had dared to stand in her way was split in two by a blade of wind—a spell so simple she did not bother chanting the command. She didn’t even spare a single glance in her newest victim’s direction.

“Know your place, mortals.”

The words slipped out before she even realized it. Maybe she really did have a natural God complex while her powers were unlocked.

But those were thoughts for later; she had places to go and things to accomplish and she refused to waste any more time with these foolish insects.

“Arcthunder!” Drawing power from her tome, Rose launched cackling spears of lightning towards the soldiers that were still gathering their wits from seeing their commander bisected so suddenly. As a result, it was a quick and simple death for the Plegians though she personally thought it was too merciful.

The sheer amount of voltage the spell had contained had vaporized their bodies, not leaving a thing behind. What dust that remained was blown away in the breeze.

The tactician strolled past the remains of the mage when the sight of a silver box on the ground caught her attention. She recognized it as one of the Reeking Boxes that contained the power of the Fell Dragon to control Risen. A key tool for Grima’s conquest of the world, granting her loyal subjects the means to enforce her will when she couldn’t be bothered.

“Well, well, well... What do we have here?”

Stepping over the spilled intestines and other assorted organs, the demigoddess took the box into her hands and analyzed its composition. The spell matrix was a bit different from the one her other half had used. Her version only revived humans and their mounts for her army. This box, however, resurrected _everything_. Humans, animals, even plants. Not only that but if she understood the code correctly it also had a sequence to merge them into a single gestalt entity.
The new beasts would not only have improved physical and magical abilities but the sight alone would also prove effective in psychological warfare. The tactician supposed she felt just a little _jealous_ of not having thought of such devious strategies before, as much as it disgusted her to admit it. As a dragon, she still had her pride, and though it probably was the draconic energy inside her speaking, but she was disappointed she never even considered such a tactic before. She might need to keep a better eye on her brother if his mind could come up with such thing under the influence of Grima. They were, after all, two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately.

Using her magic to prod the inscribed spell, Rose followed the tendrils of magic emanating from the object and could feel the locations of several dozens of similar boxes across the city. If each could summon even just a few dozen Risen the Plegia could overwhelm key points despite all the bottlenecks and contingencies in place.

Rose could have used her remaining strength to sever the connection but the act would probably leave her weaker than she desired, ending her currently tentative hold on her draconic magic. She still needed it to send the rest of the Plegians packing.

An idea popped up in her head. She didn’t need to cut the connection, just modify it. The Risen would still be summoned through the boxes, but instead of being controlled by the one activating the box the box would place them under her control instead, at least until she ran out of power. Grima wouldn’t notice it since the Risen were bound to the boxes instead of him directly, so she would be able to use them to attack Plegian forces freely before making them kill each other. Sadly, she couldn’t modify those boxes outside Ylisstol’s immediate area but you work with what you have.

A wicked smile grew on her face as she realized she had found yet another way to screw around with Grima. This situation might not have been so bad after all.

_“Time to tip the scales.”_

Donnel ran behind the war cleric that had requested his help, looking much less scruffy than usual due to his new arms and armor. His new helmet didn’t move around nearly as much as his old pot, though he still kept that with him in his room. His new spear was of a much better quality and material, not like the bronze weapon he used to scare wolves back in the village.

“Miss Libra, where are we goin’?” The farm boy matched his steps with that of his companion.

“We are going to assist the troops near the northwestern crops, by the dam. They lack support since the enemy’s artillery cut them off from the closest camps, and they need all these staves.” Libra explained, pointing at the sacks of staves they were carrying. The cleric then paused for a moment before giving a resigned sigh. “Also, I am a man.”

Grimacing at his mistake, Donnel gave a nervous laugh, avoiding looking at the priest.

“Oh… heh eh…mighty sorry, sir! It's just that you’re awfully pretty an—”

_“Please focus on the task at hand.”_ The effeminate monk pleaded, earning the embarrassed silence from the young man.

Strangely, they encountered no resistance from the Plegians during their trek. Once they were on the wall, the pair found the street littered with corpses, though there were far more Plegians than allies, which added to their confusion as they heard the continued sounds of battle coming from behind the
closed gate. Climbing to the top of the wall, they met with a few allies mending their wounds – much less than they hoped to see but still a sizable portion of their comrades.

Libra approached the closest soldier, taking out a staff to heal him while he asked his questions. “What happened here? Where are the Plegians?”

One of the soldiers nearby chuckled while he tightened the bandages on his arm. “A damn miracle, that’s what happened. Take a look over the wall.”

Donnel and Libra walked towards the edge of the wall and were shocked by what they saw. The Plegian soldiers were being attacked by a horde of Risen, with the horrible monsters made of twisted flesh leading the charge. The Plegians were putting up a valiant effort but the undead creatures were slowly pushing them away from the city with their indiscriminate slaughter.

“Good heavens! The Risen are fighting the Plegians!”

“Yeah. They came out of nowhere in the middle of the Plegian formation and started killing everything in their way until they started pushing those desert dastards back outside the walls. We were sure the Risen were the work of the Grimleal, but now, not so much...” One of the clerics explained, finishing mending one of the soldiers. “We’ve managed to take this opportunity to close and reinforce the gates once more. Don’t know how long they will last, though. she admitted with a frown. “It looks like the Risen outnumber the Plegians three-to-one, even with those cursed monsters leading them. Once one side defeats the other, they’ll just focus on us again, and we don’t have the strength to repel either of them.”

“Don’t lose faith. Naga will lead us to victory as long as we have faith.” Preached Libra, ignoring the muffled screams of the Plegians and focusing on healing their surviving soldiers.

The farm boy took another look at the battlefield. Donnel hated being unable to do anything, but at the same time, he was completely sure that there was something he could do to turn the tides of battle in their favor.

He looked towards the plain filled with destroyed crops and warriors and spotted the stream, which had been dyed a sickly red with human blood. His eyes followed it upwards until he focused on the solid structure of the dam and exclaimed in excitement, “I got it!”

“Sir Donnel! Where are you going?!” Shouted Libra as he saw the boy make his way through the rubble and begin climbing the ladder to the ramparts.

“I got an idea, sir!” The farm boy shouted back as he ran across the luckily-still-intact bridge leading to the heart of the dam.

“Darnation... where is it!? The books said it was- Ah! There we go!” exclaimed the warrior-in-training.

The young man pulled an important-looking lever in the middle of the structure and hope that his plan worked. The sound of gears turning indicated that he was right.

He looked through one of the windows and watched as the gates of the dam opened. The water rushed through the fields, washing away Plegian and Risen alike. The Plegians screamed in shock and terror at being trapped, overwhelmed, and drowned by a force they couldn’t fight.

The crops in the plains would be lost, but most of them were already destroyed by the fighting or had already been harvested in preparation for the defense, as the former farm hand knew from having helped collect them himself. It was a shame for the few houses that had remained standing from the
pillaging but they had been lost to Ylisse anyways.

The water crashed against the closed gates, unable to force the reinforced wood open and sparing the city inside from its wrath. The Plegians, however, were completely cut off by the newly freed river and could only retreat at the sight of half their forces being mercilessly drowned in the raging waters.

Turning back to the wall, Donnel could see the amazed and horrified expressions of the defenders, who had turned their gazes from the devastated battlefield to his position.

“Maybe I should’ve explained ma’ plan…” Donnel said out loud, trying to hide behind the wall in embarrassment.

Emmeryn finished healing the patient she was currently working on and got back to her feet to clean herself up. Her usually pristine robes were covered in dirt and blood, but she didn’t care. She would help her people in any way she can, image be damned. The Exalt had already discarded her golden headpiece for its weight only hindered her during the healing process.

Unaware to Exalt, the image she was casting for all the soldiers that defended the city was one of only respect and admiration. Most rulers hid behind their armies, or marched amongst the banners of conquest in the heart of battle, but no one had expected their queen to be the one patching their wounds, lowering herself to do the dirty work of saving lives.

Wiping the sweat from her forehead, only to replace with dried blood, Emmeryn took the moment to gather her breath. Her last patient would pull through.

The same couldn’t be said about countless others, though. Sometimes, they arrived just too late.

It didn’t help that not all of the civilians made it to the evacuation points. How many died screaming and terrified in their own homes? A shout from the heavens announced the arrival of one of the Pegasus Knight messengers.

“Your Grace! I bring important news!”

Emmeryn stood, aware of all the ears eager to hear to the message around her. “Speak, then. What news do you bring?”

The messenger nodded, gulping nervously as she continued. “The Risen across the city… they are turning on the Plegians. The invaders are being decimated from within.”

The Exalt recoiled at the message. They heard of the sudden appearance of Risen as part of a Plegian plot, but this outcome was certainly unexpected.

“Thank you for informing us.” She eventually spoke. “Even if the Risen are not being controlled, this doesn’t make them much less of a problem. We cannot guarantee they will focus only on the Plegian forces so do not let your guard down. Go take a rest before you resume your duties. You took a huge risk relaying his information to us,” Emmeryn recognized with a motherly smile.

“I– Yes! Thank you for your kind words, ma’am!” The girl saluted and moved to the nearby stables to rest with her steed.

Emmeryn smile dropped once the messenger was out of sight, ignoring the nervous, yet relieved murmurs around her.

“Maybe this is their punishment for playing with the dead… or Naga has blessed us with a
“If we make it out of this alive, I’m taking up running! I will no longer be a lousy runner, I promise!” declared Cordelia as she dodged another attack from the monster. Stahl wanted to laugh at her joke, but the situation at hand didn’t let him, running through Ylisstol’s alleys in an effort to escape from the beast that was hot on their heels. “I swear to Naga, I will run around the city until my boots are worn down and I’m running barefoot!”

“Who knows, maybe you’d finish a moat once you’re done running!” Stahl tried to joke but the humor was drowned by the eldritch howl of their pursuer. Unfortunately for him, their escape route led straight into a Plegian assault squad.

“Stop right there, Ylissean scum!” Shouted one the soldiers, drawing his sword to engage them but was dumbfounded when the knights ignored his warning and ran past the invaders, with the cavalier bashing one of the mages with his shield as they passed by. “I said sto –!”

A sound no different than that of a stampede startled the invaders, who barely turned to the source before the two were grabbed and turned into gory smears of blood on the ground.

“Why is it attacking the Plegians!?!” shouted Stahl, who spared a glance to screaming men behind them.

“Don’t know! Don’t care! Just run!” Cordelia shouted back, pushing way past her regular athletic limits. The redhead took a moment to appreciate just how much she could accomplish when an unholy abomination was chasing after her with the intention of ripping her to pieces.

Unfortunately, the pair of knights ran straight into a dead end, their unlucky day becoming even worse. It hadn’t been designed to be that way, but the rubble from collapsed buildings had blocked the path. The screams of the Plegians had died down and vibrations on the ground clued the duo in on what was behind them. The abomination stalked closer, as if mocking them for even trying to escape.

The cavalier weakly held his sword and shield in front of him in the vain hope of delaying the inevitable.

“Cordelia...”

As Stahl whispered her name, the redhead closed her eyes, wishing she still had her lance.

“... Yes, Stahl?” She could hear him swallow, even if her own throat felt raw.

“Look. I don’t to die without saying this… But I–”

“Heads up!”

Her eyes shot open just in time to see a javelin pierce the nape of the abomination’s neck, making the beast thrash in anger and pain. Cordelia turned her gaze up and relief flowed into her system as she beheld the shape of three Pegasus Knights darting through the air.

Phila rode her pegasus, another javelin on her hands, flanked by Sorano and Anise, with that redhead merchant holding tightly on the commander’s waist.

“Sorano!” shouted the Wing Commander as she threw another javelin towards the monster.
Said knight opened her tome and channeled her magic. “On it, captain! Burn brightly and scorch the land, Elfire!”

The spell was nothing more than the clumsy work of an amateur but what it lacked in grace it more than made up in power. A ball of fire slammed into the back of the abomination with tremendous force, burning away the skin and sending it crashing to the ground. The tissue melted under the extreme heat, sending chunks of sizzling flesh down to the floor, exposing the beast’s insides to the word.

Cordelia’s keen eyes, trained after years of riding in the sky, caught sight of what appeared to be a silver box glowing inside the body of the monster. But what truly captured her attention was the wisps of dark magic taking hold of the rotten muscle and mending the wound.

“Commander! There is something inside its body that keeps healing our attacks! We need to open its shell and destroy the object to put it down for good!” She shouted for all those around her to hear.

Phila nodded and commanded her underlings, “You heard her! Anise and I will harass it! Sorano! Burn it to a crisp and open a big enough wound so we can destroy the item!”

The knights followed Phila’s orders and began attacking, turning the attention of the monster from the exhausted pair of knights to the flying formation. Things seemed to be turning for the best until the thing managed to swing its limb and hit Anise’s pegasus with a lucky shot, removing her from the sky. Cordelia shouted as she saw another of her comrades fall in battle, or so she thought. While the Pegasus slammed into a wall close to her, Anise was intercepted into a split second by Stahl, who ran and grabbed her while she was in midair. They were sent tumbling to the street, but it did soften the blow and allow Anise to survive.

The redhead ran over to her comrades and gave them an a quick look over. Stahl was bruised and bleeding heavily from his forehead and the wounds he had accumulated through the day needed attention, but nothing looked fatal. A couple of his ribs were certainly broken, but they didn’t seem to have pierced anything vital. Anise’s left arm and leg were twisted into a horrible angle and she was bleeding from several gashes from the blow, but she was still breathing and none of the wounds looked lethal, much to Cordelia’s relief.

Her attention was snapped back into focus by the roar as it tried once more to strike the remained fliers. The genius knight saw the broken corpse of Anise’s steed close by, surrounded by the discarded javelins of her fellow rider hanging from the saddlebags.

She had one chance to make this work.

The knight reached for one of the weapons, her fingers closing around the wooden haft with a practiced grip. Cordelia calmed her heart with all the willpower she could muster and focused her burning muscles on making the perfect throw. Time slowed down for the knight as she took aim and let the javelin fly. True to her title of genius, the short spear pierced its target, shattering the silver box into countless pieces.

The beat howled and squirmed in despair as its flesh dissolved into putrid mist before the eyes of the Ylisseans. As the last of its remains vanished from sight, the warriors were welcomed by a tentative silence, indicating that there were no threats nearby.

Finally allowing her to somewhat relax, Cordelia almost dropped to the ground, weary and exhausted beyond relief, before she remembered the wounded.

“Stahl! Anise!” she shouted, running towards the wounded knights.
“Here, let me help,” a red-haired woman in tricksters clothes said as she dismounted from Phila’s steed and rushed over.

Cordelia recognized her fellow redhead as one of the Shepherds’ recent recruits. “Anna, right? Can you help them?”

“Well, I’m no trained cleric but I’ve picked a few tricks during my travels. I can patch them up until an actual healer can see to them,” Anna compromised as she took out her staff.

“Please do, and thank you.”

“Hey, that’s why the boss over there kidnapped me from the central camp.” Phila’s glare at her comment quickly forced her to change her tone. “N-not that I mind! I’m always happy to help!” Anna said with a forced smile while using her staff to heal both the knights.

Phila gave her the evil eye for a few more seconds before turning to Cordelia.

“The rest of the squads should meet up with you soon. Take shelter inside one of the buildings and tend to your wounds. I will go to the closest outpost to spread our intel. We need to relay the information about the objects inside the Risen golems. You three just rest. Your fight is over,” Phila stated as her pegasus flapped its wings, sending them both flying away.

Cordelia wasn’t about to dispute that.

“So… we won?” came the wheezing voice of the viridian cavalier.

“Stahl! How are you feeling?” Cordelia exclaimed in concern, sitting next to him.

“Like battered meat,” the cavalier said with a pained chuckle, holding his arm around his recently mended ribs. On some protective instinct, Cordelia moved and placed his head on her lap, granting him support for a more comfortable rest. “Though, I’m feeling much better now.”

“Idiot.” Despite her harsh words, she smiled. The redhead figured this was about as good as her day could get. “Thank you. For coming to my aid.”

Stahl smiled, giving a weak thumbs up. “Anytime, my fair lady. That’s what we dashing knights do.”

Cordelia snorted at the comment, refraining from pointing out she saved him too. Leave it to Stahl to say something to lighten her mood. He really hadn’t changed since they were little.

One thing did continue to bother her, though. “By the way… What did you want to say before they interfered?”

She couldn’t understand why his face turned as red as her hair.

Daylight was slowly turned to dusk when the former Fell Dragon appeared on top of a building halfway to the Southern Gate, where the bulk of the Plegian army still held their ground, stubbornly trying to crack the Ylissean defense.

They were most likely waiting for the Risen and Vanguard forces to soften the defenses before doing one final push. Though they had been severely hindered; Rose could still see – feel– the telltale signs of the magical detonations, meaning Miriel had succeeded in her task.

It wouldn’t be enough to push them all back, though, meaning Rose still had a role to play.
Opening her grimoire, Rose scanned the compendium of spells she had accumulated through her lives for a usable piece of magic. Ancient spells long lost to the world were ignored, considered too impractical or costly to use. The signature magic of Grima was outright discarded, not worth the complications they would cause.

She finally stopped at one specific page, eyes quickly scanning the compressed spell matrix of a uniquely powerful tome, thought to exist only on legends.

“Let us see what the flames of Salamander can do in the hands of the Fell Dragon.”

It would have been so much easier to just cast Expiration and rend the whole lot of them into charred frozen chunks, but that would most certainly tip Grima off to her existence and nature and she wasn’t ready for that. Relying on the power of another dragon – one that despised her lineage, which meant the magic would naturally rebel against her – was not exactly the best alternative, but it was the only one available with the reserves she had on hand that could accomplish her goals.

Even in this form, Rose wouldn’t be able to cast the spell on the scale she desired with her current stores of magic. Luckily for her, however, Grima had long figured out how to bypass such weakness. A strategy that should be enough keep her involvement cloaked from her evil male counterpart.

Closing her eyes, the former queen extended her magic and gathered together the souls of the deceased followers of the Fell Dragon she had... collected on her way here. Plegian soldiers just following orders had been spared from the total, just as how fallen Feroxi and Ylisseans were outright ignored.

A single soul was a powerful source of magic, growing stronger the more experience it gained. This stockpile of hundreds of experienced souls? This would serve just fine as fuel for her spell.

But she could do better. Much better.

Reaching into her blade, she grabbed the disgustingly putrid soul of Validar. His soul would have to be consumed a bit sooner than expected, but there was a sort of poetic justice in using him to push back Plegia’s invasion and hinder Grima’s plans.

“Let’s put you to good use for once, father.”

Using Sable, which was now socketed into Thorn’s hilt, as a focus, Rose gathered the souls of the Grimleal around that of Validar.

Their dedication to the Fell Dragon was delectably palpable to her. Such strong magic, especially from her father. She could say what she wanted, but her father had always been a rather talented spellcaster. Channeling their power into her tome and causing it to levitate, she began her incantation:

“Oh hellish flames of draconic birth, heed me!”

“Holy! What in tarnation is that!” shouted Donnel as worry and fear became visible on his face. Despite having no training nor talent in the arcane arts whatsoever, even he could feel the condensed magical presence that was flowing throughout the city.

Libra was doing no better, his knuckles whitening around his stave as the air became saturated with energy. “Dear Naga, what is this power!”
“By my hand be guided and give form to my fury! Become my wrath!”

Emmeryn felt the Brand on her forehead burn slightly as the rest of her body trembled from the power she felt. She slumped sideways, leaning on Maribelle for support as they both gazed in the direction where they felt the source of distortion.

“Let the strength of my soul blaze brighter than any flame! Let it strike faster than heavenly thunder!”

“Oh for Naga’s sake, please tell me that isn’t being aimed at us…” Cordelia begged the heavens as she did all she could to keep hold of her sanity under the immense pressure.

“If it is, I’m just gonna accept it. I’m done,” muttered Stahl, too exhausted to fall into despair. Meanwhile,

Anna just tightened her grip on her staff, nervously looking around. “Ugh! I’m totally asking for a raise after this!”

“Burn the will of those who would dare oppose me and show them their powerlessness! Their mortality! THEIR DESPAIR!”

“This magical buildup is—!” Miriel exclaimed as she watched all the measuring artifacts in the arcanum reach their maximum threshold and begin to shake, with some going as far as to explode into countless pieces. “It’s unprecedented!”

Kellam gulped, watching through the window as dark clouds began to gather beyond the wall and commenting, “I don’t need an instrument to know that!”

“Scorch the land and boil the sea! Destroy the world and rebuild it anew!”

Far away atop the Mila Tree, Tiki tightened the hold on her dragonstone, looking east towards the sea.

“Be careful, my friend.” She murmured.

“Allow your blinding flames to consume the land with your endless, never-ending light!”

Robin had just pierced another Risen warrior with his Levin Sword when he felt a curious tingling sensation on the back of his neck. He turned his gaze to the direction of mountains separating them from Ylisstol, missing the flickering purple flames that enveloped his weapon for an instant.

“Answer my call and become the instrument of my will!”

The levitating tome slowly came to a stop in front of her, the pages containing the magical array pointed towards the Plegian army.
The inscribed ink glowed a furious red.

Grima frowned, a foreboding feeling forming on the pit of his vessel’s stomach. Something had changed.

“Reduce all creation to ashes, Valflame!”

The ancient spell inscribed within her grimoire obeyed her command and from its pages surged a massive array of runes, whose meaning had long since been lost to the world. The runes vanished and reappeared completely surrounding the Plegian army contending with the Risen outside the walls.

It was sheer irony that the Plegians held their position so well that not a single Feroxi or Ylissean was able to advance outside Ylisstol’s walls. That fact alone would ensure that not a single one of Rose’s allies would be caught in the wake of her spell.

The runes glowed before the wrath of the Fell Dragon, enacted through the divine flames of the Salamander, utterly consuming the desert dwellers.

A massive tornado of draconic fire ripped its way out of the earth and consumed the heart of the Plegian army, illuminating the sky like a second sun. The flames ran wild, devouring the screaming soldiers that tried in vain to escape the raging inferno.

The superheated air cooked the surrounding warriors alive within their armor. The metal itself also reached its melting point, fusing with the burnt flesh of their wearers. Unarmored units were simply reduced to ash outright as the fire greedily vaporized all the water from their bodies.

The earth cracked from the sudden change of temperature and rivers of molten rock engulfed the bodies of those too slow to escape, yet too far to die outright. Clouds of pitch-black smoke covered the darkening sky, adding to the terrifying atmosphere.

The surviving Plegians, Ylisseans, and Feroxi alike all watched in awed horror at the display of extreme magical prowess. The entire command structure of the Plegian invasion had been torn apart, its troops were in disarray, and all the while the defenders stood their ground and watched nervously, as if waiting for the flames to turn on them like the Risen had to the Plegians.

Rose gritted her teeth as she felt the flames begin to fight back against her control. Even if Salamander had ascended and was no longer involved in the mortal realm like Naga, he certainly took exception to the Fell Dragon using his signature magic. The tactician could feel the backlash of the spell taking its toll on her body as her draconic powers reached their limit trying to suppress the flames.

Her blood boiled through her veins as the heat of the spell retaliated in defiance. Underneath her gauntlets, her nails split and dissolved away. Tainted blood flowed from her nose and ears, now uncovered due to the scorching winds that blew back the hood covering her head, letting her ashen hair fly free.

The tactician finally released her hold on the spell, satisfied with the amount of damage it dealt to Plegia. The remnants of the invaders were in complete disarray as they scrambled to escape from the tactician’s retaliation. The scorched earth glowed with residual heat, cooling streams of lava snaking their way towards the remaining desert troops. It was only by her will that the heat and aftershock did not affect Ylisstol and her denizens within.
Her draconic power receded back into slumber, utterly spent once more. Without its energy to bolster her, the exhaustion, fatigue and pain prior came back in full force. As darkness crept on her vision, Rose focused on the momentary, peaceful silence that enveloped the city, finding enough solace in it to give herself a tiny smile.

Without any more strength keeping her standing, the former queen toppled to the side, falling from the building into the street below.

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Falchion pierced the last box controlling the Risen, banishing the last remnants of the undead force from the battlefield. The soldiers around the prince cheered at their victory, some even shouting about the glorious songs that would be written about the battle.

Chrom could certainly understand the feeling. An army of righteous warriors defeating an undead army led by unholy abominations? It was indeed a legend worth immortalizing.

His tactician’s voiced cut through and halted the celebration. “No time to celebrate! Gather the wounded and patch them up. Gather the dead and we shall give them a proper funeral pyre. I will not allow them to be turned into Risen on my watch!”

The warriors sobered and nodded, reminded of the cost it took for them to live that day, leaving to complete their orders. In the end, the Prince was left alone with his tactician.

“So many dead...I could have done better....” The white-haired man whispered, the sound almost drowned out in the noise of the cleanup. “I should’ve done better...”

Chrom frowned at the self-deprecating tone he recognized. One he was tired of hearing in his friend’s voice.

“Now, don’t go blaming yourself for things outside your control. You did the best you could today.”

Robin shook his head, “Their lives were my responsibility. I should’ve been ready for an ambush… I should’ve been faster in figuring out the weaknesses of those constructs… Because of my negligence, so many of our soldiers di—”

“Lived because of your quick thinking and strategies. You adapted to a situation no one else could have predicted. You can’t save everyone, Robin,” Chrom retorted with a concerned frown.

“Rose would have,” Robin muttered bitterly.

“She isn’t here. You are. And many of these warriors will see their families again because of you. Even Rose herself has told you not to put yourself down.” Chrom insisted, trying to finally beat some sense into his tactician without literally beating the sense in. “I trust you and your judgment Robin, and it pains me to see you put yourself down for things you couldn’t predict. If I didn’t have faith in you, I would’ve asked you to step down myself. So chin up, ok?” the prince said in a more cheerful tone. “The ladies don’t like a man without confidence,” he added with a smirk, earning a hollow chuckle from the amnesiac.

“Milord!” Frederick shouted as he got closer to the pair. “We are proceeding with gathering the wounded. We should be ready to move in about an hour. Our casualties were surprisingly low, less than ten percent, if the current estimates are accurate. It might even be less.”

Chrom smiled, knowing this was what the tactician needed to hear. “That’s great news, Frederick. Please continue with your work and keep me informed of any further developments.”
“At once, milord.” Frederick stopped and turned to the tactician, nodding in his direction. “Good work, Sir Robin.”

Those words left the pair stupefied. The knight had shown nothing but doubt and hostility to the tactician, so words of praise for him were a striking, but not unwelcome, surprise.

The prince didn’t bother to hide the smug smirk forming on his face as his retainer trotted off. “See? What did I tell you? Things will work out just fine.”

“I guess.” Robin chuckled despite himself. “Thank you, my friend, for having faith in me.”

“Anytime, Robin. Now come, we need to make haste towards Ylisstol. They are awaiting our arrival.”

“NYA HA HA! That spell looks like it was a real doozy!” exclaimed a white haired mage covered in gore and surrounded by corpses of some of the city’s defenders as he watched the massive column of cursed fire incinerate his army. “Looks like the Ylisseans can put up a fight after all! I’m sure glad I tipped that Taguel about the assassination plot! Otherwise, this wouldn’t have been this fun! NYA HA HA! What do you think, Mr. Crowley?”

“CAW! MELT THEIR FLESH, HENRY! HARVEST THE SOULS OF THE INFIDELS! CAW!” exclaimed the crow his right shoulder, offering his two bloody coppers.

Henry nodded, mulling over the suggestion. “Hmm, yes that’s nice. But it would be boring to end this fine bloodbath too quickly,” the spellcaster said with a pout. Tapping his chin in thought, “Hmm what to do…”

“CAW! BLOOD FOR THE BLOOD GOD! S CAW LLS FOR THE S CAW LL THRONE! CAW!” suggested the crow on his left. She always said nice things to him.

“All nice ideas like always, Ms. Crowley! Buuuuuut… I kinda want to see how this plays out in the long run! Without my interference! Looks like the future conflicts could be fun!”

“CAW! LET US FEAST ON THE FLESH OF THE FALLEN! CAW!” the leaders of his murder spoke as one.

“Later, later. Now we should go back to Plegia. I want to see the Mad King's reaction! NYA HA HA!” The dark mage cackled as his crows engulfed him before disappearing into the shadows.

Aversa gritted her teeth in frustrated horror at the sight of her army getting decimated so one-sidedly. The invasion had taken a turn for the worst in an instant. First the Risen, against all reason, suddenly turned on the Plegians and began slaughtering them. The Grimleal had not informed the rest of the army of the Risen situation, but most believed the boxes they were meant to plant across the city were the work of the religious dark mages. Now they were paying for that assumption as the Risen manifested in the middle of every Plegian formation and began killing their own troops.

But of course, to make matters worse, the Ylisseans had some aces from their sleeves. The use of magical explosives was certainly an unwelcome surprise, as they had destroyed her eastern forces with horrible impunity. The alchemical compound Plegia had used to create their own bombs was hard to produce, even for their skilled sorcerers and alchemists. She wasn’t sure how Ylisse had come about their own alternative, but she aimed to find out.
To make matters worse, someone had the gall to open the dam and let the rushing waters wash away the troops she had placed to cross through the riverbank! A terrible oversight on her part, but she didn’t think anyone would risk pulling such a stunt with the high chance of catching their own troops on the water. From the reports she received, half the force had eliminated in such a way as they were engaging the Risen that should have been serving them!

The cherry on top was the spell she just witnessed. Aversa had no idea how the Ylisseans had gotten hold of such a spell or a talented enough spellcaster to use it, but this one use of Valflame had just cemented the defeat of the Plegian Army’s Third Division. If they cast it again, there would be nothing left of this regiment.

The sound of feet coming closer stole the attention of the Plegian tactician. A messenger stopped and kneeled at her side, breathing hard for a few moments before looking up at her. Aversa waved her hand in acknowledgment, allowing the peasant to speak.

“L-Lady Aversa! I bring dire news from the Feroxi Front. The Feroxi Army has defeated the Risen Vanguard forces in the Hallem Plains and they are currently making way towards the city! Their numbers are still strong. The reports said they only lost around a tenth of their forces in the engagement.”

That sealed it. There was no way to take the city, much less hold it, with these odds. As much as she hated to admit it, Aversa knew when she had been bested. This round went to Ylisse.

No matter, they would have the power to crush Ylisse again soon enough.

Waving at the messenger, she gave the instruction that every tactician hated to give. “Sound the retreat.”

The young messenger trembled at the order, nervously wringing her hands as she looked between the battlefield and her commander, “M-Milady…! The k-king won’t be pleased if we don’t conquer the city!”

Aversa scoffed. The Mad King would meet his end soon enough, so there was no reason to fear the crazy fool. “He will be even less pleased if he learns his army was completely annihilated to a man,” she said with venom in her voice. “Retreat. Do not make me repeat myself.”

The girl yelped assent and scurried off to fulfill her duties, not wanting to incite the ire of the twisted tactician.

Turning back to the scorched battlefield, the Dark Flier narrowed her eyes in contempt at the unconquered capital.

“Enjoy your victory for now, Ylisse. This is but a small inconvenience, for fate cannot be challenged. The world will be reborn in flames of Lord Grima, and you will be the first to burn.”

“The Plegians are retreating!” shouted an ecstatic Pegasus Scout above the central camp, earning cheers of victory from all the soldiers within.

Emmeryn gave a relieved sigh, thanking Naga for granting her people the tenaciousness to weather the storm. There were sure to be heavy losses on their side, though. The Exalt was not naive enough to think they made it through this with low casualties. Soldiers and civilians alike lay dead on the streets or crushed under the rubble of their homes.

An idea occurred to her, making the Exalt gnaw at her lip. Chrom and Lissa would chastise her for
the nature of her plan. It was risky, foolish even, but it might be what they needed to end this war.

She owed it to her people to try once more.

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Phila watched, frozen in fear and awe, as Rose cast the incredible spell. While she could not see beyond the wall from her position, and she dared not fly higher in case she incited the ire of the spell, there was no doubt that the Plegian army had been at the epicenter of the devastation. Screams of fear echoing across the city were drowned out by the Plegian warhorns signaling their retreat.

The Pegasus rider barely had time to dive after seeing the mercenary tactician fall from the roof once the spell concluded, no doubt totally spent from casting the spell. The magical aura that had surrounded her had dispersed, leaving behind a surprising sight.

Her hood had been blown back – from the wind most likely – leaving her face exposed. Without the enchantments and hood shadowing her face, Phila could see the delicate features carved on her face, marred by the fresh blood flowing from her nose and ears. Her veins were dark against her pale, giving her an unnatural look. Her white hair, arranged in a ponytail hairstyle, was dancing in the breeze as the pair cruised the skies.

Despite her state, Phila was surprised how peaceful she looked with the relieved smile on her face.

“Ylisstol...is...safe...”the tactician muttered with her last strength before completely passing out.

Securing her charge, she did the honorable thing and, despite many reservations, flew towards the closest medical checkpoint

The mercenary had protected Ylisstol, apparently almost killing herself with that spell in the process. It would be dishonorable for the knight to let her die because of a cautious opinion due to her heritage. Still, now that she was this close to the woman that had earned the distrust of many merely for her nationality, Phila could feel the remnants of the power she used sapping the heat from the area. The Wing Commander felt cold just being this close to the woman, like walking through a cold breeze in the mountains of Ferox.

Still, Phila couldn’t help but notice the passing resemblance the woman had to the Shepherds’ tactician, but that could be her mind playing games with her. She hadn’t spent enough time with the boy to commit his face to memory.

Even so, after witnessing the massive amount power the mercenary tactician could wield and what she was capable of doing with it, Phila only had one question:

“Dear Naga, who – what – are you?”

Chapter End Notes

Extinction: Ice-element. Rank: A

A/N: i. imgur. com/3BY9uVT.png for a sketch (not to scale) of how I pictured the battle of Ylisstol. Plegia is not bothering on bringing down the walls, focusing on the readily-available gates.

Next chapter should be more Robin and Chrom centric, or at least their POVs. I got
stuck for a long time with Miriel and Donnel POVs... hard to catch their personalities for me and combine it with what I needed them to do. I didn’t find a way to stick a POV for Maribelle here so I’ll later. Is it obvious that Stahl and Cordelia are my favorite secondary pairing?

I associate death with ice and it seems death is Grima’s domain. I think it fits. Mainly based on Greth from Guild Wars. Will probably mix some elements of Grima with Zhaitan from that game. Both are dragons that command the undead.

Now excuse me while I go lie down, since I've been sick of the stomach for a week.

Beta: Thanks to Victory3114 and Shipping Rates Apply from FF.net for their help.
Chrom felt his stomach drop at the sight that greeted him once Ylisstol came into view. The previously pristine landscape had been reshaped into something straight out of his nightmares. To his left he could see the fields, once filled with delicious crops, submerged under the released waters from the dam. To the far east, he could see the landslide that fell on the mountainside. Worst of all, the central plain had been transformed into a scorched hell of molten rock and burned grass, as if an angry god strike down those that dared stand in his way. Dozens, if not hundreds of burnt Plegian bodies littered the plains, with those that still had skin on their faces having their expressions frozen in horror.

And those were the ones far from the epicenter.

"Dear Naga, what happened here?" asked Frederick at his side.

Turning around, Chrom saw the shocked and anxious faces of his Shepherds as they looked over the ruined city. Smoke rose from the capital but, if he was honest, it looked much better than they had anticipated after their delay. The prince cursed Gangrel under his breath for slowing them down. They should have expected that saboteurs would block the mountain path, delaying their arrival farther. They arrived two days later than predicted, much to the Ylisseans’ dismay. The troops they gathered would not matter if everybody in the capital were dead.

The prince gritted his teeth and answered to his trusted knight, "Not sure, but we are going to find out. Be on your guard," he ordered.

The army continued their march, slowly making their way to the capital. If it was under Plegian control... They couldn't be reckless. But as they drew closer some sense of relief came over them as they could recognize the Ylissean and Feroxi people fixing the gates under the proud banners of Ylisse.

At his side, Robin took command, "I want the army divided into three parts and settling outside the city. A small convoy will come with the Shepherds. We don't need to cause panic or disorder to the populace. Once you set up camps, await further orders."

Messengers nodded and departed fulfill their orders. In a few minutes, the army dispersed to their assigned positions, leaving the Shepherds with less than a hundred soldiers to accompany them.

Marching to the main gate, the Shepherds were greeted by a morbid sight. Piles of bodies were growing outside the city gates. Plegian bodies thrown into a pile with little care while Ylissean and Feroxi bodies were respectfully lined on the ground, covered in cloth and being given their last rites by the priests of Naga.

Chrom did his best to avoid looking at the smallest bundles.

The flapping of wings alerted the group of an incoming arrival. A pegasus flew towards them at great speed, almost getting shot down by anxious archers and only spared by their tactician's orders.

The rider was revealed to be a young brunette girl with a disheveled appearance; a sign of her
constant work most likely. "Prince Chrom!" the girl saluted. "Recruit Tamara of the Pegasus Knights, reporting! It's good to see you all safe!"

The bluenette nodded in response, addressing the messenger with posture worthy of royalty. "At ease. I can't say our march was uneventful but nevermind that for now. What is the condition of the city? How are the people?" he asked in concern.

Tamara cringed slightly, rubbing her bandaged arm to ease her nerves. "We were hit hard, sir. From what we gathered from the prisoners and our observations, the Plegians used a massive cloaking spell powered by all their mages to move their army close to the city before we could mount a defense."

"Dammit! Plegia is still pulling out their cursed tricks!" snarled the prince, earning nods from a few of the Shepherds.

"A cloaking spell? Worrisome..." The prince saw Robin stop with a frown on his face at his side. After a moment, the tactician looked at him with a concerned expression. "I'll go to the central command point. They should have all the information we need to get a clear picture and get a feeling of the casualties and our current status. We need to prepare in case they use this trick again."

"I will accompany him, captain," Sumia said, patting her pegasus with care. "This poor girl needs a rest."

"The stables in the central command are still intact, ma'am," offered Tamara, earning a smile from the clumsy knight.

Sully looked at her horse and trotted next to Sumia, "Good idea there, Stumbles. I'll go with her, Chrom. This bad boy needs a rest too."

Sumia sputtered at the nickname, eyes growing wide in horror. "S-Stumbles?!" she said in dismay, turning to glare at the giggling ginger haired thief.

Chrom ignored their antics, as more important topic occupied his mind. "Alright. Report anything of importance immediately," the prince stated. He spared a glance to his most loyal knight. "How about you Frederick? Does your mare need a rest?"

Sully butted in before the knight could speak. "Bah! You know him, Chrom. He will stick you like a pair of sweaty pantaloons," Sully said, earning a glare and a blush from the Great Knight. "Give her here, big guy. I'll take care of her."

Frederick looked apprehensive for an instant, but nodded and dismounted his horse. "I– Thank you, Sully. I appreciate it. Marla needs a good rest."

The red cavalier waved him off and took the reins of the mare. "Yeah, yeah. Come on, girl. You've earned a good rest," Sully replied, departing with Sumia and Robin to the central camp.

Once they left, Chrom turned his attention back to the Tamara "What about the Exalt? Is my sister safe?" the prince asked in concern for his kin.

The girl fidgeted in place, evading looking into his eyes and making a pit form in the blunette's stomach. Reluctantly, Tamara answered the question, still not meeting his gaze. "Well... She is alive and unhurt after the battle, but...maybe you could talk some sense into her."

The tone of her voice didn't inspire the prince with any confidence.
Nine thousand four hundred and seventy dead civilians with twelve thousand, eight hundred and forty injured.

Three thousand and two hundred dead militia volunteers with four thousand six hundred and sixty injured.

Five hundred and ninety-seven dead soldiers with seven hundred thirty-nine injured.

The delicate calligraphy belittled the horror those numbers represented. The reports kept coming, and the numbers kept climbing, even if a lot of the figures were guesses at best. What was worse for the tactician is that these figures were from just from half the affected districts. Robin took a moment to run all the numbers and scenarios in his head to get a clear picture of the aftermath.

The defenders were few and had to devote a lot of time to move civilians to the northern district and into the mountain passages, which luckily lead to the east, away from Plegia's territory. The capital depended entirely on the thick walls that surrounded and sectioned the city for defense. It was this construct that endured the Plegian assault and allowed them to funnel them into bottlenecks positions and eliminated the Plegian numerical superiority.

At least that was the idea.

All the plans and preparations made by the defenders worked wonderfully, but it would be foolish to believe there were not going to casualties. The siege engines and destructive spells launched by the Plegian army had devastated the city before Ylisse could mount their defenses. Thousands dead in the span of a few minutes, unable to leave their homes. The risen monsters that appeared in both battlefields were also responsible for many casualties, carving a path of death and horror as they cut the civilians from their escape routes.

Ylisstol's population was much higher than the amount of troops they had to protect them. It was twisted luck that the number of civilians in the city were still low since the last war, but it was a small comfort when watching the piles of corpses in the street. The last census placed the population of the capital at around 140,000 in comparison to the nearly 360,000 before the Plegian War.

Many civilians had left for Ferox and Valm to escape the conflict, not returning once the war was over. Others died of famine and disease or on the battlefield. The rest spread through the kingdom's many provinces to help with the reconstruction, which probably helped them survive more than anything. Fewer people in the city meant lower casualties, but Robin still expected around 20,000 casualties in the city alone when all the search efforts were over, despite evacuating many people to other cities across the halidom.

The only thing he could say was that things could've been much worse had they not received the information from Marth. The siege weapons and surprise spells certainly did a number on the ambushed populace, taking a heavier toll than the main army before the city's defenders dispatched them.

They were lucky the battle lasted only a day. Robin dreaded to think how things would have turned out had the siege lasted longer.

Things could've been much better, though. Looters were on the rise while the army tried to calm the riots and restore order to the populace. Fear and panic were taking hold of the people, making that task harder. The loss of their field to the opening of the dam will force the capital to depend on external food sources for a while.

Robin tossed the papers on his desk and dropped his head on his hand, trying to ignore the guilt and
rage the was boiling in his stomach. Even with the tip and their preparations, Gangrel still got the drop on them. He has no idea how Plegia got their hand on that damned cloaking spell, but the tactician aimed to counter it and never fall prey to it again.

Might throw Sully at one of the captured dark mages. That might make them talk more.

The amnesiac started drafting a reconstruction plan to leave in the hands of the merchant and labor guilds because he had no doubts they would leave for the front lines soon enough.

"What do you mean she's going to the border!?!" Chrom shouted, all sense of decorum forgotten, much to Maribelle's displeasure. She was dirty, tired and had too many patients to treat to be yelled in middle of the southern camp

"As I said," the troubadour started, dragging the words and sharpening their edge, "Lady Emmeryn believes we are in a strong position to negotiate a ceasefire. With most of the Plegian force in Ylisse decimated and the rest of them licking their wounds Gangrel should feel the pressure to end the war since their morale should be at an all-time low."

"That…! That's an incredibly stupid idea! Two days. We delay for two days, and Emmeryn loses all reason!" the prince exclaimed, his expression stopping short of a snarl when he spoke to the blonde. "Who put this idea into her head!?"

Maribelle was loyal to the royal house like a noble should. But her temperament didn't make it easy for her to deal with the volatile prince. Taking a deep breath and counting to ten in her head, the troubadour responded with as much patience she could muster.

For some reason, it was much easier since she didn't have the energy to explode on a tirade.

"With all due respect, sir, what were we supposed to do? Knock her out and tie her up until she abandoned this line of thought?" Maribelle bit out, making the bluenette falter on his tirade. She really wasn't in the mood to be yelled at, not even by her prince. "The Exalt is a grown woman and our ruler. She can make her own decisions."

"Gangrel will waste no time in killing her if he so much as catch the sight of her."

The blonde pinched the bridge of her nose, understanding Chrom's concern. "Then maybe you should talk some sense into her."

"Where is she?" Chrom asked.

"Lady Emmeryn is currently in the eastern districts helping with the treatment of the wounded and surveying the reconstruction," the noble answered, kneeling next to another injured civilian to threat. "Now if you excuse me, Prince Chrom, I have patients to heal."

She couldn't see the prince nod, but Maribelle knew him well enough. "I'll leave you to your tasks and see her then."

A groan escaped Rose's throat as she closed her eyes tighter, trying to block all sound and light from bothering her. Realizing it was a futile effort, the tactician tried to sit up, but pain shot through her body, throwing her back into the bed. Painfully raising her head, the ashen-haired woman took notice of the state of her body. Blood-soaked bandages covered her wounded form. She could feel her magical reserves being lower than they had been in years. Her draconic powers were almost entirely back into slumber after her stunt, with mere wisps remaining after patching the worst
wounds.

No wonder she wasn't fully healed as she should. She didn't have the energy to heal automatically.

Grasping whatever magic she could from the air, Rose healed the worst wounds that the clerics couldn't patch, allowing her to breathe and move without searing pain. That was it, even with her rest, she would be running on fumes for the next few days.

With moderate difficulty, Rose stood from her bed, supporting herself against the stone wall of the barracks. Her eyes saw her cloak folded on a chair with Thorn and her grimoire resting on top of the garment. Only her grieves and one gauntlet seems to have survived the ordeal. Her chest plate as twisted in such a way that the black metal looked like a child's artwork. The other gauntlet laid there, split in two, probably ripped open to treat her wound by the healer.

Rose's eyes grew wide at the implication of the sight. The tactician touched her face and felt her stomach drop. Someone had seen her face. The enchanted hood shadowed her face through a very useful hex. It used a simple illusion spell so that people couldn't figure out her resemblance to her brother, but it was useless if it was pulled over.

"Shit, shit, shit! This is bad!" the former queen cursed under her breath. She hoped that none of the Shepherds had seen her face and that her brother hadn't arrived yet. Rose wasn't ready to answer his questions; not at a time like this.

Using her bedside table for support, the tactician tried to stand by her hand made contact with a piece of paper. Rose note neatly folded laid on her desk, with her name written on it in neat handwriting. The fell dragon, dreading its contents, and tentatively picked the letter and read it:

_Lady Sustrai,

No doubt you have questions about your situation but fear not. The invasion has been repelled by your spell and other factors, but sadly you were left at death's door due to sheer exhaustion. I do not know when you will read this letter, but I wrote it the day after the attack. Please mind your recovery, you were grievously injured from your engagements, but I am told by the clerics that you will make a full recovery.

As for the matter of your identity.

"Crap."

I could detect the hex you placed on your hood once it fell off as if a curtain had been removed and noticed a certain similarity between you and Sir Robin. While I do not want to make assumptions, I cannot help but think you have not been entirely honest with him and us, given the interest you have shown in him.

But rest assured for I will not voice these ideas to anyone.

"What." She was very eloquent today.

You protected Ylissol as vigorously as any native and for that you have my gratitude and my silence. A trusted maid will be taking care of you while you recover. Do not worry about the Shepherds invading your privacy for I have set up a private room for you. Your possessions have been recovered and set inside as you should already be aware by now. I can grant you this much.

If my suspicions are correct, I hope the situation between you and Sir Robin does not bring harm to Ylisse. You might be a mercenary and the situation surrounding you and him is highly suspicious,
but both of you have proven reliable even in the direst situations so far. If you have been honest with your good intentions and meant no harm to Ylisse then whatever secrets you hold will be safe with me. I swear on my honor.

But if your intentions prove harmful, no amount of gratitude will protect you from the consequences.

Should you wish to discuss this matter, I will be available once we finish my duties. Still, I do have questions, and I expect them to be answered once this war is over, if for nothing else as for peace of mind.

With regards,

Wing Commander Phila Lavellan of the Pegasus Knights.

"Huh," was all Rose could say in response to the letter. Her identity was safe in the hands of someone she least expected. Phila always struck her as a stick in the mud. "Ok… I didn't expect that from Phila of all people." The tactician chuckled, not having expected this. It was weird to still being surprised when you knew the future. "I can work with this. At least it wasn't Frederick. That would--" Rose's brain ground to a halt, releasing an exasperated groan. "Ah, shit. How long have I been out? They must be back already..."

Hopefully, no one had done anything stupid while she was out.

"Emmeryn!"

'There he is,' the Exalt thought in relief as she stood to face her siblings, though her heart warmed at the sight of their uninjured bodies. Cleaning her hands on her stained robes, Emmeryn ordered her attendants to take over her patient while she dealt with her family.

"Chrom, Lissa. I am glad you are safe," Emmeryn greeted them with a tight hug as the family reunited. "I feared the worst when you didn't arrive in time," she said with a worried expression on her face.

"Plegia blocked our path through the mountain forcing to take the long way around," Chrom explained earning a nod of understanding.

"Are you ok, Emm? Are you injured?" Lissa asked as she took in the sight of bloodied robes of her sister.

"I am well, Lissa. This blood isn't mine," the eldest reassured with a warm smile that was quickly replaced by a defeated expression. "Sadly it belongs to many of our people. So many dead, even more so wounded..."

"Emm, I understand you feel guilty, but you can't seriously consider trying to talk to Gangrel into a ceasefire again!" Chrom exclaimed, jumping directly to the point.

"It seems you already are informed of my plans," Emmeryn commented as she guided her sibling to an empty room. Once inside she looked at them with a confused frown,"But why do you say that? With the fresh troops you have gathered we should have the manpower to at least force a total retreat from out territory and secure our land."

Chrom blinked in confusion at her question, "I… You're not aware. Of course, you aren't. We couldn't send any messengers..."
"Aware of what? What are you talking about?" Emmeryn asked, feeling the cold fear reappearing in her stomach.

Leaving against the wall, Chrom ran a hand over his face in exasperation. "Before we reached the roadblock, we were ambushed. The Plegians summoned a horde of Risen and sicked them on us. Not only that but they used some unholy monsters made of corpses against us."

Emmeryn recoiled as if slapped. "Oh, Naga. How is everyone? Are many hurt? How many did we lose this time?" the Exalt ask in worry.

The man on the family sighed in response. "Less than I hoped, more than should have made it out. Luckily for us Robin was quick to discover their weakness and exploited it, so we fared much better than we could've."

"The box inside their bodies, correct?" the Exalt stated, vaguely remembering Phila's report.

"Yes, tha--" Chrom stopped as he registered the words of his sister. "Wait. How do you know about that?"

"Risen appeared in the city along during the incursion along with monsters made of their rotten flesh melded together," Emmeryn explained, privately happy that she had not faced such creatures.

Her brother was taken aback by the information. "I see... I guess I shouldn't be surprised. It seems Plegia has no intentions of playing fair, and that's all the more reason not to get close to Gangrel," Chrom said with finality. "He is willing to twist the dead to win then he is as mad as his title suggests."

Emmeryn sighed. "Then what do you suggest?" she asked, feeling down that her plan crumbled before her.

"Staying in Ylisstol is out of the question. Even though the people will feel assured with the Exalt in the city, the disorder is too high for it to remain safe."

"And hiding in Ferox would only reduce our morale," added Emmeryn.

"What can we do..." said the bluenette, racking his brain for a course of action.

"May I make a suggestion?" Lissa said, earning the attention of her siblings.

"Of course you can, Lissa," Emmeryn said with a patient smile.

"How about sending Emm to one of the provinces that haven't been attacked? One that has received Feroxi troops? We send Emmeryn in a small convoy to not attract attention. She could be safe there if we keep it low profile and don't release this information to the public," Lissa said nervously.

Her elders were taken aback by Lissa's suggestion, but they could see the merit.

"Hmm, all provinces have strong forts on their cities and Plegian won't be able to mount a strong offensive like the one in Ylisstol for a while," Chrom mused, apparently liking the idea. "But if word gets out or if she is detected, a squad could attack her in her way when she is most vulnerable."

"How about a decoy? Someone in Exalt robes and a wig could pass as Emmeryn in the distance while the real one is escorted by some guards. We inform just a few people and release false information. If they follow the convoy we can lead them to an ambush while Emm goes to her real destination." Lissa suggested to their collective surprise.
Chrom blinked their youngest sibling. "I… Actually, that's not a bad idea Lissa," he said, slowly gaining a smirk on his face. "When did you so smart?"

Lissa puffed her cheeks and pouted, much to the amusement of her elders. "Hey! I might not be as smart as Robin but if I'm good at anything it is pranking and tricking people!" she stated proudly. "Plus, I might have been picking a thing or two from listening to Robin, Virion, and Rose talk." At Chrom's raised eyebrow, she relented, "And I might have heard our dear tactician mumbling a similar plan in our way to the city..."

'Now, that makes more sense.' Emmeryn chuckled at her sibling's antics, shaking her head. It was a nice respite from the gloomy past few days. "We know you are smart, Lissa. There is no need for letting Chrom tease you like that," she said, earning chuckles from her brother and a pout from her sister. "Still, if we are going to follow this plan, where would I go? We can't go to the secret castle, and cities like Themis are too close to the border for it to be safe."

"Hmmm, let me discuss this with Robin and the others. One of them should have an idea," Chrom suggested.

The elders sibling nodded in agreement. It was a sensible idea. "Very well, I shall leave it in your hands. Now, how about you two get a bath and then we can have dinner together? We still have time to refine this idea so let's take a rest," Emmeryn suggest, much to the delight of her siblings.

The tactician spent the last two days handling the preparations for Chrom's plan. He had to admit it had merit and with the stretched resources they had thanks to the incursion he couldn't think of a better idea himself.

Even though technically it had been one of the ideas he thought of during their march.

'Sneaky she-devil prankster,' Robin though with a slightly bruised pride.

The already contacted the dukedom of Vale and issued their instructions and proper documentation through their fastest messengers to ensure their plan went without a hitch. At least with the Plegians pushed back they could send their flyers with little worry of ambush. It seems they had ran all the way to their ships and departed, not willing to engage the pursuing army with their depleted numbers. Everything appeared to be ready on that end at least.

Robin took a moment to look at the courtyard and watch the soldiers scrambled to finish their preparations. After eating and having a good night's rest, because gods know they needed it, everyone was eager to work in joining the war effort.

Their physical and mental health were stretched thin, despite the brave front many put up, though. A couple of visits to the clerics showed the real level of strain and injuries many decided to ignore and hide, much to the chagrin of the tactician. And as much as they wanted to stay and rest they would do better in the border forts to help on that front.

Which brought Robin to his current situation.

"No," stated Robin with a level of authority and conviction he wasn't aware he was capable of achieving.

Of course, his answer was not well received.

"What do you mean 'no'?"] asked Stahl in bewilderment. "Sir, with all due respect, we are ready to fight," the cavalier insisted, earning a nod from the red-haired woman at his side. Cordelia, if he
recalled correctly.

The tactician pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to push back the headache that was forming. "Stahl, I don't doubt your willingness or that of Lady Cordelia, but if my information is correct, you have multiple cracked ribs and extreme fatigue. Your friend here has multiple lacerations and bruises. It's best if you rest for at least a week."

"This is nothing a cleric and some of my family's ointments can't fix," insisted the cavalier. "We should be ready for combat in about two days."

"Sir, I know it's the first time we speak, but please! We can fight!" agreed the redhead.

Robin was about to engage on a long list of reason as to why their insistence was a terrible idea when someone interrupted him.

"Let them come, Robin," came a voice from behind him, which startled the tactician. He spun around to glare at the culprit, "Stop doing that!" Robin swore that every time she appeared behind him his hair grew whiter.

"Doing what?" asked his fellow tactician with an insincere innocent expression, though it lacked her usual playfulness. Rose wasn't wearing her chest plate and had many bandages across her body, visible through her shirt. Her cloak had gashes and looked patched up, making it look more roughed up than his own.

"You--" Robin stopped and pushed the observations to the side and resumed trying to bring reason into his comrades for their time was short. "Forget it. Even then, you're not one to talk! You've been in a coma for days!"

"...Not that many, just four, Rose grumbled out.

"You almost died from your injuries and exhaustion! I have your medical report right here! Let's see. Broken arm, cracked ribs, collapsed lung, broken jaw, multiple lacerations, ruptured kidney…" The tactician gaped at the injured woman in disbelief who disregarded his concern, finally reading the whole report. "Gods, how are you alive?"

The hooded woman dismissed his argument with a wave of her hand. "I had worse. I'm healed enough now and ready for action."

"What!?" Robin heard himself shout. She couldn't have healed from that! And yet, here she was in front of him like nothing had happened to her.

"I heal fast but never mind that. If you're that worried, you can buy me a fruit basket or something. As I was saying," Rose continued, ignoring his disbeliefing glare. "Sir Stahl and Lady Cordelia performed admirably during the invasion if what I read in the reports is correct. I know it's not my place, but I would like to recommend her inclusion into the Shepherds if that's okay with you. We could always use more flying units, especially one of such quality," the mercenary tactician stated, earning a grateful blush from Cordelia at the praise.

Robin calmed down, knowing that this debate was not a battle he would win, and mulled over the suggestion. He recalled the dossier of prominent candidates that he had been reading before his departure and Cordelia was amongst those that stuck out."I've read Phila's report and her resume. I don't question her skills, and your idea has merit. In fact, I agree. I already discussed it with Chrom, and he approved her inclusion in the squad," he explained earning surprised expressions from the two knights. Robin wasn't done, though. "But both of them should be resting in bed since not
everyone has that inhuman metabolism of yours," Robin snarked, taking the opportunity to take a jab at her."And Lady Cordelia lost her mount. She needs time to break a new steed and train it to be combat ready."

"True…” Rose admitted. She rubbed her chin as she pondered their options. "How about this? There should be pegasi ready from the unfortunate demise of some of the Pegasus Knights that must have survived." Robin winced at her clinical tone but understood her meaning. They couldn't waste resources in a time like this and Cordelia was relatively fit for light duty, even if he wanted to rest. "They can come with us to the fort and go as liaisons to meet with the Khans once their convoy arrives. That way, they should be out of battle and still fulfill an important role."

The male tactician weighted her suggestion. "Not a bad idea. It's light duty, and both should be back to full health in the next few days as long as they don't exert themselves. Plus, we need all the manpower and resources we can get. It would keep them from complaining, and we get skilled soldiers back on the field," Robin said with confidence, earning an approving nod from his counterpart.

"They know we are standing right here, right?" Cordelia questioned the wounded cavalier with a frown on her face.

Stahl gave a shrug, trying not to wince in pain. "Those two always go into their own little world when they start going. Typically it happens when Robin wants to bounce strategies with her. Don't take it personally. It's a tactician's thing."

The redhead shook her head in exasperated amusement. "Splendid."

Reaching a satisfactory decision, both tacticians turned to the tired knights. Robin addressed them while ignoring the annoyed expressions on their faces, "Very well. The both of you can accompany us to the fort and work as the liaisons to the Khan. I will give you your full instructions later today."

Both knights' expression brightened, and they stood as straight as their bodies allowed to salute, "Yes, sir!"

"Dismissed." After the knights had departed, Robin turned his attention to the tense mercenary with a concerned frown. "Seriously, are you alright?" Even to his ears that question sounded stupid. If Phila's report is to believe this walking mystery was responsible for decimating a good fourth of the Plegian force; a task no doubt with a heavy toll on her mind and body. "I tried to see you yesterday after I read the reports but Phila insisted you were left alone." Hopefully, now that they were just the two of them in the area she would be honest with him.

The hooded woman sighed and relented, "Truth be told, I've been better."

"You could always stay behi–" Robin tried to offer but was interrupted by her angry response.

"No!" Rose growled at him, much to his surprise. She quickly regained her composure, giving a tense shake of her head, "Sorry, I just hate being thought as a weak. The truth is I'm physically stable if a bit sore. Magically, however..." Rose trailed off, looking at her tome, "Let's just say I won't be casting magic for a while. At most I'll use straightforward and familiar spells."

"Speaking of spell... I read about what happened… The spell you used on the southern field. I can't believe you wielded such power… Powerful magic like the one you used could have turned the tide of many battles… Why hide it, though? Had you informed us of that, we could have planned around it. We could use all the help we can get and hiding such tool does us no good," he asked with narrowed eyes.
"So you finally asked," Rose said as if she had expected the question. "Very well. To cast this spell, I had to store a lot of magic inside my tome for a long time. I'm not going to get into the details but casting that spell is a 'high risk, high reward' kind of thing." Rose gave him a wry smile, "A fitting description for the backslash almost killed me. Had to use dark magic and a few hexes to strengthen my body and not being immolated inside out." The mercenary had the decency to grimace. "Still, it was a close call. I wasn't sure I could succeed."

"You shouldn't have done something so reckless!" he shouted at her. He ignored the glances some passing soldiers gave the pair as he focused on the woman.

"In case you've forgotten, we were surrounded by an army," Rose pointed out. "The truth is that our defenses would have held for a little while, but our hope was that you arrived with the Feroxi army to turn the tide. Had I not acted we would've lost since you were delayed. Can you think of another course of action I could have taken with such little amount of option available?"

"I...No, I don't think so," Robin conceded. It was a terrible situation to be in, and he didn't envy her for dealing with that, even if it should have been his responsibility. "Between you, Miriel, and Donell of all people, the Plegians were pushed back, but had your spell not scared them off they would have regrouped and hit harder next time."

"We just lacked the manpower to hold the city for long. And then Plegian pulled out the cloaking spell and started summing Risen. We were out of options, so we all took desperate measures."

"Alright, I understand," the male tactician relented. "But please don't take such rash actions anymore. You could have hit friendlies had they been fighting in the fields."

Rose scowled in response. "I'm not an idiot, Robin. That's why I cast it in the center of their formation and away from the city."

"Fair enough, I meant no offense," Robin said with a placating gesture. At her persistent frown, he asked, "Something wrong?"

"Nothing, just..." Rose trailed off with a thoughtful frown, "Do you truly believe sending Emmeryn away is the best course of action?"

"I take it you don't approve?" the amnesiac asked, earning a conflicted expression in return. "I said the same to Chrom, but none of the royals budged. As much as I would like her to stay here, their word is law," Robin said. It was true, and he would have preferred her in the capital with most of the troops. "Their idea has merit, though. A little diversion and we can both secure Emmeryn and bait any possible assassins into a trap."

"It's a good plan, if a little basic," the mercenary tactician conceded. "I admit I did not foresee the damage to the city. I expected us to be able to get the army here and push them away with fewer complications. With Ylistol in a much better state, her staying here would have been ideal. But the city is very vulnerable right now. We simply can't focus on the Exalt at all times. Too many variables to consider..." Rose said with a shake of her head. "I just hope this works out. I would volunteer to go with her, but I doubt anyone would want the Plegian mercenary alone with the Exalt just after the attack."

"True enough," Robin agreed, not having anything else in the matter since their hands were tied. "Funny, I didn't expect Lissa to come up with a plan."

Ra chuckled, "Yeah. You better be careful, or she might replace you as tacticians."
Both stopped at her words and took a moment to imagine the scenario only to receive simultaneous shivers of dread.

"Let's hope that never happens," Robin said with a nervous laugh and quickly changed the topic. "Well, since you are too stubborn and insist on coming with us, please rest some more. I will call you if anything needs your attention."

"I feel fine. I can help around, and I could use some stretching by torturing training some recruits. All in the name of the war effort," Rose insisted with a sincere tone that Robin didn't buy for one second.

"Yeah, no. You will rest. That's an order," the male tactician said with finality.

Much to his surprise, she gave him an honest-to-gods pout. "Fine, mom. I'll go back to my room," Rose said faux bitterness and departed with a mock salute, leaving the tactician shaking his head and muttering something about stubborn Shepherds with no respect for his rank.

The next day saw the Lowell sibling bidding farewell to the eldest. Chrom saw his sister mount the carriage, flanked by a platoon of Feroxi soldiers.

"Are you sure you don't want more soldiers to accompany you, Emm?" Chrom asked with a frown.

Emmeryn shook her head, "No. This will be enough, Chrom. Our forces are needed elsewhere."

"At least take Phila with you," said Lissa with equal worry. "She's never apart from you."

"While it would be good for the decoy to have Phila with them, I need her here. The Pegasus Knights suffered heavy losses and she is the only one that can command them effectively right now," Emmeryn explained the answer they already knew.

"I understand, though it doesn't make me feel better," Chrom said with a sigh, looking at his sister in the eyes to convey his sincere worry. "Please, take care of yourself sister. If the situation looks bad, escape at all costs. Ylisse needs you more than anything else."

"I will. I hope to see you two soon," Emmeryn said giving them a hug and closing the door to her carriage.

"Do not worry, Prince Chrom. Everything is in order for her to reach our state with little problem," said a jolly voice from behind him.

"Duke Oswell," greeted the prince, turning back to meet with the old noble. "Thank you for your help setting up accommodations for my sister."

"Duke Oswell," greeted the prince, turning back to meet with the old noble. "Thank you for your help setting up accommodations for my sister."

"Please, milord, I have known you since you were a kid. Please call me Bartholomew, or Bart if you feel like it," the portly man said in good cheer. "And how could I deny the chance to help our dear Exalt?"

Chrom chuckled at the old man's joviality, "Thank you then, Bartholomew, for your hospitality."

"Again, do not mention it, my boy," the man said handing Chrom a letter. "Here, this is the confirmation from my wife that everything has been set up on our end. The disguised caravan will go to the meeting point, while the decoy moves to the ambush point. They will give you a similar letter verifying their identities. I wish I could accompany you but I also have duties in the city," said the noble with regret.
"Don't worry, you already did enough," said Chrom, taking the letter and giving it "Excellent," the prince said, handing the letter to the Feroxi in charge of the Exalt's security who already knew his orders.

"We will protect her with our lives, Lord Chrom. No harm shall befall your sister," swore the man, giving a salute and departing with the rest of the caravan.

"I hope so," murmured the prince, taking one last look at the departing carriage before returning to the castle.

They still had a war to win, afterall.

"So Ylisstol still stands and Emmeryn lives," Grima mused as his disciple finished informing him of the situation.

"Yes, Lord Grima," the disciple replied. "Do you desire for Aversa's punishment?"

The Fell Dragon dismissed the suggestion. "Aversa still has her uses, her failure matters not. Fate will not be cheated. Emmeryn will die before the war is over. The bloodshed in her name will strengthen Plegia's soil for when I need to create my body," Grima declared. He was getting sick of the meat bag he was forced to use instead of his majestic, true form. "The loss of Sable is worrisome, but no doubt is already in the hands of Naga's pawns." Validar had all the tools to succeed, but apparently the royal brat hadn't learned her lesson and kept meddling with destiny. "The spell they Ylisse used is new. They shouldn't have access to such high-level magic. It seems the children have been busy," the dragon mused with a frown. "Anything else?"

"Our spy-ravens manage to listen to their meeting. All indicates that she is moving towards the dukedom of Vale with the intention of switching Emmeryn with a double to trick us."

"Vale?" A wicked grin spread across his face. "Good," the Fell Dragon said as he wrote something in a piece of paper and gave it to his disciple. "This are your instructions. Go and fulfill them to the letter, but make no mistake," he warned. "I expect good news next time we speak or there will be consequences."

"Yes, milord. Your will shall be done," the disciple bowed and left the room, leaving the draconic deity along.

"Soon, all the pieces will be in place. Chrom will gather the Fire Emblem and the gemstones for me in his pathetic attempt to stop the inevitable only to make my work easier," the dragon said as he watched the map on his table, starting to laugh at the memories that appeared on his mind. "Oh, how I look forward to watching you squirm again, Prince. Maybe this time, I'll have your daughter watch. It will be a good father-daughter bonding time," Grima said with twisted pleasure.

Rearranging the piece on his map so that the figures around Vale moved closer, Grima let his grin grow bigger as he saw his new course of action.

"Perfect. Everything will fall into place," Grima purred in satisfaction. "Foolish children, it doesn't matter what path this world takes for it shall always reach the same end." Grima said as he knocked the piece representing the Exalt from the board.
The carriage shook from the bump in the stony path as they convoy made its way to the meeting point. Emmeryn and her double were seated together inside, with the Exalt already changed into a different set of robes that covered her face and mark not to arouse suspicion. The trip was silent, letting Emmeryn focus on her thoughts. She would have preferred to stay in the capital and help her people, but she had to agree with her brother. Her status as an idol would mean that were she to fall her people would be demoralized. So at least for now, she would go to the state and issue orders from there.

The convoy stopped suddenly, snapping the queen out of her thoughts. The door was opened by one of the Feroxi men. "Stay close, your Grace."

Emmeryn nodded and walked behind the man, flanked by two other soldiers. Now that she was outside, the Exalt saw they were at a crossroads. On the other side of the road was a simple merchant convoy with a couple of armored guards and a few fidgeting merchants tending to their cart. An armored giant of a man stood in front of the convoy. His entire body was covered in steel armor, making him an imposing figure.

Her guard stepped forward, "Do you have the letter?" the Feroxi soldier asked with his hand on his blade. Emmeryn could see the other soldiers reading for any possible conflict.

The armored man nodded and pulled out a letter from his pouch. "Here, it is."

The Feroxi took the letter and showed it to the Exalt. Emmeryn recognized the unbroken seal of the House of Oswell. Opening it, she verified the contents and the passphrase, confirming its veracity. Nodding to her guard, the Feroxi relaxed and allowed the Exalt to march forward. The rest of the convoy relaxed and released their hold on their weapons.

"We entrust her safety to you," the Feroxi said.

The armored man nodded, "We'll make sure she reaches her destination in one piece. This way, Your Grace," he said, guiding the disguised Exalt to the inconspicuous merchant cart and stepping inside with her.

The convoy continued with the decoy towards the south to Themis, while the Exalt made her way to the Oswell state with the disguised caravan.

"Something to drink, your majesty? I got some water with lemon with me. It's not much but it should do the trick until we reach the state," the man said, offering her his water skin.

"Thank you, I haven't had much to drink during our trip," Emmeryn said to the man with a smile and took a nice gulp of the beverage to quench her thirst.

"Please, don't thank me. Not for this..." The man said in a somber tone, raising his visor to reveal a bushy beard on a dark skinned face and grey eyes.

Plegian eyes.

"Wha–" Emmeryn tried to said but much to her horror, she felt her body freeze up.

The last thing she heard before her world went black were the sorrow voice of the man, "I'm so sorry, Lady Emmeryn."

Mustafa removed his helmet and took in the sight of the collapsed Exalt. The Plegian general collapsed against his seat, rubbing a hand on his face. He picked up the fast acting sleep potion and
looked at it with disgust. Bandits and soldier he could fight despite his distaste for bloodshed, but subterfuge was something else. He despised having the get involved like this but his orders were clear.

'Bring in the Exalt or your soldier's families along with your own will be executed.'

He had no idea how that Grimleal that handed him the letter knew about the interception, but having handed him the gear of the real members of the Ylissean squad.

He didn't ask what happened to their original owners. Removing the blood was clue enough.

The general tied the Exalt up and Still, Mustafa took no pleasure in his success. The general and his squad respected Emmeryn for her desire for peace, they even sympathized with her ideals. Sadly, as long as Gangrel remained on the throne and their families under watch they couldn't deny the Mad King's orders.

"The Exalt is secured," Mustafa said to the rider through the window. "Make way for our hidden boat. It's a long trip until we reach Plegia."

The rider nodded and the general heard his orders being relayed to the other disguised soldiers. Mustafa was pleased with the professionalism and loyalty of the men under his command. At least with his directly in control of this squad he could guarantee the Exalt was threatened with the respect she deserved and not mishandled.

He could grant her that much.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Oh yeah, I'm writing this… So… Yeah, took me a while to write this between work and that virus. It totally has nothing to do with me playing Bravely Default.

I have to thank Victory3114 for pointing out the horrible way I originally handled Emmeryn's capture. It was a way too forced and I was even aware of how weak my justification was. Fear not, the bigger diversions are coming, but I need to knock Rose down a bit first. She couldn't do much for the plan since she was unconscious and they already had their own plans. As far as she is aware, this is a solid plan and one that she and Robin would have come up with anyways. Sadly, time doesn't like when she tries to change things.

Moved a lot of scenes to the next chapter to fix the flow a bit. It's not fully beta'd, so again my apologies for the mistakes since I'm sure it feels a bit clunky. Most of the meat was moved to the next chapter, this is just set up so it feels a bit rushed. I will include more of Rose's thoughts on the plan next chapter. A bit of downtime is needed after the last chapters, but they needed to get secure Emmeryn first since the frontlines are still busy. More will be explained in the scenes I moved.

http://santafer.deviantart.com/art/Rose-Concept-Art-Shattered-Reflection-606254374

A picture of Rose as an apology for the delay.
"So..." started Rose.

"So..." echoed Phila.

An awkward silence ensued.

"You wanted to talk?" The tactician said as the pair looked over the edge of the wall to see the Pegasus Knights training below. Rose had let her hood down and was basking under the sun for the first time in months: a simple pleasure she denied herself for too long. They were so high up that no other person, save Phila could see her face, so she had no worries about revealing it to any others.

Phila nodded and turned to face Rose.

"It would be in our best interests to get this out of the way." Phila was both short and straight to the point, something that Rose admired about the Knight Captain in both her old worlds.

"A good point," she said. "Well, let us get this interrogation under way. What's your first question?"

"What is your relationship with Sir Robin?"

"I don't suppose you would believe me if I told you that I am Robin's female counterpart from an alternate dimension?"

"Please do not insult my intelligence. I've no time to play games, Lady Sustrai," the Wing Commander replied with an offended scowl, instantly dismissing the outlandish response.

It seems like being honest won't work, so twisting the truth it is.

Trying to meld both timelines and their respective histories, including the actions and histories of both sets of Shepherds, was a challenge. Rose could never create a good enough of an excuse to explain that her body didn't reflect her true age, seeing that her mind was almost thrice her physical age.

The best way to explain her relationship with Robin to Phila was to treat it as a convoluted family matter. Rose had rehearsed her story a few times prior to this meeting and had made sure to cover all the basics and holes. As long as Phila did not speak to Emmeryn about her, they might not be able to find discrepancies in it.

She was thankful for all those years teaching her how to bullshit her way through the noble court.

"I am his older sister. But we weren't raised together, for both of our sakes. Our mother took care of Robin on her own in Ferox whilst I remained with one of her close friends in Ylisse, though I did see her from time to time. Our family situation is a little complicated, but that is a personal matter," the tactician explained.

Phila wasn't satisfied with the vague answers, but didn't press for any smaller details. The tidbits didn't matter at all to her, Rose knew that much. Only one thing mattered to the Wing Commander:

"Will your 'situation' jeopardize the security of Ylisse and the Exalt? You are both Plegian after all.
and the way you and he appeared to the Shepherds are awfully convenient."

"To tell you the truth, all of this is unnaturally convenient," Rose admitted. "Him joining the Shepherds and traveling to Ferox is not something I foresaw nor expected of him but when he mentioned amnesia, it made sense. Though I kept tabs on him during the past year until the last month before his departure, I had other contracts to fulfill, and thus missed whatever events that might have led to his memory loss."

"Are you saying that your meeting was a matter of chance?" Rose nodded in affirmation. "Then why did you agree to join the Shepherds if that wasn't your goal?"

"Being invited to join you was not part of my plan," the ashen-haired woman admitted. "I wanted to offer my skills to the Khan and push her to take the initiative against Gangrel but it proved unnecessary when the Prince arrived. Now I get to keep an eye on my family, help stop the Mad King, protect the country I love, and get paid for doing so," Rose explained with a shrug. "As for the lengths I have gone for Ylissstol, well, I lived a few years in the city while growing up with my caretaker after we escaped the last war, so I consider it more of a home than Plegia. I made many acquaintances that live here, so there's that too. I suppose it may seem strange, but it's the truth."

"I see..." Phila seemed to accept that answer for the moment, though she did narrow her eyes after. "Why you haven't told Robin of your relationship, though? For what I have heard, he does not have any link to his past. It seems particularly cruel to hide this from your brother when he has been looking so feverishly for clues to his past and his family."

"As I said, it is complicated. While I was aware of his existence, Ferox was the first time we actually met face to face. In addition, dropping this on him in the middle of war is not prudent nor wise; it would add more unnecessary stress and distractions, possibly jeopardizing his performance as the Shepherd's lead tactician." Rose rationalized. "I hope to break it to him after the war is over. It's not like we were close or anything before, but he is still my little brother. Once I tell him everything, it will be up to him whether or not to share it with you and the others. Our history affects him more than me, in any case."

The Pegasus Knight stared at her for a minute and nodded. "Very well, you words sound sincere and I will keep my word. You have proven to have the wellbeing of Ylisse at heart, even if the coin is part of the motivation. For now, I will give you the benefit of the doubt."

"I'm surprised you seem to care so much about us and that you are willing to put this much trust in me," Rose stated, looking at Phila with a slightly disbelieving eyebrow. "I thought you distrusted us?"

"It's my job to be distrustful of outsiders that can be potential threats to the Halidom," Phila said.

"Am I still a threat?"

"That is what I am trying to figure out," Phila admitted. "While you may have earned some leeway with your recent commitments to the defense of Ylissstol, your actions are still strange. You seem to know more about the situation at hand that you let on. At the same time, you have shown no ill intentions to this Halidom nor any signs of working for Gangrel." She then clasped her hands behind her back and looked at the Rose straight in the eye. "Is there anything I should know that could risk the safety of my people?"

Rose looked down at the city below, taking the opportunity to think about it and weighing the possible consequences.
The mercenary had no reason to tell the Wing Commander any of this before. But as her luck would have it, Phila had started putting the pieces together in an incomplete picture. That was more dangerous than anything else. Should the knight act based on incomplete information it could be catastrophic for her and Robin.

Oh, and the world too.

This was a big risk. Any tactician hated going into battle without sufficient information and leaving matters up to chance. The discrepancies between this timeline and her own were starting to grow and the mercenary was beginning to be unsure of what might happen next. She even wondered if she should travel to Valm to check how events there were currently progressing.

Now, Rose was gambling her plans in their entirety by trusting an ally that would hopefully prove valuable. From what she observed, Phila was as dutiful and loyal as any knight of her rank, but compared to the near-fanatical Knight Captain Frederick, she was much more tempered in will and mind.

She never had the opportunity to interact with Phila in such a personal manner before, the commander having died in the Plegian war in both of her timelines before she had had the chance. Any knowledge of her came from Cordelia and Sumia, often speaking warmly of her when they told her stories. Now, she gauged whether or not Phila would prove a valuable asset in this changing timeline.

She came to her decision.

"You were debriefed on the contents of Marth's letter, correct?" Rose asked slowly. Phila responded with a curt nod. "Do you truly believe she indeed had accurate knowledge of the future?"

The question gave the knight pause, not expecting the change in conversation.

"In any other case I would have found the idea ludicrous. She could just as easily have been a deserter or have stolen the plans, but…" Phila frowned as she organized her thoughts. "The degree of the details she possessed were far too specific to discard out of hand when undead monsters are walking the land. Stranger things have happened." The knight then looked at the mercenary with a raised eyebrow. "You are not going to try and convince me that you are a time traveler too now, are you?"

Rose laughed. "Oh, if only you knew the whole story." she thought with mirth.

"Nothing of the sort. Well…not exactly." The tactician clarified, grimacing. "A little backstory is necessary, though. My...father—no. Validar," Rose spat. "was the Grimleal's High Priest. A power-crazed zealot of the church. Our mother took Robin and me far from Plegia, killing many Grimleal on her way out once she realized their plans for Robin and myself:" Looking at Phila's questioning look, the tactician took a deep breath and took the gamble. "Sacrifices for the resurrection of the Fell Dragon, Grima."

"Preposterous!" The Pegasus knight jumped back, startled. "The Fell Dragon was defeated centuries ago!"

"That doesn't stop madmen from trying to achieve their insane goals." Rose retorted nonchalantly with a shrug. "From what my mother told me and some information I gathered as a mercenary, Robin, myself, and other children were planned to be used as sacrifices to create a vessel for the dragon since Grima is technically only asleep, not dead. We were all bred to have an unnaturally high magical potential. And that over there," she said, pointing at the scorched plain south of the city,
"is your proof."

"Fifteen years ago," Rose continued. "Exalt Augustus heard of this through his spy network, though he grossly misinterpreted the information and instead believed that Grima had already been reborn as a Plegian child."

"So that was the true reason behind the last war..." Phila whispered. "Lord Augustus was always a fervent worshipper of Naga, but going to war to hunt children? We could have just merely hunted the Grimleal..." The knight said with a voice filled with disgust.

"To him, it was to hunt Grima and claim glory equal to that of the First Exalt," the tactician clarified. "I believe Augustus would have stopped nothing short of killing every child in Plegia to stop the resurrection just to be 'safe' since his spies failed to gather any way of identifying his target." Rose frowned. "Still, there was one, and an obvious one at that. They magically branded us early in our childhood with the Mark of Grima as a mockery of the Brand of the Brand of the Exalt."

The Plegian took off her glove and showed her mark to the knight, who also took a perverse interest in the scarred flesh on her wrists. Phila was at least decent enough not to ask about them aloud, though, focusing mostly on the brand.

"Six eyes… This is the symbol of the Grimleal...No, it's different."

"With a bit of help, I managed to change mine and break off the torture and control hexes. At the very least, I can now pass mine off as an anti-Grimleal tattoo. But my brother's should still have his Mark unaltered, curses and all. The Mark was designed to control us through pain, but only Validar could cast it because he is, well, our 'father'."

"But what of him?" Phila grew incredibly concerned. "If the High Priest is still acting within Plegia, doesn't that mean can control Robin? That shows that he is a great risk—"

"Don't worry about that." Rose suddenly felt an upwelling of pride and a sense of achievement, giving Phila a feral smirk that sent shivers down her spine. "I already took care of that piece of vermin. I would never be able to forgive myself if I let that sack of garbage run around freely after what he put my family through." Phila's expression relaxed. Then the tactician paused. "Also, thank you for not trying to take off my head as soon as you saw my Mark."

"I am not one to act so rashly, Lady Sustrai. That is why we are talking, correct? To learn more about the situation at hand?" Phila said with a scowl. "But then Exalt Augustus succeeded in stopping the Grimleal, right? You and your brother are still alive, Grima remains sealed, and their High Priest is dead."

Rose understood the need for reassurance that all the bloodshed in the past war was not meaningless, but those feelings had no place in this conversation.

Rose sighed. "Unfortunately, his methods for stopping Grima became the cause of our current problem."

"What do you mean?"

"Robin and I were bred were to have the strong magical reserves needed to create a proper vessel the Fell Dragon's essence. Without us, they could never gather enough sacrifices without the public noticing and taking arms against them," The tactician explained, covering her hand once again. "But once our mother escaped from the Grimleal, they lost their primary tools and that set them back years, maybe centuries."
"What about the other children that were with you?"

'Crap!' The tactician cursed inwardly, having forgotten that she had also included others in her fabricated past as well.

"Lost during the chaos, most likely dead during my mother's escape from the Grimleal. Luckily not used in the ritual," Rose explained vaguely, not wanting to dive into detail about some the fictitious children. "Anyway, Augustus' crusade became a godsend for them. Every human being, whether they were warriors, farmers, or apprentice mages, have traces of magic within them. Although a mere fraction compared to us. Quality over quantity, you could say, but the other way still works just fine. Augustus's did for them what they couldn't without inciting revolt."

Phila's legs began to tremble and weaken as she began to put the pieces of Rose's puzzle together, even without her finishing her tale. As the information she had just heard began to take her toll on her psyche, she leaned against the wall for support.

"His hunt for Grima did not matter in the end. The total magical energy from all the Plegian and Ylissean blood spilled over the sands near the Dragon's Table during Augustus' invasion was enough for Grima to create his vessel."

"So… is the Fell Dragon truly reborn?" The knight asked, unable to hide the fear in her voice.

"Almost, currently Grima is still in slumber."

"Are we safe for now, then?" It was strange to see the usually proud knight so confused and hopeful at the same time.

"Kind of. But it's much more complicated than that," Rose said, grimacing.

"That seems to be a recurring theme with you," muttered Phila, forcefully calming herself down and assessing the woman in front of her.

"Hey! It's not like I wanted to be born as a human sacrifice to some ancient dragon that should be dead, and should stay dead," the tactician shot back with a scowl. "But back on topic. This is where Marth comes in."

"Does this have to do with his claims of knowing the future?"

"He does not know of the future. He lived the future and ran away from it…" The Plegian paused and took a deep breath. "A future in which Grima was resurrected and destroys the world."

"What evidence do you have for this claim?" Phila tensed up, but much to Rose's surprise, held it together. "How can you verify that he speaks the truth? Your story is farfetched enough as it is to include some supposed time traveler."

"This goes back to an event a few years ago," the mercenary informed, hoping that reassured the knight. "At that time I was working in a militia. Everything was fine up until my comrades learned of my lineage and past and thus instantly turned on and tried to kill me. Needless to say, I'm risking a lot telling you all of this so I do hope you appreciate it. As I said earlier, I was expecting you to try and cut me down as soon I said told you of my parentage, just like they did." Rose explained.

She raised her shirt to show the scar on her chest. Phila's eyes widened in shock at the sight of the dark red scarring. A scar so red, it looked almost like a fresh burn injury, but the location was the most important matter.
"That should have destroyed your heart and spine!"

"It did," Rose deadpanned. "And yet, I survived thanks to Naga's intervention."

"Naga saved you?" The knight said in surprise and no small amount of skepticism. An understandable feeling. Only psychos claimed a goddess personally saved them. "You are really pushing the boundaries of reality this time."

"I was just as equally shocked as you are," Rose admitted. "Now, before you start tearing into me!" she said, stopping Phila's protest. "I happen to have proof." The tactician reached into her coat and pulled a small, but elegant book. The cover was sky-blue in color, with golden engravings shaped in the form of the Brand of the Exalt.

"T-The Book of Naga!" The Wing Commander exclaimed, recognizing the legendary tome. "How...?"

"It's one of the tomes that was under the care of the Divine Dragon's daughter, The Exalted Voice of Naga, Lady Tiki," the mercenary confirmed, taking some small pleasure on Phila's surprise. On the other hand, she would never tell the manakete she had called her that, or else she would never live it down. The teasing would send her to an early grave. Again. "She personally entrusted this tome to me in order to allow me to communicate with her. Here, read the last page."

"I can feel its power..." Phila said as her hands closed around the legendary tome, her grip tender as if she were afraid the book might fall apart at any moment. "I-it's the same feeling when one is close to Falchion during the Celebration of Naga. Such warmth...such light..."

Phila opened and saw a footnote, written in elegant handwriting and shone with divine light and power. As she read, Phila could feel the words resonating on her soul.

*It is through this writing that I entrust Lady Rose Sustrai as an envoy of my will. Through her, it is my hope that we can prevent the calamity that may befall on all mankind.*

*You have been entrusted with the knowledge of our covenant.*

*May Naga guide us all.*

"Y-you...Marth...everything...You speak the truth!" The knight said in awe.

"I always do." It had been at the tactician's request that Tiki wrote the alibi on the final pages of the legendary tome, but that was neither here nor there. "Now, Naga explained to me about our situation. Marth came from the future from which the Grimleal succeeded in resurrecting the Fell Dragon. The Shepherds fell in battle, unable to stop the resurrection. One by one, the kingdoms fell within a span of fifteen years against the hordes of Risen and Grima's remaining live zealots. They all fell until only Ylisstol remained."

"How did we last more than a decade?" Phila asked, in hopes of poking holes in her story.

"Grima wasn't at full power for the first few years, something he won't account for this time," Rose commented. "With Chrom dead and the power of the Fire Emblem lost, the Naga of that time sent several warriors to our time to stop that dire future from ever happening. Marth is among those brave souls."

"But that is not all, is it?" Phila added. It was more of a statement than a question.

"Correct. After all, do you think Grima would really allow them to interfere with his plans just like
that? Much less the past itself?” Rose asked rhetorically. "He followed them."

"Dear Naga… the Fell Dragon is here! Where?!” Phila exclaimed, fear now clear in her voice.

Right in front of you Rose snarked internally, even if she was glad Phila believed the tale.

"I would suspect Plegia, far out of our reach. He came back a few months ago; I felt it from my Mark., the mercenary said somberly. It wasn’t a lie, she felt the ripples Grima made coming back. At Phila's confused expression, she elaborated. "The Mark was designed to suck my life energy and feed it to the Fell Dragon. I altered mine, well more like Naga altered it really, just enough for it to only give me a killer migraine. A sixth sense for Grima's presence, if you will. But I believe with Grima's return, Robin's unaltered mark released a magical backlash and caused his amnesia."

"I suppose we should be glad he did not die or we might have even more trouble. Without a tactician and with his power feeding Grima instead, we would have been at a severe disadvantage," commented Phila, surprising Rose with her assessment.

"True. Still, time travel requires a lot of energy. Naga used hers to send them back, while Grima burned himself out following them and fighting Naga on the way. On top of all that, he was forced to leave his draconic body behind in favor of a mortal form. I believe he currently should be fused with the vessel that Augustus inadvertently created; alive, but wounded and weakened. While he has nearly all the things ready for his full resurrection, he still lacks the Fire Emblem as a catalyst to undo the residual damage done by the First Exalt. That should buy us time to prevent this mess."

"Unbelievable…” Phila breathed.

"I only speak the truth, Phila," assured the tactician.

"Something is not clear to me. Why did Naga choose you? Was it for your bond with the Fell Dragon?” The knight asked, frowning as if something didn't fit.

"I would guess so. I wasn't in the best state of mind having my chest ripped open by the man I... trusted, to ask such questions of my savior," Rose answered with some bite. While it had gotten easier to speak about her past as of late, it still wasn't pleasant. "It doesn't matter to me. Naga offered me a new chance to live, to protect my family and do something to break the cursed legacy of my Grimleal blood. She gave my life purpose.” Rose then shrugged. "Plus, I like the world. I happen to live in it."

"So, Naga saved you from death and gave you the task of preventing the end of the world at the hands of the Fell Dragon?” The knight summarized.

"More like guiding the people that can in the right direction."

"Why not share this information with the Exalt Emmeryn then? Or Prince Chrom? Even the Khans?" Phila questioned the tactician's logic. Why reveal this to her and not those who can control the battlefield?

"And do what? Start a crusade? Spill more blood? Incite panic? Imagine if word gets out that we are invading Plegia to hunt Grima. People would go mad! Emmeryn would lose all support, dividing Ylisse and making them believe she turned into her father,” Rose retorted and shook her head.”No. It’s better this way. Gangrel is already being manipulated into going further into this war by the Grimleal, so no need to add unnecessary complications. We don't even know if there are any other traitors within our ranks.” The tactician stretched her body, relaxing slightly. "And if I had walked into Ylisstol without proving myself, what would have been the reaction? A Pleanian walking into the
capital of Ylisse, saying she spoke with Naga and can see the future? Tell me I wouldn't end up in a madhouse, or a ditch on the roadside with yet another weapon through my chest."

"...You have a point there," Phila conceded. But what surprised her was a smirk from the Wing Commander. "But with everything you told me, I am quite certain you do belong in the former."

"Heh. That's what my mother said when I was nine," Rose joked, earning a twitch on the lips of the Pegasus Rider. "There is more to the story, but I think this is enough for now. Let's focus on this war. If and when we're done with crushing Gangrel beneath our heels, I will explain more."

"I… yes. I think it's for the best," Phila agreed. "If you do know the future... Is the Exalt safe?"

"As safe as she could be, or should be," Rose said. "Marth prevented her assassination and according to Naga, from her observations of other timelines, had Emmeryn left Ylisstol before the invasion she would have been captured and taken to Plegia for execution. With Ylisstol still standing, albeit weakened, sending her away to a safe location while we direct our might to end Gangrel's madness is the best course of action. Ylisstol is in no position to protect her at all times, but Vale should fulfill that role so long as word doesn't get out. At least she remains on Ylisse's soil. Should she run to Ferox and let other people figure it out..."

"Riots and accusations of cowardice," Phila concluded. "I can't fault that logic. Why tell me all this, though?"

The tactician paused. There were many things she had left out, like the war on Valm.

"I need allies," she admitted. "You're a loyal knight that understand the value of discretion, I know I can confide in you to bear this burden instead of worrying about the Exalt's safety when she needs to focus on healing her people."

"Why not one of the Shepherds? Why not your brother or Chrom? You know them better than you know me," the knight questioned. Rose shook her head in disagreement.

"They are not ready. War will temper them like steel but as of right now they don't have the wisdom to act cautiously and not walk right into Grima's maw," the tactician said as she looked to the training ground. "Most of them don't trust me anyways. You, meanwhile, have the experience and position to nudge them in the right direction. I know it looks like we are against time, but don't worry; I haven't been idle these past years. Have some faith in Naga, if nothing else."

"I understand," was all Phila could say. Being part a Goddess' plan to stop an evil dragon was not something easily digested so early in the morning.

"This is a lot to take in, but I appreciate the amount of trust you placed on me. It seems I was right on placing mine on you," the knight continued with surprising sincerity.

"Don't mention it, it's a matter of survival," Rose said, waving her hand in dismissal. "I know Grima can be stopped. The First Exalt did it before, so why can't we?" Phila just gave her a distracted nod, lost in thought. "I think I have given you a lot to think about for now, however. I will prepare some things before we depart. Perhaps give your recruits some last minute torment—I-I mean, uh, training before our march to Plegia."

"Please do not cripple my recruits," Phila deadpanned, though Rose could sense the underlying lighthearted tone. It seems her attempt at humor at least lifted some tension from her newest ally. "But I understand. I will secure Ylisstol while you deal with Gangrel. We can speak more about this once we have his head on a pike."
"I'll deliver that pike to you personally," Rose jested, moving to the stairwell to train her soldiers.

"If there is anything I can do for you, please do not hesitate and ask," Phila said, turning to watch her recruits warming up below. That gave Rose pause. Well, since Phila was alive and all…

"Actually, there is something I wanted to know for a while. It's been bothering me since I acquired our newest gear…"

"Are you sure you're well enough to join us, Cordelia?" asked Sumia, trying to ignore the sense of foreboding that she felt moments ago while stealing worried glances at her friend while they tended to the surviving pegasi of their platoon.

The redhead sighed in exasperation. "For the last time, Sumia, yes. I'm sure."

Sumia had a suspicion about her reasons, though. "I know you have a crush on Captain Chrom, but you shouldn't push yourself like this. You should be resting."

"T-This has nothing do with Prince Chrom!" The redhead stuttered, half embarrassed, half angry. "I'm not so shallow to let something like that jeopardize the war effort," Cordelia said with an offended tone. "You were also in battle. Shouldn't you stay here, too?"

"I wasn't hurt, unlike you," retorted the brunette, crossing her arms and taking an uncharacteristically serious air. Cordelia pinched the bridge of her nose.

"I'm fine Sumia, I already saw a healer."

That didn't reduce the worry Sumia was feeling at the moment. "Still… Are you sure yo—"

"I SAID I'M FINE!" shouted Cordelia, startling both Sumia and all the pegasi in the stable. The redhead was quick to calm down her new steed. "Shhh. I'm sorry, girl. I didn't mean to scare you."

Sumia was taken aback by her outburst. Cordelia had never shouted at her. The clumsy girl didn't take it personally, but only felt more worried for her best friend.

"What happened, Cordy? Why do you insist so much on coming?" the clumsy knight asked in a wounded voice. "Please talk to me."

The brunette saw the conflicting emotions racing across Cordelia's face. "...My squad. Our sisters," the redhead said in a tone that twisted Sumia's heart. "They almost died on my watch. Some died on my watch. Captain Summers might have been the first to die, but that only means that every death afterward was my direct responsibility. I...I need to make it up to them! I can't stay here and not fight!" red head said in a broken voice.

"Cordy..." whispered Sumia, unable to think of a way to comfort her best friend.

"I know they never considered me a friend. The pranks, snide comments..." Cordelia said, clenching her fists and closing her eyes, "But I never wanted to fail them. I thought that maybe… maybe I could prove myself to them," she said through gritted teeth. "I hate being called a genius and the one time I need to live to that title I fail miserably! I failed Captain Summers, Sophia, Marina, Blake, Natalie... I just.""

"We don't blame, you know."

Cordelia's head whipped to the side following the origin of the new voice. Sumia looked past her to
see the few able-bodied members of Cordelia's squad standing there with guilty expressions.

"G-Girls, I–" A short-haired blonde by the name of Grace stopped the redhead from continuing. Sumia always thought she was a bit of a stiff.

"It was only because of your quick thinking that we managed to survive."

"If we had known the teasing would affect you this much, we would've stopped," said Jean, another redhead with curly hair. "Sometimes we felt you thought you were above us."

"I never thought that!" said Cordelia, her breath quickening with each passing moment. Her clumsy friend placed a hand on her shoulder, calming her down, "I just wanted to protect our country as my family has always done, so I gave it my best. I didn't mean to make you guys feel like this."

"We understand that now," Samantha stated, earning nods from her battle-sisters.

Sumia was extremely surprised by the interaction. As long as she could remember, they and Cordelia never had a civil conversation that wasn't filled with sarcasm and hurtful jabs at her friend.

Anise stepped forward with a grin. "I have to say, though, it was pretty awesome how you broke that box with the javelin."

The clumsy brunette knew the genius wouldn't take it that way.

"I'm sorry I wasn't fast enough to prevent your injury, Anise," Cordelia said with shame. Sumia took noticed of the cast around her arm and a few bruises on her head.

"A broken arm is better than being food for the undead," said the brunette with a shrug, adjusting her cast. "Though I don't see why they can't just heal it with magic, we got enough staves to heal my ribs. Cheap-ass clerics," she grumbled under her breath. "It sucks not being able to fly for a while, but I know you guys will win this war."

"We let our jealousy blind us…" Sorano admitted with shame. "Maybe if we had more trust in you, we could have learned from you and not lose our sisters."

"What we are trying to say," Elsa interrupted, getting to the point and taking a sincere tone, "is that we are sorry."

"Yes, we are sorry for how we treated you, but we don't want you to kill yourself over it," Sorano explained with a concern clear on her voice.

"But if you insist on going, we will support you, Captain!" Samantha declared, saluting her with the rest of her wing copying her actions.

The two Shepherds were stunned by the declaration, but none more so that Cordelia. "I… I don't know what to say."

"Just promise not to forget about us grunts now that you're in the Shepherds full time," Grace jested.

"Never, sisters." Sumia smiled at the happy tone in Cordelia's voice. The genius always wanted to be able to call them that in the truest sense of the word.

"And on the bright side, now you are closer to your crush," teased Sorano, earning smirks from the other knights.

"Wha–? How–" Cordelia stuttered, gaining a blush. "A-A-am I that obvious?"
"Yes," a deadpan combination of voice replied, Sumia included, before the squad burst into laughter. Cordelia was quick to join them, happy to share a moment of camaraderie.

'Maybe things would work out fine.' While Sumia had no issues with their flight wing, she decided it was something between them. She was already assigned to the Shepherds after all. Excusing herself, Sumia left the stables, closing the door behind her.

"It seems that I don't need to speak with her, after all."

Sumia almost jumped out of her skin and was only stopped from tripping by an arm quickly catching her waist.

"Woah! Sorry about that, Sumia," Robin said while helping her stand and quickly separating from her with a slight blush on his face. "My apologies if I got a little close there, but I doubt you wanted to fall on the dirt."

Sumia straightened herself, blushing in embarrassment. "It's not an issue, sir!"

"Now, none of that. You've been welcoming of me Sumia, so you can simply call me Robin," the tactician replied with a friendly smile.

The brunette just nodded and relaxed, "Oh. Ok, Robin. But what do you mean about speaking with Cordelia?"

"I thought her reasons for coming were mere stubbornness so I was going to try and convince her to stay in the capital with Phila and the other flight wings," Robin admitted. "But I can see the issue runs deep. It would be insulting to have her sit this one out."

A grateful smile spread across Sumia's face. "Thank you, Robin. I know she will appreciate it. Truth be told, I was trying to do the same."

"Yeah, well. I'm sure I can fit her squad into our formation until she fully integrates with the Shepherds. We need more fliers on our main support platoon," Robin said, stretching his neck and moving down the path. "Well, I need to speak with Father Libra about our cleric support so I will see you later. Remember to prepare, Sumia. We leave in a few hours."

"Yes, sir–Robin!" With a nod, the tactician left the pegasus rider alone and in peace.

"'Sup, Stumbles." Or so she thought.

Being aware enough not to trip this time, she turned to glare at the annoying thief behind her. "I'm never gonna get rid of that nickname, am I?" the brunette said in exasperation. She didn't know what was it about this man that pushed her buttons. Even if he saved her life and was kind of attractive.

"Nope," Gaius replied giving her that roguish grin that added to his charm. The rider liked that about him. Not that she was going to give the annoying man the satisfaction of knowing that.

"Do you need me for anything, Gaius?" Something about his smirk told her that was the wrong question to ask.

"Yep," the thief replied, taking something from his pocket and giving it to her. "Here."

"A lollipop?" she asked in confusion.

"You will want it later," replied Gaius with mirth in his voice. "Snowflake was looking for you."
"Well..." Sumia thought, rubbing the phantom pain on her arm. 'That explains the chills I felt earlier.'

The wooden boat rocked on the waves, making the Exalt slightly dizzy. Ignoring her stomach's complaints, Emmeryn looked at her bound hands with resignation. Her eyes wandered to the man sitting in front of her, who had been awfully quiet since they captured her.

"Are you comfortable, Lady Emmeryn?" asked the big, bald man that looked at her with pity.

His soft tone was unexpected, but Emmeryn hid it behind the polite mask she was used to wearing in court.

"As much as I can be, given my situation, General Mustafa. Though these bindings do chafe a little," she commented, motioning to her chains.

"For what it's worth, I'm sorry for this," he said with sincerity as he adjusted her manacles to be less tight, though not enough for her to escape. Not that she could run away in the middle of the sea. "I too desire peace as much as you, but the Mad King will kill our families if we don't bring you to him."

"I understand." She truly did, though that did not do much for her current predicament. "And I appreciate you not killing my convoy."

"We are not monsters, Lady Emmeryn," Mustafa retorted in a way that the Exalt felt it was more to assure himself than her. "True, we all suffered for your father's actions, but I know Ylisse is a much a victim of his crusade as Plegia." The bearded man looked her in the eye, "You know Gangrel will execute you right?"

"Of course." She had not any doubt she would perish in Plegia at this point.

"How can you be so calm then?" Mustafa asked, guilt leaking in his tone. "I'm taking you to your death!"

The Exalt just gave him a smile. "The truth? I am terrified, but I can only hope my brother ends this war with as few bloodshed as possible," Emmeryn admitted, feeling this man was just another victim of her father's and Gangrel's desires of conflict. "But I just hope my death is the ends your thirst for revenge and maybe you can find a new king, one that cares about his people. Peace will never be achieved with Gangrel on the throne, that I have come to accept."

Mustafa took her words in, remaining silent for a while. "...I remember what your father did to my people. He killed my sister and her family. For so long I hated you for all the pain your family inflicted on us."

"I am sorry for the pain my family brought upon your people. I cannot say I am without blame for I did nothing to pay reparations to your country. I was too occupied healing my own. I will understand if you want to take your anger on me, but please do not lash out at my people."

"Why are you so willing to shoulder all the blame?"

"I took my crown to heal people, whether they be Ylissean, Feroxi, or Plegian. If my pain brings you satisfaction for the loss of your family and tempers your hatred so that everyone can move towards a better future, I will be satisfied."
"I…no, Lady Emmery, you are not at fault. Not now, not for your father's actions in the past," the general said after getting over his shock, though that only made his guilt more palpable. "But I cannot let my family die. I'm sorry."

"You have nothing to apologize for. I understand what it feels to put family first," she reassured him.

"I will try to make your remaining time as comfortable as possible, for whatever it's worth." Mustafa then stood and moved to leave her cell.

"Thank you, sir. You're a good man and I am glad that out of all my potential enemies, you were the one that captured me. It is unfortunate that we didn't meet under more friendly circumstances."

Emmeryn said with some pain leaking into her smile.

Mustafa stopped. Giving one more glance to the Exalt, he closed the door and left Emmeryn alone in her cell.

Robin thought that the longer he spent under the Shepherds' banner, the more likely it became for him to die of a stress-induced heart attack than a battle injury.

"Gods, Chrom! We only stop at this village while rest of the army makes camp and you go bringing down a group of slavers?!

Chrom waved his concern off. "Pfft! These thugs were hardly a challenge. They bolted as soon as I drew iron. Ha!"

"You challenged them alone?!" The march had been going so well until they decided to stop for the day, making camp outside one of the largest villages in Ylisse. While most of the army rested, many of the Shepherds took the occasion to visit the settlement for personal reasons.

The prince had the decency to look sheepish. "Well, I wouldn't say 'challenged', exactly. More like 'shooed away.' And I wasn't alone. That mercenary Gregor was there, too. Can't very well just leave that sort around now, can we?"

Feeling his blood pressure doing backflips, Robin pleaded to his friend. "By the gods, Chrom! Please, I beg you, do not take any more of these foolish risks."

"Hah! You do realize we're at war, right? Just walking onto the battlefield is a risk," the bluenette stated.

"I don't fear anyone besting you head-on; I fear you being stabbed in the back! Many of our enemies do not share your sense of honor. Especially slavers."

"Do you really think some random thugs would get the better of me?" the prince asked in an offended tone.

"Shall I list every hero who said that before being poisoned, sniped, or snared?" Robin had to bite his tongue not to point out his lack of armor.

Chrom tried to defend himself at the valid points, "Well, I don't think a list is necessary—"

"You're our commander, Chrom! Battlefield victories mean nothing if an army loses its leader. You are no longer simply your own man. You stand for all of us," declared the tactician, looking at the prince in the eyes.
"Enough..." Chrom said in a defeated tone. "You have a point. You're right... as you always are. I will be more careful. Thank you, Robin. But I don't regret saving that young girl. Speaking of which..."

Both men turned to regard the young, green-haired girl with pointy ears sitting on a crate, swinging her feet as she watched both of them with a big grin. Next to her was a tall man with orange hair in his forties if Robin felt generous.

"I suppose introductions are in order," the blue-haired man said to the mercenary. "I'm Prince Chrom Lowell of Ylisse, and this is my tactician, Robin. May we know your names?"

The Northern Feroxi man gave a boisterous laugh. "Ha! Of course, of course. Name is—"

"Gregor Roque," said the voice of their own mercenary as she manifested from the shadows. Robin took some sick delight that this time it was Chrom the one that jumped, while himself only got a slight panic attack.

"How does she do that?" asked the prince in a low tone.

"I don't know!" hissed the amnesiac.

"Ah, Sustrai," the man said in a flat tone.

The two onlookers could feel the tension rising between the two mercenaries, as both stood in front of the other with tense postures. Robin felt a chill crawl up his spine as they stared at one another.

Nowi just kept smiling.

"Still crawl in debt for destroying many taverns?" Gregor asked with a hard tone.

"Still talking in third person while bitching about your betters?" Rose retorted with surprising bite.

They kept their glares locked at each other for what it felt like an eternity. Then, to the surprise of the onlookers, Gregor burst into laughter while Rose gave a chuckle.

"Ha! Gregor glad to see mighty woman still alive and of the kicking!" the older man said, patting the Plegian with enthusiasm. The woman didn't even grunt from the strong slap and returned the gesture.

"I ain't biting the dust before you, old man," she smirked. The old mercenary gave an expression of faux offense.

"Youngling, Gregor is not old wrinkly grandpa yet. Gregor still has innocent baby face and swell sword!"

Rose waved him off. "Yeah, sure. Whatever, you old fossil."

"You two know each other?" Robin as in disbelief. Moments ago they looked ready to kill each other.

"We competed for the same contracts a few times. We developed a sort of friendly rivalry," their resident Plegian answered with a shrug.

"Gregor's babushka say good competition temper mind like infant cave whale in snowy mountain!" The man confirmed with a grin while the two Shepherds raised a brow at the simile. "Gregor remembers first time talking to Rose girl. Gregor thought she was strong man-bear with long hair."
Rose's lips twitched. The other two men grimaced.

"Eeeh, but Gregor got broke arm after comment. Then Rose threaten town clerics if they heal Gregor, like."

"I can break it again," she warned him. "This time for good."

"Eh, Gregor thinks that won't be necessary." The man grimaced as he rubbed his arm.

"Thought so." Rose smirked. "So, what are you doing here? Another contract?"

"No. Gregor is free agent looking for food when Gregor saw Plegian slavers push little girl around," the Feroxi man said as he crossed his arms with pride. "Gregor could not stand bad men taking child, so Gregor chased them until Gregor met with Prince."

Chrom stepped forward and gave the Feroxi mercenary a once over, switching the explosive topic.

"Maybe you will be willing to offer your services to us? We can use all the strength we can get."

"Hmm, Gregor has no other employer at the moment and is no fan Plegian king. If Prince pays good coin, Gregor offers blade for cause."

"That can easily be arranged," the bluenette answered with a nod. If Gregor could hold his own with Rose then he certainly would be worth the orange-head puffed his chest.

"Prince will realize Gregor is good investment!"

"I can vouch for him. He bested Basilio in combat years ago," Rose added, further impressing the amnesiac and the prince. Besting a Khan was no easy feat.

"Then it's settled! I welcome you into our fold," Chrom said with a smile, shaking hands with the mercenary.

"Hey! What about me!?" the girl they forgot yelled, giving them all an adorable pout.

"We can get you back to your parents, Miss..." Robin trailed off, realizing he didn't know anything about the girl.

"Call me Nowi!" the girl cheerfully answered, quickly switching to a frown. "But I haven't seen my parents in years, and I have no idea where they are or if they are alive... I don't have a home..."

Nowi said with a sniffle.

Well, didn't that make him feel like garbage.

"I am so sorry, I-I didn't mean to bring up any bad memories," the tactician said trying to salvage the situation. Nowi nodded and then her expression brightened.

"Hey! I know what to do! I can go with you!" The male Shepherds grimaced at the idea.

"I don't think that's a good idea. We are going to war and that's no place for children."

The Shepherd's Captain and tactician ignored Rose's coughs that sounded suspiciously like like the names of their wind mage, farmer and princess.

The girl jumped from the crate, pulling out a shiny stone from her pouch and with a burst of light transformed into a dragon. The draconic creature was easily twice as tall as Gregor and snarled,
showing a mouth filled with way too many teeth.

"WHAT THE-!" Chrom shouted, stumbling back and reaching for Falchion. "FOR THE SWEET LOVE OF NAGA!

Robin wasn't doing any better. "B-by the Gods! You're a–!"

"Manakete," the Plegian mercenary answered calmly, earning bewildered looks from the men. "What? I read a lot. The pointy ears are a giveaway. Judging by the size of her dragon form I think she is around… eleven hundred years old."

Releasing her transformation, Nowi gave a cheer.

"Wow! You got it in one!" she then turned to regards the three stunned warriors. "So, seeing as I'm older than all of you combined, can I join?" The manakete asked with a toothy grin.

"...We could use a dragon," muttered Chrom, breaking from his stupor and glancing at the tactician.

Something about Rose's snort made Robin feel like she knew a joke he didn't.

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The fact that they met Nowi and Gregor this early was both a pleasant surprise and a serious concern. They should not have been here; they should have been at the slaver's camp halfway into Plegia. Two possible reasons for this change came to the forefront of Rose's mind: One was that the events in this world had simply not been entirely equal to the ones she knew in the first place, which she could accept and work around.

The more problematic possibility, and the one she was worried about, was if the timeline was adjusting itself to counter her changes. That worry was the reason she had taken a moment during the break in the march to contact Tiki and get her opinion on the latest events.

"I understand your concerns, my friend, and I have thought about similar possibilities," admitted the manakete through their link. "The ripples your actions creating are not entirely within our control, so Mother and I had taken to studying the other Outrealms to try and learn more about the flow of time and the resulting effects of altering it."

A relieved sigh escaped the Fell Dragon's lips. "That is reassuring." At least someone had a clue to the mess. "What conclusions have you come too?"

"Let us take Exalt Emmeryn's fate as an example. If I recall correctly, Emmeryn was originally supposed to die during the initial assassination. Yet once that was foiled, she instead perished during her attempted execution at the Plegian capital."

"That's correct," Rose confirmed as her tactical mind started running through all the possibilities, though she didn't want to consider that outcome. "Are you insinuating that Emmeryn will always die despite any of my efforts?"

Tiki shook her head. "Not necessarily. It's not the event itself we should be focusing on, but on its outcome."

"Care to elaborate?" Rose thought she understood what the manakete meant, but he wanted to be sure.

"In both of your timelines and the ones we have been studying, once Emmeryn died the main outcome of the event was Prince Chrom taking the mantle of Exalt and leading the Shepherds and
Ferox in both the campaigns in Plegia and Valm," Tiki explained, earning a nod from Rose. "The death of his sister was the main catalyst for his growth. From what I know of her, she wouldn't have authorized an invasion of Valm under her leadership and would subsequently lose the ensuing war regardless of Lucina's or Virion's warnings. That being said, if Emmeryn grows stronger and wiser as a leader and grants Chrom permission to attack Valm, the outcome should still be the same and she would be able to escape her current fate. I dare say that Emmeryn's death is not a fixed point in time, so to speak, but the Shepherds involvement in Valm is. There are a few timelines in which Emmeryn survives, but in all those that I have seen the Shepherds fight the Valmese Empire."

"Hmm, interesting. So the timeline will adjust itself until certain conditions are met, and not necessarily dependent on specific events..." The former queen mused out loud. "How many timelines did you observe to reach this conclusion?"

"Quite a few," admitted Tiki, who then gave the tactician a playful smirk. "For example, in one such alternate reality, you married Sir Frederick."

Rose's heart skipped a beat. In a bad way.

"In others, you fell for that blonde brute who never wears armor. Vaike, I believe his name was," the Voice said, seemingly ignoring the existential disgust she was giving her friend. The tactician wondered if was what a heart attack felt like.

The Voice eventually took pity on her friend and stopped listing off her possible mates, getting back on topic. "This is all speculation, of course. All timelines differ in both small and large ways and time is not necessarily parallel. Even now there are dimensions where a Robin of either gender is just waking up in a field, whether a twin or an only child, while in others they live peacefully and die of old age, never facing Grima in battle. Not only that, time travel hasn't been attempted cross-dimensionally like this before, let alone with a situation like yours. As of now, I can only speculate that Gregor and Nowi's encounter with your group could simply mean that all members of the Shepherds are destined to join together."

Banishing the nauseous image of her being intimate with Vaike, Rose regained her composure and muttered, "Yeah, well, destiny can bite me."

"Your colorful language is a refreshing novelty and change from the last few centuries of polite and reverential pilgrims," Tiki said dryly.

"I aim to please," Rose said cheekily. It was nice to let her old, friendly self come out once in awhile with the only person she could fully trust. "Moving on... What do you think about my outburst?"

"You need not fret for your iteration of Grima will never return. Mother and I made sure of that," the Voice reassured.

"Then what could it be? I have never felt like that before, even in the middle of battle."

"You and I have draconic instincts, and like any dragon we aim to destroy those that threaten that which we consider ours, like this city which you called home for so long. In your case, since the Fallen Bloodline has a closer link with death, you become more in tune with your power because of your injuries," Tiki explained seriously. "I dare say the closer you get to death, the more you will grow accustomed to your power and closer to wielding them more freely."

"Oh," was the former queen's eloquent response. "Well, that sucks ass."

"Indeed," the manakete agreed with a nod.
"For your information, I am not going to bring myself close to dying just to grow stronger faster, thank you very much. I'll just do it the hard, boring way," Rose declared, crossing her ethereal arms. "Training and practice."

"I am not asking you to, quite the opposite." Tiki said, looking at her with concern. "Stop running yourself so hard and stop worrying so much. While our situation is serious, having an anxious mind will do you no good. Just take better care of yourself and things might just get better."

"Yeah, I guess." Rose thought about it for a moment. "I have not had any alone time since joining the Shepherds."

"Then do it. It is the will of The Divine Dragon's daughter, The Exalted Voice of Naga, Lady Tiki." the manakete said with an air of smug superiority, puffing out her chest.

Rose groaned and dropped her head on her hands. "Crap, you heard."

"Don't say things you don't want me to hear when you are holding that book." Gods, had Tiki always capable of such an insufferable smirk? Rose could practically feel the expression grinding into her self-esteem.

"Fantastic," the Fellblood muttered. A thought occurred her. "Hey, since you insist on me relaxing, maybe when this mess is all over we could go get blackout-drunk together and have a good time?"

"I'm not sure the Voice of Naga should be doing that." The manakete drawled uncharacteristically, giving her a flat look. "Don't think I don't know of your reputation."

"You should know that I haven't destroyed any taverns since I joined the Shepherds," Rose said with a sniff. "Last time was in Donnel's village but I didn't start it."

"Sure you didn't," muttered the manakete.

"Come on. Don't be such a boring old woman."

"I am not even three thousand, thank you very much," Tiki said with an exaggerated sniff. "Though I supposed a single night of fun would not be so bad... I've never really done that before, only read about it in the novels that the pilgrims bring."

"Then it's settled! Oh, I have been such a terrible influence. The Fell Dragon has succeeded in corrupting the Voice of Naga!" Rose declared theatrically.

"Oh shut up, you," Tiki said, trying to stop her smile. "I will keep meditating for more information. While the situation in Valm is dire, I can travel through easily between the Mila Tree and Mount Prism if the need arises."

"I wish we could move the armies through there. The strategic possibilities would be enormous." Sadly, the portals were not powerful enough to transfer more than a few people at a time before needing to recharge for a few weeks.

"Then, I'll take my leave. Take care of yourself. Farewell for now, Tiki."

"I will speak with you soon, my friend."

With that end to the conversation, Rose cut the link and opened her eyes, only to be greeted instantly by the wide-eyed, draconic gaze of Nowi.
The short manakete *sniffed* her with no regards for her personal space. "You smell familiar. Like a manakete!" she said with a toothy grin.

Gently pushing the thousand-year old girl away, the tactician stood. "Sorry, girl, but my ears aren't pointy. I am no manakete."

The disappointment felt by Nowi was palpable, if slightly exaggerated. Her ears drooped. "Awww… I was hoping to you were, I haven't seen another manakete in like... nine hundred years."

Speaking with Nowi for an extended period of time was not on the list of things she wanted to do in the foreseeable future, but she could throw her a metaphorical bone, even it meant using Tiki as a sacrifice. "I am friends with a manakete in Valm, though. I'm sure she would *love* to meet you."

She ignored the frantic shaking of the Book of Naga.

"Super! I will hold you to that!" Her sorrowful mood instantly turned a one-eighty as she become just as cheery as before again. "Meanwhile we can become friends ourselves! Let's play together!"

Nowi exclaimed with joy, grabbing her hand and pulling her away from her peaceful spot.

The sacrifice had not worked.

"Oh, joy…"

Time flew as the army made their way to the frontlines. The Shepherds were just a day away from reaching the border forts, with two-thirds of the force they brought to Ylisstol right behind them. Robin thought it was for the best as the would have fresh Feroxi troops waiting at the border while the rest kept order on the capital.

"Robin, a word if you would," Frederick asks from his side, dismounting his mare and walking next to him.

"Frederick?" Normally, the knight didn't spoke to him unless it was to voice a complaint. Hopefully this time he wouldn't be antagonistic. "I mean, yes of course. What can I do for you?"

The great knight looked uncomfortable, frowning slightly and releasing a sigh. "I… I owe you an apology for the way I have treated you since you joined," Frederick said in a solemn tone.

Robin was taken aback by this action, never expecting such a change from the hostility he had shown the tactician since they met. Such was his surprise that he didn't notice an eavesdropping Rose choking on her water behind them, nor a panicked Chrom frantically patting her on the back.

"I, well, not that I don't appreciate the sentiment but why the change of heart?"

"I suppose it came as a result of the battle before arriving at Ylisstol. You had plenty of opportunities to do hurt our war effort and I was too eager to discover your faults. But any that I found was only because of human error, not born of malicious intent," Frederick said. Then, as if the surprises so far weren't enough, he bowed. "You have earned a place amongst us and it's not fair for me to treat you in such a way any long. Like I said when we met you, I wanted to trust you and know I can."

The amnesiac stood in shock for a moment as his brain caught up to the events. Here was the man that gave him a hard time through all the life he could remember, finally offering him an olive branch. "Frederick… Thank you, you have no idea what this means to me. I… I don't have anything besides my tactics and the clothes on my back. Chrom took me in and offered me a future. For that he has my absolute loyalty and I want to prove it."
"And you have," the knight reassured.

"Still, thanks," Robin said, extending his hand, slightly nervous the knight would deny it.

Grasping it firmly, Frederick gave him a rare smile. "You are most welcome. I know others still haven't warmed out to you, but at the very least I can assure you won't hear further accusations from me. Just please, do not abuse this trust."

"Never."

The days of walking came to an end when they reached the border forts. Thousands of warriors stood at the ready, waiting for the hammer to drop. The Shepherds took residence in the barracks early and spent the next day settling in. Stahl and Cordelia had departed to gather the Khans accompanied by Cordelia's wing. Libra and the clerics were checking on the wounded from early skirmishes while Robin worked with Gregor and Nowi to figure out where to use their talents. Sully dragged Kellam and Vaike to a training arena with the remaining members watching.

Which left Chrom with only one training partner available.

Even with all the time passed since her recruitment, Chrom couldn't figure out the mercenary tactician that wiped the floor with him at every chance she got. Sometimes she was a stern teacher, others a snarky cynic. Rose didn't make any efforts to bond with the Shepherds other than Robin, which he suspected was mainly for their role as Plegian tacticians. Any attempts talk about her personal life was met with cold silence, which quickly thought the militia that was a topic to avoid. Surprisingly Emmeryn and Phila of all people seemed to have the best relationship with her from what little he had seen.

She seemed especially frosty with Sully, Frederick, Vaike, and, much to everyone's surprise, Libra. Whenever they interacted the Plegian was direct and short, not wanting to spend more than the time necessary for them. Then again the knights hadn't been the most welcoming of her presence.

Chrom was no fool despite what many might believe. He has a keen eye and she had caught the small gestures through her hood on more than one occasion. Thin lips when she spoke to those she disliked, small smiles when Robin asked for her help strategies and a certain sadness when she looked at the children in the villages they passed.

More than anything, whenever they spoke the prince could detect something when she looked at him. It felt like a sense of longing, like she saw a ghost. Sometimes she joked freely with him before quickly correcting herself. On occasion he may say something that appears to ignite a furious fire behind her eyes that she quickly smothered, as if remembering he wasn't the target of her rage.

"All I'm saying is that you, like the Pegasus Knights, could do with more sensible armor," the Plegian woman said as they made their way to the mess hall for dinner. The moon was already high in the sky by the time their finished their sparring session.

"So that's why Phila was glaring at you the other day..."

"I feel that was an unwarranted action for my perfectly sensible inquiry about their lack of pantaloons. How can they ride in skirts?"

Other times she could be as weird as the rest of the army, even if she didn't admit it.

"Yeah, I'm not getting into that." The bluenette winced as he rubbed his sore muscles. "But you don't
wear a helmet, so why should I?"

"Who was the one eating dirt on the floor with a blow to the head earlier?" the Plegian asked rhetorically.

"That's beside the point," retorted the bluenette, stifling a yawn.

"That's the whole point," she drawled, like speaking to a child. "Besides, I could enchant my hood and coat to harden on impact if I wanted."

"Wait, really?"

"Obviously," Rose replied and he could see her mouth turning into a frown. "Almost all of Plegia's Magical Corps use the enchantment on their robes. Sure, it won't replace a dedicated set of armor and the materials for the enhancement are hard to get outside of Plegia. It might be temporary but why do you think they dare fight in the field with such light clothing?"

"Uhhh…" Chrom just thought spellcasters were too physically weak to handle heavy armor. Miriel would probably die if you made her run in full plate armor. The mercenary had no problem using a chest plate, greaves and gauntlets, though. It would be best for the prince's health not to voice his opinion. "Nevermind. But now that you mention it, what happened to your armor?"

"A casualty of war. I have a trusted blacksmith in Ylisse fixing it for me, but I will have to make due with…this," she said with disgust as she pointed at her standard issue plate. A plain steel piece, not at all like the intricate designs of her normal armor. "At least is not one of this Pegasus Knights' breastplates."

"I think they look very good on them," Chrom said without thinking.

"Ugh. Men," Rose scoffed with an implied eye roll hidden by her hood.

"Oh? Wait...N-No! Wait, I didn't mean it like that!" Gods, he sounded like a pervert. Her opinion of him must be lower than after the 'lady' incident.

The pair continued walking when they heard the sudden of the meeting horn, signaling the need for all officers to meet in the main hall.

"What the… Come, let's see what this is about," Chrom said, earning a terse nod from the tactician, who looked tense and apprehensive to the situation. Had he looked closer he would have noticed Rose's nails biting deeply into her skin and drawing blood.

As they made their way to their destination they ran into Robin and Lissa, the former throwing a frog from his hood through the window as they ran. Entering together to the hall, they were quickly followed by the rest of the Shepherds. Inside, they saw the unexpected presence of a worried Stahl and Cordelia standing next to the Khans.

The bluenette looked at the assembly with visible confusion. "Basilio? Flavia? I didn't expect you this soon. Is something the matter?"

"Bad news, Prince," Basilio scowled and looked at the assembled Shepherds. "The Plegians captured your Exalt and retreated across their lines."

"Lady Emmeryn never made it to Vale," Cordelia relayed in a professional, but worried tone. "It seems the Vale escort was ambushed and replaced by Plegians and from there, our escorts handed her Grace to them with no resistance, thinking they were the real thing. They had the documents and"
"Once Vale realized the situation they had messengers sent here and to Ylisstol to inform us," Stahl added. "Gangrel's taunt just verified our fears. Phila is assembling a rescue party but I don't think they will make it here in time."

"I knew we couldn't trust the Plegians! They had to be cooperating!" snarled Sully, taking a step towards Robin and Rose. Robin looked at her in disbelief, hurt by the accusation while Rose stood ready to fight.

"Seriously!? We were with you guys the entire time and Vale is in the opposite direction!" Robin exclaimed.

"But it was originally your idea, isn't it? Even if Lissa was the one that suggested it, you were the one that came up with it. Maybe this was your intention all along!" Sully said, stepping towards the tactician with narrowed eyes.

"I-I..." But before he could retort, Rose stepped in.

"Back off, knight!" Rose growled, standing with her hand on her blade. She looked tense and ready to explode. "He may have offered the idea, but it was approved by Emmeryn herself!"

"You dare address her Grace with disrespect? Know your place, Mercenary!" Sully said, not backing down. Rose gritted her teeth. "We all knew that she should have stayed in Ylisstol or Ferox!"

"That's what they would have expected!" Rose argued. "You think they don't have ambush teams waiting near the Feroxi wall?!"

"Then explain how they knew about the plan!?"

"Enough!" shouted the prince, tired of their bickering and making the two hot-headed women reluctantly stand down. "What else do we know? Do they want a trade?"

The Khans looked uncomfortable, but Basilio conceded.

"No. Gangrel has declared she's to be publicly executed within the moon."

"E-Executed?!" Chrom shouted in disbelief, an action mimicked by his comrades. "N-no..."

"Ooooh..." uttered Lissa just before passing out in the arms of a frantic tactician.

"Lissa? Lissa!"

Flavia snarled. "The bastard's not even trying to be subtle anymore."

"I agree. It's an obvious trap," said Robin, setting the princess gently on the floor.

"The Mad King knew it was a matter of time before we noticed and had our scouts relay this information back. It's clearly a provocation—a hot brand to the buttocks! We should consider our options carefully before jumping to any—"

"Shepherds! We march to Plegia!" Chrom ordered, barely holding his rage back.

Clearing his throat, the one-eyed Khan regained the attention of the Ylisseans.
"Well, that would be one option, yes... But perhaps we’ve seen enough royalty waltzing into traps in one war already, eh?"

"I don't care if it's a trap, Basilio!" Chrom shouted with rage boiling in his blood. "He's going to murder my sister!"

Flavia placed a reassuring hand on the prince's shoulder. "Peace, Chrom. Breathe a moment. No one's suggesting we don't act. We're simply saying we should act wisely. We'll need guts and wits in equal measure if we're to save your sister."

"The Khans are right. I'll think of something, Chrom. I promise," Robin said, trying to calm the bluenette."

"Should we prepare to march right now, Chrom?" asked Sumia from the side.

"Don't be reckless," Rose warned them, earning the attention of those present. "It's late and we are all tired. I know it's painful but do try to get some rest. Even if we leave right now we would only pass out of exhaustion."

He hated to admit it but Rose was right. Only adrenaline and fury was keeping him awake.

Rose then turned to the Khans, "Tell me, do we know who captured her? If she was harmed?"

"We do," said Flavia. "Lucky for us in our way here we caught up with a scout that saw a group of Plegian escorting someone towards the bay. They looked well equipped and pretty high ranking, led by a very powerful looking man."

"Could you describe this man for me?" asked the mercenary tactician. Flavia nodded.

"He's a bald man with a beard and dark skin, wearing the typical outfit of a Plegian berserker, but with a cape signaling his rank as General."

"Hmm, it could be General Mustafa," Rose said. "Which is good news for us."

"What do you mean? How could her being in the hands of a Plegian be good news?!" growled Vaike from behind them.

"Because I know of General Mustafa. Out of all the corrupted officers within Plegia's armies, he's the only one that rose through the ranks by merit. He is probably the most honorable Plegian warrior you will ever meet. He always grants his opponents a chance to surrender and if they refuse, a swift and painless death."

"How do you know about him, Plegian?" The blonde warrior accused.

The mercenary gritted her teeth in frustration. "Knowing your opponent is important. I made some research on important members of various armies across the years. Mustafa was amongst them," Rose snapped back, silencing Vaike's question, and turned back to the royals. "We have time. Gangrel won't harm her yet. If we depart tomorrow, Emmeryn should be just a day or two earlier than us, so I think they won't waste time torturing her in private when he can make a show out of it for his people."

"But once we rescue her, he will definitely lose what remains of his sanity. It will be the beginning of the end of this war," deduced Robin, earning a nod from the Plegian woman.

"I think so, too. He will become reckless, making it easier to defeat him."
The prince of Ylisse relaxed slightly, at least partially reassured her sister wasn't being tortured or worse. "...All right. I leave it to you, Robin, to formulate our strategy," he said, looking at his tactician.

"Are you certain you're up to the task, Robin? It won't be easy. You hold the Exalt's life in one hand, and all of ours in the other."

Chrom saw as his friend took a deep breath and looked at the rulers with a determined expression. "A responsibility I do not take lightly. But I am up for the challenge."

Flavia laughed and slapped him on the back, almost knocking the tactician over. "Ha ha! You've got stones, at least. I like that! You will help no, Champion of Ferox?"

Rose nodded tersely. "That's what they pay me for."

"No hesitation, no mincing words... He's either a genius or a fool! And our Champion is no better," Basilio said with a battle-thirsty smirk. "I suppose we'll find out once we march. Hold on to your tassets, Ylisseans. We have an Exalt to save!"

"Yes, we do." Chrom nodded and turned to his peers. "Shepherds! Prepare your gear and get some rest, we depart at dawn!"

I Failed.
I Failed.
I Failed.
I Failed.
I Failed.
I Failed.

The mantra repeated on the fallen queen's mind as she tried to gain sleep. Clenching her fists against her covers, Rose tried to block the image of Emmeryn falling to her death, splattering in the ground, turning her once majestic visage into an unrecognizable mess of bloody flesh and bone.

Was Tiki wrong? Was Emmeryn's death inevitable?

In that moment of silence, a dark chuckle echoed through her ears. "So naive. Just because a miracle saved us before, you think fate can always be challenged."

Rose's eyes snapped open, looking around for the source of the sinister voice as she took her blade in her hands. She kept her guard up as she scanned the place she didn't recognize until she stopped on a tall mirror, locking her eyes with the mocking, red ones of her reflection.

The blade clattered to the floor as cold fear "No..."

Her reflection looked at her with a condescending expression, laughing at her denial. "Awww, didn't you miss me?" she said, tracing circles on the glass between them. "I'm hurt! We spent so much time together."

"Nonono! You can't be here! I killed you! Naga confirmed your demise!" The former queen shouted at the mirror.
Grima sighed theatrically at her exclamation. "Were we always so stubborn?" the reflection asked. "You used my power. Our power, dear Robin. Two sides of the same coin. My sins are your sins. No matter what happens, I will always be a part of you," The Fell Dragon started, tracing circles on the glass.

Rose took a step back, "I'm dreaming. That's it. I'm finally going mad."

Grima made a show of checking her nails. "I don't see why you fight against it so much. Didn't you enjoy the power as you crushed the mortal vermin under your heel? You could destroy our counterpart if you embrace your true nature. His power is weakened and divided, yours is just in slumber."

"I don't need you! I will never need you!"

"And yet you survive because of my power. Remember, I am the dragon half," Grima said, tracing the scar on her chest. "It was the power of the Fell Dragon that saved us from Falchion's strike. But you still insist you don't need me." The dragon stopped and shrugged. "Even if it's the only thing saving such a coward like you."

"You dare--!?"

"What? Say the truth? If you weren't so afraid of our power you could have killed Gangrel and Walhart with a wave of your hands!" Grima said through a snarl. "You could've conquered Valm and Plegia instead of just tweaking the playing board! In your misery you let go of the opportunity of victory because you were afraid of dying before dealing with our brother!"

Rose recoiled at the words, not knowing how to reply, "I-- You-- What do you care, you beast!?"

"What can I say? Even if I'm dead I still have my pride to uphold. I can't tolerate my mortal self-running around, losing to another me! You shouldn't be making such stupid mistakes!"

"I'm not wasting anything! It's the best course of action!" Yet the tactician knew the specter was right. Had she mastered her full power instead of denying it, her weakened counterpart wouldn't stand a chance. But it carried the risk of killing Robin is his bonds to this world were weak.

At least that's what she told herself.

"Oh really? What is the first thing you did when you stopped wasting your time with self-pity? Take the initiative and crush Valm and Plegia? Take Robin away and explain him the situation? No. It's running back into Chrom's embrace, like an abused housewife!" the dragon shouted, gaining a cruel and seductive smile. "I understand though. Oh! How do we miss his strong arms! That strong chest. Even his firm…" Grima stopped and chuckled, "Well, you know. I mean, it has been years since we laid with a man. A lady has her needs."

Rose growled as her hands clenched tightly, drawing blood as her nails dug into her skin.

Grima raised her hands in a mocking, placating manner. "Hey, hey! I'm you remember? Deny it all you want, but deep down you know it's true," the Fell Dragon said, narrowing her eyes and smirking. "I know you miss him. That you want to taste his delicious lips once more," the specter taunted, licking her lips in a way that made the tactician's stomach churn. "We could always turn him into a Risen. That way he will never turn o—"
The specter was silenced when Rose fist slammed against the mirror, shattering it into a million pieces.

Rose woke up in an instant, panicked eyes looking for any sign of the Fell Dragon. Cold sweat clung to her skin with a slight frost created by her loss of control.

'A nightmare. That was all it was.'

Grima wasn't here.

Damn stress was finally getting to her.

Light stroke her eyes, making Rose groan. Looking at the rising sun through the small window, the fallen queen realized she wouldn't get much more sleep before their departure. Giving up, she rose from her bed and prepared for the long march ahead.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: *Hides 3DS* Sup'.

Another slow chapter, I know.

Rose is not about to get possessed or having her Grima return, she already went through that, but all that trauma was bound to affect her somehow. Delusions and nightmares are a nice way to show it, since she repressed a lot of emotions and her plans are not going so smoothly, at least on Ylisse. The past two years she was alone but distracted and not in a high-stress environment like the one she is in now. Same reason she didn’t gain control of her full power and razed Valm to the ground.

When I sent Emmeryn away I had to justify not sending her to Ferox, but I still think she is the kind of person that won’t abandon her kingdom during war for the blow to morale it would bring. It would feel like abandonment and rebellion.

Next chapter is back to the action and finally changing somethings.

Anyways, here are some recommendations for some for you to read in FF.net.

Daddy’s Little Girl by KennHyrulian

Brother’s Triumphant Return by Honore with Shurpuff

Crossed Blades by Erttheking, A FE:A/Dark Souls Crossover that deserves more attention.
Grima sat in his study, deep in thought. Changes in the timeline were not unforeseen. After all such eventualities were expected when interfering with the timeline. But something in his gut told him he was missing something. While nothing had changed that he couldn't handle, he wasn't sure what else Naga had planned.

Which was why he was taking steps to deal with the meddling hag. The first of which was to gather his lost possessions.

His faithful disciple came running from the shadows and knelt before the Fell Dragon. "Master Grima, the sacrifices you asked for are ready. The preparations for your trip are ready."

The Grimleal deity felt his lips curl up in a satisfied smile at the news. "Excellent. You did a good job."

"Thank you for you praise, milord," the disciple was quick to say. "But if I may be so bold, are you sure you have the strength to spare on this trip?"

"It's true that I'm not at full power, but that's what those sacrifices are for," Grima said, waving the concern away. "My Ascension is still a few years away, anyways. More than enough time to recover the energy from this endeavor."

"But what about the portal?" The disciple asked with a doubtful tone. "The amount of energy needed to pierce the Veil—"

"Do not speak to me as if I was a bumbling fool," Grima growled out, cowering the insolent child into submission. "The Veil is thin there. A few portals have been opened in the area, with some of my Risen falling in this timeline there."

The Risen were not the only things that were displaced in the trip back in time. The entire point of this little venture was to recover his tome and weapon, which were thrown into the timestream during that strange turbulence he felt on the way. Grima could make new ones, but it would take much longer to craft them to the level he required. The pages from that tome were taken from the libraries of the other Manakete Tribes and were not easily replaced. And since Naga insisted on hiding in her little pocket dimension where his draconic body can't enter, he needed his sword to kill her once more.

A little something he learned from her Falchion.

The disciple looked hesitant to ask anything else after being admonished, but still managed to gather the courage to continue. "I... is that location of such importance?"

"Not by itself but Southtown has certainly been close to more action than such an insignificant little town deserves," the Fell Dragon said as he studied his map, especially to a few spots marked with red ink. "Must be because it's closeness to the previous location of the Outrealm gate."
Grima was still angry that he couldn't get control of the gate before it relocated. Controlling the portal would prevent Naga from pulling this stunt again, so it was important to conquer it soon. The troops sent to the southern island reported that the gate was not on the southern island of Xila as it was in his timeline. But it mattered not; the tear in reality left behind by those otherworldly visitors would prove sufficient for his present goals. It took him a while to find the thread of power linking him to his

"What's the situation in the capital?"

"Exalt Emmeryn is to be put to death on the morrow."

The Fell Dragon did not bother to look at his loyal follower. "I want you to gather the Grimleal and prepare for Gangrel's fall. You will also observe Emmeryn's execution and covertly ensure that she dies there. Do not do anything that will reveal yourself. Not yet."

The disciple nodded, understanding that this was as much as the dragon was going to share. "Your will shall be done, my Lord."

"Make sure of it."

"So, Captain, let me be certain that I understand your report..." Aversa drawled as she looked at the quivering man. "Not only did you not confirm that the Ylissean party carries the Fire Emblem... But you can't be certain that Prince Chrom is even among them? Is that the gist of it?"

The soldier gulped and hesitantly nodded. "Y-yes, milady! The air was thick with sand—even their numbers were difficult to ascertain."

The cruel vixen smiled at the man and strutted towards him with evil intent in her eyes. "Perhaps if you had gotten closer, Captain. Here, let me show you..."

"N-no! I'm sorry, I-- Huargh!" was all the man could say before his throat was sliced open in one swift stroke.

"Apology accepted," the Grimleal tactician said sarcastically.

"Do try not to kill all our soldiers, my dear," the king of Plegia drawled barely giving a glance at the bloodied corpse on his floor. "We'll need a few for the welcoming party. The Ylisseans will be here soon—Chrom and the Emblem among them, I'm sure. That bleeding-heart prince would never put good sense before his sister!"

Aversa merely rose an eyebrow at the puppet king. She hated having to follow him, but those were the orders of her true master. If only she knew where Validar had disappeared to.

"...And when they arrive?" Gangrel gave her a tooth-filled smile. "It will be a massacre worthy of their legendary father!"

The scorching heat of the desert sun did nothing to stop the Shepherds and Feroxi from reaching the capital in record time. It was now the moment for them to storm the castle and save their Exalt. The situation would have been romantic if it was written for an adventure novel, but not when so much was on the line.

Robin tried to control the nervous mix that was boiling in the pit of his stomach as they marched under the cover of their artificial sandstorm. The sand in his boots didn't help either.
Truth be told, nothing was in their favor for this mission. They were assaulting a fortified location in the heart of enemy territory, where their foes had been preparing a defense far longer when compared to Ylisstol. Combined with Plegia's home advantage and an army filled with zealots and revenge seekers, it would not fare well for the Shepherds.

And it didn't stop the tactician from cursing to high noon.

'It was his fault, really. It had been his own plan to use the sandstorm as cover.

'Oh well, no point in crying over spilled milk.'

The amnesiac glanced at the small force they had assembled to breach the courtyard while the main army worked as a distraction and offered a prayer to whatever god was listening to let them make it out of this alive.

Gathering in the command tent, the leaders of the allied forces stood in tense silence as they received the information from their scouts.

"The Exalt is to be executed at the castle on the morrow. I heard it from the king's own lips, sire," the spy said as he knelt before his Khan.

Basilio grunted and motioned for the man to leave. "This is it, then."

Chrom crossed his arms, frowning at the information. "Exactly as you predicted, Robin."

"So far, yes. I'm glad Rose's analysis of Gangrel proved correct," the amnesiac said as he looked over the map. "But tomorrow will be the true test...We are almost at the capital. We're making good time, but it's still not enough to save Exalt Emmeryn before the execution."

"It's not like we can break in and save her," Chrom said with a frown. The tactician was glad the prince had calmed down and was thinking more strategically. "Only Gaius and a few of our spies have experience in deep infiltration. Most of our troops are composed of frontline soldiers and any attempt to sneak them in would be too obvious, leaving our infiltrators outnumbered."

"I know, but I don't like how...even our forces are numerically with Gangrel's..." Robin muttered sporadically, glaring at the map, jumping from one part to the other in an attempt to reorder his thoughts.

A hard slap on the back, courtesy of Flavia, knocked the frown off his face. "Chin up, kid! Show us some confidence! It's your thinking that's got us this far. The plan is risky, sure, but knowing our lot? We'll make something happen."

The prince placed a hand on his shoulder. "We'll find a way to see it through, Robin. Don't worry. This time tomorrow, we'll be swapping stories with Emm on the road home."

"I hope you're right," the tactician muttered. "I don't want to fail, Chrom. I can't fail you. I... I admit at this point I can't help but feel my luck will run out. We haven't lost any large engagements so far but it feels like the hammer is about to fall."

"Believe in yourself, my friend. There is a reason I follow your plans even when I'm sure there are equally qualified tacticians in the world. You're the only one that cares about each of your troops individually, not just the goal, and that's what I need from you right now."

"Well spoken, Prince Chrom," rang Virion's voice from the entrance. The leaders turned to see the
"We tried to beat that into his head, but he just insists on moping," Rose said, mildly glaring at the younger tactician. "Anyways, let's go over that plan. Maybe we can find anything you might have missed."

"Okay," Robin said, happy to get a second opinion while diverting attention from his low self-esteem. "What else do we know? Rose, you're one of the few people in our ranks with experience outside of Ylisse's borders. What can you tell us about the area around the Castle Plegia?"

Robin had asked the thief about his knowledge of the area, but the only answer he got was: 'Sorry to drop your muffins, Bubbles, but I've never even been to the capital.'

"The terrain is not in our favor," Rose commented as she took a thinking pose. "We need to cross the dunes surrounding the castle to reach the courtyard, meaning cavalry will be at a severe disadvantage until we reach solid ground."

The male tactician nodded. "I suspected as much. We will have to contend for air superiority to mount a rescue, since they plan on killing her atop the Skull of Grima; which means dealing with their best Wyvern Riders."

Drawing new lines on the map and moving certain pieces, Robin began to further refine his strategy.

"We will divide the main Feroxi force into two parts. One covering our rear to secure our retreat and the other at the front to hold the city garrison at bay. We lack the stealth capabilities of the Plegians but I've got an idea to cover our retreat."

"Well? Don't keep us in suspense," Flavia pressed on.

The tactician pulled some sand from one of the many pockets his cloak had and started to swirl it around the air above the table with a weak wind spell. "I plan on using our mages and wind tomes to create a small sandstorm and use it as cover to move our troops. Once we bypass the patrols, we can begin the rescue while the Feroxi troops distract and rout the main Plegian army."

"Blasted sand, ruining a perfectly good execution." The Mad King grumbled under his breath as small gusts of wind brought sand into the castle courtyard. Stepping on his podium, Gangrel cleared his throat and with his trademark theatrics, he addressed his subjects. "My good people! Warriors of Plegia! Welcome! Welcome, one and all! Your anticipation electrifies the air! We ALL remember the crimes of Ylisse... Would you have their witch-queen answer for them? Here? Today? NOW? YEEEEEEEEEEEEES!"

With his shout, the mad king motioned the attention of the masses to the Exalt standing on top of the Skull of Grima, with an executioner right behind her, ax ready to strike twisted revenge on the woman.

"Finally, we will have JUSTICE!" Gangrel screamed, with some of the Plegians cheering with him. "EXECUTIONER! If you would be so kind…"

That was the signal Robin needed. Quickly dispelling the sandstorm, "Virion! Now!"

The Duke of Rosanne proved once more his title as the Archest of Archers. An arrow flew towards the brigand behind Emmeryn. The projectile struck true to its mark, piercing the neck of Emmeryn's
executioner. The man dropped his axe as he pointlessly tugged the arrow lodged in his flesh, soon following his weapon on the way to the ground.

The tactician took the moment of incredulity of the masses to issue his orders. "Now, everyone!"

The small storm dissipated, revealing the Shepherds just outside the courtyard. The masses immediately panicked and began congesting the main entrance routes and blocked the path for the city garrison as they made their escape. Chrom lead the charge, with Falchion held tightly in his hands.

"Take out all the soldiers first! We'll deal with the Mad King later!" the prince shouted as his comrades stepped out of the sand onto solid ground.

The people of Plegia reacted as one, but not on the way their ruler must have wanted. The civilians that never held a weapon in their hands outnumbered the soldiers by a large margin and it showed when the mass of people screamed in fear, running for the nearest exit. Some fell and died trampled by their countrymen, inflicting more casualties than the Ylisseans would do this day.

Gangrel heard the proclamation and snarled ferally at the prince. "Oh will you now? Bwa ha! We've been expecting you, Little Prince." The king turned and commanded his troops. "Men! Kill him. Kill his sister. Kill his troops and his friends and anyone else you find! KILL THEM AAAAAAAAAALL!"

"We can use the initial panic to our advantage. The citizenry will run away and block the entrances, preventing any more reinforcements from the Plegian military, while smaller strike teams thin the soldiers already within the courtyard and anyone else that manages to enter through the gates."

General Campari gritted his teeth in frustration. How did those accursed Ylissean dogs slip past their defenses!? No matter, the fools responsible for this lapse in their preparations would be executed after he deals with the dastards that took his son from him all those years ago.

"Where is the damn wyvern brigade?! Hurry! Close off their escape!"

Gaius cleaned the blood of the Wyvern Rider from his dagger, nodding towards Vaike and Gregor to deal with the wyverns. The men reciprocated and reluctantly raised their axes to eliminate the closest aerial assets to their enemies, giving their troops a much-needed advantage. The thief glanced at the bodies of the men sprawled on the floor with slit throats and punctured hearts. He was no assassin, but orders were orders and Gaius had sworn to follow the prince's orders.

Thief or not, he had his brand of honor.

Plus, Blue had given him candy.

'A shame,' Gaius though, ignoring the reptile's dying cries. 'But we can't let them use them against us later.'

Another squad of Wyvern Riders came from the city, bypassing the wall of people stopping the garrison's progress.

Flying right into the Ylisseans' trap.
"NOW!" shouted Cordelia and her squad sprung to action. Exploding from below, the Knightesses pounced on their enemies. Like the Valkyries of Feroxi folklore, the women stabbed the surprised riders with their spears, either killing them or their mounts.

"FOR THE FALLEN!" the pegasus knights shouted as one as they slew enemy after enemy. It was with a vindictive feeling which they were rewarded with, especially after the losses they had suffered in the battle of Ylisstol.

The Pegasus Knights under Cordelia’s command moved into position under the sandstorm cover. The chaos allowed them to remain unnoticed between the walls of the outer courtyard. As soon as the first wyvern came on top of them, the knights reacted.

Cordelia drove her lance into the belly of an unfortunate wyvern, spilling the guts of the dragon and showering the redhead with its blood. Pulling on her reins, she rose further and pushed the wyvern on its back, sending its rider falling to his death with her blood-covered visage the last thing he ever saw.

Refusing to lag behind, Sumia threw her javelin with finesse unexpected of someone so clumsy. The weapon pierced the chest of a soldier, killing him instantly. Startled by the death of its rider, the Wyvern turned to strike back at what it deemed hostile, only to be quickly silenced by Elsa’s lance.

Sorano let loose a ball of blazing fire from her hand, incinerating the wing of a Wyvern and setting its rider on fire. His screams could barely be heard over the rushing wind.

Anise, Grace and Samantha flew in a circular formation and descended upon the leaderless remnants like a trio of angry wasps. The spears found their marks before the men could raise their axes, skewering them with impunity.

Some might have felt pity for the young men dying for their country, many whose last thoughts were of their families, but the vengeful valkyries only felt catharsis for the dead people of Ylisstol and their fallen sisters.

"Even though we have a part of the army securing an escape route, we still need make sure our flanks remain clear."

Sully had to hand it to the rabbit woman; she was a fierce warrior. Who would have thought a bunny could be this deadly? Not Sully, at least until she had seen this one crush a sorcerer's skull between her paws.

Twirling her lance, the cavalier stabbed one of the assassins that had tried to sneak behind Panne. At the sound of flesh being pierced, the taguel's ears pricked and she whirled around with a heavy blow from her left paw, breaking the spine of the second assailant.

With a nod of understanding and thanks, the taguel leaped back into the fray, quickly followed by an amused knight.

"Intelligence suggests that not everyone in Plegia supports Gangrel, especially now with our spies inciting dissent," Robin said, taking a look at his notes.

Rose commended the amnesiac's actions. "It was a good plan to infiltrate the Plegian populace and spread our version of the events, Robin."
The tactician sighed as he felt a foreboding sense of doom creep through his spine, "I just hope I don't regret it."

"So we're to kill or die here, simply because the king commands it?" Tharja wandered from her resting place as she observed the Ylissian Prince cut down a Plegian axeman. "Pfft. What do I care of these Ylissians? We're given no reasons to fight, only orders," the witch said as she took a disdainful glance at her so-called kin. "What's the point? It's not like they ever took anything from me." A sly smile spread across her lips as dark thoughts came to her. "Besides, I've always been quite good at choosing who to hate on my own…"

"You there!" Ah, so he finally noticed her. Tharja merely lifted an eyebrow, keeping her disinterred expression while preparing a curse in case he attacked. The prince cocked his head, foolishly taking his attention from the fight. "Are you with Gangrel? You seem reluctant to fight."

"Death comes for all of us eventually," the dark mage replied, her tone completely uninterested. "Why invite it early, fighting for a cause I don't believe in?"

That seemed to confuse Augustus's spawn. "So...I should take that as a no, or…"

"Let's just say I'm keeping my options open," Tharja said as she waved her hand. "I mean, long live the king and all, but I'd like to keep living as well." The mage gave a smirk to the Ylissian, enjoying the crept out look on his face. "And I have a bit of a rebellious streak, I'm afraid. A...dark side."

"Then perhaps you would rebel now and fight for our cause?"

That was something Tharja didn't expect. "...You would trust me?" she asked, incredulous at the Ylissian naivety. "What if this is just a ploy to plunge a dagger in your back?"

"My sister, the Exalt—I think she would trust you. And I'm trying to learn from her. Besides, I already need to watch my back, whether you're with us or not."

"Well, that's odd... Usually when I bring up the backstabbing bit the discussion is over."

"Chrom!" sounded a voice from behind them. The pair turned to see the Shepherds' tactician run towards them with his sword drawn. The man narrowed his eyes at Tharja, taking a stance. "Who is this?"

That power… It's—!" Tharja was mesmerized by the aura she felt in this man. Just watching him made her feel all tingly inside. Oh… She needed more of him.

"All right, then—consider me your new ally," the woman said, licking her lips. She then narrowed her gaze at the prince."...For now. I grow tired of Gangrel anyways. I trust you won't kill me when this battle is over?"

The men looked taken aback for a moment but the prince quickly nodded. "You have my word."

"Hmph. We shall see."

"Regardless of that, as soon as the civilians make it through the gates we will need to block them so reinforcements don't make it through."

"Ricken dear, be a gem and deal with this rabble," Maribelle said as she tightly held the reins of her
"Y-Yes, Maribelle!" replied the young mage as he charged his spell. Wind gathered on his palm as sweat from the heat and exertion dripped off of his forehead. The burst of compressed air hit the wooden gate with tremendous force, breaking it into pieces. The chains holding the structure broke free, closing the way and sending the debris crashing on the unfortunate Plegian troops that were running inside the courtyard.

"Excellent work, Ricken," commended the blonde noble in approval. Maribelle cleared her throat and looked at the young mage in the eyes. "As expected of my savior," she added with a slight tinge of pink on her cheeks, quickly averting her gaze and focusing back on the fight.

Ricked scratched his head in embarrassment, "Heh Heh… Yeah, you can count on me!"

"Maribelle and Ricken should work well together for this task. The courtyard will have solid footing so her mare will be at a great advantage. We need a second team for the west sector, though."

"What about Miriel and Frederick?" the prince suggested.

Robin pondered the suggestion, "Will they work well together?"

"Well, they are married so I think they should," Chrom said with a shrug.

"Oh, ri—" Hold on, back up a moment. "...What."

Chrom looked at him. "Hmm? What do you mean 'what'?"

"Did you just say Miriel Duverger, a devout scholar of the arcane and the mysterious, and Frederick Auriol, a knight that is uncomfortably dedicated to you, are married?" Robin struggled to make sense of the pairing that challenged his view of reality. 'Are those two even capable of feeling such emotions like love? Then again, they might actually fit together because of that. But wouldn't Miriel have taken his family name? No wait, that tradition was only used amongst nobility for the whole hereditary thing.' The tactician felt a headache forming the more he thought about the couple.

"You weren't aware of their relationship?" Chrom asked in bewilderment. "I'm sure I told you."

"No! I think I would remember such a detail!" How he felt like scrubbing his mind of those two getting… intimate. Now, Robin would happily welcome another bout of amnesia.

"Weird, even I knew," Rose added unhelpfully, Virion nodding in agreement. "It's as obvious as Cordelia's crush."

The amnesiac snorted at that declaration. "Don't insult me, nothing is that obvious."

Chrom frowned at their conversation. "Crush? Crush on who? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Miriel held her big hat so it didn't get blown away. As good as it was preventing the sun from burning her pale skin, it had its tactical disadvantages. "Frederick, keep a steady pace so I can focus."

"Of course dear."

Miriel gave her husband a rare smile she saved only for him and launched one of her most powerful fireballs at the stone arch. Just like before, the structure collapsed on top of the soldiers, blocking the
path and leaving only a few inside the perimeter.

"Now, I believe it's my turn," Frederick said as he rode his mare close to one of the confused guards and swiftly removed the head from his shoulders.

"Hmm," the scholar mused, flames dancing on her fingertips. "I shall not be left behind."

"Anyways," Robin said, pushing the images of those two together in the deepest pits of his mind, "With our escape route secured and our strike teams taking care of reinforcements, we should have control of the courtyard. Once we've dealt with the Wyvern Riders and the General in charge of security we should be free to rescue the Exalt."

Lon'qu ignored the uncomfortable feeling he got being close to that female mercenary. In the battlefield, she was another warrior and a deadly one at that.

Her lack of feminine traits certainly helped.

Watching her stab a loud berserker through the throat helped him push his reservations back.

"I will deal with his support. Think you can handle the general by yourself, Champion of the West?"

"Hmph. Do not worry about me, Champion of the East."

"Hey, just because my magic coils are not fully healed yet doesn't mean I can't fight!"

He ignored her, focusing on the task at hand. The swordsman dashed forward, clashing his weapon against that of the Plegian General commanding the local troops.

"Feroxi dog!" the man snarled, using his bulk to push the myrmidon away. "You will fall at the hands of General Campari!"

"I doubt that," Lon'qu said, dashing forward and angling his blade to decapitate the elderly man.

The general would not be taken out so easily though. Campari raised his shield to deflect the attack with skill no doubt gained during Augustus's crusade. Quickly, the man thrust his short spear with the intent to disembowel the Feroxi. "You'll never save your precious Exalt, scum!"

It could have worked had Lon'qu not been training with Frederick and Kellam during the campaign to reduce his inexperience against heavily armored opponents. The myrmidon twisted his body slightly, and the tip of the spear glanced his Chon'sinian armor. 'Too close. Something to work on.'

Had he been younger, the general would have been a fearsome opponent, but no amount of rage or experience could fight the weight of time. His aging body simply couldn't keep up with the swordsman on his prime. Especially not one that earned his title as Champion of Ferox at such a young age.

As soon as they clashed weapons, Lon'qu twisted his blade and sent the spear flying out of the general's grip. The Plegian snarled and tried to bash the Feroxi with his massive shield.

Too slow.

Moving behind him, Lon'qu drove his katana into the weak joints of the general armor, lacking the durability in order to keep mobility. The man buckled under the weight of his destroyed knee. With a downward slice, the swordsman removed the arm holding the shield from his body.
To his credit, Campari refused to scream in pain, just gritting his teeth in hate towards his executioner. "Killing me will only... feed Plegia's rage..." Campari gritted out, keeping his glare trained on the swordsman.

"Maybe, but you won't be part of it." With a swift movement, Lon'qu beheaded the Plegian General, completing his objective. The old man's blood spouting from the severed arteries, splashing against the Feroxi as if it was one last act of defiance.

'Salim... My son... I'm co...'

the old general couldn't complete the thought before his head rolled on the ground, his empty gaze looking towards the battlefield where his soldiers were dying.

Lon'qu took a look at the fallen general, before turning around to see his companion standing there, cleaning her blade of the blood of the dozen warriors dead at her feet.

"What took you so long?" she asked, looking no worse for the wear.

'Freak.'

Chrom cut down another mage, looking to where the Feroxi champions were standing, signaling that they had completed their goal. "Robin! The general and wyvern riders have fallen! The skies are clear! I'm giving the signal!"

The tactician looked where Gangrel and Aversa were standing, narrowing his eyes. "Go for it!"

"Cordelia!" Sumia shouted as they finished the last of their targets. The redhead looked at where she was pointing and saw a green flare in the sky. "It's the signal!"

The genius turned to her bloodsoaked sisters with fire in her eyes. "Knights of Ylisse! Move forward and save your queen!"

"AYE!" They all echoed her enthusiasm, raising their weapons as they rushed towards the Exalt!

Gangrel almost popped a blood vessel as he saw the flying unit moving towards his prisoner, about to ruin his day. "What? Pegasus knights?" he snarled as they approached. "How did they get so close... That damned Ylissean tactician does not play fair!"

Aversa merely smirked as she pulled a silver box out of thin air. Dark magic gathered around her hand, dancing to her will. "Heh heh heh... Yes, well. Neither do I."

At that, the magic flew towards the ground, striking mounds of earth that were previously prepared in anticipation.

Chrom saw the magic strike the ground just in time to see rotten hand break the soil. The corpses stood oozing dark magic.

Each holding a bow with a quiver of arrows at their back.

"Risen Archers?!” If they took the field the would slaughter the Pegasus Knights!

But then again...

"...Just as we expected,” muttered the tactician at his side.
"aren't you all forgetting something?" rose said, getting the attention of those present.

the amnesiac frowned, searching his notes and thinking of what he could have missed. "what?"

"we are fighting in the middle of the grimleal's home turf. the same grimleal that can summon risen. even if we rout their regular troops, they might revive them as the undead."

robin cursed his lack of attention. how could he overlook such an important detail!? "crap. you're right!" quickly scribbling some notes down and crunching numbers in his head, the tactician scowled while biting the inside of his cheek. "dammit. we can certainly expect risen reinforcements if any grimleal are amongst the troops. i'm not sure how in favor of such tactics the rest of the army is, but it's something we can't overlook. their tactician, aversa, is a cunning and deceptive strategist. she will not hesitate to use underhanded means to secure her victory. her attack on ylisse is proof of it. at the very least we know they won't summon their abominations in the middle of their territory. after their strange performance in ylisse, i doubt they would risk letting such monsters loose in their city. the main problem is that now we can't predict the troop formation."

"well, not entirely correct," the mercenary tried to reassure. "with risen troops and aversa's general lack of care for her soldier's well-being, we just need to think like her." she smirked with confidence as she continued, "and we have the perfect person to foresee such tactics."

"really? who?" robin asked, not being able to think of such a person in their ranks.

"my dear tactician, have you forgotten the warning i gave you during our games of wits?" said virion with a smug smirk. "there is a reason why i prefer you leading our troops."

"i'm launching the second signal!" robin shouted, raising his hand and letting a burst of magic fly towards the sky.

"the pegasus knights are a core part of ylisse's military and were a key part of augustus's incursion in plegia's territory during the last war. it would be foolish to think plegia will not be prepared to counter our most famous asset," robin frowned as he looked at the map of the courtyard their spies had procured. "i thought the wyvern riders and the long range troops in the courtyard would be our only concern but the ability to summon the dead certainly is a wild card."

cordelia saw the light up in the sky and her eyes grew wide in panic. "purple flare! dodge!"

the order came just in time. the pegasus knights were forced behind the cover of the stone walls, pinned down by the arrows of the risen. as she tried to calm down her heart, cordelia felt glad that sir robin had planned for the appearance of ranged backup. even their orders to eliminate the wyverns was part of placing them in a route with enough cover in case archers tried to shoot them down. a quick glance to her side showed that elsa's pegasus had lost a few feathers from the attack.

close.

too close.

the experiences at ylisse were not something they wanted to repeat.

looking around, the redhead saw sumia and the others equally distressed at their situation. the
The Risen's head rolled on the ground after Stahl's blade severed it from its body. He gritted his teeth as he ignored the pain of his aching ribs. He wasn't back to top condition, as average as it was in comparison to his comrades, but he couldn't just sit this out.

"I'm ready to jump here, Sir Stahl," said the priest behind him. 'Priest. Man. Male,' the cavalier had to remind himself, not to make a fool of himself as Chrom had earlier in the day.

No man should be this pretty.

As Libra jumped from the mount, the priest drove his battle ax into the skull of an archer that aimed for their Prince, splitting its head in two. All around them the others started taking care of the Risen that appeared.

Virion's arrow pierced the skull of an undead archer.

A bolt of lightning exploded from Robin's blade, vaporizing another Risen.

That girl Nowi bit down on a Risen, though not before it injured her wings, grounding her.

Basilio, Flavia and Chrom eliminated the Risen warriors that came to protect the ranged troops with the strength expected from such strong rulers.

Not staying out of the fight, Stahl galloped fast, raising his shield to deflect an arrow strike that would have hit Lissa.

Slowly but surely the undead troops were being taken care of, allowing the skies to be safe once more.

The disciple of Grima observed the situation from the top of a watchtower, with the bodies of the soldiers stationed there lying on the floor. The Risen were being cut down one after the other, leaving the skies free for the Pegasus Knights, who once more took flight.

"No no… NO! That won't do!"

The air grew colder as if life itself was getting pushed away.

"Lord Grima will not be denied," the disciple snarled.

Gathering the magic in the air, a dark spell was cast to ensure Grima's success.

The corpses of the Wyvern Riders twitched.

Sumia flew as fast as she could. They couldn't waste any more time. Her steed was grunting from the strain, but she couldn't let up. "Come on, Jonas. Just hang on a bit longer and then you can rest all you want."

They had an opening they couldn't waste.

The knights almost reached the perch were Emmeryn stood with horrified eyes at the battle below.
"Your Majesty! Don't worry, we a--"

A cold shrill echoed through the air, making the knights instinct kick in and dodge the swooping attacks of the Risen Wyvern Riders.

"Dammit! Engage!" shouted Cordelia as she threw a javelin towards one of the Wyverns, striking its wing and making it fall.

The Pegasus Riders were forced back from their target much to the Ylisseans' despair.

Dodging the attack, Sumia took her spear and with a graceful spin of her mount, drove the tip through the undead rider's skull. The Risen Wyvern tried to bite her but its head was destroyed by a bolt of lightning from below. With a quick glance, Sumia saw their mercenary tactician holding her twitching hand in pain, wisps of smoke escaping her fingertips. Her distraction was cut short when she heard the terrified screams of Sorano. Whipping around, she saw her battle sister falling from her pegasus, who was now missing a wing courtesy of a wicked battle ax.

Without a second though Sumia dove. The wind burned her skin and her eyes, trained as they were, were watering up from the speed. Closing in, the clumsy knight muttered a prayer and extended her hand to grab her sister.

Sumia felt her arm pop out of its socket as she grabbed Sorano's leg just a scant few feet from her hitting ground. The pain was strong but the brunette did not let go of her sister, even if the leg suffered similar injuries making Sorano scream. With both of them injured and in pain, Sumia was forced to disengage from the battle, much to her disgrace, hoping that another of the knights could break through and save their Queen.

Had she been able to focus, she could have seen them all retreat, thankfully still alive, from the overwhelming numbers.

The disciple nodded in satisfaction, smirking as Master Grima's plans were back on track.

Aversa frowned at the sudden appearance of the undead Wyvern Riders.

She had not summoned them. Nor any of the Grimleal on her command. She would have known if any used the spells without her approval and would be properly punished for their disobedience. That left only one option.

'That means Lord Grima sent h--'

"HAHAHA! MAGNIFICENT!" "Excellent work, my dear! I knew I kept you around for something!" exclaimed Gangrel as he saw the Pegasus Knights retreat.

The dark tactician gave him a tight smile, smothering the desire to rip his throat open.

"Of course, what kind of tactician do you take me for?" the vixen said with an air of superiority.

Gangrel laughed and turned to address the invaders. "Your attack failed prince! But I'm such a merciful king that I will grant you an option!" Gangrel declared as he smugly looked to the Shepherds below. "Give me the Fire Emblem and I will release your sister! Don't and she will die, devoured by the Wyverns!"
"Dammit!" screamed Robin as he saw his plan getting torn apart before him, while Chrom looked divided on what to do.

"Don't panic! We still have one more card to play!" Rose shouted at from his side. Unknown to the tactician, the mercenary was feeling the same anxiety as even with her warnings and knowledge things were still going to their foregone conclusion.

Even knowing what she was talking about, Robin didn't look too sure at her suggestion. "I barely had time to practice!"

"We have no choice!" Rose exclaimed, throwing her grimoire towards him. "Cast the spell!"

"Gods dammit all!" the amnesiac snarled, catching the tome and casting the spell he hoped would turn the tide.

Chrom was torn on what course of action to take. They didn't even have the Fire Emblem, though they prepared a convincing replica that was even enchanted with magic to fool someone long enough to escape, but it was a risk. There was no way Gangrel would not execute Emmeryn once he had the Emblem, but if there was a chance it could save his sister...

"Don't give up!" Robin said behind him, luckily hidden from view, as he continued to channel his magic. "Buy us just one minute!"

Chrom nodded, and was about to speak when Gangrel grew impatient.

"I will count to three! Throw down your weapons, or your sister becomes the lunch for the undead!" Gangrel then raised his hand and started counting, "One! Two! Thr–"

"Gangrel, hold!" Chrom started, hoping his bluff would work. "...You win. Everyone, lay down yo–"

"No wait!"

Gangrel snarled at the interruption, "SILENCE!"

"Emm…" Chrom whispered, hearing his sister's voice for the first time during the incursion.

Robin crossed his arms, looking at all the pieces and notes with new information for the attack. "We need something else. We need a backup plan."

"Hmm true," Virion added. "Plegia has thrown quite a few surprises our way."

"Then we should answer with surprises of our own."

Emmeryn looked down as her siblings, subjects, and allies were pushed back. The Plegian troops were also watching from behind the walls, being able to hear everything through the voice enhancing spell. She had to do something, no matter how desperate it was. "King Gangrel, is there no hope you will listen to reason?"

Gangrel snorted at the suggestion. The man had all the cards and wasn't about to capitulate, even if he wasn't mad to begin with. "You mean listen to more of your sanctimonious babble?! I think not. No, all I want is to hear is a splat when your headless corpse hits the ground!" the Mad King declared. "Take one, long, last look from your perch. You do so enjoy looking down on people..."
Then prepare to meet the ground, and your maker! That is, unless if someone were to give me the Emblem... NOW!

The Exalt just looked in silent disappointment at the king that was so eager to spill blood.

Much to her horror her brother spoke up. "ALRIGHT!" Chrom shouted before taking a more resigned tone as he looked at her. "Alright... Emm, I know you won't approve, but this is my final decision. Maybe someday we'll face a crisis where maybe the Emblem would've helped. But I know for a fact that Ylisse needs you, today!" His voice took a more pleading tone as he continued, "The people need their Exalt... And we need our sister. If those dark days should come, we'll face them together."

Emmeryn closed her eyes and gave him a small smile, proud that her brother had grown so much. Ylisse would not be left without a capable leader. "Chrom... Th-Thank you. I know now what I must do..."

The prince was surprised, but anyone could feel the growing sense of dread inside him. "Emm, what are you--"

"Plegians!" The Exalt began, "I ask that you hear the truth of my words! War will win you nothing but sadness and pain, both inside your borders and out. Free yourselves from this hatred! From this cycle of pain and vengeance. Do what you must... As I will do. See now that one selfless act has the power to change the world!"

Chrom finally understood what she was alluding to, much to his horror. "Emm, no! No!"

Looking at the distance, Emmeryn hoped for anything, any sign that her words had reached the people of Plegia and they would stop this bloodbath. Looking at the distance between her and her siblings, too far for even the fastest pegasi to cross in time, the Exalt took a deep breath and resigned to her fate.

'No reaction... Was I wrong then?'

A bird soared in the sky, giving Emmeryn a pang of envy at its freedom, while she was bound by the chains of duty.

'Hmph... So be it.'

And was now placing that burden on her brother.

'Chrom... This is some torch I'm passing you.'

Emmeryn opened her eyes and looked forward again, this time with a determined and serious expression on her face. She looked once more at her people and moved forward.

Chrom screams, telling her to stop and continues running towards her, ignoring the shouts of his comrades.

'Chrom…'

Standing behind a crumbled wall treating the injured, Lissa watches in horror as her sister walks towards the ledge. The young princess covers her eyes and bends over, screaming at her not to continue.
Plegians, Ylisseans and Feroxi froze as one, watching as they all understood the Exalt's intentions. To remove herself as a hostage.

"...And all my people."

"What do you mean, Rose?" the tactician asked, wondering if they had anything else to do.

"My magic coils haven't returned to normal, even after all these weeks, so I can't use my spells," Rose explained. "As I am right now, I can barely cast class D spells. So this will be in your hands."

"Spare me the suspense, I already got a headache," Robin said, rubbing his eyes. "What are you talking about?"

The mercenary pouted for a moment, but proceeded to place her tome in his hands. "A spell native of Plegia."

Gangrel's smile grew wide at what was to come. His victory was so close he could taste it.

"Know…"

"It's limited in range and we need to get close to be able to cast it. It needs a direct line of sight to work, though those with experience can cast it more freely. So we need a distraction and being far enough inside the courtyard to even work."

"ROBIN!"

Robin rushed through the chant, his words barely understood by those that knew ancient Plegian. He grabbed the Plegian's hand and looked unblinkingly at Emmeryn. "Open us a path! Relay!"

"A teleportation spell."

A flash of darkness appeared on top of the dragon's skull.

Shards of ice struck the remaining Wyverns, piercing their flesh and having it devoured by frostbite just as the Exalt took her last step.

"...that I loved you."

Emmeryn felt the air beginning to blow on her face as she began gaining speed and for a moment felt as free as a bird.

She only hoped her sacrifice would mean something to the peace she so desired.

The slight feeling of freedom was interrupted when something jerked her foot, stopping her fall. Her eyes grew wide and small part of her was happy that her robes covered her modesty in her awkward
position. Looking up, the Exalt was stunned to see a certain Plegian mercenary grabbing her ankle with her grasping the ledge using her clawed gauntlet.

Many Plegians saw the hooded figure, wearing their colors, diving to rescue the Exalt.

Some shouted 'traitor' as a Plegian saved their enemy.

Some raged, being denied their twisted revenge.

Some screamed, mostly in fear of the chaos around them.

But most stood still, having listened to the Exalt's words and watching how she was willing to die for peace between them.

*Only to be saved by one of their own.*

"L-Lady Sustrai!?" the Exalt blurted out in surprise.

"You…" Rose gritted out. "Stupid..." Emmeryn flinched at the tone. "Selfish...Self-sacrificial… Bitch!"

It was by mere luck that they were outside the sound spell's range.

"I didn't spend this much effort into saving you for you to just throw it all away! Do you think Chrom, Lissa or the rest of Ylisse would want this?!!"

"I–" Emmeryn stuttered, clearly not used to people talking to her like that.

"Shut up!" And Emmeryn did so. "Sorry to interrupt your dramatic hero moment, but this war won't end until Gangrel lies dead in a pool of his own blood! And I sure as hell will make sure you live to see it!"

The Exalt was taken aback when she caught a glimpse of Rose's angry, pained tears as she held on for their lives. Emmeryn could feel that they signified something deeper, but she couldn't figure out what. It wasn't like she wanted to die, but it was the only course of action available to her.

She refrained from voicing her fears that now they would die together.

"ENOUGH OF THIS!" Gangrel shouted, livid at the interloper. "I WILL NOT BE DENIED! Aversa! Do your magic and end the harlot and the traitor NOW!"

Aversa merely glanced at him before casting her spell, "As you wish, your majesty."

Rotten flesh mended slightly, just enough for a pair of Risen Archers to take aim.

Rose was thankful for all the enhancements her rebirth had granted her. Her familiarity with Fell magic and her sharp eyesight allowed her to see the shambling corpses slowly taking aim.

The Fell Dragon looked at the carrier of the Exalted blood. "Do you trust me?"

Emmeryn was confused "Wha–?"
"Do you trust me?"

"Y-Yes."

Rose nodded and shouted, "NOW!"

'Shitshitshit!' Robin screamed in his mind as he weaved his spell once more, ignoring everything else around him.

The arrows flew from the undead's bows, piercing the air with the intent of ending the Exalt.

Taking a risk and placing her trust on her brother, Rose let go of the ledge much to the horror of her allies. She would have preferred to have a Pegasus Knight or even Nowi rescue them, but all were either pushed away too far or grounded so they had to improvise. In an instant, the mercenary did a quick spin to shield the Exalt with her body.

Just in time for the pair of arrows to pierce her back.

The mercenary bit down the scream of pain as her replacement armor was unable to stop the enchanted arrowheads, holding Emmeryn tight and using whatever magic she could muster to guide Robin's spell.

"Relay!" Robin shouted once more.

Chrom felt his heart stop as he saw both women fall once more, his hope banishing for an instant until a flash of darkness enveloped the pair, vanishing them from view.

"Wha~"

The same darkness opened at his side, catching his attention. Before he could speak the portal spat out the women, sending them rolling through the courtyard.

"EMM!"

Emmeryn cried out in pain as her arm and leg broke from the impact. Painful injuries but they were easily treatable.

Rose though…

"ROSE!" Chrom heard Robin shout as he ran towards the fallen woman, Libra hot on his heels with a staff ready.

The mercenary laid down on the ground, with the shaft of the arrows broken and embedded in her flesh. A pool of blood was quickly forming under her.

"YOUR MAJESTY!" Came the voices of various Shepherds as they made a wall to protect their rulers.

Basilio quickly grabbed Chrom's arm, pulling him to his feet. "Come on boy! we need to retreat!"

Chrom reacted and took the lead, "Cordelia! Take Emmeryn out of here!"
"At once your highness!" The redhead answered "Pegasus Knights with me! Keep low to the ground!"

"R–Robin..." Chrom heard a weak voice say, as the priest helped placed the injured woman on the back of Stahl's horse. The prince turned to see her grab hold of his friend wrist, with a strange glow, barely visible to the eye surround her grip, "...Last Page. Cast it. Don't f-fear it and just let the magic flow. I-It will buy us some time...."

"NO! I WILL NOT BE DENIED MY VENGEANCE!" The Mad King screamed with foam coming out of his mouth as his troops finally made their way into the courtyard. "KILL THEM! KILL THEM ALL OR I WILL YOU MYSELF! I WILL GRIND YOUR FAMILIES INTO WYVERN FOOD IF I DON'T HAVE HER HEAD!"

His troops hesitated for a moment before they started moving towards the escaping Ylisseans.

Even if Gangrel wasn't so consumed by his rage he still would be unaware of the effect his words, along with Emmeryn's, will have in the future of the desert nation.

Robin nodded, not letting go to waste what could the last words of a remarkable woman. He opened the grimoire and took one look at the spell and it was like he knew it all his life. The ink was bright, as if it was written not long ago, but the power itself was ancient.

"Oh spirits of winter, heed my call," Robin started the chant and he immediately felt something calling from deep in his soul.

The wind around him gathered, picking up speed. The humidity of the desert air increased as the ambient magic transmuted itself into moisture.

"Gather around and push away the heat of life and engulf the world in stillness."

He could barely ignore the rush of power that threatened to swallow him as he felt like a God.

Robin quickly shook his head, dispelling the strange thoughts.

"Let the icy grip of your power strike at the heart of those that oppose me!"

Cold fire danced in his hands, as specks of frost gathered in his fingernails taking a shape not unlike that of a dragon's claws. Glaring at the Plegians that dared chase after his friends –his family– Robin let all his pent up emotion flow with a single word that could have frozen the world.

"Fimbulvetr!"

Ambient magic answered his call, dropping the temperature of the desert to match those of a Feroxi night. Magic surged forward enveloping the courtyard and sending the Plegian troops flying. A huge wall of ice appeared out of the thin, dry air. A few of the most unfortunate souls were frozen solid, like living statues trapped inside crystal skins. Other felt their skin crack under the sheer cold that had no place under the desert's sun.

The Shepherds looked in awe at the magical display of their tactician, unaware he was capable of such feats. The surprise didn't last as they weren't willing to waste the opening they were given by the tactician for retreat.

The magical structure was bombarded by spells from the other side, but the enchanted ice didn't give
an inch. The tactician was stunned, looking at his handy work. It was the first time he had cast such a strong spell and one of the ice element. In fact, he wasn't aware such spells existed!

But he didn't waste any time, catching up to his comrades and making his escape.

Though he couldn't deny Gangrel's mad screams were music to his ears.

---

Rose gave a small smile at the magical display, proud that her brother didn't fall under Grima's clutch and could control the little magical boost she gave him.

'Not bad, little brother.'

A scream escaped the disciple. Too busy celebrating their Master's success, the Grimleal missed the rescue, only being able to watch a familiar cloak holding the Exalt, preventing her fall, only to drop down into a portal and escape.

This is not how things were meant to happen.

Unable to follow the escape as the watchtower didn't have a good sight of all the courtyard, the disciple could only slump over in defeat.

"Oh no Oh no… Master Grima won't be pleased..."

---

A warm breeze blew past Corrin's smiling face as she walked the tiled streets of Shirasagi, enjoying the sights of Hoshido with her mother, Queen Mikoto.

'Her mother.' It was strange to say that word for her. She didn't remember anything of her early life before being placed in isolation in Nohr, by her supposed father's orders. Things weren't making much sense yet, but the sense of familiarity was starting to return.

"How are you liking Hoshido, Corrin?" the queen asked, catching her attention.

"It's beautiful," the princess said with an honest smile. "It's so… Homely," she added with a sense of longing.

"I would hope so," Mikoto said and the implication was not lost to the Nohrian princess.

"I'm sorry. I still don't remember anything," Corrin said apologetically, looking at her bare feet with a frown.

Mikoto was quick to shake her head. "Don't apologize. I'm sure you will remember in time." "But for now, let's start the ceremony."

The lost princess stood beside the Queen of Hoshido as she introduced her to her subjects. Mikoto spoke with such warmth that Corrin felt it spread through her body. But then something changed. Her vision blurred and she could barely hear her mother calling for her when Ganglari flew from her side into the hands of a hooded man.

Dark magic gathered around the blade, much to the horror of those around him. The man stabbed the blade into the ground causing an explosion that destroyed much of the town's square. Corrin was blown back, crashing against the shattered remains of the central fountain. Shaking off the effects of the impact, the princess barely had time to open her eyes as Ganglari was shattered into hundreds of pieces, dancing under the magic of the assailant.
Everything happened too fast.

The broken blade flew towards the stunned princess.

The Queen of Hoshido jumped in front of her child.

The Royal children screamed in horror at what was about to happen.

Time seemed to freeze as regicide became imminent.

"Now, now. I don't like when other people play with my toys."

Only for them to stop cold inches from piercing Mikoto's back.

The Hoshidans watched as a figure shrouded in shadows materialized out of thin air with his hand extended, a magic circle glowing at his fingertips, indicating that it was what was stopping the shards from killing the Queen. With a snap of his fingers, the razor sharp scales of Ganglari reassembled into a more intricate, slimmer blade resembling a mix of a broadsword and a saw. The new weapon flew towards the hands of the newcomer. "There we go, I had been looking for this for a while. Much more elegant in its original form," he said as he sheathed the blade inside his shadowy cloak. "Perfect for dealing with Naga and Falchion."

"Who are you!?" shouted the assailant, asking the question on everyone's mind.

The Hoshidans were stunned by the sudden arrival of the man that they ignored the damage done to the town when he decided to speak. "Hmm? Oh, don't mind me. I just came here for my property. You see, I lost a few items of value a while ago and they ended up in the hands of someone I despise. In fact... You are here because of magic that belongs to me, aren't you? That's a big no-no." With a snap of his fingers, a torrent of black flames consumed the assailant, who screamed in agony. "I have a monopoly on undead minions, thank you very much."

In an instant Ryoma, Takumi and Hinoka were in front of Corrin and their mother, shielding them from hard. "Stay away, you fiend!" shouted the eldest prince, brandishing Raijinto in preparation for any attack.

The hooded figure sighed dramatically. "That's what I get for making my good deed of the millennium." With a wave of his hand, the weapons of the royals were sent flying from their grasp and landing across the street, leaving the stunned warriors defenseless. "That's not how you treat your savior. Normally I wouldn't mess with other worlds; I still got plenty of fun left with mine for the moment, but I just couldn't let go of the opportunity of screwing over a certain Dragon. If you think about it, you owe me. After all..." the man then pulled the shadows apart, letting something fall to the ground.

A trio of heads rolled at the feet of Mikoto, making her scream.

"I got rid of a couple of pests for you."

The lost princess's eyes grew wide in recognition of the deceased's' faces. She had seen them a couple times in the scant few occasions she left her tower. "They are Nohrians!" Corrin declared, much to the surprise of those present. "Iago, the tactician of Nohr," she started, turning to the next head. "Spymaster Zola and..." her eyes narrowed in disgust as she recognized the last one. "Hans."

"Yes... Quite a colorful set of characters. Had to assault a castle to get my property back and
they were mighty uncooperative." The man shrugged."Oh well. Without them, Nohr will certainly lose a lot of strength, so there you go."

Ryoma looked at the heads for a moment, before he glared at the stranger. "Why are you helping us?"

"Helping you?" the stranger said with an amused tone. "Huh, Maybe I did. Consider it my payment for your help locating my book and sword."

"What are you talking about?" Corrin asked, feeling as if the answer was directed at her.

"Don't worry your pretty little head with such questions, Princess. You will know the answers soon. That is if you survive long enough," the man said with an amused tone and a careless shrug. "It was also a matter of pride. These cretins used my grimoire to produce those Faceless creatures and I can't have just anyone using my creations." The man then pulled a magical tome, which mere aura made those around him sick with its presence. "Though I've to admit I'm ashamed I didn't think of them myself!"

"You're responsible for those abominations!" shouted Takumi with an accusatory tone.

"No no, my abominations are worse," the man said, dismissing Takumi's rage. "Hmmm, the bastards wrote their notes here. Although...I can certainly use the theory to improve my own troops..." he rambled, ignoring the horrified Hoshidans. "Anyways, it's time for me to go. I have things to set in motion in my own world and as fun as it would be to incinerate this town I can't risk wasting any more power in this little incursion." The stranger took a glance at the ruins of the town and nodded. "Speaking of which, I think it's time for a snack."

The survivors watched as the man opened his mouth, the pale skin now visible through the shadows, and inhaled. Light shone from various points in the destroyed square as the balls of lights danced towards his mouth. Corrin didn't know what they were, but she had a terrified feeling in her gut once she saw the light shine from the bodies of the fallen close to her.

"That... Those are the souls of the fallen Hoshidans!" Mikoto shouted in dismay.

The intruder made a show of licking his lips before he addressed them once more. "Yes, and quite a delicious bunch they were. So full of hopes and dreams."

Corrin could see the outlines of the people she met in her short trip through town. The laughing children that almost crashed into her. The nice woman that gave the princess her first sweet potato. The proud ninjas that guarded the populace from the shadows. The princess snapped and charged towards the man. "YOU MONSTER!"

As Corrin ran forward, the primal rage flowing through her veins triggered something inside her. Her lungs produced an unearthly roar, pushing back her mother and siblings. Her body twisted and reshaped into a new form. Armored scales covered her body as her limbs grew to an inhuman length. Her family bore witness to their lost child's ascension into something out of legends long past.

The man just stood in place with an air of smugness. He whistled as the princess closed the distance, water starting to answer her primal desires to crush the stranger before her. "Quite the trick you got there, Princess. You certainly will grow to be a formidable force." The man praised her, though anyone could feel the mocking leaking through. "But here is there thing. You're new to your powers..."
The Dragon that was once Corrin was just a scant few meters away when, with a snap of his fingers, the man summoned a storm of fire and lightning that enveloped the princess.

"I had millennia to master mine."

A scream of pain mixed with the roar of anger as the dragon's muscles locked into place. The black flames slowly but surely started burning through the shiny scales of the dragon, sending her thrashing on the floor. The pain couldn't let her human side make a rational thought, while her animal side was running on pure instinct to get rid of the pain. Her control of the water was lost, unable to help her.

"CORRIN!"

"LEAVE MY SISTER ALONE YOU BASTARD!"

A snort escaped the stranger. Even with their declarations, raw fear prevented the royals from charging at the man unarmed. "As amusing as this is, I have to cut my playtime short."

A wave of dark magic shot from his hand, washing over the princess. The scales cracked and exploded in a shower of silver lights. When they dispelled, the Hoshidans could see Corrin laying in the crater.

"I won't kill, so don't worry. I find her struggle too entertaining to waste." Crossing his arms, the stranger nodded and began to walk away. "Ah, be thankful that I'm in such good mood. Got my things back after killing their thieves, saw a good terrorist attack, ate a few souls..." The man smirked as he patted his pocket. "And even got a few souvenirs in the way."

Mikoto ran toward the broken body of her daughter, afraid of losing her once more. But as she cradled her body the tears of fear became one of pained love.

Corrin opened her eyes to gaze at her mother. She was alive. Burnt, bleeding, but alive.

A vortex of shadows opened behind him and the man made his way to depart. "I've watched the history of this world and that of the little princess," the shadow man said with a grin that could be felt through his shroud as he addressed the girl who barely clung to consciousness. "Yours will be an interesting story. Such a tragedy, having to choose between the family of blood or the one that took you in. I wonder what path you will choose," turning his back, he began to walk once more, with the Hoshidans letting him pass as his power was not something they could challenge right now. "Pray to whichever god that looks over you that you don't pay for having to take such a decision."

As the man disappeared into the portal, no one could hear his last comment, barely a whisper through the magic waves.

"I know I did."

Chapter End Notes

AN: I got a couple of PMs here and in FF.Net about Rose being a Mary Sue, something
I try to avoid. A hard thing to do when she has a walkthrough guide. Way pictured it, she is an end game unit send to a point in which everyone is low level. Like Thundergod Cid in FF Tactics, which I just realized is another hooded badass with a magic sword.

Rose could teleport to Grima because she knew where he could be and knew the area that was close enough. Right now she is still spent from Valflame, which was a reckless move on her part, so she can't teleport freely. Ain't that inconvenient?

Anyways, story time. My Fates experience has been sullied. I can't purchase the DLC or Paths in my region it seems and I can't switch region. Strange since I could buy the Awakening DLC. But then I go to Awakening to verify and shows that I can no longer purchase the remaining DLC or download the ones I had already purchased! So I have to be careful to never delete that data or else I would have wasted my money… I guess I will win the remaining DLC I had pending.

Also, have you guys noticed that young Eto from Tokyo Ghoul looks like F!Morgan?

Thanks to Victory3114, Shipping Rates Apply and Xbro Kong for checking this chapter for errors and their suggestions

Well, back to Overwa- I mean, writing.
A bolt of lightning struck the walls of the canyon, shattering them into huge pieces. The rocks crumbled behind the escaping Ylisseans, blocking the path from the Plegian capital and granting them a moment of respite to pull themselves together. Not a moment later, a wall of ice merged with the stone, further sealing up the way.

“I didn’t know you could do that!”

“Neither did I!”

“What?!” the prince shouted in dumbfounded disbelief. But experience earned since meeting Robin in that field had prepared him for strange situations and was quick in reining in his emotions, focusing on his burning muscles instead of questioning tactician’s insane magical potential. Chrom had no idea how long they had been running, but the sun was already going down the horizon. They couldn’t rest for long; not until they reach the bulk of the army. Even then, he couldn’t afford the time to be tired. That stunt his crazy Plegian tacticians had pulled saved his sister and bought them the time they needed to escape and he couldn’t waste it.

‘Gods… I was this close of losing Emm...’

As the Shepherds have taken care of the patrols chasing them, Chrom hadn’t had the time to think about the events that transpired in great detail. During the skirmish, everything looked to be working in their favor but the longer it went the more Aversa seemed to counter their plan at every turn. When Emmeryn decided to jump Chrom felt like he aged a decade as he prayed for a miracle. A miracle that was composed by two crazy Plegians he decided to trust. Never before had he been gladder to have trusted his instincts and recruited those two cloaked tacticians. It was only by that insane teleportation move that Ylisse hadn’t lost its Exalt.

And Chrom and Lissa didn’t lose their elder sister.

“Robin,” the prince said, catching the tactician’s attention. “Thank you.” At the amnesiac’s confused expression he elaborated, “For saving Emmeryn. Just the thought of losing her...”

Robin was quick to shake his head in denial. “I didn’t do anything special Chrom, just my duty,” the tactician said as his face twisted into a scowl. “I would have failed without Rose and Virion correcting my plan and accounting for further variables. Looking at my plan, I can see many holes I should have taken into account.” His voice lowered almost to a whisper, “I could have gotten your sister killed an–”

“And you didn’t,” Chrom finished for him, stopping Robin cold. “The plan worked and had we not know about the Grimleal’s involvement with the Risen in Ylisstol we wouldn’t have been able to prepare.” Chrom couldn’t help but think what could’ve happened had Ylisstol fallen. Would they have killed Emmeryn right away or would Gangrel still have done the execution? “When the time came, you managed to adapt. There is no shame in accepting others help to check your ideas.”

“No plan survives first contact with the enemy. How you adapt to the flow of combat is the key,” Robin said out loud, more to himself than the prince. “A basic tactician lesson. Made famous in the times of King Marth.”
“See? You’re aware of this, so don’t blame yourself. Everything worked out in the end.”

“Yeah, bu–”

“Just shut up and take my gratitude,” the exasperated prince said, not in the mood for one of Robin’s emotional episodes, effectively silencing the tactician. Seeing as Robin wasn’t about to interrupt him again, his expression softened. “It was a team effort. She couldn’t cast the spell, you couldn’t jump into the portal. You needed each other to achieve this success.” His expression and tone softened as he looked at his friend. “You pulled off a miracle. Sure, we didn’t kill Gangrel nor Aversa but we have shaken the faith of his people on him while showing our own prowess.”

“...If only it had gone smoother.”

Chrom understood what he meant, as right now their clerics were doing their best to heal the injuries sustained by Rose, which proved to be no easy task last he heard.

In the time since the mercenary had joined them, Robin was the one who interacted with her the most, as the woman helped him with his tactics and proved a match for all his wits. Even Virion and Chrom, the only ones that spoke with her with any modicum of success, had a mostly professional relationship with the hooded woman.

That is not to say he and the other Shepherds weren’t concerned about her health. While she wasn’t close or necessarily friendly with them, Rose still proved extremely helpful during the campaign and had certainly earned the respect of many of their members by strength alone, if nothing else.

More so after this stunt.

The prince was quick to reassure his friend, for he knew how worried he was. “She will be fine. Rose has proven too stubborn to die.”

That got a chuckle out of the tactician. “That she is. You know, maybe it’s because of our skill and country but after spending so much time with her she feels like a kindred spirit.”

Thinking about the pair made the prince pause. If the prince was honest with himself, he had his suspicions about her relationship with the amnesiac. He had the nagging sensation that she and Robin are connected in some way, even if she insisted otherwise. They are too similar to simply buy the idea that they lacked some link. The fact that she had shown an interest in him was also suspicious.

But then again, white hair and violet eyes were not that uncommon in Plegia and the fact that they both wore the robes of a Plegian tactician from the last war could be mere coincidence. The few snippets Chrom had caught from Emmeryn and the gossiping maids that had ears everywhere hinted to a past filled with pain, even if he lacked the details, so maybe she found a kindred spirit in Robin. She was mysterious but certainly not malicious.

It wasn’t his place to pry, even if he wanted to help his friend figure out his identity. With all she had done, Rose had earned her privacy.

Still, it was something to think about for when this war is over.

“Come on,” Chrom said, patting Robin’s shoulder. “Let’s check the perimeter to make sure the coast is clear.”

“Ow ow ow!” hissed Nowi at the pain in her shoulders.
“Mighty sorry ‘bout that, Ms. Nowi,” said the thickly-accented voice of Donnel. The farm boy was doing his best to patch up the shoulder the manakete while she was piggybacking on Gregor’s back. It was unfortunate that manaketes could retain their injuries through their transformations.

Anna sighed through her exhaustion, patting the farmer’s head in a slightly condescending gesture. “You’re hopeless, Donny. Here, let me help.” The merchant pulled out her staff, muttering something about charging the Crown and addressed the Feroxi mercenary. “Keep her still, big guy.”

“Ah! Gregor has no issue holding ladies with delicacy,” the mountain of a man boasted.

“Oh?” the redhead smirked and patted his muscular arm. “Then maybe you will hold me later.”

Gregor smirked at the banter. “Ah! Pretty lady has been captivated by Gregor’s charm,”

“We shall see, big guy but we will need to patch up those cuts on your arms first, too,” the merchant said with a frown as she studied the reddening wounds of the mercenary.

“As long as pretty redhead patches Gregor, Gregor is happy,” Gregor said, earning a smirk from the merchant.

Donnel flushed at the unshameful flirting between the two redheads. The farm boy decided to focus on helping the resident manakete. “Is there anythin’ I can bring ya, Miss Nowi?”

“Some food would be nice,” she mumbled as she fought to keep her eyes open.

Donnel nodded vigorously, eager to be of use to his comrades and get away from the flirting redheads. “Right on it, Miss!”

“Thanks… Donny…” she said as she finally succumbed to sleep.

“Check with Stahl,” Anna called out as he moved to his target. ”If anyone here has extra food is him.”

“Yes, Ma’am!”

Donnel ran towards the convoy, thinking back to the battle and souring his slightly good mood. His heart almost stopped when he saw the two brave women fall to their deaths but thankfully they were saved by the power of Commander Robin.

The march was not without problems. A few Plegian assassins were able to intercept them through the canyons as they came from their forward bases as soon as their scouts detected the Ylisseans advance. Soon after they were engaging their frontal troops while the rest of the Shepherds and Pegasus Knights treated their wounded on the rear.

Sully severed the arm of her opponent, eliciting a scream that was quickly silenced. They were a fair distance from the main convoy, securing the perimeter while they waited for the Feroxi vanguard to meet up with them. Her horse, Spirit, was currently holding Lady Emmeryn, meaning that Sully had
to fight on foot.

Not that it affected her much since she trained hard to be ready for such situations.

Still, while so far the forces that had found them weren’t an issue, the Plegian troops were starting to take a toll on the Shepherds' stamina. There was no telling when a fresh soldier will ambush the most tired Ylisseans or when fatigue would cause them to make a mistake.

Just as the cavalier did in that moment.

Sully overextended herself and felt her shoulder muscle lock up for an instant. Just in time to give an assassin the opening he needed to eliminate the knight. The man jumped with the intention of splitting her skull open, but the cavalier wasn’t having it. Since her arm was not useful at the moment, Sully kicked the man with all her strength and weight behind it, knocking the attack off course. Clumsily using her left hand to hold her sword, she stabbed the Plegian in the heart, killing him instantly.

Grunting, she rolled her shoulder to unblock her muscles not paying attention to her surroundings, allowing a dark mage to finish his spell.

“DIE, YLISSEAN WHORE!”

Sully barely turned around when she was knocked to the ground by a heavily armored figure that appeared out of nowhere. The cavalier gathered her bearings just in time to watch as Kellam took the brunt of the attack with gritted teeth. Biting down a scream as the dark spell cursed through his flesh, the heavy knight threw his javelin right into the chest of the mage. The Plegian gave a gurgle before falling dead on the floor, spine severed by the weapon, and releasing the spell. Kellam soon too found himself on the ground.

“Kellam? Hey, Kellam!” Sully shouted, running to his side now that all the enemies in the vicinity were taken care of.

Kellam heaved as he discarded his shield; the extra weight not doing anything for him right now. “S-Sully? Y-You ok?”

The cavalier clenched her jaw as she helped her comrade to his feet. “Dammit, pip-squeak! That attack was meant for me! Were you following me around, trying to play hero?! Look where that got you!”

Making the effort to open his eyes, Kellam glanced at her in confusion. “Um, I-I wasn't trying to play, Sully. I was just fighting alongside—”

“Well, knock it the hell off!” Sully snarled. She was confused, angry and grateful at the same time, but her pride wouldn’t let her admit it. “I'm the one who does the protectin’ around here, got it?! I don't need some tiny man in a huge suit of armor watching me.”

Kellam grew more confused, not understanding why his actions were being reproached. “B-b-but…”

“You think I need extra protection? That it? You think I'm frail and weak?” the redhead asked, earning a shaky denial from the injured knight. “You think you can be my gallant knight in shiny, oversized armor?”

“I wasn't g-giving you special t-treatment, honest! I just like protecting people!”

“I'll say this once, pip-squeak!” Sully poked his chest angrily with one hand while giving him
support with the other. “Don’t ever pull that crap again! Are we clear now? Words sank in?” There was no response. Sully was about to start back again when she noticed his head dropping and his breathing becoming shallow. “…Kellam? Hey! Wake up! Dammit! Hold on, you’re not dying because of me!”

“You need to rest, Emmeryn!”

“But Lissa, I can hel—”

“NO!” Lissa shouted, surprising her elder sister. The pair was in a small space they had secured to patch the wounded while they awaited for the convoy. The young princess glared at the Exalt through her tears. “No, today you listen to me! I almost lost you and I’m not going to let you hurt yourself anymore! Now, sit down and rest!”

Emmeryn turned to the downed form of their Plegian mercenary that was being patched up by Libra. “But Lady Ro—”

“I will heal her,” Lissa interrupted, her voice serious. Right now she was no princess or younger sister; she was a medic and her word was law. Lissa understood her concern, though. They have no idea what spell or poison was in those arrows but it was fighting all their attempts to close the wounds on her sister’s savior. Libra and that mage, Tharja, were doing their best to remove the cause but it was slow going. The most they could do was replenish her blood and cover her with bandages. “I will use the remaining power of my staff to try and heal her now that we got time, but first let me heal that leg of yours.” Lissa frowned as she gave her elder a once over. “Your arm was healed in a hurry so I need to check that too.”

Emmeryn sighed and seated, much to Lissa’s pleasure. “Let’s start with the arm. I think we need to reset the bone first and bandages.”

“I’m the medic here, Emmeryn. You let me worry about that,” Lissa said as she finished mending Emmeryn’s leg so she could walk. Pulling a piece of wood from her knapsack, she passed it to the Exalt. “I will reset the bone. The potion we gave you will wear off soon and we have no more anesthetics. I need you to bite this so you don’t bite your tongue in pain.”

With a little hesitation, Emmeryn bit into the wood. Lissa studied the wound, finding it less serious than the one she had suffered in her leg. Maribelle, who was currently healing the Pegasus knights, had mended the flesh in a hurry to stop the bleeding, giving Emmeryn the potion to push away the pain, but the bone was set incorrectly.

Lissa might be many things. A prankster, lazy, squeamish about killing, but when it came to healing she had taken to it like a fish to the water. “This is going to hurt,” she warned with an apologetic tone, earning a nod from Emmeryn. “Ok, then. At the count of three. One—”

Emmeryn screamed, biting into the wood as Lissa reset the bone with all her strength. The young princess quickly healed the bone now that it was properly in place, using her staff to soothe the pain.

“Emm! Focus on me!” Lissa said, grabbing her sister’s shoulders while she sobbed in pain.

“I… I’m fine….” the Exalt said through heavy breaths. “Now, please… heal Lady Rose… I owe her…”

“You got i—”

“I NEED HELP!”
Lissa nearly jumped out of her skin at the shout. Running towards them was Sully, shouldering an armored figure that was hard to discern but became clearer the closer they came.

“Sul— Kellam!?” the blonde shouted as she finally noticed the figure using Sully as support. “What happened!”

“A dastard Plegian attacked me with dark magic while I was finishing off an assassin,” Sully explained as she placed Kellam on the ground with unusual care. “This idiot took the attack for me. Can you heal him.”

“I can but…” Lissa trailed off as she saw the Plegian mercenary. “We need to prioritize.”

Sully bit her tongue and growled. Lissa wondered if it was in anger at Rose for getting in the way or the situation in general.

“Heal… him…”

“Huh!?” Those present turned to see Rose pushing herself into a sitting position. More surprising than her sudden awakening was the fact that her face was completely visible to those present. Long, white hair stuck to her with sweat, face paler than it was healthy due to blood loss. Libra must have taken her coat while attempting to heal her wounds.

Libra attempted to stop her before she made her state worse. “Milady, you need to rest! You will only make your injuries worse!”

The tactician pushed away his hands, gazing directly into the princess’s eyes. “Focus… on Kellam…” Rose wheezed out. Her hand gained an orange glow as magic gathered on her palm. “I… will take… care of this. I’ve… enough magic… for this…”

Before anyone could stop her, the mercenary placed her hand on her lower back and smell of burnt flesh reached her. She gritted her teeth as the pain became clearly unbearable.

Lissa was quick on her feet, taking her staff, ready to berate the mercenary who just dropped her hand and gave a weak smile. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?”

“There…” she said, pointing out at the new scar charred skin on her lower back. “Cauterized… Now, you… can heal him…” Her eyes rolled back and she passed out from exhaustion.

“You’re insane,” Lissa whispered as she inspected the wounds and grimaced. It wouldn’t fix the internal bleeding but maybe the first burned the inside wounds. With nothing else she could do for Rose at the moment, Lissa gave a wave of her staff and the burnt flesh mended into proper scar tissue. She turned to Libra to issue her orders. “Give her some more anti-venom and a healing potion, then try to heal my sister’s wounds. Minimal, but proper healing. We need to conserve the power of our staves for now.”

Libra bowed. “On it, your highness.”

As the priest moved towards the Exalt, Lissa gave Sully a nod, “Take off his armor and bring him here, let’s see what we can do.”

Gaius and Sumia were holding the rear, fighting the Risen summoned by a Grimleal priestess that snuck behind them, cutting them off from the rest of the militia.

“Just what we needed,” grumbled the thief as he cut down an undead warrior. “Just our luck, we
overextended and got ambushed.”

The Plegians that had ambushed the scouts were low in number, forcing them to resort to the classic strategy of “divide and conquer”.

“Drats,” cursed Sumia as she spun her spear to deflect an incoming blow. Like Sully, she too had left her mount behind in case they needed to evacuate the wounded. The clumsy knight was starting to have second thoughts about that decision since she was less effective on foot than on a pegasus. “They just keep coming!”

“You should be resting, Stumbles,” Gaius said as he cut another Risen. “That arm of yours is not completely healed.”

“I’m well enough to fight,” insisted the knight. Her arm had popped out of its socket when she grabbed Sorano. It was not nearly a serious wound as the others had suffered but the lack of available fighters meant she had to get some quick healing to get back in the fight. Sadly that meant the healing was not nearly as good and still left her arm sore and stiff.

A Risen took the opportunity present by their chat to jump the knight. The axe of the undead barbarian came down fast and only its growls alerted Sumia of the attack. She quickly raised her spear in defense but the blow of the heavier weapon slammed down with full force on the shaft of the spear. The war had taken a toll on her equipment and the spear shattered, absorbing enough of the force to just knock Sumia to the ground instead of splitting her in half.

“A Risen took the opportunity present by their chat to jump the knight. The axe of the undead barbarian came down fast and only its growls alerted Sumia of the attack. She quickly raised her spear in defense but the blow of the heavier weapon slammed down with full force on the shaft of the spear. The war had taken a toll on her equipment and the spear shattered, absorbing enough of the force to just knock Sumia to the ground instead of splitting her in half.

“Sumia!” Gaius shouted. Ignoring his slip at the use of her actual name, the thief jumped in front of the fallen brunette and deflected the next attack with all the skill he earned through his run-ins with the law. “You ok there?”

“Y-Yes, I’m ok!” she stuttered through a wince. “But we better finish this soon.”

“This isn’t over!” the priestess growled, summoning more undead soldiers. Sumia thanked the gods that the Grimleal wasn’t summoning those Abominations but they still outnumbered the Ylisseans four to one. They weren’t impossible odds, as the corpses looked more rotten than usual, but they weren’t favorable either.

“Fuck me,” muttered Gaius as he raised his sword in anticipation.

The Risen rushed forward towards the Ylisseans who took their stances hoping backup was around the corner. As the corpse leaped to attack a javelin pierced its rotten flesh. Dark blood and pus pooled into the ground as the magic that kept it moving ceased to be, leaving behind only decomposed muscle.

The confusion was broken by a feminine voice coming from above, followed by an equine whine.

“Cheers, luvs!” a pixie of a brunette woman on top of a pegasus shouted cheerfully getting the attention of the living humans. She threw another javelin through the Risen summoner’s the heart, killing her instantly. “The cavalry is here!” she exclaimed with a cheeky grin.

The sound of flapping wings and javelins slicing air and flesh was music to the Ylisseans’ ears. Sumia released a sigh of relief as the rest of the Pegasus Knights finally arrived. Fresh and unbloodied, the winged riders destroyed the Risen that remained even after the mage’s demise, giving the Shepherds a much-needed respite.

Phila descended from above like a messenger of the gods in front of the three soldiers and proceeded to glare at their savior. “Lena! Stop playing around and go assist Hana and Angela up there! The rest
of the squads have their hands full already!”

Lena gave a stiff salute, knowing better than to play around in front of the Wing Commander. “Yes ma’am!” she said before going to support her battle-sisters.

Gaius chuckled as he leaned on the canyon’s wall, finally letting the exhaustion take its toll on his body. “Heh. Seems we got ourselves some sweet backup. Right, Stumbles?”

The klutz returned the sentiment with a smile, “Seems like it.”

“Sumia!”

Years of training kicked in, making the brunette stand straight and salute. “Y-Yes, Commander!”

Phila gave her a once over, scrutinizing the clumsy Shepherd. Nodding once, her expression softened slightly, making Sumia relax. “It’s good to see you safe and sound.”

“I can say the same about you, Commander,” Sumia said, wincing at pain shoot through her shoulder. “Thought I can’t say I came out of it unscathed.”

“I told you to rest, Stumbles,” Gaius butted in.

Phila spared a scowl at the thief, who promptly found the wall to be extremely fascinating. The Wing Commander continued with a worried frown. “Where is Lady Emmeryn? Is she safe? We came as soon as news of her execution reached the capital.”

“It...It was a close call,” Sumia admitted, “but she is alive. She has a broken arm and leg but nothing that a proper healing won’t fix if I understood correctly.”

Phila released a breath at the news. “Thank Naga. Was it your squad that saved her?”

Sumia shook her head with a slight hint of shame. “We didn’t save her ma’am. They were prepared for our pegasi. They had Risen Archers ready to shoot us down.”

The pale-haired woman closed her eyes as if prepared for a punch. “Any casualties?”

“Thankfully no,” the brunette explain much to her obvious relief. “Luckily for us, Commander Robin had planned for this. In hindsight, it was obvious that Plegia would prepare for one of our iconic divisions,” Sumia admitted with some embarrassment.

The Wing Commander hummed in thought. “It seems Prince Chrom was right about vouching for his tactical prowess.”

“It was incredible! Like something out of ‘Dark Fliers of Florem’!” Sumia gushed, letting her inner romantic take hold, oblivious to the exasperated huff of her superior. “Commander Robin opened a portal and Lady Rose dived in, grabbing Lady Emmeryn while taking arrow meant for the Exalt before falling back into another portal!”

A flicker of emotions appeared through Phila’s face as she processed that information. “It seems Rose and I have much to talk about,” Phila muttered. Slamming her spear on the ground she regained Sumia’s attention, who looked downright embarrassed at her own display while the ginger-haired thief looked on in amusement. “Lead me to the Exalt. I need to speak with her at once.”

Emmeryn took a deep breath while letting the potion do its work. The pain had finally stopped but the sensations were not comfortable. The hastily-made casts on her arm and leg were more an
insurance than anything else but served as a reminder of her condition.

Looking from her seat on the edge of their small camp Emmeryn saw those that were injured during her rescue and felt her heart drop. Even though, by the grace of Naga, there were no fatalities the wounds many received were grievous. Quite a few soldiers were injured. Those that could still fight, like Sully, went back to give support on the edges of their perimeter.

“Emmeryn!”

The Exalt was surprised to see the owner of that familiar voice. “Phila?”

“Thank the gods you are alive!” The knight said, foregoing decorum and pulling the Exalt in a gentle hug. “I was so worried when I heard you were captured.”

“I am sorry,” muttered Emmeryn as she returned the hug. “I should have been more careful.”

“Shh...” Phila silenced “I am just glad you are saf–”

“Ummm.”

The pair turned to see an awkward Sumia watching the display of platonic love.

“Should I leave..?” the klutz asked, clearly uncomfortable.

‘Oh dear,’ Emmeryn though at how their hug could be misinterpreted. If she remembered correctly, Lissa had spoken about Lady Trevelyan being a romantic with an active imagination. ‘We better clear the air before any misconcep–’

“You will not speak of this. You will not misinterpret our friendship. You will control your imagination and we will not repeat the ‘November Incident’. Am I clear?” Phila warned the brunette, earning a hasty nod. “Good. Go get your shoulder checked up.”

Emmeryn looked at Phila with a perplexed expression, “November Incident?”

“Just… Let’s just say she tends to misinterpret displays of affection and tends to get carried away.” Do not worry about it. More importantly, we intercepted the Feroxi convoy. Armored carriages and their escorts will arrive soon to lead us to safety, with the Pegasus Knights providing support.”

The ruler of Ylisse felt a weight being lifted from her shoulders at the news.

“Good. We need the supplies to heal the injured.”

“That crazy woman...” muttered Phila. “I will need to speak with her later.”

“That makes two of us.”

“Well, everything should be–”

A growl from the side made Phila tense and grab her spear. A pair of Risen stalked towards them.

“Dammit! Stay behind me, Emmeryn! I can deal with them!”

As Phila prepared to deal with the enemy something unexpected happened. The sound of dozens of wings rippled through the air quickly followed a mass of dark shadows enveloping the field. The birds pecked at the rotten flesh while the Risen tried to finish them to no avail. Quickly, the undead soldiers were nothing but piles of bones and exposed muscles on the ground
“Ahh!” Emmeryn cried in surprise as the birds started circling them.

“Wh-what's that?” Shouted Phila as she covered Emmeryn with her body .“A storm of... crows?!”

“CAW! CAW! Are you folks lost?” a voice asked from inside the whirlwind of feathers. “Or perhaps a lost CAWs? Heh ha!”

“Who's there?! Show yourself!” demanded the Wing Commander. “Gods' breath, I can't see anything through all these damned birds! Shoo! Scat! Away with you!”

The murder of crows dispersed, revealing a white-haired young man with an eerie smile on his face. The Plegian robes only made Phila tense more, preparing herself while Emmeryn crawled behind a rock. The rest of the clerics were tending the wounded on the other side of the path, but apparently were dealing with their own problems as Risen and crows battled each other.

“What's wrong? CAW-strophobic? Nya ha ha! Oh, I slay me!”

The bad pun stunned the women, not expecting that response.

“What,” said Phila, not understanding.

The stranger didn’t seem bothered by their reactions. “You know, I thought you were all right... Turns out you're all FRIGHT! Nya ha ha!” he said with a laugh. “I'd wish you good luck killing these monsters, buuuuuut... They’re ALREADY DEAD!”

Emmeryn could see Phila was mere moments from snapping and the Exalt was surprised she hadn’t already attacked the boy; something she was glad for since he couldn’t be much older than Lissa.

“Start making sense or prepare to phase the consequences!” the knight shouted.

“The ravens wanted me to give you a message. 'Caaw... C-caw-caw.' Roughly translated, it means... Hmm, now what was the human word for that again? ...Traipse? ...Trope? Oh, Trouble! Right! ...They say you're in trouble!”

“We know,” Phila said exasperated, before taking a closer look at the boy. “You are not attacking us... What are your intentions, boy?”

“Name’s Henry, ma'am! A pleasure!” Henry said with a bow. “As for what I want, well, I want to join your CAWs– I mean, I can help you! I know magic! What do you say... Birds of a feather and all that?”

Phila stared incredulously at the boy, her spear slacking as she fell into disbelief. “You want to… Why would you help us? It doesn’t make sense!”

“Why not? They let Tharja join,” the boy complained, still smiling.

As the two bickered, Emmeryn thought to herself. The boy had ample chance to kill them and looking at the effects of his crows on the Risen he could have done so with ease. So focused on her thoughts that she didn’t notice a new presence at her side.

“You,” a new voice rang. Emmeryn turned to see the taguel woman that helped them before appeared next to her; her eyes firmly on the boy. “You are that creepy man-spawn that warned me of the assassination attempt on the Exalt’s life.”

“Hey, bunny lady! Been a while!” Henry greeted.
“What are you talking about, Lady Panne?” asked Phila, who had an incredulous look on her face.

“Before the attempt on the Exalt, this man-spawn found me and informed me of the plan. That’s how I knew to be there that night,” Panne explained, surprising the other women.

“Why would you betray your king and help your enemy, before and now?” Emmeryn asked, not clear on his motives.

“Well, what can I say? It would have been a boring war otherwise, with you guys so weak already. Figured I would even the board and make it more fun!” he said with an uncaring tone, still smiling and ignoring the incredulous looks of his audience. “Truth be told I was ordered by my commander to help you guys on this occasion, as repayment for something.” Henry shrugged. “No idea what, though.”

“How can we trust you? This is just too bizarre,” said Phila.

“Well...I could have let them drop that boulder on you,” the dark mage said, pointing up. The women followed with their gaze and their eyes widened when they saw a boulder sitting close to the edge of the upper walls, with corpses clearly visible hanging on the edge. “You would have turned into a lovely smear of blood and guts! Mmmm blood.”

“He is not the first Plegian we recruit...” Phila muttered to herself, seemingly ignoring the last part of the comment. “Certainly the strangest, though.”

“I do not sense deceit in his words,” stated Panne.

“I trust him,” agreed Emmeryn, surprising the knight. “He seems honest, if a... little strange,” she amended, earning a snort from Phila. “But he had ample opportunity to harm us and yet preferred to talk. If he wants to help I am sure Chrom won’t turn away another soldier. Rose, Robin and that woman Tharja, are all Plegian, and have proven helpful despite their...quirks.”

“Hmmm,” Phila mulled it over and sighed. “Fine. I will let Prince Chrom deal with him. He is the one dealing with the most exotic members of our army.”

If possible, Henry’s grin grew wider and creepier. “Awesome! Just point me towards whoever you want to be turned into a pile of guts! Mmmm, I love me some guts.”

“...Right.”

Emmeryn wasn’t done yet and asked something that had been bothering her. “Excuse me, Henry, but who is your commander? Why would he ask you to help us?”

Henry just smiled.

“It seems they are talking and he will join them. I hope I don’t regret this,” Mustafa said as he lowered his looking glass. “Henry is not the most stable boy...” The ex-general of the Plegian Army released a sigh and descended from his perch into one of the many passages hidden in the canyon. “Well, what’s done it’s done.”

“Uncle Mustafa!” a feminine voice called him.

The warrior turned to see his niece running to meet him. “Slow down, Jen,” he said.

“Sorry... uncle...” the girl said through panted breaths. “But everything is ready for our escape.”
The ex-general nodded, “Good. Did we got everyone?”

A cocky grin preluded her answer. “Yes, sir! All loyal soldiers and their families are safe and sound!”

Mustafa smiled and ruffled the young girl’s hair. “Fantastic.”

It was a hard gamble, but Emmeryn’s words had shaken the general. This wasn’t the Plegia he wanted to create for his family and the more he saw the upper echelons of the government descend into madness, using undead as troops and killing even their own soldiers made Mustafa understand that he couldn’t stand behind their cause. He couldn’t stay in Plegia either, as the Grimleal were gaining more control every day. Her attempted sacrifice only validated his decision. Mustafa was thankful for her rescue, for she was too great of a woman to die just yet.

So he made a plan. As soon as they reached the Plegian borders he gathered his most trusted soldiers and asked them for their help on breaking their families from Gangrel’s threat of death and escape the country. They didn’t have much faith that they could return even if Gangrel died but they couldn’t remain there. The Grimleal wouldn’t let them change anything so Mustafa would have to bide his time until he could return Plegia to its former glory.

“Come. I think it’s time we depart to the north. I got some friends on the Feroxi border that might let us settle behind the wall.” Mustafa chuckled. “If not, we could probably bribe our way onto an island in the south with all that we stole from the treasury.”

Jen laughed at this. “You got it, uncle!”

The man smiled as his niece ran through the passage. He gazed at the sky for a moment and closed his eyes. His sister might have died to Exalt Augustus, but Emmeryn was different. Her ideals were pure and they pushed him in the right direction. For now, he would protect his sister’s legacy: Her children.

“Good luck, Lady Emmeryn,” he muttered. “And thank you for reminding me who I a supposed to be.”

Lon’qu felt his muscles burn as he drove his blade into Plegian flesh, eliminating the last of his opponents. He leaned on his sword to catch his breath. Even a swordsman of his caliber was not immune to fatigue, and the constant fighting was taking a toll on him.

The sound of quick steps around the corner forced the Feroxi swordsman to take his stance.

“Lon’qu?”

The familiar ring of that sweet voice made the swordsman relax. A lantern pierced the shadows of the canyon, revealing the familiar sight of pink hair tied in twin braids.

“Olivia,” Lon’qu breathed while smiling at the sight of the Feroxi dancer.

The beautiful dancer turned and smiled as she saw the swordsman. “Hello dear,” she greeted, gently grabbing his callous hand and tracing circles on it with her thumb.

It would have surprised the Shepherds to see the man not flinch away from a woman’s touch but Lon’qu allowed it, feeling some of his fatigue leave his body at the mere sight of his wife. The one woman he could stand getting close to him after all the years of working with Khan Basilio. The Feroxi Ruler always pushed for them to be together and Lon’qu couldn’t say he was angry the Khan
got his way.

Pushing back his reminiscence, Lon’qu inquired. “What are you doing here?”

“Khan Basilio put me in charge of the convoy. I know this canyons well from all my travels to spy on Plegia,” the dancer explained.

“Typical,” the swordsman muttered. As much as he respected the man, Basilio did like to push his wife into the weirdest assignments. He didn’t like how the Khan used her appearance and talent for dancing to make people drop their guard and let her spy on them. But still, people were happy to ignore the dancer and spill out their secrets for her ear to catch. While she could wield the sword as well as any Feroxi, Olivia lacked the killer instinct needed to use it properly. “I trust you brought backup, right?”

Olivia smiled at his comment. He knew that any attempt to hide his concern behind a stoic facade would not fool his wife. Shy she might be with anyone else, but not him. The dancer knew how to read the swordsman like a book. “Two platoons are securing our way and we met with the Pegasus Knights of Ylisse that came as soon as they heard of Emmeryn’s situation. The are now bolstering our numbers.”

Lon’qu nodded and adjusted the grip on his sword. That was good. They had plenty of back up and now had a secure escape route. “Let’s meet with the Khan’s and the Ylissean commanders. I’m sure they will appreciate the good news.”

Lucina released a breath she didn’t realize she was holding once she witnessed the reinforcements arrived.

“They did it. Aunt Emmeryn survived,” she whispered into the wind. “Everyone survived.”

The time traveler stood near the edge of the canyon, observing how they loaded the wounded into the Feroxi convoy. Lon’qu and Olivia were speaking with her father and the Khans while Commander Phila stood beside the Exalt like a mother hen. Lucina never got to meet the Pegasus Knight’s Commander as she died before the princess was born, but she could tell Phila was strong and loyal. Maybe she could learn more about her and her aunt now that they were both alive. From a distance, of course.

The princess gave a sigh of relief as the rest of the Shepherds joined a few minutes later, preparing to leave for Ferox and towards safety. Lucina hated that she couldn’t fight alongside them but they simply couldn’t reach them in time and they seemed to have everything under control.

Her gaze trailed to the fallen tactician that was being loaded into one of the carts. Rubbing her neck at the memories of their last encounter, Lucina couldn’t prevent the conflicted emotions that crossed her face. There was much she wanted to say but the knowledge the older woman had scared her. How could she know of her identity and how will that affect them? Had Naga recruited her? Why?

But at the same time, the situation gave Lucina some hope.

‘She knows about me. Maybe if I explain everything...’ Lucina couldn’t get much further analyzing her thoughts as a familiar voice broke her out of her reverie.

“Lucy!”
Turning around, Lucina gave a small smile at the sight of one of her dear friends.

“Cynthia. Did you catch a glimpse of your parents?” the princess asked, earning excited nods from the young rider that made her pigtails bounce in response.

“Yep! They look great! Dad was protecting mom all heroically from the Risen when the Pegasus Knights swoop down to the rescue! It was amazing!” an ecstatic Cynthia said, using her hands to mimic the battle.

Knowing better than to encourage her sister in all but blood, the future princess just nodded and smiled. “I’m glad to hear that. It safe to say you weren’t spotted?” she asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Come on, Lucy! I scouted Grimleal territories in our timeline and I know this canyon like the back of my hand,” the pegasus rider whined.

Even though she wanted to mention that Grima had reshaped the land, Lucina still gave a rare chuckle at the sight of her friend in such high spirits. They had so much horrible experiences that any good thing should be cherished. “Alright, alright. I trust you.”

A male voice interrupted their conversations, much to the annoyance of the scholar. “Lower your voice Cynthia, or we will be spotted.”

Cynthia turned around, sticking her tongue out at the intruder. “Stop being a stick in the mud, Laurent. I know you were spying on your parents too!”

The bespectacled mage huffed but didn’t deny her accusation.

The familiar bickering was a sight for sore eyes to the young princess. Lucina was glad that the information given to her had proven correct. Finding at least some of her friends eased some of the worries from her shoulders. She wished it was under better circumstances, though.

Laurent was wandering the land near the border when she found him. The “Mirage Village” in which he was previously residing had been raided by Grimleal to gain the secrets from the cloaking spell, which they then used to attack Ylisstol. Thankfully, the scholar had managed to evacuate the small populace before the Grimleal had their way with them.

Sometime in between their meeting he had joined with Noire, much to their delight. Lucina felt guilty knowing that Laurent had spent two years alone after being pushed back further into the timeline, but she had no way of knowing that. At least Noire had only been alone for a month.

It did worry him that others could’ve have been thrown out farther out of time. Earlier or later than herself would still mean they were separated.

Meanwhile, Cynthia was a near-offensive case. The princess couldn’t comprehend how could the young girl think that that brute was the Prince of Ylisse. He looked like a vagabond, not a prince, and she was still about to join his band.

Pushing away the headache that Cynthia’s action was about to bring, she focused on what was important. “What news do you bring, Laurent?”

“Noire finished setting up our camp,” the lone male explained. “The location should be safe enough. I set up our regular barriers to prevent the Plegians from finding us.”

“Great!” Cynthia exclaimed, pumping her arms. “We can have a small party to celebrate their victory!”
“It’s too early to celebrate,” Laurent chastised as he adjusted his glasses. “This is far from over.”

“Yes, it is,” Lucina agreed. Squaring her shoulder and gripping Falchion’s hilt, Lucina knew what their next step was. “Come on, we need to rest before we go find the others.”

The Fell Dragon couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face. It had been a productive and fulfilling day, even for a dark god such as himself. ‘I did my good deed for this timeline, got my things along with a couple of souvenirs and to wrap it all up I managed to screw over another dragon.’ He chuckled to himself.

Naga, Salamander, Anankos, and those so-called “First Dragons”... They were all the same in Grima’s eyes.

Obstacles. Threats. Fools.

The Fell Dragon didn’t like that bastard Anakos; his dislike for him only second to the one Grima held for Naga. The Silent Dragon always thought he could just manipulate everyone as he saw fit.

That was his territory.

‘Now that Emmeryn has died Chrom shall take the mantle as he was meant to,’ Grima thought with satisfaction. ‘Then the Valmese war will reach its apex and the blood of the fallen shall empower me. The little tactician will succumb and become one with me. The timeline will stabilize and everything will be as it should. Destiny will not be defied, nor will my vengeance.’

As much as he wanted to just snap the stupid prince’s neck, he needed him alive. Otherwise, his plan will not work as intended. This little trip in time had presented him with plenty of new opportunities, but he couldn’t be rash if he wanted them to come to fruition.

“Naga. Chrom. I can’t wait to watch you burn.”

The Fell Dragon walked into his studio, ready to hear the news of Emmeryn’s demise. His good mood turned into one of confusion once he finally noticed the anxious, shaking of his disciple’s form, whose eyes were firmly looking at the ground.

“What?”

Chapter End Notes

AN: Someone said they expected an Overwatch reference so there it is. Fates won’t play a major role in the story. It was mainly to tie in the DLC with the First Dragons and for Grima to get a few new toys to add flavor to the story.

Both Grima and Rose are unaware but the reason Robin could control his power was because Future Grima was away and past Grima is still slumbering. I say this here because I can’t think of a way for them to even be aware of the situation and to figure it out naturally.
Henry’s part was a bit rushed but well, he isn’t the easiest to write expressions for. Just another change in the timeline.

For convenience's sake, the future children’s landing places will change a little for them to meet earlier. I also have dropped hints of who will end up with who with a few additions to the canon pairs. I married Frederick and Miriel before because that support is the only one in which Miriel outright admits she loves her husband. I also married Lon’qu and Olivia, having them worked together for a long time under Basilio. I felt it was appropriate. I also like their awkward supports: a family of shy, awkward badasses.

And Ana is older than she looks. And if you notice any error, feel free to point it out. I would correct or clarify as necessary.

This has been a hectic month, as I’ve been writing a research paper for a class so sorry again for not being a fast uploader. I sat on this chapter for 3 weeks without time to write or motivations since I got sick of looking at word documents.
The Shepherds had marched non-stop until they reached the imposing walls of the Feroxi border. By now everyone was running ragged but in surprisingly good spirits. The injured had been stabilized and the Exalt was now under the protection of the Shepherds, the Royal Pegasus Knights, and the Feroxi Elite. The Great Wall was a sight for sore eyes and the tired warriors could finally relax without fearing an ambush.

As they settled within the closest fort on the Feroxi Wall, Robin felt the stress drain from his body. The tactician thanked the gods that the weather was pleasant, making it a relatively warm day in the warrior country. Tents had been set up for the army with bonfires placed within the inner courtyard to warm the soldiers, for even the warmth of the sun wasn’t enough to overpower the occasional bite of Ferox’s icy winds. The injured had been placed in individual tents near the central building for the healer’s easy access, while the main barracks had been set aside for the royals and commanders.

Chrom had ordered the young amnesiac to take at least one day off. Even if he had had the energy to argue, Robin could no longer deny that he needed downtime. The stress he felt was starting to overwhelm him. He knew his friend was starting to get worried – and annoyed – at his constant self-deprecation, but what could he expect? This was his life. Tactics were apparently all he knew. Not being able to remember his past life meant he had no experience or memories to fall back on to. Had he worked on a farm? In a store? Why did he remember useful books on tactics but not his favorite meal or any other skills? As far as Robin was aware, he was only useful to others when it came to war games and strategy.

He hadn’t even known what he looked like until Lissa had lent him a mirror after the battle at Southtown.

So he had latched on to the one purpose – the one lifeline – he had been offered: being the tactician for the Shepherds.

And he had almost failed.

Robin clenched his fist, his cracked fingernails digging into his palms. Failure of such magnitude was not something he had ever experienced. Every battle and every skirmish he could ever remember had always ended with victory and no casualties for the Shepherds. Robin was not arrogant, but he had been building up his confidence in his skills with each battle, even if he still doubted his worth outside of the role of tactician. And yet, in one of the most important battles he had ever taken command of, he had almost caused the death of his best friend’s sister.

“You look worried, Sir Robin.” Robin’s heart leaped to his throat and he whirled around to see the worried smile of Exalt Emmeryn Lowell.

“You Grace! I–” Robin stumbled through his words like Sumia would walking a straight line, trying to find the right way to address the Exalt of Ylisse. “M-My apologies, I was–”

“Now there’s no need for such formality from one of my saviors,” Emmeryn said, her tone pleasant as she waved off his concerns. “I will say to you the same thing I told Lady Rose before. At this point, you have more than earned the right to address me as an equal,” she said with a pleasant smile that did nothing to reduce his nerves.
“I… don’t think I can do that without having a panic attack, Your Grace,” Robin replied weakly. “Though maybe in the future?” ‘When the idea won’t shave off years of my life.’ Give him a battlefield over social interactions with nobles any day.

Chrom and Lissa didn’t count in his eyes.

“A pity, but I won’t force the issue,” Emmeryn answered easily. “It does seem to be a constant these days: to be protected by Plegian tacticians. I can not say I am disappointed with my brother’s decisions to induct you and Rose into our ranks.”

“Well, to be fair, most of that part rescue plan was her idea. I just conjured the portal spell and blocked their path,” Robin clarified. “Without her suggestion, I doubt I would’ve foreseen this outcome.”

“Which were both equally essential parts in the plans,” the Exalt insisted before giving Robin a look. “Chrom has already mentioned your doubts, which is why I decide to talk with you. It's the least I could do.”

Robin was currently cursing his so-called best friend and beginning to reconsider his loyalty to him since he had decided to sic his older sister on him.

“It took a while to shake off Phila and Chrom, but I should have a few minutes of privacy to speak with you.”

Robin was overcome with a new feeling. Was this what it felt like when one was about to be scolded by their mother? If so, he was glad he couldn’t remember the feeling.

“As I said, I have been made aware of your self-doubt and I cannot, in good conscience, let our tactician and my saviour feel that way about himself when I can do something about it,” Emmeryn said with a tone that made Robin pay attention, similar to the one Rose took sometimes when trying to give him a lesson. “I know that you had problems with suspicions from our soldiers. Sadly that’s to be expected. been an important part of the Shepherds since you joined, regardless of your origins. Any doubts of your intentions should have been erased after that battle.”

Robin looked down as he pondered her words. He supposed she was right. He had done as well as he could. He had been surprised when Frederick had begun treating him like a comrade while Vaike and Sully had become more polite since the rescue, even though they haven’t interacted much. Soldiers that had once looked at him with suspicion were now more pleasant.

“I have to admit things have gotten better,” Robin admitted.

“There you have it. There is no reason for you to doubt yourself or the bonds you have formed.”

“Maybe… But there is something I need to do first.” Robin knelt before the Exalt, head bowed as he continued, “I am sorry. It was a foolish oversight on my part that allowed you to get captured in the first place. If I had been more careful, this entire situation could have been prevented. I failed you and your family, your Grace.”

“The idea was approved by the House of Ylisse, Sir Robin,” Emmeryn soothed, placing her good hand on his shoulder as she knelt down to his level. “We all share blame here. I am the one that decided to jump after all. I am sorry for putting you and Chrom in that situation.”

“It wasn’t your fault, milady! It was Gangr– Oh…” he trailed off once he noted the satisfied smile on her face. Clever. Robin chuckled, “I see what you just did, Your Grace. Thank you. I’m just not used to the idea of losing.”
The Exalt pondered her answer for a moment. “I can not say I am well versed on military matters but even I know we would not have made it this far without your sharp mind.”

“Thank you. You’ve set my mind at ease.”

“I am pleased that is the case,” Emmeryn replied in a wistful tone. “It is good that one of us can get some peace of mind.”

That made the tactician frown. “Your Grace?”

Emmeryn looked reluctant to continue. Robin was about to change the topic when she relented. “...The past few days have been rough, Sir Robin. Whenever I close my eyes I can only see the ground coming closer. Or Rose’s pained face as the arrows dug into her flesh. It has made it... difficult to get a restful sleep.”

Robin felt like an idiot at that moment. Of course, the Exalt would have trauma! Not only had she been present during the attack on the capital but she had also been kidnapped by Gangrel only to evade falling to her dead by a hairsbreadth. It was surprising that none of the other Shepherds had suffered some crippling trauma so far, but he realized he had been taking their strength of will for granted. “I had no idea, Your Grace. Of course, you would have a hard time after such. Is there anything I can do to assist?”

“It’s alright, Sir Robin,” Emmeryn said with a tight smile that didn’t convince him at all. “I think the shock will disappear once this war is over.”

“I hope I’m not overstepping my bounds but if you feel the need to talk, I’m willing to lend my ear.”

“The offer is appreciated and I will keep it in mind, but I think you should focus on the oncoming battles instead of my nightmares. Not doing so will have much more severe consequences than dwelling on my own demons.”

“You’re right, Your Grace.” The war was at its apex and the next battle had to end it unless they wanted the land dyed red. “Though I would prefer to have Virion’s and Rose’s opinion on my next plan.”

“I inquired about her state a short while ago. According to Lady Maribelle she should be waking up soon,” the Exalt supplied.

A relieved sigh escaped the tactician. “That’s good to hear. I hope she gets better.”

“Our best healers did say she was healing miraculously fast,” Emmeryn explained in an assuring tone. “I’m sure she will be feeling well once she wakes up.”

’Naga’s tits, everything hurts,’ Rose thought as she awoke from her slumber, feeling sore all over. With great effort, the battered woman opened her eyes— and immediately regretted that decision as the sunlight seared her retinas. Taking a moment to gather herself, she opened them while facing away from the sun this time and looked around.

She was in a tent with a single table with two chairs, some medical supplies including a few broken staves, and her bag of belongings on the floor with Thorn and her tome rested next to it.

’Where am I?’

Since she wasn’t in chains in some dungeon, it was safe to guess she wasn’t a prisoner. Again. That
was nice. Trying to sit up, a stabbing pain shot through her body. Looking down, Rose saw the bandages wrapped around her midsection. Remembering the injury she took saving Emmeryn elicited a groan from the tactician.

Rose then recalled exactly how she had closed the wound. It had not been her best idea but she hadn’t had the energy to fix the wound like she normally would have.

“Speaking of which…” Rose muttered as she closed her eyes in concentration. Deep inside she felt her draconic magic feeling more powerful than before. Her magic coils, surprisingly, had healed nicely and could now feel the power coursing through her body once again. “Must be what Tiki was talking about… Another brush with death. Fantastic… Oh well, it worked out it seems. Could have used that earlier…”

Rose sat up more carefully this time and started channeling a fraction of her dragon power. Frowning in concentration, the ashen-haired woman recalled her experiences as Grima’s Avatar. How any injury she received, no matter how grievous, instantly healed. How the steel of a mortal’s weapons had meant nothing in their last moments of defiance. The memories stung, but she only needed to recall the feeling of the magic.

A red glow shone through the bandages. A wave of relief washed over Rose’s body as her organs and muscles healed properly. Clerics could mend flesh and bone, but things like internal bleeding and infections were outside the limitations of their magic.

Not hers, though.

Removing the bandages, she was happy to see that the wound had healed. The scarring was not as bad as it would be for a normal person; her skin was still red and was not a smooth as before, with a clearly uneven texture, but it was not the disfiguring wound it would have been for a normal human.

Part of her was disappointed that her healing skill was not yet at the level it was when Grima had been in control, but in a way, it was fortunate. Healing too quickly would draw attention and cause questions, whereas she could still play these current results off. Not quite on the level of the immortality she had once possessed but nevertheless, it paid off.

‘Thank you, Dragonskin.’

Satisfied with her state, Rose stood to take her bag and proceeded to change into her casual outfit. However, as she took her cloak from the chair, an alarming thought hit her.

She wasn’t wearing her cloak.

That meant that at least one healer, if not the entire army, must have seen her full face.

‘Shit.’

That could be problematic. Sure, white hair and violet eyes were not uncommon in Plegia; Henry had had the same features, but his facial structure and her’s were nowhere near as similar as her’s and Robin’s.

This could bring up problems with her brother. Robin was sharp enough to draw accurate conclusions when he had enough information, as demonstrated by his ease in developing new strategies in their games with little tips. He would certainly grow suspicious of their similarities.

Maybe Phila was right. Maybe she should explain something to him. That could work in their favor, but she would need to be delicate about it. While this development was not ideal, Rose could adapt
her plans. She still had a few years to prepare him and the Shepherds for the truth.

First, though, was making sure that everyone, especially Emmeryn, had survived after she passed out. 

_That_ brought yet another complication. She had succeeded. The Shepherds had _won_, and taken back the Exalt. Normally such an event would have been a clear cause for celebration, but it only made Rose frown. Emmeryn’s death had been the point where the Shepherd’s loyalty to Chrom had been cemented in stone. It had been a point of growth, both for herself and for Chrom. Rose had learned a lot from that defeat and the fires that had been started by Emmeryn’s sacrifice had only tempered the Shepherds’ steel. Her confidence had taken a dive, but that blow had been one she had needed in order to mature and prove herself once and for all. It had been in that moment that the Shepherds’ bonds had become stronger than ever.

And she had just denied that moment to her brother.

‘Well, it’s not like it did much good to me in the end.’

Not to say that she regretted saving Emmeryn, not at all. But sadly, it did bring uncomfortable implications, chief of which being that Chrom would not mature as fast as he had before without Emmeryn’s death hanging over his head.

However, this could work in her favor. A happier Chrom might be more willing to listen to her when the truth about Grima’s host inevitably gets revealed. He wouldn’t have the weight of being Exalt on his shoulders, and Emmeryn’s rescue had clearly demonstrated that she had their best interest at heart. That could earn her the chance to explain everything and maybe save Robin from a fate similar to her own.

But on the other hand, would Chrom and Robin be strong enough emotionally to handle the war on Valm?

The grandmaster was so focused on her thoughts that she didn’t hear the tent’s flap opening, allowing Lissa inside. The princess froze, clearly not expecting her patient to be able to stand.

“You’re awake!” Lissa shouted, moving closer to her patient and startling Rose out of her thoughts. “You gave us a huge scare, buster!” the princess scolded, but her quivering lips betrayed her inner turmoil.

Rose flinched at sight of that face. It had been a long time since one of the Shepherds had shown genuine concern for her and she was not feeling comfortable. Part of the reason she used her hood was to hide her discomfort, but now Rose felt very exposed. Not wanting to make a scene, she turned back to her professional persona, one perfect in the Royal Court long ago.

“My apologies, your majesty. I was so focused on saving the Exalt that I disregarded my own safety. Cauterizing the wounds saved a staff’s magic charge for Kellam.” Rose apologized in a professional tone, placing a hand on the young royal’s shoulder to calm her down.

It seemed to work, as the cleric calmed down enough to give her a strong hug. The white-haired woman put her arms around the young princess, awkwardly returning the unexpected gesture. It wasn’t like she spoke to Lissa much, so the show of concern was strange. “...I trust everyone made it to safety?”

“Yes! Kellam survived and so did everyone else!” Lissa explained much to the tactician’s awkward satisfaction. The young girl’s voice quivered and the fluctuation made Rose wince internally as she
continued. “Y-you saved Emmeryn! I can’t tell you how grateful I am for that!” the young princess exclaimed while burying her head in her chest, tears spilling out of her eyes. “I don’t know what we would have done if she died,” she managed to whisper, tightening her hug.

Rose cringed, having forgotten how touchy Lissa could be. ‘This is getting awkward.’

The princess suddenly remembered why she came into the tent. Pulling apart, her eyes darted all across her patient’s body. “Your wounds! I’m so sor–” She then stopped as something clicked. “Wait, what are you doing off of your bed?! You got two arrows to your back and multiple burns! You shouldn’t even have the strength to move, much less walk! It’s only been four days!”

“Four days, huh? That means we should be out of Plegia and into Feroxi territory if we took the carriages…” Rose mused aloud.

“Yes. And we had to take off your clothes to treat you. I’m sorry and I know you like your privacy, but we couldn’t heal you properly with the hood and cloak on.”

”Worry for me not, Lady Lissa. I understand, even though it’s not my desired outcome. Anyways, my wounds are completely healed so. It’s not the first time someone put a hole in me,” she said before muttering, “or several.”

Lissa did not take the news quietly. “W-What?! That’s impossible! We used what few staves we had to spare just to keep you alive! The dark magic in those arrows took a lot of power to remove extract and even then the damage is not something so easy to heal!” Without warning, the princess grabbed the edge of Rose’s bandages and removed them to check. To her astonishment, Rose spoke the truth: there was only unscarred, if reddened skin on her toned abdomen.

“N-no way… H-how?” asked the bewildered princess. “You can’t just heal an arrow through the stomach and kidney in a few days! Even with all these staves, we barely kept you from bleeding out!” Her voice was getting higher, amusing her patient.

“Ancient Plegian secret, Princess Lissa,” jested Rose, taking some delight at the bewildered expression of the usually mischievous princess. “Anyways, I’m off to take a bath and then grab something to eat. By your leave, your highness.”

Rose left the tent with her bag, leaving a dumbfounded Lissa in her wake.

“Yo! Robin!”

The tactician stopped writing, surprised to see Vaike standing before his desk with a nervous grin that honestly creeped out the tactician. Vaike had been civil the past few days but they never really talked. Still, Robin was pleased that he couldn’t feel any hostility from the axe fighter, so he decided to give the conversation a chance.

“Well, Vaike. This is a surprise.“

“Hey man, Teach was wondering if ya got a moment to talk?” Vaike asked with a hopeful grin.

“You want to talk to me?” Robin asked. “I thought you weren’t that… fond of me.”

The fighter had the decency to look sheepish as he rubbed his neck. “Yeah… That’s why Teach’s here,” the blonde admitted.

“Oh?”
Vaike scratched his neck as he struggled to continue. “I… I wanted to say that I’m sorry.”

Robin blinked. “Pardon?”

“Bah! Don’t make this harder!” he whined, “So, after all this mess and the Exalt’s rescue, I… I don’t think you are a Plegian spy.” The fighter sighed. “The Vaike is not _that_ blind and he can see he has been very hostile towards ya.”

“That’s putting mildly,” muttered the tactician.

Vaike didn’t seem to have heard him. “And… you didn’t deserve that.” The blonde clicked his tongue and took a somewhat serious expression. “The Vaike was convinced that all Plegians were nothing but good fer nothing Grima worshippers. But you and Rose? You helped us despite being Plegian and the way some us treated ya.”

“It was only rig—”

“And not just you!” Vaike interrupted. “There’s that creepy gal… ya know, the one that has been skulkin’ around your tent all morning?”

“Oh, Tharja?” Robin sighed at his current predicament with the strange mage. “Yes, I’m aware,” he said, ignoring the sound of _someone_ running away outside his tent.

“Yeah! That’s the one! She helped us escape. And there’s also that smilin’ kid saved Chrom’s sisters during the ambush.

“His name is Henry.”

“Yeah, him!” Vaike said, nodding. “So while y’all are kinda weird and creepy and into strange books and dark magic, maybe you’re not the same kind of evil scumbags as Gangrel!”

“Thanks, I think…?”

“Doncha mention it!” Vaike said obliviously proud of himself. “Now come here and give Teach a hug as a symbol of our friendship!”

“Wha— UGH!” Robin huffed out as Vaike crushed him under the display of affection.

’First Frederick and now Vaike... next thing you know, Sully will come in too...’

“Robin! I need to speak wi— ” said cavalier shouted as she barged into the tent only to stop cold and awkwardly. “Eh… It seems you two are having a moment.”

“Hey, Sully!” Vaike greeted with a grin, ignoring the tactician whose face was turning blue. “Teach just got a new student!”

“Wha—?” Robin grunted out.

The cavalier stared the the pair for a moment. “Right. Well, good luck with that, Robin,” Sully said as she backtracked out of the tent. “We can talk later if the dunce’s _lessons_ haven’t killed ya,” the redhead said as her parting words.

“Hey!” Vaike shouted at the redhead.

“Stop shouting, Man-Spawn!” a certain taguel growled from the other side of the canvas.
“Oh, my bad Panne!” Vaike shouted, earning a growl. “Teach will make it up to ya!”

“Just keep it down!”

The blonde turned and gave Robin a grin after letting him go. “She wants me. It’s my animal magneti-whatchamacallit” he said smugly.

“Magnetism and I am sure she does,” Robin wheezed out.

“Hah! You get me!” Vaike said, slapping him on the back. The Plegian honestly felt the sensation of his own shoulder popping out of its socket. “Come on! How about we go and drink with the rest of the guys, huh?”

And Robin smiled.

Chrom was looking around camp for Rose. Hearing she was healed and walking around after such an injury was astonishing; the woman was just full of surprises. He would love to hear her full story and experiences but he respected her privacy. She earned that much by adding her skill to the Shepherds, not to mention almost dying to save his elder sister. He needed to thank her for that personally.

“Gaius said she was in the red tent near the river… Ah! Here it is.” Chrom entered the tent just to find himself surrounded by steam. “What’s with this steam?” Looking around he saw a silhouette through the steam. There she is. “Rose! Are you in here? I wanted to speak with y–”

“This bath is just what I needed…” Rose thought as every part of her body was caressed by the hot water in her bath. ‘You would think surviving two wars and getting your soul stitched back together would make you indifferent to sore muscles… or an arrow piercing your kidney… Good thing those grow back.’

As the former queen laid in the tub so generously provided by the Feroxi, she let her mind wander. From what she gathered speaking with Emmeryn, the Pegasus Knights survived the attack thanks to her suggestion, so she could justify deserving some indulgence. She would need to work on Robin’s confidence later. While Emmeryn’s death wouldn’t cause the bonding as it had in the past, maybe the trauma that did happen would be enough. And the cherry on top was getting to screw over Grima. There was something about messing with the plans of an eldritch dragon that could make a person giddy.

Even if they had been on the receiving end before.

‘Hmmm, I wonder what Grima must be thinking right now…’

“GRAAAH!!!” the Fell Dragon screamed, crushing a Grimleal’s skull with his hand and tossing the bloody carcass against the wall. His disciple hid behind a pillar careful not to catch his attention, lest they become the focus of his wrath.

‘Probably not too pleased.’

She moved to the rack where her towel was when she felt a cold breeze hitting her back. Turning around, she found herself in an oh-so-familiar situation.
The Prince of Ylisse stood frozen in the middle of the tent. As if Naga herself wanted to mess with him, the steam chose this moment to leave through the open flap, allowing Chrom to finally see Rose.

*All* of her.

Strands of wet hair clung to her body, framing her face into a delicate visage that was not normally associated with her. The droplets of warm water slid down her ivory skin, enhancing the curves of her generous breasts, normally hidden by her chest plate. His gaze trailed across her body taking in everything while the small, sane part of his mind yelled him to retreat.

Unfortunately, he was never the best tactician.

‘Are you fucking serious?’

Three times.

He had done this three times, in three timelines.

It was as if the universe conspired against her. Which, if she was being honest, wouldn’t surprise her.

Now, her old self would certainly have overreacted to this little incident, letting the embarrassment dictate her actions. *This* Fell Dragon had hide too tough to feel something as trivial as mere embarrassment after dealing with so much severe emotional pain.

Then again, this presented her with a golden opportunity for some cathartic payback. Sometimes Rose liked to imagine how this situation would have played out had she been able to prepare for it and now she had the perfect opportunity.

Oh, she knew this was wrong. The Chrom of this timeline was by all means and purposes an innocent; and a bit of a prude if she recalls correctly. She knew by now he was not the one that had wronged her. The Chrom she knew and the Chrom before her are not the same beings and hopefully wouldn’t be. She could at least look at him now without feeling pain.

Still… Call her petty, but she couldn’t let this chance pass.

*Even I deserve some fun every now and then. Especially after getting shot by arrows saving his sister.*

As his eyes trailed across Rose’s breasts, lewd thoughts were the farthest thing from his mind. His eyes were drawn to the nasty scar that ran through her chest. The old wound started above her heart, trailing across the upper curve of her breast and ended just above her belly button. There he could see the multiple scars she had received, including the new ones that the woman had received saving Emmeryn.

Chrom was so entranced with her wounds that it took him nearly a minute to realize something: he had been staring at her naked body the entire time.

And Rose was well aware of this.

“I didn’t take you for a voyeur, your majesty,” stated the snow-haired woman, putting down her towel and directing her attention to the intruder.
“ROSE! I’m so sorry! I didn’t—” stammered the bluenette, trying to regain his bearings. “I would never spy on a lady bathing!”

Her lips twitched at the words. “Oh? Am I a lady now? So you finally see me as a woman?” Rose teased with a raised eyebrow, enjoying the sight of him squirming. Who knew petty catharsis felt so good?

“No! I-I mean yes! I can clearly see you’re a woman!” Realizing what he just said, he quickly corrected himself. “Wait! I d-didn’t mea—!”

Rose laughed at the bumbling royal, who still hadn’t fled for safety. This was too amusing.

She crossed her toned arms under her breasts, pushing them up and drawing his eyes to them for an instant before survival instinct kicked in just enough to look her in the eyes. Taking a moment to enjoy the prince lose his cool, she playfully questioned his intention, “Well, it seems you were looking for me. How may I be of service?”

“S-service?” His mind, probably still looking like it was trying to grasp its sanity amongst a sea of indecent thoughts, didn’t deduce yet that the best course of action was to leave this conversation for another time. With his eyes still trailing the curves of her body, his mouth spoke “I, well, I-I just wanted t-to thank you for risking your life-saving my s-sister… You almost died, a-and well… I…” Chrom trailed off, still distracted by the sight before him.

“Thank me, huh? There is no need for that, I was just doing my duty and preventing a tragedy. But if you want to return the favor, I have something in mind.” Sitting down on a stool, she gave a towel to the prince before turning her back to him and uttering her suggestion. “You could help me wash my back. I can’t really rea–”

The insinuation was enough to snap the lord out of his daze. “I-I NEED TO GO!! I’LL SEE YOU LATER! WAIT, NO! I MEAN– ARRG!!” Finally regaining hold of his remaining sanity, the prince fled from the tent, followed by the amused laugh of a purple-eyed witch.

Emmeryn was walking around camp with Lissa and Maribelle, trying to relax after such a close brush with death. She was ready to die for her people and for peace, but only now that she had time to reflect on her situation did it fully hit her. The Exalt was doing remarkably well but, despite the strong front she put for Sir Robin, there were still moments of panic as the images of the ground rapidly approaching as she was hugged by the bleeding mercenary kept replaying on her mind. Lissa and Maribelle were trying their best to get her mind on to other things but with the war approaching climax it was not working as well as they had hoped.

That was until they saw Chrom running out of the women’s tent with a towel in his hands.

That certainly took her mind off of her troubles.

The male Shepherds were talking about the last fight with some drinks, enjoying a moment of masculine bonding that was long overdue when Chrom busted into the mess tent. The prince then grabbed a mug of ale from Stahl – earning a reproach that was ignored – and chugged it down in one go. The prince was not in the mood for their brotherly camaraderie and sat at a table far away from his comrades. The men did take notice of their captain’s strange behavior yet the prince chose to ignore their stares and instead rested his head on his hands, trying to ignore all indecent thoughts that were flooding into his mind.
Which was hard considering he was a young adult male that had just witnessed an attractive, fit woman dripping wet inside a steamy tent.

'I need to stop thinking about that wet hair voice, toned muscles and generous –NO! STOP THAT! Oh Naga, Please give me some peace and quiet to pull myself together…’

Unfortunately for the young prince, Naga did not feel particularly merciful that day.

To make matters worse for the young prince, Rose chose that moment to come into the tent. For many, this was the first time they’ve seen her face completely, only recognizing her for the sword strapped to her waist by the familiar red sash.

Some of them also were quick to notice her attire. Used to her wearing a chest-plate and her tactician’s coat all the time, they were surprised to see the Plegian woman wearing leather pants with a white camisole.

“Well that coat of her’s hid quite the sight,” muttered Gaius as his eyes trailed to her posterior, enjoying the sight of tight leather swaying at each step. Robin felt slightly uncomfortable at the sight, though, even if he was not sure why. But he knew he didn’t like the way they were looking at her.

Rose ignored the men and proceeded towards the table with the militia’s food. Serving herself some bear-jerky, the Plegian silently sat in front of the bluenette and began to eat her food. Finally noticing her presence, Chrom looked at her now uncovered face before going completely red. He was trying to utter more apologies but nothing came. Rose kept eating in silence.

The rest of those present kept watching the red-faced lord and the unhooded mercenary’s interaction. The entire tent was silent, which made it perfect for eavesdropping. They sat there for a short while in silence, no one daring to move despite the burning questions they had.

Finishing with her food, Rose stood up ready to leave, but not before uttering one sentence only for the prince.

Her voice was smooth as a blade being plunged into his weakened heart.

“Well, I certainly hope that after our little one on one earlier, you will now see me as a woman.”

She started walking away, leaving an embarrassed lord and a stupefied set of warriors behind.

The silence had to be broken eventually.

“Well… Damn,” commented Stahl, for once on his life forgoing food for something more interesting.

“Bwahaha! Teach is proud of his rival!” Vaike shouted between laughs.

Chrom just wanted to crawl into a hole and die. ‘This can’t get any worse.’

“Chrom Herbert Lowell!” He was proven wrong by hearing the voice of his older sister, asking a question he never wanted to hear. Emmeryn stood there, her normally serene expression was replaced by a stony one, with a snickering Lissa and a disgusted Maribelle at her sides. “Care to explain why you were inside the women’s bathing tent?”

This question set the rest of the males into a frenzy.
“Man, she used your full name. You’re in trouble,” stated Stahl.

“You went spying on Rose?! You got guts, boss! She almost killed me when I tried.” Vaike praised his rival.

Stahl looked at Vaike in confusion. “I thought you hated her?” questioned the viridian knight.

The axeman just shrugged. “Eh, sure, I wasn’t her biggest fan, but I’m not blind. She still has a killer body. Did you saw those pants fit her ass?”

Stahl did. They all did.

“Voyeurism is most uncouth, Sir Chrom,” scolded Virion, looking at him with disappointment.

“That’s why you had Snowflake’s towel! Sneaky! I like it!” Gaius commended.

“Ma’ always say to respect women, milord,” stated Donnel, watching his lord in a new light and it wasn’t a flattering one.

“I’m surprised she didn’t skin you alive—wait, your middle name is Herbert?” Robin asked, trying and failing to control his laughter.

The laughter didn’t last long as the temperature dropped and Emmeryn directed a scathing glare towards them, reminding them of her presence. They have never expected such action from their sweet Exalt, but now everyone felt as if they were facing an angry mother.

Emmeryn turned her gaze back to her little brother with a raised eyebrow. “Well? Anything to say?” And for the second time that day, Chrom was left speechless.

The next morning Rose decided not to torture the fragile mind of the prince for petty entertainment and took things more seriously. She went looking for her brother with the intent to discuss the next battle with him. Of course, that was not to be as she ran into the prince, who looked happy to see that she was fully clothed this time.

“Prince Chrom,” she greeted politely, ignoring his flinch. “It’s good to see you this fine morning.”

“Rose… I can’t begin to apologize for that incident,” Chrom blurted out. “It was improper of me and I can only blame myself for it. I hope this doesn’t tarnish your image of me.”

She laughed and decided to throw the prince a bone. It was moments like this that reminded her this was not the Chrom that wronged her and that there was still hope with him. She already had her fun anyways. “It’s alright your majesty, it was an honest mistake. If anything I should apologize for having some juvenile fun at your expense, but I figured it would lighten the mood after such a dark time and take your mind off the war for a moment,” Rose said, lying with a straight face.

“Still, it was improper of me. It's not something a member of the crown...NO, any decent man should do,” Chrom said with conviction.

“All is forgiven. Though I must say, and pardon if I overstep my bounds, that I haven't seen anyone blush like that in ages. It was like a teenage boy looking at a naked woman for the first time.”

“Eh…”

Using all her willpower to hide her smile, Rose faked a shocked expression. “Oh dear. Was it? Well
I’m honored and I hope it met your expectations,” she added sweetly.

“I’m not going to fall for that one,” the prince said with a deadpanned expression.

“Pity,” she replied with a smirk. “Oh well, enough of this. How are you, prince? The battle and escape certainly were a whirlwind of emotions.”

“They were,” Chrom admitted. “And it was because of a certain pair of Plegian tacticians that I still have two sisters,” he added somberly. “Once again, you have my gratitude. If you ever need anything, the crown will support you.”

“... Don’t go promising things like that your majesty or I might hold you to that. Though I can’t think of anything right now that requires such an action,” Rose said, not wanting to get into that topic. But if anything she could use that promise when the truth inevitably came out. “What plans do we have for the next battle? Gangrel will not take our rescue lying down. If anything it will finally drive him over the edge. He will come at us with everything he has.”

“And we will be ready for him,” the prince declared, hand on Falchion’s hilt. “I will never forgive him for what he put Emmeryn through.”

“You’re angry. Understandable,” Rose said empathically. “Temper your anger but don’t let it control you, lest the madness of combat consumes you. Gangrel will press you, goad you into attacking blindly.”

“I know, but I’m not sure I will be able to contain myself when I see him.”

“You will have to or you will play into his hands,” Rose stated. “His style is that of a trickster and I know he favors a Levin sword like Anna and Robin,” the tactician mentioned and was satisfied with the thoughtful look the prince got. “I would recommend using the next few days to spar with Anna and Gaius so you can get used to fighting slippery opponents.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Chrom said, liking the idea. “I could certainly use the time to prepare.” The prince sighed. “While you were out, the entire militia pledged their support to the cause, even those two Plegians we recruited. It seems Emmeryn’s words reached them too.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Maybe it will reach the rest of Plegia and we can have some peace,” Rose added, before looking around. “Pardon me, your majesty but have you seen Robin?”

“I think after the spending a little while with the guys he went to the War Room. He should still be there.”

Finally some progress. “Thank you. By your leave, prince,” she said, bowing and departing.

“And Rose?” the bluenette called behind her, making her turn.

“Yes?”

“Please drop the honorifics and call me Chrom. You have more than earned the right like any other Shepherd,” he added with an honest smile that ached her heart as it dug out old memories.

A flash of something must have shown on her face for Chrom to get a confused frown. “Very well. I will see you soon, Chrom.”

Ignoring the familiarity of the situation, Rose departed towards her objective. Minutes later she found herself inside the Feroxi Fort’s war room and in front of her brother as he moved pieces on a board,
plotting their plan of attack.

“You’re a difficult man to find,” she said, enjoying the sight of his jump and glad she could still do it. He was getting better at detecting her but she still had a couple of tricks up her sleeves. The lack of armor certainly helped get these amusing drops on him.

To train his awareness of course. She couldn’t allow him to get rusty.

“Ah, Rose!” Robin greeted once he calmed down. “You’re here! Sorry, I’ve been meaning to speak with you, but well… between the guys and what happened with Chrom…”

“I get it. No need to worry, you didn’t hurt my feelings,” she said while patting his shoulder.

A snort escaped her brother. “I think you could take it. But it’s your other injuries that worry me. Should you really be walking around?”

“I come from excellent stock and I’ve always healed fast. Same reason I could walk after the mess in Ylisstol.” One good thing that bastard Validar gave her.

“I wish I could heal that fast,” Robin said as he rolled his aching shoulders.

'The price is not worth it, little brother,’ she thought to herself. ‘But you may get it.’

“Anyways. I wanted to check with you about the oncoming fight and what my role would be this time. I think you have proven yourself not to need me to correct your strategies any longer, but I can always give them a new outlook.”

“Yeah... About that...” Robin said, sounding nervous for some reason. The man sighed and looked her straight in the eyes. “You’re not participating in the next battle.”

Rose eyes widened at the proclamation. “Pardon?”

Robin ran a hand through his hair, “You, Kellam, Sumia and some others have barely recovered from the last battle. Your injuries, in particular, were horrible and that’s not taking into account the wounds you received in Ylisstol not that long ago, regardless of this insane healing you have. Even a month would not be enough to heal entirely from that.”

“I’m fine now.” Truth be told her stamina was down the drain. Her magic had recovered surprisingly well, but her mana coils were still too bruised to use that power. Like any muscle, it would only make her stronger once they had time to heal, but right now Rose could only fight in melee and was still damn tired. Her rapid recovery already brought suspicion over her abilities, alongside the power she showed in Ylisstol, so maybe laying low for a while was necessary. It didn’t help that Valflame took offense of her using it. Even if the Shepherds weren’t asking questions others in the army will.

‘Damn you Salamander! Why couldn’t you just share for once?!’ Arrogant Flame Dragons...

“I would feel better if you stayed here and rested. Additionally, I want you to stay with Phila to protect her majesty,” Robin explained as if trying to appease her. “I would feel better if we knew people of your caliber were protecting her.”

“I...” Damn, that made sense. Assassins could be everywhere, even in Ferox with all its mercenaries. But this was another opportunity if she played it right. She couldn’t babysit him forever and this could be the opportunity that cemented the Shepherds trust in him. Saving Emmeryn prevented that whole bonding session in Ferox if things went like in her timelines, though it seemed Chrom still received support from them. Maybe it was time to roll the dice once more. Rose sighed dramatically
and nodded. “Very well, I will stay. I know you will pull us through.”

“It’s not that I don’t want you there!” Robin quickly backtracked, which she found honestly adorable.

“I’m not offended Robin and I understand the desire to not take any more unnecessary risk,” she relented. “And truth be told... I could use the rest.” There, she admitted it, rolling her shoulders.

The tactician released a breath in relief. “Thank you,” Robin said sincerely. “Knowing you and the others are safe is a weight off my shoulders.”

“Geez, you sound like an annoyed mother.”

“I’m trying to be serious here...”

“Serious, huh?” she said giving him a feral grin. "In that case, let’s discuss your training regimen for the next few days.”

“Ehh... Pardon?”

“Come on, I decided a while ago to help you as much as I can as a fellow tactician. There is still much I can teach you, little chick. Let’s see how far you can fly.”

Time passed and it was time to depart for the front lines once more. Word had reached the Shepherds that the Plegian army was marching towards them; the alliance planned to meet them halfway, on their terms.

Robin prepared his horse, adjusting his Levin Sword and Thunder tome to this saddlebags, along with other spellbooks in the case they were needed. He had to admit, those ice spells that Rose had him practice were pretty great, but he had a certain fondness for the element of lightning. And even if his body spent the week protesting, he couldn’t deny the results. It was almost freaky how fast he improved his stamina and strength but Robin wasn’t about to complain. He could cast spells faster and stronger than ever before and that made the tactician wonder what the limit of his potential was.

A set of purposely loud steps indicated someone was approaching him. “Robin,” the familiar voice called from behind him.

“Hey Rose,” he said, thankful she chose not to try to scare him this time. “Come to see me off? Heh just like in Ylissit. Hopefully, you won’t injure yourself while we are away. We don’t want a repeat of last time.”

“Hmph. I’m not that ba—” she stopped. “Ok, yeah, even I don’t believe it. But let’s ignore that. Saying farewell is not the only reason I’m here.”

“Oh?”

Rose looked hesitant for a moment, which was easy to see since the woman had taken to walking with her hood down now that apparently everyone had seen her face. He was glad because she was honestly too pretty to be hiding like that. Robin couldn’t understand her reasoning for hiding her face but he respected it.

He didn’t like how the others ogled her in those leather pants, though...

“I have something for you,” she said, capturing Robin’s attention. “Turn around and close your
eyes.”

The amnesiac blinked at that. “What? Why?”

“Just do it,” she grumbled with a dash of pink on her cheeks.

Curiosity got the best of him and Robin complied. While his eyes were closed he could hear a slight click and the movement of cloth. After a moment the tactician felt something being placed on his shoulders with surprising delicacy.

“You can open your eyes now.”

Robin obeyed and saw what it was. A pair of shoulder guards joined by purple cloth just like the one his cloak was made of, rested on his shoulders. The golden designs signifying importance and rank as they complimented the designs of his cloak. Turning to the woman Robin saw that her own shoulders were bare, leaving her only with her cloak.

“What--?”

“Those were given to me by former comrades,” she explained in a soft voice. “I think we spoke of this before. Those… are important to me despite the fact that we parted on bad terms. This is the symbol of a Grandmaster who looks over their comrades.” Rose gave him a smirk which looked a little pained. “Kinda like how a Shepherd looks over his flock. I think you can now associate better memories with them while you lead Ylisse to victory.”

His eyes glanced at Rose and to his shoulders. “I… I can’t accept this! If they truly had that much history with yo--”

“Yes, you can,” she said with finality. "Think of it a sign of my pride in your growth,” she amended. “When we first met I had no intentions of joining this militia but I guess curiosity got the better of me. Even if you don’t believe it, you’ve grown immensely in our time together. You drink knowledge like water and anyone can see your drive to keep your comrades safe. You’ve gained their trust. They will support you. You don’t have to do everything alone.” Rose put a hand on his shoulder. “I think you would’ve done fine without my help.”

Robin held her gaze for a minute and decided to add his own confession. “I didn’t expect many things when I joined the Shepherds, but they happened anyways. Certainly didn’t expect to run into another Plegian tactician who would become a mentor and, dare I say a friend in that arena. Heh, sounds like something out of an amateur novel.”

Rose smiled at him. “Nothing ever goes exactly as expected, but you have the skill to adapt and triumph over such situations. Many men fall because of their hubris, unwilling to adapt to an ever-changing battlefield. Not you, though.” She took a deep breath and continued, “You have the potential to be not only a great tactician but also a great man. I think you already are. Keep your ideals at heart and your mind sharp and nothing will stand in your way. You will triumph over Gangrel, of that, I have no doubt.” Rose spoke with such confidence that Robin could feel his heart pounding in his chest.

“…Do you actually believe that?” Robin said, his voice barely above a whisper. The amnesiac would be lying if he said he didn’t have doubts on their chance of victory.

Rose nodded, “I do. Now it’s a matter of you believing it. The only thing holding you back from your potential is your own doubt. What’s one more battle?”
Robin felt confidence surge through his body. Thinking back at all the battles he had with his comrades since waking up in that field. He felt the last of his doubts on himself banish. He had defeated countless enemies. He led the army to victory in the Hallem Plains against the Risen Horde. They infiltrated Plegia and rescued Emmeryn right under Gangrel’s watch and lived to tell the tale.

They had their share of injuries but so far the Shepherds suffered no fatalities. Robin knew not to get overconfident, and that a defeat will fall on their laps at any time, but right now that was not the case. They were strong. They were survivors.

She was right.

He could do this.

*They* could do this.

“Thank you,” Robin said with a smile that she reciprocated.

“Thank me by winning this war. I can’t be there holding your hand all the time,” Rose said with a smirk that made him twitch. “Sometimes a mother has to let her children go their own way, no matter how adorable there are,” she added while pinching his cheek.

The amnesiac pushed her hand away and rubbed his cheek. “And just like that, the moment is gone.”

“You love it.”

Robin snorted. Still, he couldn't deny it. They had bonded in their joint love for tactics, in the long nights of planning and learning. Small bits of her experiences allowed the amnesiac to picture the world in a new way. Yes, he enjoyed her company and he was happy she seemed to reciprocate. If Chrom was his best male friend then Rose was his best female friend. He didn't felt any romantic feelings for her, as some might have gossiped after one too many long nights together in his tent, but that didn't mean Robin lacked affection for the stranger mercenary. Stranger things happened in the Shepherds anyways. Like Miriel and Frederick being married, apparently.

In a bold move that certainly took the woman by surprise, the amnesiac pulled her into a hug. “Take care.”

He felt her arms close on him, and heard a soft, “You too.”

For a moment, as he felt her lips kiss his blushing cheek, Robin wondered if this is what family felt like.

The sight of the marching army brought memories to the surface, but this time Rose welcomes them. These were not tarnished by betrayal, for in that moment the bonds forged through pain and loss had been at their strongest. The Fell Dragon hoped that everything goes as well for her brother as it did for her.

No.

She *knew* it will.

“You truly care about him.”

“Emmeryn,” Rose said, turning around as she recognized the voice. “It's good to see you out of bed.”
“Indeed. Phila has not let me out of her sight the past few days and insisted I rested. I barely had time to speak with Robin and to scold Chrom before she locked me in my room,” Emmeryn said earning a smile from the tactician. “My apologies for not speaking with you sooner but they insisted I rested.”

An ungraceful snort escaped the tactician who felt more at ease being informal with the Exalt. “Trust me, I understand. Robin insisted I stayed behind with the injured even though I can walk.”

“You have taken enough risks for us. More than a mere contract requires. You have earned some rest,” Emmeryn insisted as she stepped next to her. “Additionally… I think it is a good time to talk.”

Rose looked at Emmeryn searching her face for something. The Exalt was sincere and she knew she would be a good ally.

‘Well, I already took a risk with Phila... And the captain would feel better knowing the Exalt is informed... yes, this could work...’

“Yeah… I think I would like that. We have much to discuss.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Something to take your mind of the elections. These are going to be an interesting 4 years.
Well, Robin has his brotherly instincts and doesn't like people ogling his sister. Even if he doesn't realize it. A bond that transcends time.
Sadly, the war didn't let me have much room to play with the bonding but I hope I showed Robin and Rose care for one another, even if only one is fully aware of the reason.
I was going to post this on October 23rd to fit the one year anniversary of this story. Sadly, time wasn't on my side. That Pumpkin Reaper skin wasn't going to drop itself! (it didn't). I mean… That paper wasn't going to write itself!
Got two one-shots in the works. One funny and one that might as well be a rant on Conquest.
Also… Why did Sumeragi bring Corrin with him to Nohr? What an idiot.
Thanks to Victory3114, Shipping Rates Apply and Xbro Kong for checking my atrocious grammar.
"That new look suits you, Robin."

Robin looked at himself and had to agree with Lissa. The shoulder-guards brought a certain air of professionalism to the tactician. Or Grandmaster as Rose called it. Robin doesn’t feel like he has earned the title just yet but he wouldn’t be against it once Gangrel is taken care off.

He can have some pride.

“Thanks, Lissa,” he said with a smile.

“You’re welcome,” Lissa replied way too cheery for someone marching into battle. “Sooooo… Do you think this battle will be easy?”

“Easy? No,” Robin said as he looked forward. “But we will succeed. Don’t worry, I will pull us through,” he added with a reassuring smile and certainty in his voice.

Lissa looked at him for a moment, “Hmmmm.”

“Something the matter?” Robin asked, confused by sudden behavior.

“You seem more… confident,” Lissa stated and smiled. “I like it! It’s a nice change! Maybe the clothes do make the man!” she added with a wink.

The tactician blushed and chuckled, “Heh. Maybe.”

“They do make you look more dashing. I bet all the girls will be swarming you during the victory ball.”

Robin cringed, “Oh gods...” He had forgotten about that. The tactician wasn’t looking forward to that kind of celebration. He might not remember but he could tell that was not his kind of party.

At his side, Chrom chuckled and patted his shoulder, “Now you know what I have to deal with all my life.”

“Well, don’t worry! I will take care of you so there’s no need to despair!” Lissa declared, puffing her chest in pride.

“Robin. If you do decide to go with her...” Chrom said in a low voice. Robin tensed. “You have my condolences,” the prince added with a solemn nod.

The tactician sighed at his liege’s jest. “They are appreciated,” Robin snarked back with a smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

“Hey! Chrom!” Lissa whined, slapping them both on the arms.

Her brother chuckled as he swatted her hand away, “It’s just a joke, Lissa. We still need to win before w–”

“Sire!” a voice interrupted before the prince could finish.
“Huh? Oh, it’s one of our scouts,” Chrom recognized as the man made his way towards him.

The scout bowed to his leaders. “Sire, we have spotted the Plegian Army! They are just beyond that ridge.”

All signs of joking faded into seriousness. Chrom nodded gravely. “So, it’s finally time… Very well, alert the troops!”

“Milord, that’s not all,” the scout continued. “The Plegians... They...”

Aversa landed her black pegasus with elegant grace next to her king. The king was livid and the seductress had pushed him into the path the Hierophant had ordered her to. Despite their failure to kill Emmeryn, the Speaker of Grima had assured that her god’s plan was moving in the right direction. Validar might not be here, but she was still a devoted follower of the Fell Dragon. “The enemy has taken the field, milord. Our scouts report they are in good spirits and that the youngest royals are leading the march.”

Gangrel gritted his teeth. “The dastards are mocking me! The robbed me –us!– from our righteous vengeance! But not anymore,” he snarled only to suddenly throw his head back and let a cackle filled with madness. “If Ylisse wants to deliver the heads of two royals on a silver platter, who are we to deny such an offer?”

The Dark Flier smirked at the thought, even if agreeing with the vermin sickened her. “I’d love to hear the song the bards make of that.”

The king ran a long fingernail through her cheek, making her shiver in disgust. “Aversa, there is a truth about the world this Ylissean welp must learn. A man is either strong... or he is dead! Bwa ha haaa!”

“Y-Your Highness!” a soldier yelled as he dropped to his knees in front of the Mad King. “Dire news!”

Gangrel turned to look at the messenger like an insect under his boot. “Oh? Speak.”

The lowly soldier trembled as he relayed his message. “Our troops are laying down their weapons and deserting en masse! Other are taking arms against the loyalists!”

“What!? the king snarled, taking the man’s neck into his hands. “What is the meaning of this!?”

“Please, sire... I am but a messenger... Have mercy…”

Unfortunately for him, the king had none.

“Milord, I have a report from Khan Flavia and what the scout said is true. The Plegian army is in disarray,” Frederick said.

Chrom frowned at the report, “How do you mean?”

“It seems many of their troops are opposed to further violence. There has been infighting, desertion, even reports of a possible civil war... Gangrel is trying to stamp out the mutiny by force, but with
little success. Outside of the faithful who serve him directly, his army has all but collapsed.”

Robin lowered the pages he was reading and did the calculations on his mind. “The forces he still commands are still considerable but nothing that we can’t defeat. Morale is high on our end while our enemy is divided. Some might even fight at our side. The odds are in our favor.”

“This is incredible news. But why...?” Chrom wondered until realization hit him. “Emmeryn.”

His faithful knight nodded, “Yes, milord. Emmeryn. The report says Gangrel’s men chant her name as they abandon the field. Her words reached them. It seems they are tired of Gangrel’s abuse and her sincere words touched their hearts.” Frederick looked at Robin with a small smirk. ”It also helped that two Plegians were the ones that rescued her. That certainly pushed them past the tipping point.”

Robin had the decency to look bashful.

“Emmeryn... Why did it take me so long to understand?” Chrom said looking at the sky. “She believes all people desire peace. That deep down the Plegians want it, too.” Chrom closed his eyes and sighed.

Robin looked at his friend in confusion, “Something wrong?”

“I can’t help but think what would’ve happened if Emm… if she had perished. Could I forgive the Plegians? Could I work for that peace? I don’t think I’m that kind of man.” Chrom said to himself. “Sometimes I fear that I truly am my father’s son.”

“What do you mean?”

Looking at Robin, the prince spoke in a somber tone. “A part of me will always resent Plegia for what they did to Ylisse. For almost taking Emmeryn from me... Even if I know most Plegians had nothing to do with it. I don’t think I have it in me to forgive so easily.” The prince gave a hollow chuckle. “Then again, that’s why they hate us too; for what my father did,” he said with a shake of his head. “Clinging to hate... It seems I’m not different than my father.”

“No.”

The bluenette blinked at the tactician’s blunt denial. “Huh?”

“Chrom, you took me in when I had nothing. Despite the clear danger of trusting an unknown like me –a Plegian at that– you never wavered. I don’t see why you can’t extend the same hand to the innocents in Plegia.”

“...”

As Chrom didn’t respond, Robin continued, “They have proved that this is not a conflict they desire by either laying down their arms or fighting their own countryman,” Robin said, crossing his arms while taking a look at the prince and smiling. “From what I heard, your father lacked such a trait. No one is perfect and forgiveness is hard to give, but we must strive to be better than we currently are, no? I know you are the kind of man that is capable of such actions.”

Mulling over his words, Chrom couldn’t help but chuckle at the irony. “Heh, what is it about tacticians that they always know what to say?”

Robin offered him a smile. “You and Rose are always telling me not to doubt myself, so I want you to follow your own advice. The least I could do to pay you for all you have done for me is to support you as best as I can. That’s what friends are for, isn’t it?”
“I’m glad for that, my friend,” Chrom said with a smile.

Rose and Emmeryn stood in silence as they overlooked the garrison from the top of the wall. Since Emmeryn desired to talk, the tactician thought some privacy was necessary. A chilly wind passed through the pair, making Emmeryn tremble at the cold. Noticing this, Rose took off her coat and placed it over the Exalt.

“Thank you,” the Exalt said with a smile.

“Think nothing of it. The cold doesn’t bother me,” Rose said. Looking at Emmeryn, she smirked. “I must say… The Exalt wearing a Plegian coat certainly makes for a bizarre sight.”

Emmeryn blinked and giggled. “If the court could see me now… How scandalous!”

Both women shared a small laugh. Rose certainly appreciated the easy friendship she developed with Emmeryn. She expected it to be much more difficult but Emmeryn had a trusting heart, even if it failed her when she trusted that traitorous hierarch. Interacting with her only served to redouble her efforts to keep her alive.

“Well, I think it’s time we talked. ‘Something in my gut’, as Chrom would say, tells me that there’s more to you than meets the eye. I feel that despite your good intentions there is something big you are hiding. As the Exalt, I cannot ignore anything that can present risks to my halidom. After Gangrel, I can no longer take such a passive role in our defense.”

Rose nodded in agreement. “That’s a good stance to take. Peace is preferable but that doesn’t imply that we must be vulnerable.” She paused for a moment before relenting more information, “Especially with what is on the horizon.”

“So, you do know of something else that could bring harm to my people?” Emmeryn said in her ever-pleasant tone but there was steel in her voice that told the tactician she wouldn’t leave without explaining.

She knew it was only a matter of time before Emmeryn asked. Phila could not resist holding such secrets from her queen but it was better to hear it from the source. “Yes. There are many threats that will come in the next few years but there are two of great importance. My sources are very reliable and I have verified them myself.”

Thankful that Emmeryn hadn’t interrupted her yet, Rose thought about where to start. Grima was the big point she needed touch but for now, the situation with Valm should take priority. “One I can understand not knowing, but the other one should be making waves already. I suppose I should start with tha–”

But as life would have it something had to interrupt her.

The door behind them flew open, smashing against the wall and startling the pair. On the entrance stood Phila, leaning for support with heavy breaths.

“N-Naga’s ass, where the he– Your Highness! There you are!” Phila said as she tried to catch her breath. “What are you doing here? You should be in bed!”

“Peace, Phila. I am just enjoying some fresh air and talking with Rose,” Emmeryn said, completely ignoring the sacrilegious words of her knight. “I shall return to my quarters soon enough.”
Phila spared a glance to Rose who nodded in acknowledgment. The pegasus rider seemed to understand what was going on. “I-I see. Well, I’m sorry to interrupt but I must insist you come inside. We’ve got word of a large wyvern in the area making its way toward the fort. Since we only have a few pegasi with us, I don’t want to risk injuring them so I ordered the archers to be ready to scare it away or shot it down if it insists on getting close but I rather not risk your safety.”

That caught the tactician’s attention. “Strange. Wyverns shouldn’t come near Ferox. They dislike the weather.”


Phila nodded in agreement. “That was our consensus.”

The tactician shook her head. “For a single Wyvern Rider to come alone into Ferox in middle of a war? That’s suicide,” Rose said, “Something else must be going on.”

As if by divine interference, a roar split the calm atmosphere. Rose turned to the source to see a shadow flying towards them at great speed.

“Wyvern on sight!” someone shouted from the outer wall.

“Archers, be ready!” Phila shouted to the troops below.

“Hmm, something’s not right about that wyvern...” Rose squinted her to try to get a better look. The flying was too smooth. Too intelligent for a mere beast. Her eyes widened once recognition settled in. “Wait a minute... Don’t shoot!”

Phila looked at her in disbelief. “What are you doing!?”

“She’s on our side!”

“She?” the knight asked, bewildered.

Gathering a small amount of magic, Rose launched a small fireball to signal her position. She then turned to the Exalt to try and calm her. This certainly was not the best way to start telling her about the future...

“Don’t worry! She won’t hurt anyone! Though I can’t think of a reason for her to be here.”

“Lady Rose! What is the meaning of this?” Emmeryn asked, but she didn’t get her answer before the draconic beast landed next to them.

Phila quickly took her lance and placed herself between the Exalt and the dragon, ready to protect her liege with her life.

The green dragon ignored them as her eyes were focused on the calm tactician. Rose walked towards the beast. The pair looked eyes for a while, with the Ylisseans not daring to make a move.

Then Rose, much to their shock, patted the snout of the dragon with a grin, “Hey, girl! What are you doing here?”

The dragon growled, snorting hot air that blew Rose’s hair back. In an instant, the dragon enveloped in a cocoon of light. It shone like a small star for a moment before dispersing...

Leaving behind a green-haired woman with pointy ears.
“A manakete?” Emmeryn asked, while Phila’s eyes grew wide in recognition.

“Rose! I’ve been trying to contact you for days! I felt your life force dwindle and feared the worst,” the manakete exclaimed, slapping Rose on the shoulder. “You need to stop worrying me like this!” she scolded.

The Plegian waved off her concerns. “You worry too much, Tiki. As you know, it takes more than that to take me down.”

“Not for your lack of trying…” The voice of Naga muttered as she poked Rose’s tender ribs.

The tactician winced as a spike of pain ran through her body. “Ok… So maybe this one was a little close…”

“Wait, did you say Tiki?” Emmeryn asked, finally overcoming her shock and recognizing just who it was in front of her.

The manakete and the tactician then remembered they weren’t alone.

“Maybe introductions are in order?” Tiki suggested.


Tiki sighed in frustration, “Of course you would do that…”

“Oh my!” The Exalt exclaimed, ignoring the banter between the two. She quickly knelt before the demigoddess, with Phila following suite. “Milady, it is an honor to meet you.”

“Please raise, Lady Emmeryn. The honor is mine,” Tiki said quickly, lending her hand to the Exalt so she could stand. “I heard many great things about you from the pilgrims that visit the Mila Tree.” Tiki nodded towards Rose. “And from our mutual friend here, too.”

Emmeryn blinked. “You two are… friends?”

Tiki sighed and nodded. “Indeed, with all the headaches that involve. In fact, the reason I’m here is because I felt her life force dwindle –again– so I decided to come here through the portal in Mount Prism. Mother informed me of the situation on the way here, so I followed the magic signature of the Book of Naga in Rose’s possession and arrived here.”

“You were telling the truth,” said Phila in awe as she stared.

“You didn’t believe me?” Rose asked with a raised eyebrow. Not that she was surprised. Honestly, her story so very convoluted that she was surprised Phila took it as well as she did.

“I believed most of it, but you being friends with the Voice of Naga herself is a little hard to swallow despite the evidence,” the knight stated flatly.

“More so than a time traveler coming to warn us of the apocalyptic future that us looming on the horizon?” Rose asked dryly.

Phila shrugged. “Weirder things have happened.”

That got the Exalt’s attention. “Wait. What is this about an apocalyptic future? Time travel? What is going on?” Emmeryn asked, looking at the trio in bewilderment.
Rose sighed, receiving a pat on the back from Tiki. “It’s complicated but maybe once I finish my story you will understand. Phila here already knows most of it, but Tiki can corroborate the veracity of my words and add to the details so you get a better picture.”

“Of course,” Tiki said in agreement. “Please understand that everything we will say is true, despite how unbelievable it may seem.”

Figuring the best way to proceed is to elaborate on the story she told Phila, Rose proceed to weave her tale once more. “Let’s start from the beginning...”

The sound of battle could be heard by the army as they made their way towards their final confrontation. The Shepherds were eager to end this war and Robin was planning to do so with the least amount of bloodshed.

At least on their side.

“The Plegian army is just behind this ridge,” Robin said as he looked at their troops. “What can you tell us, Gaius?”

The thief took the lollipop out of his mouth and frowned. “Well, Bubbles, things seem to be a mess there like that scout said. The loyalist to Gangrel are putting up a fight but too many of their troops have deserted and a lot of infighting is going on. It’s working in our favor since their archers were unable to rain down arrows on our troops since they still can’t tell friend from foe or have already been engaged.”

Robin nodded. “Good. That frees up our mages. That’s a welcome advantage. Everyone knows what to do?” he asked, earning confirmations from his comrades.

“Where will you be, Robin?” Sumia asked.

“He will fight at my side,” Chrom answered for the tactician. “Amongst you, Robin is the one that complements my fighting style the best. And the sight of a Plegian fighting side by side with the Ylissean Royalty will send a powerful message.”

“Destroy their resolve while demonstrating that there is hope for cooperation between our people. An interesting strategy,” Frederick complemented and a part of the tactician wanted to check the Plegians were not riding flying pigs. It was still hard to swallow that Frederick was being civil with him.

“One that we hope will show that we can cooperate with one another,” Chrom said in agreement.

“Chrom! Gangrel is here!” Stahl shouted as he rode towards him.

The prince took a deep breath and drew Falchion, “It’s time,” he said towards Robin, who nodded.

Robin looked at the battlefield and was glad his strategy would work on such territory. The vast plain would be of great use for their cavalry, something Gangrel had lost during the siege of Ylisstol. Plegia lacked the resources to maintain a large cavalry division and having committed a large part of them to their invasion had proven a mistake.

The tactician had divided the Feroxi army into three divisions. One that will cut out the escape route at Gangrel’s back. Another that will meet and organize the rebels to surround the loyalists. The last division will push alongside the Shepherds, clashing with the bulk of the army. This last was composed of their mounted units and mages, to help divide the Plegian army in two.
The Mad King still has the Wyvern Riders that survived their encounters with the Pegasus Knights. Luckily the Pegasus knights still outnumbered them and the rocky hills where they were placed worked as a defense against archers.

“The Pegasus Knights will take on Aversa and her air regiment,” started to repeat his plan, tweaking it slightly now that he could see the current battlefield. “I want the cavalry to pair up with our mages to take out their wyverns from below and soften their numbers fast, then move to the division line. Meanwhile, the Shepherds will push through the Royal Guard so that Chrom and I can finish Gangrel fast. The sooner we take him out the sooner we can end this battle.”

Luckily for them, whichever archer and cavalry Gangrel could muster were either taken care off or were currently engaging the rebels, if they were not rebels themselves. In fact, most of his loyalists seemed to be Grimleal mages and fighters, which was strange. As far as the reports from their spies went, Gangrel and the leader of the Grimleal did not see eye to eye, only allied on their mutual hatred for the Exalted bloodline. But that was of no consequence now.

The Shepherds finally reached their place on the battlefield, opposite to that of the Mad King.

Gangrel stood on top of a hill. “Come, princeling! I've sharpened my sword just for you!” the madman cackled. “Time for you to pay for your interference of justice!”

Chrom stepped forward, Falchion on hand as sunlight danced across the sacred blade. “My sister wishes for our people to know peace, Gangrel. But as long as you draw breath, it can never happen!” Raising the sacred blade towards the sky, he rallied his troops. “Shepherds! Today, we put an end to Mad King Gangrel and bring peace back to the land. For Ylisse! For Ferox! For Emmeryn!”

The roars of their comrades only fanned the flames of determination inside them.

“I’m surprised Phila didn’t come with us,” Anise commented as the Pegasus Knights flew to their positions. It was lucky for them that the rebels had taken out most of the long-range support that could shoot them down, but that didn’t mean the knights were not taking it seriously.

Elsa rolled her eyes while allowing her pegasus to hover in place. “Please, she will not leave the Exalt’s side after the last time,” she said earning a nod from Grace.

“Girls, focus. Our part is about to start,” Samantha scolded them before turning to her captain with a questioning gaze. “But are you sure you should be here, Cordelia? Aren’t your wounds still healing from the battle at the capital?”

“I’m not at my best,” the redhead admitted. “But the Clerics said that I’m fit for combat. And since Phila won’t leave the Exalt unprotected again, someone with experience has to fill the leader role. I’m counting on all of you once more.”

One of the members of Phila’s squad, Lena, flew to her side. “Don’t worry luv, that’s why we are here,” she said cheekily.

“This battle is important and we must all do our parts,” a blonde carrying healing staves chimed in.

“Angela is right. Though Hana and Fara are not here, I’m sure we can assist you,” A purple haired woman named Amelia added, carrying with her a silver lance and plenty of throwing spears.
“I’m sure we—” The hairs on the back of her neck told Cordelia to move. “Dodge!” she shouted. Training and instinct kicked in and her sisters obeyed, dodging a blast of dark magic by mere inches.

The knights retook their formation again, their focus razor sharp as they searched for their opponents with weapons on hand. A dark figured descended in front of the squad, revealing the presence of Aversa and her personal squad of Wyverns and Dark Fliers.

The sorceress licked her lips as she took the measure of her opponents and smirked with confidence.

“Time to dance, little fledglings!”

“Are you sure you can fight your countrymen, milady?” Libra asked the sorceress at his side as he adjusted the grip on his war axe.

Tharja sighed, trying to be polite with the priest if only to avoid a scolding from her new commander. She was beginning to wonder is joining the Ylisseans was such a good idea. “Fear not, priest. I have no more love for these fools that follow Gangrel than I do for the madman himself.”

“I do not question your loyalty, Lady Tharja. I just worry that you might end up fighting former comrades,” the priest clarified. “It could be fatal should you hesitate when facing a former friend.”

The blond was getting on her nerves with his incessant worries. If he didn’t stop she would hex him into compliance. “I have no friends in that army. Just focus of on—”

“WATCH OUT!”

The mage barely had time to react before she was thrown to the side by the priest. She watched as a spear smashed against the flat of Libra’s axe that had filled the spot where she stood moments before. The Plegian soldier that sneaked behind her flinched at the impact and Libra wasted no time on taking advantage of it. The first swing took broke the shaft of the spear, making the Plegian lose his balance. The priest followed by using his weapon to bifurcate the Plegian. The blood sprayed on the white robes of the devout, giving him a macabre look.

The blood-covered blond turned to the sorceress with a concerned expression. “My apologies for manhandling you, Lady Tharja, but I had to take action. Are you injured?” He asked, taking her hand to help her to her feet.

Tharja did not immediately respond to his question for she was distracted by what she had just discovered after taking his hand. The contact allowed her to sense something she did not expect to find in a man of the cloth.

‘Oh my… I can feel the darkness inside him. Not as tantalizing as Robin’s but still… Intriguing. He could make a fine test subject.’

Already making plans on her head, Tharja gathered her bearings and stood with Libra’s help. Dusting her robes, she nodded at the priest and gave him a smirk that would have sent lesser men running. “Oh yes, I quite well. Thank you for your assistance.”

Maybe joining wasn’t such a bad idea after all. After all, she just discovered an interesting test subject.
“Nyahahaha!” Henry laughed as he blasted hex after hex towards Gangrel’s loyalists. The dark magic transformed into raging flames that consumed the opposition. Those that evaded the blast were soon attacked by a horde of crows. Their beaks attacked the vulnerable, exposed flesh of the Plegians while the most unfortunate had their eyes plucked out or their throat pecked open by the dark birds.

At the young man’s side, Lissa just stared.

A crow perched itself on the boy’s shoulder, cawing into his ear. “Yes, Mr. Crowley! We shall get more blood! Nyahaha!”

The princess blinked. “… Ok, he is weird. I already knew that,” said Lissa simply, already having made her opinion of him after their first meeting. She could work with him despite his macabre attitude. Weird was not something she was a stranger to.

Lissa grew up with the Shepherds, after all.

“Dance little prince! Dance!” Gangrel cackled as he launched bolt after bolt from his Levin sword towards the prince and his tactician. The pair dodged attacks with reflexes earned in battle, closing the distance in an instant. Chrom moved to bisect the king with Falchion, but the madman twisted out of the way with a flip.

“Tsk. Slippery dastard!” Chrom spat in annoyance.

Robin could sympathize, for he was starting to feel it too. They managed to push their way past the Royal Guard to fight Gangrel alone while their comrades dealt with them, but the king was a tricky opponent.

“What’s the matter? Am I hard to hit?” the king taunted, and Robin could see Chrom’s temper rising.

“Calm yourself, Chrom. We can’t let him rile us up,” Robin warned his friend while dodging another lightning bolt. It was moments like this that made him thankful that magic lighting was nowhere near as fast as the natural phenomenon. The tactician sent a bolt from his own Levin sword towards the king, who evaded it with surprising agility.

Robin frowned, looking at this weapon. The sword was nearly depleted of magic while Gangrel’s was still full. He certainly will look into how to refill its reserves once this battle was over.

“You’re slowing down, prince. That cushy life in Ylisstol made you soft!” the madman spat. “And you, tactician…” Gangrel began, eyes glaring at Robin with surprising hostility. “A Plegian fighting for Ylisse? Have you no shame, boy?! Raising your blade against your people?!” he snarled.

“I might be Plegian but I’m no ally of yours, madman!”

Gangrel growled at the white-haired boy’s words. “Plegian blood flows through your veins, that much is obvious. You cover yourself in a Plegian coat and wield a sword of Plegian make!” Gangrel shouted while pointing his sword at Robin. “The prince I will impale in a stake as a trophy, but you
and I will have some fun together before I’m finished with you. I will make you an example of what happens to traitors!”

“Over my dead body!” Chrom shouted while trying to rush the king.

“That’s the idea!” Gangrel cackled as he launched another bolt of lightning, pushing the pair back.

Before the duo could mount another attack, the sound of multiple footsteps alerted them of the arrival of more fighters. But as luck would have it, they were not on their side.

“Great… Just what we needed…” grumbled the prince as he saw a trio of axe fighters come to the madman’s side.

“King Gangrel, we’ve come to assist you!” one of the brutes shouted, wielding a wicked looking axe on his hands.

“About time you mongrels showed up.” Gangrel muttered. The king pointed his sword towards Chrom. “Men, why don’t you soften the prince up a bit while I deal with this brat?” he said as he focused on Robin. “Do keep him alive, yes? I want to make him suffer, too. Maybe make him watch as I have some fun with his friends and sisters.” he added as an afterthought.

“I will rip your heart befor–” Chrom couldn’t finish his threat before the trio descended on him like a pack of wolves. It was clear that the prince had more skill but quantity had a quality of its own and the managed to push the prince into the defensive.

“Chrom!” Robin shouted

“Eyes over here, boy!”

Gangrel’s shout made Robin react, forcing him to dodge a swipe from the lightning covered blade that would’ve taken his arm. The tactician parried the following strike, feeling the electricity passing to the blades and into his body, locking both Plegians into a bind. It was only the electric nature of his own weapon that mitigated the damage and prevented him from dying of electrocution.

“I thought you wanted me alive?” he asked, trying to stall for time while formulating a plan. A hard thing to do since he had limited resources and couldn’t wait forever for reinforcements.

“You don’t need all your limbs to survive, boy! And I can’t wait to get started with you!” Gangrel shouted, pushing the tactician away and launching a bolt of lightning while Robin responded in kind. The magic clashed, being attracted to each other, and canceled the attacks.

Robin tried to launch another attack but it was not to be. The lightning around his sword fizzled and died as it’s charge finally ran out.

Gangrel saw this and laughed at the tactician’s predicament. “Having performance problems, boy?” taunted the king. “Here, let me show you how a real man does it!”

Robin dodged the attack and took advantage of the slight delay between each attack. “Tsk. Let’s try something else…” muttered the tactician. Pulling an Arcfire tome from his cloak, he prepared to cast the spell, but wouldn’t give him the chance to start. A bolt of magic almost took his hand as it slammed and incinerated the magical book.

“None of that!”

“Dammit!” Robin snarled, raising his sword again and charging at Gangrel.
The king’s madness and overconfidence were a blessing for Robin, for Gangrel stopped sending bolts of lightning his way in favor of matching him blow for blow. The tactician couldn’t stall until Chrom was done with the trio, even if he had complete fate in the prince’s victory. The king proved to be more formidable than expected. Despite his strange trickster outfit, Robin could see the king’s muscles bulge as he pushed the tactician back.

Robin gritted his teeth. He needed something—anything—to tip the scales in his favor.

Grima smirked as he felt Robin tap into his power.

Rose frowned, stopping her tale as she felt a chill down her spine.

“Something the matter?” Emmeryn asked her after a moment of silence.

“...Hopefully not.”

As Robin locked blades with the Mad King again, something stirred inside him and answered his call.

Warm flames manifested around Robin, dancing and caressing his skin and clothes. They didn’t burn, but filled him with invigorating power. The feeling was familiar, he knew he had felt this before but it didn’t matter now. Using his newfound strength, Robin yelled and shoved a startled Gangrel back, who was distracted by the sight.

“Purple flames… No…” Gangrel snarled as he gazed into the flames surrounding Robin. The king finally took a moment to notice every detail of the tactician’s appearance and his eyes widened in recognition. “Ignis?! Those eyes… That cloak… I knew I recognized them! You… You’re Morgana’s spawn!” he shouted, tightening the grip on his sword with his trembling hand.

Robin jumped back and raised his own blade in defense, taken aback by the sudden, personal hostility. “What are you talking about?”

“Yes, only her damned bloodline could summon something so vile as Ignis!” Gangrel spat, looking more deranged by the second. “Did your whore of a mother send you to kill me?! Is she finally done hiding?!” Whatever shred of sanity the Mad King still had was thrown to the wind as he launched against Robin with pure hatred. “I WILL NEVER YIELD TO THAT COWARD! THE THRONE IS MINE AND MINE ALONE! DIE AND ROT IN HELL!”

Robin barely had time to push the shock out of his system to block the blade. His mother? Did Gangrel recognize him from somewhere? What was this about the throne? ‘Oh gods, I hope Gangrel isn’t my father’. He wanted to interrogate Gangrel but he knew the madman would never relinquish any information willingly, especially in such blood craze.

As the king attacked, Robin muttered his thanks to Rose for making him spar against the unpredictable styles of Anna and Gaius. Dodging a lightning bolt, Robin kicked sand into Gangrel’s eyes, earning him a few seconds of respite as he dodged another stray bolt. The king coughed as he swallowed the dust and his eyes burned. Taking the opening, Robin kicked the king in the ribs, unable to deal a fatal blow by a stray bolt from Gangrel’s Levin Sword.
Landing on his feet, Robin dashed forward and swung downwards with all his strength. The flames of Ignis ripped through the Levin sword on Gangrel’s hands. Both blades shattered, causing the clashing magic of Ignis and Gangrel’s sword to detonate in a battle of dominance. The resulting explosion knocked both combatants several feet apart, leaving them burned and bruised.

Robin rolled through the ground, landing roughly on his back. The tactician pushed himself to his knees, coughing in pain, feeling the remnants of the electric shock run through his body. The flames around his body dispersed, taking with them the boost of strength he received and leaving him gasping for breath. His palms were burnt from the explosion, making him grit his teeth in pain. At the corner of his eye, Robin could see Gangrel standing shakily.

“Damn brat… You will die here, by my hand!” The king spat, taking the remains of his broken sword in his hand. The hilt still held enough sharpened metal to kill, which was something Gangrel knew very well. “You will die alone and in agony! I will mount your head on a pike with rest of your damn friends as I march towards Ylisstol!”

‘Dammit, think think think!’ Robin though as he wracked his brain for any plan. Wounded, alone, and unarmed. Backup is too far away to save him and he doesn’t have time to cast a spell, even if he wasn’t injured past his ability to focus his magic. As he tried to stand, Robin grasped something rough and solid. Eyes flickered to his hand and saw it was a large rock. A weapon as old as human history and just what he needed. Waiting until Gangrel was close enough to raise his weapon, Robin acted.

Using all the strength he could muster, Robin stopped Gangrel’s arm before the weapon made contact with his chest. Biting down a scream of pain from his burned flesh, the tactician then twisted his grip to deflect the attack and smashed the rock on Gangrel’s face. The blow made the king drop his weapon as his hand moving on reflex to his wounded face. The madman howled in pain as he spat broken teeth and clutched his swollen, bleeding nose. Wasting no time, Robin tackled Gangrel to the ground, using his knees to apply weight on the king’s chest to stop him from moving.

Gangrel spat a glob of blood as he tried to regain to strength, but both combatants knew this battle was over. Too dizzy to do anything else, Gangrel glared at the tactician with all his hatred and used that to fill his last words with as much scorn as possible. “You w-will see… They will turn on you when y-you are no longer needed, just like those cowards did to me… Ylisse will…never accept a Plegian… You are…alone… As every man lives and dies…alone.”

Robin didn’t say anything, only raising his improvised weapon to deliver blow after blow to silence the king. His fingernail broke and bled with each impact. The golden crown bent out of shape as his skull finally gave in, putting an end to the reign of the Mad King Gangrel.

But that was not the end of the king’s legacy, for Gangrel’s words made something stir deep in the mind of the tactician, like a whispered dream long forgotten.

‘Why are you—?! I tho— you—!’

‘I a— r the best.’

Before the tactician could make sense of those broken words, his injuries and fatigue finally took their toll on his body. The energy he gathered dispersed into the desert wind as his muscles uncoiled and his body collapsed under its own weight.

As his eyes rolled to the back of his head, the last thing Robin heard before darkness took him was the concerned shouts of his first friend.
Dodging a swipe from a Ylissean lance, Aversa pushed the daring knight back with quick wind spell and scowled. The Ylisseans Knights had proven to be annoying pests to deal with. They had taken on most of her Wyvern Riders and Dark Fliers with the help of their grounded comrades, while were avoiding her most damaging spells. Luckily for her, the ground troops had to break off and engage the Plegian ground troops.

She still hadn’t even managed to kill one of the brats, though. It was insulting to her pride as Royal Tactician that they survived her first ambush but that they still refused to die by her own hand made it personal.

As she started to feel fatigued from the constant casting, Aversa decided to kill two birds with one spell. “Darkness eternal envelops all. In her embrace your life is forfeit. Fear my Night!”

A shroud of darkness exploded from her hand, catching a couple of fliers in her blast. Three of her Wyvern Riders had the life sucked out of them, much to the horror of her underlings, while two of the female knights barely evaded the attack.

The same could not be said for their mounts, however.

“Elsa! Grace!” The brunette in the tacky pink armor screamed.

Soon, both women started to fall as two more left the battlefield, rushing against gravity to catch them before they became smears on the desert soil. Having taken care of four opponents for the time being and recovering her strength from the life force of those useless riders that couldn’t kill a couple of girls, Aversa had more than enough power to take on the rest of the Ylisseans. A blast of wind from the sorceress slammed into the chest of the brunette’s pegasus. The beast reared in pain, even if it’s armor protected it and threw its rider off as it thrashed in the air.

“Sumia!” the red-haired captain shouted in horror.

“I got her!” a blonde in white armor shouted, pulling out her own tome.

The falling girl had her fall broken, instead of her neck, by another blast of wind. The girl slammed into the desert floor with a sickening crack. Her arm and leg were bent at an unnatural angle, indicating that she hadn’t survived unscathed.

“She’s alive!” Aversa could hear the blonde shout as she dodged a javelin.

Just as the sorceress was about to retaliate, she saw Gangrel’s fall at the hands of the Ylissean tactician.

Aversa clicked her tongue as she heard the prince’s shouts of victory and call for surrender. ‘Tsk, it seems the rat couldn’t even work as a decent pawn.’ The Dark Flier sighed in resignation. ‘No matter. My lord’s will shall not be stopped.’ Despite the advantage she now had, Aversa saw no reason to risk her life in such an even fight.

“Your king is dead! Surrender and we will be merciful!” shouted one of the Ylissean harlots, quite obviously through gritted teeth.

‘As if I was that stupid.’ They would probably crucify her sooner than letting her go.

Having no reason to stay and fight any longer, the sorceress decided it was time to make her escape. She still had a role to play in the incoming events after all. Maybe next time she could have some
Risen Abominations at her side, once those kinks over their control spell are taken care of.

“It seems there is no longer a reason for us to play, little birds,” Aversa taunted as she gathered magic on her hand. “Tada!” A burst of light flared to life, blinding the knights as they took down the last of her troops, who foolishly continued to fight.

When the Pegasus Knights recovered, Aversa was no longer in sight.

“Where did that damn strumpet go!?”

“Sire, the remaining Plegian forces are surrendering en masse!” one of the Feroxi soldiers announced.

Chrom smiled and nodded at that. It was finally over. “Order our forces to cease fighting at once and tend to the wounded. Make sure Robin get taken care of. He fought Gangrel alone and deserves the best treatment we can provide.”

The messenger nodded. “Yes, sire!”

The prince sighed, cursing himself for allowing those dastards to separate them. They weren’t much of a challenge but they took precious time to eliminate. By the time Chrom was done decapitating his last opponent the main battle was over.

Robin took down the Mad King –which was supposed to be his responsibility– and almost paid the price with his life. The tactician had done so much for them already. He pledged his support for the prince just before the battle but Chrom couldn’t return the gesture when he needed it the most.

He failed Robin.

It already hurt to not to have been in Ylisstol to protect it or to have Emmeryn captured under his nose, but his friend almost died fulfilling his duty. Time and again someone else had to cover for his failure. What kind of prince was he that couldn’t protect those important to him?

‘If things had gone differently… After almost losing Emmeryn and Ylisstol, to almost also lose a close friend…” Chrom shook his head. There was no use in thinking on the ‘what-ifs’. Robin was wounded, not dead, and the least the prince could do is make sure that his recovery was taken care of.

Flavia walked to his side, followed by Basilio. She patted the prince’s bruised shoulder, making him flinch in pain. “It's finished. Once their messenger delivers our terms, that's it. We put an end to this bloody business, once and for all.”

The Ylissean prince breathed a sigh of relief at the news. “We've won... Somehow I don't feel like celebrating. We lost many soldiers and much more are wounded.”

Basilio grunted. “Victory can be bitter as well as sweet, boy. It's good you learn that now. Be glad that you’re not mourning your family, too.”

“Speaking of mourning, Regna Ferox lost many good soldiers today,” Flavia stated with a frown as she looked at the battlefield littered with bodies. Though most were Plegian, there were plenty of Feroxi and Ylisseans amongst them. “We need to see to our dead. Then it's time to attend to the living and rebuild our army.”
Another reminder of his failure. “I'm sorry, Flavia,” Chrom said solemnly. “Your sacrifice will not be forgotten. Ylisse will compensate your nation in whatever fashion—”

“Oh? In that case, how about you hand over the Fire Emblem and we'll call it even?” Flavia said, making the prince choke on his own spit before the Khan burst into her usual laughter. “…Hah! Just a little Feroxi humor,” she said while slapping Chrom on the back. “Don't worry about our finances, Chrom. Reparations will fall to Plegia, and I've seen their treasury—they can well afford it.”

“Yes, pity the man who stands between Flavia and a full coffer, boy,” Basilio whispered to him as Flavia walked away.

Chrom laughed, glad for the lightened mood. “Heh, I'll have to remember that when you come to visit Ylisstol.”

“Well, that is quite the story,” Emmeryn simply said, breaking the silence that had settled for a while after Rose finished relating the same story she gave Phila. “I noticed you changed quite a few things from the version you told before but now some of the things you mentioned make more sense.”

Rose shrugged. “Well, when demigods start involving themselves in mortal affairs nothing is simple or believable, so I omitted a lot of details until I spoke with Phila.”

Emmeryn remained silent for another minute before she continued. “I thought peace would come once this war with Gangrel is over… But an invasion from Valm in just a few years? And the return of Grima after that?” The Exalt shook her head, leaning against the wall as the weight of the revelations set on her shoulders. “This is just…”

Placing a hand on the Ylissean’s shoulder, Rose nodded. “I understand your anxiety, but rest assured that we are taking all measures to ensure our victory.”

“Indeed,” Tiki confirmed. “While Rose dealt with the situation on this continent, I have made my own movements on Valm. Hopefully that will allow us a stronger position once the time comes.”

The Exalt looked at Rose with wide eyes. “You have been doing this alone for two years?”

The tactician shrugged, already having getting used to her burden. “Well, not alone. Tiki and Naga offer their support and suggestions when possible but I’m the only one with the freedom to move as I please.” She didn’t regret it, though. Not only did it grant Rose a chance for redemption but also allowed her to focus on her brother’s future instead of her past, despite depending on it to prevent a repeat. “The situation is just to big for us to fully stop and the Conqueror was already on the moved when we started acting.”

“And you knew of this, Phila?” Emmeryn asked her knight with a frown.

Phila looked like a kicked puppy that failed her master. “My apologies, milady, but I agreed with Rose that the current war is stressful enough. I have only informed of this a short while ago and even if I had wanted to inform you I wouldn’t have the opportunity.”

“I would’ve preferred to continue this alone but I fear that things might change a lot and our knowledge will be less reliable,” Rose admitted, regaining the Exalt’s attention. “I have changed quite a few things already and I can only guess the ramifications of my interference.”

“You mean things like my death,” Emmeryn stated in a neutral tone, not looking at her, already
understanding her meaning.

To her credit, the tactician only flinched internally. “...Yes.”

The Exalt swallowed and closed her eyes. “How... How would things have gone had you not intervened? How would’ve I...?”

Rose and Tiki looked at each other, not really wanting to speak of such morbid details. Rose relented to the responsibility, but still wanted her to understand. “Are you sure you want to know? You already know enough to understand the ramifications.”

“We know of two outcomes,” Rose began. “Had we not interfered at all, the assassination attempt would’ve been a success. Your... head would’ve been taken to Gangrel and Chrom would’ve been injured, forever reducing his combat abilities. He would’ve become a fine ruler. But from what we saw of that future, Chrom never fully recovered, both in the physical and emotional sense. Eventually those wounds would’ve contributed to his fall at Grima’s hands. Lissa tried her best but she never could recover that spark.” A little twist but she couldn’t reveal the truth about Robin. Not yet, if ever.

The royal’s voice was barely above a whisper. “Chrom... Lissa...”

“And had I not informed Robin of Aversa’s plan, you would’ve indeed fallen to your death,” Rose said, deciding to not pull any punches. “Your death would’ve achieved peace by inspiring the Plegians to lay down their arms... at the cost of traumatizing your siblings when you fell on the ground in front of them. Once again, they would suffer for your absence, forcing them to mature and change.”

Rose could see Emmeryn hands tremble as Phila moved to comfort her. “Then it seems it is my destiny to die and make my sibling suffer. The way things have been going my death seems in--”

“No,” Tiki and Rose replied as one, startling the Exalt.

“The river of time is not immutable, milady,” Tiki insisted. “The reason things seem to be happening despite our efforts is due to outside interference. Don’t think it’s fate trying to kill you.”

“But if what you say is truth my death in Plegia could have ended all this bloodshed!” Emmeryn tried to reason.

“Milady! You can’t be serious!” Phila exclaimed in disbelief.

“Is my life really worth that much? If it would really accomplish peace, I would gladly give it... Even if...”

Rose felt a punch in the stomach.

Emmeryn was willing to die for peace.

Her Chrom had been willing to kill her to protect the world.

She was willing to challenge fate itself to save her brother, who she had come to love.

What worth has one life if it jeopardizes peace?
For her, yes, it did.

Placing a hand on the royal’s shoulders, Rose locked eyes with the blonde. “Make no mistake; your words did reach the Plegian’s hearts. Maybe not all those they would’ve had you perished, but they still made a difference.” She squished Emmeryn’s shoulder, pressing the Plegian coat against her skin. “Of that I’m sure.”

That seemed to calm the queen slightly. “It just... so much meaningless war...”

The tactician frowned and pursed her lips. “To be honest, Gangrel was not originally so twisted about his intentions for obtaining Fire Emblem.”

“You can’t possibly defend that madman!” Phila shouted in anger.

“I’m not, but there is more to this that pure hatred,” Rose said, trying to placate the angry knight. “From our information, Gangrel initially intended to unite the continent to fight Valm, mimicking Walhart’s strategy. Sadly, the Grimleal used dark magic to push his hatred for Ylisse to the tipping point and that was too much for his fragile psyche.”

Phila scoffed at the explanation. “You make it sound like he is a tragic hero.”

“In a way, he is,” Rose said, earning an incredulous look from Wing Commander. “If you remember, even though Gangrel never liked Ylisstol, he preferred isolation that aggression. He didn’t start building his army until two years ago, when he heard of Walhart. Plegia was never as prosperous as Ylisse but it they had recovered plenty from the war. He doesn’t even worship Grima, he just plays lip service to keep the Grimleal and devouts in line.”

“What are you saying?”

“Had Gangrel remained sane, I do believe he would have let you go had we given him the Fire Emblem. The longer the war went the more he lost sight of his objective, which was to unite the continent behind the Fire Emblem against Valm and Walhart.” Rose shook her head. “Killing you would only have divided us more, as Ylisse would never rally behind him and Ferox would rather fight alone. A prolonged war would only weaken us further, leaving us more vulnerable to the Valmese invasion.”

“What if we just tell the truth? Tell the people about what’s coming? Gangrel might not have believed it could work but maybe it can.” The Exalt asked, sounding slightly desperate. “We could prepare a defense and maybe if we push a united front we can negotiate peace with Walhart.”

Rose understood where Emmeryn was coming from. She had a good heart that yearned to spare others from pain and lying was just not in her nature, but sadly that wouldn’t work here. The tactician shook her head. “You’re not that naive, Emmeryn. You declaring that war is coming against an enemy that hasn’t wronged us so soon after the other war? We would lose all public support, and who knows if Walhart already has infiltrators and sympathizers in our ranks. And telling the people of Grima? That sounds too much like your father. We might use this war as an excuse to build the Ylissean army once again, but even that will be hard.”

Emmeryn flinched but it was obvious she couldn’t deny it. “True... The wounds are too fresh from both wars and it would destroy all I’ve tried to accomplish. We can only wait and react without making things worse,” she said in a disappointed voice.

“True, but there is plenty we can do, though we can discuss that in depth later,” Rose said, stretching her arms above her head. It felt like she had been standing for months on that spot. She then put her
hand over the Exalt’s shoulder again to show empathy for the royal. “But please, Emmeryn, have some faith in us. We don’t want you to think you have to die for us to succeed.”

“Yes, I think you’re right. I guess it’s just my nature,” Emmeryn admitted. “I do recall you calling me a ‘stupid, selfish, self-sacrificial bitch,’” she added with a raised eyebrow.

’Well, I never thought I would get to hear Emmeryn say those words...’ Rose thought as she laughed awkwardly and Tiki sighed. “Heh... it was the heat of the moment. Didn’t actually meant it...”

“I am sure,” Emmeryn said, though the corners of her lips were twitching. The same could not be said about Phila how looked both scandalized and livid.

Before the knight could decide between impaling Rose with her spear or strangle her with her hands, Emmeryn turned to the Voice of Naga with more questions. “Do these changes mean that you will be staying in Ylisse, Lady Tiki? I would be most happy to offer you accommodations in the capital,” she said, moving to a more positive topic.

The Voice pondered the question for a moment before nodding. “I will stay for a time, if only just to make sure this fool does not hurt herself again.”

“Your concern is touching...”

“I’m glad you appreciate it,” Tiki responded without missing a beat. “Although, I think that staying in the castle could attract too much attention...”

“You know, I could try to get a house in Ylissstol,” Rose said, earning a surprised look from Tiki. “Once my contract with the Shepherds is done, I won’t be able to stay in the barracks so a house could be useful. You could stay with me and we could bounce some ideas around. I must admit that influencing events and people in power is very hard in my current position, especially when we are trying to prepare for an incoming war so shortly after the last one.”

“Not a bad idea,” the manakete agreed, but then looked at the tactician dubiously. “But can you even afford it? I know of your debts for all those bars you destroyed last year?”

“...I thought we agreed not to talk about that,” the tactician said with a slight tint on her cheeks.

“No, you agreed not to talk about that. I never made such promise,” the manakete retorted.

“Wait, what are you t–” Phila started, only to be ignored

“...Anyways! I earned quite a lot of coin from the Feroxi Tournament and I had taken enough missions to pay my debts and our investments so I actually have a spendable coin,” Rose said, doing some math in her head. “I might need to take a few jobs to get some land in the capital. Prices will certainly go up now that people will try to move into empty districts after the siege.”

“I think I can help with that,” the Exalt said, gaining the tactician’s attention. “I would be most happy to finance you a house in Ylissstol as a reward for your assistance. Even so, I have no problems with you remaining in the castle and I’m sure my siblings won’t object. You could be close to your brother that way. I know Chrom already insisted he lives there after the war.”

Rose blinked at the offer. She knew the Exalt to be generous but this was maybe a bit too much. “I... That would be very generous, Emmeryn, but I don’t want to impose any more on the crown.”

“It's not trouble and I admit it's not entirely selfless. It would also help with my other idea,” Emmeryn began with a smile that made Rose wary. “Tell me, Rose... Would you be interested in a more...
extended contract?”

Grima’s blood was boiling. Things were not going per plan.

Maybe he should gather more information, it seemed like Lucina changed more than expected.

“Maybe I’m getting complacent with the knowledge of my assured victory…”

“Master… if I may?”

Grima turned to his disciple. “Speak.”

“Well… I understand you wish to make Chrom suffer, but isn’t this a better outcome overall?” That intrigued the Fell Dragon and motioned for the child to continue. “I mean… If Emmeryn survives and keeps her ideals of peace, doesn’t that mean that Ylisse will be militarily weaker than under Chrom’s command?”

“Hmmm not only that, but the difference in ideals could cause friction during the Valmese campaign…” A feral grin split his face. “Yes, this could actually be interesting. I have no doubt my past self will gather the gemstones for us while weakening our opposition, but that doesn’t mean we have to make it easy. I can always destroy the Exalted Bloodline in a later date.” He laughed. “Let Lucina think she has won, it will make it sweeter when I rip that hope from her!” Grima turned to the kneeling child and decided she earned some praise. “Good work. I think it’s time to continue your training. Despite this setback, you are still my most precious piece, Morrigan.”

The girl’s purple eyes widened in elation at the praise, “Thank you for your kind words, Fa–Master. I only aim to please.”

A small part of his mortal heart tingled at his daughter's slip of the tongue but the Fell Dragon ignored it. He needed to stay on task. Reaching into his robes, he retrieved the little souvenir he picked on his trip to the Outrealms. “Remember your lessons about controlling spirits?”

Morrigan nodded. “Good. Take these,” Grima said, placing a small package into her hands. “Study them. Master them. They will play an important part in my plans.”

The girl opened the package to find something unusual.

A deck of cards.

“What are these?”

“They are called Einherjar.”

Deep into the Outrealms, an old man frowned at the empty room that once held the records of legends and heroes. The treasury now laid empty, having been plundered from its contents. Dropping the facade of a jolly fool, Old Hubba gripped his cane in anger. The wood splintered from the strength no old man should possess as the air became heavy with power.
“This won’t do.”

Normally not one to interfere, the mysterious elder had enough. Messing with the timelines was already a daring insult, one that took a lot on his part to ignore, but this was personal.

Interfering with a world in which they didn’t belong.
Stealing the essence of legends and myths of countless worlds.
The Fell Dragon needed to be taught a lesson.

Both of them.

Chapter End Notes

Currently unbeta-ed.

“Yeah. 5 months, pfft enough time to write 1 chapter.”

Fuck.

My apologies for the delay. The past few months have been… harsh. I finished my research paper and everything was looking great until January when I was told my company was closing our project. We were told that they would do whatever they could to put us in another project, but on the 31st they fired a lot of my coworkers. Now they told me that I will remain alone in the project doing what I already do until January and working with a remote team, so I can breath more easily now. Kinda made me put a lot of projects on the back burner too, like fanart and other stories I was working with, but I’m getting back into the groove.

Well, I’m rambling. This also took a while thanks to a writer's block, which the above didn’t help. I’m not too happy with this chapter. I felt it a little clunky, but I needed to push past this writer's block. Definitely, not my best try. Hopefully, I can get some finesse back.

And hey, DeathDealer Inc made a TVTropes for my story. So that’s nice. Go check it out and update it if you feel like it.

And to the guy that said I blatantly reference RWBY: I take offense to that; I blatantly reference Overwatch, thank you very much! And since I’ve been playing Nier: Automata… well, we shall see.

6O is too pure for this world.
Downtime

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Three weeks had passed since the war’s end and the spirit of celebration was prevalent in Ylisse. Once news spread of the Exalt’s daring rescue along with the death of Gangrel and consequent surrender of the Plegian army, the people of Ylisse let off a collective sigh of relief. Not wasting any time, the healing of the country had begun in earnest.

The dead were mourned and buried. Buildings were restored. People were throwing themselves into any activity in order to overcome the grief and fear that the war left in its wake, but the fact that victory had been achieved with much fewer losses than the past war made it easier. With the Plegians pushed back and no longer harassing Ylisse’s roads, the food and relief caravans could finally cross the country without issue, reducing the pressure on Ylisstol’s supplies, which had been starting to run low. This news alone had been a cause for celebration for many.

It wasn’t all good news, though. Much of Ylisse’s already small military and a large amount of civilians were killed during the war, with many more injured. Though the Shepherds were lucky to not suffer any fatalities, they had still received plenty of injuries and had yet to recover.

Robin had woken after two weeks of being unconscious, much to the relief of his comrades. However, he still wasn’t allowed to leave his bed for a few more days, at least until the healers could verify he hadn’t sustained any lasting damage.

Part of him still wanted to remain in a coma, though.

A victory ball had been announced for all the nobility and war heroes in two weeks time, with multiple parties and celebrations simultaneously scheduled across the capital and other cities to renew the spirit of the people now that the war was over.

Of course, the Slayer of Gangrel was invited as the guest of honor. Such status in this class of events, though, meant that he was required to bring a partner for the opening dance.

Which led to his current predicament.

“Look, my friend. We’re war heroes! You’re the Slayer of Gangrel! You need -no-, deserve to go with a beautiful lady to that ball. As your friend, it is my duty to make sure you do just that.”

"I don’t need your help getting a date, Gaius.”


Robin wanted to refute the accusation, if for no other reason than to save his pride, but found that he couldn’t find the words. He honestly didn’t know if Gaius was right. Past relationships were something he had managed to push out his mind during the war, but he didn’t truly know if he had had a wife or girlfriend somewhere.

However, now that he was a hero, he couldn’t trust anyone claiming to know him to be sincere. Word had already spread among the ranks about how the tactician had been found on a field with amnesia. It would come as no surprise if anyone tried to take advantage of that information to advance themselves.
“...There is no proof that I have no experience, as I don’t have my old memories,” the tactician mustered in his defense, pushing those thoughts aside. “And I haven’t had the time to even try dating, so maybe I am quite the ladies man.”

Once Gaius was done laughing at him, the thief spared a solemn look at the glaring tactician. “Look, Bubbles. I like you. You saved my hide plenty of times, but I’ll be honest with you: you can’t talk to girls to save your own life.”

“C-can too!” he replied, completely aware of how childish he sounded.

“Really?” The thief challenged. “When was the last time you talked to a member of the fairer sex about something that’s not related to those strategy books of yours?”

“I... asked Miriel for that magical theory book?” The tactician didn’t like how insecure that answer sounded.

Gaius certainly didn’t look impressed.

“Ehhh… AHA! I asked Cordelia what was for lunch the other day. We even spoke about…” the Plegian trailed off, losing the wind on his sails. “Lunch...”

The thief just raised an eyebrow.

Robin remained silent a little longer before dropping his head on the table. “Do I really need a date? I don’t think I even know how to dance. Maybe I can skip this whole thing to save us from public humiliation?”

“Oh, don’t let Twinkles hear you say that or she’ll whip you into shape,” Gaius warned, making the tactician straighten up. “Maybe you could ask Lon’qu’s gal if she can help you.”

“That is if she doesn’t pass out when I ask her,” the tactician muttered with a shake of his head. “How Lon’qu, of all people, managed to marry her is a mystery to me.”

“Got me there,” the thief conceded. Gaius then pondered their options for a minute. “Okay so... Let's see... we need a woman for you to practice small talk. Someone you feel comfortable with... Hmm... Maybe Lissa? No, no, bad idea... Twinkles? Worse . Thar...”

“No”, Robin cut him off with more conviction than he had when he faced Gangrel. The tactician definitely didn’t check his surroundings to make sure a certain stalking sorceress wasn’t around.

“Fine, fine. Don’t know why you’d turn away a woman with such a body away.”

Robin didn’t feel the need to mention finding her going through his laundry. He also suspected she was behind the uneven haircut he had when he woke up the other day but he had no proof.

“Let’s see, Sully? No, we need you with all your limbs intact... Nowi? Ha! Now that would be fun...” Gaius laughed. “Hmm... Cordelia?”

Robin just stared at him like he was an idiot.

“...Fair enough,” the thief conceded.

“Even if she didn’t have that crush, she’s with the Pegasus Knights all the time. I would like my pride to survive and not get rejected in front of her entire wing, thanks.”

“Anna would probably scam you out of your gold before you got a normal conversation out of her,”
the thief mused while rubbing his chin. “Or maybe we can just skip and ask one of the girls without a date directly… Now, who can we ask…?” Gaius trailed off until he saw someone sitting on another table, reading a book. ”... Perfect.”

Robin glanced at where Gaius was walking towards and almost fainted.

“Hey, Snowflake! You’re a girl, right?”

“Think through your next words very carefully.”

Ignoring the drop in temperature, that literally froze his juice, Gaius powered through her withering glare with all his might. It seemed the war had tempered his nerves, as the last time her glare had been enough to make him back away.

“So, anyway,” the thief continued, stabbing the frozen liquid and taking a bite of his improvised dessert, while ignoring the unamused glare of the mercenary. “I was wondering if you had a date for the ball?”

Rose froze, staring at the ginger-head with disbelieving eyes. “Are you–” Rose's mouth moved trying to form the words she couldn't believe. ”Are you asking me out?” she asked, making sure she heard right.

Gaius almost choked on the frozen juice. “Oh gods, no! No offense, gorgeous, but we both know you would kill me by the end of the night.”

The mercenary tactician breathed in relief. “Most likely scenario.” She had been a little… harsh with Gaius. She knew he was a… good man –if she discounted his counterpart–, but gods if he couldn't be annoying. “Why, then, are you asking?”

“Curiosity. To be honest, I didn't think this kind of parties were to your liking anyways. I know I'm only going for the free food” Gaius pressed, eating the rest of his frozen juice. “So, you are going?”

“...Yes, I am,” Rose answered cautiously.

“And do you have a date?”

“Despite my better judgment telling me not continue this conversation, no, I don't have a date.”

“Perfect!” Gaius said, smirking. “I happen to know that a certain tactician acquaintance of ours is in need of a partner for the ball and I think you would be perfect for it.”

Taking her brother as her date? Talk about awkward. She was not that pathetic yet. Close, but not yet.

Finally noticing her brother's presence in the room, Rose decided to humor Gaius with an explanation. “While that would solve both of our pairing issues, it could give the wrong impression to the fickle nobility. The two Plegian tacticians who joined the Shepherds in such a short time, coming together? They would scream conspiracy. More than they must already be doing.”

“I hadn't considered that,” Gaius grumbled. “Tsk, nobles.”

“Additionally, I am not required to have a date.”
That got a reaction out of her brother. “WHAT?!”

“Yeah. Lady Emmeryn was most understanding that, well, I don't feel comfortable with the idea. Phila is not bringing a date either, last I heard.”

“But you rescued her! And lead the defense during the siege!” Robin said, taking a seat on her table.

“Oh, I managed to sell that it was all your idea, since you were the one who cast the Relay spell and convinced Chrom to put me in charge.” She flashed him a smile. “Enjoy the spotlight, war hero.”

“...That's cheating,” mumbled Robin. “...Do you think that may–”

“I'm pretty sure Chrom and Lissa have already convinced her that you have a date,” she interrupted. She then glanced towards a whistling Gaius, “I'm sure they had some outside pressure, though.”

While the amnesiac grumbled about 'abuse of power' and 'royal tricksters', something popped into Rose's mind, causing a devious smile to spread across her face.

Tiki felt a shiver go down her spine, despite the good weather.

“What did she do this time?”

“You know…” Rose said in a tone that promised nothing good. “I have a friend that could be your date for the night. I was going to ask her if she wanted to come with me–”

“Ooh, steamy” the orange-haired pervert interrupted with a wiggle of his eyebrows.

“As a friend. Get your mind out of the gutter,” she growled at the thief. “Anyways, I think I can convince her to be your date.”

“I can get my own date,” retorted the amnesiac.

“No, you can't,” the thief and mercenary agreed.

“I can!”

“Ok prove it,” Rose said with barely contained mirth. “Seduce me.”

Robin almost choked on his own spit. “WHAT!?”

Rose burst into laughter. “Naga's tits, I'm joking. Just show me how you would invite a girl to the dance.”

“Ok, sure. Um… Ok, so… Hi, I'm Robin,” he said with what would pass for a confident smile in a fourteen-year-old, not a war hero.

Rose definitely did not give what many would qualify as a snort.

The amnesiac's face clearly showed he had no idea on how to proceed. “So, hey, I couldn't help but notice that you… were a woman and I'm a man,” Robin said, making Rose cringe. “I was wondering if you, maybe…”

“Gods, this is painful…” said Gaius, dropping his head on his hands.
“Ok, stop,” Rose said with finality. “You need more than tips on interacting with girls, that much is obvious. Hmmm,” she pondered her options for a moment. “Ok, I think I know where to start…”

In another part of the world, a certain philandering dancer felt he was missing something important.

Robin wasn't sure how the conversation got to this topic.

He was also not sure when did so many people gathered around the table.

He knew the reason, though, since he had been listening for close to two hours already.

“Then you pull until you hear a pop,” Rose said, popping the p loudly and making a few men jump. “And that's the Plegian Tickler.”

They might have gotten slightly off-topic.

The tactician had dabbled a little into some of the more… steamy romantic tales during his few downtimes –for educational purposes, of course– but even those legendary stories were not this graphic.

He was sure a leather belt wasn't meant to be used that way.

The amnesiac glanced to his left to see a blushing Olivia take the hand of a frozen Lon'qu and rush to their quarters. He didn't need any more information for the situation was already uncomfortable enough. It was amusing to see Gaius open-mouthed and wide-eyed, his lollipop forgotten on the floor, though.

Maybe someone should make sure Donnel hadn't hit his head after he passed out.

“Well, now, for the Valmese Twist. You ne--”

That was his signal. “Ahem! I-I think we had enough to think about today,” a flustered Robin said, taking her arm and dragging her away from her frozen audience. At least his mercenary counterpart didn't put any resistance.

“Tsk, alright, fun-burglar,” Rose mumbled. “Aren't you the one always telling me to be more social with the other Shepherds?”

“Y-Yeah, but that's not what I meant!” Robins stuttered.

Rose rolled her eyes. “Naga's tits, you're a prude… You really need my help, it seems.”

“I d--”

“It's decided. Meet me tomorrow near the central commons. Leave your coat behind and get some nice and comfortable clothes. We are fixing this problem,” the mercenary ordered. “Don't make me come looking for you.”

“But I--”

“Perfect! See you tomorrow at the around five,” Rose said, ending the conversation and leaving the amnesiac standing dumbfounded.

Robin blinked. “What just happened?”
“Come on, Sumia. Just one step after the other,” Lissa encouraged.

Sumia grit her teeth and took the step, holding the railing in a crushing grip.

Angela stood at her side, offering her support. “That's it, girl. You can do it,” the combat medic said with a soothing voice.

'One.'

Her legs were swollen with blood.

'Two.'

Taking a single step felt like walking on broken glass.

'Thr—'

The brunette's feet gave under the weight of her own body, sending her to the floor in pained tears.

“Sumia! Are you ok?” the princess asked, rushing to her side in concern.

“Heh… At least now I have an excuse for tripping, right?” Sumia said with a strained smile and tears in her eyes.

“Oh honey. You will recover. Sure, the damage done to your legs is extensive, but with therapy you will walk and ride again in no time,” Angela said, while hugging the crying brunette. “Just don't give up, ok?”

Sumia nodded numbly. She knew she should be thankful. Normally, this kind of damage would have been too extensive to heal. It had only been Angela's intervention and medical skills that had given her a chance to walk again.

Many others injured weren't as lucky.

“I… I think I want to stop for today,” Sumia said in a voice above a whisper, not wanting to see her friends' pitying expression.

“Of course. We will continue tomorrow,” Angela soothed as she helped the brunette towards her wheelchair. “Do you want me to take you through the gardens? I can’t stay out too long, but we can have some fun in the meantime,” the medic encouraged.

“I can take care of that, doc,” a roguish voice said from behind them.

The women turned to see a certain ginger haired thief leaning against the wall.

“Oh, Gaius. Thanks for the offer!” said Lissa from the side. “We appreciate it.”

“It's no problem, princess. Come on, Sumia. Let's go get some fresh air,” Gaius offered, taking hold of her wheelchair. “Hopefully, we don't run into any beehives this time. I still have the stings from our last outing.”

“...Why are you doing this?”

Gaius hummed, “Who knows? Maybe I just don't want to see a pretty girl all sad,” he added with a roguish grin. “Cheer up, Sumia.”
“You're not going to call me 'Stumbles'?" Sumia inquired.

Facing away from him as she was, she couldn't see the thief's frown. "I'm not that heartless, sweetheart," Gaius said with unusual seriousness. He then added more playfully, "I'll call you that again once you recover, or when I can think of a better nickname."

Sumia slowly turned to look at the thief, gauging his sincerity. Finally, she gave him a small smile. The first one she had in weeks.

“Thank you.”

Cordelia stepped out from the corner and looked as Gaius took Sumia away. “She's doing better.”

Angela nodded with a concerned frown. “The damage the fall did to her legs was more than what a staff can heal, especially in the middle of a battlefield. We were lucky her spine was undamaged.”

The red-haired captain understood. A healing staff might speed up the process, healing regular broken bones and muscle, but damage to joints and nerves was much harder to fix. “Will she truly recover?”

The blonde medic nodded, giving a small smile. “She will heal if she continues the therapy,” she said, but frowned after a moment. “Although, I fear she might fall into depression and give up. We can't let that happen.”

That made Cordelia scowl. There were plenty of injured soldiers, like Stahl or… that tall knight she couldn't remember the name of that was being taken care of by Sully. She had seen Ferox warriors lose limbs, or worse, but Sumia's case had hit much closer to home. The brunette was her best friend and to see her struggle that much just to take a single step broke her heart.

Curse that harlot Aversa for hurting Sumia.

Cordelia would do whatever she could to help her friend.

“Do we have any final numbers on the remaining squadrons?” Angela asked, interrupting her musings.

“We lost too many,” said the captain, recalling her last count. “About half our pre-war members survived the war, but only a two-thirds of them remain fit for duty.” Cordelia crossed her arms and shook her head. “We are stretched thin already patrolling our territory, even if we are at peace.”

“I guess it was to be expected,” the medic said with a sigh. Angela then smiled at the redhead. “You did a good job keeping your squad alive, Cordelia. You've certainly earned your rank as captain.”

“Please, you're too kind, Angela. I didn't do anything special.”

“You really did, Cordelia. There is no need to be modest. Your squad owes you their lives.”

“She's right.”

Hearing that voice, Cordelia whirled around, glaring at the injured man at the door. “Stahl! You should be in bed!” the redhead scolded, annoyed that he would disobey the cleric's orders. “Your ribs need time to heal, they were already fragile from the siege and getting hit again did nothing good for them!”
“Sorry, Cordy. I got hungry and couldn't stop myself from listening in,” Stahl answered sheepishly, rubbing a bandaged arm through his messy hair.

“Gods, you're impossible,” Cordelia grumbled with a sigh. She then pointed her finger towards the barracks. “Get back to bed. I will prepare you something to eat.”

That brightened the cavalier's mood, “Really?”

“How about some lamb stew?” the redhead asked.

“With potatoes?”

“And carrots, just like your mom prepares it. I remember,” Cordelia said with a small smile. “Now, shoo! Before I change my mind.”

“Yes, ma'am!” Stahl said with a cheeky salute.

“My apologies, Angela. I think we need to reschedule my own evaluation.”

The medic waved her off. “Go on. Your ribs are healing fine so the treatment is minimal as long as you don't exert yourself.”

“Thank you, I will make note of that. I will contact you later.”

“By Naga, she is blind,” Angela muttered with a shake of her head, watching the redhead walk towards the kitchens.

Lissa finished putting away the unused staves and stepped to her fellow blonde's side. “Right? I know she has a crush on my brother, but come on. How can she not see what's right in front of her?”

The knight gave an uncharacteristic snort, “I can't answer that. We have a pool going to see when she will finally realize Stahl's feelings for her. Another for when she will finally realize she doesn't really love your brother.”

“When?”

“When,” Angela assured. “She's practically married to the numbskull already. It just that she's such a dramatic romantic that she doesn't realize it. She's worse than Sumia in that regard.”

Lissa hummed in thought, imagining the scenario. “I like Cordelia, but you are right. I don't see her and my brother together. I think she is just mistaking admiration for love.”

“Yes, well. I hope she grows out of it soon. It's not healthy to pine for someone in such a way,” Angela said, turning to smile at the princess. “You've improved a lot, Lady Lissa. Your healing is much faster and more precise now.”

Though happy at the praise, Lissa couldn't stop the frown from appearing on her face. “Sadly, it's because I got plenty of practice. Hopefully, I won't have to treat anything bigger than a cut in a long time.”

“That's all we can ask. Now, if you have the time I could use the help with other patients.”

“No need to ask twice!”
A night's sleep hadn't helped, nor did the attempt to distract himself with work. Robin had spent his morning going through paperwork and helping the advisors on dealing with the reconstruction, so it was not a total loss. Although he lacked experience in those areas, they still appreciated his input. In addition, he was learning quickly.

Hopefully, he could apply that kind of skill to whatever the white-haired woman had planned for him.

“You can stop laughing anytime…” grumbled Robin, while he walked towards the town with the prince in tow.

Maybe he was a sponge for knowledge, like Rose said.

Chrom didn't. At least not for a little while. “Hah...Sorry, haha, it's just that… pfft aha ha ha! I can't! Just the idea of her giving you flirting advice it's hilarious!”

“Oh yeah, because you're so much better Sir 'I-didn't-know-you-were-naked.' ”

“Hey! That was an accident...” Chrom retorted weakly.

Robin snorted, shaking his head. “Sure, sure.”

“And I will let you know that I can talk with girls with no issues.” Chrom declared. After a pause he conceded, “With proper preparation.”

“Noble girls don't count,” the tactician said unimpressed.

“Why not? They always seem eager to engage in casual talks,” Chrom insisted.

Robin rolled his eyes. “Please. You know those noble girls are just trying to marry into the Royal Family.”

Chrom frowned. “What are you talking about? All the noble girls I have talked with seem like proper ladies. I've never got the feeling they were after power.”

Robin just looked at him like he was a moron. “I– Just– Never mind,” the tactician said followed by a sigh. “I already have enough with getting a date to worry about yours...”

“Oh, I don't need a date.”

Robin almost got whiplash from how fast he turned his head. “WHAT?!” he screeched in an unmanly high pitch voice.

Chrom looked with amusement at his friend. “As royalty, we only bring a date if we are in a serious relationship. Otherwise, it could give the wrong ideas to the nobles and the public.”

“But then, you and the other Shepherds aren’t… Am I the only one required to bring a date?!”

“Yeah, pretty much,” the prince replied, enjoying leaving the tactician speechless. “I will dance with a couple of ladies as it's required by etiquette to keep good relations. Mainly the daughters of nobles and rich merchants, but that's about it. The same for Lissa.” The bluenette gave an uncaring shrug.

“It's politics.”

Chrom had a chance to appreciate the extensive and explicit vocabulary available to someone as well read as Robin.
He learned plenty of new words that day.

“Shouldn't be that hard to get a date, though. You get along with all the female Shepherds and the Pegasus knights respect you. You could invite one of them,” Chrom offered.

Robin finally composed himself and sighed. “Not sure that's a good idea. Feels kinda… awkward. I don't want to ruin friendships by giving the wrong impressions. It's not like I have many… or any friends outside the army.”

Chrom felt guilty about that. Though his help had been priceless, the tactician had to give up looking for his past life to help his kingdom. Robin didn't even have the time to make his own life outside the military and that made Chrom feel responsible.

He will help him with that. He owed Robin that and much more.

“Well then, there's Rose's friend, no? Or maybe one of the other girls has a friend that can go with you,” Chrom offered. “Just don't beat yourself over it. It's not as serious as the war and you still have plenty of time to get a date. Maybe just go incognito and try to talk with some merchant girl? It's only one dance and it would certainly be a night to remember for them.”

“I suppose I could give it a go…” Robin conceded, checking the position of the sun to tell the time. “Hmm. Well, it's almost time to met with Rose. I will catch you later.”

“Good luck, my friend.”

After Robin left, Chrom couldn't help but think about his own attempts at small talk with members of the fairer sex. They tended to be very formal with the noble ladies or very battle related with the Shepherds. Not to say he didn't chat with his friends but it was always casual, never like flirting.

Rose's incident didn't count.

'I'm not that bad… am I?'

A while later saw Rose take her brother through the street of Ylisstol with practiced ease. Both were not wearing their coats, if only to not sour the good mood of the Ylissean populace by seeing Plegia's colors. They weren't ashamed of them, despite the actions of their countrymen, but that didn't mean they were about to create unnecessary trouble when they were alone.

Well, unplanned unnecessary trouble.

Luckily, the few times she stopped in Ylisstol to scout the area and get jobs as a mercenary had required her to move without her coat, so she would be recognized where they are going.

“So where are we going?”

“We're killing two birds with one spell. I have a couple of errands to run here and meanwhile, you get some help with your… social skills.”

“You're not dropping me in a brothel, right?”

“Nah, the would be cheating. We are going to a tavern, so relax. We're almost there.”
Robin released a sigh worthy of Cordelia. “Very well, I trust you.”

“You won't regret it!” “I know a couple of people that can help you with a little crash course. Soon, you will be all ready to get a date. Then you will be ready for all future boring ass events filled with prissy nobles.” She didn't mention that she pictured Maribelle when she was talking about them. “Talking to girls and dancing could be a good way of not dying of boredom in that snore fest.”

“...You know, with the enthusiastic way you describe these events, I would've thought you would find a way not to assist,” Robin commented.

She could see where he was coming from. “Normally you would be right, but...”

“You must assist! You are a guest of honor!” Phila insisted.

“Well, here is my counter argument: I don't wanna,” Rose retorted. “These parties are awfully boring. I have better ways to spend my afternoon that watching a bunch of nobles looking for the favor of the crown.”

“You talk like you've assisted Royal Balls before,” the knight noted.

The mercenary tactician shrugged, “I have had an interesting life.”

“I've noticed,” Phila said with a roll of her eyes. “I didn't want to resort to doing this but...” The knight sighed in a way that made the tactician realize where Cordelia learned the skill. “I am authorized to offer you a twenty percent bonus to the amount Prince Chrom agreed to pay you if you agreed to come.”

“...Phila was very convincing.”

“Huh, alright.” He seemed satisfied with that, strangely enough. “So... why do you want to help me with this?”

“Well, I feel like it's my responsibility. After all... I already kinda see you like a little brother so I feel responsible for it.”

“I... Um, thanks.”

“Heh, well you certainly are an improvement over my bitch of a sister.”

“You got a sister?” Robin asked in surprise.

“Yeah... I got an adoptive sister, thanks to the gods. Just thinking about sharing blood with that skank sends shivers down my spine.”

“She can't be that bad...”

“... Imagine having Aversa as a sister and that will give you a general idea of how much of a strumpet she is.”

“...Wow. Heh, I guess my amnesia has an upside. I would have to know I have a sister like that.”

Rose almost had to use her dragon magic to hold her laughter.

“Oh look we are here.”
The pair stopped in front of a nice looking building. The establishment had been spared damage during the siege it seemed, though it was way out of the main streets.

“Sealed Verses’?”

“Yep. Come in,” the mercenary said, nodding that the guard at the door who returned the gesture. “Oh, and don't tell anyone about this place. It's my little hangout spot and I don't want it all crowded.”

The inside of the building was very nice, if simple. Clean and well lit, the tavern was certainly a few steps above the holes in the wall the male Shepherds tended to frequent.

“Good afternoon, Devola! Popola!” Rose greeted with more cheer than Robin had expected.

“Rose, always a pleasure,” the woman at the counter greeted. Robin looked at her and could see she was very beautiful. Long, straight red hair adorned with a white flower framed a delicate face with vibrant emerald eyes.

“Please, do try not to break anything, Sustrai!” a voice said from inside the kitchen.

“It was an accident...” Rose mumbled under her breath.

The redhead in front of them shook her head in amusement. “Hey, Rose, who is this?”

“Ah! This is Robin, my apprentice and recently adopted honorary little brother slash experiment for the afternoon.”

“Yeah I– Wait, what?!”

“Ah! This is Robin, my apprentice and recently adopted honorary little brother slash experiment for the afternoon.”

“Yeah I– Wait, what?!”

“Oh!” Popola exclaimed, clapping her hands. “It's a pleasure to meet you. Rose never brings anyone when she comes for jobs. I was beginning to think she had no friends.”

“Honestly, I can see where she was coming from,” Robin said with an amount of sass that made his sister proud.

“...Yeah, ok, let's not talk about that. Robin, go sit down and order something to drink. I need to discuss something with Popola in private.”

Robin looked unimpressed at her 'suggestion'. "How is this supposed to help me?"

"Don't worry, this is part of it,” she reassured him. “Soon, Devola will come to take your order. Talk with her. That's step one.”

Robin looked at her with a dubious expression. “Alright...”

“That's the spirit!” She said, patting him on the back and sending him on his way. “Hey Popola, please handle this note to Devola before she takes his order. Call it a favor.”

“Oh?” Popola said, taking the note and give it a read. “Oh, this will be fun,” she added, sending the note to the kitchen.

'Some help this is,' Robin grumbled internally, as he sat on a stool at the other end of the bar, looking at the selection of drinks on the menu. He was so focused on this situation that he didn't hear the sound of footsteps stopping in front of him. It was a well-manicured hand rested in front of him, tapping the wood that finally got his attention.
“What can I get you, handsome?” a sultry voice asked him.

Raising his head, Robin met a pair of mirthful green eyes. The wild, red hair adorned with a white flower and the smirk on her face gave her look that made Robin's knees weak. Luckily, he was already sitting down.

His mind pushed past the block and he spoke. “Hi, I– Wait, weren't you just ove–”

The woman gave a melodic laugh and looked at him, still smirking. “Ah, a first timer. I knew I didn't recognize you. I'm Devola,” she said, offering her hand to the tactician who politely shook it. “The one over there is my twin sister, Popola. I handle the bar while she handles the mission board.”

“Oh, ok. That makes sense…”

“So, first time in our little establishment. You don't strike me as mercenary looking for work.

“Ah no. I'm just tagging along with her,”

“Ah. So Rose does have friends. Hopefully, you are less destructive than her”

“I sense there is a story there that I haven't heard before.”

“How about you order something and I tell you while you drink?”, she said, pointing at the selection of bottles. “Anything special strikes your fancy?”

“Uhh, not sure. What do you recommend?”

Devola looked at him like a predator about to pounce. “We got some Desert Rose ale in store, though it somewhat… strong.”

Robin gulped.

“He seems nice,” Popola said, watching her sister fluster the tactician.

“He is, if a little innocent when it comes to women.” Rose commenting as Robin blundered through his order. “Please, make sure Devola doesn't break him. I kinda need him in one piece.”

“You're the one that asked for her help with this 'socializing' business, but I will do my best,” joked the redhead, as she pulled out a ledger from behind the counter. “Anyways, I supposed you came to check on the job?”

Rose nodded. “Do you have any news?”

“Yes. Rylock and his gang of misfits took the offer,” Popola said, offering her a signed contract. “They completed it without any incidents. As per the contract they will remain vigilant for the next four weeks.”

That certainly pleased the mercenary. “Great. It's nice that one of my plans proceeds without any complications,” Rose said, reaching into her bag and pulling out a coin purse. “Here is the second part of the payment.”

“Much obliged!” the bartender said, taking the money and counting it. “Yep, this is the right amount.”

“And for the other errand?”
“All taken care of,” Popola said proudly, reaching under her desk to pull a manila folder. Opening it, the redhead pulled a set of legal papers. “Here is the deed for your new property. Congratulations,” she added with a wink.

“Perfect. I knew it was a good idea to get you get the deal for me,” Rose said, eagerly taken the papers. “Everything seems in order. You're amazing as always, Popola.”

“I aim to please,” Popola added with a small bow.

“And pleased I am,” Rose said, dropping another coin purse on the table. “Here, a bonus for you help in such a short notice.”

“Oh, thank you!” the twin replied with a smile. Popola looked at Rose with a moment of hesitation. “Hey, about that first job...Any chance you tell me why you needed them to protect this location?”

“It's of personal value for me,” she said, stealing a quick glance at her brother. “Hopefully, it will pay off.”

“I see. I still don't know how you knew of such a specific attack, but it certainly would've been bad had they succeeded.” Popola said while counting the money. She then stopped and looked at Rose intently, humming slightly.

The mercenary noticed this and raised an eyebrow in question. “Something wrong?”

“You seem… happier. Usually, you are more sullen and withdrawn. In fact, I've never seen you with a friend of such. It's quite the change. I quite like this new you.”

“You're not the first person to tell me that,” Rose admitted. She had noticed her change in behavior more after speaking with Tiki. “I think I'm finally moving on from my past.”

“I've known you for a year already, but you never talk about your past. You only come for business, like those strange request to look for those teenagers or the rare spell books.”

“Maybe I will tell you more, later. Maybe I can come back and talk over a drink.”

“I… didn't expect that much,” Popola responded in surprise. “But it certainly would be nice to get to know more about one of our best clients.”

“You would have more clientele if you weren't so… exclusive.”

“Sure, but then we would have all the rabble in here. We prefer quality over quantity. We need to keep a good standard on completed jobs if we want to keep getting good requests.”

“I can understand that,” Rose said in agreement. “Hey is everything ok with the business? Today and last time I've seen fewer patrons than before.”

“Oh quite well actually. The war caused a lot of damage and that created plenty of requests for quality mercenaries. A tragic situation, but I can't deny the commissions are nice.”

“I can agree with that.” The mercenary stood and stretched. “Well, I'm going. Put his drinks on my tab,” she said offering her hand to the tavern owner.

Popola shook it with a smile. “Will do! Don't be a stranger.”

Her brother snapped out of his stunned state, waiting for Devola to come back with his order, when he noticed Rose leaving past him.
“Wait, where are you going?” he hissed at her, pointing at the kitchen door. “You can't just leave me here! What do I do?!”

Rose put a hand on his shoulder and whispered, “I need to check on some things, and you need to practice casual conversations, so stay here and do your best. Devola and Popola are very nice, so just be yourself.”

“B-But… I've no idea on how to proceed?”

“Look. You're a grown man. You can talk to a girl. Don't worry yourself about flirting back, just keep calm and this will help you,” Rose said, looking at him straight in the eyes. “You can do this. Most girls like confidence, so give it a go. Just don't try acting like Virion or something stupid like that and everything will be fine.”

“I… Fine,” her brother said in resignation. “I can do this.”

“Just another battle,” Rose reassured him.

“Just another battle...” he repeated.

As she walked away, Rose turned around and saw Robin nervously scratch his arm in anxiety. He looked like a lost puppy. It was hard to believe this was the man that lead the Ylissean's victory and bashed Gangrel's skull open.

'Hmm, maybe he could use a little boost.'

Normally she wouldn't use this but it couldn't hurt to cast a little confidence hex on him. Nothing drastic, but enough to give that much-needed push. Gathering a smidge of her draconic magic to replace the components of the hex, she whispered an old incantation. A small, dark spark flew from her hand and into Robin's back, sending a shiver down his spine.

Satisfied with her job, Rose left to check her new house.

As if a river washed all of his worries away, Robin suddenly felt silly on being nervous talking to a girl. It's not like he was going to ask these sisters out or anything. It was a just casual conversation. His courage raised just in time for Devola's return.

The bartender set a tall glass with a red liquid in it. “This is a special brew we make here. We call it 'Desert Rose Ale','” Devola explained, pushing the glass towards him. “Take a shot and tell me what you think.”

Taking a sip, the tactician felt fire rush through his throat, but it was not at all unpleasant. It had a slightly sweet flavor, but it was still plenty strong. “Wow, it's delicious.”

“And with quite the kick. It's pretty popular with our clientele. Normally it's pretty expensive but Rose is paying so enjoy yourself,” she said with a wink.

'Ok, Robin. You can do this,' the tactician told himself as he gave his most charming smile. “Gotta say, that must be the second reason people come to the establishment”

Devola's eyebrow rose in amusement. “Oh? And what would be the first?”
“I think the company speaks for itself,” he said in a playful tone. A part of him was screaming that it was too corny, sounding too much like something Virion would say.

Even so, it earned a little laugh from the redhead. “A charmer after just a sip, I see. Were all those nerves a show to lower my guard?”

Robin took another sip and felt his confidence rise, “I'm just speaking the truth,” he said with an air of certainty, keeping his expression soft while enjoying his drink. “I happen to enjoy the company and the alcohol this place has to offer. Can't help but offer some words of appreciation.”

Her lips twitched. “Well, keep sweet talking and it might get you a free drink,” Devola said, leaning on the counter and looking around. “Hmm looks like slow evening for now. How about you tell me about yourself? How did you end up in the company of Rose's charming personality?”

“Well now, that's quite the story.”

“You seem happy.”

Rose didn't even blink at Tiki's voice, as she had been waiting for the manakete when she saw the prince. Turning, she saw her friend in a simple yellow sundress and a headscarf to hide her ears until they can find a better solution. The voice is carrying a bag with toiletries she purchased from the merchants. It seems like she was enjoying herself.

“I resent that implication.”

Tiki gave a noncommittal hum.

“How was your little venture? Did you get what you needed?” Tiki asked.

Accepting the change of topic, Rose nodded. “Yep, a little side project was a success and I also managed to get the paperwork for the new house.”

“I still don't understand why you denied Lady Emmeryn's help with that.”

“She's busy enough and I had already seen a nice property around so I didn't want to waste her time,” Rose answered. “Do you want to go there now?”

“Might as well. Would be nice to see where I will be staying for the near future.”

“I know I recognized you!” Popola exclaimed, having joined the conversation after finished stashing away the money. “So you are that Robin? The one that slew Gangrel?”

Robin nodded with a smirk, cheek tinted with both embarrassment and alcohol. “Well, yes. I'm still surprised people call me that. I think Chrom should have gotten that honor, though. Felt like I took his victory from him.”

“Oh, I don't know,” Popola said with a slightly dreamy tone. “A prince defeating the evil king does have its allure, but it's kinda cliche. I like the idea of a man with a mysterious past helping liberate his corrupted homeland. Much more romantic. Like in 'On the Wyvern's Wings', or the 'Light Castle' series!”

“There she goes again...” Devola said with a roll of her eyes, still smirking.

“I take it you are into literature?”
“Absolutely. In fact, I was a librarian for a long while, but stopped to help Devola manage this place after she got it from the previous owner,” Popola commented, starting to clean some of the glassware. “I always loved to read stories.”

“Speaking of stories,” Devola said with a glint in her eyes. “You must have some juicy stories from your time in the army. Maybe about the Royal family. Or even Rose!” the wild-haired sister exclaimed. “I can never get anything out of her.”

Her twin slapped her on the shoulder. “Devola! Stop being such a gossip!” Popola chided her sister, which felt short when she turned towards Robin with her own expectant look.

Robin laughed and shook his head. “Well…. Ok, but don’t let this story get out. I could cost me my job,” he said jokingly. “Alright, so, we had just reached Ferox after saving the Exalt and Chrom was looking for Rose to thank her when...”

“Something wrong?” Tiki asked as her friend suddenly stopped walking.

“Suddenly got the need to punch my brother,” Rose said out loud. “Oh well, must be nothing. Anyways, we are here!” the tactician announced, pointing at the building.

“Well, now. This is much more than I expected.” Honestly, Tiki was expecting a small house, not this multi-floor building, with a garden and all. Not exactly a mansion but still pretty nice. “How did you manage to afford this?”

“Oh, it was a steal. Apparently, a family was killed by Plegians that managed to get this far during the siege. From what it says in the papers, it was quite a macabre sight, with the bodies impaled and sigils of Grima painted in blood on the walls. Rumors spread and it scared all prospective buyers away. They owners couldn't sell it even at a low price, so I got it super cheap,” Rose said with a slight chuckle. “Hehe, suckers.”

Tiki stared open mouthed in horror.

“What?!”

“Shhh, relax! It didn't really happen,” Rose amended.

“Oh, so it was a joke?” The Voice breathed a sigh of relief and rubbed her temples.

“What? No, what I mean is that I was the one that spread those fake rumors.”

“What.”

“One of the jobs I had Devola put up after the war was to have someone break into the house the day before a sale and paint the symbol with some cattle blood and drop some evidence of the ‘massacre’. Rose shrugged. “I mean, what other way could I get such a deal?”

“But that's horrible!”

“Don't get your panties in a twist,” Rose said, opening another door. “It belonged to a weapons trafficker named Samuel. The piece of shit is a scumbag of the highest caliber, so don't need to waste tears.”

“It doesn't make me feel any be– is that a room-wide bathtub?” Tiki asked, looking at the object in question.
“With enchanted heating crystals for perfectly warm water.”

“...Do we need to buy furniture?” Tiki asked, looking at the marble floors of the room. An improvement over the ponds on top of the Mila Tree, that's for sure.

The tactician waved her concerns off with a smirk. “Nah, I purchased it with some basic furniture so we at least have a place to eat and rest. Should be here tomorrow afternoon.”

“So what now?” Tiki asked, having finished checking the bathroom.

The tactician smiled. “Now we celebrate! I have plenty of gold remaining, so let's indulge ourselves!” Rose proclaimed, putting her hand over her friend's shoulder. “Come on Tiki, let's go for a drink!”

The disguised manakete mused for a moment. “I suppose... It's been awhile since I partook in such activities. I would like to taste some Ylissean wine.”

Rose grinned. “That's the spirit! I would normally recommend Sealed Verses but I don't want to get in Robin's way. Let's hit some other tavern.”

'Hopefully, Robin's night is going well. Can't have all the fun tonight.'

Sealed Verses had attracted a small crowd that night. Turns out tonight was a regular entertainment night at the tavern. Once a week the establishment was less for mercenary work and more regular tavern activities like musical entertainment. Many of the regular patrons of the sisters came tonight after spending the day working on rebuilding or doing mercenary work.

Devola played her lute with surprising enthusiasm, with a small group of patrons joining in with their own instruments.

Popola gave a girlish laugh as the tactician twirled her in his arms, earning cheers from the crowd. Turns out he knew how to dance, go figures.

In a tavern in the eastern district of Ylisstol, the Fell Dragon from another world was trying to convince the Voice of Naga to go with this realm's Grima as his partner to a royal dance.

“I think that defeats the entire purpose of me keeping a low profile, though it does explain the chill I felt earlier.”

“Come on, it will be... fun,” Rose slurred lamely, not entirely convinced.

I didn't help that both were slightly tipsy already.

“Isn't it awkward that you are asking me to be your brother's date?”

“I just think it would be a fun night for both of you. And you should get to know firsthand the person we are working so hard to prevent falling into darkness.”

Tiki pursed her lips, cheeks already rosy, clearly not buying her reasons. “I feel like you're leading me into a trap.”

“Don't be like that. I might not enjoy it but a woman of your ag--” Tiki glares. “class would certainly enjoy this kind of event.”
“...I guess it wouldn't be so bad,” Tiki mused. Taking a sip from her wine, she pondered for a minute and shrugged. “Oh, why not? Might as well have some fun before things get serious.”

Rose gave a tipsy cheer in victory. “Fantastic! We can go looking for a dress for you later this week. Something to accentuate your hair.”

“That would be nice.”

The pair of women spent the evening talking about meaningless things, ignoring the dark cloud looming on the horizon. Even if the next wars were two years away, the players were already in motion. So there was no reason they couldn't take the time to enjoy themselves.

“Hey there, gorgeous gals. I can't help but see that you two are alone tonight. Maybe… my friends and I can help with that?” a drunk, smelly man said, placing his arm over Rose's shoulder. The man was sweaty, most likely from working all day, and was smearing the smell all over the plegian woman.

Now, that in on itself would normally not be a problem. The tactician could… convince him to remove his hand and there would be no need for violence.

As Rose opened her mouth to reply, Tiki's hopes for a peaceful evening were destroyed once the drunk man groped her friend's breast.

“Oh, mother...”

The wine was nice, though.

Robin grudgingly opened his eyes, feeling a slight hangover. Luckily it was still dark outside so he could go back to sleep. But something was different today.

Blinking away the sleep, the first thing he noticed was that he was not his room at the castle nor in the barracks.

The second thing that he noticed was that something was pressing at his sides.

The third and fourth things he noticed were the two redheads that were snuggling at his side.

For all his tactical prowess, his mind ground to a halt as it recalled what happened last night. Going with Rose to that bar. Her leaving him to practice talking to unknown women. Drinking some liquid courage. Pulling out some charm he didn't know he had and then...

“Hmm… Good morning, war hero,” said Devola, planting a kiss on his blushing cheek.

“I gotta say, those long marches certainly build up some impressive stamina,” Popola said, snuggling deeper into his arms. “It's been awhile since we had such a workout.”

“This is not how I expected our evening to go when you walked in with Rose, but damn if you are not a sweet talker.”

'Keep your stupid mouth shut,' his male instinct told him. 'Don't fuck this up for us.'

He obeyed.

“I had heard of the Plegian Tickler, but...wow.”
'Don't think about it. Just go with the flow.'

He could do that.

“It's still early. Think you got it in you for one more round?” The wild-haired sister whispered into his ear with a salacious smile.

He could definitely do that.

The grin on his face that seemed to amuse the girls. Before they could continue, something outside caught his eye, though.

'Is that smoke?'

'Breathe, Tiki. Breathe.'

“...I can pay for this,” Rose said to the owner of the partially-burnt tavern.

'Count to ten.'

“In my defense,” her headache-inducing friend continued. “I didn't know Uncut Feroxi Vodka was strong enough to ignite if you threw the bottle against a wall.”

The hooded manakete was reluctant to mention that it had happened before. Even if Rose isn't aware of it, Tiki and Naga were keeping an eye on her.

Life on top the Mila Tree tended to be pretty boring.

“I'm also not the one that started that brawl.”

Tiki had a hard time agreeing with that. Fortunately for them, it was not that big of a brawl. She took a look at the pile of unconscious men outside the ruined building.

Less than two dozen.

New record low. Rose was learning to hold back.

“And it was only one wall. I did manage to stop the fire before it spread,” the tactician insisted, pointing at the block of ice that was holding the structure as proof of her innocence.

Though if was so sure she was innocent, Rose shouldn't have offered to pay for the damages first. These were supposed to the be diplomatic skills of a former queen? It looked like the bulging veins in the neck of the owner were about to explode.

“You shouldn't serve such strong drinks if you don't want such things to happen when you have wooden walls, though.”

May her Mother grant her patience.

“So, if you really think about it, this is kinda your fault.”

'This is the hope of this world…'

Meanwhile, in the castle, Gaius woke up with a start. Sniffing the air, his eyes widened at the lack of
a certain scent in the air.

“Bubbles?”

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, I named her Morrigan after the one from Dragon Age. Capcom's Morrigan is not someone I have knowledge off outside Marvel vs Capcom. There is a reason for the change of name. Should be explained in about...3-4 chapters?

And dammit if I'm not too deep to change it but it occurred to me that Stahl and Sumia would be a perfect couple, and Cynthia would fit perfectly as Stahl kid. Oh well. I mean, a family of clumsy dorks would be adorable.

I was gonna use Marjory Delaqua and Kasmeer Meade from GW2 for Robin's “training” but I decided these girls needed some love.

Next chapter is the ball and Rose's plans get an undesired turn.

PS. Devola and Popola did nothing wrong.

Thanks to Victory3114, Xbro Kong, and Shipping Rates Apply for fixing my atrocious writing once again.
“Why are you sniffing me?”

“Red-heads,” Gaius stated matter-of-factly

Robin’s eyes widened in surprise. There was no way Gaius was being serious when he said that he could smell ‘purity’. “W-Wha-”

The thief sniffed again, this time more deeply. “Twins.”

The tactician sputtered, realizing what Gaius meant. “How did–”

Gaius shushed him. “Wait...I recognize that– Devola and Popola ?! Damn, Bubbles!”

Robin opened his mouth, but no sound came out for a moment. “That’s an unbelievably creepy skill,” he finally managed to say.

“Forget about that! How the hell did you bed them?!” the thief demanded. “They blue ball every man that visits Sealed Verses!”

Making a note to warn Rose that Gaius knows of her favorite bar, Robin decided to take a jab at the orange-haired man. “I told you I could be quite the ladies’ man,” he smugly added.

The thief didn’t seem deterred. “Oh? So, did you ask one of them to the dance?”

Robin’s smirk faltered.

“...You backed out, didn’t you?” Gaius said as a grin grew on his face. “You had the perfect chance and you blew it.”

“No, no...that’s not it,” Robin said, sighing in frustration. “It would have been too awkward. I might not have my memories but I know a social faux pas when I see it. Asking one of them out to such an event after a one night stand? I would come off more desperate than anything. And besides, they’ve probably already forgotten about me anyway.”

“Do you think Robin is coming back anytime soon?” Popola asked her sister, polishing a glass while thinking about the fantastic night they had with the young man.

Devola licked her lips and smirked. “I certainly hope so. I want to see what other tricks he has under his sleeves.”

Popola laughed, “Oh, I agree.” She said, lifting a crate of wine and motioning for her to follow. “Come, we need to finish the preparations for the festival’s orders.”

With a groan, Devola followed her sister to the back. “Ah, what I would give to go to the dance....”

“Fair enough,” Gaius conceded with a shrug. “What are you going to do about it, then?”
“As pathetic as it sounds, I think I might have to take Rose up on her offer to take her friend and stop worrying about this…” Robin sighed. “I hope she’s nice.”

“I have been alive for thousands of years—” Tiki stated.

“Please don’t,” Rose groaned, rubbing her.

“I have seen and experienced many things. I have fought at the side of King Marth. I saw the rise and fall of empires.”

“You’ve made your point,” the tactician said, covering her head with her hood.

“But in all that time, I have never been banned for life from a tavern,” admitted the manakete.

“Ugh…”

“Which, I must remind you, is quite a long time for me;” Tiki added, taking a sip of her herbal tea. “I have to say, it's quite the novel experience.”

Rose dropped her head on the table.

“Don’t dent the table, we just got it delivered this morning,” She chided.

The Fell Dragon’s vessel muttered something under her breath.

“Changing topic, do you have anything to do today?”

“Nope, have the whole day free,” Rose answered, drinking the last of her own tea.

“In that case, will you accompany me later today to find a dress for the dance? We need to find something for you too, now that I think about it.”

The mercenary perked up a little at that. “Sure, I will go. And don’t worry about me, I already have something to wear.”

Tiki blinked in surprise. “You do?” she asked dubiously.

“Yeah, don’t worry about it,” the plegian said, dismissing her concern. “Hmmm. There is a Valmese-style shop in the eastern district. It should be intact, if we are lucky,” she suggested. “And we could also visit some… under the table merchants to see if can get a simple illusionary enchantment on some jewelry to hide your ears. I’ve also got a special perfume that should keep Nowi from detecting your manakete nature.”

“...You seem awfully excited about this,” the Voice of Naga commented with a raised eyebrow.

“Says the one that accepted being my brother’s date so easily” retorted the Fell Dragon.

“...That’s fair. I suppose I just wanted a change of pace from staying in the temple sleeping for years.”

“Yeah, I can see that getting boring after a few centuries,” Rose said with a roll of her eyes. “Now come on! We’re wasting daylight and it’s been ages since I went shopping for clothes with anyone!”

Emmeryn took the time to enjoy her favorite blend of tea, sitting on her balcony and watching the
reconstructions of the capital. It made her proud that her people were so resilient in working together so the hardships they suffered in the past wouldn’t repeat.

“Lady Emmeryn, I bring you the report.”

“Ah, Phila! Sit and join me for a cup of tea,” the Exalt greeted with a smile, motioning for her friend to sit with her. “How are the preparations for the ball?” she asked, serving Phila a cup.

Phila took it with a smile, taking a slightly more casual stance as only the two of them were present. “Thank you. Everything seems to be in order. Security has already been briefed and we have increased patrols with the assistance of the Feroxi troops still in the city.”

“That is a relief. The people need the sense of security after all that has happened.”

“Indeed. Anything to help the morale of the masses is a welcome respite,” Phila added, taking a sip of her own cup. “Ah, your taste in blends is as exquisite as always, You Grace.” She savored it for a minute, taking the time to ponder her next sentence. “I have also received confirmation from Rose that Lady Tiki will be coming under a false name.”

Emmeryn’s eyes shone with glee. “Oh, that is marvelous! We must make certain to excel in the preparations and make this an event to remember.”

“Rose said she is taking care of that…”

The Exalt blinked, then gave an unladylike shrug. “Oh, that’s good then. Rose has not failed us thus far.”

Phila didn’t look convinced.

It was two days later that Robin finally found Rose in the barracks, reading a novel. The mercenary had been hard to track down, due to the fact that they didn’t have matching schedules.

It didn’t matter now. He needed to be smooth about this. The tactician couldn’t sound desperate or pathetic. He could have gotten a partner if he had wanted to, but he had chosen to deal with all the paperwork that came with being the tactician of the army instead due to priorities.

Yeah, that was it.

It wasn’t because he couldn’t get over the awkwardness of asking a one night stand –or one of two in this case– to be his date for one of the most important events in recent memory.

Not at all.

Robin gathered his courage and greeted his only hope. “Hey… Rose… I…”

“Her name is Lily Pendragon. She has green hair and her dress is dark red with golden embroidery. Make sure your outfit matches. I would recommend a dark-colored suit,” the woman answered without looking up from her book.

Robin opened and closed his mouth. “W–wait! Why are you so sure that’s what I was going to ask!? I could already have a date.”

“You don’t,” she said, taking a sip of her tea.

“…I could.”
“You don’t.”

“…Dark suit, got it,” Robin relented in defeat, slumping on the seat next to her.

“Don’t worry; she can handle the spotlight, and I can do damage control for any rumors that might arise,” Rose said, turning a page.

“Thanks…?”

“By the way,” the mercenary started, pushing a plate of biscuits towards the amnesiac. “Nice going with Devola and Popola. I must say you surprised me.”

“Didn’t help me with my problem in the end…” he said, taking one of the treats for himself.

Rose scoffed at his self-deprecation. “Oh, stop being such a drama queen. You bedded two gorgeous, bisexual twins that reject pretty much anyone that makes a move on them. Just because they are busy with their business during the ball doesn’t mean you have to play the victim.”

“What?”

The woman gave him a look. “…You do know they won’t be able to assist since they are catering the main festival, right?” Rose said, taking the time to explain. “They have one of the few remaining restaurants with a working kitchen and the contract for catering services for the festival was too good for them to deny.”

‘Sure, let’s go with that.’

“Of course,” Robin lied. “I discussed it with them the next day. Anyways, thanks. You took a weight off my shoulders,” he thanked sincerely

“No problem. But despite your success with the twins, you’re still pretty green with this kind of thing, huh.”

“Hey…”

“So! I decided to graciously take matters into my own hands and write you a guide for the dance!” She then produced a roll of paper from her coat, handing it to the tactician.

Robin stared at her in bewilderment. “You...what?”

“No need to thank me, I’m great, I know,” she said, nodding to herself. “Read that and your date will be fantastic.”

“Date, right…” Robin said, looking at the notes and looking them over. Much to his surprise, they were fairly normal suggestions. The type of music that is going to be played, the dances that are expected, as well as notes on etiquette and much more. “Huh, this is actually useful…” A thought occurred to him. “Oh, could I meet Lily before the ball?”

He didn’t like the smirk Rose got, nor the gleam in her eyes that seemed to shine under her hood. “Oh, but that would ruin the surprise! Don’t worry, you will see her at the ball, and you won’t be disappointed! She is gorgeous, and a pretty good dancer.”

Robin narrowed his eyes at her cheeky tone. He was starting to miss the serious and professional tone she had when they first met. “You’re enjoying this way too much.”

“Oh, like you wouldn’t believe,” Rose said mirthfully. “Which reminds me…”
“Wh–OUCH!” Robin said, rubbing his arm after she punched him in the arm. “What was that for!?”

“For telling Devola and Popola about Chrom walking into my bath!”

Crap. That was one of the things he could remember from that night… Along with the steamy bits after burning the alcohol through ‘exercise’. “H–how did you find out?”

She raised a condescending eyebrow. “What? Did you think that I wouldn’t go and grill the twins for details?”

“Oh gods…”

“Morrigan.”

The voice that resonated through the chambers startled the young mage out of her focus, dispelling the magic that was gathered on her hands. “Ah! Y–yes Master?” she said, turning to face her father.

Grima stood at the door of her quarters, looking at her with an expectant frown. “How are your studies coming along? Have you made any progress with the Einherjars?” he asked, his tone calmer than what one would expect from a dark god.

The girl stood taking one of the cards and focusing her magic into it. The item responded to her call and the spirit of a spy named Matthew, who she learned came from a land called Ostia, manifested before her. The spirit's eyes were glassed over as he knelt at her feet. “I’m making progress. I can summon a few of the weaker spirits, but others are hard to control, especially if they had strong personalities in life.”

“Understandable. That’s part of your training after all. You need to impose your will on them, otherwise they will be useless to us should they keep enough freedom to rebel.”

Morrigan shuffled in place, debating with herself if she should bother her father with her questions. In the end, her desire for progress won over. “Do… Do you have any suggestions?”

To her surprise, her Master pondered the question for a moment before offering his advice. “Think of them as Risen. You can already direct the Risen to do your bidding; this is just the next step. You’re familiar with the spells that allow us to control the bodies while retaining their combat prowess. Apply the same theory here.”

That certainly sounded reasonable, and the young girl was already thinking of new possible tests to run for her assignment. “Understood! I will get to it right away!” Morrigan said with poorly concealed enthusiasm, much to her master’s surprising amusement.

“Make sure you do. I look forward to your progress.”

Time flew by and before anyone had noticed, the awaited date had arrived.

It was still too soon for a certain tactician.

Robin had prepared himself for this day for weeks, doing everything from getting the right clothes with Maribelle’s ‘help’ as well as practicing ballroom dances with her and Cordelia. He felt prepared.

Maribelle, however, didn’t feel the same.
“Stop fidgeting!” Maribelle scolded Robin, attempting to flatten every slight wrinkle on his suit. “It was already a challenge to tame that disaster you call hair and I will not have you give a bad impression in front of the entire court! And stop wrinkling the suit! I spent hours smoothing it out for you!”

“B–” the fulminating glare the troubadour gave silenced him. “S-Sorry…”

“Hmph! Just do not embarrass yourself in front of everybody. Impressions are important, especially for the new Grandmaster of Ylisse,” the noblewoman said with finality. “Now, I need to check on Ricken. The poor dear always has problems with these kinds of events. I trust you will be fine on your own from here on?” she demanded more than asked.

“Yes. I think I can manage to not get myself killed in the next 10 minutes,” Robin said slowly and with a surprising amount of sass.

“Keep that tone in check. It is unbecoming of a man, regardless of his commoner origins,” Maribelle snapped with her departing words, leaving the tactician alone for a moment.

“I’m starting to regret winning this war,” he grunted to himself, pulling at the collar of his suit.

“I hope you don’t really mean that.”

Robin snorted turning to see his best friend, followed by his faithful retainer. “I’m very close to doing so, Chrom,” the tactician snarked. He then turned to the knight and gave him a nod. “Good evening, Frederick.”

“Good evening, Robin,” Frederick replied pleasantly. The knight and the tactician became much more civil with one another after their talk during the war, though it was still a long way before they became friends. “I see you’re ready for the dance.”

“Almost… just waiting for my partner to arrive.” And wasn’t that a kick in the teeth. Despite arguing with Rose–and a rather poor attempt at espionage that he will never mention to anyone–he had yet to physically meet his partner. Robin only hoped they could dance well enough together so that the day at least wouldn’t end in a total disaster. “Speaking of which, have any of you seen Rose? She was supposed to be escorting her friend here tonight.”

The pair shook their heads. “Not at all today,” Chrom said before adding, “Shouldn’t you have picked her up before coming here?”

Robin sighed, leaning on a column and looking outside the window. “I had intended to do so, but Rose had insisted that she needed to ‘get everything right’.”

“That’s not so bad.”

Robin had to resist the urge to bang his head against the wall in exasperation. “She’s been saying that all week. I haven’t even met this Lady Lily. This better not be a prank…”

“Oh… I can see how that can be a problem.” Chrom said, scratching his chin to hide his amusement. “Nice suit, by the way. It strange to see you in colors other than beige and purple.”

“Yeah, well, I decided to try something different this time, to compliment what Rose said Lily’s dress would be like,” the tactician said puffing his chest. “I think I picked a good look.”

“Didn’t Maribelle pick your outfit?” Chrom teased with a smirk.
“Didn’t Frederick pick your outfit?” Robin shot back.

“Yes, I did,” the knight confirmed with a nod, making his lord sputter. “The last time we let milord pick his own suit, he ripped off one of the sleeves. Lady Emmeryn doesn’t want a repeat of that,” he said, leveling an unamused look at his charge.

Before Chrom could come up with a poor excuse for a defense, a voice interrupted them from behind.

“Ladies, please. You both look lovely tonight, so quit your bickering.”

The men recognized that voice and turned to greet the mercenary they were talking about just moments prior.

“Ah Rose, th–” Chrom started just to fall silent, which Robin could understand.

Rose had her hair done in a braided bun, with light makeup accentuating her best features and giving her an attractive appearance. However, the mercenary wasn’t wearing a dress or gown for the evening, unlike most of the women attending tonight. Instead, she was wearing a form-fitting white uniform with a blue sash running diagonally on the front. Simple golden embroidery adorned the fabric, with the Brand of the Exalt visible on her left shoulder. Knee-high leather boots were accompanied with moderately high heels to give a more feminine touch while still being practical. She carried herself with the poise of a queen, commanding respect.

It was a uniform that the two Ylissean natives recognized.

“That’s a Ylissean military dress uniform,” stated Frederick, giving her a once over.

“Phila insisted that I wear it and I didn’t want to disappoint her,” Rose said, shrugging. “We are friends.”

“That’s a terrifying thought,” Frederick muttered. “But that uniform in particular is only used by members of the Exalt’s Guard.”

Rose nodded and sighed. “That’s true. I can tell many will feel uncomfortable with a Plegian wearing this uniform but there is a reason for it… aside from me not wanting to wear a dress.”

“There is?” asked Chrom.

“Yes. As you are aware, my contract with you and the Shepherds is officially over.”

The trio nodded. It was a topic they had touched on in the past weeks. Despite the commanding pair wanting her to continue with them, she insisted that she already had a contract, though she refused to divulge what it was.

It was all becoming clear now.

At least for Robin, that is.

“Yes. And you rejected the invitation to continue your services with us,” Chrom said, unable to hide his disappointment.

“That’s correct… because your sister hired me.”

That took the prince back. “What?! Emmeryn hired you? This is the first time I’ve heard of this.”
“You can ask her for her full reasons yourself, but the gist of it is that she desires to take a more proactive role in protecting the country. I will be part of that process, working as her liaison with you while also doing certain missions for her. So while I might not be a part of the Shepherds, I will still work with you in the foreseeable future under your sister’s orders.”

That was a surprise and one welcome by Robin. His fellow Plegian had always been a rock for him whenever he had felt doubt. She truly was like family to him, even more so than the other Shepherds, and Robin didn’t want to lose that.

He didn’t want to look too clingy though.

But that was a worry for another time. The man of the hour already had another thing to worry about.

“Oh, Rose,” Robin started, looking around nervously. “Not to interrupt your explanation, I’m happy you will still be around, but this is kinda of important … Where is–?”

The mercenary silenced him with a raised finger as if predicting his question, and started to slowly push him around the corner.

When he saw who was there, his jaw dropped.

There, in a gorgeous red and gold dress, was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. And between the Shepherd ladies, the Pegasus Knights and the bartender twins, it was quite a compliment.

Her skin was flawless, not a spot blemishing her creamy tone. Her emerald eyes were framed by hair of the most vibrant green, arranged in a beautiful hairdo held together by a string of scarlet silk. The dress hugged her curves, accenting them just the right way to enhance her alluring figure. The silvery moonlight reflected off of her skin, making it shine like sculpted marble and giving her the appearance of a midsummer dream. The way her lips curled only accentuated her beauty, showing fragments of her personality in that simple gest–

‘Oh gods, I’m thinking like Virion!’

“Ah, you must be Robin,” the beauty in front of him said with a smile gracing her pink lips. “I’m Lily. Rose has spoken highly of you,” she said, offering her hand.

“Uhh–” Robin managed to push out, earning a giggle and a smirk from his partner for the evening, and an elbow from his fellow Plegian.

“You owe me,” Rose whispered in his ear, getting a numb nod in return.

He did.

“Just relax and be natural,” she continued while disregarding Lily’s questioning, but amused, look.

Another elbow to his ribs snapped him out of his daze. “I mean, yes. I’m Robin. A pleasure to meet you milady,” he said, taking her hand and placing a chaste kiss on it, feeling the soft skin against his lips.

The action earned a giggle that showed Lily’s dimples. “Such a gentleman.”

“I try my best,” he said, letting his natural charm override his nerves. A moment later the bell rang, signaling the start of the event. “It’s almost time. Shall we?” He asked, offering his arm to Lily.
The woman smiled and took the offer. “Please, lead the way.”

As Robin walked away with his date, quickly followed by an amused Plegian and two dumbfounded Ylisseans, it occurred to him that night might not be so bad.

He’s not someone of notice, Kellam knows that better than anyone. It hurts when his teammates forget about him but he doesn’t begrudge them. It has its advantages though. It allowed the knight to pay attention and learn many things of those around him while they thought no one was around. He didn’t take advantage of it like many would, but sometimes it couldn’t be helped.

Like getting to watch the opening ceremony from a good spot.

It also helped he was the tallest Shepherd.

Soon enough, the doors to the royal balcony opened and the Exalt made her way to greet the guests, wearing an elegant white and gold dress that exposed her shoulders and forgoing her crown for the evening. Her hair was arranged in an elegant braid decorated with flowers. Kellam then noted that she was flanked by Captain Phila and, much to his surprise, Rose. Both women stood at attention, hands clasped behind them as Lady Emmeryn started to speak.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I bid you all welcome to this celebration of our victory.” she paused, waiting for the applause to die down “Before we start, though, I would like to say a few words. We lost much during this war. Friends. Family. But we remain strong. Let us not fall into a cycle of hate and vengeance. Plegia suffered too during the war, and it was our actions in the past that lead to their desire for conflict. But if we allow ourselves to fall into the thirst for vengeance it will only end with more blood spilled. More children losing their parents and growing up with hate in their hearts. It’s our duty to not repeat past mistakes.”

The tall knight found himself nodding at the words.

“I understand it’s difficult and it will be a hard road ahead, but remember, I stand before you thanks to the assistance of two Plegians, as well as those that laid down their arms in their desire to end the conflict.”

Robin and Rose. Those two were certainly pivotal to their victory, as well as saving Ylisstol and Lady Emmeryn. Kellam didn’t dare imagine how much life would have been lost on their side. Otherwise, they might have been celebrating Chrom’s coronation.

“And tonight, to kick off this event, I present the guest of honor who will be opening the night with the first dance. The man who slew Gangrel and helped the Royal family in their time of need, Grandmaster Robin of Ylisse and his partner, Lady Lily Pendragon.”

Kellam’s jaw dropped when he sees Robin’s date. She was gorgeous. Emerald hair complimented by a gorgeous red dress. Robin was certainly a man with bizarre luck. Waking up with amnesia to be invited by a prince to be his tactician, only to fall into a war. Then to slay a king and being honored by the kingdom and landing such a beautiful date for a magical night.

It was as if a god was looking out for him.

“Geez, close your mouth when you’re gawkin’ at another man’s date.”

Kellam jumped in surprise and turned to watch with a certain red-haired cavalier watching with a frown.
“S-Sully! It’s you!”

“Last time I checked,” she drawled.

“Oh, umm... You look nice,” he added noticing her outfit. It was a simple Ylissian dress uniform, instead of a ballroom dress like most other female Shepherds had elected to wear that night.

The cavalier snorted, earning a look from one of the noble that she chooses to ignore. “Could you imagine me in a dress?”

Kellam tried, but for the life of him the image just wouldn’t form. “Honestly no. It’s just not you.”

Sully guffawed. “Damn right it ain’t, pipsqueak!” she declared, slapping him in the back. “Now come here. I ain’t one to dance and I need someone to get drunk with.”

“I can’t believe you convinced the Voice of Naga to be Robin’s date,” Phila whispered, fighting the urge to shake her head as the trio made their way down from the balcony towards the main floor.

“I can be very convincing,” Rose said with a sly smile.

Phila snorted and shook her head. “Convincing a demi-goddess to be your brother’s date... That’s a terrifying power,” she snarked.

“Be glad I don’t use it for evil.”

Emmeryn laughed at the byplay between the knight and mercenary. It was funny how easily the two seemed to get along, despite Phila’s usually frigid nature. Maybe in time the Wing Commander would call Rose a friend, and not just a professional acquaintance.

Arriving at the doors to the main hall, the Exalt called their attention. “I want both of you to be with me for a little while just so the nobles know Rose is with us. After that, I think you can take turns as my guard depending on how the night goes, so both of you can enjoy the festivities. Does that sound acceptable?”

Both women nodded, with Rose adding, “That sounds perfect. It gives me the chance to watch my brother dance in case something comes up that I can use to mess with him.”

If anyone else saw it, they would have sworn Emmeryn smirked at the thought. She understood where Rose was coming from.

She was an older sister after all.

“You’re quite the dancer, Sir Robin,” Lily said as the pair bowed and stepped out of the dance floor.

“Please, just call me Robin. I think we can move to a more casual tone, if I may be so bold,” he said, guiding his date towards a table reserved for them.

That earned a small giggle from the woman, which he counted as a victory. “Then just call me Lily.”

“Very well, Lily, and thank you. It was a surprise to me to realize this skill,” Robin admitted. “I assume Rose explain a little of my situation to you?”
Lily nodded, “Yes, she did mention your amnesia. I can’t imagine what it’s like to wake up with no memories though.”

“I can be hard, but I try not to let it get to me. I have a good life now, so it’s not like I can complain.”

“*We are not defined by our past, it’s who we decide to be this moment that makes us who we are.*”

“Mhairi Regan. *The Man of Many Faces,*” Robin said, smiling at the fitting quote. “It’s supposed to be a biography of King Marth.”

Her face lit up at his recognition. “Ah, you are familiar with the title? It’s one of my favorites. I do love to sit down under a tree and read a good book every now and then.”

“I agree. It’s a pretty rare book, though,” Robin noted. “I thought only the royal libraries and holy temples had copies.”

“I consider myself a bit of a historian. I love to find what people wrote about the past and how it compares to today so I made it a hobby to hunt down rare copies, though most of them are currently in my home in Valm.”

“A traveler, a scholar, and beautiful to boot,” Robin said, using his charm to earn a slight blush from his date. Some might have found it corny, but he wouldn’t complain since it seemed to work. “You truly are full of surprises, Lily.”

The green haired woman took a glass of champagne and took a sip, before giving the tactician a mysterious smile.

“You have no idea.”

Sumia sighed, leaning against a pillar for support. She had to make an excuse to get away from the other Pegasus Knights to have a moment for herself. It was difficult enough to stand as it was and she could only force so many smiles while they looked at her with concern.

“Sumia?” the familiar voice of a certain thief called from behind her. “What are you doing here alone?”

“Oh Gaius, I’m just taking a moment for myself,” she said, forcing another smile. She looked at him, she had to admit he cleaned up nicely. “You look handsome in that suit.”

“I know,” he said with a rogueish grin, earning an eye roll and a giggle from her. “Blue paid for our suits, so I picked a nice one. Never owned anything this expensive... that I didn’t pilfer somewhere that is.”

“Well, is good to see you are moving up in the world”, she said, enjoying the distraction. It was then that a slight pain in her legs made her wince. “Owww...”

“Are your legs still that bad?” the thief asked in concern.

“I can walk and move slowly but it’s tiresome. And sometimes my legs act up,” Sumia admitted. “I think”

“So not even one dance tonight?”

Sumia shrugged. “Maybe, but it’s not like I have a date and I do have a reputation as a klutz. No one asks me to dance because they know I will just trip.”
“Not if I support you.”

That got her attention. “W-What?”

“Come on, you didn’t get ready to spend the night like this. I’ll take care of you,” Gaius said, offering his hand. “A pretty girl should get at least one dance and I didn’t groom myself like this for nothing either.”

The klutz blinked. “S-sure,” she said, taking his hand and leaning on him for support.

“Just tell me if it starts to hurt and we can sit down,” he commented, slowly moving his body in a surprising and guiding Sumia with gentle dexterity.

“I-I’m alright. It doesn’t hurt with your support,” she said, relaxing into his arms. “I don’t think I ever danced so long without tripping.”

“Maybe you just needed the right partner,” Gaius commented with a cocky smirk.

Sumia looked at him and her imagination ran wild. A dashing rogue, abandoning his thieving ways to do the right thing and stop and assassination. Now serving the Crown, the ex-thief protected her, offering her comfort and was now dancing with the simple knight in the Royal Palace after winning the war.

But this is real, not fantasy.

She smiled, leaning on him. “Maybe.”

Watching Chrom dance with the noble girls made Cordelia feel something in the pit of her stomach. Strangely, it wasn’t as strong a reaction as she would’ve expected from watching the man she claimed to love dancing with other women.

“Honestly, Cordi. Either ask him for a dance or stop torturing yourself,” Sorano said.

“I couldn’t! He’s a prince and he’s above my station,” the captain said. “It could only work if he made the first move. Otherwise, I might look like a desperate gold-digger.”

“Oh please, like he is one to care about who makes the first move,” Elsa said, taking a bite of a royal pastry that probably costs more than her monthly pay. “We all have seen that Prince Chrom is not like other noblemen.”

“...But what if he says no?” Cordelia asked.

“Then you can move on with your life,” Anise said with a roll of her eyes. “Or you could finally accept your true feelings about another certain someone.”

“What do you mean?”

Her battle sisters just smiled.

“I feel like I’m missing something here,” Cordelia said in a flat tone, earning giggles from her friends. “Where are Samantha and Grace, by the way?” she asked, only to have Elsa point to the dance floor.

Turning, Cordelia saw said pair lost in each other’s eyes as the music washed over them. “Ah. Well, good for them.”
“Yep. At least some us are getting some action tonight...” Sorano said, earning a slap to the back of her head from Anise.

“Well, you know about me, but what about you girls? where are your dates?” the red-haired captain asked.

The trio pointed at their glasses of alcohol.

“Oh.”

“Yep,” the girls said with a synchronized sigh.

The four dateless beauties, spent some time talking and enjoying each other’s company when a familiar man made their way towards their table.

“Ah Cordelia, good evening.” Stahl said, walking towards their table. He nodded to the other women with her. “Ladies.”

“Hi Stahl,” Sorano greeted, with the others waving at him.

Stahl cut a handsome figure in his suit. Not as high quality as what the nobles were wearing, but it fit him well. Despite Miriel calling him average, he certainly had a nice physique, which the knightesses could appreciate.

Still...

“Stahl, should you be walking around?” Cordelia asked in concern, standing up to check on him like the mother hen she was.

The cavalier scratched his head nervously and gave a chuckle. “Well, I’m much better thanks to the treatments, so Angela cleared me for the night. I think I can handle some dancing... if I had a partner, that is,” he hinted, which seemed to go over Cordelia’s head, making her sisters groan in frustration. “What do you say? Would you join me?”

That took Cordelia by surprise. Her eyes momentarily flickered towards Chrom, “I...”

“Would love to,” answered her battle sisters, pushing the redhead towards the cavalier’s arms, almost making her trip on her dress.

Cordelia whirled at them with wide eyes only to find them smiling in return.

“But if she doesn’t want to...” Anise said, giving the cavalier a sultry look. “I dare say you have three other beautiful, lonely girls that could keep you company tonight.”

Like cold water into a furnace, that feeling she thought she would get for Chrom came in full force at the comment. It didn’t help that Sorano winked at him and Elsa gave him a once over, making him blush.

“Sure, Stahl,” Cordelia said, her tone a little more possessive than expected, making her question where that feeling came from. Taking his hand and earning an eager smile from the man, she replied, “I would love to dance with you tonight.”

Her sisters grinned, with Cordelia unaware this was their intention the whole time. “Now shoo! Enjoy the night!”

As the pair walked away from the table, Cordelia could have sworn they were muttering something
that sounded like, “Finally, some progress… make your bets on who makes the first move…”

“Hey, if you would prefer to sit this one out, I’m not offended,” Stahl said, noticing her trepidation.

Cordelia quickly shook her head. “No no, it’s just–”

“You wanted to dance with Chrom.”

Her eyes widened. “I-!” He knew, of course he did. He and Sumia are her oldest friends, so it’s no surprise they had noticed. “Am I really that transparent?”

“Well, I dare say the old man is pretty dense to not notice,” Stahl commented, putting his hand on her waist as they started to dance.

“Stahl!” Cordelia said, slapping his arm, but still laughing. “He’s barely older than us.”

“I’m just saying. Having a beautiful girl, head over heels for you and not noticing can make an average guy like me feel pretty jealous,” he commented, taking slow steps in synch with her, just like they used to do when they were little.

“Oh stop! If you continue talking like that, I might think you have fallen for me,” she jested.

Her heart beat a little faster when Stahl has her a small smile, his cheeks rosy. “Heh… Funny you say that…”

It was fun for a certain Fellblood to see the Shepherds mingle and relax. It also verified Rose’s questions on who would end up with who. Despite not getting involved much with this version of her comrades, the tactician couldn’t help the curiosity.

She was always a bit of a matchmaker when she was the tactician of the Shepherds, placing potential couples together in the battlefield.

Call it a guilty pleasure.

Rose watched with a forlorn smile as the couples she remembered started forming in this mirrored world.

Nowi pulling Donnel into the dance floor as the young farm boy tried to keep up with the excited manakete.

Lissa and Henry laughing as they talked and danced, much to the chagrin of some nobles.

Not Maribelle, though. She was too busy dancing with an awkward Ricken, who looked adorable in his little tuxedo.

Slowly dancing on their own corner, the socially awkward dorks Lon’qu and Olivia remained in an embrace, letting the music wash over them.

Libra conversing with a reluctant Tharja, who kept stealing glances at Robin and glaring at the manakete.

Anna and Gregor laughing as they drank together in one of the tables near the Feroxi.

Frederick taking Miriel’s hand and guiding her to the dance floor.
Vaike and Panne talking outside, away from the prissy nobles.

Sully standing alone, meaning she was talking with Kellam most likely.

Gaius supporting Sumia as she slowly danced with a small smile on her face.

Cordelia smiling as she danced with Stahl, maybe finally realizing her feelings.

Virion was sweet talking some vapid noble girls that were falling for his antics, though it's not a surprise since Cherche was not around to steal his attention.

Basilio and Flavia drank together, scaring the softer nobles away from the Feroxi rulers.

Only Priam and Say'ri were missing, but well… it was still a long time to see if it was the same for them.

But for now, everything seemed to be the same as in her timeline.

Rose took a sip of her wine as she watched Robin and Tiki dance with smiles on their faces, enjoying each other's company.

At least some teasing material came out of this.

“Shouldn’t you be enjoying the celebrations, Lady Rose?”

Turning to see the Exalt and her guard, Rose smiled pleasantly. “Ah, Your Grace,” she said, making sure to use the formal title in case someone was listening. “It’s fine for now. Is it time for me to trade roles with Phila?”

Emmeryn shook her head, smile still in place. “Oh, do not worry too much. In fact, I was about to tell Phila to rest and enjoy the festivities.”

Startled, the Pegasus Commander turned to her queen. “But Your Gr–”

“Now, now, Phila,” the Exalt said, waving off her retort. “I understand your concern but we are in the same room, there is no need to worry so much. We are surrounded by soldiers and we are meant to celebrate. You have been so stressed these past weeks, so please take a moment to relax.”

A myriad of emotions passed through Phila’s face before she relented in defeat. “I… very well. I will try to relax,” she said, as if the words were foreign to her.

“Here, you look like you need it,” Rose said, offering her a glass of wine.

Phila took it and sighed, “Thank you.”

“See? Was it so bad?” Emmeryn said with that serene smile of hers.

Phila just grumbled something earning a giggle from her queen.

“Ah Lady Emmeryn, I finally see you.”

The trio looked to see a handsome, auburn-haired man in his late twenties and Rose would have to be blind to miss the way Emmeryn’s face lit up at this his arrival. “Aedan! It is such a relief to see well!”

“I should be the one saying those words, your Grace. After all, you are the one that almost got
executed,” Aedan said bowing and placing a kiss on the Exalt’s hand. He then turned towards Phila and Rose.

“Commander Phila! It’s good to see you as well.”

“Aedan,” Phila greeted with a nod.

Noticing Rose, Aedan moved and offered his hand to the tactician. “Oh, pardon my manners milady, but I haven’t had the pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am Aedan Amell, a sorcerer in the employment of the crown.”

That’s a new name. She couldn’t say she ever met him in her past lives. “I’m Rose Sustrai, the pleasure is mine,” the mercenary said, shaking his hand with a smile.

His eyes widened in recognition. “Ah! I’ve heard of you! You not only saved Ylisstol but also the life of Lady Emmeryn! We owe you a great debt,” the sorcerer said with something shining in his eyes.

Gaining a rosy tint on her cheeks, Rose brushed off the praise. “Well, the former was a collective effort, while the latter was Sir Robin’s plan. I just played my ro–”

“I also heard you have been tutoring Sir Robin in ice magic! That’s one of the rarest examples of elemental magic in the continent!”

“Well, I wouldn’t go s–”

“And that spell you used against the Plegian Army!” the sorcerer cut her off again. “That was Valflame, no? Oh, we need to share notes!”

“Uhhh...”

Emmeryn giggled at the antics. “As excitable as always,” she said, shaking her head fondly. “Aedan is an old friend of mine. We studied magic and history together at under his father.” The Exalt then turned to the man, “How is your father doing? I heard he injured during the siege.”

The sorcerer sighed and smiled. “You know my father, he is too stubborn to die. He is more angry that he can’t get back to his research than being injured. I think it's time for him to retire as head of the Arcanum, though.”

“I could try to convince him, but we both know it would require me to use the Feroxi troops to pry him from his desk,” Emmeryn said, covering a giggle with her hand.

While the old friends laughed together, Rose turned to Phila with a raised eyebrow. The knight just shrugged, taking another sip of her wine.

“Ah, Your Grace. Would it be bold of me to ask you for a dance?”

Rose was surprised with the genuine smile on Emmeryn’s face as she took Aedan’s hand. “I would be delighted. If you excuse me, Phila. Rose.”

As the pair departed into the dance floor, Rose turned towards Phila, “…Are they?”

“It’s nothing official,” Phila said, refilling her wine. “Honestly, they have been… crushing on each other, for the lack of a better term, since their teen years. Only their duties have prevented them from anything formal. But I think that after her brush with death, Emmeryn might be willing to take the
first step,” she commented, knowing no nobles were around the pair to eavesdrop. Phila smiled softly as she watched Emmeryn dance with the sorcerer. “About time I say. She deserves such happiness after all she has done for this country.”

Oh.

OH!

This is new.

She never met the man in her previous lives, but if he died during the Siege of Ylissstol it made sense it never came to light after Emmeryn’s passing.

A sigh brought Rose back to the present.

“Excuse me. It seems I need to stop Lena from flirting with that poor waitress and embarrassing the entire Pegasus Knights,”

“Is that so bad?”

“It wouldn’t if I didn’t know for a fact that she is trying to invite her for a threesome with her girlfriend,” Phila stated, pinching the bridge of her nose. “She always does that...”

“Ah...”

“Indeed...” With that, Phila departed, leaving Rose alone with her thoughts.

It was the third time she assisted this event, the first time she didn’t assist as Chrom’s date, though. Even in her last life they were still in good enough terms to come together, despite Lucina’s early warnings against a traitor.

“Are you not going to dance tonight, Rose.”

Of course.

Turning around, she greeted the blue haired prince that moved to her side. “I could ask you the same thing. Are there not plenty of maidens willing to take your hand tonight?”

Chrom flinched. “Well, yes, but they tend to be a little… touchy.”

Rose response was something between a snort and a scoff. “I wonder why would some young girl try to get touchy with the Prince of the Halidom during such a gala.”

“I’m not that dense, Rose,” Chrom said with a sigh. “I understand the perils of my position, as Robin saw fit to remind me. I do think some of them are genuinely friendly without any hidden intentions.”

‘Fat chance of that.’

“Still, are you not going to at least dance once tonight?” he asked.

“Kinda hard without a partner and I don’t see any man here running to invite the strange Plegian mercenary to the dance floor,” she snarked back.

“Ah, that won’t do.”

“Hmm?” she asked, turning to see him and have a surge of painful memories pierce her heart.
“Milady, would you do me the honor to take this dance?” Chrom said with an exaggerated bow, earning looks from the nobles around him.

Those were the same words he uttered two lifetimes ago when they celebrated this same victory before their marriage.

“Tsk, really?” she said with a raised eyebrow, her tone level to hide her inner turmoil.

“Of course! After all, I owe you plenty. I figure this is the least I could do,” he said, hand still extended.

“Such a reward,” she snarked, earning a smile from the prince.

Maybe it was the wine and loneliness talking, or maybe it was just the desire to lost herself in her memories that pushed Rose’s decision.

“I…suppose,” Rose said in defeat, downing the last of her wine. Taking his hand, she gave him a wry smile, “Oh alright, just don’t step on my toes.”

Chrom returned the smile, “Even if I could, I would never dream of hurting you.”

It was surprising how well Rose matched his steps.

Every twirl and step he took, she matched with expert ease, almost as if she had danced with him countless times before. It was a strange, but not unwelcome, experience to have such a dance partner. Dancing was never his strong suit, but Chrom couldn’t deny his enjoyment at having a partner that just clicked with him.

“You’re pretty good at this type of dance,” the prince commented.

Rose hummed in response. “I have experience,” she admitted. “My... late husband and I used to dance a lot. You’re surprisingly a lot like him. This is... nostalgic,” she said with a longing tone.

Curious but not willing to ruin the night with bad memories, Chrom quickly changed the subject. “I feel the need to thank you again.”

“What for?” the Plegian asked, tilting her head slightly in confusion.

“For joining us in Ferox. For helping Robin more than I ever could. For protecting Ylisstol when I couldn’t. For saving Emmeryn,” Chrom said, listing her contributions. “I can easily say, losing to you on Ferox was one of the best things to have happened to me. I don’t want to imagine how things would’ve turned out had you not been here to offer your support.”

“I’m just glad you will never have to know. I have no doubt you would have succeeded, but maybe the price would’ve been much higher.”

“Of that, I have no doubt,” he admitted. As they slowed their steps as the song neared its end, he looked at her directly, attempting to convey his sincerity. “You and Robin... Without you two, I don’t think I would’ve made it this far. I can honestly say I’m honored to call you a friend.”

A conflicted expression crossed her face for a split second before she responded. “I... Thank you, Prince. I think I can consider you a friend too,” Rose said, giving him a curtsy. “And thank you for the dance, Chrom,” she added with a genuine smile that made him feel proud. “I think that’s enough, least the nobles start spreading rumors.”
The prince chuckled and smiled bashfully. “I understand and it was my pleasure.”

Robin decided to end the night with a walk through the Royal Gardens, which Tiki knew was Rose’s idea. Probably from one of those trashy romance novels she denied reading. Still, it was a nice gesture. The gardens were magnificent, with flora from all around the Halidom, expertly tended and untouched by the war. It was a relaxing sight, especially under the shining full moon and enchanted torches illuminating their path.

The Voice saw other couples walking around, both nobles and commoners enjoying the sights. The gardens were open to the public as part of the celebration, though only those that wanted privacy came all the way to the castle. Most were enjoying the celebrations either in the ballroom or the city proper.

Sadly, they were a bitter reminder of things she could never have. The curse of being not only long lived but also a religious figure meant Tiki was destined to a life lacking any sort of romantic partnership.

Not wanting to let that bitter reminder, she focused on her ‘date’. She could still enjoy such events, rare as they were.

“Thank you for your companionship tonight, Robin,” Tiki said sitting on one of the stone benches under a beautiful tree with golden leaves. “I know Rose kind of pushed this on you, but I enjoyed this evening.”

“As did I milady,” Robin said, taking her hand and placing a theatrically chaste kiss on it, eliciting a beautiful laugh from the green haired woman. “In truth, I’m the one that has to thank you. I have to admit I was panicking at the idea of finding a date that wouldn’t cause a scandal… or that I wouldn’t freeze at asking one out,” he admitted, earning another giggle from her. “I have to thank Rose for convincing such a beautiful woman to agree to be the date of a simple man such as I.”

“Quite the charmer, and a humble one at that,” Tiki said, smiling at the blushing tactician. It seemed despite the little night out Rose arranged for him, he was still self-conscious. “It’s the first time in a long time that I had the chance to enjoy myself in the company of a gentleman.”

“Surely that can’t be the case,” Robin said, blinking in surprise. “Excuse me if I overstep myself, but I would imagine a lady such as yourself would have no shortage of suitors.”

Oh, if only he knew. Tiki had to admit it would be fun to imagine his face when he inevitably learns of her true identity in the future.

“You’d be surprised. Many consider me unapproachable. I haven’t had a date in…” Tiki started, only to frown. “Well ever, now that I think about it.” It sounded worse when she said it out loud.

Robin shook his head. “I can’t believe it… Any man would be lucky to have you at his side. Smart, funny, and if I may be so bold, beautiful.”

Tiki blushed. It wasn’t the first time a man had complimented her but the few pilgrims brave enough to do so were always doing so out of self-interest or simple politeness.

“Beautiful, huh?” she teased. It was fun to behave like a normal person, not bound by her semi divine status.

It was clear she cornered him with her little jab, “If I'm lying may Naga strike me down.”
Sending a quick prayer to her mother not to do such a thing, Tiki smiled, “Thank you for the compliment, Robin.”

The pair sat under the tree for a while, talking about any topic that came up and enjoying each other’s company. It was a nice change of pace for the manakete. She could hardly believe that such a nice man could carry the heart of such a vile creature. The more she talked to him, the more she felt personally invested in saving him from his destiny. He might be Grima’s avatar, but Robin himself was a good man. Smart and a bit socially awkward, but good.

And not a bad looking one.

Soon enough, the castle’s bell rang, indicating that the event was over and soon it would time for the guests to depart.

“It seems our time together it’s at its end,” Robin noted with a disappointed smile. “You’re staying with Rose, right? Allow me to walk you home,” he offered.

“Do not worry, I will be leaving with Rose to go back home together. The Exalt arranged for a carriage for us as a thank you for her assistance.”

“I see. Well, then. Thank you for putting up with me tonight.”

Feeling bold, maybe due to Rose’s bad influence, Tiki leaned in and gave Robin a kiss on the cheek as a sign of gratitude. Her lips barely touched the edges of his, but she could still feel his body heat rising. “Thank you for making this night one to remember, Robin. I shall see you later,” she said, departing with a slight pink tint on her cheeks.

Taking a glance back as his silly smiling face, she couldn’t help to give one last giggle.

She was allowed some fun every century or so.

Wisps of aether magic danced across Morrigan’s hands, answering to her whims. The girl directed the power into one of the Einherjar cards that she specially selected. She knew this had the risk of enraging her father but she needed to do this.

It had been so long…

Morrigan breathed life into the specter, summoning the echo of a woman, who started to form.

The young mage watched with trepidation as her spell weaved itself into success, then she pulled off her hood.

Revealing green hair and pointy ears.

Just like her mother’s.

Morrigan locked eyes with the spectral visage of the Voice of Naga. The Einherjar of Tiki stood in front of the young girl, looking at her like a stranger with glassy eyes. No surprise there, for the spell was still incomplete and this version of Tiki didn’t have memories of her daughter in any case.

That didn’t stop Morrigan from wrapping her arms around the specter, imagining the familiar warmth missing from the ghost’s cold skin. She loved her father, even if he had become colder since her passing, but there was not replacing the loving embrace of her mother.

The Einherjar didn’t reciprocate.
Dropping into his chair, Robin relaxed with a smile on his face. Last night had been exhausting but more enjoyable than he could’ve imagined. Lily was delightful company, easily keeping up with him during their conversations. Like she had decades or centuries of knowledge locked away in her mind. A smart, beautiful woman that made this a night to remember. Touching his cheek, he knew he wouldn’t mind seeing her again.

He really needed to make it up to Rose for getting her to agree to be his date.

Looking at his messy desk, Robin took Rose’s note with tips for his date. It was surprisingly helpful and he had to laugh. She really looked out for him. Almost made him feel like a puppy.

With a chuckle, he placed it on his desk next to Marth’s notes about the future. He really needed to figure how they could possibly have gotten that information. To be able to gain the knowledge of the future would help tremendously on future conflicts.

It was then that something caught his eye. Taking Marth’s note he narrowed his eyes and scrutinized it. Eyes widening, he pulled out many notes he had lying around to compare it. It could be a coincidence, but the more he checked the more things looked connected. After nearly an hour of running through all the scenarios and possibilities, Robin had enough. His good mood gone, he took the notes and rushed out the door.

He needed answers.

Rose was in good spirits, enjoying a cup of tea in the new office Emmeryn had assigned to her. A smile stole its way into her face as she thought about the ball and losing herself in the old good memories she still retained. Dancing with Chrom had been conflicting, but...nice. It was nice to remember the good times even though Rose knew there was no going back to how things were. Not only was this a different timeline, but she had changed too much.

She was risking too much already, anyway. But she could afford a new friendship.

‘*Heh, so much for not getting too involved with them,*’ Rose thought ruefully, thinking back at her original plans.

Maybe this was how every Lucina felt when they had to focus on their mission.

They were no different, it seemed. Maybe she could make peace with this Lucina, for she had not done anything to her. And she *had* been kind of a bitch to the girl…

Those were thoughts for another time. Right now, she had to plenty of information on Valm to check on while thinking on ways to tease Tiki and her brother about their date. She wanted the juicy details and while the manakete kept her lips sealed, her satisfied smile spoke volumes.

Her thoughts were interrupted when Robin burst into the room, nearly knocking her cup of tea on the floor.

“Robin, what the f–”

He pointed at the piece of paper.

One that she recognized.

“You wrote this, not Marth,” he accused, his tone sharp as a steel blade. “The handwriting matches yours perfectly, down to how you dotted the ’i’ and curve the ’s’. Don’t deny it. I checked with all
your notes multiple times and they match. The probability of it being identical is too low, not to mention it fits your strange suggestions perfectly.” His eyes narrowed. “Now, tell me the truth. How did you know this? Why say it was from Marth? Why lie? Who are you? ”

Rose blinked.

‘Well, shit.’

Chapter End Notes

Does Phila count as a retainer? I mean, she is the leader of the Pegasus Knights but she also takes care of Emmeryn in this. Frederick is for Chrom and Lissa, obviously. I thought for awhile about who to pair Emmeryn with and honestly, I couldn’t see her with a Shepherd without forcing it.

Then it occurred me that why not an OC? Plenty died during the war so he might have died in the past and with Rose saving Ylisstol she spared his life, and now with Emmeryn alive, they can finally pursue their relationship after such close encounters with death. Just because Emmeryn doesn’t have many friends, doesn’t mean she doesn’t have any. Or if they had a secret relationship and all those that knew died the Chrom and Lissa never found out.

I also figured that despite being “medieval” it’s been long enough in the timeline for same sex relations to be common, with only nobles having issues with it as it might affect their bloodlines.

And so, most of the pairings are revealed. At least for the first gen. Most, since there are still a few twists and turns left for the characters.

Thanks to Victory3114, Shipping Rates Apply and Xbro Kong for checking my atrocious grammar.
This was not supposed to happen, but looking back it was a stupid oversight on her part to not plan for this.

‘Naga’s tits, why does he have to be so smart?’ Rose was mentally kicking herself.

It was no excuse, though. She had planned contingencies for many possibilities. Not everything, as even with her knowledge Rose couldn’t predict how her changes would affect the timeline or how different this Grima was when compared to her own. She shouldn’t have been complacent after he accepted her lie in Ferox and think he wouldn’t put things together. The longer they interacted the more little things slipped through the cracks, so it’s no surprise he figured it out.

Rose would’ve preferred to keep their bond hidden for a while longer, at least until things calmed down, but her hand was forced by her brother of all people. She could try to play dumb, but the surprise was clear on her face and Robin had already noticed.

“Well?” her brother asked, annoyed at her silence.

“It’s complicated.” What else could she say?

Robin scoffed, not that she blamed him for not accepting the vague answer. “Isn’t it always with you?”

He had her there. “…You have no idea.”

The two Fellbloods stood at an impasse.

Rose was unwilling to talk.

Robin was unwilling to relent.

“Look,” Robin finally said, trying to reason with her. “I know that you don’t have bad intentions, but this is important. Tell me why I shouldn’t tell this information to Chrom and Emmeryn?”

“Lady Emmeryn knows.”

That information threw her brother off balance, giving her a few extra seconds to think. “…she does?”

“So does Commander Phila.” Rose shrugged; there was no point in hiding that bit of info anymore, lest it comes back and bites her in the ass. “They know. We don’t share this information with others, but you can ask Emmeryn to verify that I’m telling the truth. I… I want to tell you more but now is not the right time.”

“What do you mean?”

“I suppose I could tell you that I get my information from the same place as Marth, but I don’t have any concrete evidence to prove it to you right now,” she said. Despite everything, explaining the whole time traveling mess was not something she could afford to do right now.
Her brother crossed his arms, not amused by her vagueness. “You still haven’t told me anything of substance. How am I supposed to trust you?”

Rose bit her lip. She still had a card she could afford to play, but she didn’t want to use it so early. Then again, the universe wasn’t going to make things easy for her.

She took a deep breath and a risk, something she was getting more used to do as of late.

“I… ok, I’d lied in Ferox when I said that I didn’t know anything about you.”

Robin tensed and clenched his jaw. “So, we have met before?” he asked, his voice devoid of emotion. She couldn’t blame him. He must have felt that she had betrayed his trust.

Didn’t that make her feel like a hypocrite. She shook her head. “No. We’ve never talked or met face-to-face before that day.”

Robin’s expression made it clear that the statement confused him, forcing Rose to expand on her answer.

“Damn,” she cursed under her breath. Well, might as well get this over with. Honesty and all that. “Look, it’s a long and complicated story but… The reason we are so similar and why I joined the Shepherds is that… I’m your sister, of a sort, and I have been looking out for you for the past two years.”

This had been a part of her long-term plan that Rose wasn’t looking forward to. She was aware that eventually Robin’s link to Grima was going to be revealed eventually, but she wasn’t planning on revealing to Robin their true relationship until after everything was said and done and she could disappear. A scummy move, but her mission was to protect him.

So much for that.

Taking in his shocked silence, she tried to play it off. “It’s kinda obvious when you think about it. I’m actually surprised you bought my lie for so long.”

Robin sat down on the couch of her office, looking at the ceiling with a frown on his face.

Taking his silence as a cue to continue, Rose did so. “You wouldn't have recognized me though. We didn’t grow up together, but I knew of your existence, though not your location.” A slight lie, but it made selling the narrative easier. “I mentioned it before but my life before this was… complicated. I was granted a second chance, so to speak, and was informed that I could protect a sibling I never met. Learning about you from the shadows, I couldn’t help but feel protective of you. For the past two years I’ve looked over you from afar. I… I can’t tell you who gave me that information. At least not yet, but please know that everything I’ve done has been out of love.”

A myriad of emotions flashed through his face, settling into a snarl. “You… All this time you knew about my past, and you said nothing to me!?” He was angry and confused, letting his emotions take the best of him. “Was all this some sort of game to you?!”

Rage suddenly blazed up in Rose’s heart as her emotions got the best of her too. She had never been as angry with her brother as she was at that moment. “Don’t you dare!” she shouted, slamming her hands on the table. “Everything I have done is for your own good!”

“And who are you to decide that?!” Robin pushed back. “You have no right to keep this from me!”

“I thought it was for the best! You needed to focus on the war and I couldn’t risk you leaving the
Shepherds to search for your past!” Even to her, that excuse felt weak. In truth, she was just afraid of what would happen if he were to step out of the Shepherd’s protection and never form bonds with them. “I didn’t plan on staying with the Shepherds at first, so I couldn’t take over for you.” Which sounded even worse, but she was grasping at straws here. “I know it wasn’t a perfect plan, but I was limited on what I could do!”

“Then tell me! The war is over! I have the right to know!”

“You–!”

“What is all this commotion?” a new voice rang through the room.

Rose gritted her teeth. This day just keeps getting better and better.

Turning to the door, she saw Chrom standing there, arms crossed with a frown on his face.

“Nothing serious. Just a private disagreement,” Rose said with a brittle smile that clearly stated it wasn’t Chrom’s business.

‘Nothing serious’...Right,” Robin said followed by a short, hollow laugh. “I need to clear my head. If you want something, ask my sister here,” he said, slamming the door behind him.

“Sister?” Chrom asked in bewilderment.

Rose sighed in defeat. So much for a quiet morning.

“You screwed up,” Tiki said bluntly, sipping on her tea.

“Look, I need to do something to prove that I’m on his side in this!” the tactician said, slumping in her seat.

Tiki pondered the situation for a couple of minutes. “There is one thing you can do.”

Rose perked up at that.

“What do you mean?”

“Well...” Tiki then began to explain her plan, which got

“No.” Rose said, grimacing at the suggestion. They had talked about this before, but doing that was not something she was looking forward to.

“Why not?” Tiki said, clearly not surprised by the response.

“I–! Well…! Because–!”

“As eloquent as your response is, you can’t keep postponing this,” the manakete said.

“I... I’m not sure I’m ready for that. I have no idea what to do if we do that!”

The manakete rolled her eyes in exasperation. “You had years to prepare for it. You knew this was coming. But in this case, you don’t have to do anything. Just let him take the lead. You can’t direct his entire life.”
Rose knew Tiki was right. At this point, this was the best course of action to take. It was also not fair to Robin to keep postponing it.

She didn’t have to like it, though. The mercenary slammed her head on the table in defeat.

“Stop doing that! I had to polish it to remove the scratches from last time!”

Robin had been acting strangely all week, constantly tense and angry. However, he didn’t take it out on anyone. Others had noticed, but none more so than Tharja.

After observing his interactions with other people— which did not count as stalking— she could easily pinpoint the reason for his change in demeanor.

Rose.

That was a strange realization that picked the sorceress’s curiosity. Normally, those two got along better than anyone else, so it was bewildering that they were having some sort of fight. And yet, Robin was clearly doing all he could to avoid her.

Then Chrom had let it slip that they were siblings. While that had earned him the ire of the mercenary, it also helped explained Robin’s emotional state.

It hadn’t been that big of a surprise to anyone other than the prince, though. Everyone had noticed the similarities between the two, especially after Rose’s face had been revealed to everyone after the Exalt’s rescue. Both were Plegians with white hair and purple eyes. Facial structure, mannerism, and assortment of minor details betrayed her. Despite Rose’s denial of any relationship with Robin, everyone that saw them interacting together could see there was more than a casual interest in the woman’s part. The Shepherds had been either too polite to push the subject or too afraid to ask.

It was not strange that people had accepted her denials for so long, though. The pair may have looked similar but their personalities were too different. Robin had been friendly with everyone, even those that had suspicions about them, while Rose had always seemed to hold a sort of dubious hostility when she interacted with the Shepherds, though she had softened to some.

There was also the matter of their aura. Being proficient in the dark arts had made Tharja capable of feeling the auras of others. Amongst the Shepherds, none were more curious than that of the tacticians.

The darkness that she had felt from Robin was enticing, like a flame in the middle of a cold night.

Rose, though, had a different aura. She had felt conflicted and cold, only ever warming up to her fellow tactician.

Tharja wanted to know more about them but asking would never work, though. Good for her that she had other methods and, on a whim, Tharja decided to start with Rose.

Gathering the materials needed for the spell had been a trivial matter. Grinding the bones of a dead crow with the newt eyes the farmboy gathered and the toenails of the dragon girl had taken the better part of her afternoon, but Tharja didn’t mind. A long strand of white hair she had managed to gather from the mess hall was added to the mix to complete the spell.

With a small explosion of smoke, the spell took hold and Tharja’s mind felt the aether take her as she
connected with the mercenary. She started thinking about what she could find in such enticing vault, thrilled to unravel her secrets.

The sorceress’s curiosity was soon snuffed out, however, as her astral body froze in terror.

Before her stood a gargantuan entity with long, leathery wings covering the skies of her mind. Tharja’s soul knew who it was that stood before her. Any Plegian could recognize the visage of their patron deity.

The Fell Dragon, Grima.

Fear rushed through her veins like cursed icy water. She tried to speak—plead—to the entity before her but she couldn’t move as the glowing red eyes

The dragon roared. It was an ancient and powerful sound that vibrated through the world.

A set of images rushed into her mind. Knowledge she couldn’t understand filled her brain. The world burning as undead ravaged the land. The Shepherds falling one by one, as did all the others that took a stand.

Pain. Fear. Anger. Betrayal. All these feelings were given shape inside her soul as Tharja understood who she has been dealing with.

Robin. Rose. Grima. One and the same, yet so different.

Grima roared again and reality reformed around her.

Tharja laid catatonic on the floor of her room, drenched in cold sweat. A pool of urine had formed under her as the nightmarish images flowed into her mind. Her mouth remained frozen in a silent scream, with drool dripping out. She didn’t know how long she laid there until the door of her room opened and closed, followed by the sound of heeled boots closing in.

“Scary in there, isn’t it?”

The voice was calm, almost teasing, but carried an edge.

Rose kneeled before her tilting her head as she inspected the fallen woman. “You won’t be doing that again, right?”

Tharja weakly shook her head, tears flowing from her eyes. She’s scared. Screw her pride, she’s terrified of the being before her.

“R-Robin...Y-You...G-Grima...”

“Ah, so you got that much,” the tactician said, nodding to herself. “Sorry you had to do that, but you caught me in a foul mood. Then again, this was your fault. You shouldn’t go poking around inside other people’s heads,” Rose chastised her. “Now, while I can assure you I don’t have anything but the best intentions for you and the Shepherds, I can’t let you keep that knowledge. Too valuable, you understand.”

The white-haired woman raised her hand, and Tharja could see the tattoo of a serpentine dragon biting its own tail.
“Don’t worry, I get the feeling you will all know the truth eventually. But until then….”

Her muscles didn’t respond to her desires to run away, not wanted.

“Forget.”

Darkness embraced her.

“Well, that deals with that issue,” Rose said, closing the door behind her. It didn’t take much to erase Tharja’s memories of the past hour, especially since she had already linked her minds. Sadly for her, while damaged, Rose’s mind was much more powerful than the sorceress’s.

She also has been in a horrible mood after the whole mess with Robin.

It did give her the opportunity to rearrange some things in there, though. Hopefully the tweaks she made in there will reduce her creepy stalking nature.

It was not healthy for the girl, even if her intentions were… noble would be an exaggeration.

Then again, messing with her brain probably wasn’t either.

Food for thought.

Her brother better thank her for this.

Still, while Tharja provided with a small distraction, Rose still had to deal with her brother.

“Robin.”

The tactician ignored the voice of his sister, which was still a strange way to think about Rose. Sure, she had said she considered him a little brother, but to realize that was actually the case just made Robin feel betrayed and confused.

“Look, I know you are still pissed at me for not telling you everything but I did it for your own good.”

“I wouldn’t have abandoned the Shepherds,” he said simply, walking towards the door that separated them and leaning against it. “I would have seen the war to the end.”

“And I should’ve known that. It was a mistake on my part,” she admitted and Robin could hear the sincerity in her voice. “I… I wasn’t sure on how to deal with this, so maybe this wasn’t the best course of action to take.”

Robin wanted to snort but stopped himself.

“…I can offer you the answers you want,” Rose said, catching his attention. “Take two weeks off. I’m going to take you on a trip. There, you will get your answers.”

“Why not just tell me?” he asked, not amused at her game.
“I’m not sure you would believe me without proof at this point.”

He couldn’t deny that. “And I suppose you won’t tell me more before we leave,” he said, not really asking.

He could easily picture Rose’s small, strained smile from the tone of her voice. “At this point, what’s one more surprise? Please… Despite my silence, I haven’t led you astray so far. I’m just asking for your trust one more time.”

“…Let me think about it.”

“That’s all I ask.”

After she left, Robin spent the entire afternoon in his office, mulling over his choices. He was still having a hard time thinking of Rose as his sister, even though she had already been acting as such since she took him under her wing. Maybe he was being unfair, seeing as she had done nothing but help him during the war, but to think she had been hiding such information made him feel toyed with.

A knock on the door caught his attention. “Who is it?” he asked, still thinking about his choice.

“It’s Emmeryn, Sir Robin. May I come in?”

Robin bolted out of his chair and quickly opened the door to let Lady Emmeryn inside his office. “Your Grace! Excuse the mess, I wasn’t expecting any visitors.”

Emmeryn laughed lightly at his flustered reaction. “Now, now Sir Robin. You relax your tone around my siblings, but not for me? I do not think of myself as an intimidating woman,” she said, offering him a motherly smile.

“Yes, of course. My apologies, it’s just that so far our interactions have been mostly formal, so I have a hard time adopting the same tone as I do with Chrom and I don’t want to offend,” Robin motioned for her to sit on the chair across his desk, “Please, take a seat.”

“Thank you and I understand. But I want us to talk normally, as I have something I want to discuss with you and I think you already know what that is.”

Robin sighed. He should’ve expected something like this, though not from the Exalt herself. She was more like Chrom that she first appeared to be. “I suppose you mean my… sister?”

The Exalt nodded. “Indeed. Now, pardon if I am stepping into a private matter, but I wanted to offer some perspective.”

The tactician blinked in confusion at that. “Perspective?”

“The perspective of an older sister,” she said, smiling. “Now, I understand you resent the fact she hid this from you. But believe me when I say she did not do it out of malice. Even I have secrets I do not tell Chrom and Lissa, some even for their own good. Sincerity is the best policy but sometimes… Sometimes you have to keep silent.”

“She said you and Phila know more of her situation,” he said, keeping his voice respectively even. “Were you… Were you aware of our relationship?”

Emmeryn nodded. “Yes, and my apologies for not telling you sooner, but I didn’t feel it was my place to intervene,” she said, releasing a breath. “Rose is a woman damaged by tragedy-- a shattered
reflection of who she once was. With what has happened to her in the past, I understood why she will keep making secrets to protect those she cares for. One cannot blame a broken vase for being broken, Sir Robin. I know she made a mistake, and her approach was something I do not agree with, and excuse me if this sounds a little insensitive, but no one was really hurt because of it. You’re alive and she did plan on telling you the truth in time. It’s just that she thought she was doing it the right way.”

“...She did mention that past friends betrayed her during our sessions, which would explain her trust issues. She never gave me the impression that she hid this out of malice...” Robin thought for a moment and sighed in defeat, “I guess I let my emotions get the better of me.”

“It’s understandable given your situation. Give her a chance and you will not regret it. I am sure of that,” Emmeryn said, giving him that calming smile of hers.

Robin returned the smile. Emmeryn certainly lived up to her caring reputation. “Very well. I don’t think I can easily forgive her but I will listen to what she has to say.”

The Exalt clapped her hands, clearly pleased with the outcome. “Excellent! I will clear up your schedules so you can take time off. Do not worry about a thing and remember that whatever happens during this trip, you will always be welcome here.”

“That means a lot to me, Your Grace.”

“Lady Rose, if I may take a moment of your time?”

Rose stopped in her tracks and turned to look at the person that called her. She saw Virion walking towards her with an uncharacteristically serious expression on his face, which picked her interest. “Of course,” she said, motioning towards her office. Once inside, she motioned for him to sit down. “How can I help you Virion?”

“I felt it prudent to inform you that I will be departing towards Valm in the next few days. I have managed to secure assistance from Khan Flavia to send some troops to boost the defenses of Rosanne. It took a lot of convincing and a few promised but we reached an agreement.”

Rose had informed Flavia of the situation on Valm before, so she was glad the Khan had heeded her advice enough to listen to Virion. “That’s good to hear. I take it the dukedom remains free?”

The archer smiled and nodded. “Yes, my dear Cherche has done a magnificent job at keeping the city running,” he said with pride and longing in his voice. Rose hoped he would soon propose to Cherche. “Your suggestion has proven to be quite a morale booster.”

He, of course, was talking about something Rose suggested during their training sessions. Sending a letter to Rosanne to inform them that he had not run away, but had actually managed to gain troops from across that sea would not only help increase morale, but would also restore Virion’s reputation. It was a good thing he did secure Flavia’s assistance, or else she would’ve to intervene again. Hopefully that would help not only in making their allies stronger, but also weakening Valm further before Ylisse has to interfere.

“And have you contacted Chon’sin?”

Virion sighed. “I have, but they are stretched thin as it is. Communication is slow, too, even with Anna’s family working as intermediaries. And they are quite efficient at that.”
Rose frowned but nodded, understanding that the situation was delicate, even if her actions had helped weaken the empire. “I can help with that,” she said, reaching into her desk’s drawer and pulling an envelope. “Take this letter and go to the address written on the envelope. There is a warrior named Priam that owes me a favor.” More like she had him under threat after she kicked his ass. “Present this letter and he will fight for you along with his troops. They are only fifty men, but I dare say they are as strong as any Shepherd.”

Virion took the letter, looking at it for a few moments. Slowly. “This is too much, milady. You’ve have helped me a lot and yet I feel I could never repay you.

The mercenary waved him off. “Do not worry about that. It’s in everyone’s best interests Walhart doesn’t succeed. These troops will help you turn the tide of battle.”

“Even so, to lead them into battle… You have seen how I lead.”

“You learned from me and Robin, don’t pretend you didn’t. You are good tactician yourself and you care about your people. Just make sure not to lose sight of that.”

“Thank you,” he said, his voice solemn.

Rose was almost moved by the sincerity in his voice. It reminds her of her own archer, but that was not here nor there.

“You’re welcome.”

Virion stood and offered Rose her hand. “I will be leaving for Rosanne soon. I hope we see each other again, Lady Rose.”

Taking the hand and giving it a shake, Rose smirked. “Of that, I have no doubt. Best of luck to you.”

“So, family trip?”

Robin snorted but still smiled at his friend. “Apparently,” he said, fastening his bags to the horse he would be taking. Talking to Rose had been easy and she had everything ready for their trip. Apparently, she knew he would take her offer. “What will you be doing in the meantime, Chrom?”

“Phila suggested we run some training exercises to deal with the Abominations,” Chrom said, frowning at the thought. “We are hearing reports that some bandit mages have gotten their hands on a few of those boxes and are using them to cause chaos and then loot villages.”

Robin grimaced at the memories of the creatures. They had done a number on their troops and he could imagine the casualties small villages and outpost could suffer against even one of such creatures.

“That’s a good idea. I have notes on them on my bookshelf. The book with the red cover.”

“I will take a look at it later today. Might as well brush up on my strategic side. Gods know I need it,” Chrom said with a sigh.

The amnesiac patted him on the shoulder and gave him a small smile. “You will be fine. I will only be gone for two weeks at most. I think you will be fine without me planning your meals.”

Chrom snorted in good humor. “Now that I think about it, this will be the longest we have been
separated since we met,” he commented with a pensive look.

“Careful, Chrom. People will think we are married,” Robin jested.

“Man, that would be weird.”

The men laughed and shared a friendly hug.

“See ya soon, Robin.”

“Take care, Chrom.”

Saying their farewell, Robin mounted his horse and rode to the main gate where Rose was already waiting for him.

“Ready?” she asked.

Robin took a deep breath and nodded. “As I’ll ever be...”

From her balcony, Emmeryn sat and watched the Plegian siblings depart. She hoped Robin would listen to her advice. “You think they will be ok?” she asked her bodyguard.

“If I had to spend a week alone with her I would probably kill myself,” Phila said.

Emmeryn raised an eyebrow at that, but smiled nonetheless. “I think it's nice that you two are such good friends.”

Phila made a face at the implication.

“I rather not answer that, Your Grace. On more important matters, are you ready for the meeting next week.”

A sigh escaped the Exalt’s lips as she slumped slightly in her chair.

Watching the pair depart from a small cafe, a disguised Tiki hoped things worked out for them. While she didn’t completely agree with how Rose had handled things since she joined the Shepherds and deviated from the original plan, she thought things were working out well so far.

Still...

The Voice closed her eyes and contacted her mother. “Are you sure this is this is the right course of action?”

“I believe this will make things easier for the Fellblood, my child. We should strive to take some burden off her shoulders.”

Tiki sighed, looking at her teacup. “I hope you are right...”
Robin was going insane.

They have been riding for a couple of days now, and the entire journey had been filled with a tense and awkward silence. They only talked when stopping to rest and eat, and he was starting to hate it. His anger at her had simmered down, but he felt annoyed that she still refused to tell him everything even now. Still, he decided to trust her, as long as the end of this trip he had the answers he wanted. And yet, despite the revelation of being siblings, Robin could feel a wall form between them. Every day she looked more anxious, which was strange all by itself. He wanted to fix this situation if just to have someone to talk to.

Turning towards his sister, he noticed she was frowning, deep in thought and that only raised his curiosity.

“Something wrong?” he asked, breaking the silence for the first time all day.

Slightly startled at his question, Rose quickly composed herself and pursed her lips. “I feel like I’m forgetting something. Like an important date or event…”

Lucina was taking in the sights of Ylisse and burning them into her mind. Ever since she arrived at this time it felt like it was moving from one event to the other at a frightening pace that she couldn’t get a moment of respite. That’s why she was taking this moment to enjoy the peace and beauty of the untainted halidom.

The sound of quick footsteps followed by something hitting the ground broke the spell of peace.

“Hey, Lucy!” Cynthia said, picking herself from the floor and dusting her clothes. “Something occurred to me.”

“Yes?” the princess asked motioning at her friend to sit at her side.

“Well I was thinking about our birthdays and doing some math in my head–Don’t laugh Severa!” she yelled towards the other side of the camp. “Anyways, if I remember correctly your parents’ wedding it’s in a few weeks, right?”

“Correct.”

“Soootooo shouldn’t they be announcing their wedding about now? I always wanted to see a royal wedding!” the pegasus rider said with stars in her eyes.

Lucina’s eyes widened. She ran the numbers in her mind and Cynthia was right. In fact, she remembered that the announcement was supposed to be done during the Victory Ball! But so far no news had caught their attention.

“Y-Yes… They should’ve…”

“My apologies for intruding, but I have a hypothesis on this that I’ve been meaning to discuss with you all.”

“Well, don’t keep us in suspense!” Cynthia said, motioning for him to continue.

“Quite. As you well know, many changes have occurred on the timeline. If I recall correctly, while Exalt Chrom did marrying out of love, the ceremony was rushed by the nobility to give the people
something to feel good about after the passing of Lady Emmeryn.”

“But Lady Emmeryn is aliv–!” Cynthia said, trailing off as she realized where this was going.

So did Lucina.

Emmeryn knew something like this was bound to happen sooner or later. Dealing with new trade routes, restoration efforts, and the formation of a defensive army were things she expected and was prepared to deal with.

But this was something she would rather avoid.

“Your Grace, please reconsider. A royal wedding would certainly be something the people would love to experience,” said one of the nobles she’s sure was about to offer his child on a silver platter. “There are plenty of young nobles that would make perfect spouses for your siblings. Why, my dear Rachel just turned...”

‘There it is.

Yes, she knew it only a matter of time before the concept of marriage reared its ugly head. She had been spared since there were no male nobles around her age, having either died young from famine or simply being already married. A flimsy excuse, as most nobles didn’t care for things like age gaps, but one that she exploited a much as possible.

That didn’t help her siblings though. There were plenty of options for those two to choose from, but they would be loveless marriages. She swore to spare her sibling the burden of the crown and by Naga she will also spare them the unhappiness of a political marriage.

“There is also the matter of continuing the Exalted bloodline. With the attempts to your life almost succeeding and you siblings continuing to take roles in the frontlines, there is a chance the Exalted line could die off. We need an heir to the throne to bring hope and stability to the halidom,” another duke added.

Even so, Emmeryn knew he had a point.

Still, she swore to herself to never place such burdens on Chrom and Lissa, and she’s not about to go back on her words.

“I don’t believe that is necessary. I have always maintained that my siblings should be allowed to marry only out of love. They have fought on the frontlines of this war to protect our people. I think they have earned that much.”

It pleased Emmeryn that so many of them had headed her words, though those that had children up for the taking looked discontent, but that’s a minor setback. She noticed that her siblings sighed in relief, but kept her attention on the gathered nobles.

“But there is merit to the idea,” she admitted, startling Chrom and Lissa. “I will need to discuss the idea with an acquaintance of mine first, but I think I can offer an alternative.”

What she learned from Rose and Tiki, especially considering her close brushes with death, has thought her life is too short to not enjoy it to the fullest. And if others could benefit from it, well, that’s good too.
Rose and Tiki had granted her this chance by saving her life and she’s going to waste it.

She needed to talk to Aedan.

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Rose shrugged. “Ehh, probably nothing important.”

“Huh,” was all Robin could say.

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Cynthia had always seen Lucina as a rock to hang on to in a raging river. An oasis in a storm that never seemed to end. Never losing her cool and ready to fight, even in the face of insurmountable odds.

Then again, Lucina had never faced an existential crisis at the possibility of collapsing a timeline and erasing her own birth.

"Breathe, Lucina! Breathe!" Cynthia shouted while holding down a panicking “Brady! Get your butt over here!”

“Hold yer horses, I’m comin’!” The rough-looking priest yelled, running as fast as he could. “Now, what got yer royal knickers in a twist!”

Lucina continued to hyperventilate.

Brady scratched his head as he looked at their leader. “Err, this is not something that can be fixed with a staff...”

“Gosh dang it Lucina! Get a hold of yourself!” the pegasus rider yelled, grabbing the princess’s shoulders to try and calm her down. “What do I do, Brady?!”

“I dunno, slap some sense into her or something,” he said, shrugging.

“Alright!”

Lucina finally stopped she Cynthia punched her in the jaw and knocking her out.

“Ok, that that you have calmed dow– “ Cynthia trailed off, noticing the unconscious royal in the floor.

“What in tarnation!? I told ya to slap her, not to punch her teeth out!”

“...Oh, right. Open palm, not closed fist. Forgot about that...” she muttered, face red as she ignored Severa’s laughs.

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The pair of tacticians arrived at their destination later in the afternoon, stopping only to rest their mounts and eat their lunch. The place had a quaint feel to it when compared to the capital city, but it remained beautiful and untouched by the war. Just like it had been all the times Rose had visited it in the past.
“Go,” Rose said, motioning to a house near a small farm down the path they were on. “You will find your answers in that house.”

Her brother looked at her with a questioning eyebrow. “You’re not coming? I don’t even know what’s down there.”

Rose remained silent for a short while. “It’s… It’s better if you do this alone. I will stay around here if you need me for anything. Just don’t mention me.”

Robin gave her a concerned look but didn’t press, respecting the offer of trust. He tied his horse to a tree near a small pond and started walking down the path towards the house. Rose then walked into the forest, arriving at a camp that had been set up outside of view. There were a few mercenaries resting there, who Rose had been happy to recognize.

“Halt! Who goes there?” a tall man with hair that looked like the mane of a lion.

“Calm down Rytlock, it's me.”

The man relaxed at the voice, recognizing her. “Well, would you look at that. The little flower came out all the way out here to check us?” Rytlock said, crossing his arms and resting against a tree. He waved off the rest of his team to get back into their seats. “I sent Popola the updates on the mission as per your contract.”

Rose shook her head. “I don’t doubt your professionalism. Some… unexpected circumstances forced me to move my timetable.”

“Huh, fair enough,” Rytlock said, not really interested. He did give her a measuring look. “Hmm…”

“Something the matter?” Rose asked, her hood hiding her raised eyebrow.

“Your tongue is looser than the last time I saw you.”

Rose sighed, closing her eyes and pinching the bridge of her nose. “Everyone says the same thing. The last few months have been eventful but that’s neither here nor there. Look, has anything happened in the past week and a half?”

Rytlock grunted and nodded. “Some bandits looking for an easy mark, though they were no challenge. But there were some suspicious Plegians lurking around. We took them out as per your request, though they were not some run of the mill thieves. These were professional assassins. Put up a half a decent fight,” he said as he narrowed his eyes at her. “Who exactly are we protecting, again?”

“If I give you this purse of gold, will you stop asking questions?” Rose said, pulling out said item from her bag.

Taking it, her fellow mercenary nodded. “And just like that, my curiosity is sated.

“Rytlock! Food is ready!” someone called from the bonfire.

“Calm your tits, Caithe! I’ll be right there!” he yelled back. Rylock then turned towards Rose with a friendlier expression, now that business has been concluded. “You wanna sit down with us? We got some extra food and I’m sure the others won’t mind the company.”

Rose shook her head, looking at the small farm with a longing expression. “Maybe some other time. I… I think I will want to watch for a little while and then take some time for myself.”
Rytlock nodded and didn’t press. “Suit yourself,” he said, leaving Rose to watch her brother with a conflicted expression.

The strange feeling of familiarity continued to envelop Robin. He shook his head and knocked on the door. It soon opened and his heart nearly stopped. If you looked at the woman without much scrutiny she could easily pass off as being in her early thirties, but looking at her up close Robin could tell she’s at least her late forties. Her white hair pulled into a braid while her pale skin had a slightly tan, most likely from working in the sun.

What struck Robin the most had to be that she looked a lot like an older Rose.

Her face lit up in recognition and Robin soon found himself enveloped by a tight hug. She’s strong, most likely from working the fields, but still held a soft warmth in them that made him feel safe and at home.

“Robin! Thank the gods you’re ok!” she said, her voice filled with concern.

The tactician stood frozen in her arms, despite the warm feelings rushing through him. The woman didn’t seem to notice, even as she pulled away to take a look at him.

“I have been so worried something happened to you since you left the farm. Then you just stop writing home and I have to hear from a wandering merchant that my son is now a war hero after slaying the Mad King?” Morgana scolded her son who stood dumbfounded in front of her.

Chapter End Notes

So big change there huh? A little wrench in the whole timeline thing. Fun times. I rarely see fic with Robin’s mom. I think only 2 or 3.

I finally published one of those one-shots I kept postponing. It’s called What she deserves https://archiveofourown.org/works/11957358. Check it out and give me your feedback. I always appreciate it.

Thanks to Victory3114, Shipping Rates Apply and Xbro Kong for checking my work, as always.
Robin felt a poke on his stomach, just like Rose had done on a few occasions to tease him, which just made the situation more surreal.

"Hmm, you've lost muscle. I guess even war is no substitute for good ol' fashioned farm work," Morgana said to herself. "Have you been focusing more on magic?"

“Mom?” Robin uttered, the word feeling foreign to his lips. Morgana was her name if he were to believe Gangrel’s words. Truly, the name did match her face in his mind, adding credence to the claim.

“Are you ok, my little chick? You look a little pale,” Morgana asked concerned, looking over at the frozen man.

The fondness that was felt as she said that nickname made his heart beat faster.

“Are you–” he had to stop, feeling his throat constrict in nervousness. “Are you really my mother?”

That took the Morgana by surprise, as her eyes widened in surprise and worry. “Robin, honey, what do you mean? Of course, I’m your mother!”

Any doubts he had evaporated at the look of pure love and concern she gave him, which only make the next words even more painful.

“I...I don’t...”

His mother put a hand on his cheek. “Don’t what?” she asked.

Tears started streaming down his face as he looked at that lovely, worried face. “I don’t remember.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t remember you.”

“Hopefully, things will go smoothly in there,” Rose said to herself, resting against a tree.

The efforts she had made through the years to keep their mother alive had paid off. Even if she technically wasn’t Rose’s mother, she still felt love for the woman that risked everything to give them a normal life instead of becoming Validar’s pawn.

She hadn’t been here often, since her cover as a mercenary kept her busy. The last time she had visited had been a few weeks before departing for Ferox and becoming Flavia’s champion. It’s nice to see her home, on any timeline, untouched by war.

The picturesque scenery made her wonder; What could have happened had Morgana also taken Aversa when she escaped? Had her mother taken the time to get rid of Validar, could they all instead have lived a simple farmer's life without Grima ever becoming a problem?

Unlikely. The universe isn’t that kind.
After all, assassins had still come for Morgana, even with Validar dead. Someone had found her and still came for her. Could it have been Grima? This option was more likely, but there was always the chance Validar had sent them prior to his demise, or perhaps it could have been Aversa, crazy wench that she was.

“Great, more unknowns…” she muttered, closing her eyes. She needed a nap.

Robin walked into his home taking in everything down to the smallest detail, making sure to commit them to memory to never again forget them.

‘Home.’

He had spent many nights awake, thinking about how it would look and feel to walk through it.

Now that he’s actually here, he knew exactly how to describe it: Cozy, warm and familiar. He felt at peace inside.

“Your room,” his mother—’Morgana Surana’ she had supplied—said, pointing to a door. “I’ve kept it clean in case you dropped by. Though I guess you had a good excuse to not visit sooner.”

He nodded, a little embarrassed and unsure of how to respond. Looking around he could tell that this room certainly was his, as it reminded him a lot of how he set up his room in the castle. A bookshelf filled with books, from fantasy to some rare tactical tomes, as well as various volumes on magical theory. Sitting on his bed he felt just how familiar it was, more so that the bed he had in the castle.

“You are taking this pretty well, m-mom,” he said, feeling strange calling her that, but not in a bad way.

She gave him a smirk that eerily reminded him of Rose, though he could tell there was some hurt hidden in her eyes. “The tales of your exploits mentioned that you had lost your memories. I was about to steal a carriage and go to the capital myself,” Morgana declared, earning a chuckled from him. “But then, how to proceed? The roads are not safe, even with the war over. And a Plegian asking for an audience with the Royal family, saying she’s your mother? There’s no way that could go well.”

He had to concede to that.

I guess still I held onto the hope you would remember and come back,” she added before frowning in confusion. “But if you don’t remember me, how did you know to come here? We’re not well known outside the village.”

“...I had help,” he said, taking the chance to verify something. “Hey, mom? May I ask a question?”

“Of course, honey. Ask anything you want.”

“I… Where is my father? Do I have siblings? A sister, maybe?” he asked, feeling the need to confirm Rose’s words.

Morgana’s eyes widened for a moment, before turning to the window with a forlorn expression. “Well, now. That’s an interesting question…”

Back in her room in Ylissstol, Tiki closed her eyes, taking in the smell of the incense she lit earlier, enjoying the sounds of the bustling city. It’s so much different than the calm winds of the Mila Tree,
but for now she had to silence them. A quick spell made her room devoid of all noise, allowing her to focus on contacting her mother to voice her opinion on the current events, “I still don’t agree on keeping this from her.”

Her mother’s reply was as instantaneous as it was expected. “It will not matter in a short while, my daughter.”

Before she could explain, Morgana felt a chill on her spine and frowned. Turning to her expectant son, she offered him a smile. “I need to go outside for a moment to take care of a few things,” she said, ruffling his hair. “It will take me only a few minutes, but then I will answer all your questions. Be a dear and set up the table, ok?”

“It’s everything, alright? Do you… Do you need help?” he asked awkwardly.

Morgana smiled. Something doesn't change. “It’s fine, dear, it will not take me long. In the meantime, why don’t check around a little more? Your old journal is still in the drawer. Maybe that will help you recover some memories.”

Robin’s face lit up with excitement and moved to the desk. It pained her that all his memories were taken from him but she will help him recover them.

And if not, she will help him make new ones.

Morgana continued to ponder on her options to assist her son while she walked; her steps silent like a thief, until she stopped at a particular spot well to her, usually used by her son to read in peace. Looking down with an impassive face, she saw a woman wearing a familiar cloak, sleeping under a tree. It was like looking at a portrait of her younger days, but with a few features belonging to that man here and there.

After staring at her for a minute, she used her feet to nudge her side and the woman reacted, ready to attack the one who disturbed her sleep. With grace and agility unexpected from a farmer, Morgana stopped the blade from being drawn by placing her boot on the hilt and applying pressure. Impressive strength, though she clearly wasn't used to drawing from such a position. Something she will have to work on later.

But for now, it was time for a talk long overdue.

“So, my daughter finally decided to pay me a visit.”

“You do realize she will be livid with you for not informing her?” Tiki said.

Rose’s body froze as if her blood turned to ice. Her mother, or at least this version of her, stood before her with an expectant expression; a look she remembers getting whenever she snuck out to go town during her teen years. Still, that was not her concern. Her brain was running over and over through the words she uttered. Just a single statement that threw all her plans for a loop, more so than her brother pushing her into a corner. After a minute of silence, her brain managed to produce a response that conveyed all her emotions.

“W-What?” Rose eloquently asked.

Her mother arched an eyebrow and crossed her arms with an exasperated huff. “Honestly! Two years since you came to this world and you haven’t bothered to come say hi! I know I technically
didn’t give birth to you but still!” Morgana said, pushing Rose’s brain towards its breaking point.

“What?”

Her mother looked at her curiously.

“Naga didn’t tell you.”

“What?”

“...Yes, she most likely will be,” Naga reluctantly admitted.

Morgana sighed, ignoring Rose’s stupefied/livid expression. “Typical. Divine beings always try to be all cryptic with those they help. Believe, I know,” she said, sitting next to the stunned mercenary.

Rose just kept staring, stewing in a mix of confusion and rage.

“Right, an explanation. For the past few months, I worried about Robin since he left to travel and make his own path. Even if he was only pursuing the path of a scholar I knew he would eventually end up on the battlefield. And so, like any concerned mother, I prayed to Naga to protect him, especially considering his...status,” Morgana said, before snorting and flipping her ponytail back. “What I wasn’t expecting was for her to manifest before me.”

“What?”

“You know words other than what?”

“Wh– I mean, yes, ma’am,” she said, automatically adapting to the manners her original mother had engrained into her brain. Morgana had her ways to instill discipline and respect into you and she made sure you never forget them.

“Good. Well, it was quite the shock as you can imagine,” she explained, crossing her arms and frowning at the sky. “Then again, I shouldn’t be surprised she had interest in your brother thanks to his so-called destiny.” Morgana snorted in derision at that. “She told me that he had lost his memory, of Grima coming back… and you too.”

“She...” Rose swallowed, a pit forming in her stomach. “She told you about me?”

“I heard part of the tale from Naga, yes, though I Imagine she omitted many details,” she said, looking at Rose with a serious expression. “But yes. She told me the ‘big, important’ parts.”

“So… you know who–what– I am,” Rose said, looking at the ground, waiting for the worst.

“Robin, my daughter from another world. One in which you survived instead of your brother. One that managed to take Grima’s power for her own,” Morgana said in a sad tone, before giving her a lopsided smile. “Though I heard you go by Rose Sustrai. Risky, to use my mother’s maiden name.”

Looking away, Rose answered in an embarrassed tone, “I thought it was nice, and it’s not an uncommon Plegian surname, despite being used by the nobility.”

Morgana smiled at her, “It is nice.”

The two sat in silence for a few minutes, with only the sounds of the forest passing through the wind, before Rose spoke. “...You are taking this whole mess awfully well,” she said, getting back to the
Morgana shrugged, resting against the trunk of the tree they were under, disregarding how the wild surface could dirty her dress. “I had time to come to terms with this thanks to Naga’s words, and it’s not the weirdest thing that has happened to me,” she said nonchalantly, peakng Rose’s curiosity. “Besides, knowing some of the things Validar and the Grimleal have at their disposal make me predisposed to believe on certain things more easily.” She then turned to her daughter, with a concerned frown. “Speaking of him, do you know anything about his status? My contacts in Plegia have lost track of him. I don’t know what he is up to now but it can’t be anything good.”

“He’s dead. I killed him.”

Morgana’s face froze in shock at the news she just received. “V-Validar is dead?” she asked, her voice hopeful.

Rose nodded, earning a hitched breath from Morgana. “He was the one that leads the assassination attempt on Emmeryn. Since I knew how the attack would go if it followed the same pattern as it did in my timelines, I was waiting where I knew he would escape to. My Grima was there, waiting for him, just like this one was. I severed the Dragon’s connection and then killed Validar.” She said, deciding to omit the fact that she used his soul to power Valflame. She didn’t want to seem too monstrous in front of her mother.

“We are finally free of that monster...” Morgana whispered as a thought occurred to her. “What about Sable? He always had it on him.”

Rose raised her hand to calm her down. “I have Sable, though for security reasons, I can’t tell you where it is. Nothing personal, but better safe than sorry. My apologies.”

“No need. I understand. We can’t risk Grima or any of his pawns getting all the Gemstones. With enough human sacrifices, he can use the Fire Emblem to resurrect himself to full power... though I guess you already know that, right?” Morgana stated.

Rose blinked and nodded. “Indeed. I’m surprised you knew about that ritual.”

The older woman scoffed as if offended. “Please. Validar might have been a Fellblood, but he belonged to a branch house. I, on the other hand, belong to the main house and have stronger blood.”

The tactician’s mind crashed like horse against a tree. “Wait, back up. You are related?”

Morgana gave her curious look, as if it “Our marriage was political and it’s not uncommon for nobility too. He was magically strong for a branch house member, and I had the purest blood from the main house. Before I realized the foolishness of our beliefs, I was already engaged with him. This allowed him to get his position as Head of the Grimleal Church while I was to take the throne. At least until I fled with your brother and left the throne vacant.”

That made Rose think about something she never bothered on researching. “Now that you mention it...How did Gangrel get the throne?”

“Gangrel... he was the bastard child of my uncle, the third born of the main line. Validar had been assassinating all the members of the main branch during the war, hoping to gain full control of Plegia that way. But eventually Gangrel rose through the ranks of the army and proved his bloodline with the help of the Sorcerer’s Academy, getting legitimized. Though weak enough to lack access to Ignis, it was enough to grant him the legal right to the throne. I think I heard he considered Ignis a curse or something,” she added with a shrug.
“Validar must have thought he could manipulate Gangrel to not gather attention to himself. All the power with less risk,” Rose pondered.

“Correct, but despite his madness, Gangrel was no fool. He kept Validar at bay and used him as much as he himself was being used.”

“Tsk… Plegian Politics…”

Morgana threw her head back and laughed. “And be thankful you weren’t raised in the Plegian Court. Or having to learn the whole history of Grima’s origin and our family’s blood pact with it.”

“I have vague memories from Grima’s birth, but I mainly have his knowledge of magic, not his full memories. The more I look them over, the more… gaps I find. I think that maybe its due to the long periods of slumber. And I did spend time on the Ylissean court, but that was more boring than anything else.”

“Pfft, a Plegian year in court is boring if there is not an assassination or two. I can give you and your brother the full history of our bloodline later.”

Once again, they settled on silence, both enjoying each other’s company even though they should be strangers. Maybe it was because they should be mother and daughter, or simply two Plegian women cursed with the same blood, but it was easy to relate to each other.

“Rose, may I ask something of you? About your past… experiences?” Morgana asked, breaking the peace that had settled under the tree’s shadow.

The young woman tilted her head with a frown. “Of course. After everything I’ve told you, I don’t feel the need to hide much more.”

Morgana leveled her gaze with Rose’s, “I have only heard what Naga told me. I want to know your version of the events that led you to this point. I… I want you to show me.”

Eyes wide in surprise, Rose stuttered her answers. “S-show you?”

“A simple spell to look into your memories, if you allow me. Just show me what the truth really is. Not that I don’t believe you but I want to be ready for what is to come,” Morgana stated, gathering wisps of shimmering darkness on her hand. “It’s not invasive, and only will show what you desire, though it will always be the truth.”

“I…”

“I won’t hate you,” Morgana said, as if she had already read her mind. “I don’t think I could, after all you have done for Robin. Call it mother’s intuition but I trust you.”

“I… I can’t promise it will be a pleasant experience,” the tactician said as she tentatively moved her fingers to the gathered magic.

“I expect as much,” Morgana said, letting her magic do the work.

Slowly, Rose’s fingertips touched the wisps of magic and Morgana’s world was engulfed by the rush of memories.

The budding friendships. The harsh battles. The painful losses. The sweet love she shared with the prince. The burning pain as Grima chained her inside her own body. Traveling to the past, ready to crush the children that dared to hope. The distrust that led to her betrayal, death, and rebirth. All the
efforts she made to make things better for Robin.

The burden and guilt she carries, for crimes not her own, but still willing to rectify.

And all the fear she still had at the possibility of facing failure once more.

The spell ended as fast as it started like the world had stood still waiting for them. Regaining her sense of reality, Morgana realized she’s crying. She could feel the veracity of the memories down to her very core, just as all the pain and suffering her daughter endured. Any doubts she had about this girl being her kin were wiped by the motherly instinct that came roaring to the injustices inflicted upon her.

She was used by Grima, force to destroy all she loved, only her chance to fix thing to be ruined by her granddaughter's distrust. Her bonds shattered by fear and betrayal, only barely formed in this world, opting to interact with others than to place the same trust on the hands of the Shepherds, despite not being the ones that wronged her.

And yet, here she was. Still fighting, clinging to whatever hopes she could find to change at least one world for the better and give her brother the chance she never had, hoping his bonds were stronger than her.

At that moment, Morgana didn’t care about time and space, or the wills of the Gods. This girl is her daughter and she’s going to support her, for she couldn’t be prouder of her strength.

Their finger stopped touching as Rose directed her gaze to the ground, awaiting some sort of punishment. Instead, she found herself into the loving embrace of her mother; something she hadn’t felt in decades.

“I’m so proud of the woman you have become. Despite all your suffering, you still fight, and not fall into despair. I… I know it’s so tempting and easy to just give up, but I’m proud you endured. Had I just accepted Validar’s plan, where would everyone be now?”

Rose choked a little at the words, feeling a kinship with her mother in their shared pain.

Pulling away, Morgana looked at the shocked tactician with eyes filled with sadness. “Once Naga told me of your existence, I’ve eagerly been waiting to meet you. To get a glimpse of the girl I could never raise. You have done well, my child.”

The tactician started to tremble at her words. “But why? I’m not–”

“It doesn’t matter from which world you are from,” Morgana said, cutting her off. “You might’ve been born from a different version of me, but the way I see it you are my daughter. On this or any world.”

Rose choked a sob, unable to cope with the unconditional acceptance. She expected many things in the case of meeting her mother, but for her to know her history as well as accepting her with little protest was too much for her. The acceptance of her other confidants, while appreciated, did not hold the same weight as that of her mother’s unconditional love. The tactician couldn’t stop the new flow of tears that escaped her eyes, despite the childish desire of appear strong in front of her mother.

“To think… If I had just run away from Validar before giving birth, I would have had the joy of watching my version of you grow up. Maybe even have both of you together,” Morgana said softly, running her hand through Rose’s hair. “You’ve grown into a beautiful woman.”

Rose blushed like a teenage girl, belittling the years of experience she had accumulated. Never mind
that with both her lifetimes, she was easily older than Morgana; the mere touch and compliments from her mother had been something she had missed for decades. “Thank you,” she said in an uncharacteristically small voice.

“You are most welcome my dear,” the older woman said with a smile, before standing up. “Now come, we shouldn’t let your brother wait. I feel we are due for a long family conversation.”

Rose cringed at that. “Do… Do we have to? I have been thinking about a way to—”

“Wiggle your way out of telling your brother the whole truth?”

“Ehmm…”

Morgana sighed. “I agree that right now telling him everything about our lineage and his role as Grima’s avatar is not the best course of action. Let him enjoy peace for a while, but we can tell him a modified version of your story, while allowing him to prepare for the future wars. That way, he will be more accepting of the whole truth when it comes out.”

Her daughter gnawed at her lip, before relenting. “You always knew best…”

The words written in the journal stirred many of Robin’s long-lost memories. His younger-self had, thankfully, a certain flair for writing his experiences that only helped him on reliving the moments. The description of the spring festival where he asked Valette Wi to be his date was particularly vivid. He closed his eyes and the memories just came to him. Robin could recall her soft laugh as they played the games in the town square, following by getting his first kiss under the moonlight. He could also recall running through the corn fields as her father chased him when he returned her only an hour later than promised. He felt a tear run down his cheek after recalling how only a month later they moved away to the south, where he hadn’t heard from her again.

Many other memories came to him. Smells, sounds, and images rushed through his mind, like walking through a museum dedicated to his life. It was incomplete, there were many moments he might never recover, but now he had something! Dinners with his mother and her delicious dishes. Reading near the fireplace in winter, helping on the fields, or simply talking with the townspeople were only some of the things he could recall, but he couldn’t be happier.

The front door opened, making him wipe away his tears and the stupid grin on his face. Leaving his room, he went to talk to his mother about his progress.

“Mom,” he said, no longer feeling that little sense of awkwardness using the title, “did you finish with you had to do? I have some ques—” His words died in his throat when he saw Rose walking behind their mother, looking like she wanted to be anywhere but there. Morgana seemed to be the only one immune to the awkward atmosphere.

“Sit down little chick, we need to have a talk.”

Robin’s face remained unreadable as he listed to Rose’s tale with rapt attention. The version of her story was the same that she told Emmeryn, though she did admit she came from an Outrealm. Morgana corroborated her story, adding her own twists as they discussed before.

“So, you really are my sister, in a twisted sort of way. You come from a… parallel world?” He asked, receiving a nod in clarification. “One where I died at birth just like you did in this world? Is everything the same in your world?”
“Not exactly,” Rose said with a frown. “We didn’t have the same lives; we are not the same individuals. I’m not a female you, I’m the survivor of our pair in my world.” That much was true, if one were to get nitpicky. Her interactions with her Shepherds before their betrayal were like his, but she tended to bond more with the women, just as Robin did with the men. This changed their approach to strategies as they gained different details on their comrades’ skills. “Here, you suffered amnesia for some reason and joined the Shepherds, while in my world I joined a mercenary group that doesn’t seem to exist here,” she lied smoothly, not willing to get into that mess until a later date and spoil his relationship with these Shepherds.

“Are these the ones that betrayed you?” he asked for clarification.

“I was part of two groups in my world. One died, leaving me the only survivor, while the last to take me in killed me once my lineage came to light,” Rose said bitterly, shrugging at the end. “Maybe they got all killed since I wasn’t their tactician. In my world the Shepherds still went to war with Plegia, but it was longer and bloodier, with Emmeryn dying during the first attack in the castle. I know about them since my company was eventually hired to fight for Ylisse during... subsequent battles, including the oncoming Valmese campaign.” This was true for the original timeline at least. Without Lucina’s interference, the war lasted much longer, leaving them more vulnerable to the Valmese invasion. It took even longer to push that back.

“Lineage?” Robin asked, pushing the threat of war for the moment.

Right, she needed to explain that. Now, how to do that delicat–

“We are the Royal family of Plegia. Rightful heirs to her Theocracy and its throne,” Morgana stated bluntly as she served tea to them.

“What?!” her brother shouted as he bolted to his feet.

“We are all of Fellblood, ‘blessed’ by Grima thanks to our ancestor Forneus, a Thaneban alchemist,” their mother said, sitting down to drink her tea. “He sought to create the perfect lifeform, using the blood of multiple dragons. His research on Dragon magic and Thanatophages insects lead him to discover how to raise the dead as perfectly obedient soldiers.” She took a sip of her tea, giving her son a serious look. “Grima and the Risen ware the product of his twisted research.”

“So Grima is an artificial dragon?”

“Don’t think that makes him less powerful,” Morgana warned him in a sharp tone. “Forneus bred him not only with Divine Dragon blood, but the blood of other tribes to increase his power, but that only lead to a much faster deterioration of his mind. The same madness that eventually consumed those dragons that did not become manaketes. From what I understand, he hates humanity for squandering the Gods’ gifts and not taking responsibility, or something along those lines.”

“The blood pact Forneus forged with Grima is just like the Lowell’s with Naga. That’s why we can control magic so easily as well learning spell and tactics much easier than others,” Rose explained, filling that information of Grima’s origins to fill in the gaps on her knowledge. “Out lineage always tried to practice selective breeding and boost our strengths. Not only that, but that allows us to cast Ignis.”

“Ignis? I think I recall something about that…”

“You saw it before during my fight with Marth,” “It allows us to use magic to boost our physical strength or vice versa. It’s the opposite of Aether, the signature move of House Lowell.”
“Marth used Aether,” Robin said seriously, making Rose cringe. “And you said she was from the future…”

“I… have a theory on that. I guess she is related to the Royal family, maybe Chrom’s or Lissa’s child,” she mentioned, making the wheels turn on Robin’s head. “Or a distant relative. Or maybe Naga just forged a new pact with someone once all the Shepherd’s died. I recommend not mention this to the royal family, even if we disclose the rest. I rather not make assumptions,” she finished, hoping he took the bait.

“Fair enough. If she doesn’t want to reveal it herself, I won’t do it for her. She earned that much.” “but something bothers me. How did the Grima become such a threat if Forneus created him to control it.”

“Grima’s influence was too great too, and he soon bonded with Forneus, overpowering his will,” Morgana said, scowling at the thought of the legacy their ancestor had pushed on the world. “He wasn’t strong enough to contain the full power of the artificial dragon, though, and eventually he sired our bloodline in the hope of creating a proper vessel. They eventually succeeded and the First Exalt took him down with Naga’s help. Validar has been trying to create another vessel for years.”

“And this Validar is my father? He was the one that tried to kill the Exalt?” Robin asked with a mixture of disgust, sorrow and guilt.

“Yes. But I killed him as he tried to escape. I even burned the body,” Rose said in a dark voice. “He won’t be a problem.”

The former Queen of Plegia sighed, her memory taking her to a dark period in her life. “Your… father wanted to use my stronger Fellblood to sire you two, hoping one would be the perfect vessel since his blood was too weak fulfill the role. I followed my duty as Heir of House Savill, siring children for him, but the attempt was a failure. You weren’t strong enough, luckily for us,” she lied, sparing the young man the guilt for now.

Rose could see how the loathing for father grew by the second on Robin’s heart.

“Despite my protests, suggesting you could be of use to him, he wanted to dispose of you. I even suggested using you to sire more children, to my eternal shame and disgust. Before he could kill you though, I ran away with you and abandoning the throne. This left it open for Gangrel, who is a bastard of our line, though weak of blood,” Morgana said, taking a sip of her tea and letting Rose take over. She had already told all of this to Rose, but they needed to tell a slightly different, but detailed version to Robin. Just enough to satisfy him.

“Our House– you and I especially– were breed to excel to create a vessel for him. Though we failed to produce one, it seems Validar managed to find a substitute. Maybe a bastard girl with strong magic,” Rose said, pushing Robin further away from thinking he was the vessel. “It’s not strange for nobles to birth illegitimate children, so it’s a possibility.”

“Maybe Aversa?” Robin pondered. “She’s strong, cunning, and a talented mage, as much as I hate to admit it.”

Morgana frowned at that comment. “What does your sister have to do with this?”

Rose watched as Robin almost choked on his tea at that comment. “Oh yeah… forgot about that, too…”

“aversa is our sister?” he cried, giving a high pitch shrike that Rose would’ve found
amusing in other circumstances.

Their mother blinked. “Adopted but yes. She was quite a nice girl from what I remember. Sadly, I couldn’t take her with us when I escaped. Validar had her fostered under House Armes.”

“That’s Tharja’s last name…” Robin pointed out.

“Yeah…She is a minor noble, but her family is skilled in hexes and dark magic,” she admitted, reluctantly, before turning to her mother. “Anyways, she worked as Gangrel’s right hand the execution ceremony for Lady Emmeryn, as well a kidnapping Lady Maribelle and lead the troops that attacked Ylisstol. I’m sure she worked for Validar and now has a high position on the Grimleal.”

“Oh,” Morgana whispered. “That’s… a shame. I wish I could’ve given her a better life.”

They lapsed into silence, drinking some tea and allowing Robin to process all the information. Finally, he asked his sister about something that he couldn’t figure out. “Why are you here, though? Not that I don’t appreciate the help, but there must be a reason. I understand my world is in peril, but what made you come here instead of fighting for your world?”

Rose leaned back in her seat and sighed, looking at the ceiling in thought. “After my ‘friends’ stabbed me in the back after discovering my Plegian lineage, Naga offered me a chance to make things better for another world. She also told me that after my death, Grima would invade the world and destroy it,” she said, remembering the desolate wasteland the original timeline had become. “The Shepherds and the armies of the world were in shambles. The war with Plegia took its toll, and Valm was worse. Grima let us kill each other, producing more corpse for him to use as soldiers.”

“If the wars had lasted longer… hell, even only Ylisstol’s siege…”

“My world is doomed, yours isn’t,” she said with finality. “I made many mistakes in my life, and I decided to help you as penance,” she admitted, bowing her head in shame.

“And if this world goes the same way, it would justify Marth coming back to stop it from happening.”

Rose nodded. “Marth came to stop the same from happening to this one. We haven’t informed Chrom since he is not the most… tactful person. As such, Emmeryn, Phila, and I are working to use the reconstruction to enhance our defenses. Will be necessary once Valm inevitably invades. That’s a problem regardless of Grima.”

Robin frowned as something occurred to him. “Did your world not have a Marth that came back?”

His counterpart scowled at the memory of her daughter’s betrayal. “Yes, it did… but that was part of my problem. She was looking for troops and when she discovered me. She then revealed my lineage and relationship to Grima. You can guess the rest.”

“Gods… I’m sorry,” he said, conveying his sincere sympathy.

“Don’t be, it wasn’t your fault. At least you have earned the Shepherds trust, so maybe they will realize you are not Grima’s pawn. I didn’t have that luxury as a mere mercenary.”

Letting his head fall back on his chair, Robin mulled on all the information. “I… I don’t know what to think. We are of royal and fell blood. And in a few years not only is Valm going to declare war, but Grima will return,” he sighed. It surprised Rose how he was not panicking more. “It’s almost too much…but I believe you,” he said much to her surprise and Morgana’s satisfaction. “As I said
before, you’ve done nothing but help me, and now you reunited me with my—our—mother. While I
hate all these secrets and half-truths you told us, I can sympathize. Still, I get the feeling you are not
telling me everything.”

The traveler conceded with a nod. “You’re right. There are a couple of things I haven’t said, but
that’s because it’s not critical right now. You will find out on your own and that will only help you.
Sorry, but sometimes it’s better to learn things the hard way.”

Robin scowled, staring at her for a long moment before relenting. “Very well. I will trust your
judgment. It hasn’t failed us so far, if the original outcomes are as bad as you say. But if all of this is
true, then I have a proposition for your mother.”

Putting her cup of tea down, Morgana looked at him with a raised eyebrow. “Go on.”

“You should come live in Ylisstol with us,” Robin said, much to the women’s surprised. “I think it’s
safer for you and if we all know what’s coming, we can do better if we are together.”

“That’s right,” Rose said in agreement. “Despite Validar’s death, assassins still came for you. Maybe
they want to kidnap you to sire a vessel or just kill you in revenge. Just because he is dead doesn’t
mean the Grimleal are no longer a threat.”

“It’s not a bad idea… but I need to think what do about the house and farm.”

“Please do, if all this is true, then the world is about to become more dangerous.” “I will talk with
Chrom about training a more formal army to counter cavalry tactics. I can pass it as an exercise. I
agree he can be impulsive, so we can keep him in the dark under the Exalt’s direct orders.”

“I’m glad you are picking things up fast,” “you mind is sharp as a blade, little brother.”

Morgana perked up at that moment. “Oh! that reminds me, I got something for you.”

“Huh?” he asked, as Morgana rushed to her room. The twins could hear her moving things around
before shouting in triumph. In no time she was back with a long bundle of cloth in her hands.

“If you are going into battles of this caliber, you need a proper weapon. I would’ve given it to you
earlier, but I thought it risky. And then your amnesia happened…” Morgana trailed off, her meaning
clear. She unwrapped the cloth revealing a sheeted longsword with an intricate design. Drawing it
from its wyvern hide scabbard, she showed it to her children who looked at it in wonder. The blade
had a black and gold guard, with a black blade with a sharp white edge. And intricate was at its side.
Robin felt the power radiating from it and felt drawn towards it, flicked of purple flames dancing on
his fingers.

“I think I saw this blade on a book before....” Robin mused as he took the blade in his hands.

Rose was the tactless one this time. “You had Mystletainn all this time?!”

Morgana blinked. “Yes.”

“Where?!!” she shouted, while Robin ignored the pair.

“Hidden under the floorboards in my closet, next to my emergency savings. Did my other-self never
mentioned this to you?” Morgana asked in sincere confusion. “Then again, I didn’t tell Robin…”

“I think I would remember having a legendary holy blade under our floor!” Fuck, it probably was
still sitting under the house in her world. Maybe for the best, who knows what would’ve happened
had Grima known about it and used its power… Or worse, *him*….

In a market far away, Cynthia and Owain were walking with bags of provision to where her pegasus was waiting for them. The pair had been tasked by Lucina to gather provision on the nearby village. As they found more of their missing companions, their supplies were running short. The others meanwhile focused on gaining some coin. Quite a departure from their harsh life, but not an unwelcome change.

Suddenly, the prince froze mid-step, eyes widening and hand trembling as if burning. His companion noticed this and stopped, looking at him with concern.

“Owain, are you okay? Why did you stop walking?” Cynthia asked.

“My fair maiden, my sword hand trembles in sorrow, as if my destiny has been stolen from me! She calls for the sword of legends, yet realized we are not the ones destined to wield it.”

“… You think of your hand as a *she*?”

Owain said nothing as he remained frozen mid-pose, but the pegasus knight could see the red tint slowly crawling up his neck.

“…”

“…”

Thoughts for later.

“Anyways, since you already seem to have a good blade,” she said while pointing at Thorn, aware of its origin and power, “It’s only fair your brother carries one.”

“How did we get our hands on this, anyway?” Rose asked, her anger leaving her body.

“Long ago, before we lost contact with Jugral, our ancestors arranged a marriage between the descendants of Hezul in House Nordion, in hopes it strengthens our bloodline and Grima’s power,” Morgana said with a snort. “It certainly did the first, at least. The sword had been passed to the heir of the house, which was fully integrated into our House, House Savill. Your father belonged to the branch house, Lessard.”

“I remember reading that Gangrel’s full name was Gangrel Savill. I take it he claimed the name to legitimize his claim…” he mused, before pausing. “Wait, I thought you said our last name was Surana.”

Morgana waived it off. “A fake name to throw Plegia of our scent until we were safe. Eventually, I settled on our real given names and a fake last name for our new beginning.”

“Hmm fair enough.”

“I was the only one who could wield it. Not even my father nor Validar could, much to our luck,” their mother said, looking at the blade with pride.

Slowly, Robin stood up and gave it a swing. Even Rose could feel it’s call and power. He took it into his hand and the trio felt the ripple of powers answering to their blood. Robin gulped, entranced by the feedback. Rose could sympathize. Even her blood felt the calling, but she already had Thorn.
“ Seems it answers to you,” Morgana said with satisfaction. “We will need to practice so you can use its full power. Ignis too, since your sister hasn’t done so.”

Broken from his thoughts, the only male in the house turned to his mother in confusion. “Huh?”

“There is still much I need to tell you, about the blade… about me and our history. Moving with you might be a good idea since I can teach you more things,” she said as a sly grin grew on her face. “Especially about tactics.”

“You’re a tactician?” Robin asked in shock.

The matriarch gave a tittering laugh at that. “Oh, honey. That coat used to be mine. Who do you think held off Exalt Augustus’ Crusade for so long?” Morgana said much to her children’s shock. Even Rose didn’t know this. She knew her mother was good at tactics, but not this part of her story. “He invaded because his spies informed him of Validar’s attempts to resurrect Grima and he only made advances once I was taken from the front lines due to pregnancy.”

“…Damn,” was all he could say. “Just another secret to keep huh? It doesn’t feel right to lie to our comrades.”

“Pfft, how do you think I felt all these years? It’s the weight of the world on my shoulders for a long time.”

Morgana clapped her hands, gaining their attention as she stood up. “Okay, that’s enough gloomy talk for one day. Let’s just enjoy the rest of the day and worry about the end of the world later. It’s time to prepare dinner!”

It’s been a while since Morgana had to prepare a meal for someone other than herself, but she jumped to the task with gusto. Her children helped, using the opportunity to bond as a family with no worries about wars or the stress of their jobs. Well, Rose helped, since Robin remained hopeless in the kitchen. Some things never changed it seems. Still, she and Rose shared a lot of recipes while they instructed—or in Rose’s case, bullied—Robin into setting the table and another task while the siblings traded harmless barbs at one another. The older girl came out on top more often than not, but it warmed Morgana’s heart to see they had managed to bond during their time with the Shepherds.

She would be lying if she said she isn’t worried about the future, but her children were strong. Maybe she could help them along the way. She mused on how to accomplish that as she finished the meal. Roasted onions, toasted bread and honied chicken made the main course, with a side of salad made from vegetables Robin picked outside and freshly squeezed juice to help it go down. Not bad, if she said so herself.

The family sat down to enjoy the meal outside, where Robin had set up a table so they could enjoy the summer sunset. Having come to a silent agreement not to discuss future troubles during this dinner, the trio proceeded to simply talk about their adventures, their past. Morgana talked about the town and its surroundings, while Robin described the Shepherds and the capital while complimenting their dishes, especially this made with her motherly touch. Rose had more to say for the Valmese lands, having spent a long time there. Her brother had been enthralled by her description of a volcano, as well as the flower fields of Rosanne, only surpassed by the cherry blossoms of Chon’sin.

For the first time in a long time, the small house felt like a home once more.

That night, Morgana sat in front of her mirror, preparing for her sleep after offering a prayer of
thanks to her effigy of Naga. Looking at her reflection, she imagined that she was looking at the version of herself that gave birth to Rose.

“You would be proud of her,” she said, careful not be heard by her children in the other rooms. “Despite all that she has endured, Robin…No, Rose has grown into a strong and beautiful woman. And her brother is strong, too. Curious and kind to a fault, but not in a bad way I think. I wish you, too, would’ve had the chance to see them together. I promise you, I won’t waste this chance… for both of us.”

Maybe it was the weight of the tiresome day, but Morgana could’ve sworn her reflection smiled at her.

After the nights’ revelations and a couple of days of planning, Robin and Rose got started on the preparations for moving their mother to the city. Despite her acceptance of the idea, Morgana didn’t want to lose the house and property regardless of the status of her children. She had too many memories of the place and it had been her home for nearly two decades, which had been something the two tacticians could sympathize with.

In the end, she decided to rent the farm to a friend. He will work the land and take care of propriety, taking a portion of the profits for himself and for maintenance while sending Morgana the rest. Once the agreement had finally been completed and approved by the town’s mayor, they proceeded to get her things ready to move.

It was then that they noticed they lacked something critical at the moment.

“We will need a carriage and horses to move mom’s stuff to the capital. Maybe someone in town can sell us one? I still have some gold with me,” Rose suggested.

“Well, we have two horses with us, they would do to pull the carriage. It’s not like we are moving everything right?” Robin asked his sister.

Later he would realize just how much he underestimated the amount of luggage his mother could pack.

“Better safe than sorry, it’s a long trip after all. At least four horses. I got a mare of my own that I bought after you left, so we only need one more. I think I can negotiate with Hamilton for one of his…” Morgana said more to herself as she crunched the numbers in her mind.

“We can buy a good one and maybe sell it for a profit in the capital or something. Maybe Frederick would be interested in a strong horse for his knights,” Rose offered.

“That just leaves the matter of the carriage,” Robin said. “Do you know where we can get one in town, mother?”

Morgana just rewarded him with that smile he associated with one of Rose’s schemes. “Oh, I know just the place! An old acquaintance has just moved into town and I’m sure he has what we need.”

In a warehouse on the edge of town, a group of smugglers was finishing setting up shop to starting their movements. Samuel grumbled at the sight. The material loss at that mercenary wench and the Ylissot military had hurt his operation badly. Not to mention losing the properties he owned in the capital know that his identity was known to the crown. He really liked his house there, especially the crystal-heated tub.
Suddenly there was a lot of noise outside, making his diminished crew nervous. The army couldn’t have found him already, right? That bitch promised to leave him alone! As he made his way to the door it burst open as an unconscious man flew through the opening and crashed on the floor.

A woman with white hair made her way inside, casually stepping over the unconscious man. Samuel’s blood pressure began to rise, thinking it was Rose who came for him, “Damn wench! Who da–M-Morgana?” he stuttered, recognizing the woman immediately.

It’s hard to forget a woman that made one of his testicles explode with a hex.

“Hi Samuel!” she greeted, far too cheerful for “So good that you came to this town! I would’ve come earlier, but I was busy. My bad, old friend.”

“Old friend?! You–!”

“–Came here for business. You see, I know you move a lot of… merchandise around and I thought you could do me the favor of lending me one of your carriages? I’m moving to the capital and I need to move a lot of stuff there.”

“What is it with all the crazy Plegian women on my life?” he asked no one in particular. Having already lost too much in Ylisstol and aware of what this woman could do, he decided to not fight this time, not wanting to lose what remained of his manhood. “You are moving to the capital?” That could work… he wouldn’t need to leave this town, nor share it with this psychopath. He could establish his network from here and be left in peace.

“And was it in for me?” he asked. Clearly, she couldn’t be expecting to her the carriage for free? …Right?

“I leave you in peace,” she said, but to him it sounds more like leaving him in one piece.

That’s… quite a good price to pay, he had to admit.

As he was about to respond, a new, familiar voice called out. “Mom, do you need h–?”

“YOU!” the man screamed, heaving in fear and anger at the sight of the newcomer who just stepped into the warehouse.

Rose stood bewildered at the reactions until she recognized the man. “Samuel?” she asked, as a grin that could make a priest faint showing on her face as she walked into the room. “Well, the world is a small place, isn’t it, you bastard.” She then turned to Morgana, who merely looked at the interaction with amusement. “Do you know him, mother?”

Blood seemed to vanish from Samuel’s veins as he processed the words. “Mother?! You–No. Nonono–!” he shouted as if his nightmares were coming to life.

“I had dealings with him in the past,” she said, ignoring his hyperventilating ramblings.

“She cursed my manhood and threatened to implode them if I didn’t smuggle you and your brat out of Plegia!”

“Call it insurance,” Morgana said with a shrug.

“And then you did it anyway!” he shouted, the veins on his neck ready to burst.

Morgana merely raised an eyebrow. “Maybe you shouldn’t have tried to grope me when I was
asleep,” she said, noticing his livid expression.

“He does tend to do that lot,” her daughter added helpfully, though he could see her hand moving to the hilt of her sword.

“Really now?” Morgana asked in a flat tone, her maternal instinct flaring hotter than a dragon’s fire. “Did he try anything on you?”

Rose just waved it off. “Yeah, but I broke his leg.”

The dark look turned into one of pride as she hugged Rose. “I did notice he had a limp now. I’m so proud of you,” she said before noticing the foam starting to froth from the smuggler’s mouth. “Oh, stop complaining. You still have one testicle left. Unless you want me to fix that?”

His face went from red to purple, before all fight left him. He just couldn’t deal with both of them, especially now that he knows they are kin. “… Just take the damn carriage and leave me alone,” the smuggler relented, waving them off and hoping that would get rid of a headache.

Morgana beamed at him with “Pleasure doing business with you, as always!” she said, earning a new string of curses from the man who watched as she moved to the largest and most expensive of his carriages. But he decided to bite his tongue.

After the two women attached her two horses to the empty carriage—thankfully without any property or physical damage—he hopes that was it.

The Gods aren’t that kind, as the mercenary had some parting words before they rode away.

“Bye Samuel! Stay out of trouble and thanks for the house! The giant, heated bathtub is great!”

“Go to hell you b– Wait… What was that about a house?!”

The announcement of her departure broke the hearts of the village, especially from the children she helped teach during the weekends. The townspeople wished her the best, thinking it was simply Robin’s position in Ylisstol that convinced her to move to a better life.

They threw her a small party, where they were informed of Robin’s situation and Rose’s existence, with the obvious details omitted. The town welcomed both, helping Robin by telling him of his early life and learning more about Morgana’s newly discovered daughter. Morgana weaved the tale of her daughter better than Rose ever could, sticking to simplicity and half-truths.

As the farewell party passed, more memories stirred in Robin’s mind as he spent time with old faces of his youth. He couldn’t remember small things, but he could easily recall the big moments that made him into the man he was when he woke on that field, and for him, that was enough.

But in the end, that chapter of the family’s lives came to a close. The carriage left the simple farming village for the capital, where the family of Fellbloods is going to start anew; this time with the mother the two tacticians had lost before.

And woe to whoever dares hurt her children, in this or any world.

The Shepherds had gathered at the castle’s courtyard after their patrol to welcome their tacticians back. While they were out, Emmeryn received with that Robin and Rose were coming back today, and they were bringing a surprise visitor with them. Curious, the Shepherds gathered to see who this
was, accompanied by Emmeryn and Phila.

“Any idea who they are bringing?”

“I’m afraid not, milord. Robin’s letter was pretty vague, so I assume he wanted it to be a surprise.”

“Well, it certainly will be interesting to meet more of their family.”

“Try to not put your foot in your mouth if it’s a girl, Chrom,” Lissa teased.

“Why do you say that?” he challenged with a scowl.

His little sister gave him a pointed look. “Your first meetings with women are almost always bad. You made Sumia trip into a pile of pegasus dung. You dropped a bucket of water over Maribelle. You feel on top of Cordelia. You called Rose a man...” Lissa said, listing just some examples, making said girls turn red for different reasons.

“I have to agree, Chrom,” Emmeryn added, much to his shock.

“You too, Emm?” he asked, feeling betrayed.

“Your charm tends to be... lacking, when talking to non-noble girls,” the eldest royal said diplomatically. “I remember when you were little and had a crush on Phila and you gave her a--”

“You promised to never mention that!” he hissed, ignoring how the Wing Commander blushed. Frowning he turned to his friends for help. “And I have changed since I can be charming, right guys?”

They didn’t meet his eyes.

“Well...”

“Ehh, sure Blue.”

“You could do better...”

The prince clenched his jaw “... I will prove you wrong.”

“Of co– Oh look, they are here,” the Exalt said, pointing at the carriage coming through the gate.

“Welcome back,” Chrom greeted the tacticians, shaking Robin’s hand with a smile. “I hope your trip was fruitful, my friend?”

Looking at the two women dismounting behind him, Robin smiled. “I dare say so, Chrom. Not only did I regained some of my memories, but I as I mentioned on the letter I found my hometown and my family,” Robin said, smiling at the excited expressions on his friends’ faces, unaware of the idea that had just popped up on Chrom’s head. Motioning to the woman next to him, “Guys, this is Morgana, she’s my--”

“Ah! A pleasure, milady. Rose and Robin didn’t inform us that they had another sister.” He would show his sisters he could be charming and it didn’t hurt to make a good first impression on his friends’ family. He already screwed up that part with Rose and Robin was sort of a mess too.

The tacticians froze and just stared incredulously at the prince, who didn’t notice as he was busy giving the newcomer a charming smile.
Morgana smiled bashfully, though she certainly enjoyed the attention. “Oh, I’m certain they didn’t mention it, Your Highness.”

“Please, call me Chrom,” he said, giving her another dazzling smile.

“Is he really…?” Stahl started, already figuring out the situation along with the rest of the audience.

“…Should we tell him?” Ricken asked, watching as Chrom continued to half-talk, half-flirt with the woman.

“Shhh, I want to see how this goes,” Gaius added with a shit-eating grin, while the rest of the Shepherds and the Royal sisters looked in amusement.

“She is playing along with him. I can see where Rose got her sense of humor,” commented the Exalt.

“She has one?” Lissa said, surprised. “I mean, I have heard her being sarcastic but I thought it was more like a sadistic amusement at running the recruits ragged.”

Emmeryn smiled at her sister, giving a slight shrug. “You just need to get to know her.”

“I have to say, your majesty, you are quite the charmer,” Morgana said with a girlish giggle that made her children’s stomachs churn with revulsion.

“Well, thank you, milady,” the prince answered smugly, preening at the praise as if rubbing it on the other’s faces. Sadly, some did take kindly to that.

“Chrom,” Robin said, his voice flat and sharp as a blade cutting through the atmosphere while his sister’s face twisted in bewildered disgust.

The prince was surprised by his friend’s tone, looking at him in confusion. “Yeah?”

“I know you are my friend, my boss, and the prince of the Halidom, but I will only say this once before this goes any further… Please, stop flirting with my mother,” Robin said through gritted teeth.

The silence that descended over those present was total. Gaius almost choked on his candy as he tried to contain his laughter, only to receive a distracted punch on the back from Sumia.

“M-Mother?” the prince squeaked, putting the pieces together. Looking more detailed he could see very slight wrinkles on her face under certain lighting.

“Oh, don’t be such a stiff, my little chick,” Morgana said with a laugh, ignoring the shocked silence of their audience. “It’s not every day I get compliments from a prince. If I’m allowed to be a little vain, I do look rather well for my age.”

Emmeryn stifled a giggle with her hand while Lissa didn’t bother being discrete and openly laughed at her brother. The Exalt decided to put her brother out of his misery and turned the conversation back on track, “Lady Morgana, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, I’m Emmeryn, Exalt of the Halidom, and this is my sister Lissa.”

“Hi!” the youngest royal greeted.

“Your Highnesses, it’s an honor to meet you,” Morgana said, bowing respectfully to the Exalt. “I
hope my children have not been much trouble.”

Emmeryn shook her head and smiled pleasantly. “Quite the contrary. I owe them both my life, and so does the people of Ylisstol. You did a magnificent job raising them.”

Morgana smiled at the blushes that came over the twins. It seems that being praised in front of their mother was too much for them. “That’s more than a mother can ask. I thank you for helping my son during his time of need.”

“Thank my brother, he is the one that found him,” Emmery added, but stopped as she pondered something. “Though if I recall correctly it was actually Lissa, since she is the one that tripped over him, no?”

Lissa coughed awkwardly.

“In that case, thank you so much Your Highnesses,” she said, giving Chrom a smile that made him realize just how similar to Rose she looked. If she smiled sincerely more often, that is.

Clearing her throat, Rose changed the topic before any further embarrassment. “I will go put your stuff in my house. Why don’t you show her around, Robin?”

He nodded in agreement, eager to escape the awkward situation. “Sounds good,” he said, “That is, if that’s alright with you, Your Grace?” he asked, not wanting to overstep his bounds.

Much to his relief, Emmeryn smiled at them and nodded to show her consent. “Of course, she is more than welcome into the castle at any time.”

“Yeah! You are practically family, little chick,” Lissa said, taking a little barb at him and eliciting giggles from the use of his nickname.

“...I’m going to ignore that last part. Come on, mother, we can start in the garden,” Robin said, sending one last glare at his best friend who at least had the decency to look sheepish.

“I look forward to talking with you all,” Morgana said, waving at them.

“So do we. I hope you have many funny stories about Bubbles,” Gaius said, earning another punch from Sumia. “Ouch, stop that, Stumbles!”

“Oh, my dear, you have no idea,” Morgana added with a smile that made Robin uneasy. “Bubbles huh?”

“Oh! Come, the gardens await!” Robin said loudly, tugging at his mother’s arm and forcing a laugh out of her.

Even as they walked away from the assembled audience, Morgana’s voice was easily heard by the Shepherds.

“There are a lot of pretty girls here, son. Is one of them your girlfriend? I’m getting old and I want grandchildren.”

Robin groaned while the Shepherds followed, laughing along the way.

Rose smiled at the scene, glad that her mother had survived. Things were working out for her, with her plans giving fruits. And yet like had taught her that it would not last. She could only wonder when the other shoe would drop.
“It seems your reunion was a success,” the Exalt said, having moved closer to her newest retainer as she changed the horses on the carriage to allow them to rest.

“It was,” Rose said before making sure no else could listen. “She took her reunion with me better than I hoped. We hadn’t seen each other in… ages. It’s nice to see her well.”

“I recall you were raised in different households but I am glad it worked out,” her liege said as she motioned her sibling to go ahead without her. “I had been wanting to talk to you about the events that have happened in your absence.”

That caught the tactician’s attention “Something happened?”

“A couple of things, especially with that Dark Mage that was recruited during the last battle. Tharja was it?”

Rose pinched the bridge of her nose in exasperation. “What did she do?”

Emmeryn just pointed toward a part of the courtyard and Rose’s grasp of reality shattered.

There, in a prudish yellow sundress, was Tharja. Her hair loose under a simple sunhat as she planted sunflowers and daisies with Libra, along with a few children from the orphanage. They all looked very happy, and the mage laughed merrily as one of the girls put a crown of flowers in her head.

Tharja giggled; a fucking bizarre and scary sight for the Fell Dragon.

Then the mercenary remembered what she did to her when the mage invaded her mind and cringed in realization.

“I might have done some damage there…” she murmured to herself.

“Did you say something?” Emmeryn said, turning to her with a confused look.

“Oh nothing, just thinking to myself. Must be the product of a curse that backfired. I could talk to Henry about it…” she said, trailing off as if doubting this was a good idea. “Anything else happened?”

“Well, more like it will happen,” Emmeryn responded with a tinge of pink on her cheeks, only adding to the Plegian’s confusion. “Rose, ever since you joined us and shared your burden with me, I have come to see you as a trustworthy friend. Your tale made me realize how fleeting life can be and I decided to take a leap of faith. As part of it I want to ask if you would do me the honor of being my bridesmaid alongside Phila for my wedding next month?”

“…What?”

Chapter End Notes

AN: Happy new year! Like in 2016, this longer than normal hiatus was due to depression. This time I spend December hospitalized, though thankfully not due to doing anything stupid. Mainly for observations and to get better treatment. I’ve also been reading A Song of Fire and Ice, and I hope I can use it to improve my prose. I also got a Switch with Breath of the Wild and Monster Hunter World so that also delayed this.
This was a Lore/dialogue-heavy chapter, and I couldn’t skip too many things like I did with Emmeryn, but I hope this clarifies Morgana’s story, Robin’s past. Used some concepts like Houses to refer to nobility like in ASoIaF. Between Bloodborne, Nohr’s Faceless, and the White Walkers… well that’s plenty of inspiration for a Grima more inclined to use psychological warfare.

This one is just partially beta’d so probably plenty of errors… as always, point them out and I will correct and clarify.
To Rose’s satisfaction, Morgana settled well with their group of misfits. The family only told Phila and Emmeryn of Morgana’s full history. They even told them of her rightful claim to the throne of Plegia. To the Shepherds they told of their ties to House Nordion to explain Mystletainn and Ignis. As a sign of trust, Morgana told them of her role as the tactician of the Plegian army during Augustus' Crusade.

Before anyone could get angry at her, she did point out to look at the history and timeline of the war. She pointed at the date she left her post. Her strategies allowed both armies suffered light losses during her time as tactician. Morgana feared heavier loses would only make things worse. After she deserted her post, Augustus finally pushed deep into Plegia. But her replacement made Ylisse bleed for every inch of ground it took. This culminated with the ceasefire after the death of King Augustus and Queen Elissa.

In the end, no one could say anything against her. After all, why blame her for leaving to save her children from a zealot father? Even Vaike didn’t protest her presence. Especially after tasting her food, which everyone loved. They also loved all the embarrassing stories she had about Robin's teenage years. Much to Rose’s horror, Morgana had gained some stories about her from their shared memories.

The nobility had their reservations with yet another Plegian getting close to the Royal Family. Their accusations ceased when Chrom reminded them of the roles the twins had in the war. He insisted that their mother was more than welcome into the castle and that was the end of that. Rose was glad she didn’t need to have any noble suffer an accident if they planned something against her mother.

In no time she had earned the love of the Shepherds with her charming personality. Much to everyone’s surprise, Emmeryn and Morgana took to each other like a house on fire. Morgana’s character and motherly nature was something Emmeryn missed for herself. It also helped that the older woman jumped to help with the wedding preparations. Tiki assisted too, if only to keep busy while Phila and Rose took care of the security planning.

In the meantime, these were not the only celebrations going on. Cordelia and Stahl married just a few days after their return. Rose was glad Cordelia had moved from her crush on Chrom to the one that she knew would make her happier. It seems that having her fellow Pegasus knights support instead of the guilt of her deeds did that trick. Other couples were using the opportunity to plan their own weddings.

Days after their arrival, Rose 'fixed' Tharja. To an extent, at least. There is no fixing that mess. The mage had her old personality back. Rose kept the mental blocks on her knowledge of Grima, and added a little hypnosis to she didn't become too obsessed with Robin nor practice black magic on her children. Might not be the most ethical choice she has made, but she could live with it. At least this allowed Tharja's nice side to not be overcome by her obsessive darker one. She had goodness in her, after all. Rose got rid of the giggling, though. She already had enough nightmares.

Speaking of nightmares, Morgana took over Robin’s training. This allowed Rose to focus on establishing an information network. Sadly, it required a lot more paperwork than she had done in years. It reminded Rose of her time as grandmaster, sorting the mess that had been Ylisse after the war.
Why did she accept this position again?

Ah, right, because it was the right thing to do for her kind-of-sister-in-law. That and the salary.

Well, at least that kept her focused on a few tasks. Unlike her brother.

Between his responsibilities and having the tard beaten out of him by their mother, Robin had also started to spend more time with Tiki. The Voice had decided to stay longer in the capital, now that the war in Valm is about to heat up. They chose to reveal Tiki’s identity to Robin to add another layer of veracity to her story.

Maybe she should’ve thought that through since Robin almost got a stroke once he realized he went on a date with the daughter of Naga. He got worse when he remembered how he complimented her with corny words, and even got a kiss from her. In the cheek, but still.

His reaction amused Tiki. To calm him down, she told him that had been the most enjoyable outing she had in centuries. This didn’t help Robin’s embarrassment, though. That was a fun afternoon.

At least Tiki managed to calm him down and introduce herself properly. She insisted that she wasn’t that different from ‘Lily’ so they could still be friends. They were getting quite friendly with one another. They had taken to talking about books and history, or simply walking around the city. It was sickeningly sweet, though nothing compared to Aedan and Emmeryn. Those almost made her want to vomit sometimes, in a good way if there is such a thing.

Although… She had heard he had accepted some invitations from Devola and Popola. This before he had gotten closer to Tiki, of course. It seems the visits had become less frequent as of late. Something to check out on later. Well, at least he would be getting experience on many topics, other than tactics and fighting.

“Now then. I want to see what you are capable after your time with the Shepherds,” Morgana exclaimed far too cheerfully for Robin’s liking. His mother was wearing boiled leather armor and breaches, with gloves and boots to match. She had her hair pulled into a braided bun, making her look just like her daughter. She didn’t look out of place in the castle’s training grounds. No one would suspect her of being a farmer for so long, though she did have the muscles to show for it. Robin wore a similar outfit, discarding his coat. Later he would start wearing heavier armor to get used to the extra protection.

The sight of the duo had caught the attention of many that walked past the training grounds. This was the woman that held off Augustus for three years and evaded the Grimleal for decades. Not only that, but she also raised Robin into the fine tactician that protected them. And despite growing up apart, she also helped shape Rose into whatever the hell was. The monster.

She handed him a blunt copy of Mystletainn to train safely while he gets used to the weight. They also practiced harnessing the power of Ignis. While he disliked the link to Grima, he couldn’t deny the tactical advantages.

“I mean, I understand that you want to teach me what I missed when I left, but, um…” he said while rubbing his neck. “Are you sure, mom?” He might not remember everything, but surely, he never fought his mother… right?

“My little chick,” she said in a sweet tone that fooled no one. “Are you afraid of your dear ol’ mother?”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Robin said, though their audience thought it was the other way around.
“Ohh! How long did he last this time?” Gaius asked with a cringe at the scene. Robin crashed on the ground as his sweet mother slammed the pommel of her sword on his face. This was the twelfth time the scene repeated itself.

“Fifty-four seconds,” Miriel said as she noted the time in her book. In its pages were the records for each round between the mother and son. Along with the methods used by the woman and the injuries sustained by their tactician. Looking at her notes she nodded. “New record. Most impressive.”

“Ah! You are improving fast! You used to only last thirty seconds before you left home! I’m so proud of my baby boy!” Morgana cooed, gaining awkward laughs from the Shepherds.

“Whaa...?” Robin asked, blinking at the stars that appeared in front of his eyes.

Frowning, Morgana turned to the benches. “Lady Lissa, if you would be so kind to heal my son? We don’t want him to lose his memory again.”

“Of course!” Lissa said, grabbing one of her staves and waving at the thief next to her. “Gaius, help me move Little Chick t–”

“Stop calling me that...” the tactician growled at the princess.

“–o the bench!” she said, ignoring his protests.

The thief complied, getting a closer look at the tactician and wincing. “I think his nose is broken.”

Lissa waved her staff and frowned. The soothing light did reduce the bruising, but not by much. “I will need a stronger staff. I think it’s enough training for today, Miss Morgana.”

“Oh, that had to hurt.”

Turning to the origin of the voice, the group saw Rose looking at her brother with sympathy and amusement. She was not wearing her coat today, instead only a simple shirt, trousers, and leather boots.

“Hmm, agreed. I think that’s enough training for you, son,” Morgana said before turning to her daughter. “What do you say, Rose? Are you up for a round with your mother?”

“Are you sure?” Rose said, her tone implying something that the audience could not decipher.

Morgana took a more serious look. “I want to see how you grew while you were away. No magic for now. Nor our family’s little trick,” she said taking her stance and preparing for the fight.

“Fair enough,” Rose said, putting a simple leather vest and arm-guards. She then took a training sword from the rack that was like her regular weapon. Testing its weight, she nodded and got into her stance.

Having been on the receiving end of that ass kicking before, Rose knew better than to underestimate
her mother. She still figured she could fare far better than the pitiful sack of bruised meat her brother had become. Narrowing her eyes in focus, she tried to remember all the practice sessions she had with her mother.

Both had been younger at the time, with physical strength favoring Morgana back then. Now, Rose should far surpass her in that regard, but she’s aware her mother never showed all her tricks. It’s not like she could, or would, go all out on her mother, but she had some reputation to uphold. She might be strong, but Rose wasn’t taking any chances.

“Alright, it won’t be as easy as Robin, though,” Rose said, succeeding in hiding the nerves she’s feeling. Say what you want, Morgana had ingrained respect and fear in her soul since she was a child.

“And I won’t go as easy on you as I did with him,” Morgana said with a tone that promised pain, earning a cry of protest from her son.

The two circled each other, looking for openings. Rose looked at her mother’s eyes for any tells, but it was as if she was carved of stone. There was barely a muscle twitch before Morgana dashed to her, slashing at her midsection, only to have her strike parried. The dance continued for six minutes as the women got used to each other’s fighting style. Morgana had her own mix of styles, just like Rose. The older woman easily matched her skill, much to her surprise. Her mother had more up her sleeve than she suspected.

“Damn, mom. I knew you were good, but this?” Rose asked, shocked. Her own body was stronger than that of a normal human, Ignis constantly running through her veins. And yet her mother was easily matching her blow for blow. Sure, she wasn’t tapping into her draconic power in full, but damn if that farm work did not make up for a decent equalizer.

Morgana smiled, twirling her sword in a playful taunt. “Oh, my little flower, who do you think took care of the bandit raids on the village all those years? Or trained those poor excuse for guards for the garrison? Or dispatched those poachers that wanted take what little cattle we had?”

Ah, that explained those days she went away, leaving Rose alone at the farm in her early youth. While growing up, she thought she was spending time with Mr. Rodrick down the road for… other reasons. She shuddered at that and locked the idea far away in her mind.

Taking advantage of her momentary lapse of focus, Morgana put pressure on her daughter with quick attacks. The tactician grunted as she blocked with some effort. Rose moved to counterattack, but her mother was exceptionally fast for her age. Morgana pushed back her attack, feinting twice and stabbing at her midsection.

With a curse on her lips, the younger woman twisted out of the way and lashed out with a kick. It didn’t hit her target as her mother, using her sword to keep her own at bay, caught the leg with a grunt. Morgana twisted the grip of her sword and pushed Rose’s blade downwards. She then thrust the fist around the hilt towards her daughter.

Rose caught her mother’s fist to the side of her face. Using free leg, she kicked her mother away and put some distance between them. Spitting blood on the floor, much to their audience shock, the tactician glared at her mother.

“Ready to yield?” Morgana asked with no small amount of cockiness. No fair, that was her thing! Rose growled. “Oh, it’s on!”
“Bubbles?” Gaius asked, having dragged his friend to the bench as he watched the two women trade blows. It’s like watching two angry Fredericks fighting each other.

“Yeah?” the tactician managed to slur out as Lissa used various staff to heal his wounds as she looked back and forth from the duel.

“The women in your family scare the shit out of me,” he said, earning nods from the others. They watched Rose strike Morgana’s stomach, only for her mother to grab her arm and flip her over her shoulder. Rose rolled with the hit, dodging the downward slash and pushing herself to her feet, ready for another go.

Robin could only grunt in agreement. Better they don’t find out about Aversa…

Maybe he could get his mother to help Chrom master Aether while they trained with Ignis. He knew his friend was trying after watching Marth use it. That was still a mystery, though

That would be fun.

“I’m telling you, Emm, I don’t need help talking with women!” Chrom declared in exasperation. The siblings walked the hallways of the castle towards the training grounds. They had heard of the sparring session between Robin and Morgana and decided to watch. Unfortunately for the prince, her sister thought it was the best time to discuss something they had postponed long enough. “Look! I’m talking with you perfectly fine!”

“...I am your sister, Chrom. It’s not the same,” Emmeryn responded, unamused. “And I am not talking only about your blunders with Lady Rose and Lady Morgana. I remember what you said to Lady Mormont during the New Year Banquet.”

He grimaced. “Maybe complimenting the thickness of her arm muscles was not the best way to start a conversation, but—”

The pair jumped back in shock as the door to the training grounds exploded in a shower of debris. Chrom immediately jumped in front of Emmeryn, Falchion ready to face any threat. Only his discipline and trust on the castle’s improved security had stayed his hand.

Once the dust settled, the royal siblings were treated to a sight no one had seen before.

Rose laid upside down against the wall, her eyes wide and her expression one of stupefied disbelief. Her sword laid embedded in the stone floor in front of her.

“Don’t underestimate your dear old mother, little flower!” Morgana’s voice called from the courtyard.

Emmeryn and Chrom looked up from the gaping tactician, whose body slowly slid from the wall to the floor and stared at each other. A mutual understanding sparked between the two. Something they haven’t felt since they were children, before they were shackled by the weight of their responsibilities. An unspoken set of rules and customs that every sibling knew. And there was only one way to decide who would win this silent challenge.

“Dibs,” said Emmeryn, quick as a whip.

“Di– Aww, Come on Emm! You already got Rose!”

“And you have Robin. Not to mention that Rose accompanies you as my proxy during large
missions,” she retorted. Chrom narrowed his eyes. “You only want her because of the pastries she makes.”

“I have no idea of what you are implying,” Emmeryn denied, head held high despite the rosy tint on her cheeks. "And I doubt she desires field work. A job around the castle is a better choice."

Her brother stared for a moment, before sighing. “...Fine, but if she makes more of those blueberry cheesecakes while I’m away, you better save me some.”

Emmeryn smiled as her brother’s grumbles, enjoying her victory. Things had certainly gotten livelier in the castle since that family came into their lives. And those pastries taste heavenly.

Cynthia had been anticipating the news of the royal wedding. They all were, especially Lucina, who anxiously waited to see her parents' wedding. So, when the announcement came they all cheered. It quickly stopped when they realized it was to be the wedding of Lady Emmeryn Lowell and Aedan Amell. From what Laurent said, the groom was a scholar of renown, who in their time died during the attack on the capital. They seemed like a good match in her opinion, and she would love to see the public part of the ceremony.

Someone disagreed, though.

“Nononono, this is all wrong,” Lucina cried as she pulled her hair. She’s a mess. Cynthia had never seen her this distraught. Sure, she had lost her temper a few times after harsh defeats, and badly at that, but she could understand. Lucina was always calm, but the changes on the timeline have only deepened her existential crisis. “It should be my parents’ wedding! Are they not getting married? I won’t be born; What if I do disappear?! Will time collapse in a paradoxical self-implosion?!”

Cynthia was honestly surprised Lucina knew those words.

“There is always multiverse theor–”

“Shut up, Laurent!” shouted Severa from her seat near the fire. “Gawds, Lucina! Get a hold of yourself! This is getting annoying!”

“What is all this ruckus,” growled Gerome, coming out of his tent with an air of annoyance.

The pigtailed brunette sighed as she stood up and proceeded to reason with Lucina. Using the same method as before, of course. It worked last time, so might as well do it again.

“Cynthia!” her friends shouted in alarm.

Looking at the unconscious princess, she muttered. “Drats, forgot the open palm again...”

Hopefully, the others are having a better time in town.

“No, he knew it was to get him out of the room. Emmeryn getting married made his protective instincts go into overdrive. He didn’t dislike Aedan. He couldn't think of someone worthier of his sister now that he was aware they have been infatuated with each other. For a long time as he found
out.

It's the principle of the matter.

Chrom sighed in defeat as his own thoughts and focused on his task. “Oh well, how hard can it be? Just ask a florist for a nice wedding bouquet, no big deal.”

Silently, he was glad this was the only thing he had to do for the preparations. A month was barely enough time to organize such an event like a royal wedding. And he didn't want to deal with Maribelle and Lissa right now.

Finally, a store caught his eye. It was a large building instead of the collection of stalls that littered the marketplace. The front was cleared, and he could easily see through the windows. They had a wide selection of items, from weapons to toys, but most importantly the biggest collection of flowers he had found all afternoon. Making his decision he opened the door and walked inside.

The store was nearly empty of customers, being already late in the day, just with a few of the staff and guards. At the door were two young myrmidons whose features reminded him of Lon’qu. ‘They must be from Chon’sin. They are rather young, though, especially the girl. Why are they working as guards?’ Before he could give it any more thought the owner of the store came forward to welcome him rather enthusiastically.

“Welcome! Welcome!” the vendor greeted. He was a young man with red hair and an easy smile. “Welcome to Alann’s General Store! I’m Alann, the owner. I did not expect the honor to serve the prince of Ylisstol after only being open for a couple of months! How can we help you, your highness?”

“Please, just Chrom is fine,” he said, shaking the man’s hand.

“Lord Chrom, then,” Alann said with an easy smile that reminds him of Anna. “My mother always said to be respectful to your clients and their status.”

The prince smiled in response, understanding his professional reasoning. “Fair enough.”

“Now then! How can we be of help to you today?”

“I’m looking for flowers for my sister bouquet and wedding crown. I saw outside you have quite the selection and I hope you can help me decide,” he said, rubbing the back of his head in embarrassment. “I’m afraid I’m not the most knowledgeable person when it comes to such things, but I couldn’t say no to my sisters.”

“I understand, Lord Chrom,” the red-haired man said, nodding as he guided the prince through the store. “Arianne is our florist. She can help you with anything flower related. I dare say she is one of the best in the whole city!” he added with pride before shouting, “Arianne! We got a big client for you!”

A reply came from the back of the flower section, “Coming, sir!”

As the florist stepped into view. Chrom had to admit the woman was. She had shoulder length blonde hair held in a simple white bandana, framing her clear blue eyes, with freckles dusting her rosy cheeks. Quite a different sight from the painted noble ladies or even his more feminine comrades, but still quite beautiful in a simple way. It was even more charming when her doe eyes widened in shock at the sight of the royal.

“Arianne, this is Prince Chrom,” Alann said with mirth in his voice as he introduced the
dumbfounded girl to the royal. Clearly, her boss enjoyed her reaction. “He is looking for help in choosing something from our selection of flowers.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Lady Arianne.”

The florist waved her hands in front of her nervously. “P-Please, milord! I’m no lady, just a simple florist.”

“Alann said otherwise. He insists you are the best florist in the city. I’m hoping you can help me with a special order. I need flowers for Emmeryn’s wedding bouquet as well as her flower crown.”

The girl took a moment to process his words before her mouth dropped in shock. “That’s such an honor!” She squeaked. “Oh, Alann… Milord, h-he’s exaggerating about my skills, but I will do my best to assist you with this honor.”

‘Goodness, it’s like talking to Olivia,’ he thought with amusement. She started guiding him through the selection of flowers. The girl gained more confidence as she explained the nature, origin, meaning, and symbolism of each flower. There was so much to about that he didn’t even imagine that made him glad he didn’t pick some random bunch and be done with it. He would’ve probably chosen some funeral flowers or something.

“You are quite knowledgeable about flowers,” he complimented.

The young blonde woman blushed, hiding her freckles from view. “W-Well… I grew up in a village outside the capital. My family owns a farm that produces many things, but we pride ourselves on our flowers. Orchids, lilies, camellias, carnations, tulips, roses... You name it, we know it!” she stated proudly, before remembering who she was talking to. “P-Pardon me, milord! That was too informal of me!”

Chrom chuckled at her attitude. “No problem, and please, call me Chrom. My family likes to be approachable to our subjects.” Then he stopped as something she said caught his attention. “Hmm, roses...” he said, thinking about one of the tacticians that had shaped his life in such a short time. One that had not only saved his sister nearly at the cost of her own life but had become a close friend of hers. “Tell me, do you have any white roses? They should fit rather well with Emmeryn’s wedding dress. Or maybe something blue, for our house color? I admit I’m can’t tell if those are proper colors for a wedding, or if they would clash...”

Arianne pondered for a moment before breaking into a smile. “I have just the thing! Please follow me,” she said with the enthusiasm of someone that loved her job. “These are Winter Roses, from the north of Ferox. In the cold they are a pale blue color, but they turn silvery white in warmer climates. They are very rare in Ylisstol, only grown in the greenhouses in the mountains behind the city. We are one of the few stores in the city that can keep them fresh and healthy,” Arianne stated, puffing her chest with pride. “They are associated with purity and goodness of heart, while their meaning is the purity of love. If I might be so bold, I can’t think of a better flower for such an occasion.”

Chrom gave a soft laugh and checked the flowers and was stunned. “They are lovely,” he breathed. They were. He might not know a lot about flowers, but he could appreciate their beauty. Silvery white with a slight cerulean shine that reminded him of frost. He could see why they were named that way. The blue tint would work well to represent the color of the Brand of the Exalt. Maybe Robin and Rose could do something with their ice magic...Yeah, that could work. “I would like to commission a wedding bouquet and a flower crown from these roses for my sister’s wedding. Can you do it yourself, or do we need to talk with someone else? I would of course pay you generously for your work.”
The request shocked the girl, who stammered with her response with a shrill voice. “You want me to make the flower accessories for the Exalt?! I-I mean! Selecting the flowers is one thing b–!”

“Breath, Arianne! Breathe!” came Alann’s voice from the counter.

“I–We–I mean… I have experience with small weddings and it would be an honor for me and my family to do this. I can only hope my work befitting of your sister,” she said after gathering all her courage.

“I’m sure it will. Unlike most nobles, my sister is not that picky. She prefers simplicity over complicated arrangements,” he said, offering her a reassuring smile. “Something in my gut tells me you have the talent, and for the most part those feelings haven’t wronged me so far. That’s what lead me to recruit some past enemies that turned into precious allies. I get the feeling you will not disappoint,” he added, placing a hand on her shoulder as an idea occurred to him. She was saving his skin after all. “In fact, how about this? If you can help me, I will make sure you get a couple of invitations to the wedding as well as the reception. How does that sound?”

“I–! I would love to! Oh, I could invite my sister!” she squealed, before freezing. “B-But I’m just a lowly commoner, milord. Would I even be welcome in su–?”

“None of that! Everyone if our kingdom is important. Most of my friends have no title and some of them even rose from nothing to high positions by their own merit. I would never look down on anyone due to their station. That’s not the kind of lord that I am,” Chrom said seriously, halting her protests.

She looked down at her clothes and Chrom noticed the worn cloth. "I don’t think we have proper attire for such an occasion..."

“Don’t worry about that,” the prince said, waving off her concerns. “I will give word to our merchant, Anna, to get you something nice.” he said with a smile.

"This is too much! The invitations, the dresses, and the business for some flowers?!”

"They are rare flowers, and they will be part of my dear sister's wedding. That deserves a good compensation," Chrom said with a shrug. It wasn't that much in his opinion. The invitations were easy to get since they had some reserved in case of something unforeseen. The dressmaker for her dress was given invitations too so it's only fair. Paying for the flowers was already taking into consideration. Getting Anna to cooperate usually is like squishing blood from a stone, but she had been happy lately. Between her time with Gregor and the increased business, he could pull this off.

Arianne stared at the lord in shock, and her eyes started to mist up. “You are too kind, milord,” she said, flustered. “Attending the Royal Wedding… This is like a dream...”

“It's good to make other’s dreams a reality, for life is too short,” he said, thinking about how close he was to losing Emmeryn and never seeing her wedding. “And I told you that you may call me Chrom.”

The girl gave him a shaky smile and nodded, “O-Of course, C-Chrom.”

The prince smirked. She’s kind of cute.

'And Emm says I can’t be charming.'
strange sight to see and it was one that worried him. What were the chances that the prince picked
their store for such important occasion? ...Or that he was hitting it off with his florist?

“Ke’ri. Sun’fey. Jocasta. Meet me in the back,” he said to his guards – his friends – who nodded in
understanding, “Tobias, the store if yours for a while, we are taking an early lunch!”

“Got it, boss!” was the reply he got. There shouldn’t be an issue but if anything happened they
would be just one door away.

Nodding, the redhead went to the back and closed the door behind him, leaving him alone with the
three guards. “What do you make of that?”

“Not sure,” Jocasta said, leaning against the wall with a frown. “Isn’t Chrom the one supposed to be
the one getting married?”

“Emmeryn is alive. It makes sense she took the responsibility for giving the populace something to
celebrate,” Sun’fey pointed out. “If I recall correctly, the Exalt and the Queen married in haste to
increase the populace morale.”

“Did you see the way he looked at her, though?” Ke’ri said, crossing her arms. “It reminded me a
little of my brother. Do you think they are...?” she said, trailing off and leaving the question open?

The merchant scowled in thought. Chrom getting married might not be so far off if his gut feeling
was correct. But he wasn’t sure it was the right thing to happen now that Emmeryn was alive. Too
many variables. Deciding there was only one course of action available to them, he stated his
decision. “We should report this to Lucina.”

Watching over the city from the battlements of the castle, Robin enjoyed a moment of respite. All the
preparations for the wedding amidst the reconstruction certainly increased his workload. The rubble
had been removed, so setting up the stands and decorations was a simple matter. There were still too
many damaged buildings, though. At least the outer walls were fully repaired to provide a sense of
security to the people.

Some purposely loud footsteps came from behind him and the familiar voice of his sister asked,
“You aren’t brooding, are you?”

He sighed in mock annoyance. “No, just enjoying some ‘me’ time.”

“Well, it’s now ‘we’ time,” she said, putting a blanket on the stone floor and putting down a basket
he just noticed that she had been carrying around. “Here, mom made us lunch,” she said, offering
him a box wrapped in cloth.

“Oh, thanks,” he said, taking the box and opening it. He smiled at the simple but delicious food his
mother made. He could see the truth in that nothing beats a mother’s cooking. “What brought you
here?”

“Other than being mother’s delivery girl?” Rose said and shrugged. “Nothing really. I just enjoy
some time away from the sickening display of love that is Emmeryn and Aedan. I could feel my teeth
rot from the sweetness.”

“You are such a good friend.”

“I know, right? So, then I thought, what better way to spend that time than my baby brother?” Rose
said, flashing him a smile.
“Mom said you are only older for a few minutes...” Robin said dryly, before taking a more thoughtful tone. “We haven’t spent much time together just the two of us since before we left to look for mother.”

“Yeah...” she said, rubbing the back of her head and he noticed he does the same thing when he’s nervous. “Sorry again for not being truthful from the start, but...”

“I understand. I have come to terms with it. Things have worked out, so no hard feelings,” Robin said, before looking at his sister flatly. “Though I would’ve preferred that you had told me the truth about ‘Lily’ in a less blunt manner.”

“Heh, your face was priceless.”

“You invited me to lunch and just said, ‘Oh, by the way, Lily is really the Voice of Naga, Tiki,’” he said in a mocking imitation of Rose’s voice. “Then she took her jewelry off and revealed her manakete nature! I almost pissed myself when I realized I was being too familiar with freaking Naga’s daughter!”

“Relax, she loved going as your date. Life in the Mila Tree is dull, and you showed her a good time,” she said, before giving him a sly smirk. “Though not as good a time as you did Devola and Popola.”

“Please don’t say that! Tiki might get the wrong idea and Naga might smite me!”

“Oh, come on, don’t tell me you haven’t thought about it,” she teased him with a grin that reminds him of a cat stalking a mouse. “I mean, she looks fantastic for being older than dirt and all, but she has never been in a relationship. People take her a symbol of purity and all. Then this dashing tactician with a mysterious past, who ended a war by defeating a mad tyrant in single combat, takes her out to magical night as the belle of the ball.”

“...You planned on her being my date only for this moment, didn’t?”

Rose laughed, and Robin begrudgingly admitted it was fun to spend time together as siblings.

The day of the wedding finally arrived, and the city was bustling with activity. The main roads were clear so the Emmeryn's carriage could do a lap around the castle. This way she could greet the masses before she stopped at the entrance of the castle’s great hall. The Pegasus knights were patrolling the skies, while some of Rose’s contacts watched from the crowds. So far, nothing bad had happened, which was good news for the two bridesmaids.

Phila and Rose stood on the side of the altar, in a set of matching light blue dresses, internally not too happy to be wearing them. Normally, it would’ve been a challenge to get both women into a dress, but they relented for Emmeryn’s sake. Next to the pair, Lissa stood in a similar dress, holding a box engraved with the Brand of the Exalt. Aedan stood before them with his best man at his side, his brother, holding a similar box with the sigil of House Amell. The mage looked twitchy, eyes flicking towards the door in anticipation, lips witching upwards every second. It was kind of endearing.

Once the first part of the ceremony was done along with the customary prayers and songs, the Exalt finally made her entrance. She was being escorted by her brother and the sight made the whole audience fall silent.

Emmeryn was a vision of ethereal beauty. Her white and gold wedding gown complimented her luscious golden curls that framed her face. Her makeup accentuated her natural beauty. The necklace she wore was made of silver adorned with a sapphire centerpiece with the brand of the Exalt.
carved into it. On top of her head sat a crown of winter roses. The women had to admit Chrom did a good job picking up the flowers for the bouquet and crown. It had been tricky for the Plegian tacticians to complete the request of the Prince. It took them the better part of a week, but they succeeded. A light coat of ice magic brought out the shimmering blue of the roses, making the scene even more ethereal.

Both warrioresses glanced towards the groom and were pleased to see his love-stroke expression as he saw his bride walking down the aisle. When they finally stood in front of each other and looked into the other’s eyes, there was no doubt in Emmeryn’s retainers that these two loved each other. Which was good, since if he broke her heart there would be no god to save him from their wrath.

The High Priest of Naga’s Church led the ceremony, looking at the couple with kind eyes. Rose recalled he had a part in teaching the Royal family about Naga’s teaching, and help a close connection with them. He would have been a better advisor than Howe had he not being tied to the church.

“We have been invited here today to witness and celebrate the uniting in marriage of this man and woman. They are taking the first step of their new beginning; their new life together. The ability and desire of one human being to love another is perhaps the most precious and fulfilling gift that has been entrusted to us. It is an all-consuming task, a lifelong endeavor — the journey we’ve been preparing for all of our lives.”

Stealing a glance to the front rows, Rose could spy Stahl holding Cordelia’s hand, while Gaius put his arm across a blushing Sumia’s shoulders.

“Loving someone is a reason to stretch beyond our limits, to become more for the sake of the other. It is to look inside the soul of your beloved and accept what you see. Good and bad. Loving is the ultimate commitment which challenges humans to become all that we are meant to be, but that's not the only challenge they are going to face.”

At her side, Lissa vibrated with excitement, her grin wide matching Henry’s perpetual smile visible from his seat. She still remembered how Chrom had almost gutted the mage once he found him on a simple date with Lissa. Luckily Emmeryn was nearby to stop him. Next to them were Panne and Vaike, both hating to wear clothes, in brooding but respectable silence. Even Tharja seemed to scoot closer to Libra.

“We know the suffering they have gone through due to the war, for we too share that burden. Their union heralds not only a new beginning for them, but for the Halidom as a whole. As they join in marriage today, they are announcing to the world that they are welcoming that challenge. And they can be assured that we, their subjects, will help them carry that burden.”

Phila closed her eyes, probably remembering all those of her soldiers that fell in battle.

“Let us then proceed with the ceremony,” the high priest said, silencing the crowds. “Who stands before the Gods and the Divine Dragon Naga this day?”

Emmeryn spoke with conviction as her soft voice seemed to ring through the hall. “Emmeryn, of House Lowell, Exalt of the Halidom comes here to be wed. A woman grown, trueborn and noble. I come to beg the blessing of the Gods and the Divine Dragon.”

The priest nodded, smiling at the girl he knew since she was a child. “Who comes to claim her?”

“Aedan, of House Amell, Archmage of the Ylissean Arcanum,” the groom said with passion and certainty. A tone so different from his regular scholarly demeanor. He never took his eyes of his
smiling bride.

“Who gives her?”

“Chrom of House Lowell,” the leader of the Shepherds said with pride in his voice. “Her trueborn brother, Prince of the Halidom.”

The priest nodded. “Do you, Emmeryn Lowell, take this man as your husband, welcoming him as part of House Lowell with all the responsibilities it entails for you and the Halidom?”

“I do.”

“Do you Aedan Amell, take this woman as your wife, with all the responsibilities it entails for you and the Halidom?”

“I do.”

“Does anyone here have a reason for why this union should not be? Speak now or keep your peace.”

No one did. Sure, Rose might have... a few people that disapprove of the union for political gain into silence, but it worked. Maybe Lucina would... Oh well, those were future Rose’s problems.

Nodding in satisfaction, the old man continued with a pleased smile. “As there are no objections, we shall seal this union. The rings,” he said to Lyssa and Aedan’s brother. The two walked to their siblings, opening and holding the engraved boxed so they could take the contents.

Emmeryn took a golden ring with the Brand engraved into the polished sapphire. Like the one Rose used to own, but clearly meant for a man. “This ring was made the day of my birth as heir to the throne. With it I place my faith and heart into your hands, welcoming you into my family.”

Aedan smiled and offered his own ring. “I accept that ring, and I give you my own as proof of my devotion and love.”

“I accept it,” Emmeryn said as the pair slipped the rings into each other’s fingers.

The old man couldn’t help the proud smile and tears from his eyes. “Then by the power vested in me I declare you husband and wife. May your union bring prosperity to your houses and the kingdom.”

He turned and winked at Aedan. “You might now kiss the bride.”

They certainly didn’t need to be told twice as Aedan took a step forward and pulled Emmeryn into a loving kiss. The display of love earned cheers from those present, none more excited than their friends and family.

“It was beautiful!” Cynthia gushed as the newlyweds kissed. “It’s a wedding straight out of a song!”

“Only you would compare it to that,” Severa said with a roll of her eyes, though it lacked her usual bite. Maybe out of respect to the ceremony. “…It’s pretty nice, though. Lady Emmeryn just oozes grace.”

“Was it necessary to tie up and gag Lucina?” Ke’ri said, eyeing the seething princess dubiously, being held back by a reluctant Owain and Gerome.

“Agreed,” the two said solemnly.

“We couldn’t risk her making a scene, especially after what Alann told us, sweet sister,” Inigo said, putting an arm around the tiny myrmidon’s shoulder.
“Fair enough, big bro,” she grumbled. “Don’t think I will let you go around flirting with every girl in the city, though!”

“You wound me! How can you deny these sweet maidens the chance to spend time with me?”

“Easily,” the pink haired myrmidon said in a deadpanned tone. “How did you get invitations for us anyways, Alann?” she said, waving her hand to the private balcony where the many future children say, watching the wedding. Why does a church need to have balconies she didn’t know, but she wasn’t complaining.

“Oh, I know some people,” Alann said

“The twins from ‘Sealed Verses’ had a few invitations from a friend in the castle. They sold them to him in exchange for some rare, imported alcohol,” Sun’fey said. His words shattered his friend’s image of a savvy merchant while not bothering to look at him.

“You have too much Anna’s blood in you,” Jocasta said.

“As a merchant, I take that as a compliment.”

The dark-skinned blonde warrior snorted and waved him off. “Yeah, yeah. Kjelle, grab Lucina. Let’s see if we can enjoy the celebrations in town.”

“Wait. You didn’t get us invitations to the reception?” Cynthia asked in angst.

Alann looked at the side. “I can’t get that much alcohol and they sold them to someone else.”

Later in the evening, the reception was in full swing. Food and wine flowed freely as the guests mingled and celebrated a new beginning for the royal family. The nobles wanted to complain about the rumbustious group that was the Shepherds. But they couldn't without insulting the Royal Family. And while they would never admit it, they livened the party. Robin just shook his head in amusement. Uncouth they may be, but the Shepherds are a fun group to have at a party. Better than a boring nobility party full of half-hidden insults and political agendas.

Tiki was his date once again, much to his secret delight. He enjoyed her company, though he didn’t have ideas that he could be more than that with the Voice of Naga. A man could still dream, though. That kiss in the cheek gave him hope. Sadly, they missed their first dance since his mother took her to talk for a while, wanting to know more about her. Despite being the Voice of Naga, she wasn’t excused from Morgana’s curiosity.

He got a surprise when a certain pair of red-haired twins took his arms. Devola and Popola, who had invitations courtesy of Rose, took it upon themselves to guide him to the dance floor, taking turns to dance with him. The girls were excited after having missed the Victory Ball and took their turns dancing with him, much to Tiki’s amusement. He was sure she knew about them from Rose, and hoped she didn’t get the wrong idea, but didn’t seem to have an issue with them.

Of course, any sign of amusement soon vanished as soon as he saw his mother dancing with some man he didn’t know. She looked lovely in her dark purple dress, with her hair pulled in an elegant braid. She looked half her age, making it no wonder people thought she was their elder sister. Not only that but she had such charisma that just endeared her to everyone. Now he couldn’t imagine a life without her.

The man was another story. His clothes were fine, but less so that those of a higher noble, so either a successful merchant or a minor lord. The tactician committed his face to memory to give the
information to his sister. He was sure she would get every dirty secret the man had by the end of the week. Robin’s eyes narrowed, watching like an eagle at the mere sign of his hand moving somewhere inappropriate. If he tried anything on his mother, he would make Gangrel’s corpse look handsome in comparison. Or maybe plant some incriminating evidence of some crime in his room? Damn, his sister really was a bad influence...

“You know your mother can take care of herself, right?” his date’s voice said as if reading his mind.

Looking at the green haired beauty, Robin did his best to hide his blush and game a sly smile. “Is it wrong for a son to worry about some stranger’s intentions for his mother?”

Tiki did a show of pondering the question, shrugging with a smile. “I suppose not. I don’t have siblings and my mother’s dating life is nonexistent, so my experience is very limited.”

“Eh, I suppose that’s one way of putting it.” He never would’ve guessed that Naga’s dating life could be a topic of conversation.

Luckily for him, Tiki spared him by changing the topic. “It was a beautiful ceremony, don’t you think? It’s been a while since I attended a wedding.”

“It was. I don’t know who was happier, Emmeryn or Lissa. Certainly not Chrom.”

Tiki rose an eyebrow at that. “Oh? Why do you say that?”

"Chrom is happy for her, make no mistake. But he's still miffed that now there is another man in her life, regardless of how happy he makes her."

“Men are as protective of their sisters as they are of their mothers it seems,” she jested. An idea seemed to occur to her as she asked, “What would you do if Rose gets married?”

Mindful to swallow his food first, Robin snorted. “Even if we ignore her disastrous past relationships, can you think there is a man out there that can put up with my sister in her current state?”

“Point taken,” the Voice conceded. She then got into a thinking pose and got a sly grin. “Hmm, what about if it was… Prince Chrom?”

The tactician almost choked on his wine, “Chrom and Rose!?” He tried to imagine it, but for all his brain’s power the idea just didn’t process. It was like picturing Gangrel and Emmeryn together, or him and Tharja. No. Just… “No. Rose would kill him in a week if she is in a good mood.”

Tiki hummed noncommittally as if she knew something he didn’t and probably didn’t want to know. Deciding not to stay in awkward silence, “Say… Even after, you know… I learned the truth of who you are, I… Umm, I was wondering… and I know I have no right to ask this from someone of such importance and I apologize if I was improper in the last celebration, but...”

“Yes?” Tiki asked, with a tilt of her head, though her smile indicated she knew what he was about to ask.

He swallowed his nerves and steeled himself. “W-Would you like to dance with me? I owe you for dancing with Devola and Popola first. That was wrong of me.”

Tiki's smile widened and offered her hand. “I would be delighted. I was afraid you wouldn’t ask after knowing who I am. People tend to be intimidated by my… station. And don’t worry, I have no
problem with you dancing with your friends."

Friends. Right.

"Oh, I'm terrified, make no mistake. No idea what you or your, ehm, mother would do if I offended you," he said, laughing awkwardly as he took her hand and guided her to the dance floor. "Or what mine would do to me if I offended you."

Tiki laughed, and the melodious sound made his whole embarrassment worth it.

"So…"

"So?"

"Emmeryn is married," Rose said conversationally, sipping on her wine as she watched all the couples dancing.

"That's a fantastical observation," Phila replied dryly. It took her a moment, but she noticed that despite her rather impressive resistance to alcohol, Rose had gained a slight slur on her voice. Not enough to be drunk, but still tipsy. Not a good combination in her option.

"And you are still single," the tactician said while pointing at her coworker with narrowed eyes.

The knight's lips formed a thin line as she finally turned to the former mercenary. "I fail to see the problem with that."

"I mean, I have an excuse, but you?" Rose said, ignoring Phila's scowl. "Come on, Phila! You are a fit, beautiful woman in her prime. One of the most influential persons in the Halidom, not to mention a warrior of renown!" she said, making the Wing Commander's cheeks gained a rosy tint. "There had to be some poor sucker out there that has at least tried asking you out!"

"Well, Rose…. To be perfectly honest…” Phila started, taking a sip of her own wine before leveling an unamused stare towards the other woman. "I don't think that's any of your business."

Rose did the closest thing to whining that Phila had ever seen her do, "Come on! We are friends, right?"

"If we stretch the term then yes, I believe we loosely qualify as such."

"I mean, sure, you still have the boring hairstyle, but with a few tweaks you can knock out the sucks out of some gallant knight!"

"I'm not interested in— wait, what's wrong with my hair!?" the knight asked indignantly.

"I mean, it's not wrong…” Rose said, eyes glassing over for a moment before she continued, "it's just so… simple,” she finished with a shrug.

"I happen to like my hairstyle, thanks,” Phila gritted out. “And we are not having this conversation."

"Fine, fine…"

Pinching the bridge of her nose, the knight sighed and refilled her glass. "Ugh, I'm going to need more wine if I'm spending the rest of the knight babysitting you and making sure you don’t burn the castle down."

"I knew you cared!"

“We are really here,” her sister, Bethany, breathed out and Arianne was forced to agree.

She still couldn’t believe she was in the Great Hall of the Ylissean Palace! They were simple girls from a farming village and yet the prince himself gave them such an opportunity. Both girls wore simple, but elegant dresses of higher quality than they could ever afford, adorned with flower patterns. That girl Anna had done them the favor at the prince’s request, though she did try to sell them more things. They did manage to get a nice contract for their family with the Annas, so that was great for them.

“Think we could dance with some nice gentleman?” Bethany asked, seeing how some young men were looking at them with interest.

She couldn’t contain her hope. This was a like a fairy tale. “Oh, that would be delightful! But who would ask us? We are just some common girls...” she trailed off, depressing herself.

“Ari...” her sister said with exasperation. “We really need to work on your self-esteem.”

“R-Right! I just... need not to make a fool of myself.”

“I still can’t believe you got to meet the prince! And you got us invitations for this!” her sister gushed, pulling her to one of the tables and taking a glass of wine that was offered to them. It was delicious and the doubted anyone in their family had ever tasted something so fine. “The girls back home must be seething in jealousy! Think we will meet him tonight?”

A lump formed in the pit of her stomach. Lord Chrom was so nice to her, but she couldn’t imagine talking to him in front of so many people! “Oh, I don’t think so. He must be so busy with t—”

“I’m glad you decided to join us, Lady Arianne,” a familiar voice said as if the gods had intervened.

Turning to the man, the girls’ nerves froze at the sight of the topic of conversations. Chrom wore a nice dark blue suit and fitted him perfectly, accentuating his muscles. But what caught their attention was the fact that the Exalt of Ylisse, the bride herself, stood at his side with a gentle smile. She was wearing the flower crown she and her sister wove, making them feel proud of their work. That combined with her natural beauty made her look almost divine.

“Lord Chrom! Your G-Grace!” Arianne squeaked as she and her sister bowed to the Royals.

“I told you to relax with us,” Chrom said, amused but a little frustrated. “Emmeryn, this is Lady Arianne. She is the florist that helped me with your flower crown and bouquet.” He then turned to her sister and smiled. “And you must be the sister she mentioned. May we know your name, my lady?”


“You look lovely tonight, Lady Bethany,” the prince said with a dazzling smile that made Bethany’s knees week. “And do too, Lady Arianne. I’m glad Anna had dresses that flatter both of you tonight.”

The girl stared like a deer in front of a hunter. She wasn’t sure how to deal with a compliment from the dreamy bachelor that was the Prince of Ylisstol.

Wait, what was that thought?
“Right,” the prince said, taking her silence in stride. “I hope you are enjoying the festivities? Remember, if anyone harasses you, you can find me or any of my comrades and we will be happy to help.”

The sisters nodded numbly, realizing a few nobles had turned to watch and feeling wholly out of place in their simple, yet nice dresses. They were not nearly an extravagant as the nobles, but they were not cheap. Simple designs like those worn by the Exalt’s bridesmaids or some lesser nobles. More than their family could afford.

Bethany was fitting in better than herself. She had always been the extrovert of the two. How Arianne envied her confidence. If only she was more like her maybe she could get a boyfr– Wait.

Was the Exalt talking to her?

“–or the lovely flowers. The work you did on the was exquisite.”

Luckily, her sister had recovered her wits quickly and answered for them.

“We thank you for the opportunity, milady,” Bethany said, giving a polite bow to the Exalt. “It’s a great honor and opportunity for our family to be of service to the House Lowell.”

“You more than earned it with your skill,” the Exalt said with a smile that could have melted any heart. “My sister Lissa and her friend Maribelle are currently helping plan the weddings of a lot of their friends. Don’t be surprised if you receive more request. Directly to your family, of course.”

Arianne swallowed. This could be a great chance for their family, if they cut Alann as a middleman. He’s a great boss but working for him it still required to give him part of the profits. This was better business for the Hinton. “We´ would be thrilled to serve your sister and her friends, milord.”

The Exalt smile was as gentle as the songs said. “Excellent. I will be sure to mention it to Lyssa.” She then turned to her brother and the sister could see the brief flash of a smirk on her lips. “Chrom, why don’t you take the ladies to the dance floor? It would be awfully boring to stand all night here by themselves. Maybe introduce them to the Lissa and Maribelle.”

‘Dance? With the prince?!’ Both sisters froze at the impossibility of how the night was turning out to be.

“Is that okay? I don’t want to make some of the more troublesome nobles angry with them,” Chrom said with a concerned frown.

“Don’t worry about it,” Lady Emmeryn said, much to the girls’ surprise. “You already danced with more than enough noble ladies tonight. Indulge the girls They earned it with their work.”

“If you think so...” Chrom said, narrowing his eyes. Did he not want to dance with them?

“It won’t do if you are the only one of your friends without a date,” Emmeryn added with a wink, making the other three blush. “Sir Robin is already spending a lot of time with Lady Lily last I heard.”

“You just love teasing me don’t you, sister?” The prince sighed in the same way her father did when her mother manipulated him. “Rose has been a terrible influence in you,” he grumbled good-naturally.

So that was it. It was strange to think so, but Arianne realized the Exalt and the Prince were still a brother and sister that loved each other. Teasing is just part of the package when it comes to siblings.
It made her smile realizing that even people of such high standing were still people at heart.

“What do you say, Lady Arianne? Would you grant me this dance?” Chrom asked, breaking her out of her thoughts. “Of course, I would also dance with you, Lady Bethany.”

The reality of the situation came crashing down on Arianne all at once. They were being called ladies by the prince of Ylisstol. In the beautiful Palace Grand Hall. During the Exalt’s wedding. And he wanted to dance with them.

Had she died and gone to paradise?

Feeling a pinch on her arm, and a side glare from Bethany, Arianne replied after miraculously pulling her wits together. “We would love to, your highness.” It wouldn’t do to reject the prince in middle of so many witnesses. It would be social suicide, especially for an insignificant flower girl such as her.

“Excellent,” Lady Emmeryn said, giving a slight nudge to her brother. “I will leave you to it. Aedan should be done dancing with his mother, so it’s my turn again. Have an enjoyable evening, ladies.” With that, the Exalt left the sisters alone with the prince.

“Shall we?” Chrom said, offering her his hand.

Arianne took it and followed him into the dance floor for a night she would never forget.

The prince and the flower maiden were unaware of a pair of drunken eyes looking at them with disgust.

Having seen her husb– No, wait. He wasn’t her husband, right? Ugh, damn headache, she needed more wine. Watching the prince dance with another strumpet still made the former queen jealous. Something she would only admit under supreme torture or the influence of alcohol. The girl looked like any other maiden from a random… village… A village maiden? There was something there, but she couldn’t remember. Maybe more wine would help.

“I’m telling you, men are stuuuupid,” Rose slurred, drinking from her eight – or eighteen, but who’s counting? – glass of spiced wine. The answer to her confusion stood at the tip of her tongue but was washed away by the wine.

“Damn right they are,” Phila said with a flushed blush on her cheeks. “That’s why we got a woman on the throne and we are her bodyguards.”

“Yeah! I mean, Chrom as Exalt? Pfct, we would have to run the country for him! …Or my brother will. I can’t handle all that babysitting again...” the tactician added, catching herself.

“Again?”

“Eh, past relationships,” Rose said, barely sober enough to not spill out her secrets. “Had to keep previous men in my life from doing stupid stuff. And that’s coming from me!” she said, laughing at her own joke.

Phila snorted a laugh and clicked her glass with Rose. “To women!”

“To women!”

After clicking their glasses and drinking more wine, Rose suddenly smiled. “Hey! I got an idea!”

“Yeah?”
“We should get out of here and go to the celebration outside! I will be less stuffy with nobles and more fun!”

The Pegasus Knight pondered the idea for a moment before smiling. “That’s not a bad idea, Sustrai.”

“Umm…” a voice said from behind them, making both drunk women turn to see one of Phila’s knights standing awkwardly in her dress uniform.

“Lena? What are you doing here?” her commander asked with a raised eyebrow, no less intimidating with her flushed cheeks.

The perky brunette gulped and forced a smile. “I’m… just making sure everything is ok here! You know, so you don’t get too excited haha….”

“Hmph, very well. I can see Emmeryn’s hand at work here,” Phila said with surprising clarity and gave a drunken nod. “You will come with us, then. We will need more wine. Or beer. Anything really.”

“W-What?”

“Good idea! The more the merrier!” Rose slurred with a smile that would make children cry.

“Don’t I have a say on this?!” Lena exclaimed, eyes wide in terror as both women grabbed her arms and lead her to the door. Desperate, she looked around for her wing-mates only to see them waving and saluting her as if she walked to her demise.

“Nope.”

“Your retainers seem to be enjoying themselves,” Aedan said with amusement as he danced with his wife to the expert tunes of the orchestra.

“I might have given the order to give them some of our best wine, so they won’t be hovering over my shoulder all night. They can be a bit protective,” The Exalt said with a theatrical sigh. “Phila’s knight will make sure they don’t burn the town down. Or at least I hope so.”

The enchanter gave a hearty laugh. “Ha! You’re surrounded by colorful characters, my love. Each of them is worth a thesis themselves.”

“And now they will surround you too, once we get you your own retainers,” Emmeryn said, giggling at the expression of mock shock her husband pulled. She kissed him, making the smile return to his face. “Not like you are not colorful yourself. You can be a bit of a dork,” she said playfully. A more human side that few ever saw of their graceful ruler.

“But I am your dork now,” Aedan said proudly.

“That you are,” Emmeryn said with a happy smile, leaning into his embrace. “I am so glad you can now be free to express our love.”

“I’ve waited for years to do so,” he whispered into her year, sending shivers down her spine. “Those stolen kisses after our meetings were not enough.”

The Exalt didn’t know what made this assertive at the moment, but she liked it. “Well, now we don’t have to hide,” she said, kissing him again. “We can just enjoy our lives together.”

“For being a mage of the Arcanum and the son of the Senior Enchanter, no matter the research I did I
never could figure out what spell you cast over me.”

“Poetry was never your strong suit, Aedan.”

He shrugged. “I had to give it a try.”

“Something bothering you, Robin?” Tiki asked as they danced to a soft Ylissian ballad.

Robin frowned in thought, mulling over how to answer. “Not sure if it should, but earlier I saw Rose dragging some poor soul out to party it seems,” he said, looking nervous. “And Phila wasn’t stopping her.”

Tiki paused. “Now that’s strange,” she said, her tone light with amusement but with a hint of worry.

“Should we check on them?” Robin asked tentatively, not wanting to ruin the evening.

Lena was sure she walked into a portal into a parallel world like from those stories her grandma used to tell. That was the only explanation. Because there was no chance she was witnessing Phila Lavellan—bonafide stick in the mud—drunk off her ass and being chummy with Rose Sustrai.

“You know Sustrai… When I first met you, I thought you were such a biiiiitch,” Phila said, swaying in her seat as she took another sip.

Oh gods, Lena had no idea Phila was such a lightweight. She barely had any wine before getting drunk.

Rose laughed and tried to point at her fellow warrior, missing completely. “I thought the same of you!”

“But really, like really really…” Oh gods, did her commander had that much to drink? “I think of you as a friend.”

“Aww, I love you too Phila,” Rose said, pulling Phila into a hug. “And you too Lana!” she added, pulling the terrified girl into the embrace.

“L–Lena,” she squeaked.

“You are nice, Lina,” the tactician slurred, nodding to herself. “Here! More wine!”

“But I don–! HMM!?!?” she stopped as a bottle was practically shoved down her throat.

“Drink up! Don’t be shy!”

‘It’s going to be a long night.’

“I’m sure they are fine,” Tiki said. “Phila is quite responsible after all.”

“You’re probably right,” Robin conceded, ending their dance and leading her to the glass doors. “What to take another stroll through the gardens and maybe go see how the town is celebrating?”

“That would be grand,” she said, walking with their arms linked. “This celebration reminds of the stories the others told me Mar-Mar’s wedding. Though I suppose they were still quite different in those times.”
Robin tilted his head in confusion. “Mar-Mar?”

The manaketes blushed at her slip of the tongue. “Oh, sorry. I meant King Marth,” she clarified, slightly embarrassed. “I was a child when I lived with him and the nickname stuck with me all these years.”

“I almost forgot you were part of the king’s party!” he exclaimed, eyes shining with even more interest. “You were at his wedding then?”

Tiki shook her head. “No, I didn’t join him until after he married Queen Caeda.”

“Still, it’s fascinating to hear the perspective of someone who was there. If it isn’t too much of a bother, could you tell me more King Marth and Queen Caeda? I doubt the legends and clinical biographies do them justice.”

“They don’t,” Tiki admitted with some sadness. “Legends portray them as flawless individuals, forgetting that they were human too. But I would be delighted to share my memories with others. It makes so that they live longer in our worlds, at least in some way.”

“Hmm, there are many biographies written by stories, but none with your input, right?”

“Correct, while I’ve been visited by historians, they tend to twist the worst to suit their needs,” she said with a frown. “There are plenty of misconceptions about many historical figures, but that’s the way of the world.”

“Well, we can fix that. We could work on giving your account to your old comrades, so people really know them. With Emmeryn’s support of your identity, as well as Aedan’s position as a respected scholar, we can publish it and clear all the misunderstandings,” he said, smiling at her. “I doubt many will dare doubt the voice of Naga and if they do, they can always visit you and you can verify it.”

Tiki eyes widened and a spark is excitement showed in her eyes. “That’s a fantastic idea! We could do the same for the Shepherds, so they aren’t forgotten like my friends!”

The pair talked about the past, not only of Tiki’s but of the memories Robin regained. The stories of the follies of his youth earned more laughs from the manakete. It didn’t embarrass the tactician, though. Robin’s heart swelled with happiness at her laugh, unaware that the same feeling was growing on his companion. A small ember that would only grow with time.

The sun pierced through the curtains, letting its warmth spread across the room like a mother’s embrace. Phila snuggled into the silk sheets enjoying the comfort of the body next to her. Surprisingly, she felt only a slight headache from the hangover.

“Hmm, good mornin’...” a familiar voice said from her side.

“Mornin’ Rose,” the knight responded to her companion without opening her eyes. “Want to get up?”

The tactician hummed as she shuffled in the sheets. “Hmm... nah, we got the day off. Let’s stay in bed a little longer.”

“Ok,” Phila whispered, snuggling with Rose at her side, ready to fall asleep again.

“...”
Two pairs of eyes snapped in horror. All traces of exhaustion and hangover vanished from their bodies. Jumping from the bed in opposite directions—barely aware that they were both naked—the two women pointed at each other. Noticing the dry sweat on their skin and the discarded clothes on the floor, the pair came to a horrifying realization before letting out a scream.

Chrom, Gaius, and Robin walked through the hallway, talking about the party. Or in Gaius case, bothering them about their romantic exploits.

“So, how was the night with the green haired goddess, Bubbles?” the thief asked with a smirk. All the Shepherds had seen him during the Victory Ball with Lady Lily. Seeing them together a second time just spread gossip amongst their ranks.

The prince was curious himself. This was the second time he had seen them together and he hoped his friend had finally found someone he could have a relationship with. “Did start courting her?”

“I saw them walking out of the celebration and into town. Did you manned up and kissed her?”

“...No comment,” Robin said, not taking his eyes from the front.

The thief threw his head back and laughed. “That says enough! Nice, Bubbles! Keep going like that and who knows? Maybe you will take Lily to *Sealed Verses* to ask the twins to join you,” Gaius said with a lecherous wink.

Instead of reacting angrily to the jab, Robin paused and seeming to ponder the idea.

Gaius stared at the tactician, his eyes slowly widening in wonder. “...Bubbles. If you do that, I will make a religion in your honor.”

“I never suspected that you would be such a casanova,” Chrom said with a shake of his head.

“You’re one to talk, after flirting with my mother,” the Plegian stated dryly, making the prince sputter in response. “Besides, I saw the way you danced with those sisters. The ones that helped you with the flowers. You enjoyed that much more than any other dance.”

“He got you there, Blue.”

“I was just being polite and Emmeryn strong-armed me into it!” He defended himself, though it sounded quite pathetic. Then again, he did enjoy his dances with the sisters. Both were lovely ladies, but he had to admit Lady Arianne had a certain air to her he quite couldn’t place. Like he was bound to meet her, but at the same time he had a strange feeling he shouldn’t. It was quite confusing.

“Sure, sure,” his friends said as one.

Changing the topic, Chrom turned to the orange-haired Shepherd. “What about you Gaius? How are things with Sumia?”

The thief gave them a sincere smile. “Doing wonderful. I still marvel that taking the job to break into the castle could turn out this way. She—”

The trio stopped when they heard the scream. They rushed through the hallway, following the sound to Phila’s room. Not wanting to give any intruder a chance, the men ready themselves for an attack. Robin gathered magic in his hand, while Gaius pulled a dagger from his cloak. Nodding to his
friends as he drew Falchion from its sheath, the prince knocked the door open, rushing into the room, followed by the other two.

“What’s going o–?!” Chrom started to shout only to freeze at the sight of the two of the strongest women he knew with their backs at the opposite walls, breathing heavily.

They were also naked.

Robin’s brain seemed to have burnt out at the sight of his naked sister, probably traumatizing him for life.

“Nice,” Gaius said unhelpfully, probably signing their death sentences.

The combined glares of Emmeryn’s retainers made the prince wonder why they hadn’t been reduced to a pile of smoldering ashes.

“OUT!”

The three men obeyed, but before they could disperse Phila called out to them.

“AND WAIT OUT THERE!”

The trio froze. They knew better than to disobey those two, especially when they seemed to be working together. Never mind that one was the prince of Ylisse. The men remained in place as the minutes moved painfully slow. Finally, the two women came out of the room, fully dressed this time.

“This never happened,” Phila said, the perfect picture of the leader of the Pegasus Knights.

“You saw nothing,” Rose gritted out, pulling her hood over her head. Chrom took a moment to wonder where she pulled that from since she was wearing a dress last night. The men were aware she was sparing her brother but, sadly for Robin, Phila’s glare more than made up for it.

The two women shared a silent discussion through their gazes and, after a moment, reached a silent agreement. They nodded and proceeded to leave, but Rose caught Gaius shoulder in a vice grip that certainly would leave a bruise. “If I catch a whiff of a rumor about this, I’m coming for you,” she said while trying to incinerate Gaius with her glare.

The thief paled, swallowing his candy along with his fear and nodded.

Rose let him go and left the trio standing there.

“We shall never speak of this again,” Chrom stated to them, not even bothering to look at the retreating women.

"Aye."

"Agreed."

The door of the bathroom opened, catching the attention of the men. They saw a perky brunette coming out in an open bathrobe, leaving a window to her toned body. Lena, a knight under Phila if Chrom remembered correctly. She looked around in confusion, not noticing the trio.

“Hey! Where did those two go?”

Chrom saw Gaius freeze and bite his tongue from the corner of his eye. He would really need to talk with him, well aware of what Robin’s sister was capable off in retaliation. That is if he survived the
stroke he seemed to be getting. And this girl, did she not hear the scream? The prince sighed and wondered why the gods were punishing by putting him in this situation.

Did he do something heinous in another life?

Many other weddings soon followed, starting with Sumia and Gaius, with the rest of the couples planning their own. Rose and Phila stood away from the stronger drinks during all ceremonies they were invited to. They avoided each other’s gazes for a few months, much to Emmeryn’s confusion. Eventually, they seemed to make peace with the topic and moved past it.

Chrom had offered to host the weddings, but his friends declined, not wanting to waste the crowns gold on frivolities. Lissa and Maribelle were more determined, though. They took over the preparations despite their protests and that got a lot of business of the Hinton family. Still, they had a single banquet for all the couples and it was one to remember. It was hosted only three months after Emmeryn’s wedding, but there had been some announcements there.

Cordelia, Sumia, Miriel, and Olivia were pregnant, much to the happiness of the Shepherds. But the biggest surprise was when a few weeks later Emmeryn announced her own pregnancy, bringing the joy of the Halidom. And she suspected many of the others will soon follow. Post-war celebrations tended to do that.

Still, this confused and worried Rose since the times of the pregnancies were off in comparison to her own timelines. Laurent is supposed to be the youngest and Lucina the eldest, but things were getting mixed up. She didn’t know what to make of this. She was sure her sources were correct with the locations and identities of the future children, so they should be born still.

Even though, Rose and Tiki lamented that Lucina’s birth had been prevented. They hoped it had just been delayed since Naga assured them that Lucina is a constant in the worlds. If Chrom marries, his first child will be Lucina. The topic is a sore one for the Fell Dragon, so they don’t discuss it much, but it does bring some other points.

What other changes would happen? Emmeryn and the Pegasus Knights lived, as well as the bulk of Ylisse’s population. The Ylissean Army stood stronger than in her timelines, so that was great to start with. With her work to help Virion and Chon’sin, they should face Valm on a more even ground.

Months after the wedding, two best friends walked the streets of Ylisstol. They were gathering supplies and information for their leader while having a nice conversation.

“Gawds, why am I stuck babysitting you today, nerd?” Severa asked, annoyed like always.

“No one asked you to come, jerk,” grumble Cynthia, not happy with having her peaceful afternoon ruined with Severa’s company.

“Lucina did,” the red-head said smugly, flicking one of her twin-tails. “She knew you would do something stupid alone, like dropping Alann’s supplies while doing ‘heroic’ poses.”

“That just happened one! Ugh, why couldn’t anyone else come?” the orange-head mumbled. She decided to ignore her companion until they passed through one of Ylisstol’s parks and something caught her eye that made her freeze.

Cynthia quickly moved behind a large bush, mindful not to drop her bags, and hiding from view as she spied on her newest target. Not very noble nor heroic, but she didn’t care at the moment. The sight was something she needed to see.
“What are you doing now, dork?”

“Shhh!” Cynthia hissed, waving her to be silent.

Severa bristled at that. “Hey! Don’t you ‘shhh’ me! You–!”

“Shut up and watch!” the orange-haired girl hissed, pulling her behind the bush and pointing at the park was a couple of women were having a picnic.

Severa was about to snap at her when she noticed two familiar and very pregnant women amongst the group.

“Mom…” Severa whispered.

“Yeah…” Cynthia said, looking at her own mother. “And they seem to be pregnant with us…” she said, swallowing her nerves.

This was a surreal experience for both girls. Severa silently hid too and watched, as both girls strained their ears to hear the conversations.

“So, do you know the gender already?” Sorano asked from her spot in the blanket, serving everyone a glass of fresh juice. It was a beautiful day and one of the few the squad had free to enjoy themselves.

“Yep! We both are getting girls!” Sumia said excitedly. “I’m sure they will be the best of friends like me and Cordelia!” she said, earning a smile from the red-haired captain.

“Oh, that’s marvelous!” Anise cooed, clapping her hands together. “And they will get plenty of aunts to pamper them.”

Sorano nodded with a wide grin on her face. “Yeah! We can train them to be pegasus knights!”

“Well, that will be their choice. My little Severa can be whatever she likes,” Cordelia said proudly, then wincing for a second. “Her kicks are strong. She will be a little spitfire.”

Elsa tilted her head, swallowing the bite of her sandwich before asking. “Don’t you want her to follow in your footsteps?”

Cordelia frowned in thought. “I don’t want her to feel she has to live under my shadow or something like that. I… I grew up in my father’s shadow. He was one of Augustus’ best soldiers until he got an injury that took him out of duty.” “Well, I couldn’t exactly follow in his footsteps…”

“Why not? You are good with the lance!” Jean added but stopped as something occurred to her. “Although, I have never seen you wielding a sword.”

“Truth be told, I’m mediocre with a sword at best. I mean, I wouldn’t die instantly, but even Gaius would defeat me with ease. And he prefers daggers!” the redhead admitted, blushing at the unbelieving looks her comrades gave her. “But the real reason I joined the Pegasus Knights is that…. I’m a lousy runner.”

There was a beat of shocked silence before her friends started laughing, though there was no malice in it.

“Oh? Our captain admitting, she is not perfect at everything?” Grace said, playfully ribbing Cordelia.
“She must be sick! We should take her to Angela!”

“Oh, shut up you!” Cordelia said with a laugh, swatting her friend’s arm.

They all laughed for a while until Samantha changed the topic of conversations to the other future mother. “What about you, Sumia? Do you want your kid to follow in your footsteps?”

“I think the same for Cynthia, but I hope that she wants to ride a pegasus,” Sumia admitted. “I will be right there to teach her! ...I just hope she doesn’t inherit my clumsiness or her father’s bad habits.”

“You can always have Phila babysit her,” Jean suggested. “That will straighten her up. I know it worked on me.”

“Please. She would probably make the poor thing do laps before they can talk,” Anise said.

“I’m pretty sure that giving Phila a kid to watch over qualifies as a war crime,” Elsa snarked, making the spear-sisters laugh once more.

Severa and Cynthia watched with conflicted emotions as their mothers spend time with their friends. They didn’t recall their mothers having many friends outside the Shepherds. But it didn’t take them long to realize these were the original Pegasus Knights. The comrades that had died early in the war in their timeline, leaving their mothers as the only Pegasus Knights in Ylisse’s fledgling military. They obviously survived this time.

Not even Severa made a move to leave their hiding spot. They drunk the images of their youthful mothers laughing, full of life, and happily awaiting their births. The redhead watched with conflicted emotions boiling in her heart. She wanted to be angry at her mother for abandoning her to follow Chrom into war. But the way she talked about her and her father made it clear she loved them dearly. She already knew this. She knew Cordelia went to war for her daughter more than anything, but Severa only wanted to lash out in anger and grief. Maybe… if everything goes well, if Naga allows it, she could talk to her and move on.

Cynthia meanwhile was doing her best not to cry at the sight of her mother laughing while rubbing her pregnant belly. Sumia was rambling about how she will take her flying once she is old enough. The girl recalled the few times her mother took her into the sky, cementing her desire to follow in her footsteps before fate took them apart. Maybe they can fly side by side at least once. She had to smile, though. She did inherit her mother’s clumsiness and her father’s love of sweets. The young girl hopes she won’t be too disappointed.

But Cynthia noticed something that bothered. “Severa… Correct me if I’m wrong, but isn’t it too early for them to be pregnant with us?”

Severa frowned but did the math in her head. Her eyes widened in realization. “I… You’re right,” the redhead said in such a shock that she didn’t insult her companion. “We are younger than Lucina, for more than a year. The shouldn’t be pregnant yet.” Not only that, but the war with Plegia should’ve lasted longer, so Lucina would be born much later. And so, should they. And yet, Lucina hadn’t even been conceived yet!

“So… those could not be us?” Cynthia asked, fear in her voice.

“I… I don’t know,” Severa admitted. They started to understand how Lucina since the announcement of Emmeryn’s wedding. “I mean. They are sure they are girls and they will have our names, but...” she trailed off. “We… need to talk with the others.”
The orange haired girl nodded but returned her gaze to their mother. “Yeah...”

The pair continued to watch for a long time. They knew Lucina’s plan was to disappear once Grima had been taken care of. So, this might be the only time they could see their mothers up close. They won’t have the chance to interact with their parents if things work as intended so they would take what they can get. Then again, things hadn’t been going according to plan.

The two girls didn’t want to leave, but the knights made the decision for them. The women started prodding their mothers for information about their fathers’ skills in bed. Not wanting any more emotional scars, the two girls picked up their bags and banished.

On the other side of the city, another couple was enjoying a day together. Tiki was happy that Robin had asked her out to town. After the two celebrations they had become quite close. She had never felt so bold as when she stole that kiss on his cheek. She had never kissed anyone before. At least with less than innocent intentions. The close she had come was kissing Mar-Mar in her dreams, but that was just a childish crush.

Robin was so like Marth, but still his own person. She hated that such a man was bound to have his soul consumed by Grima.

“Here you go!” Robin said cheerfully, breaking her out of her thoughts.

Tiki turned to see Robin holding something she hadn’t tasted in years. “This is...”

“You mentioned that one of your friends introduced you to fried apples. And that they are one of your favorite confections,” he said, offering the treat.

She took it into her hands and memories rushed to her.

A young Tiki looked curiously at the confection on Kris’s hand. “Huh? What's that?”

The man that had treated her so kindly looked at her in confusion before understanding. “Oh, this? This is a fried apple. You remove the apple’s core, add butter and sugar and fry it. We used to fry and eat old apples like this quite often, back in my village.”

The ‘young’ girl’s mouth watered at the description. She had apples before, but this sounded better than those she had before. “Is it tasty?”

Kris smiled and nodded. “Yes, want a bite?” he offered.

“Yeah, I do!” she said, nodding excitedly. She could feel her tummy growling in anticipation.

Chuckling, her friend offered the rest of the treat to her. “Alright, then here you go. It's hot so be careful.”

“Thanks!” She took a large bite, thinking her dragon tongue would protect her. It did not. “It is hot...” she said, quickly blowing air through her mouth.

“You'll need to blow on it, so you won't burn your tongue,” “Here, like this.”

Tiki watched the demonstration and eagerly tried again. “Okay, got it.” Blowing on the apple, she munched on the cooler treat. It was delicious!

“Haha, yes, just like that,” Kris said jovial, watching her with a fond smile. “But, even though she's
just a little girl now...She becomes a mighty dragon during battle...The dragonkin sure are mysterious...” the knight mused out loud.

The girl tilted her head, making a questioning sound through her munching.

Kris shook his head. “No, nothing. Do you want more?”

She nodded happily, continuing munching on her treat.

“... You remembered that?” she said softly.

Robin tilted his head with a smile. “Shouldn’t I?”

He didn’t need to. It was barely a small thing she commented during Emmeryn’s reception if she remembered correctly. A small detail not worth remembering.

The Voice just managed to prevent tears from forming in her eyes. While not common, there still had been many through the ages that professed their love and devotion to the manakete for her role as the Voice of Naga. Others for her beauty. Tiki wasn’t blind, she knew she was attractive, but those that stated their affections for her didn’t know her past the image history painted of her. And yet none had left such an impression as the tactician did with such a simple gesture.

Tiki was glad for their current circumstances. She felt feelings growing for the tactician as more time passed, and the little gestures he made only helped to reinforce that he felt the same.

“Thank you,” she said, rewarding him with a smile as she took a bite of the apple. It was delicious.

“Do you like it?”

“Mhm,” she said, still munching happily.

Robin laughed. “I’m glad.”

Swallowing, she smiled at him. “It’s been… wow, centuries since I last had one as good as this. I never mentioned it to others, and it’s not a threat common on the areas I tend to visit. And it’s better with good company,” the Voice said, taking a more somber tone. “Something that it’s hard to come by for me…”

“It must be lonely…” Robin mused out loud. His eyes widened as he caught himself. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to bring up bad memories.”

“It’s alright,” she reassured him. “It can be lonely, but I have grown used to it.”

Robin frowned at that. “You shouldn’t have to,” he said, taking her hand into his. “Well, at least you have us now. Me. My family. The Shepherds. I know… I know you will outlive us, but that doesn’t mean you should lose contact with our families. And well…”

She squeezed his hand in reassurance. “I know.”

The pair kept walking in comfortable silence, taking a seat in one of the benches of the park as Tiki finished her apple.

“You have a good heart, Robin,” Tiki said, breaking the silence. “You remind me too much of Mar-Mar and Tar-Tar,” she said fondly, looking back at the memories of times long past.
Tilting his head in confusion, the tactician asked, “Tar-Tar? I know the first one is your nickname for King Marth, but who is the other one?”

Tiki gained a blush of embarrassment. “Ah, yes my bad. I tend to call them that out of fondness. Tar-Tar is my nickname for Kris. A member of Marth’s army. He is the one that first shared a fried apple with me.”

“Of course,” Robin said. “We haven’t talked about all the members of Marth’s army. So, you were close friends with Kris?”

“Yes, he and Kat-Kat introduced me to my favorite confections when I was little.”

Robin just gave her a confused, expectant look and she blushed.

“Katarina,” she clarified. “I’m not that creative with nicknames ok! I was a child.”

The tactician chuckled, raising his hands in surrender. “Hey, it’s ok. I think it’s adorable.”

The manakete’s blush got worse but she still returned the smile. “Careful, or I will start calling you Rob-Rob or something.”

Robin coughed on his hand at her teasing. “Ehm, back to Katarina,” he said, bluntly changing topics. “I’ve read about her. Another member of Marth’s army. A powerful mage and loyal to him.”

Tiki nodded and gave him a pained smile. “That’s what history tells. Not many know that her original name was Reese and was sent as an assassin to kill Marth and his army.”

Robin’s eyes widened in shock. “What?! Nothing I’ve read said such a thing!”

“Yes, well. History is written by the winners,” Tiki said, looking at the sky. “She found Kris and use him, eventually setting a trap that failed to kill the army and forced her to retreat. There were many attempts by her organization to kill Marth, eventually leaving her as the only one left. But she was too kind for that. She lost too much, and the army still considered her a friend. She finally defected after her boss left her friend to die and joined them for good under the name Katarina; the name she used to first infiltrate them.”

“She was treated with true friendship and kindness, changing her heart,” Robin said understanding. “Marth and Kris must have been very charismatic to earn such loyalty.”

“Just like you and Chrom,” Tiki said, knowing that would make him self-conscious. “Funny. She aspired to be a tactician, which wasn’t a lie, and fought next to Kris in many battles. They were quite the powerful pair. Katarina developed a crush on Kris, and they eventually married. Marth, having forgiven her, allowed them to create a minor noble house: House Sterling.”

“An extinct house that served the ancient kings for generations as loyal knights,” he recited. “A shame they no longer exist.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” she said nonchalantly.

“What do you mean?”

“A powerful, loyal knight and a magically adept tactician. Both loyal to a blue-haired royal. Sounds familiar?” Tiki asked with a smile.

“With the look you are giving me, you are making it sound like they are my ancestors,” Robin jested.
“Oh, they are.”

Robin blinked. “...What?”

“I suspected it for a while and asked my mother. She confirmed that their bloodline survived, though not publicly,” Tiki admitted. “They served the royal family for many generations. But as it's bound to happen, the many branches of descendants spread out through land. Eventually, the main house succumbed to time. One of the branches ended in Plegia, though. I’m sure there must be some documents in the archives, as well as in Plegia.”

She could see the information was taking its toll on Robin. “So… Not only do I have the blood of Hezul in House Nordion, but also of the founders of the legendary House Sterling? Add to that the power of Grima that Forneus obtained and our claim to Plegia’s throne… This is too much...”

Tiki understood. The Sterling bloodline was strong and it's showing it their tactical brilliance. But it wasn’t special in any magical sense. Not like Forneus or Hezul’s blood. That the Grimleal’s selective breeding managed to get them too was sheer luck.

“Yes, but if anything, it just proved that others don't control your fate. You can choose your own path. You have none of the dark quality of your ancestors. You might have their power, but you have Kris and Katarina’s spirit,” she said kindly. “You already live up to their legacy. Build on it and make it your own.”

“Thank you,” Robin said with sincerity. Then he paused for a moment before he slowly started laughing.

Tiki looked at him in confusion. “Robin?”

“It just occurred to me,” the tactician said. “My ancestor, Katarina… She was an assassin sent to infiltrate and kill the army. Exactly what Frederick and many of the others suspected I was going to do. Is that ironic? I don’t know,” he said with a shake of his head. “So similar and yet so different.”

“Fate works in interesting ways, does it not?”

“It does indeed,” Robin admitted, looking at the sky. “Hmmm, it almost midday. I doubt that apple was enough. Do you feel like getting lunch together? Just the two us? Or would you rather we go to the castle and eat with the others?” It was frankly adorable how he tried to be subtle.

Linking her arms with his, Tiki leaned on his shoulder and smiled. “I think the two of us it's just fine.”

Time passed quickly, and soon the joyous news spread through the Halidom.

The Crown Prince, Jon Eddard Lowell was born to Exalt Emmeryn Lowell and King Consort Aedan Lowell nee Amell on the first days of winter. He was born with the Exalted bloodlines dark blue hair and his father dark grey eyes. The Brand of the Exalt was clear on his little hand since the day he was born. Lissa had been a little bittersweet at that, but she easily got over it once she held her nephew.

They named Phila as the godmother, much to her embarrassment. Aedan’s cousin, Robert, was the godfather. Lissa and Chrom were over the moon, doting on the child at every moment. Emmeryn had also gotten closer to the Shepherds, hoping that her little Jon too would get along with the children of her most loyal protectors. Loyalty like the one the Shepherds showed was not something easy to gain.
She enjoyed life to fullest with Aedan and Jon, knowing how close she had come to never experience the joys of having a husband and child. She loved her siblings, but there was something about holding the little bundle of joy that nothing could compare. She swore to protect this little one’s future at any cost.

Emmeryn would forever be thankful to the Plegian family that had helped her get this gift.

Chrom dodged Robin’s stab, twisting his body out of the way and spinning to slash at his side. Morgana’s training had certainly borne fruits as Robin deftly blocked the attack. He had adopted more and more of Rose’s and Morgana’s style into his own and could give even Chrom a run for his money. It was sometimes scary how fast he grew in skill, but that only made the prince push himself harder.

Robin pushed back, leaving some distance between them. The two shared a measuring look until the tactician smirked. “I think we can increase the intensity, don’t you think?”

The prince grinned at his friend. “Took the words right out of my mouth.”

For the past few months, the two men had been training together to harness the power of their bloodlines. It still impressed Chrom to witness the full power of Ignis. The descendants of Hezul certainly lived up to the power of the Twelve Crusaders of Jugdral. It explained the strength of the Plegian family.

Ignis and Aether ignited, enveloping the blunt swords as the power of their blood came to the surface. Robin could draw from his magic to increase his physical strength or vice versa. Chrom’s flames could bypass some of the defenses of their opponents, zapping away at their energy to reinvigorate him. Still, the flames tended to negate one another, only increasing their striking power.

The pair exchanged blows for a while until they ran out of stamina to keep their techniques up. Deciding to take a rest, the pair took their waterskins and sat down to recover. It was a nice day and the two were alone in the private training ground. The other Shepherds were taking the day off, but the two friends still liked to have at least some sparring in the mornings.

“So, how is it being an uncle?” Robin said, after taking a generous gulp of water.

Chrom had to smile at that. “It's fantastic! Jon is a great baby,” he said, pride clear in his voice. “He is healthy and calm. I can see he is going to grow up strong. Lissa is going to spoil him rotten, I just know it.”

“I can certainly see that happening,” his friend said with a chuckle.

“And I can see you two have progressed nicely with your techniques.”

The pair turned to the doorway where Robin’s mother was leaning, looking at them with an approving expression. Chrom wasn’t surprised to see her. Emmeryn had taken to her quite nicely. Not only that, but she helped train many of the recruits when she wasn’t helping at a nearby school. Say what you want about her, but she was not one to stay idle.

“Hello, mother,” Robin said, waving at the woman who smiled in return.

“Good day, Lady Morgana,” Chrom said politely, making sure to keep its response simple least he incurs the wrath of his friend.

“Good morning, Robin. Lord Chrom,” she said. She then turned and gave her son an appraising
look. “I hope you didn’t forget your date with Lily. It would be most improper to arrive covered in
dirt and sweat,” she said with a raised eyebrow.

The prince looked in amusement as Robin froze. “You have another date with Lady Lily?” he asked.

Robin blushed and scratched his cheek. He cleared his throat and turning to his friend. “Ehm, yes. But it’s not until the afternoon.”

“...It’s past midday, son,” his mother said in a deadpan tone.

In an impressive display of speed Robin rushed past them, dropping the training blade and
disappearing towards his room in the castle. It was lucky he lived here instead of that with his mother
and sister. Sometimes he wondered why, but since Lily lived there too he might’ve found it
improper.

“At least his training increased his speed. Honestly, sometimes...” the bluenette said, shaking his
head in amusement. Still, he was happy that things had been working out well for his friend. He had
his family back with him for nearly a year, working excellently for the crown. And now it seems he
finally has started courting Lily. With the birth of his nephew as well as all the pregnancies of his
friends, things certainly were looking good for the Shepherds.

The sound of a blade being cutting the air got his attention. Turning, he saw Morgana giving him a
smile that was somewhere between Emmeryn and Rose’s. To him, that promised nothing good.

“Now, Lord Chrom,” Morgana said as she twirled her own training sword. “Since my boy left you
in such a hurry, how about I help you train? Add my own motherly touch to your training?”

He gulped. He might be envious of his friend having a mother at times, but this was not one of them.

Later that evening, Robin and Tiki strolled through one of the parks of the capital. It was decorated
with banners with the Brand of the Exalt. The landscaping done here was less grandiose than the
Royal Gardens, but it was still beautiful. Emmeryn had wanted the parks restored soon so the people
could have a place to relax and forget about the attack on the city.

She felt bold, for some reason. Robin had been kind to her. Even without her knowledge of his
bloodline, she still found him interesting. He was funny, intelligent, kind, and not bad on the eye.
The times they had spent together talking about random topics were some of the happiest she had in
her long life. The book they were writing together was coming along and the act itself helped her
recover many of the memories of her long-lost friends. It was as if they were returning to life.

Tiki turned to the man and gave him an appraising look. Robin wore some rather fine clothing this
evening. She herself wore a nice dress, but nothing fancy.

“If I had known we were wearing fancy clothing I would’ve put more effort into my appearance,”
she jested. She saw him blush they walked past the fountain and sat on a rather lovely stone bench.

“Ah, but you are lovely even in the simplest of clothes,” Robin said with a smile, his voice carrying a
theatrical tone.

“Hmm, still a charmer,” she retorted with a sly smile.

Robin chuckled and looked at the sky. “It’s silly. I guess I did want to impress you today.”

The disguised manakete frowned in confusion. “Why? I told you, you have nothing to prove to me.
Please, don’t tell me you are feeling pressured by my status after all this time.”

“It’s not that,” he denied with a shake of his head. “Well, maybe, but not by you. It’s just…”

“Just what?”

Her friend looked hesitant, before relenting with a sigh. “Well, you've lived for millennia... Seen the legendary heroes with your own eyes... You knew the Hero-King Marth himself! And compared to him, what am I?” he said, looking at his hands. “I felt that I had to be as great as him, as mighty and powerful... Otherwise, you couldn't help but find me lacking in comparison.”

“You don’t have to feel such things. You have earned your own victories which are no less important,” Tiki pointed out.

“I’ve triumphed so far thanks to my sister’s intervention,” Robin denied. “Otherwise we would have suffered terrible losses.”

“Remember, you would’ve won anyway, but what Rose did was spare you the same suffering her world went through. I think that’s worth a little loss of merit in those victories.”

“Maybe you are right. I guess it’s my pride talking,” Robin admitted with a laugh.

Tiki licked her lips. She dared not hope too much but something told her to act or she would regret it. She needed to pick her words carefully. “There is only one Mar-Mar, and that was Marth, the great king of ages past,” she conceded. “Just like there is only one Kris and one Katarina.”

The tactician chuckled a little. “Yes, well. Fair enough, I suppose. I'm hardly qualified in comparison.”

“That’s no it,” the manakete quickly denied. “There is a reason why I can’t really compare you to them.”

Robin gulped, his nervousness clearly visible on his face. “...And that is?”

Tiki took his hand and squeezed gently. “Because you, too, are a singular—and very special—man to me. You are the man with whom I've...developed feelings for,” she admitted, blushing up a storm. She felt like a kid again and was glad her glamour hid her pointy ears because they surely were now bright red.

The tactician’s eyes widened in shock. “T-Tiki?!”

“We have spent a lot of time together these past months. More so that I have with anyone since the days with Marth’s army. I don’t think it's strange for such a thing to happen,” she explained. “I’ve lived a long life and yet I’m inexperienced in the matters of the heart. I don’t know if this is love, but...”

“I’m afraid I’m no expert either,” he admitted, gently squeezing her hand in return. “I know it's too early to claim this is love between us, but I want to find out together.” Robin gulped, clearly gathering courage. “I... I would like to start courting you properly.”

The lethargy she felt for so long, making her sleep her lonely days away vanished in an instant. “I would be delighted,” she said with a smile that could light up a room.

“I’m so glad to hear that haha…” Robin said, and she could almost see tears in his eyes. “Truth is, I've been hoping against hope that we might be together, but dared not ask...”
“No more doubts from you,” she chastised in jest, before taking a more somber tone. “I know that to love another, I must watch the world move past him. But such short years make an eternity worth living. I’m willing to give it a try, if you would have me.”

Robin gave her a big smile that made her heart swell. “Nothing would make me happier.”

Smiling, Tiki leaned in and their lips met for their first, proper kiss.

“**So Emmeryn had a boy…**” Grima said, crushing the letter in his hand and engulfing it with his dark flames. “**Another concerning, albeit irrelevant, change to the pile. I will not be denied.**” There was also the matter of the insurrection in the far west of Plegia, luckily away from Ylisse’s eyes. Some foolish deserters decided it was time to change Plegia, weakening his stance on the game. That would not do. Curse that Emmeryn and her words.

He needed a pawn to put on the throne, one easily manipulated and that already had enough influence. Maybe he should not have sent the assassination order for that harlot Aversa. That had been a rash decision. Her plan for Chon’sin failed but she would've been useful right now. But the bitch had slipped through his fingers, and he had made those that failed him pay. If only Lucina hadn’t killed Validar. He still wasn’t sure how she accomplished that right under his nose, but he would make that blue haired bitch pay.

Well, it’s a good thing that he brought a spare with him from the future. The Fell Dragon then gathered his magic and opened a portal to a pocket dimension where he kept his most useful creations. He was quite proud of that spell as he watched it spit out a Risen in a very familiar set of sorcerer clothes.

Validar stood up with a blank face as if carved of stone. The purple mist oozed out of his skin, making him easily recognizable as a Risen.

“**Hmm, that would not do,**” Grima growled at the obvious flaw, thinking of a solution. “**The hex to return his mind to him and getting rids of the necromantic aura… Yes, that would do.**”

A set of runes glowed around the slimy little weasel and the aura vanished as if a great wind had swept it away. Validar blinked as if awakening from a long dream. His skin returned to the disgusting grey tone he always had. Pouring his will and memories into the sorcerer, the Dragon saw him take it in and getting the hang of the situation. Then Validar smiled as he dropped to one knee.

“What are your orders, Lord Grima?”

“**You will retake the throne and put down this stupid insurrection,**” Grima said. The dragon stood from his chair and pointed at a set of locations on the map. “**It's been a thorn in my side and keeping it quiet has been a waste of my time,**” he ordered. “**Restore the army and navy. The Ylisseans will need the boats soon to travel to Valm. Let them slaughter and weaken each other in that meaningless war. It will save us the effort and we will have more corpses to rise later.**”

Grima would love to have his Risen infiltrate the enemy ranks, but to get rid of the aura he had to return their free will. Something he had tried and failed to fix. It hurt his pride, but even he had limits. ‘**Irrelevant,**’ he thought. Things will soon be set right, for the future he desires to come to pass.

His lips curled into a bloodthirsty smile. The scales will always tip in his favor.
“And this letter is from House Cassel,” Phila heard Rose say from her seat. They were going through letters from all over the Halidom and beyond. “It came with a casket of their best wines. Let’s see what it says. ‘Dear Exalt... yadda yadda ... congratulations on the baby.... Yadda yadda ... this is totally not a bribe... yadda yadda’. There is some more ass-kissing there, but seems nice enough,” she said, throwing the letter on the ‘done’ pile.

Phila scowled at her lack of professionalism but didn’t contradict her coworker. She had detected the same thin veiled bribes from many of the lesser houses of the Halidom. At least there were few, with many offering sincere congratulations. They had already gone through nearly a hundred letters and the pile wasn’t getting any smaller. Phila too was feeling a little short on patience for empty flattery.

Emmeryn didn’t mind, still happy from the birth of her child. Little Jon was spending time with his father while the three dealt with the paperwork for the day. “That’s nice, though we still have the ones they gave us for the wedding.”

“You can never have too much good wine,” Rose said, shrugging, earning a glare from Phila. “You can always throw a small party for the castle staff or give it to them as a reward for good work. We can keep a few for when the Cassels visit and do the whole showcasing bit.” She paused. “They could gift something other than wine all the time though. It’s like they put no thought into it...” she said to herself.

“That’s a good idea, better than having them sit in storage gathering dust. Their wine is still one of the best in the continent,” Emmeryn said, nodding. “Might keep some in my room for...”

“Special nights with the King Consort?” Rose said with a grin, making Emmeryn blush.

The Pegasus knight sighed, annoyed that she seemed to be the only professional one today. But even her nerves were starting to fray from the dull paperwork.” Let’s just continue. The sooner we do, the sooner we can finish this. Hmm, this one is from...” The knight froze for a moment. Swallowing and hardening her voice, she continued, “From the King of Plegia, Your Grace.” That caught the attention of both women.

“Oh, that’s true. They recently appointed a new king,” the Exalt said, frowning after a moment. “We haven’t established contact with him.”

“After the last king, I’m not eager to have another Plegian monarch around,” Phila said. Pausing, she gave Rose an apologetic nod. “No offense to your mother.”

“Some taken,” she said with a shrug, frowning after a moment. “Just wondering who it is. Even my sources haven’t been able to give me the identity of the man. He is very paranoid and secretive, focused on stabilizing the country after the war. There is still plenty of regions where unrest is prevalent. But I don’t like how he has routed almost every possible source of intel so easily. It’s like the country went silent.”

Phila didn’t like the sound of that. “Well, hopefully this letter will give us an answer.” The knight opened the letter, clearing her throat and reading:

“To Exalt Emmeryn Lowell of Ylisse and King Consort Aedan Lowell,

It is with great joy that my first letter to you is one of congratulation on the birth of your heir. Please forgive the lack of contact during the past year, but Plegia had trouble on choosing a king. Fear not, I will not restart the feud between our people. Your words have change many hearts, mine being one of them. I will strive to better the relationship between our people, so the mistakes of the past are not
repeated. Along with this message is a gift. In a few weeks a fleet of seventy-eight ships will arrive at Amaranthine Harbor carrying gold as further repayment for the war, as well as food and cloth. Please, keep the seventy ships. The crew will teach your people how to use sail if needed. Once again, my apologies for the delay but I hope this is enough proof of my good intentions.

Signed, Validar Lessard. King of Plegia.”

The sound of glass shattering on the floor startled the Ylisseans. They turned to see a pale and horrified Rose, looking at them with wide eyes.

“Impossible...” she breathed, quickly standing up and knocking her chair back. “Excuse me, I need to check on something.” Before anyone could answer, she dashed out of the hall into the training grounds. Phila and Emmeryn watched in bewilderment as moments later Rose rushed past the door all but dragging her mother and brother along.

“What could have gotten that reaction from her?” the Exalt said with worry in her voice.

“Validar...” Phila muttered, “Why does that name sound fami...li...ar...” she trailed off, looking at Emmeryn who had just realized the same thing. The reason why Rose went into shock at the last part of the letter. Something she had mentioned to them before.

It's signed under her father’s name.

Morgana and Robin were practically thrown into the chairs of Rose’s study as she bolted the door and proceeded to pace around the room. Morgana took in stride, but Robin had no issues in showing his annoyance.

“Ok, what’s the big idea?!” he said as he fixed the collar of his shirt.

Rose stopped and moved her mouth as if trying to form the words that wouldn’t come out. That worried Robin, for she only lost her wits when she was cornered.

“I… One second… Look,” she said as she unsheathed Thorn and closed her eyes. Robin saw how she focused, making runes glow on the blade with gathering magic. A moment later, tendrils of purple light moved from the blade and took the shape of a bound man. He remained unmoving, his eye empty. But Robin recognized him from that night long ago.

“Is that… Validar? Our father?” he asked, looking at the man that tried to assassinate Emmeryn.

“Yes,” she said cringing. “I forgot to mention I had his soul sealed inside my sword, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you forgot that small detail during your briefing,” Morgana said drily. Robin could see how she looked at with hate at the bound soul of her ex-husband. The man remained bound to the sword, weak and unable to struggle. “Is there a reason for showing this to us now?”

The former mercenary stopped pacing and nodded, taking a breath to calm herself. “Yes. We received a letter from Validar congratulating Emmeryn and Aedan,” she said through gritted teeth. “But that’s possible! Look!” she exclaimed, pointing at the bound soul. “I’m not imagining this, am I? I sealed his soul inside my sword as insurance that he never becomes a problem ever again. So then why is there another Validar running around?”

“An impostor? Someone claiming to be him to get to power?” Robin suggested. “His name alone holds sway over the Grimleal.”
“Wouldn’t work,” their mother said with a frown. “He needs to pass the Test of Blood to rule and Validar is too well known in Plegia for someone to claim to be him.”

He remembered all he heard from Rose's world. It was a shock to hear that the damned Fell Dragon came from the future, but he understood the need for secrecy. Especially the Shepherds being some of the worst secret-keepers in the world. “You said Marth and Grima came from the future. Marth came with companions, correct?” he got a nod in response. “Is it possible for Grima to have brought followers too? I understand that the dragon is weak right now, so he would need people loyal to him to make his moves.”

Rose froze, “But in my time… I mean, Naga didn’t mention anything about that! As far as I know, Grima came alone.”

There was something in the way she said that that made Robin frown, but he focused on the problem at hand. “You were sent back before you faced his full might, so it's more than likely you didn’t face all his tricks. Or there could be enough deviations from our births that our Grima did bring troops with him.”

“There are a few things that don’t match either, right?” Morgana said. “You mentioned that in your world, Grima never used the Risen in the manner he has here. Like fusing them together into those monstrous Abominations,” she said with a shudder. Robin could sympathize. Remembering having to face those creatures still made his stomach churn. “This could be another difference.”

“Fuck,” was all Rose could say, slumping on her own chair. “Well. There is no way to get rid of this Validar without starting another war. From what I recall, he will offer us support for the war with Valm, though the ships were supposed to arrive later.”

Morgana and Robin agreed. Validar would remain King of Plegia as long as he plays the role of a benevolent ruler. Still, it was clear Rose was not eager to explain how their father could be alive.

Luckily, Emmeryn stopped taking Plegia’s promises at face value. If Plegia asked about the military build-up, they would respond that their civil war and the situation in Valm has them nervous. The Exalt might hate having to reassemble the army, but it was her duty to protect her people. For now, it would remain as a deterrence for future conflicts.

But they know that would not last.

At that moment, a rider left Regna Ferox, carrying with him an urgent message as the Khans marched west to war.

Chapter End Notes

AN:

Sun'fey Fujiwara: Say’ri’s and ■■■■■■’s son. Serious, honorable, blunt, and a mama’s boy.

Alann Roque: Anna and Gregor’s son. A savvy merchant that can charm any woman but is mediocre with a sword. He oversees procuring housing and money for their large party and is damn good at it.
Jocasta Mikhailov: Basilio and Flavia’s daughter. The best/worst of her parents.

Ke’ri Sirot: Inigo’s younger sister. Just because it’s a bit weird that only Lucina gets to have siblings. Think of her like the Misty to his Brock.

The way I see it. Katarina’s story is exactly what Frederick expected of the Plegian Siblings. That and her being a grandmaster in Awakening fits perfectly for being an ancestor of the twins. This doesn’t grant them power like the legacy of Hezul or Grima, nor was it planned. But if anything, we know in this world fate works in funny ways.

The relationship between Robin and Tiki might seem to go too fast, but remembers, these snippets are across nearly two years. Since I’m so slow writing I didn’t want to spend the entire two-year in-story writing every date. That would probably really take me two years. Hopefully those snippets of dates and thoughts are enough to portray a growing relationship. Unlike many the other Shepherds, many who already knew each other, these two won’t marry right away. They are just different from the others.

And hey, Cordelia kept her promise from the battle of Ylisstol. She promised to run around town if she survived.

So… How about we see what Hubba has been up to next chapter? It will have plenty of insights on characters we haven’t seen yet or in a while, as well as what has happened in the two years.

And yes, now I used some GoT for the Houses, wedding, and some names. Gotta give my boy Jon a good life.

Hopefully not too many errors this time...
Tears in reality lingered in the air. Each of them was a window of possibility. A man turns left in one world while turning right in the other. Millions of permutations existed in the branches of Yggdrasil, the World Tree. Each guided by the will of forces beyond the Divine Dragons. Even Gods were not exempt from these rules.

Many think there are infinite possible worlds but that's not the case. Each choice has to affect a world in a significant way for the world not to collapse into the main branch and become its own self. A mortal wouldn't be able to comprehend the images in front of him. The abstract nature of reality simply was beyond their grasp.

Such was the case with the world Old Hubba was currently watching. With each moment his annoyance increased. This new branch was born from the twist and turn of past, present, and future into something that should not be. It was a new thing for him and that angered the elder being. In all his eons a mess like this had yet to happen. Or at least hadn't dragged for as long as this one.

He needed to know more, but this form lacked the strength. A necessary measure to hide from the most troublesome meddlers that walked through the realms. Now was not the time to worry about them, though. He needed access to his full strength. It was time to shed this form.

His spine pulled back, straightening. His eyes opened, revealing ice blue eyes that could pierce souls. Wrinkles and age spots disappeared from his skin as he took a more youthful appearance. His image flickering between that of a man, a woman, a child, and other beings before settling on one of an adult male. The guise of Old Hubba was discarded and only Janus, the Gatekeeper of the Outrealms, remained.

Having access to his full power, Janus watched as the branches of the new timeline grew only to disappear into the mists of uncertainty. He growled, unable to see where this world would go. Time might pass different for him, twisting and turning as worlds are born and destroyed. Looking into the main branch he saw the new variables with careful detail.

Aversa ran, her cloak fluttering in the night to escape her pursuers. Forced to abandon her black pegasus, the sorceress made her way into the mountains on foot. She felt disgusting, forced into the mud while wearing peasant clothing. She hoped the false tracks she left behind would buy her the time she needed to get to the meeting spot.

To think she used to hold a place of honor in Plegia's Court and the Grimleal Church. Now she had to leave behind a life of luxury and power just to survive that damned hierophant. Just thinking about the brat made her grind her teeth. She had been loyal! She had followed her orders to the letter! It wasn't her fault the Ylisseans anticipated her trap and saved the Exalt. That failure was enough to outlive her usefulness.

The brat even had the gall to unlock her memories and spell the truth to her. Her blood family slaughtered. Kidnapped and brainwashed by that dastard she thought as a father. Her adoptive mother and brother disappearing into the night. She was nothing but a pawn that no longer had
value.

She would show them!

An arrow embedded itself on the ground, stopping the fugitive on her tracks.

"Identify yourself!" a voice called from the trees.

A man. One with good aim. She couldn't risk making a move toward her tome without becoming a pincushion, but the fact that she was still breathing was a good sign.

 Barely catching her breath, Aversa hissed her response. "I'm the Purple Raven! I want to talk to the Mountain Lion!"

"You're far away from Grimleal territory, witch," the scout said and she had to bite her tongue to stop herself. If she provoked him, she would be rewarded with an arrow in her throat.

"Back off, Musa." said a commanding voice. Aversa watched as a dark-skinned man with an impressive build just melted from the shadows into the clearing. He was the one she was looking for.

"But sir–!" the young scout tried to protest.

"I know," Mustafa said in a grave voice. "But I promised her the chance to talk. She seems unarmed, but I can handle myself. Keep the perimeter secure with the rest of the patrols."

"...Very well, sir," Musa said, before throwing Aversa a dirty look. "Make one wrong move and it will be your last."

"Charming," Aversa grumbled.

"Pardon my subordinate. As deserters, we have to be careful with who we trust," the general of the rebellion said as he guided her further into the clearing, illuminated by full moon.

"Oh, believe me. I understand."

"I supposed you do," Mustafa said diplomatically, motioning her to sit on a fallen log. There was no campfire as to not give away their position, but at least Aversa could rest her feet. "I have to admit, I'm still surprised that you requested this meeting. Had you not offered the information on those loyalist officers, we would've ignored the request."

"Understandable," Aversa conceded. She had a reputation after all. "I learned quite a few things in the past month. Amongst them was the fact that I'm quite disposable to the Grimleal and the Crown. Taking this gamble was worth the risk if I could get even with them."

"And why should we risk sheltering you? While your information is useful, we have our families and friends to worry about. I don't think you are a spy, as my sources are very clear about the price on your head," he said, making Aversa cringe internally, though it didn't show on her face. "But it's still risky. What guarantee do I have that you won't sell us out for a pardon?"

"I owe nothing to the Crown. Not anymore, now that I know the truth of my past," Aversa said with no small amount of venom. "And I think you will find me a highly valuable resource," she continued smoothly. The sorceress had already planned for such, after all. "I didn't come empty-handed, after all. I brought some gifts with me, as proof of my intentions," she said coyly. Reaching into her pack, she pulled a large set of documents. Everything from troop movements to the current plans of the Grimleal Church.
After skimming through them, Mustafa nodded. "...Maybe we can work something out."

Running like a rat from his former master. Oh, he had fun with other Aversas, letting them take some of his Einherjars to train the weaker Shepherds. It was one of the many hobbies he had developed in millennia. Watching over endless realities could be quite dull when everything worked as intended. This one had no such role, though. At least, she wasn't supposed to.

Maybe he was looking in the wrong place. He turned to the parallel branch from which the girl originated. This timeline was a mess too, but dependant on the other. Each change balanced on the other side. He extended his sight and focused on the Ylisstol of that world.

Standing on his solar, a blue-haired man oversaw his city. Ylisstol had finally been restored to its former glory. The Ylissean army stood ready to protect its people, never again to be caught unprepared. The civilians were happier now that the war was over and an heir to the crown was born. The hard times that started when Plegia first sent their troops across the border and culminated with resurrection of the Fell Dragon were finally coming to an end.

But that was a lie. Not everything was well. People felt safe inside the walls of Ylissean cities, but outside was an entirely different story.

Exalt Chrom sighed, feeling older than he was. Ever since the final battle with Grima and his execution of Robin, things had turned much harder. Part of Plegia remained a wasteland. With a nearly a tenth of its population sacrificed to revive the damn dragon, they struggled to rebuild. This had lead to an increase in bandit raids, civil wars.

A large part of Feroxi troops died in the war with Valm. More so when many of the senior commanders started doubting Robin's strategies. When she finally was imprisoned and replaced, he realized how dependent they were on her. The number of losses had increased drastically under Frederick's guidance. He was a reliable man, but he lacked experience commanding such large forces. That had cost them the lives of many Shepherds.

Valm was a war zone. Walhart might have been a tyrant but he kept the many countries in check. With no heir, the Valmese Empire broke down and leaving a power vacuum. And so, many warlords and dynasts jumped at the chance to seize power.

Chon'sin and Rosanne remained barely functional thanks to their alliance, but that was it. They had to constantly put down with attacks from neighboring countries. Robin had suggested many ways to deal with them, but was ignored in favor of opposing views from others.

If he had listened… if he had trusted her... No. He couldn't think like that. What's done is done. They could deal with the issues of mortal men, regardless of the price.

Hearing a knock on his door, he sat down, trying to hide his conflict behind a facade of professionalism.

"Come in."

Stahl entered the room, carrying a satchel with documents along with his somber expression. He hadn't been the same since Cordelia's death and he was clear on his reservations regarding Robin's execution. At least, he was not vocal about them. In the past few years he had tried to breach the subject but only Olivia had any success. Then again, she was still hurting from losing Lon'qu. He hoped things worked out between them, regardless of what Inigo thought.
"What does the scouting party say, Stahl?" Exalt Chrom said as he took his seat to get the report.

The knight sighed as he dropped the stack of paper on the desk. "More Risen attacks. They just keep coming."

Chrom scowled, looking at the report and then to the map in the wall. The number of purple marks indicating the locations of Risen attacks grew by the day. "How is this possible? It's been years since Grima's death, so why are the Risen still coming?"

"I might know the answer to that," a female voice said, catching the attention of the two men. At the door stood a woman in red robes, with her blonde hair in a bun. She was holding a stack of notes and a concerned expression on her face.

"What do you have for me, Leora?" The new head of the Arcanum was good at her job, but she wasn't Miriel. He tried to not dwell on his lost friend, it was not fair to Leora. She lacked the experience Miriel got from being on the frontlines.

Leora pursed her lips, handing over some diagrams filled with notes to him. "I spoke with some of my colleagues. Our studies show that Grima's magic is still running rampant. We still have no way to control it. It's feeding on the ambient magic and spreading like a forest fire. The center is Grima's corpse. It's still producing that foul magic and we can't get close to the island to study it further."

"But Grima is defeated and Robi– it's Avatar is no longer alive! The monster shouldn't have any influence in the world," Chrom said, and he was thankful no one commented on his slip of the tongue.

"We believe it has to do with Grima's artificial nature. It was originally a way to utilize draconic magic to create undead soldiers. An endless, tireless army that would not risk the lives of their soldiers," she explained, pointing to an ancient text from the Age of King Alm and Queen Celica.

"Do we have any leads?"

"From what we gathered from the tomes in Valm, Grima was supposed to be the leading consciousness, obeying the orders of his master. But it grew beyond that. We don't know what happened or how he came to create the Fellblood lineage. Too much has been lost to time. But without Grima to control it, the magic is doing what it's meant to do."

"Create an endless army… If we placed a mind in control of it?" He hated the idea, but he didn't seem to have many options.

The mage sighed and it was clear she already thought of that. "We have no idea where to begin with that so far. And even if we did, what is to stop them from becoming the next Fell Dragon? Right now, we lack the tools to deal with it."

He pushed away the dread he felt at her last words. "I see. Thank you, Leora. Leave the full report here, I will look at it more in depth later."

"As you wish, Exalt," the scholar said, bowing and leaving the two men alone in the room.

"Damn," Stahl said, look at Chrom with a frown. "Maybe we could ask Naga for help? She would h–"

"You know that's not gonna happen," the prince cut off, a hint of pain in his voice. "Not after that day..."
“Father! Is it done? Is it finally over?” Lucina asked, desperately wanting to hear confirmation of her source of suffering’s demise.

“Yes, Lucina… It's over,” Chrom said through a slightly strained smile as he was engulfed in a tearful embrace. Despite his inner turmoil, he was glad to give his daughter what she needed to finally rest easy. He hoped this was the beginning of an era of peace and prosperity.

The Shepherds went around gathering the rest of the army. They alone wouldn't have been able to stop the tide of Risen after all. The Ylissean League and the New Valmese Alliance were key in providing the troops to allow the Shepherds to fight Grima.

"Gather around everyone!" Chrom shouted, gaining the attention of the Shepherds and gathered representatives. "I'm pleased to announce that the threat of Grima has finally been defeated! The Avatar of Grima has been slain and the tainted bloodline has been extinguished!"

"I know we lost a lot. Many of our friends are no longer with us, but we must keep going forward. Now it's the time to heal and rebuild." He could see the troops gaining confidence and smiled. They had truly given it their all.

"To the Shepherds, my closest friends. I know that there are those amongst you that did not approve of the actions taken against our former tactician, but it was a necessary sacrifice. The risk was too high. Its something I would've liked to avoid, but the needs of the many outweigh the wants of the few."

There certainly had been those that voiced some opposition on killing Robin. They were willing to remove her from command and imprison her. Sumia, Stahl, Olivia, and Virion had suggested that they simply exiled her. He considered it, but if she had children then Grima's bloodline could continue and a new vessel would eventually form.

Chrom raised Exalted Falchion in victory, earning shouts from the soldiers below.

"Take heart my friends! The price we paid was high. Our will and mettle have been tested but we have prevailed!" he declared as the cheers rose, even from those that had defended Robin. "Together we will forge a new future! For those that have fallen—!"

Pain surged through him like a thunderbolt. Chrom fell to his knees as he felt his shoulder burn with searing pain. At his side, Lucina clawed at her eye, while she screamed. Not far behind, Owain also fell to the ground, holding his arm. The Exalt turning to how to shoulder and saw his Brand shining with light. It slowly eroded into specs of light and vanish into the wind leaving pink flesh on its place.

Both Falchions and the Fire Emblem glowed as they were consumed in blue fire, before vanishing in flash of light.

The soldiers panicked, thinking they were being attacked. Many drew their weapons, looking for Risen or Grimleal.

"W-What's going on!?" Chrom hissed through the pain. "Are we under attack? Is Grima back!?"

"That is not the case, Exalt of Ylisse."

The gathered warriors froze as a figure made of light materialized behind the Exalt. The Divine Dragon Naga stood above them, her silhouette glowing with green light. Her long gown dance on the wind, looking as if it had been made from a piece of the night sky. For those soldiers that were not Shepherds this was the first time they saw the legendary goddess. She would've been a beautiful sight had it not been for the frown on her face.
Chrom stood and noticed that both Falchions rested on the dragon's hands. "Naga, what is the meaning of this?"

Naga just looked at him with a disappointed scowl. "There is no longer a need for your line to carry my blessing or for you to remain in possession of Falchion."

"But what about when Grima returns?! Even if we destroyed its vessel it c–!"

"When you slew Robin, her soul went and met Grima's," Naga said, interrupting his questions. "The Fell Dragon offered her the chance to fuse. To combine their power to stop them from fading into slumber and for her to take revenge against those that wronged her."

"She wouldn't!"

"What?!"

"That bitch!"

"So she took th–!"

"Enough!" the Divine Dragon silenced them with a stern glare. "Grima won't return. She rejected the offer, and stroke down Grima with the real final blow. For she was the vessel of its power, and the Fell Dragon can only be completely slain by its own power. Robin saved this world, despite your treatment of her."

This made many of the Shepherds recoil as if slapped, though many still held on to their anger. Those that were the closest to her felt the worst. Even after turning their backs on her, she still was willing to die for them.

Naga then turned her gaze to the four children that survived the fallen future. "Children of the future. You were sent here to prevent a future of catastrophe from befalling this world. In a way you succeeded, but the path that lays ahead will be filled with harsh trials."

"What do you mean?!” Lucina pleaded. Chrom looked at her and saw her bleeding from her eye, though thankfully she wasn't blind. Still, he could understand her distress. They had done all she requested, so why were they being punished?

"This is no punishment, Exalt," Naga said, as if reading his mind. "These are the consequences of your actions. Though fault also lies with me. My own hatred for Grima blinded me too. I feared her magic would influence my daughter and lead her to the same degeneration that has taken so many dragons, but I have seen that's not the case." Her voice took a more somber tone. "She was her own person. I should've have seen that and made sure you did too."

This confused those present, who remained shocked at the events going on. Naga was admitting fault on the events that happened, but out of worry for her daughter. Tiki remained on the Mila Tree, having been forbidden from helping directly in battle. And yet Naga felt pity for Robin?

"Lady Naga, what is the meaning of all this? Are we being punished for... not siding with Grima's vessel?" Libra asked. As one of the most devout to the Dragon, he thought he was doing the right thing. They all did.

"Not as a punishment as you might think," she said, looking at the soldiers. "Performing the Awakening and using my power against Grima have taken their toll on me. I need to rest. For
that, I will slumber for many years to recover."

"But the Brand! The Fire Emblem and the Falchions! What's the meaning of that?"

"I shall keep the Fire Emblem and the Falchions," she explained as said objects vanished once more. "As for the Brand… Loyalty and Trust are two of the key aspects to keep the blessing. Something you denied her to the very end. If it comes a time when the bond is needed again, then we shall see."

Chrom didn't know how to respond, standing there in silence as the weight if his actions came crashing down on him.

"Tiki will guard them during her slumber. From this point onwards, humanity needs to rely on its own strength. For too long have we dragons meddled in a world no longer our own." Naga's face then took a more compassionate expression. "I wish you luck in the battles to come."

"Naga, wait!" Chrom shouted.

She did no such thing, vanishing on a flash that left only specs of light and a shocked army behind.

"I still don't understand. We did the right thing," Chrom said, dropping his head in his hands. Things had become more complicated after that. Soldiers started whispering and rumors spread. It was known now that House Lowell had lost the favor of the Divine Dragon, putting them in a perilous position. There were whispers amongst the noble houses that by having lost the blessing of Naga that also took away their right to the throne. No matter that it was his bloodline that forged this kingdom. It was only the fact that he had won two wars and slain Grima that stopped a full revolution.

But Robin had a lot of goodwill amongst the soldiers that fought under her. It was not only the Shepherds that held reservation against killing her, or even having her arrested. She had done a lot of good, keeping the soldiers alive with her strategies. Getting to know them, writing letters to the families of the fallen soldiers or just spending time with them. Many of their troops had their doubts silenced by the most devout followers of Naga, only for that stance to be turned against them with the actions of the Divine Dragon. Needless to say, there was quite a division among the ranks.

"Did we?"

The soft question broke through the Exalt's thoughts. "Stahl?"

His friend had a frown on his face, looking at the window were there Pegasus Knights' recruits were training. "I… I lost Cordelia and our daughter in the war. But I never blamed Robin."

"She was Grima's Vessel. You heard Lucina's story. You knew the risks," the Exalt said in a defeated tone.

"Yes, she was her Vessel, but she wasn't Grima. She was a victim of both Grima's plans and our own paranoia," the knight said, finally voicing the thought he had bottled up for years. "I let myself be convinced, but sometimes I ask myself what would've happened had we trusted her. Even at the end, she never did anything to us."

"Leaving her alive would have risked everything. We couldn't let Lucina's future come to pass," he tried to reason.

"And yet in that future, Cordelia and I lived together long enough to have a daughter," Stahl said
"with a forlorn tone. "I can't help but wonder if she would've survived had Robin being the one leading us. She sacrificed herself for us and yet there are still those that blame her for everything. She even apologized for Cordelia's death when it Frederick was the one thea--"

"Stahl, that's enough." Chrom said with a stern voice. "There is no point in torturing yourself thinking about the what-ifs," he said, almost choking on his hypocrisy.

The viridian knight sighed in resignation. "Not like it matters. Both are dead anyway and yet Risen keep coming. We still don't have a way to deal with them."

"Take a break," Chrom suggested, not wanting to strain his friendship with the knight. "Maybe visit Olivia?" The two had lost their loved ones, but gotten closer during the last few years. Nothing serious yet, but hopefully both would heal from it.

Stahl understood the polite dismissal and nodded. "As you wish, sir."

After the knight left, Chrom followed a minute later. He made his way down the halls until he reached the Royal Family's wing. Entering a communal room, he found his future daughter reading a book. Once he entered, she only had to take a look to guess what happened.

"More Risen attacks, father?" she asked with a concerned tone, leaving her book behind as she walked towards her father.

"Yes, but these were manageable," he said, dropping on a chair. "For now."

"Father…" Lucina said with surprising optimism. "We bested Grima at her strongest. Everything will work out."

The Exalt had his doubts but he didn’t voice them to his daughter. "You're right, Lucina. Thank you."

"Always, father," she said, leaning and placing a kiss on his cheek. "I need to go talk to Kjelle. I will come back for dinner. Mother is in the nursery, she will be here in a moment."

Chrom smiled at his daughter. "Be safe."

Once Lucina left, he leaned on his chair feeling the weight of the day on his shoulders. Things were much simpler when bandits were his biggest problem. Ruling the Halidom was hard even after all these years. And he didn't have someone skilled enough to help him with the workload.

Not any longer at least.

"Another long day, dear?"

He smiled and stood as he turned to the door of the nursery. "Yeah. It seems like every day is like that lately."

His wife stepping out of the nursery, having laid down baby Lucina in her crib. Queen Arianne looked lovely in her simple flower pattern dress. Her blonde hair was styled on a simple braid, framing her freckles.

She walked to him, taking his face on her hand and frowning with concern."You need to rest. Running yourself to the ground will do no one any good."

He sighed, not willing to hide the pressure he felt at the moment. "I can't stop worrying. We have no
way to stop the Risen from keep coming back. Naga won't help us, so we need to figure things out ourselves."

"Just like Lucina said, everything will work out," she said with surprising optimism.

"Maybe you're right Arianne," the Exalt said, kissing and hugging his queen. "We found each other after all. Not even Grima or her Avatar's interference prevented that."

"That we did," his wife said with a smile, leaning into the hug. It was a warm moment until her tone changed to a softer, resigned tone. "But you still love her," Arianne said and he was glad he was not seeing her face.

"I do not," Chrom said, though he was sure his wife didn't believe him. 'I can't allow myself to, or I would be forced to admit my mistake.'

"We both know she would've been a better queen than me. I'm just a flower girl, not a leader. Maybe then the Risen wouldn't c–"

"I don't regret my actions. I happy that you're my wife, not Robin."

Maybe if he kept repeating that he would believe it himself.

Foolish man. Then again, he is but a victim of this Lucina's meddling. Had she kept her mouth shut, the ripples could've been contained. But no. She had to be blind to her situation. Ugh, teenagers. Janus wondered is the new boy, Jon, would've to come back to "fix" the new timeline like the Lucinas did. There was no sign of that yet, but that didn't mean anything at this point. Anything could happen on this timeline.

It was interesting to see Naga's reaction. Normally, she held contempt for Grima and their bloodline. That and her deteriorating relationship with her daughter always caused problems for the Avatars that fell in love with Tiki. On the new timeline, though, she was much more accepting. Then again, these two Naga's had the knowledge shared by their fallen future counterpart.

Focusing back on the timeline at the epicenter of this ink spilt on the script, the elder focused on the continent of Valm.

"Agh! P-Please Lord and Lady, have mercy!" an ugly, fat man pleaded as he fell bloodied on the floor. His troops laid slaughtered at his feet as a platoon of swordsmen finished them off.

"Fie! What a sniveling bag of puss you are," Say'ri sneered at the Valmese tactician.

"Calm yourself sister," a man with long, silvery hairs said, placing a hand on her shoulder to calm her down.

"How can I do that Yen'fay!? He tried to kill mother and father! You read what he planned for us!" She, like the entire royal family, had read the letter from the Voice of Naga detailing the vision she had received about the plot against their country. It made Say'ri's blood boil thinking about being used as blackmail to control her brother.

"Make no mistake. He will not live more than a few more moments, but a good swordmaster must always remain calm…" Yen'fay said, "or they can be taken by surprise," he finished, pointing at the lightning-enchanted dagger Excellus tried to use to attack his sister.
"You mise--" Say'ri stopped herself, taking a calming breath. "No. You're right, brother. This worm is not worth the temper."

"Excellus. For the attempt on the king and queen of Chon'sin there is only one sentence."

The worm pissed himself in fear, dissolving himself into a blubbering mess.

"Death," he stated as his sword moved in a flash, severing flesh and bone. Excellus's head rolled in the floor, his face frozen in terror.

"Good riddance," said the princess, spitting on the decapitated body.

"Milord! Milady!" a man shouted, dropping to one knee before the two royals.

"Han'zo, report," Yen'fay ordered to his retainer, flicking the blood from his katana and sheathing his blade.

The ninja archer bowed his head, placing his weapon on the ground in respect to his lord before elaborating. "All of Excellus's troops have been eliminated."

"And Pheros?" the prince asked. Ever since the sage had been contacted by Lady Tiki to join Chon'sin cause. She had been a devout follower of Naga and loyal retainer of the swordsman since she joined them. She had been suffering a crisis of fate, but the Voice had managed to sway her to their side. Good thing too. She was a powerful asset and was one of the reasons they kept Walhart at bay.

"She's rounding up those that surrendered and treating their wounds as your ordered," the archer answered.

"Gen'ji and Kas'mi should return soon," Say'ri mused, thinking about her own retainers. "Catching up to those runners should be a simple task for those two," her brother said, setting his lips on a thin line. "The longer Walhart takes to realize this thing is dead, the more time we have to prepare our defenses," she said while glaring at the corpse.

"Indeed," Yen'fay said, looking toward Chon'sin. "So let's not waste this time."

So the cowardly toad met his fate earlier. Interesting. That should cause quite the ripple. Which reminded him…

A thin thread connecting the world of Anankos to this one made his blood boil. With his full power, he saw well past the cloaking spells of the Fell Dragon. The failed experiment stood over a map and his anger improved Janus's mood.

"Excellus has fallen," Grima said out loud, catching the attention of his daughter. The girl was progressing at a rapid pace with her spells, tapping more into her blood's potential. The new experiments she had performed on the Einherjar while he created more Abominations and tinkered with the Faceless creatures the Nohrians created. He hated how they used his grimoire and sword, but at least he got something out of it.

Morrigan stopped writing her notes and looked at him with a furrowed brow. "That horrible excuse for a tactician Validar planted in Valm?"

Grima had to chuckle at his daughter's words. She had gotten bolder since she started working on the
Einherjar project, but she still knew when to be respectful. Good. He didn't want his child to be a mere pawn.

"Yes, though I didn't expect him to fall so soon. It seems things are changing more than anticipated," the Fell Dragon mused, tracing the map that had his notes on the various nations. More importantly, the changes that had happened in the timeline since his arrival. "After Plegia and Emmeryn's survival, things have gotten more interesting..." And annoying.

Morrigan furrowed her brow as she studied the map. "Do you require me to do something about this situation, Master?"

"Yes," he said, motioning for Morrigan to come closer and pointed towards the map. "You will go to Valm and take over as their tactician. Use the control spell on Walhart. He is dangerous but useful." Making some calculations, he wrote down some notes "Make sure the invasion of Regna Ferox happens in this timeframe, even if you have to split your forces into two fronts. Let the Shepherds go to Valm and win the war, but make sure to weaken both sides. Take your Einherjars, as well as the new reeking boxes. Test the new Abominations and Faceless. Keep the Einherjars and some of the boxes as a trump card. Anything else you can think off, you have free reign."

Something seemed to light up in her eyes. Clearly, she had an idea. "I will depart immediately."

"Good," he said, waving her to leave. But something inside him stirred. "And Morrigan?"

The girl stopped, tilting her head in curiosity.

"Be careful."

Morrigan's eyes widened in surprise. But she was well trained. In a moment, she recovered before bowing once more. "I will… Father," she whispered and left.

The Fell Dragon stood there alone, pushing these feelings to the back of his mind. Mortal weakness of his heart was not something he needed at the moment.

"Better get back to my experiments. I can still improve my Risen. Who knows what surprises Naga has in store for me." Grima mused out loud and smirked. He walked to the next room where his most precious soldiers stood awaiting instructions. "And we can't forget about my Deathlords," he said as he looked at the undead shapes of his former comrades. That will certainly be a fun thing to use when he finally faces the Shepherds.

But he needed to recover his full strength first, and for that he needed the active gemstones. Enough power would be enough to activate the Fire Emblem's power, but if Naga performed the Awakening on it, he would get more power than the sacrifices would produce. A risk to let Falchion awaken, but he had contingencies for that.

"I might have lost Sable, but doesn't matter. Complete the Fire Emblem and perform the Awakening. I only need Naga to set the right conditions," he said, while looking at the completed Shield of Seals on the wall. "It's a good thing I brought a spare with me."

Two Fire Emblems in the same world… That was something he didn't see often. Then again, it seemed this world was bound to have spares for legendary weapons.
The interactions between the Dragon and the child intrigued him. Janus scoffed at the notion of that fool having feelings for others. Then again, the two Fell Dragons that were giving him a headache were not like the ones on the other timelines. This one was particularly troubled and far more creative with his monsters. The situation in Valm worried him, though. It looks like the girl's interference had sent ripples all the way out there and were far more serious than expected.

Descending on the battlements of the outer walls of Rosanne, Cherche dismounted Minerva with a sense of unease. The Valmese had been quiet for quite some time since the death of their tactician but lately they had started moving again.

"The Valmese are about a week away," she said to the captain of the guard, Enzo. "I dare say at least eight to ten thousand strong."

He frowned and she could understand. They might have the home advantage, but this was a mere fraction of the Valmese war machine. Rosanne had a moderate population, but in terms of soldiers they were barely five thousand. They could wither the advancing forces with traps and reduce their numbers at the gates, but they would just keep coming. "We will need to send troops to sabotage the bridges. That should buy us a couple of days at least. Every second we delay them allows us to prepare better."

Cherche mused at the idea. It had merit, but would also leave them trapped. Not like they had anywhere to run, however. "We are pretty self-sufficient inside the valley, but at the same time the troops we have here is all we have."

At times like these she wondered if it wouldn't have been better to surrender, but kept those thoughts to herself. She, like all the soldiers present, were loyal to Rosanne. Morale had dropped when Lord Virion left, only to raise when they got a message that he had gained the assistance of the Feroxi as well as a mercenary company. Ten thousand troops. Not enough to outright defeat the Empire, but more than enough to take advantage of Rosanne's natural defenses.

At least it had restored faith in the leader they thought had abandoned them. The dukedom would have collapsed without that. It had taken her a lot to convince the troops he hadn't run away. She knew why he had done so. They would've died for their Lord, so running away was a way to spare them. At least he actually got help, so her lies were not unfounded.

"Any word from Chon'sin or the other dynasts?" she asked. Chon'sin had stopped the assassination attempt on their rulers, rallying many the southern dynasts to their banner. This had given Valm pause, allowing Rosanne and other free territories room to breathe.

"We hav--"

"Lady Lacroix! A fleet is coming from the southeastern sea!" another wyvern rider announced as he dropped into the battlements.

"Valmese?" she asked with a hint of worry. The small dukedom had the advantage that it only had two easy entries into their territory. Laying in a fertile valley, the only openings were a path through the mountains at the northwest and an opening on the southeastern gulf. Both entries were heavily guarded, with many heavy weapons lining the walls, but they would not stand an extended siege.

The scout shook his head. "I'm not sure, ma'am. The designs are crude and carry no flags."

Frowning, Cherche mounted Minerva and flew towards the gulf. After a few minutes of hard flying, Minerva stopped and hovered in the air. Her rider took a looking glass and focused on the large
armada. The size made her grimace. The warships and supply ships were large enough to contain thousands of soldiers. If they broke through the blockade they would have an easy time overwhelming Rosanne.

Focusing on the lead ship, she saw something that made all her worries melt away. The familiar mop of long cerulean hair dancing in the wind was unmistakable. Standing next to him was a blonde woman on heavy armor and another man with long, messy blue hair.

"That man loves his theatrics, doesn't he, Minerva?" Cherche said, shaking her head with a wry smile. "At least he didn't arrive in the middle of battle."

First Chon'sin and now Rosanne. This war was going to be bloodier than in any other world, now that both sides are more evenly matched. Things certainly were heating up in Valm, and would only get more complicated once the Ylisseans arrive.

And then there were those kids...

"Are you sure you can do this?" a boy asked, as he looked over to his companion.

"Of course I can! Don't you trust me?" the girl asked indignantly. She looked over the fort where the bandits they were assigned to take out resided and nodded. It was a small fort in the borders of a small country that laid in ruins thanks to the Valmese War. Those vultures wasted no time settling in as both sides were too busy to redirect troops here.

"Well--"

"Don't answer that, I need to concentrate!" the girl said, walking out of their hiding spot and into a hill to get a clearer view to cast her spell.

"...Right," the boy said in defeat, running a hand over his face. "Just... don't kill us."

Ignoring his words, the girl cleared her throat and began the chant for her spell. Winds twisted as magical energy gathered above her.

"Darkness blacker than black and darker than dark,

I beseech thee, combine with my deep crimson.

The time of awakening cometh.

Justice, fallen upon the infallible boundary,

appear now a–!"

"I should've never let you buy that tome," the boy grumbled as he warily looked at the unstable spell.

"–s an intangible distortions!

I desire for my torrent of power a destructive force!

A destructive force without equal!"

"Are you sure that's a real spell? The chant sounds redun–"
"Return all creation to cinders,
and come from the abyss!

Explosion!"

A massive ball of fire smashed into the captured fort with terrifying force. The walls exploded from the shock wave while the sheer heat melted the stone and incinerated those within.

The girl looked smugly at her brother, clearly proud of herself. "See? Told you I didn't need any help." She stopped her bragging once the tome in her hands turned to dust. "My tome!"

The boy closed his eyes and counted to ten. "...You destroyed the fort. We were supposed to bring the gates down!"

An awkward moment of silence passed between the two as the girl processed the words. "Whoops. Heh heh..." she laughed off awkwardly, rubbing the back of her head.

"Damnit Morgan! This is why we haven't been able to afford passage back to Ylisse!" the boy shouted.

Morgan flinched at the reproach. "Chill, Marc! It's not that bad," she said waving his concerns off and wiping the ashes from her blue hair. "Just some paint and elbow grease and it will be just like new!"

Marc glared at his sister's lack of concern. He's the most level-headed of the siblings but she really pushed his buttons sometimes. "One. We spend most of our gold in that tome that you just incinerated! Two! We are not getting paid for this job now! Three! We are not any closer to getting back to Ylisse! Four! It's literally a pile of ash! We can't keep getting these 'accidents'!"

"To be fair, half of those accidents were your fault."

"What? No, they weren't!" Marc shouted in denial.

"We are twins, we share everything in halfies," she said, nodding to herself.

Marc wanted to throttle his sister, but managed to not commit fratricide. The pair were good tacticians, always completing their tasks, but sometimes they tended to use unorthodox tactics that more often than not ended with collateral damage that their clients used to cut their pay down.

"Let's just go back to town... Maybe we can spin this up into something useful. Like they blew it up before letting us capture it... I will think of something..." the young man grumbled as his sister trailed behind him.

That twins started walking back to town, trying to think of an excuse. Their little accidents had forced them to walk as they couldn't afford horses. They had to travel light since they had not much on them. It was problematic, but they were used to much worse in their timeline.

"Oh! I heard there is a warehouse of some shady smuggler around here. Sa... Sam-Something. Maybe we can raid it and get something to sell?" Morgan suggested with a grin.

Marc sighed. He didn't want to stoop so low but they were running out of options. "I guess we can try... No different than when we raided Grimleal's warehouses I guess..."

Thinking back to those times was not something Marc liked to do. It only brought bitter memories.
Morgan had no such qualms, however.

"...Hey, do you think Lucina will be happy to see us? We didn't part in the best of terms with her," she asked in a somber tone.

Marc was not surprised by the question, but by the fact that it had taken his sister so long to touch the subject. It was not a pretty set of memories. "Honestly, I don't know. Remember how she was before we separated? Always snappish and angry at everyone?"

"Yeah, but we suffered losses before! And that was months ago! Or will be? Agh, time travel. Anyways, she should've calmed down... I mean, there were so few of us left... Owain, Kjelle and Inigo were the only ones left when she made us leave."

"True, but the losses we suffered in those last months were our fault. We made mistakes on the strategies and it costs us our comrades' lives. Including..."

"I know..." Morgan said softly. "But we have a chance to make it right!" she said with determination. "And maybe she will feel better. You heard the news that Aunt Emmeryn is still alive, so Lucina must have succeeded!"

"Possibly. I just wish Naga had sent us closer to her," Marc grumbled, hoping the Divine Dragon hadn't been listening. Sighing, he recalled how their last talk had gone. "And well... the things we said to each other are not things that are easy to take back..."

Morgan grimaced and for good reason. After the three siblings had pieced together how their parents died, Lucina's emotions had become even more volatile. She had this idea that their mother had something to with Grima's resurrection, which the twins didn't want to accept. They kept the idea to themselves, not wanting to cause discord amongst their ranks. But after another discussion and one more comrade lost, Lucina reached her limit.

They shouted at each other in a fight unlike any they had before, ending only she told them she didn't want to see them again. They responded with equal harshness and separated from the remnants of their group.

"Hey don't worry," Marc said, placing a hand on his twin's shoulder. "Come on. We need to report back and then find more work if we want to ever get back to Ylisse."

Shaking her head, Morgan put a forced smile on her face and nodded. "Gotcha bro! I can't wait to see mother and father again!"

"You will have to, because we have no money..." he grumbled.

Janus frowned as he watched the visions of the twin dragon children. They didn't belong in this world. Looking at the tear displaying the female Fell Dragon he scoffed. None of them belonged here. There shouldn't be so many new pieces in the board.

Too many changes.

Normally, he wouldn't care as long as they stayed limited to a single branch of a timeline. That was normal for him. But these damned lizards... The boy dared intrude in another universe entirely, when only those three future children were supposed to interfere there. Not only that, he changed the playing field entirely. The original three branches are not invalid. He would've to trim those branches and guide the new single one with care.
And what the girl did… He could accept her helping one timeline, as her was balancing out the new one, but had she not done that this entire mess could've been avoided.

His temper had simmered down, though, and he was not without sympathy.

Still, the girl had to pay for her actions, intentional or not.

Afterall, she is the catalyst for this entire mess.

As he turned his gaze to another window in reality, one that showed a messenger from Regna Ferox galloping towards Ylisstol much earlier than she was supposed to, Janus knew things were coming to a head.

He saw the diverging branches forming on the base of the fused mess. Some taking a similar form to the ones this worlds should've taken, with the main branch standing like a tumor. And yet he couldn't do anything on this world… On this world…

A smile spread on his lips as an idea came to him. He looked at the messed up world and found Naga during the arrival of the Valmese. He might not be able to interfere on the world, but with a nudge he could gain a foothold and start fixing this mess.

Naga stood on the edge of her reality, trying to glimpse into the future or other worlds similar to her own. She saw worlds in which she never mended her relationship with her daughter. Where her own hatred for Grima transferred to his Avatar. Worlds such as her in which the two fell in love. She feared the degeneration could take her daughter. Or that Tiki would suffer through the pain of losing her mortal lover to time.

The Divine Dragon sighed. At least in this world she had mended the relationship with Tiki. Grima's Avatar was a good man. His sister, broken as she was, had a good heart, too. She would wield that dark power for good. If they all played their parts, they could end Grima's threat once and for all.

Still, she hadn't found what she needed. The Outrealms were hard to navigate at the best of times. Even one such as herself had to struggle to get a glimpse of things to come.

That's why it came as a shock when a vision of a parallel world slammed into her mind. Knowledge of what could be and could've been. Her eyes widened as the clues connected into a pattern. Gathering her magic she vanished, making haste back to Ylisse.

She needed to return and talk to Rose and Tiki.

Janus smirked. This would be entertaining.

Chapter End Notes

AN: I posted a new short story, “The Wrong Choice”. Check it in my profile and tell me what you think. And read “What she deserves” while you're at it. Views and reviews are how I measure my worth, people!

So, Marc and Morgan are in this world. They traveled separately from Lucina and the others. Their departure was not a happy one. But they knew of the plan thanks to Naga.
But they ended up on this Valm. Who knows how things would’ve changed had they arrived with the other children to their future to the correct timeline? (I do) Won’t meeting Rose and this Lucina be a fun thing?

I think my guilt on taking too long posting a chapter is getting to me, since I had a weird dream about a Lucina being corrupted by an Evil Santa Claus that was actually an evil dragon in a weird international sports event.

I used the name Janus because in mythology he is a gatekeeper and Hubba is a silly name.

How is a person from Chon’Sin called? Chon’sinian?

Thanks to Xbro Kong for checking this up.
She knew this day would come.

Rose wondered for years if she should've dealt with Walhart from the start. It certainly would've made things easier. But it would create a domino effect that she could barely predict. Virion would've not become a Shepherd, nor would Cherche, Say'ri and maybe Priam. It was possible it could still have happened, but she had no way to know how. It was callous to sacrifice so many lives for those of her former comrades' counterparts, but she had to keep the things relatively close at the time to not tip her hand and lose her advantage to too many changes. It was a miracle that Grima had not homed in on her yet.

But she could feel in her bones the time was getting closer.

The tactician watched as the Feroxi messenger left for the guest chambers. It wasn't Reimi, so that was already a change. Not a big one, but she was a general. She was spared in her time to help convince the Exalt about the Valmese, but that was clearly not the case anymore.

The messenger said as much.

Valm had invaded with a sizable force earlier than she anticipated. It didn't make any sense to her. Their troops should be tied up with Chon'sin, Rosanne, and the other southern territories. Why send troops to start a war on a second front? Was Grima baiting them to their territory? That's what she would do in his place. Send a force overseas so Ylisse and Ferox would send their troops to assist the Southern Alliance. Force them into large battles to deplete their armies against each other. That way The Shepherds wouldn't try to perform the surgical strikes she used before. With the South on their side, Chrom and Robin would be more tempted to use regular military tactics. And of course, that would create plenty of corpses for his Risen army.

Bloody and brilliant. Shit.

Was it bad that she was jealous that her own Grima didn't think of that? Probably. It wounded her pride a little.

Frederick's voice brought her back to the present. "What do you make of this, sire?" the knight asked Chrom. Emmeryn may still be the Exalt but Chrom lead the army. Any campaign would be led by him and the Shepherds.

Chrom frowned standing next to Emmeryn, Aedan, and Lissa. "Ill business to be sure," he said before turning back to the messenger. "We will meet with Flavia at once--"

"We will," corrected Emmeryn, looking at her surprised siblings.

Rose could feel a headache coming. Keeping this woman alive was an exercise of patience and perseverance.

"Emmeryn..." King Aedan started before his wife interrupted him.
"I know what you're thinking, Aedan, but we owe Regna Ferox a great debt. We will honor our alliance. I will go to Regna Ferox and appraise the situation. In the meantime, I want Chrom to lead our troops to assist them while I talk with the Khans about the information they have."

Aedan shook his head. "No, I understand that. What I worry is if this is just a prelude to a bigger conflict. Are we really ready to fight Valm?" the king said, turning to Robin for an answer.

Her brother frowned in thought. "We reformed our army, so we have troops. But experience is a problem. Most are rookies that haven't fought anything harder than a bandit camp in their area." Robin explained. "Most of the troops that fought against Plegia came from Ferox and they are already taking the brunt of the attack."

"Plegia is a wild card. Are we certain they won't throw their lot in with the Valmese?" Aedan asked. He might not be a military strategist, but he had quite a head for the geopolitical situation of the continent. He and Emmeryn made quite the pair.

Chrom frowned at that. "I don't think so. They just got free from the yoke of a madman. I doubt they would want another."

Oh, Rose had to bite her tongue at the naivete of those words. No matter how he came back, Validar made Gangrel look like an eccentric uncle in comparison.

"They won't," Rose assured, finally stepping into the conversation, holding little Jon in her arms. She rocked the little prince to keep him calm. She didn't have time to find someone to take care of him before the meeting was called, but at least he was a calm baby. "There might still plenty of Plegians that hate us, but a foreign dictator is not something they want. Better the devil you know."

That and Grima wanted them to bleed each other.

Chrom sighed and relented to her logic. He knew a losing battle by now. "Fine, but you are taking a strong escort with you once we separate." The prince turned to his fellow Shepherds. "Come on. We need to send messages to rally our troops and prepare for a long march."

They left, leaving only Phila and Rose with the Royal couple.

"Take care, my love. I can't bear the thought of losing you. Not after Plegia…" Aedan said, holding his wife in a tight embrace.

"I will return to you. I swear to the gods," Emmeryn said, kissing him in reassurance.

"I love you," Aedan breathed, barely separating their lips.

"I love you too."

Jon gurgled as they watched the sappy display.

"Disgusting, isn't it?" Rose said towards the confused infant in her arms. "Trust me, never get married. It's not worth it. You become a sap and then it's all downhill from there."

Phila turned to her with an incredulous look on her face, finally breaking her silence. "Are you telling a baby, and the heir to the throne at that, not to marry?"

The tactician shrugged. "Someone has to teach him life's harsh truths. Who better than his favorite aunty?" she said, tickling the baby's nose.
Jon gurgled happily and Phila just glared at her.

She enjoyed this little fun. Who knew how long it would be before she felt this calm.

"And so, we march again to war..." Robin muttered as he set his horse down to rest. They were making good time, especially since they were moving a sizable number of troops. A day and a half march was all that remained before the battle.

Thankfully provisions were not a problem due to the frontier garrisons having been fully restocked after the conflict with Plegia. No one was willing to drop their guard down even if Gangrel was dead. The longer they marched, the more troops joined their caravan. Some had separated from them to escort Emmeryn to the capital while the bulk of their troops made their way to the port city.

Much to his chagrin, his mother had accompanied Emmeryn. He hated the idea of putting her in danger, but he couldn't deny Morgana was one of the strongest warriors on their side. Tiki had also gone with them. His girlfriend—and it still made him giddy to call such a woman that—was powerful in her own right. He hoped that would be enough.

"Not something I'm happy about either, Robin, but we can't abandon the Feroxi. We owe them," Chrom said at his side, letting his own horse drink from the river they stopped by.

"I'm not saying to not help them, I'm just lamenting that they need our help. It's not even Plegia."

Robin said, closing his eyes in frustrations. "Valmese troops on our continent..."

"That's the way of the world, Bubbles. Someone is always ready to wage war," Gaius said, walking towards them. "What do you think the situation is going to be?"

Robin frowned, running through the possibilities in his mind. "The Feroxi had little to no warning, despite knowing of the situation on Valm thanks to Virion. While they have fortified their garrisons and port cities they don't have ships to deal with the Valmese fleet."

"But they have home advantage," Chrom added. "Clear supply lines, the full support of their population and thanks to the war they are by no means green warriors. The Valmese will depend on their supply ships as well as any resources they capture for their campaign."

The grandmaster nodded at the prince's words. "Correct. But no doubt this is something the Valmese have already considered."

"Could they have support in the continent? We already have Plegia in middle of a civil war, and let's not forget that Ylisse had its own traitor in the war," the thief added.

"It's possible, but I doubt it," Robin said, considering the words as the trio walked towards the camp. "Very few ships have come from Valm in the past few years. Trade all but stopped. Gangrel didn't let any ships come into his ports, so the other possibilities are Ferox or Ylisse, and going to Ylisse would mean a longer journey. Rose's network has no information on any envoys coming before this attack."

"There is no point on worrying about those suspicions for now," Chrom added with a frown as they entered the tent where the other Shepherds were waiting for them. "Everyone's here. How will we proceed with the offensive?"

Robin looked at the map and proceeded to outline the situation. They might still have time, but it was better to get everyone on the same page. "The main issue we will face is routing the Valmese before they get reinforcements. They will already have taken the town and dealt with the garrison of Port
Ferox by the time we could mobilize. Ferox will be able to respond, but due to their large and rough terrain, it will take them time to gather their full military strength, hence why they called us. Our roads are in better shape and we can respond faster to their aid."

"In terms of troops, it's hard to say. Valm has the strongest cavalry in the world but Feroxi terrain does not lend itself for cavalry charges so they can't use their best advantage. At least not that close to the coast. Plegia has its deserts to protect them from large charges, so they will depend on infantry and aerial units there. It will become a problem if they come to Ylisse, though. We have too many plains, which makes us vulnerable."

Chrom got a grim look at the prospect. No one wanted more war in their lands. "Then we need to destroy their foothold now, or we will pay for that later."

"Right," Robin agreed. Leaving vulnerabilities was not something he wanted to do. "We got our own cavalry, but the bulk remains in our territory for now. Still, they do not have the level of experience of the Valmese. We do have plenty of pikemen and archers, as well as mages, so we are not entirely at a disadvantage."

"Rose and Phila have been insisting on training in anti-cavalry tactics for nearly a year," the prince mused. "I guess you saw it coming."

"...Yeah, I suppose so," the grandmaster said, glancing at his sister who just shrugged.

"We didn't face much cavalry from Plegia, and I did have my suspicions, but I had no concrete proof. Better not to start making accusations and cause panic."

"Fair enough," conceded the prince, though not without a note of doubt.

"Ferox has plenty of heavy armor troops, so they can stop cavalry charges," Robin continued, pointing at the upper side of the Feroxi territory. "But according to our latest reports, they are currently routed on the northern ports. We will take Port Ferox at the south, and then we will go north. If the Feroxi defeat the north-most troops, we will trap the central troops in a pincer attack. If not, at least we will divert reinforcements towards us."

Frederick nodded in approval. "Good. Either way, we will take the pressure from the Khan's troops."

"Port Ferox has no wall around it, but it has fortified garrisons and watchtowers. That means archers and scouts will have an advantage unless we take them out. At least, we won't have to worry about cavalry if we fight them in narrow streets." Robin then pointed to the various piers across the coast. "By now they must already have disembarked all they needed from their boats. I would prefer to capture them, so we can use them, but I doubt we can do it without heavy losses. We can capture their supplies and then our flying units can go high in the sky, out of range of any archers in the ships and drop oil bombs to torch them."

Cordelia stood on attention, with two other women at her side. "We got three squadrons of Pegasus Knights with us. We divided the veterans and the newer troops evenly to maintain an even distribution of skill. I will command Squad One, Elsa squad Two, and Amelie Squad Three. Once the sky is clear in the port we can take out the ships."

Robin nodded, happy with the numbers. Flying units were always less numerous than their grounded counterparts. It simply required more time and skill to become proficient in aerial combat. And with the pegasi preference for females, it halved the number of candidates. While Wyverns had no such preferences, they were harder to tame, breed, and feed than pegasi. And while Valm had the best cavalry in the world, Ylisse dominated the skies.
"Good. From what I know, the Valmese use both wyverns and pegasi, usually they prefer the former. You know what to do by now, so I will leave the finer points to your discretion. Keep clear from the town until we take out the watchtowers, then move in to engage their air units," he said as he turned to the next person. "How are the new shields, Miriel?"

The mage adjusted her glasses and looked at her notes. "They are adequate. As requested they were enchanted and reinforced to resist magical attacks to mitigate the vulnerabilities of slow, heavily armored units. However, they are not completely magic proof. They will give eventually, so using them to stop a constant barrage is not an option."

"I don't plan on using them like that. Our heavy units will hold the line with a phalanx of shields and spears against their cavalry charge. If we manage to keep the battle in the town, their mobility will be hindered. What about the armors?"

"As per your request, we standardized the armors of our units. Non-reflective dark blue with golden accents armors representing the Ylissean royal family. We have trained for moving in armor, in particular mages such as I. I dare say this will increase our chances of success."

"That's the idea," Robin added, pleased at the information. "How is our own cavalry?" Robin said, turning to his mounted comrades.

Sully was the one to step forward this time. "We got some with us, but not enough to challenge the Valmese one on one. Stahl and I have been running the rookies through the wringer, but only a handful had to face anything tougher than bandits. Risen simply don't use the same tactics as a living commander."

"There is the matter of numbers, too," Stahl added, looking serious. Something rare for the normally mellow man. "As you said, we have more cavalry, but spread out across the country. We have picked what we could from the outposts along the way, but we are mainly dependent on infantry. And we will suffer the same disadvantage of narrow streets."

"We got around two hundred horsemen, along with the sixty pegasi," the grandmaster muttered, running the numbers. Current estimates put the forces in the town at around twelve hundred troops, after all the others spread across the land and engage the Feroxi. Possibly there were between two and three thousand Valmese in Ferox at the moment. Not enough to conquer it, but enough to gather a foothold. Robin had only eight hundred right now.

He had sent twenty-three hundred soldiers with Emmeryn to assist the Khans, dividing his forces.

Three thousand… Much less than what he commanded in the last war, but this was just the beginning. Ferox had suffered casualties during the war and skirmishes in the past two years, as well as soldiers too injured to fight again.

Risen raids hadn't helped at all.

From the original forty-five thousand troops they had when they first meet, now they had around thirty-three thousand. Not only that, but they had sent around ten thousand to help Virion and the Resistance in Valm. Around five thousand were in Ylisse under contract, helping to train Ylisseans and garrison towns until they could do it themselves.

So they now had eighteen thousand troops in Feroxi territory but spread out. From the initial blow by the sudden arrival, he guessed the Khans could move four thousand in short order while recalling troops from the farther regions.
The three thousand Robin brought were just the first wave of reinforcements. Though green, Ylisse could now call around thirteen thousand soldiers if they left their territory vulnerable. Better than the measly three thousand soldiers they had in peacetime, not taking into account guards on their towns and cities. Recalling former soldiers as teachers and offering youth that lost family during the war jobs as soldiers helped not only secure the morale of the populace and nobility, but also increase security and offer a deterrence from further attacks.

"Your role will be to surround the town and deal with any Valmese that either tries to escape, or to alert other troops. The last thing we need is them getting reinforcements."

Both knights nodded, understanding the importance of their role.

"For support, we have around eighty good archers and around a hundred and twenty mages, including medics. We will try to hit the watchtowers and any camps outside the city at the same time," Robin said before sighing. "That's all for now. We will have one last meeting once we reach the port. I will send some scouts to gather more information and then proceed from there."

The Shepherds nodded but before they departed Robin spoke again.

"Guys. I know that we don't want war, but once again that has been taken out of our hands. I hate the idea that any of you will not return to your children, so I promise you to do my best to ensure you return home." He closed his eyes, feeling the weight of guilt in his shoulders. "I know it might sound callous to our other soldiers, but you guys are my family. I can't help but feel some favoritism," he added in jest.

His comrades laughed, though there was still a tinge of grim acceptance to their situation.

"We all know we can perish at any moment, Robin. Not only us but all of our fellow soldiers," Sumia said, earning nods from the others. "But I plan to see my Cynthia grow up, so I will do my part!"

That sentiment was echoed by the others and he could only feel pride in his friends.

He would not let them down.

Rose was proud of her brother. His plan was good and he had more troops on his side than she had on her own wars. Then again, she had faced less than five hundred soldiers with four hundred of her own, though that was after a bloody fight between the Feroxi and the Valmese. She wasn't sure why the numbers were much higher this time, as well as landing on three points when the Valmese were still fighting in their own continent. Even if Grima was subtly influencing the outcome, why would Walhart attempt this? It was foolish to fight a war on two fronts. The tactician was missing something, and she didn't like it.

She was supposed to know the script to the story and yet every so often this Grima threw her for a loop. It was strange. The events happened as they were supposed to in a general sense but with new variables. Rose had been pondering this for the past two years but couldn't come to a reason why her counterpart had more resources than her, other than the universe having a twisted sense of balance.

She would have to leave that for later. For now, the Plegian needed to focus on the fight at hand.

The plan started well enough, using the moonless night to cover their movements. The sea was rough and loud, covering the sound of their march. Gaius and other stealth units in combination with a short-range teleportation spell made short work of the sentry towers. They had no anti-portal wards,
which made the work trivial. After dealing with them, they made sure to secure the warehouses that were housing the Valmese resources. While destroying them with one of Miriel’s tome bombs was possible, it would be a waste. Better to take them and use them in their own war effort. Locking the Valmese outside would also ensure a lot of them would not have access to weapons and armor.

Strangely, there were only around ten large galleys, six decks high, on the port. Not enough to transport all the men, animals, and supplies. A larger amount of smaller ships could actually dock, and the port would be secured.

Once the first stage was done, the large initiative started. Mages and archers launched their attacks on the stables and the camps outside the town, as it was not designed to hold troops. The men and beasts were taken by surprise, with many running wild into the open, right into the patch of the Ylissean cavaliers. Stahl and Sully lead the charge, making sure to cut down as many troops as possible.

It didn’t take long for the disciplined Valmese to mount a defense though. Plenty of foot soldiers had taken the deserted houses for themselves and were ready. Many were cut down as they were without the weapons or armors locked in the warehouses.

The archers that tried to take the rooftops were felled by the Ylissean spells and arrows, though not all were taken down. Plenty managed to survive and inflict casualties on Robin’s troops. At least they had the sense to use the trees and city walls as cover while they pushed in.

The war galleys weren’t idle, though. While they only had a skeleton crew, they could still man half of the ballistae and catapults on their decks. The projectiles started hitting the outside of the town, while the burning boulders crashed on his backline, pushing his troops towards the city.

"Infantry, move!" he shouted as he moved next to Gaius. "Stick to your groups and fight one street at the time." He then turned to the Shepherds’ scholar "Miriel! Signal the Pegasus knights to start the attack! We need to stop that bombardment!"

The mage nodded and launched three fireballs into the air, and soon he heard the flapping of wings as the female warriors took flight, moving under the cover of darkness high in the sky.

"This is it everyone!" he shouted, rallying his troops. Adjusting his new helmet to complement his armor, Robin rose Mystletainn in the air. "For Ferox! For Ylisse!"

His troops cheered as they followed him on to the breach.

Yes, she felt pride in his growing skills.

If only he had chosen a different partner for her...

Chrom had to admit he was surprised how easily he and Rose synchronized their attacks, despite the little actual experience they had together. She had always shown herself to be a proficient fighter, but it was like she had fought at his side all his life and took to it like a fish to water. Not even Frederick nor Robin was this in synch with him. And he found himself moving quite as easily as her, following her movements like it was second nature.

The Prince slashed at a mage, and his gut told him to duck, just as Rose launched a thunderbolt at an incoming axeman. He wasted no time, swapping from Falchion to his rapier. The magically-enhanced weapon punctured through the hardened plate armor of the knight that tried to sneak up on his partner. Something that would be hard or impossible with regular rapiers.

This deadly dance repeated itself as the duo covered each other with eerie precision until the pair
made their way to the commander. The Valmese wore armor relevant to his rank, with a gray beard and long hair in a ponytail. He stood near the pier, with three soldiers at his side.

The man snarled at the two Shepherds that faced him and his retinue. "So the Ylissean Prince and one of his dogs come to face me," he said, looking at them with contempt before standing taller and drawing his sword. "Hear me now, you filth! I'm Commander Dalton Felsen! The Conqueror himself, Emperor Walhart, claims dominion over these lands! You will grant your new emperor your ships! You will grant him all your provender! You will bend the knee and surrender the Fire Emblem to his Majesty!"

The Ylissean prince could only stare at the man. After centuries of keeping the Fire Emblem, suddenly a lot of mad men were after it. And they actually expected them to surrender it.

"Do this, and your lives will be spared. Resist, and your lives are forfeit! Now kneel and swear fealty to the mighty Valmese em–!" A series of loud explosions rang through the air and caught their opponents by surprise. "What!?"

Chrom smirked as the bombardment against the port stopped, silencing the monologue of the invader. Looking at the sea, he saw the smoldering wrecks of the war galleys, with the Ylissean Pegasus Knights flying overhead. The Knights were facing the few flying units that were on the ships and making short work of them. The wooden ships, despite their sturdy construction, were still consumed in flames. It seemed Robin was right, and they had flammable supplies on board, like oil or explosive powder.

Dalton turned his glare to the two Shepherds, conveying all his rage with his eyes. "You vermin!" he said as he ordered his troops. "Kill them all! Leave the prince alive, though. He is valuable, but if he is missing an arm or a leg it's inconsequential."

The three warriors obeyed their leader, preparing to deal with them. His partner had other ideas. In a fluid movement, she launched a wind spell, throwing one of the men into the water. Before anyone could react, she closed the distance and shoulder checked the war priest giving them support into the water. The two Valmese couldn't do more than scream as she launched a thunder spell into the water, electrocuting the duo to death. The two other invaders were momentarily shocked, which Chrom took advantage of.

The prince charged the last of Dalton's men, this time with Falchion in hand and pulling the shield he had strapped on his back. The men's armors didn't look as thick as other heavier units, so Falchion sufficed. The man reacted by swinging his axe to remove his head from his shoulders, but Chrom easily ducked under the attack and aimed at his feet. He stabbed at the man's feet, piercing through the hardened leather. Had it been proper grieves it might have resisted but that wasn't the case. The Valmese's screams were cut short as Chrom bashed his jaw with the edge of his shield. With a final thrust, the prince pierced the gap between the neck and helmet, ending his life.

Dalton's rage was palpable as he saw his men be cut down with ease before him. His face then gained a bloodthirsty smirk as the sound of footsteps alerted them of incoming troops.

Rose turned, and he could hear the scowl in her voice. "Tsk. I will deal with the reinforcements," she said, sparing a glance at him. "Think you can handle the loudmouth without me holding your hand?"

Chrom snorted at the banter, not taking his eyes off the angry Valmese. "I think I can manage," he declared as he dashed forward to engage the leader of the invasion force.

Dalton was skilled, more so than the Plegian warriors he had been fighting the past two years. Only some of the more troublesome Risen and Abominations had given him such a challenge. But after
suffering two years of training under the Plegian family, especially Morgana, he was prepared.

They clashed swords, dancing through each other's swings. He could recognize the Valmese swordsmanship that Rose used, or at least part of it. But Dalton had tricks up his sleeve too, as he finally landed a hit on Chrom's chest, pushing the prince back, but it failed to pierce the plate armor Rose insisted they all wore. At that moment, he ate all his previous complaints as it might just have saved his life. The prince scowled and decided he couldn't waste time with this man. As such, he called out the power of his blood.

The years of practicing with the Plegian family had allowed Chrom to master Aether. He gathered the azure flame on his blade and swung hard. It cut through the invader's shield with little resistance, only missing Dalton's hand thanks to the man's quick reflexes. Cursing, he dropped the ruined shield and grasped his longsword with both hands.

Before they clashed again, a blast of ice separated the men. Sparing a glance, he spotted Rose engaging with a heavily armored knight with a greatsword in a struggle of strength while a myrmidon laid impaled on a spear of ice. Looking at the frost generated by the spell, it gave the prince an idea.

Taking a page of the tactician's book. Chrom used his shield to scrape off some of the ice, throwing it towards Dalton's face. The man was blinded for a moment, which Chrom used to his advantage. Closing the distance, he smashed the hilt of Falchion on the man's unprotected nose. Dalton swung blindly, but the Ylissean deflected it with a shield bash. Aether ignited around Falchion once more and easily pierced Dalton's armor.

The man slackened, his face in shock as his spine was severed and organs began to burn. But he wouldn't go without parting words. "This… is just the first wave…" Dalton said, gritting his teeth in defiance. "Soon, all the lands will bend to Walhart's will..."

"And we will stop him once again," Chrom declared, before pulling Falchion out and kicking the man away.

He turned to assist Rose only to her walking towards him, covered in blood, and leaving four broken bodies behind her.

"Well! They certainly offer more of a challenge than Gangrel troops," she said slightly out of breath. She then looked at him and smirked. "What took you so long?"

"Report!" Robin said, breathing hard. The battle had been hard, and his muscles burned with exhaustion. Mystletainn was drenched in Valmese blood and his magical reserves were low, but thankfully he only suffered minor injuries.

"Sir!" reported one of the Pegasus Knights newer recruits. He had yet to learn her name. "The town is under our control and all enemies have been neutralized. We managed to capture a few for interrogation, but most died in the fight."

"And our losses?"

"...We lost around twenty mages, forty horsemen, and two hundred infantry," the girl explained, before taking a more solemn tone. "For the Pegasus Knights, we lost twelve pegasii, though only seven riders died. We have eight more injured. Most of them are fresh recruits."

Robin did his best not to cringe at the numbers. While it was a total tactical victory, the cost of living was something he still felt on his soul. Not only that, but this girl must have lost friends among her
fellow recruits if her reaction was anything to go by. "Understood. Excuse me for not asking before, but may I have your name?"

The young knight stood straight at the question. "Sofia Moldova, sir!"

A Feroxi surname. No wonder she was working hard. "You've done a fine job. I will talk with Phila about your performance. You will catch up to veterans soon enough."

Sofia got flustered at the praise. "S-Sir! I'm a mere rookie when compared to the other knights!"

Robin gave her a sad smile. "No one here is a rookie anymore."

That silenced the girl. With a nod, she left for the tents.

"Never gets easier, does it?" he asked out loud once Sofia was out of earshot.

"No, it doesn't," Rose said, stepping close to him with a cup of tea, Chrom next to her. "You did well."

"Thanks," Robin said, sitting down on a crate. "All things considered we came out on top, but this was just the start."

Chrom sat down next to him with a frown on his face. "Yes. From what we gathered, it's clear the Valmese won't stop after one defeat," he commented, looking at the pile of bodies his troops were gathering. "They are almost fanatically loyal to this Emperor Walhart."

"I dread to think how our last war would've been had the Plegian been equally devoted to Gangrel. The Grimleal are b--" A horn blast got their attention. Thankfully, it was the familiar sound of a Feroxi horn.

Sumia flew down after a minute, lading next to them. "Sirs! It's the Khans!"

"Send a messenger to greet them. We will be right there," Robin said, nodding to the other to meet the Khans.

"Basilio. Flavia. It's good to see you alive," Chrom greeted them with a firm handshake that they returned. They met at the edge of town while their troops helped assist on the repairs of the town.

"Ah! Well met, boy. I knew you'd come." Basilio said with a grin, though it did not reach his eyes.

"And good thing you did. We would've been overrun without the help. These Valmese..." Flavia said with scorn as she saw the piles of foreign bodies. "Chrom, is that all of them?"

Chrom nodded grimly. "Yes, but victory came with a price…"

"The port towns are in shambles, as is my army," Flavia said grimly. "They also cut down many of the smallfolk that fought back. And those with Feroxi blood will always fight back."

"Did you suffer that many heavy losses?"

Basilio crossed his arms in with a frown. "Less than it could've been. Your sister and her troops aided us greatly," before he turned to Robin. "Your mother is fucking terrifying in battle."

"Don't I know it..." Robin grumbled.
"She reminds me of your sister here. I like her," Flavia said, gaining some joviality.

"Of course you would, woman..." Basilio muttered, earning a slap to the head.

"Where are Emmeryn and her troops, by the way?"

"She insisted on helping patch up the wounded and her troops are helping keep a safe path back to the capital. She truly is a great woman, that sister of yours," Basilio said, patting him hard on the back. "You are lucky to have strong women at your back. Keeps you on your toes."

"Thanks?" the prince said uncertainly, glancing at his female comrades. "Did you guys learn anything from them?"

Turning back to a serious tone, the West Khan frowned. "Not much more than that, I'm afraid. The details remain hazy."

"We have someone that claims to have insight into Valm's intentions. I believe you've met?" The East Khan said, motioning for a group of people to come closer and Chrom could feel a headache coming already.

"Good day, lords and ladies. How far you all?" Virion greeted them with a dazzling smile. "Allow me the great pleasure, and indeed the honor, of introducing myself..."

Chrom pinched the bridge of his nose. "We all know who you are, Virion. Although I don't believe we've met your companion?" he said, motioning to the pink haired woman at his side.

Virion scrunched his nose in indignation. "Hmph! You know nothing! Prepare for my great unmasking! Long have I posed as arcest of archers! Yet that was but a ruse!" He said with a theatrical flourish. "Yea, an artifice, to disguise me as a mere above-average man. In truth, I am—"

The woman next to him cleared her throat, cutting his monologue off. "May I present Duke Virion Ashurst, Ruler of Rosanne. I am his humble wife, Duchess Cherche Lacroix. Greetings, Prince Chrom. You honor us with your presence."

Virion's shoulders slumped and looked at his wife askance. "Dear! You stole my moment!"

Remembering his lessons in etiquette, he took her hand and kissed it. "A pleasure, Lady Lacroix," he greeted her, earning himself a smile. He then turned to Virion with a raised eyebrow. "And we already knew you were nobility, Virion."

The archer sputtered at that. "What?!"

"Expensive tastes. Fine clothing. Training and education more accessible to nobles. The fact that there were nobles that recognized you and mentioned it to me."

The Shepherds stared at the prince.

Chrom scowled once he noticed the reaction. "I'm not that dense," he said offended. "Perhaps you could speak on your husband's behalf?"

Cherche sighed but still had a smile. "That may speed things along, yes..."

"Then please. Time is of the essence."

The Duchess nodded, "Very well, then. First, concerning our origins... We hail from Rosanne, a fertile territory on the continent of Valm. My husband is the head of House Ashurst, and the ruler of
Rosanne. A fact he often reminds us of—and loudly."

"Ha! Is she not a true wit? She gets it all from me, you know," the duke said proudly.

"Right… So what brings the Duke and Duchess of Rosanne all the way across the long sea?" the prince asked while ignoring the archer. "Surely, an envoy would suffice?"

Virion, though, took a serious tone. "Valm. Theirs was an unremarkable nation once. Tiny, almost pitifully so. Had our continent not shared its name, you might almost have forgotten it existed. And so Valm might have remained, if not for Walhart. The Conqueror. One by one, he has taken the surrounding realms into his growing empire. I had no choice but to ru—" he bit his tongue. "Er, that is, to recruit new allies to aid my people. That's why I've come."

"...You fled for your life," Chrom said with a deadpan tone.

"More or less, yes," Cherche clarified, much to her husband's embarrassment. "While Virion hastily gathered his valuables and left to look for allies, I remained in charge of the garrison to keep an eye on the Valmese crisis. Thankfully, he secured the assistance of the Feroxi and a mercenary group with the help of a Lady Rose, if I'm not mistaken."

Chrom turned to look to said woman, who stood a few feet back with her arms crossed.

Rose shrugged. "That guy owed me a favor," she said pointing at a man with a strong build and wild hair.

He just accepted it. His life was easier that way.

"A favor we now owe you it seems," Cherche said with a thankful tone. "With their help, we managed to establish push back their advance on the southern portion of the continent after establishing an alliance with the kingdom of Chon'sin and other surrounding territories."

"We have been at a stalemate for a nearly half a year. It was then that we learned that that Walhart was launching an invasion on this continent," Virion added. "We gathered half our total forces and came back as fast as we could. Let it not be said that Rosanne doesn't pay its debts."

"It was thanks to then sending their fastest ship with Cherche on board that we learned of this invasion."

"And they were not the only ones to send help."

"Indeed. That's why the two of us came personally instead of a mere envoy. Please, allow me to introduce our Chon'sinian allies. The Crown Prince of Chon'sin, Yen'fay Fujiwara and his sister, Princess Say'ri Fujiwara."

"Greetings, Prince Chrom," the tall man named Yen'fay said. He looked like a powerful warrior, and his mere presence commanded respect.

"Well met, Ylisseans," Princess Say'ri said. She was beautiful, but it was obvious she was a fighter. "Tales of your exploits have reached even our continent. We look forward to fighting at your side."

They had names and armors similar Lon'qu's. He must be originally from Chon'sin, though he never broached the topic with him. That was neither here nor there.

"A pleasure to meet you as well," he greeted them as equals, leaders of their people. "As you know I'm Prince Chrom Lowell. This is my sister, Princess Lissa and our army's Grandmaster, Robin
As the royals made their greeting, two mercenaries met one another after not seeing each other for a long time.

"Rose," the blue-haired warrior said, grunting in respect.

"Priam," Rose said with a nod of acknowledgment. "I'm glad you answered Virion's call for help."

"I always pay my debts, and while I care little for who sits in what throne, the promise of these battles has been interesting."

Noticing them talking, Say'ri walked towards them, quickly followed by the others. "Priam has been a great help in our conflicts. His troops are disciplined and adaptable."

"Well, I hope so. I did train them for a little while, Your Grace," the tactician commented with a smile.

Priam narrowed his eyes at her. "My men still have nightmares about the incident."

If Rose felt anything about the implication, she shrugged it off. "They'd better. Fear is a great teacher. And the women in your group are better fighters now."

The man gave a reluctant grunt. The rulers of each kingdom continued to talk, leaving the two mercenaries alone once more. Rose then turned to the wielder of Ragnell with a smirk.

"So… the network said there is something going on between you and the warrior princess over there?"

The man actually blushed, much to her amusement. "…I preferred when you were a cold bitch."

"Once their full fleet arrives, their host will wash over the whole continent in a matter of weeks." Basilio stated grimly. "There's no way we could repel them and defend our people. Not while we still have the Risen to deal with. It would be a slaughter."

The prince grimaced at the idea. "Ylisse is no better equipped to handle an attack from the sea…"

"What do you suggest? Robin?"

"Hmm…" Robin hummed in thought, looking around until his eyes fell on the burning wreckages of the Valmese fleet. "Their greatest strength is their cavalry, which puts us at a disadvantage... on land. But if we were to catch them at sea…"

"But how?" the prince said, his voice laced with frustration. "Ylisse has no warships, nor does Ferox. All we have is the merchant fleet that Plegian gave us as reparation. They won't be enough against a war fleet."

"True. The ships we used to send troops to Ferox were half merchant ships, half refugee ships that we appropriated," Flavia said. "Even against Gangrel, naval warfare was never really the focus of our battles."

"The ships we brought are mainly troop and supply transports. Only a few are war galleys not enough to challenge a Valmese Fleet," Yen'fay explained. "My apologies, but we couldn't leave our coasts unprotected."
"Understandable. You've have done more than enough. But that still leaves us with a problem."

Basilio seemed to be forming a plan in his head. "So, we'd need aid from a kingdom that does…"

Flavia looked at him with a raised eyebrow. "You have someplace in mind, oaf?"

"Perhaps a land that borders the sea, with enough wealth to afford this campaign?"

It was Robin who figured out where Basilio was going with this. "Plegia."

Chrom didn't take that well. "No. Absolutely not. Out of the question." He could not go crawling to them after all that happened. After almost losing Emmeryn...

"They have gold, boy! Countless ships! And more importantly, we have a fart's chance in the wind without them."

Flavia didn't seem any happier than him, but she relented. "The oaf is right. ...Crude, but right. There's only one path forward. It will take time to gather the supplies and troops for an attack, so we have time to build naval weapons, but we need ships to fit them into. And we should leave some behind to not leave our coasts undefended."

"We have the ships they gave us as payment," he insisted. "Can't we just use those?"

"They won't be enough," Rose said. "They aren't dedicated troop transports, they are just merchant vessels. They have weaker hulls and different structures. If we could secure some of Plegia's warships we could actually pull this off."

"If not, well… I think Rose and I could come up with something to even the odds," Robin said, seeming to be running the numbers in his head.

"Oh, I already got some ideas… Though they aren't on the good end of the ethical spectrum."

"...I rather not ask," Flavia said as she looked at the two. "Chrom, will you reconsider?"

He knew he was defeated, and he wouldn't risk his people for his wounded pride. "...Very well. Send a messenger and request a summit immediately. I will go meet them. I don't want Emmeryn anywhere near them," he said, running his hand over his face. "Let us pray this new king is more reasonable than their last."

He didn't fail to notice the silent conversations between Robin and Rose.

It didn't take long to get an invitation from Plegia to meet at their outpost on Carrion Isle. A poor venue should things go sour. Going to an island makes any escape difficult if not impossible. But the situation left them with little choice. Chrom was apprehensive of the situation, since the last king they met almost succeeded in killing his sister. It had been a challenge to convince Emmeryn to remain in Ferox, for she did not want to accidentally insult Plegia when the peace was still fresh.

Robin, though, had other reasons to be worried. He was about to face his father.

He had to remain calm. Rose had ensured that Validar's soul remained trapped, so this had to be either a future version of him, or an impostor. Neither made much of a difference, for he would still carry the title of King of Plegia. Too much power for a man that was so dangerous to his family.

At least Rose had kept any information about her and Morgana from leaking out. She had taken care of quite a few spies. Even if Morgana's identity were to be leaked, it would not be farfetched to
believe she heard of him and found him in Ylisstol. Rose's name wasn't really associated with Morgana, despite her relative fame and coat. Small mercies.

As he thought of everything that could go wrong, a woman in a black robe soon arrived and bowed to their party. "I welcome you and your entourage to Carrion Isle, Prince Chrom. I am Lady Sariah Mahim, castellan of Westwatch."

"A pleasure to meet you, Lady Mahim," Chrom greeted her. "I wish we had more time for long introductions, but time is of the essence."

"I understand you're in a hurry," the woman said with a polite smile. "I came to greet you and inform you that the king will see you now."

"You serve the new king, then?" Chrom asked as he followed the woman through the castle's main hallway. "This... Validar?"

"I do," she said with pride in her voice. "It's quite the honor to serve royalty, as your comrades know."

"They say he worships Grima..." Frederick said with as a little accusation as he could muster while remaining polite.

Lady Mahim nodded, keeping the polite smile in her face. "He is Grimleal, as it's expected of the King of Theocracy. My liege often says it was his faith that got him through to the throne, after Gangrel's passing. It has been a difficult time, with the civil war and other rebels vying for power," the castellan added with a scowl, before schooling her featured. "But he has kept order where there might have been chaos. We had meant to arrange an official visit to Ylisstol, but– Ah, here is my lord now."

They arrived at the large chamber where a man in a black, regal robe waited for them. Robin recognized him immediately, not changing at all from the imprisoned visage Rose showed him. "An honor to finally meet you, sire. I am Validar, king regnant of Plegia."

Chrom nodded, shaking the king's hand. "The honor is mine, good king." He paused, squinting slightly, and Robin could pinpoint the moment the gears started turning. "Is it possible we've met before some... Gods! It can't be," the prince said, as recognition showed on his face.

Validar grinned as if he knew a joke no one else did, and it made the tactician's blood boil. "Oh ho! I'm quite certain I would remember any encounter with Ylissean royalty."

"If only you knew, you bastard..." he thought.

He knew Chrom wanted to ask more, but now was not the time. "I am sure we can have a proper
"Then let us get to it. The Valmese are a threat to us all, after all." The Plegian King said with a nod, motioning for the castellan to bring a book with her. "Dear Sariah, what can we spare without current situation?"

The robed woman adjusted her glasses as she looked over her notes. "Plegia can offer no soldiers, as we are keeping our borders secure as well as fighting a civil war," she said with an apologetic tone. "But we can provide eight hundred warships and two hundred transports. In addition, we would be pleased to fully fund the campaign against Valm. Our coffers can handle it thanks to our rich mines."

That generosity shocked all of them, even if Rose had already told him that they would offer support. He didn't expect this much.

Frederick was the only one not speechless. "That is... surprisingly generous of you, milord. We could not ask for more, quite literally. You offer almost all your assets..."

The king just waved it off. "I would give troops as well, but our army remains in shambles from the last war and what remains is busy with our local problems. I trust the gold and ships will suffice as a sign of our commitment to the cause?"

"Of course it will," Chrom said, once again shaking that snake's hand. "Thank you, King Validar."

"The honor is ours, my prince. I look forward to building a strong bond between our two nations."

The Ylisseal nodded, "As do I. Then, if there's nothing else? My men and I must hurry back to Port Ferox."

Lady Mahim frowned slightly. "So soon? I could still prepare a small dinner, and we have one more introduction to make."

Chrom was surprised by this. And he wasn't the only one. "...Yes? And who would that be?"

Validar smiled with too many teeth for Robin's liking. "A hierophant. The highest of his order in Plegia."

Robin felt his skin crawl as he heard the footsteps approaching. The hierophant arrived through a doorway, wearing Plegian robes just like his own. Clearly a man, though he kept his head hidden like Rose used to do. He was just missing the shoulder pads.

"...So you lead the people in worship? Grimleal, I suppose?" Robin asked, trying to be diplomatic despite the bad feeling he was getting.

No response.

"...I'm sorry, have I said something to offend you?" he added as his heart started to beat faster.

"The heart still sleeps, but the blood flows through it. And the blood is strong..."

Strong blood. He knew about his bloodline. Of its power.

Frederick, the ever-wary retainer, looked at the man with hard eyes. "Good hierophant, I would ask you to lower your cowl. In Ylisse, it is a courtesy expected of one in the presence of royalty."

The hierophant gave a low chuckle before he answered, "You are a long way from Ylisse, sir knight, but very well..."
Time slowed down as the cowl came down. The Ylisseans behind him cried in shock as the mop of white hair became visible and a pair of familiar purple eyes looked back at him.

"Is that better?"

Robin felt his heart stop at the sound of his own voice.

"By the gods!"

"What manner of sorcery–!"

'He looks just like... me.'

"My name is Robin," the man said, looking at him with a hint of mockery in his eyes. "Oh, and that's your name as well, wasn't it? What a strange coincidence…"

He willed his nerves to still, trying to think about this. The man looked slightly older and had scars in his face that Robin lacked. Not only that but the way he looked at Chrom and Frederick spoke of something deeper going on. Did he also come from the future? Did he side with Grima? He would never do so, not now. But... had he not lost his memories? Had Marth not come back? He was missing too much information and that piece of shit father of his was not helping.

"Why that is rather curious, now that you mention it... What are the odds?" Validar said as if he knew nothing of this. "In any case, I believe we are finished here. We will let you be on your w--"

"Hold just one moment!" Chrom shouted, snapping himself out of the shock.

"M-Milord?" Lady Mahim said, looking nervously between the men. At least it seemed she wasn't in on this farce.

"What is the meaning of this? Why do your hierophant and Robin--"

"I'm afraid we've no time for such trivial matters now, Prince Chrom," Validar interrupted smoothly. "We have aid preparations to attend to, and you have a long, hard journey ahead. Oh, and do be careful on your way back to Port Ferox. The highroads of Plegia can be quite treacherous with the Civil War still going on…"

The party understood that they were being practically being kicked out, but they were unwilling to jeopardize the aid given. Reluctantly, they followed the nervous castellan back to the entrance.

Robin meanwhile, was thinking about the conversation he would have with his sister.

It was a long week for Robin. They rode they ship back to the Port Ferox and rode horses towards one of the forts were Emmeryn and the other leaders were waiting while the bulk of their army prepared around the ports. The tactician couldn't answer Chrom's questions, as he didn't know the answers. His sister wasn't around when he arrived at camp, so he had yet to have the opportunity to talk with her.

He went to bed early that day, but sleep eluded him as he tossed and turned thanks to his running imagination. Giving up on getting any sleep, he put on his clothes, taking his weapons for good measure, and went for a walk.

"... It's no use. I can't sleep," he muttered as made his way to a hill outside the camp. "Was that my future self? Why was he there?"
He closed his eyes and tried to clear his mind, letting the evening wind roll over him. But the chill that ran through his skin did not come from the cold breeze.

"Robin... Heed me, Robin..." a dark, familiar voice rang through his very bones.

"Huh? Who's there?!" he demanded, hand on the pommel of his sword, as he looked around for the source of the voice.

"Heed my call, Robin..."

His hand flew to the sides of his head, clutching it as pain speared his brain like shards of broken glass. "Nngh... This voice is... in my head? Who are you?! What's happening?!" he ground out, trying and failing to keep the pain at bay.

His vision blurred and soon the dark visage of his father manifested before him, like a ghost haunting him from beyond the grave. The man looked down at him with a mix of pity, contempt, and amusement.

"Why do you close your heart to him, my son?" the man asked with a hint of disappointment in his voice. "Have you truly forgotten your lineage? Your destiny?"

"You were... calling me... Augh!" Robin cried out, his nails digging into his scalp. "Get out of my mind."

The Plegian king laughed at his pain, only fueling his hatred for the man. "Heh heh. Such arrogance! You dare take such a tone... with your own father?!"

"...I would," the tactician answered through gritted teeth, glaring at the man.

Validar took his knowledge of his heritage with amusement, barking a laugh at his struggle. "Ha! So you do know! I knew that wench Morgana would not keep this from you! That's why I gave you all those resources! A father has to ensure the safety of his most precious scion."

Robin's glare only deepened as he tried to fight off the pain.

"You are of my flesh, but of sacred blood. You are to serve a glorious purpose! Search deep in your heart. You already know it is your destiny..."

"No... Get... out..." he demanded as it became harder to breathe.

"Why do you resist us, Robin?" he asked disappointedly. "Your rightful place is at my side. Not wasting your time with these doomed servants of Naga! Give yourself to Grima! Let me join your strength to the fell dragon! You can crush the Valmese! Then the entire wo–!"

"BEGONE!"

Validar couldn't react before his connection was severed. Robin sank to his knees panting when he felt a pair of hands take hold of his shoulders. Looking up, his eyes met the concerned gaze of his sister.

"Are you ok?" Rose asked, using her magic to soothe the pain. Not as efficient as a staff, but a welcome relief nonetheless.

"Nngh... Ahh... Ahh... I-I think so," he said through heavy breaths, trying to stand on his shaking legs. "Yes, thank you. I'm... I'm fine, now."
"...It was Validar, right?" Rose asked him, and he was honestly not surprised that she knew at this point.

"Yes," Robin replied regaining his bearings. "I met him in Plegia, as we expected. But there was also this man..."

"...That looked just like you," she whispered.

He looked at her with wide eyes. That, he did not expect. He felt a rush of emotions at the revelation. "H–how do you know? Who was he?! Why did you keep this a secret?!!"

"I told you before there were more things I haven't shared with you. This was one of them." she explained. "As for who he is... It's not something easy to explain, though I think you have guessed as much. And lately I've been wondering if I'm wrong with my knowledge."

"He's the future me, right?"

Rose frowned and looked at the side, avoiding looking at him in the eyes. "...He is what you could've have been and could become if you fall to Validar's and the Grimleal's influence. A tool. Yet..." she sighed, rubbing her eyes. "From what I've gathered he is too different from you, even before you lost your memories. I feel like there are gaps on what I know that I wasn't aware of before."

There was something else she wasn't saying, the key to the puzzle and he wasn't about to let her go so easily. "I think–!"

The sound of a horse coming their way caught their attention, accompanied the distressed voice. "Robin! Rose!"

The pair turned to see a Stahl coming their way. His armor looked hastily put on, making them wary. "Stahl? What's the matter?"

"We are under attack!" he shouted, ordering his horse to a stop. "Risen have encircled the camp! They caused an avalanche that cut us from the main army!"

Robin was shocked, failing to notice the scowl forming on his sister's face. "But... we posted sentries! How did this happen?"

"They made a stealthy approach, and killed the sentries," the knight said, looking around in case an enemy snuck up on them. "I've never seen Risen behave like this. Either they are learning our ways, or someone is commanding them..."

"Validar! This is his doing, I'm sure of it," the tactician gritted out. "Equip anyone who can bear arms and tell them we fight for our lives!"

Janus looked into the tear in reality, intrigued on the turn of fate. It seemed like many pieces were converging in place, without his involvement. It was bound to be interesting, if nothing else.

"Should we be following so close to the army, Lucina?" Cynthia asked as their small convoy made their way through the thick Feroxi forests. The Pegasus rider flew down and let her steed land next to the princess.

"We need to keep an eye on the Shepherds or our efforts will be in vain," the princess said, looking
at her friend. "If we can, we should hitch a ride on one of the ships. Though I have yet to think of a way to do so…"

"Maybe we could pretend to be a mercenary company working for the Khans?" Kjelle suggested from behind them, making the pair turn. "We are diverse enough, and very few have seen you without your mask. You have a reputation as a Khan champion, so we could just say we are a wandering company and you're our leader." The armored girl shrugged. "Which is not a lie."

Lucina pondered the suggestion. "That's not a bad idea. It might just work," she said, smiling at her friend. "Thanks Kjelle."

Kjelle chuckled, "Any time, 'Boss'."

Lucina shook her head and looked to Cynthia. "We should stop and make camp. Please go tell the others to start prep—!" Her orders stopped as the ground rumbled, and the forest came alive with sounds.

"What's going on?!" Cynthia shouted as she reined her spooked pegasus.

The princess didn't answer immediately as she drew Falchion from its sheet, looking for the source of the commotion. Yet, it was the Risen jumping from the woods that told her all she needed to know.

"AMBUSH!"

"I blame you entirely for this!"

"Ok! So maybe this time it's my fault!"

"This time?!" Marc shouted as he cut another Risen with his blade.

Morgan followed up by using a simple thunder spell with no incantation. "Less shouting, more killing!"

The twins finally landed in Ylisse, having haggled for passage on one of the cargo vessels coming from Rosanne in exchange for work. It took a quite a lot of effort on their part, but after weeks of working as deckhands they were on their home continent.

Marc wanted to wait on the docks until the Shepherds came around, but his sister insisted on finding them themselves. After losing at a game of "Sword, Axe, Lance", Marc relented and followed her lead.

Which meant things only could get more difficult for them, starting by walking right into the middle of a Risen ambush.

"We couldn't just stay in the damn inn, could we?!" His muscles burned, and the injuries were starting to pile up. Neither of them were good with staves and even if they were they had no respite to use their one staff.

If they died here, he would blame Morgan through their eternity in the afterlife.

Chrom bashed the spear to side with his shield, closing the distance and beheading the Risen with a single swipe. His breathing got hard as enemy after enemy fell to this blade. It felt like hours of fighting before the tide finally slowed, even if it was just a few minutes. He had his comrades' skill to
thank for these. They worked together as a flawless unit, suffering no casualties.

The new additions from Rosanne and Chon'sin had integrated well with them. Cherche worked with Virion well, and the Chon'sin royal siblings showed flawless teamwork. The mercenary Priam showed his skill, adapting to all fighting styles which he credited to his band's diversity. All in all, it worked for the prince.

It seemed that for now the Risen had stopped coming but he couldn't let his guard down. Lissa came to his side, staff in hand, and started enveloping him with regenerative light.

"Thanks, Lissa," Chrom said, feeling the strain in his muscles banish under the waves of healing magic.

Lissa returned the smile as her staff did its work. "No problem! I will have you back to full strength in a…" The princess trailed of as her eyes widened in surprise. Before her brother could ask what was wrong she shouted, pointing with her staff to the forest below. "Chrom, look!"

The prince looked to where she was pointing, and his eyes widened as he recognized the figure engaging a pair of Risen. "Is that Marth?"

"Looks like it, and she has comrades," Robin said, coming to his side with Mystletainn in hand. "Look! To the south! More Risen are coming their way!"

"Dammit! If those Risen get to them they will be overwhelmed," he cursed, turning to his comrades to issue his orders. "Robin, guide the troops and reinforce our rear! Phila should be with Emmeryn and Prince Yen'fay. Go there and organize them! We can handle this!"

His grandmaster nodded. "As you command," he said, moving to fulfill his duty.

"Comrades! Follow me! An ally needs our assistance!"

On the other side of the forest, steel clashed with steel as Marc's blade struggled against that of his attacker. The Risen was bulky and wielded his sword with terrifying force. His started buckle under the strain and yet he knew he couldn't give in. He reached deep inside him for the power of his blood, but it was not Aether which answered, but the power he inherited from his mother. The word came to his mind by instinct and he let the power run free.

"Ignis!" he shouted, letting the words of power resonate through his body.

Marc's blood singed as purple flames emerged from his hands, weaving his magic into his tired muscles and enveloping his blade with power. He pushed the offending blade back and swung his own in a wide arc, cutting through armor and flesh with ease.

As Thorn bifurcated Rose's opponent, a siren's call rang through her body. Rose's head snapped to the side, her eyes wide as she felt something familiar come to life. She hadn't felt anything like this before, yet the presence was familiar. Something she had been missing and could identify on instinct alone. Feeling the familiar pull of Ignis in the distance once again she noticed the familiarity. It wasn't Robin or Morgana, for their power was not dependent on her Grima's. But this one tugged at her with a sense of belonging.

"It can't be…" she breathed, not daring to hope for the impossible.

She drove her blade through the skull of the Risen in her way and burst into a sprint, looking for the
source of the disturbance.

Her tome drained of all its stored power, Morgan was forced to use her blade. While her brother was the superior one with a blade, she was no slouch either. The girl cut Risen after Risen but the use of so many spells had taken a toll on her. This cost her when one of the Risen broke through her defense, smashing her with the shaft of its broken spear. The impact belittled its force, sending the girl tumbling through the ground with a cry of pain.

"Morgan!"

The name rang through her ears as her feet stopped cold at the edge of the hill, having left a trail of Risen carcasses on her path. Her eyes locked on the twin figures at the edge of the forest.

It couldn't be. They shouldn't be here. They should be dead. They had to be dead. Were they her brother's kids?

No. She could feel the link to her.


She exploded into motion like a coiled spring, jumping from the ledge as her magic gathered in her fingers by sheer instinct. Her vision was red and her heart was threatening to burst through her chest, but her focus had never been more crystal clear.

Her children were alive.

Marc and Morgan were alive.

They were in front of her.

They were in danger.

'I will kill anything that threatens my children!'

Having vaporized the head of the offending Risen with a bolt of magic, Marc stood protectively in front of his sister, ready to protect her with his life. On the ground, he could see Morgan on the corner of his eye, healing her wound with what little magic she could muster.

"Marc…" she said, showing fear for the first time in ages. Her bravado gone as the battle took its toll on her mind.

"It will be alright. We've beaten the odds before and we will do so again!" he declared as he severed the arms of a Risen before cutting his head, pushing away his exhaustion through willpower alone. "We didn't come this far to fall here, sis!"

That seemed to rally his sister. Morgan shakily stood back up, taking her sword in hand. "Right!"

Marc gave her a smile as the pair stood before a dozen undead soldiers. Bad odds, he knew, but he would ensure they both made it out alive. They had no other choice. "We do this like we always do."

Morgan nodded. "Together."

The Risen charged at them.
The siblings held their ground.

And Fate smiled upon them.

"GET AWAY FROM THEM!"

A blast of wind ripped through the ground, sending earth and Risen alike flying. One of the few that evaded the blast looked up only to have its skull crushed as an armored foot smashed it into the ground. Not wasting any time, the newcomer rushed forward, engaging the Risen like she was possessed.

The twins could not believe their luck, much less because their savior was a woman with long, white hair, wearing a painfully familiar cloak.

"Is that…?"

Falchion cut through rotten flesh as Lucina weaved through her opponents. She felt tired and the wounds were starting to accumulate, slowing her down. Her group had been divided into the chaos, but she still had backup.

Very loud backup.

Her cousin clashed blades with a Risen swordsman, spinning into a pose and using his weapon to point at his enemy in a dramatic form. "You dark creatures of the abyss! You shall reckon the day you faced me! RADIAAAAANT DAA~!"

The Risen he was about to engage was bashed to the side by a heavy shield, wielded by an annoyed Kjelle. "Owain! Shut up and fight!"

"Y-Yes, ma'am!" he squawked, turning and facing his enemies in silence.

The princess sighed and refocused on the right, preparing to meet the incoming Risen when a flock of crows clouded her vision. The birds pecked at the Rise, blinding them and giving them some respite.

"No way..." Owain said, recognizing the technique.

"Nyahahaha!" a laugh cut through the night.

"Henry! Only the Risen!"

"I know, dear!"

Lucina's and Owain's heads snapped to the side, looking at the incoming reinforcements with a mixture of joy, relief, shock, and dread.

"Sully! Kellam! I need you to give us some breathing room!"

The voice froze Lucina's blood. She had talked to him before, but on her own terms. She wasn't prepared to talk to her father like this.

The two knights roared in acknowledgment at the prince's orders, smashing into the Risen host and breaking their lines with their heavy armor.

"Fa–Prince Chrom! What a–?"
"Sorry for our late arrival, Marth. We would've have come earlier but we had our own ambush to deal with," he added with a smile, before turning to his sister. "Lissa, heal their wounds. Henry, cover her!"

"On it, Chrom!" Aunt Lissa replied as she dutifully fulfilled her duty.

"Awww, ok! I still get to see some blood, I suppose!" Uncle Henry said as he jumped back into the fray.

Lucina watched as her father took on two Risen at once. His skill had improved by leaps and bounds since their first meeting and now he resembled the legend she remembered.

"Father!" she cried, ignoring her aunt's cries as she jumped to intercept the assassin's blade. The Risen's attack failed, as Lucina pushed him back and with an application of Aether to her sword, split the undead down the middle. Finished her task, she turned to see a very confused prince looking at her.

"W–What did you call me?" Chrom asked, clearly confused by her shout.

"Uh…"

Severa gritted her teeth as her blade clashed against her opponent's. The blade chipped as the struggle for dominance, but the redhead had the stubbornness to spare. Suddenly, the Risen grunted as a spear found his side. Looking at her side, she saw Cynthia as she pulled the spear from the body. Her pegasus was grounded with an injury on her wing. She would live, but that left Cynthia at a disadvantage.

"Leave the girls alone!"

A knight on green armor dashed past her, beheading the Risen. Another undead prepared to attack only for a pegasus to dive and a spear to pierce its skull.

Her eyes widened in shock as her parents moved in tandem, dispatching enemies in perfect sync.

At her side she could see Cynthia frozen in awe as Aunt Sumia stabbed a Risen axeman, with Uncle Gaius shooting down an undead wyvern.

"Gods…" she said, having regained some of her faith in Gods on that very moment.

Alann and Jocasta held their ground against the barrage from the Risen Knights that came after them. With a battle cry, the pair pushed the greatsword out of the weapon lock they had, and they wasted no time on counter-attacking. A bolt from the redhead's Levin sword stunned the knight, while the future Khan smashed the hammered side of her battleax on the knight side, toppling him to the ground. Before he could retaliate, the Levin sword stabbed through the gap of his helmet, letting the electricity destroy flesh and bone alike.

They were not the only ones fighting in that clearing, though. A short distance away, Inigo and Ke'ri stood back to back, cutting down enemy after enemy in a deadly dance. As different as they were in their tastes, very few could match the sibling's resonance.

Inigo's longsword slashed high, forcing the Risen to block, leaving his underside exposed as Ke'ri moved her katana into a wide arc, cutting his leg under him. As he fell, the girl stabbed his head, while her brother moves to attack cut into the chest of an incoming Risen assassin. But in
doing so, he left himself exposed to another enemy. A berserker rushed at him with her axe ready, but before it reached him, another katana blurred through the air, severing the Risen's head from its body. The siblings watched in shock as their father dispatched the enemy with barely a backward glance to them.

"Cover your flank, boy," Lon'qu said, cutting down another attacker with ease before turning to his comrades. "Gregor, with me! Olivia, cover them while Anna heals them?"

The older mercenary laughed boisterously as he followed the swordsman just as Olivia replied. "O-of course! Leave it to me!" the pink-haired dancer said, nodding and taking her position. Unbeknown to her, her future children looked wide-eyed at her as her Feroxi blood showed. Be it a theater or a battlefield, she would perform to the best of her abilities regardless of her shyness.

"Don't worry, guys! Help is here," Anna said to her bewildered audience as the staff in her hands glowed. "Now, hold still! These things are expensive!"

Gerome growled as he guided Minerva to avoid a volley of arrows. Nah was on the ground fighting alongside Yarne to prevent the Risen from flanking their friends. The normally-coward rabbit was fighting fiercely next to the dragon, making quite the strange pair. While he observed, instinct kicked in and he dodged the swipe from a Risen's lance before he cleaved the skull of its mount with his axe. An undead Pegasus Rider came after him, but before it closed the distance, a dark blur smashed against its bulk. Stopping mid-air, he could see a painfully familiar pair of pink and blue hair fleeting on the breeze.

"Go rest, young man, we will take it from here," Cherche said, offering him a smile as her Minerva's fangs ripped the undead pegasus' head off.

The boy was thankful his mask hid his shock at the sight of his mother riding her Minerva, while his father shot arrows with deadly precision to the incoming flyers from the backseat. A deadly duo whose presence filled him with both joy and dread.

A cry made him look down with fear. On the ground, Nah was clutching her side and Yarne was panting as he stood protectively in front of her. He swore, and steered Minerva into a dive, but his intervention was not required.

As the four Risen moved for the kill a blast of fire came from above, incinerating the corpses. Gerome looked astonished as Nowi blasted another group of Risen with her flames before engaging a wyvern in an aerial battle.

Down on the ground more reinforcements appeared from the woods as the shapes of Donnel, Vaike, and Panne charged to fight the incoming Risen that escaped Nowi's blast.

Vaike smashed a Risen general's armor with his war-hammer, making the corpse crumble under its own weight as if someone had cut a puppet's strings. "Booyah! Who wants another lesson from Teach!?"

Panne looked at the younger taguel for a moment, making him sweat, before her husband's shouts took her out of her inspection. With a huff, she jumped back into the fray, her husband hot on her heels. The wyvern rider gritted his teeth. They needed to get together and leave, or the Shepherds would start asking questions. He got lucky that his… parents didn't get too close to recognize Minerva, but it was just a matter of time.

"Oh! Another manakete!" Nowi exclaimed, having returned to her human form after incinerating her
opponent, "And you smell like me! Are you family?!" she added as if to prove Gerome's point.

Nah looked deeply uncomfortable. "Ehmm..."

"Sorry about that ma'am," Donnel said, offering a vulnerary to the younger manakete. "Mah girl here can get mighty excited when meetin' new people."

"Hey!"

"Uhh," was Nah's only reply, as her eyes remained wide in the presence of her parents.

Gerome frowned behind his mask. This day was getting more and more complicated.

"Noire! Laurent! Don't let up!" Sun'fey shouted as he held back a Risen while his companions peppered their enemies with arrows and spells. His katana was getting dull and covered with rotten blood. It vanished in time, but every second was precious to them.

"I'm running out of arrows!" Noire shouted as she swapped to her last quiver.

"I am afraid my reserves are running low..." Laurent added, panting as he launched one more spell.

A scream cut through his thoughts as he saw Noire in the ground, clutching her thigh where an arrow was now buried.

Brady was running towards the downed girl, staff in hand. "I'm comin', Noire!"

Sun'fey was about to reach for the sword on his back when he saw that same sword blur in front of him and behead a

"Come on! Will one of you vermin give me a challenge?!!" Priam roared as Ragnell cut a Risen mage in half.

The princess of Chon'sin moved to his side, cutting an undead cleric. "Fie! These beasts know not when to quit!" she added, and Sun'fey couldn't stop the blush at how beautiful his mother looked as she cut down her foes.

He shook his head, now was not the time to be a mama's boy.

"At least they provide a workout," his father said.

"I only have known you for a few months and it's always workouts with you..."

"These muscles didn't make themselves, princess," he retorted

He felt ants crawling up and down his spine as his parents cut down the Risen in front of him while flirting.

A blast of wind blew a Risen wyvern from the air. A young man moved to his side and offered him a smile. He recognized the young mage, though he was much younger than he remembered.

"Don't worry, sir. Backup is here. Libra, Tharja," Frederick ordered, his voice carrying his commanding presence. "Protect Maribelle while she heals the girl. Miriel and Ricken, provide long-range support."

The priest nodded, taking his axe in hand and looking for enemies, "Understood."
"Only because Robin asked me to…" the Plegian sorceress muttered as she too took a defensive position in front of the healers.

The two Ylissean mages simply nodded as they started to chant their spells.

Maribelle kneeled in front of Noire and examined her wound with a scrunched nose. "Hmm, it seems this ruffian knows a thing or two about healing. It will take only a moment to fix his mistakes."

"Hey, now! Wait for just a second!"

The samurai could only stare in bewilderment as the heiress of Themis chastised her son for his manners. This sudden change of fates was almost too much for him.

"You called me father..."

"Ehm... Well... I--" Shit. Lucina knew she was a terrible liar. How could she get out of this? If court had still existed in her time, maybe she would be a good liar, but she didn't have that luxury. Before she could form any semblance of a plan, however, her cousin intervened.

"Lucina..." Owain said walking to her side with a tired expression painted in his face. His voice lacked the theatrical flair it normally possessed. He cast a forlorn look as Aunt Lissa, looking both younger and more mature with her long hair flowing free of its childish twin-tails. "I think it's better if we just... tell them everything. Things have changed too much to continue as we planned."

She whipped her head around, looking at Owain in disbelief. He couldn't be serious! "You know the consequences this could've!"

"We can't continue as we were!" he retorted with surprising force. "As... painful as this could be, it would be for the best."

"What plan?" Chrom asked in a serious tone.

Shit. For a moment, she forgot their parents were right there. But maybe Owain was right, and she couldn't believe those words crossed her mind. This was important and clearly things were nowhere near going according to plan.

She relented with a sigh, before looking at the royal siblings in the eye. "Prince Chrom, Princess Lissa, maybe it's best if we discuss this in private?"

The siblings looked at each other and nodded. Her father looked at his troops and issued his orders. "Sully, you're in charge here. Make sure the area is clear."

The cavalier nodded, though not before giving Lucina a weird look. "You got it, Chrom."

Chrom nodded and turned to Lucina, motioning them to walk. "Very well, lead the way."

The four walked a small distance away from the others for a modicum of privacy, stopping on a hill. There were still a few battles going around on the distance, but with the combination of both her friends and the Shepherds, the Risen had been routed. Only some stragglers remained behind.

Knowing she couldn't put this off any longer, she took a deep breath and started. "I... Our story is difficult to believe. I know it will sound fantastical but please be assured we speak only the truth."

"You've given no reason for me to doubt your words so far," Chrom said sincerely, though he now had a confused frown on his face.
"Yeah! You helped protect Emmeryn, so the least we can do is hear you out," Lissa added, and it warmed Lucina's heart to know they trusted her.

"Very well." No turning back now. "I have knowledge of future events, because to us, they are the past."

A pause.

"What?" Both siblings replied at once.

"Behold!" Owain said, striking a pose. Whatever willpower he had held back his theatrics had banished, and the princess could feel a headache coming. "We have braved the treacherous tides of time and space, to join forces with the legends of days long past to stop the incoming darkness from consuming the world!"

"What?"

"We come from the future," she offered helpfully and bluntly. Might as well take the direct route. Their reactions were just as she expected, with disbelief clear on their faces. Her father was the first to speak his thoughts, "But… that's… Pardon me, but such declarations are quite unbelievable."

"I understand your disbelief," Lucina admitted. "But do you remember how I showed up out of nowhere during the Risen attack near Southtown?" she asked, getting tentative nods in return. "I came to the past in that moment, having split up from my comrades during the transition."

"And you knew about the assassination attempt against us and how to infiltrate the castle. You said you had knowledge of the future…" Chrom mused out loud, considering her words seriously. "If you do come from the future, then those were things that already happened in your time."

"That's correct," she said with a pleased smile. Her father was taking her words seriously, but she could do better. "If you've any other doubts, please look at this Falchion," she said as she handed the sheathed blade to the prince. "It's not a replica. It's the future version of your own."

Chrom took the blade. Lucina watched how his eyes widened and his breath hitched as he saw the blade in detail. "It's real. I can feel it in my blood," he breathed before looking at her once more. "How did you come to possess this?"

Lucina swallowed her nerves and pushed onwards. "I inherited from you. I called you father because you are my father," she confessed, receiving the shocked reactions she expected. "My name is Lucina Lowell, and this is my cousin, Owain Lowell. He is Lady Lissa's son with Ser Henry."

Her aunt was nearly knocked out of her feet. "WHAT?!"

Owain jumped at the chance, taking a heroic pose for his mother. "Blessed Mother! I have crossed oceans of time to find— Oh, forget it. I'm your kid from the future!" he said suddenly, shocking his cousin. "Look at the signet ring upon my finger. Behold, a perfect match to yours! Unique in all the world, and yet here lie two. Proof positive my claims are true!" Owain paused, before he nervously asked. "…You are married to my father, Henry, right? We were away from the Ylisse and haven't heard much..."

Lissa blinked at the question. "Ehm, yes. We got married a month ago."

The young man sagged in relief and Lucina had to stop herself from feeling jealousy. It was not fair that her own parents were not married, and she was not born as she should've, but that was not
Owain's fault.

"The ring is identical! It has the same inscriptions and I can feel the protective hexes Henry cast on it!" she said in amazement, before something hit her. "...And you have the Brand," she whispered in realization.

"The one carried by House Lowell," her son said, taking her into an embrace. "So no more need to worry, eh?"

Her breath hitched, and she choked a sob. "Th-then you know? That I don't…"

"That your Brand never surfaced? Yes, you told me as such when I was little," he added, remembering the moment with fondness. "You said it always weighed on you... You should have seen how happy you were the day mine appeared! You were sobbing and laughing for an hour without pause!"

Lissa laughed through her tears, easily accepting his words after all the proof. "I was kind of hoping to grow out of the crying thing…"

"Yes, well. No more worrying. It was by chance alone your Brand never surfaced," Owain said tenderly. "We're all family, linked by blood. You really are Emmeryn's and Chrom's sister. My Brand proves our lineage."

"I believe you," she said with a smile. "Chrom, I believe them. I have a son!"

Chrom smiled at the scene. "I believe them too. Well met, nephew," he said, before awkwardly turning to Lucina. "And daughter... Although... I'm not married."

Lucina grimaced at that. "...Yes, I'm well aware," she said awkwardly.

His face paled at that. "D-Did I...? I mean, your mother... Ehh, was I present in your life...?"

Understanding what he meant, she quickly waved her hands to dispel such thoughts. "You were married! At least in my time. You don't have an illegitimate daughter running around. Haha..." Lucina said with an awkward laugh while she screamed internally. At least, that's what she hoped. Clearing her throat, she continued, "We managed to stop Aunt Emmeryn from being assassinated and she survived the war. As such, you were not required to get married... Or to have an heir."

"So, in your future, with Emmeryn dead, Jon was not born?" Lissa asked with a grimace. It was clear she loves her nephew.

The future princess shook her head. "No. Owain is my only cousin."

"If Emmeryn died, then I became Exalt?" he asked, getting a nod in return. "...Who is your mother?"

Ah. That question. "W-Well, despite our revelations, I think it's better if you don't know. I don't wish for you to get together out of some sort of responsibility."

Chrom pondered the suggestion and nodded. "That's fair, I suppose," he admitted before looking at her more seriously. "But, you still haven't told us much about how or why you came to the past. I doubt it's only to save Emmeryn. As much as I love her, I don't think it would be required you coming back from decades into the future with time travel."

She gulped. How it was time to drop the big bomb. "Ah, yes... Well, Naga assisted us in our
journey. As for the reason, we–"

Before she could continue, a voice saved her. "Lucina!"

Turning around, she saw one of her friends coming towards them in a hurry. "What's going on, Kjelle?"

"Come! You need to see this!"

The dying gurgle of the Risen soldier was music to her ears. Rose ripped through the Risen like a natural disaster, slaying each and every one of them with reckless abandon. Anyone that dared hurt her children would suffer for daring such a thought. A group even tried to merge into an Abomination, and the small rational part of her mind took note of the lack of them beforehand. It didn't matter to her, she only saw a threat to her children.

Ignis burned in her palm, feeding into the spell she charged. Uttering the incantation by instinct, Rose launched an Arcfire spell into the monster, making flesh and blood boil under the intense purple flames.

She nearly snarled, looking around for more enemies, though there were none left in the battlefield.

"...Mom?"

Morgan's tentative voice broke through the haze of rage that had consumed her like a wave of icy water. She turned to the children she never thought she would see again. Morgan's blue eyes were wide wonder and hope, not believing what she was seeing. She had grown into a beautiful young woman.

"Mother?" Marc said, his voice hopeful and soft. He was always the polite one out of the two. Her sweet boy was now a man grown. He inherited his father's looks.

They had grown.

And she missed it, being a puppet to Grima.

Her blood sang at their presence. There was no doubt in her heart

"Marc. Morgan," she said, her voice trembling as she walked towards the two. Thorn clattered to the ground, forgotten, as the two teens rushed towards her with tears in their eyes.

"MOM!"

"MOTHER!"

"My babies," she breathed, kissing them and hugging them as if they would disappear at any moment. She didn't care how, but they were here. "I... You're here. You're alive. Wha--"

Morgan interrupted her with her own questions. The excitement made her run her mouth at a fast pace. "Mom, it's really you! How are you in the past? Where is your past self? You look so young! Do we have two moms?! Where is dad?!"

"Morgan, calm down," her twin chastised lightly, though still with a smile on his face.

"How can I? This is great! We got found mom!"
Rose had many questions and a part of her knew there would be plenty for her once the Shepherds met them, but she honestly didn't care. She had her kids back. If only Lucina...

Lucina.

Oh gods, this Lucina. How would she react? Would she think they are Fellspawn too? Kill them?

She heard footsteps and saw two other bluenettes coming her way. Chrom and Lucina were looking at them in confusion and Rose felt her heart hammering at her chest. She needed time. Time to think. New variables. New things to protect.

Time she didn't have.

"Rose? What's going on?" Chrom asked, but she barely heard him as she looked at the blue haired girl next to him.

"Lucy!" the twins shouted in joy, momentarily forgetting their mother who stood in shock.

She reacted on instinct. She needed to protect them. "Wait! She's not y–!"

"Marc! Morgan! You're alive!" Lucina shouted in glee, tears in her eyes as she embraced the twins.

Her words died in her throat, her hand froze mid-movement.

What.

"We are sorry, Lucina! We didn't mean–" Morgan started to babble.

"I know. And I'm sorry too," the older girl said soothingly, and she ran her fingers through their hair.

"I shouldn't have said those things to you. I… I thought I lost you and..."

What.

"Never, sis!"

"Hey! We found mother! And you found father! This is awesome!" Morgan squealed as she hugged her sister harder.

What.

Lucina let out a breath but still smiled. "I know you did. I had seen them before, though this is not how I wanted to be introduced to them..."

But she couldn't… No… Nonononononono!

Rose stood there, her mouth dry. She didn't want to believe. The threat of hope was crawling into her heart. She knew pain would come on any outcome but took a gamble that would hurt worse than Falchion if it failed.

"Little light?" she said, swallowing all the feeling bubbling in her throat. "Is it really you? My little light?"

Lucina turned towards her, wide-eyed, before giving her a nervous but genuine smile. "Hello, Mother."
AN: Thanks to Xbro Kong for checking this.

So this is where I make or break the story. I was still debating if I should make this Lucina not Rose's to make it more original, but it didn't work with what I had planned story wise.

Most Shepherds and Pegasus knights are now wearing more armor, similar to Dark Knights and Bow Knights. Chrom is wearing as a less ornate version of the Knight Exalt armor. Robin and Rose are wearing their grandmaster armors but with thighs protectors. Most are wearing helmets too.

The chart explaining a bit of the timeline: https://sta.sh/01i9hln4h2p8
A more detailed-spoilery one: https://sta.sh/01m4wd5jkiy

About Morgan being overpowered. Part of it was the tome. A one-shot super kill move that cost them a lot of gold. So not something she can do again unless someone finances her. There was also explosives in that fort but as well as other flammable stuff. Things that those that hired them wanted. I mean, Rose needed to use a super spell and her Dragon magic to do something similar in Ylisstol. Morgan just bought a nuke and wasted it for funsies.
Ok, so gotta compress the numbers here so I don't backtrack later. Though not as important I guess ASolaF/GoT influenced me a lot and I'm always a sucker for battle statistics.

During Augustus' Crusade, Ylisse had nearly 100,000 soldiers, but that was taking every man and woman that could wield a weapon decently and sending them to the frontlines. Obviously, keeping more than enough behind to keep a viable population. So more like 40,000 actual soldiers and 60,000 peasant levies.

Plegia back then had 40,000 soldiers and 40,000 peasant levies.

Both were depleted after the war, with Plegia building up the numbers with quantity over quality, which is why the Shepherds succeed more often than not despite being young.

At the start of the Gangrel's war, Ylisse had around 1500 Soldiers, 400 Pegasus Knights, 600 non-combat pages that took the field and 5,500 guardsmen for the entirety of Ylisse. Guardsmen are like police. Not soldiers. Less training, lesser equipment. They lost less than a third of that between the war and the Risen but gained enough recruits to replenish their forces.

Ylisse: 13,000 (Including 600 Pegasus Knights and 2000 mages)

Ferox: 45,000 Pre-War. 33,000 Post-Timeskip.

Plegia: Pre-war 44,000, Post-war: 19,000.

Chon'sin: 20,000

Chon'sin's Dynasts: 10,000

Rosanne: 5,000

Other resisting countries 25,000

Valmese Empire: 90,000 Total. Preparing to send 20,000 to Archanea as part of Grima's manipulation.

So, in canon, I say since Ylisse suffered more losses thanks to the loss of the Capital, but a less creative Grima. The Alliance sent around 22,000 troops to Valm to deal with them. But in that timeline, the total fighting force of the continent was around 400,000 without peasant soldiers. This due to Yen'fay surrendering. As such, they suffered fewer losses. But the Dynasts eventually do turn back to Say'ri's side thanks to the surgical strikes of the Shepherds.

Things are more even now. Does it feel larger in scale and more like a proper war? I have tried to portray it a such through the story.
She felt like drowning in the deepest part of a freezing ocean; the intense pressure crushing her body to the point of immobility.

Her body might be frozen, but Rose's thoughts were running a mile a minute. Only her heart worked faster at that moment.

Lucina just called her "mother". Now by spending more time in the presence of the princess, she began to feel an instinctual tug– something that lacked the last time they saw each other. Maybe it was because she was more attuned to her dragon magic, but her blood and her entire being felt the same tether as she did with Marc and Morgan.

She was her Lucina.

Her daughter was not in the other timeline. And now, everything that happened in her old world began to make sense. The one that instigated her judgment was not her daughter. That Lucina's words now made sense to her. Why she didn't recognize her as her mother. Why she remembered Robin as a man. She must have been from this timeline, or at least a similar one. But all those thoughts paled when she remembered their encounters at Arena Ferox and Ylisstol.

She attacked her own daughter.

Sure, the encounter at the tournament was more competitive in nature and she never had the intention of killing Marth, but she couldn't deny some of her resentment spilling into the fight. But what scared her the most was at the night of Emmeryn's attempted murder– the shocked and pained eyes as her own hands wrapped around the neck of her Little Light with murderous intent.

Suddenly, Rose knelt over and emptied her stomach all over the grass.

"Mother!" her three children cried at once.

They quickly rushed to her aid, unhindered by any sort of doubt or fear. They did not question how she recognized them or anything else, only that their mother was in pain. Yet Rose flinched at Lucina's touch, making the girl falter. She turned her head and saw the hurt in her eyes, wearing away at the tactician's already fragile down heart.

"Little Light…" she whispered, gently taking her hand into hers. "You…what…you're here, but you're supposed to be in the other world… I… I hurt you..."

Lucina reached to her neck with her fingertips, remembering the moment that happened so long ago but felt as if it happened yesterday. "I'm so confused, mother… You recognize me and our siblings but you didn't before? A–And you look so young…too young to be the from our future, but I can't think of anything other reason for you to recognize us..."

"Lucina, I..." What could she say? Anything she could do to explain it would only end up making them turn against her, like the other Lucina did. What would they do once they realize that their mother was once Grima's vessel? That she was now the Fell Dragon? That she carried the power of
the very monster that destroyed their lives? That the cursed bloodline flowed in their veins?

"What is the meaning of all this?" Chrom demanded, his patience almost at an end. "First, she called you mother. And not too long ago she called me father. I know she came from the future and she's given us proof; but now...you knew this the whole time?" he frowned. But his eyes widened in shock at the implication between himself and the mercenary named "Rose".

The small coherent part of her mind that was in control and hadn't descended into hysterics realized the absolute disaster that began to unfold. Years of planning, acting, and changing everything to avoid the tragedies that she thought would come to fruition were ruined by a passing moment. Whatever plans she had in the future were quickly burned to ashes and the remains soaked in Gangrel's wastes.

Oh, who was she kidding? Her plans went to shit a long time ago and it was only going to get worse.

The fighting had finally stopped, and both the Shepherds and their children had come to the spectacle her life had become. It was almost supernatural how everyone just decided to come there at that moment. The Shepherds themselves flocking around them like sheep. The fluttering of wings made all of them to look up and witness the arrival of the Royal Pegasus Knights with Robin, Emmeryn, Morgana, and Yen'fay in tow.

Sure, why not? Might as well have everyone taking their turns stabbing Robin and her.

"Guys, all enemies have been..." Robin began as he dismounted the pegasus, only to stop as he looked at the strange gathering in front of him. "Marth? Who are all these people? What's going on here?"

"That's what I want to know," Chrom said, looking at all of those present with a frown. "Apparently, they...are my and Rose's children from the future," the prince said, leaving out his own role while eliciting murmurs from the crowd.

"Oh dear..." Rose could hear Tiki whisper as she made her way to her. "Are you okay?"

Okay? What a joke. She was the furthest from okay as she could possibly be.

"I believe..." Morgana said, coming to her daughter's side. "That explanations are in order now that all the players are here."

"Indeed. It is time to shed some light on this mystery."

A warm and inviting light surrounded them like a dome, isolating them from the rest of the world. As if a gift bestowed upon their hard work against the Risen, they were revitalized and healed of their injuries. Before them, the Divine Dragon Naga, manifested in all her splendor. Her ethereal form shined like daylight and glimmered like a bright, starry sky, unlike with the gloomy and, cloudy one they had that night.

"Naga!" came the shouts of many, with the more pious kneeling before their goddess.

Fantastic. Was Grima coming next too? Should she take her shirt off so Falchion doesn't stain it?

"Greetings, warriors," Naga said, her voice vibrating through their bodies. She then turned her gaze to Rose and Tiki, her expression softening in pity. "My apologies for not arriving sooner, but I needed to ensure that this conversation would not be spied on. Tis good to see you well, Lady Rose. You as well, daughter."
There was abject silence. Then a reverberating yell.

"WHAT?!" They yelled as they looked at Robin—specifically Chrom, Gaius, and Vaike.

"DAUGHTER!?!" As everyone else looked at Tiki.

Robin flushed the brightest red he would ever blush while Tiki simply just sighed. She took off her hood and dispelled the glamour, revealing her ears to the world. The simple girl known as Lily Pendragon was no more.

"Greetings, mother. Everyone, allow me to introduce myself properly," the manakete said with a tone of strength as her true nature became visible. If only it were as simple for Rose. "I am Tiki, known by most as the Voice of Naga."

More abject silence.

"I KNEW YOU SMELLED LIKE A MANAKETE!"

"Nowi, please..."

The mercenary could feel the veins in her head throbbing. This was too much for her. Tiki put a hand on her shoulder and spoke with as much compassion and care to her friend. She looked at her and gave the former Queen a comforting yet stern look.

"Rose, it's time to disclose the truth to everyone." She began as she looked at their audience. "I believe those present here are trustworthy. With mother's spell protecting us, we would be free of any interlopers from the outside."

Rose looked at her as if Tiki was the one that had lost her mind. "Are you aware of what you're asking me to do?!" the tactician practically shouted, ignoring those who could hear them. "If we do that, there is no putting the genie back in the bottle!"

"Do you still not trust them? After everything that has happened?" the manakete asked with a frown.

"I did, once, and you know how that went," she countered bitterly.

"They are not them."

"They could easily—"

"Rose," Morgana's voice cut through the air with finality. Everyone looked at her as the woman made her way in between all of those present. "For better or for worse, they deserve an explanation."

"Indeed," Emmeryn added as she approached her with Phila a step behind. "We all have questions about not only your children, but their comrades as well. Not to mention the presence of Naga herself," she added with a bow towards the Divine Dragon. She turned toward Rose again. "You saved my life and earned my trust. You shared a great deal of your knowledge with me but it has always been clear that a lot was left unsaid."

This was a bad idea. A terrible idea. This was it. Stuck between a rock and a hard place. She had no chance of taking things slow explaining everything. Now that her audience was not only her children and their friends, now the Shepherds of the wrong timeline had to be part of this, too. It was an entirely different scenario now that she understood these were the children of her original comrades. That made them her responsibility too.
But once she does so, Rose believed history would repeat itself. That she was sure of. But now…it was strange. She was more accepting of judgment now, as long as it came from her children. If Lucina or the twins asked for her head, then she would give it gladly. Maybe it was because she didn't share that connection with the other Lucina that she held such resentment deep inside.

"My children…go stand with your friends. You will understand in a moment." she said, preparing herself for another execution as her kids reluctantly obeyed. Morgan displayed the most apprehension time but a firm tug from both her brother and Lucina swayed her to comply. The Shepherds of the present stood at one side, while their future children stood at the other. Tiki and Morgana stood by her side, giving her the support she needed.

She hoped Robin forgave her for all of this.

If he survives their judgment of him too.

"As many of you might've figured out, I'm not exactly normal," she joked dryly, to no one's amusement. An empty, poor attempt to lower the tension in the air. "This is due to my past and burden. Some of you are familiar with fragments of it."

"You have mentioned that you were betrayed by your comrades and saved by Naga," Emmeryn said, shocking many, but none more so than the scions of the future. Murmurs spread as the word 'betrayal' started to move through the children.

"Emm, you knew about this?" Chrom asked, hurt clear in his voice.

The Exalt inclined her head to her brother. "My apologies Chrom, but this was shared in confidence."

Giving Emmeryn a strained smile, she continued. "To put it simply, I come from another world. Another timeline," she explained and took some perverse pleasure in their shock. "One where my brother died and I lived, while in this world I was sacrificed as an infant in a Grimleal ritual," their confusion was palpable, so why not make it worse? And with that her tone changed to that of someone she once was.

"Allow me to introduce myself formally. Due to Plegian naming traditions, my birth name is the same as my brother. I am Robin Surana, former tactician of the Shepherds…" she stopped, looking at the Chrom before continuing, "And the disavowed Queen of Ylisse. Wife of Chrom Lowell, Exalt of Ylisse." she added, looking at the shocked faces of the Shepherds. Then with a heavy heart, she let Ignis calmly run free across her skin. "These are my...our children. Lucina, Marc, and Morgan Lowell."

Realizing the attention was now on them, the trio greeted awkwardly as one, "H-Hello..."

Chrom looked like he was about to get a stroke. Not only did he just realized he was married in another time, but he also became the father of three children not much younger than him.

As whispers started to spread, Rose stopped them with her hand. A certain regal aura emanated from Rose that demanded their attention, despite their shock. She looked at her brother, preparing to continue with his part of the story. "I don't mean to impose ourselves into the lives of the Exalt's family more than we already have. That life is not this one. Both Robin and I led very similar lives but...we are still different people of different timelines. Of course, there were small variations between our lives, and yet destiny seems to have ways to make sure certain events happen. The battle at the Ferox's Border Wall, the drinking parties, Anna and her sisters. Nowi and Gregor." She then pointed at the group they had saved. "My children and their friends come from nearly two
decades into the future. These young men and women are the children of the Shepherds from my world."

That statement cast a stunning silence over the Shepherds as they looked at their possible descendants. It didn't help that they looked at the children and immediately, as if by magic or instinct, they were able to tell whose children were theirs. They then turned to Naga as if to ask if this was a cruel joke. The deity only nodded to agree with Rose.

"She speaks the truth. It was by the actions of my future counterpart that your successors returned to the past." Few could dare question a demigod.

While Chrom and Lissa didn't look surprised, probably from talking to their children, the reactions she got from the rest were mixed at best.

"They're our kids?" Sully said, wide-eyed in shock as she looked at Kjelle in surprise. Meanwhile, the knight's head retreated a little deeper into her armored shell.

"Time travel? Fascinating," Miriel said as she looked as she analyzed the children and Laurent from a clinical standpoint. Laurent pressed his glasses further up the bridge of his nose and nodded.

"Those hair colors…Cordy, I think those are Severa and Cynthia!" Sumia exclaimed, earning the attention of the parents of said girls. Cynthia blushed and waved while Severa huffed and looked away, only shooting a small peek at her mother.

The children were equally flabbergasted. Not only about their parents that looked almost afraid of them, but also their entire predicament.

"So…we're in the wrong timeline?" Alann muttered, rubbing his face. "This ain't good."

"They are not our parents. Not even their past selves..." Gerome said bitterly, stroking Minerva's scales.

"But they are…in a way, right?" Ke'ri said, looking at her brother for confirmation, but Inigo looked at his sister unsure of what to say.

"I don't know how or why you ended up in this world while I ended up here as planned," Rose admitted before chaos could spread further. "But I believe that the children from this timeline ended up in our past."

And that did little to prevent the chatter between the two parties involved.

"I can sense your confusion, warriors," Naga said, silencing their audience. "Time does not simply flow one way like a river. Possibilities spread, split, and grow into their own worlds like branches on a tree. Some touch, some never do. Some grow long, some… wither and fall."

The allusion clarified the Shepherds' confusion but did little to sway their doubt.

"I can shed light on the root of these events but before we begin– Rose, you must show them your true nature," the demi-goddess said to the female tactician.

"True nature?" Phila asked what everyone was thinking. Rose sighed, doing nothing to alleviate the pressure in her chest. It was over.

"...Then I should just get to the main point," A heavy pressure was felt by those around the former Queen. Rose began to unlock something that she truly hated. It was that power. The power that
ruined it all.

"The children are here on a mission: to stop the resurrection of the Fell Dragon, Grima. They were to prevent the deaths and tragedies of every Shepherd here. But despite the Future Naga's guidance, they lacked a lot of information."

Ignis burned fiercely and degenerated into a flame darker than any Flux spell. Tendrils of dark flames enveloped her form. Her eyes shone like blood rubies, sending a wave of shock and fear through the future children, but none more painful to her than the seeing the palpable fear that showed on the faces of her children.

The power displayed was a shadow of its former self. It was not even comparable to the power used to cast Valflame, with Rose only having recovered about half of that strength. Even so, that power was enough to put fear into the Shepherds' souls, and Rose felt disgusted with herself. While she appreciated the tactical advantages of the power and had made great strides with overcoming her fears, there was still a part of her that hated her draconic magic. The former queen felt Naga's magic soothing the fears of those present like a warm blanket.

"This is the fate to befall Robin unless Grima's resurrection is stopped. To become one with the Fell Dragon." She closed her eyes, her next words a whisper easily hear in the deafening silence. "Just like I did."

A fleeting dream quickly turned into a nightmare. That's the only way Lucina could describe her current situation. Her friends had been reunited with their parents, only to learn they were in the wrong timeline. Now her mother, her real mother, told her she was the monster that destroyed their world.

That only meant one thing.

"You're Grima's Vessel?" Lucina asked, not trusting her voice to crack. The energy in the atmosphere was nowhere near as foul as the one Grima displayed, but the power was undeniable. "Did you—" she swallowed, feeling her throat dry as sand. She forced herself to ask the question she dreaded to get an answer for. "Did you kill Father?

Her mother turned those blood red eyes away in shame, unable to meet her daughter's eyes as she answered.

"Your father and I went to battle the Grimleal and stop Validar from resurrecting Grima when you were a young girl." She began as everyone turned to Lucina and Rose,"We thought we had won but Validar completed the ritual and allowed Grima to take over. I was…imprisoned in my own body and became nothing more than a puppet." Everyone could see the look of horror in the princess' face. "Grima made a mockery of your father's legacy and my life as he destroyed everything we vowed to protect,"

Before the princess could even think or react to this revelation, someone needed to say something.

"And that's what's going to happen to me?" Lucina and Rose heard someone ask.

She looked at the man with her mother's name. Her uncle. The tactician of this world. Robin's face was as pale as his hair. A small part of her that could think logically felt pity for the cursed man, but instinct made her grip the hilt of Falchion in preparation for an attack as he approached them.

Robin gulped before leveling a glare to his sister. "That man with my face. He was Grima with my
"body right? That's what you tried to keep hidden from me?!” he demanded, getting angrier by the second.

"The Hierophant..." Chrom muttered, his eyes wide in realization.

"Know now that Rose is not Grima for she has destroyed him and claimed the raw power for herself. And Robin, you have yet to fall under Grima's influence," Naga said, before continuing in a graver tone. "But words will not sway the doubts I sense in all of you. Rose, will you lend me your power? The truth will be shown to everyone, including you."

"Me?" she asked, confused.

"I learned many things regarding our situation as I watched the timestream. Allow me to show you all."

Reluctantly, Rose nodded and let Ignis merge with Naga’s Aether. The Shepherds were shocked that Naga, the Divine Dragon just asked the embodiment of the Fell Dragon to lend her power to her. And for her to comply as if they were companions. The bright blue flames of Divine Dragon and the dark purple ones of the Fell Dragon merged together, a feat possible thanks to the willing cooperation of the two.

The flames flowed outwards like an explosion, enveloping all those present before they could react.

It was like someone made paintings come to life. To Chrom, he thought it was a little self-invasive towards Rose but dared not to voice that opinion. He had too many doubts and hoped that this was to clarify everything.

It started with Rose and Robin's birth. From there, the visions split in two, representing each tactician's past. The natural death of one and the ritual sacrifice of the other. Both branded by the power of their blood– the culmination of centuries of selective breeding. Conversations between Morgana and Validar revealed that he was the father, much to everyone's shock. By their birthright, the tacticians were royalty from their rival country and the prophets of their enemy religion. Then these events seemed to blur and vanish, but the important parts were burned into their minds.

Exalt Augustus' Crusade to kill the vessel of Grima began. The horrors the Ylissean armies against the Plegian populace. Morgana escaping with the surviving child. The Plegians matching the Ylisseans in brutality and murder. The terrible aftermath of Augustus' crusade. Her struggles raising them alone. The tactician leaving home to join the Shepherds. Emmeryn's death through Validar's successful assassination and Chrom's crippling injury that would affect his performance in future battles. A longer and bloodier war with Plegia. Those events happened the same for both, but what shocked everyone was watching Chrom propose to Rose and their subsequent marriage. The birth of the three children during a longer period of peace than the one they enjoyed.

And yet, in the stream showing Robin's life, this world’s story, Chrom married another person, for Rose was not meant to exist. He recognized her. Arianne, the florist that helped him with Emmeryn's wedding. She was supposed to be his wife? His queen? But with Emmeryn alive, he didn't know what to think when he saw her give birth to another Lucina, but no other heirs. Not even the twins were born out of this union.

The peace extended for years until Valm invaded. A harsher invasion that nearly trampled over this continent. A bloody campaign ending with the death of Walhart and the warning of the Grimleal's plans.
And then, as they moved to through Plegia to kill Validar. How Chrom and the tactician fought side by side, eventually defeating the king only for everything to go to hell in the eve of their victory. The Shepherds saw how the king's ritual succeeded with Grima taking control of the tactician and subsequently killing Chrom.

"'Killed by his best friend'. That's what they meant..." he heard someone utter.

Grima's wings spreading across the sky as Risen ravaged the land. The children taking their parent's mantle as the world crumbled around them. The Shepherds falling one by one. Other comrades dying for meaningless victories. Rose's children fighting amongst themselves. Lucina thinking most of her comrades perished due to the twins' plan to gather the jewels going awry after they lost contact with the parties. The stress and grief finally getting her and wrongfully blaming her siblings for their deaths. The twins leaving the group after the bitter argument, only for the parties to return a fortnight later with the gemstones. The Awakening ritual failing due to Naga's power waning. Their plan to go to the past, even if it meant leaving the twins behind, as their world was past the point of recovery. Naga using the last of her power to send the twins after their comrades.

That made him frown. It took him a moment, but he realized this was only Rose's future, as Robin's became cloudier as each moment passed. As if sensing his question, Naga's voice answered.

"Grima made sure I could not see into his own past, so my vision on this world's future is limited. But there are some minor parts I could see."

The children from Rose's future survived, but only a handful seemed to remain in Robin's. Was this world's Grima more powerful? The prince dreaded to think of the implication. He saw both groups jump through a portal as Grima cut down the Naga from the future, much to their dismay and horror. The moment to come would change everyone's understanding of the events.

Rose remembered that moment, though up until this point she hadn't given it much thought.

She could feel the rush of time itself against her skin as she struggled to scream. How her face twisted in horror as Grima smiled menacingly with bloodlust. She felt the heat in her hand as magic gathered for a powerful spell to obliterate the large bubble carrying the scions of the Shepherds, only for her body to freeze as her heart fought back with every ounce of defiance that she could muster in all her years as Grima's vessel. The spell was launched before being completed. The unstable magic didn't succeed in killing its target. The bubble cracked and simply drifted off course.

The woman felt herself being pulled out to see the events like watching a parade from above. She could see how the stream timelines twisted and reacted, compensating for the changes. The other, smaller group of future children took their place. So while the Avatars of Grima ended up in their intended destinations, the future children ended up on opposite pasts.

Rose thought that her defiance killed the other children. That it was the reason why the Lucina that came to her timeline only had a few of her comrades. Now she understood: her attempts to save her daughter succeeded, but at the cost of sending her to another world—the world where the brother she never met lived. She traded her daughter for a Lucina that held nothing but mistrust and loathing to her. A version of her lovely daughter that would end up destroying her life. The tactician to end up betrayed by her comrades and murdered by the man she loved, placing her on this chaotic path.

She had been the instigator of her own demise by doing one good deed.
A mixture of clarity, dread, and sorrow rushed through Lucina's veins as she saw her mother's history. Grima never showed its human vessel to them, always appearing covered in dark flames to instill fear in their souls. Maybe it was a cruel mercy not to destroy their lives while wearing the Queen Tactician's face.

History repeated itself. Grima attempting to possess her mother only to wipe her memory. And yet fate ensured that she join the Shepherds. They could see how the other children followed the original plan they had, only for destiny to lead them to Emmeryn's death, as well as the Valmese invasion and the Resurrection of Grima.

The future Exalt felt pure rage as her opposite, the one native to this timeline if she understood correctly, slowly turned the Shepherds against their mother. Lucina never thought it would be possible to hate one's self so much and yet, horribly, part of her understood every action she took. She too was confused by the past she didn't completely recognize. The princess and her comrades had their doubts about the male tactician that took her mother's place, but now they understood. That was a clarity their counterparts lacked. The mix-up had created confusion, doubts, distrust, and it festered like an infected wound that led to the Shepherds' betraying her mother.

The sight of Rose chained up as her father plunged Falchion in her chest made her scream. Marc and Morgan were at her side, clutching her as their rock, burying their faces in her arms. As the eldest, she returned the gesture. She took hold of her siblings as they watched their mother burn and vanish. Fear returned tenfold as Grima appeared before her, offering her a chance for revenge, but once more her mother showed her true intentions as she defied Grima one last time, destroying them both.

Everyone could feel the heat of Naga's and Grima's flames enveloping the past and future souls of the female tactician. How the tragedy and pain reforged those souls into the single woman they knew as the mercenary named "Rose Sustrai". They saw the same things she saw— the offer the injured Naga and the mysterious voice gave her. Her meticulous movements through the years to fulfill her mission, from saving Donnel's father to giving Chon'sin information to stop the assassination of their rulers. The realization was palpable in the faces of those affected by each repercussion… and yet, doubt, fear and distrust were clear in the face of many.

She looked at her father— no, this Chrom was not her father. She needed to understand that. He was the father of the Lucina that killed her mother. But her mother was the Vessel of their greatest enemy. That wasn't the case either. Her mother is the Fell Dragon as she took the mantle from Grima. Lucina tightened the grip on her siblings. It was not fair. She couldn't find it in herself to hate her mother. Why her mother? Why them? Her mother had done nothing but good and had been blamed for things she couldn't control.

Would this Robin suffer the same fate? He might be of another world, but in a way he was her uncle. From what she had seen he was a good a person as her mother. Tiki and Naga trusted them. They had a better chance than ever before to stop the tragedies to come!

What kind of princess would she be if she turned her back on her family?

But the sound of broken laughter took her out of her thoughts.

Rose could feel the laughter bubbling in her throat and surrendered herself to the hysterics. It was so painfully ironic!

Her laugh startled everyone but she didn't care.

"Rose...?" Tiki asked in concern, but Rose could barely hear her.
"Hahahaha… in the end, it was my fault," she declared with tears in her eyes as Ignis receded back into her soul. "Not only did I fail on fighting Grima off, but I ended up messing up multiple timelines! Ha! Gods, I'm such a failure!"

Her brother was faring no better. Her attempts to spare him had been destroyed in the course of an afternoon.

"That's what awaits me? To become a puppet to the world's destroyer? To kill my comrades or be killed by them?" Robin said, looking at the sky with empty eyes.

Chrom recovered his wits first and moved towards him. "Robin! You can't let yours– Wait!" the prince shouted as Robin ran to the forest.

"Mom…!" Morgan muttered while Marc looked at her with tears in his eyes.

"Mother…?" Lucina asked, not letting go of her siblings. Good. She would protect them from this mess.

Normally she would've gone after Robin herself, but Rose had reached her breaking point herself. "I need… I can't..." with nothing more to say, she cast Relay and vanished, leaving a shocked audience behind.

"Mom, wait!"

"Oh, no, where is she!?"

"Hold on, someone should go after Robin!"

"By the gods, is Grima coming back?!"

"What's all of this?!"

"What should we do about them!?

"Do we kill–?"

"ENOUGH!" Naga's command thundered like a dragon’s roar. She then pointed to a cliff at the distance. "Rose is sitting on that cliff. Morgana, please tend to Rose. I will speak with her at another time; I must focus on keeping this barrier up."

Morgana nodded and bowed to the deity. "I will do so at once, Lady Naga," she said as she departed, but not before giving a sidelong glance to the blue-haired children.

The Divine Dragon nodded to her and turned to her own daughter. "Tiki, will you look for Robin?"

"Of course," her daughter said and ran in the same direction as the young man went.

Naga then turned her gaze to the present and future warriors, looking at the myriad of expressions running through the crowd. "Calm thyselfes, lest you allow yourselves to be blinded by fear. You all witnessed the consequences of acting rashly when you let it consume you. It will destroy you and harm innocents," the Divine Dragon warned them. "Rest, meditate over it, and make your judgment with a clear mind."
"Pardon my insolence, Lady Naga, but I must ask!" Frederick said, kneeling towards the dragon. "How can you trust her? How can we trust them? Isn't she the Fell Dragon? Is Robin its vessel too? Should we not eliminate the Fellbloods, like Exalt Au–"

"Do not finish that sentence, knight," she said coldly, shocking Frederick into obedience. "I never once gave Augustus my blessing to commit his atrocities to the Plegians." After cowering the knight into silence, she swept her gaze over those present. "Those two carry a heavy burden. Remember their deeds. Rose had no reason to help this world yet did so, saving many lives that should have perished. Robin did not need to help you in your war against the Theocracy—a war most likely to be bloodier than the previous crusade. Shepherds, judge them through their deeds, not from their blood."

After a minute of silence, Chrom stepped forward to address her at last. "I believe we need time to process this, milady. My apologies, but it's too much information for us to sort through in one night."

The prince understood, which Naga appreciated.

"Do so, prince, but be aware. Grima waits for no one."

"Oh are you kidding me? This whole thing was a waste of time," Jocasta spoke as the time travelers moved away from the Shepherds. They all needed a moment to process things and emotions were running high. "Not only did Grima reincarnate in the form of Lucina's mom, but we aren't even in our own timeline!"

"I agree. I don't see the point in this. These Shepherds are not even the past versions of our parents," Gerome spat bitterly, agreeing with the Feroxi warrior. "Come here Minerva. Let me check that you are not wounded."

As each her friends began voicing their opinions, Lucina felt how the situation would soon descend into chaos. But a part of her didn't care. A great burden had been dropped on her shoulders. All the answers to questions that plagued her for years coming to light at that moment. And yet she could only focus on her two younger siblings in her arms. Marc had grown and soon will surpass her in height while Morgan was just a little shorter but blossoming into a young woman. She missed them, and the girl only wished they had reunited under better circumstances.

"Guys," Marc said, gaining the attention of everyone after letting go of Lucina. "Let's calm down and analyze the situation. We have a lot of things to deal with, including them," he added, motioning to the older warriors on the other side of the field.

"We need to talk with them!" Cynthia said, jumping to add her suggestions. Others didn't look as convinced however.

"And tell them what, Cynthia? Are you clear of mind at the moment or are you just excited to see your mother?" Nah retorted, her arms crossed and a scowl on her face. "I understand what you and probably what all of us desire right now, but we need to calm down and think this through like Naga suggested."

Laurent cleared his throat, and gained everyone's attention. At the apologetic look he had, Lucina's defenses immediately went up, just like her siblings. Well justified, as the mage finally addressed the elephant in the room.

"I believe we need to discuss what course of action we must take with regards to your mother, Lucina."
"What are you implying?" Morgan hissed, bristling like a cat.

"Look, Marc, Morgan. I'm glad you guys are okay, but Laurent has a point," Alann said, giving a nod to the mage. "We need to discuss this before we invest ourselves. Your mother is Grima and our enemy."

"H-Hey…that's not fair calling her that," Yarne defended, fidgeting in place once the focus was on him. "You saw that she was possessed by Grima. She didn't do so on her own free will."

"Their ma's got the power of Grima—the power that destroyed our future," Brady pointed out, giving the siblings a sideways glance. "And ya three have it, too."

Inigo stepped in between everyone, trying to diffuse the situation. "Hey, come on, Brady. We're all friends here. Why are you talking like they're the bad ones?"

"Because we just learned that our leaders are Fellblood," retorted Severa, and even she seemed shocked once the words were finally out in the open.

Lucina felt like she had been slapped by those words. At her side, Marc had to restrain Morgan from throttling the girl, while all their friends looked tense. But the fiery redhead had a point. Which another girl also caught.

"Could Grima listen through their blood connection? Maybe all these years, she spied on us through them!" Jocasta said, gripping the hilt of her sword. Her frustration at the situation started to boil.

"Peace, Jocasta! We must not throw baseless accusations at a time like this!" Sun'fey said, stepping in front of her. "Turning against each other shall kill us faster than the Grima here!"

"Could they get possessed too? Are they potential Vessels?" Kjelle said, scowling at the possibility.

"The chances are very minuscule…" Laurent added, albeit reluctantly. "If we recall from the visions, the Grimleal manufactured a vessel that is of pure blood. With the Exalted bloodline coursing within, we can infer that the Grimleal will treat their blood as being corrupted by Naga, therefore our comrades are poor vessels to even be manipulated."

"Hey, you're right! They have Exalted blood, too! Maybe they are fine?" Ke'ri insisted, though there was doubt in her voice.

Things were descending into chaos as each of her friends started voicing their opinions. Each of them arguing with more passion than logic. She needed to intervene this before the situation escalated any further. But as quickly as she planned for the worst, an unexpected quarrel began.

"What do you mean just support her?" Jocasta said furiously as she bumped chests with Yarne. "You weaselly, hairbrained furball, you think we can just let Grima walk around freely?!"

For once, and to the surprise of everyone, Yarne stood his ground. "You saw it yourself, Jo! She wasn't in control! Queen Robin is not evil! I can't ever hurt someone who never did anything bad at all!"

"Didn't do anything bad?! She killed your mom! She killed my mom! She killed everyone's mom!" Jocasta shouted, almost to the verge of tears with her anger. "I don't give a rat's ass if Saint Elimine held that fucking power! That power is evil! And it's our gods damned job to stop it!" But before Lucina could take any action, someone else did so for her.

"I believe that power should not present an issue now that Rose is in control. But before I explain
anything else further, I humbly suggest that you all you refrain from fighting each other and discuss this with a calm and clear mind."

Only stunned silence followed once they noticed who it was coming to talk to them. Even Jocasta's fury tempered down significantly.

"By Naga, the Exalt!" One of her friends shouted, but the princess was more focused on her aunt's presence that the identity of the shouter.

"Lady Emmeryn!" Lucina exclaimed, dropping to her knees, quickly followed by her comrades. None of them had met the Exalt, having died before any of them were conceived, and she wasn't sure this was the best time for introductions. But she couldn't just tell her to go away. "I mean— how can we serve you, Your Grace?"

Emmeryn tilted her head and gave Lucina a frown that made her feel like a child. "Your Grace? Not Aunt Emmeryn?" she said with a note of disappointment. "Though, I suppose this is to be expected. I was not present by the time of your birth, right?"

Oh, how she wanted to call her that. To meet the woman that impacted her father's ideology so much. One who could bear the weight of her predecessor's sin to heal her country. Lucina could feel Marc tense and Morgan vibrate with mixed emotions. Even Owain could not hide his excitement. She swallowed and cleared her throat, all while fighting the blood rushing to her cheeks. "Ehm, that is correct, milady. Pardon me, but I do not wish to impose any unwanted relationship upon you... I mean, we are not of this world, and—"

"It is no imposition. Certainly not unwanted either." Emmeryn waved her hand motioning them to rise. "Stand. I will not have my family kneel before me," she said, walking closer to her kin while her friends stood back. "Now let me look at you. I heard your names in the memories and from your mother, but I do not believe that is a proper introduction between us."

"Oh. Right." She stood straighter and called in her poise. She needed to give a good impression now that it was clear they would be interacting in the near future. "I am Lucina, the eldest. These are my siblings—Marc, and his younger sister, Morgan."

"Hey! You didn't need to point that I came out maybe a minute later!" Morgan complained, crossing her arms and pouting. Why was she always designated as the "youngest"?

"Please excuse her, she's not housebroken yet," Marc said, glaring at Morgan while slapping the back of her head. "By the way, it was five minutes later. Mom said you were too stubborn to leave!"

Stopping herself from committing fratricide, Lucina gave a shaky smile to the amused Exalt as she introduced the last of her family. "And this is my cousin, O—"

"Oh, our dear, exalted aunt!" her cousin exclaimed as he struck a pose, cutting Lucina off. His theatrics eliciting groans from her friends and a confused tilt of the head from their aunt. "I, Owain Lowell, scion of your fair sister, stand in awe to your presence! The legends of your grace and beauty span far and wide, lasting into our future as a beacon of hope!"

Lucina felt mortified at the lack of tact her immediate family displayed. This was a serious moment! Not only were things delicate but first impressions are everything! For goodness sake, Owain was at the very least being respectful to his mother earlier! In hindsight, she should've known that it wouldn't last. As she was about to scold them and apologize, her aunt's melodious laugh caught her attention.
"You remind me so much of my own siblings," Emmeryn said, offering them all smile as she looked at them with fondness. "Lucina, we share the burden of being the eldest. Do not worry, I understand what is like to have siblings of colorful character."

The princess felt a bond instantly form between them.

"Marc, you look just like Chrom when he was younger and I feel the same youthful air around you," the Exalt said, making the young man blush, before turning to Morgan with a raised eyebrow and a *smirk*, of all things. "And I can tell you have Lissa's mischievous spark in those eyes of yours, Morgan."

Lucina swore she could hear Morgan *squee*. She felt dread at the chaos the two pranksters would bring together. She chose not to think about it, madness only lay that way. Like those blasted pitfall traps.

"And you have quite a lot of your mother in you, Owain. She was quite into theatre when she was younger," the Exalt said, humming as she scrutinized the trembling young man. "You have her nose, but I can see our grandfather in you. We have a portrait of him in the castle and your resemblance is uncanny. The only difference is the hair color."

"I... didn't know that..." Owain said meekly, scratching the back of his head in embarrassment. "I– thank you, Aunt Emmeryn."

"At least one you calls me that. Hopefully that is something we can aim to remedy in the future," she said with a smile. It was a simple but graceful smile and it was easy to tell why that smile earned the adoration of the Halidom. "I just hope my own son grows up as strong as you four."

They all murmured their thanks, trying to downplay their efforts. It was clear none of them knew how to react to the existence of this new cousin, but then again, they were the outsiders here.

"But before we acquaint ourselves as a family, I believe we must come to a consensus," Exalt Emmeryn began. "I understand the situation is frightening. Rose just shared everything she knew to all of us," she said as she walked past her nephews and addressing her friends. "I do not claim to know what you lived through. I have only witnessed but a sliver of your hardships, but can you not give their mother and uncle the opportunity to prove themselves?"

"I beg your pardon, Your Grace, but it's not that simple for us," Gerome said, stepping forward to address her with the respect she deserved. "Lucina and the twins might be able to do so because she is their mother, but Robin...Rose, whatever they call her, is the one that killed our parents."

Emmeryn only looked disappointed at the answer. "Are you truly unable to separate Rose from Grima? Has your rage blinded you so much? You saw the same thing as everyone else. Robin and Rose did not wish for this. She is as much a victim as you. She was a prisoner in her own body, watching as it was used to destroy all she held dear. Even her attempts to fight back and save you cost her greatly."

"It's not easy, milady," Kjelle said, bowing to the Exalt. "We've been fighting her for so long and lost too much to simply let it go. We understand, but when we see Queen Rob– Queen Rose, we see the shadow of our world's doom."

"I must admit that her nature as the Fell Dragon is frightening. No one can deny that, nor the suffering that you carry on your shoulders," Emmeryn conceded, placing a hand on the knight's pauldron. "But witnessing what my fate would have been without hers or your interference made me understand that just like you, she wants the best for everyone. Her intentions may have been
pragmatic at the start, but she has held her humanity despite all her trials. You felt her emotions. You have seen her actions. Naga herself has offered her support. The only thing holding you back is yourselves."

"Maybe..." Severa muttered and turned to her friend. "I'm sorry Lucina. I still need time to think about this."

The princess gave her a reassuring smile. "I understand," she said, before turning to the Exalt. "Thank you, mil--" Lucina stopped at the look the Exalt was giving her. "...Aunt Emmeryn."

The Exalt smiled at that, pleased. "That is what family is for. Speaking of, I believe your comrades all have families that they need to talk to," she added, looking towards the Shepherds who were talking loudly amongst themselves. "Although it might be tempting to do so now, I suggest you refrain until the morning. It is best that everyone has time to calm down before coming to such a sensitive topic."

Her friends clearly were battling the needed to protest, with some eager enough to run towards their mothers. But Alann quickly spoke.

"They may look like them, but they're not really our parents," Alann said as he shot a glance towards Anna and his father talking. How ironic was it that he was to bring that point up but wanted to talk to his mother the most? "They're not even our parents' past selves. Do we even have the right to introduce ourselves into their lives?"

"These might not be the past selves of your parents, but I do not believe it could ever be as clear as that when is time travel involved." Emmeryn said. "I do not dare speak for your parents but, if it is of any comfort, I believe that they will accept you all the same. This world– this timeline– has the potential to be the best possible outcome for everyone. Do not rob yourselves of the chance of happiness by clinging to fear or hatred."

Her words had a clear impact on the children, who each was mulling over them in their own way.

The Exalt then looked at her niece with a sad smile. "Sadly, time is not something you and your siblings can afford at the moment. I need to speak with my own siblings on how to proceed, but I believe your mother could use your support...before her emotional state worsens."

Lucina stiffened at that. Regardless of everything, she had mixed feelings about facing her mother. She loved her and did her best for everyone. She didn't blame her for thinking she would be like the other Lucina.

But she still carried the power of their sworn enemy.

At the same time, she was her mother and she needed them.

The princess nodded and started walking with her siblings towards the cliff where their mother was.

Far away from camp, Robin stopped running and looked at the brand on his hands. It was shimmering like bright purple scales. The Mark of Grima pulsed with power, marking him as the harbinger of the end times.

He wanted to rage at the injustice of it all. To take a dagger and carve the cursed flesh away. To deny and damn the gods that decided to punish him with this curse. To scream and snarl at everyone that hid this from him.
But he also understood why Rose didn't share this sooner and he hated that part of himself. It was easier to be angry without trying to reason. Whatever destiny had in store for him, his sister had already lived through it and wanted to spare him the same suffering.

He shuddered as he remembered Chrom stabbing his sister through the heart with cold eyes. It felt as if he was the one being stabbed. Would he do the same to him? To her? Will all his friendships end today? Could they trust him with the chance to be possessed? Could he trust them not to stab him in the back at the first wrong step? The lack of trust would destroy the entire army and war effort. Would it be better if his family just disappeared?

"Robin?" a familiar voice called out to him.

"Tiki? What are you doing here?" He said, not turning to look at her. How could he, the vessel of her mother's enemy, even dare talk to her.

"What kind of question is that?" the manakete responded, walking to his side and giving him a concerned look. "Can't a girl worry about her lover when he is in clear distress?"

"Distress… that's a simple way to put it," he said bitterly and could stop himself. "You always knew, right?"

"Yes, I did," she admitted easily, much to his surprise. "Please understand we didn't hide it out of malice, but of concern. If we could, Grima would've been dealt with in silence and no one would have to worry about his rebirth. Everyone would lead a life with mundane concerns, not cataclysmic threats." She looked to the side, before speaking in a softer tone. "We did what we thought was best. We couldn't risk Grima learning anything through your bond."

"I deserved to know, Tiki!" he shouted. Tiki didn't react to that and he felt the sudden flow of anger evaporate. "I… I don't know what I should do. What about the Shepherds? How can I help them? How can they trust me with their safety when I'm already compromised. How can I stop myself from becoming a mere prisoner in my own body?"

"I can't answer that. We've just developed a way to stop him from reading your mind, but that's as far as we've progressed. As for the Shepherds, I can't speak for them. But I believe your bonds will endure this time. They know what's at stake and the consequences of letting their fear guide them."

"I suppose. I will need to talk to them eventually, and clear all my doubts about them." But there was still some dark thoughts that lingered in his mind and he needed answers least they festered like an infected wound. "I need to know…" he started, slowly turning to look at Tiki to gauge her reaction. "Did you start this relationship just to keep an eye on me?"

His head snapped to the side at the force of the sudden slap he received.

"Do you think me so callous as to do such a thing?!" the manakete shouted, incensed and with angry tears starting to form in her eyes. "I will allow such comments just this once due to the circumstances, but do not question the nature of my affection again."

"…Sorry, I should know better," he apologized, feeling like a dog with his tail between his legs. Gods, he was an idiot.

"That you do," she replied with a huff. Her expression softened and took his hand as she sat down with him. "Robin. When we first met, it was because Rose pushed me to. I talked to you because I wanted to see what kind of person you were. And you've earned my heart once you showed me the kind of man you are. You're caring, smart, funny, and most importantly, a trustworthy and loyal
friend. I trust you and I know you will never ever betray us for anything or anyone."

"You're too good to me," he said bashfully looking away, before his voice turned serious. "But are you sure you want to continue with… this?"

Tiki narrowed her eyes and pursed her lips at the question. "What do you mean?"

"You're the Voice of Naga and I'm the Vessel of Grima. Others won't be so accepting our relationship," he warned. "Are you willing to go through with the hardships our union will bring you? I'm already a burden and—"

The manakete stopped him by placing a finger in his lips and giving him a determined expression. "What others think of us is of no concern of mine. I may be a symbol of divinity but despite my longevity, life is too fleeting for me to worry about such things. We could die at any moment, filled with regret."

"But—"

"I've always been aware of the complications this relationship will face, and it's my confidence in our success that gives me strength." She cupped his face and smiled. "You're not alone. Your sister has fought to prevent the same fate for you, and I believe that will be rewarded by your friends. Our mothers will assist in their own ways. And don't forget that I'm here too. Always."

The words seemed to do the trick as he felt himself smile at last.

"I love you," Robin said closing his eyes and leaning his forehead against hers.

Tiki smiled and whispered before kissing him, "I love you too."

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A rock flew through the air and fell into the canopy below with a dull thud. Rose picked another rock and threw it with no particular care, staring emptily into the distance. Emotionally drained, she just sat there, hugging her knees, while repeating the monotonous motions. She cried and laughed for a while, not helped by the memories brought forth by the Naga's spell. At this point, she had nothing left in her.

"You won't hit any Risen down there."

She didn't react to her mother's barb.

Morgana sighed and sat next to her, keeping the silence for a minute before she continued, "That went well, don't you think?"

"Peachy," she spat. "I just found out that I ruined two-going-on-three timelines, started the chain of events that lead to my death. And then I attacked my daughter. Twice."

Her mother shook her head, rubbing her back with soothing motions. "You couldn't have known."

"Doesn't make me feel better. Should've looked deeper into the situation," Rose said, grumbling.

"And what would you look for?" Morgana retorted. "This whole situation is too bizarre to guess logically."

"Dunno," she admitted with a shrug. "Are they calling for our heads yet? Do they want to line me and Robin to stab us at once? Two Falchions should do the trick. You should get away while you can."
The older woman scoffed and slapped her arm. "Stop being so dramatic and have some faith."

"Mom, I had faith once and look where that got me," Rose retorted bitterly, as she felt where Falchion burned her chest. "Why couldn't I be more like you? You wouldn't have messed things up."

"You talk like I'm perfect." Morgana scoffed at the compliment.

"Mom, you pushed a crusade to a stalemate, escaped with a baby and Plegia's regalia while evading the Grimleal's top assassins. You delayed Grima's resurrection, raising Robin and me alone, managing a successful farm, and you're still one of the most formidable fighters around--"

Morgana stopping her tirade with a wave of her hand. "Let me prove you wrong again, child: I had an entire army at my back, with plenty of tactical, geographical, and logistical advantages for that war. Ylisse had no idea how to fight in the desert and their supply lines were thin." She stood up to stretch. "I also had the support of the people defending their homeland from a zealot. Don't underestimate the lengths people will go to protect their home."

That she could understand. She saw it first hand during the siege of Ylisstol. Her mother didn't stop there, making sure to give her a look that made her feel five years old again.

"The farm? I was royalty, Rose. I knew nothing about farming when I arrived at the town. I barely knew how to cook and wash my clothes. Just a woman with a baby, some gold, a sword, and the clothes on her back. You might not remember this from your world, but I had to scrape by for years, going hungry some days before things started looking up. I even considered selling Mystletainn just to get us food!" Morgana exclaimed, losing her cool for a moment before calming herself. "I had to raid bandit camps to get the most basic items and I failed many times, getting innocents hurt."

True enough. She herself understood what getting others hurt meant. Much better than most.

"Escaping the Grimleal was not easy, girl," Morgana continued, looking at the sky with a faraway gaze. "I had to kill plenty of assassins through the years to cover our tracks and more than once things ended up in a close call. That's why I had to keep my skills sharp. And according to your memories, they did eventually kill me."

Rose winced at that. It was true. Her mother would be dead in this timeline had she not intervened.

Morgana's expression softened as she ran a hand through her daughter's hair. "I'm not perfect, Rose. No one is. We all make mistakes. Maybe you've made more than most. I know I have. What matters is that you learned from them and you're now using that knowledge to help and save others."

"I tried," Rose insisted. "I made many plans and now everything's come crashing down. It's like we're destined to go down the same path as in my world."

"That fact that the Exalt Emmeryn is alive and has an heir says otherwise," she retorted. "You're assuming the worst. At least hear them out. I doubt Naga would've intervened had she not intended for us to survive this. Have some faith once more."

"Faith..." Rose muttered. She lost that at her resurrection and only started to regain it in the past few years. It was hard to reconcile herself with the concept given her situation.

"Come," Morgana said, standing up and offering her hand. "We need to find your brother and talk to the Ylissean royals. The sooner we get this over with, the better."

"I… Before we do that, I must speak with them."
Sitting on a boulder at the edge of camp, Yen'fay looked at Amatsu, tracing the edges with his thumb. His father had trusted him with the regalia as a symbol of his status. He was the crown prince of Chon'sin, meant to embody the best traits of his people. A man that would lead his people through example and respect.

And yet, he sold his country to a madman.

Technically, a parallel version of him did so, but he still felt wholly responsible. He certainly did not expect such revelations when he arrived at this continent. Yen'fay owed that woman for saving his family and his honor, regardless of her power or bloodline.

Having witnessed how his sister ran through the docks, escaping her former soldiers as they hunted her at his command. If he put himself in that situation, where he was being blackmailed to serve Walhart for her protection, those men were probably tasked on taking her alive back to him. That would've removed the source of blackmail and he could've worked on deposing the madman.

It didn't stop him from feeling any less like filth for making Say'ri suffer like that.

Could he sell the entire war for his sister? Yes. In a heartbeat. And didn't he felt like scum for that, but he did not regret his answer.

As if the gods were mocking him, Say'ri arrived at that moment, looking at him with a frown.

"What do you make of this, brother?"

Putting the sword away, the prince stood up. "I do not know, sister. This is quite the vexing situation we found ourselves in. But it seems we owe one Fell Dragon for saving us from the plots of another."

She nodded at that, bewilderment mixed with relief. "Fie, what an unbelievable situation we find ourselves in, but our lord father and lady mother still live thanks to her intervention." Her expression grew darker as she spat, "And we gutted that worm Excellus."

"And you are not a fugitive from your own people," he added softly.

"Yen'fay..." she said, pain laced in her voice.

"Sister, do you believe we can trust the tacticians?" he asked, changing the topic while cursing himself for his weakness. "The war is far from over and now we all know the true scale of what we face."

Thankfully, his sister granted him the reprieve. "If Milady Tiki and Naga trust them, so can we."

"Some might think it prudent to kill them now," the prince said looking at Say'ri to see her reaction.

"If we killed everyone we thought a threat, then every person with hands would be executed," she said with conviction. "Should we kill the leaders of the armies that followed you in those futures? Or the dynasts that turned on me? Their present selves have not taken such actions. Until proven otherwise, we must act accordingly and honor our debt to the tacticians. I shan't kill a man for something he has no control of, regardless of the threat. Not when we have other options."

Yen'fay felt pride swell in his chest and smiled at his sister. At least he knew that in that world where she survived, Say'ri would make a great and honorable queen. "Well said, sister," he praised her. After a moment, he added something he felt needed to be said. "I apologize."
Say'ri looked at him, frowning in confusion. "Whatever for?"

"For failing you. Or the other Say'ris," he clarified. "I understand why my other selves chose such dishonorable paths. I know they can't apologize to their sisters for their failure, but I hope this gives them a measure of peace."

"Yen'fay! You haven't failed me," Say'ri reassured him, taking his hand into her own. "If they are anything like me, verily they have forgiven their Yen'fays. Now we shall fight for a future where we don't have to worry about matters as trivial as this."

"A future… Yes. I believe it's time for me to find myself a betrothed. Father has insisted now that the war is getting worse," he agreed, before his smile turned frigid. "Speaking of which… Have you see that boy over there? The one with our people's features?"

He could feel Say'ri tense at his side. By Naga, he could hear her sweat. "...Yes?"

"He looks like us. You' were the only survivor of our family… and he has blue hair and carries the same blade as that sellsword," the crown prince said, pointing out all the evidence in only to stress his point.

"Ah… A-about that..."

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Despite being accustomed to her antics, Rose always found a way to surprise Phila. She was always odd and mysterious, and she knew she was hiding something from them. The Wing Commander understood and accepted that. She had proven herself trustworthy and even saved the Exalt.

Phila would've never guessed the entire mess that was Rose Sustrai.

Or maybe she should call her Robin Surana? No, too confusing. Her brother already wore that name, and wasn't that another kick to the head? Phila couldn't even begin to guess how things would've turned out had Naga herself not shown up to clarify everything.

And somehow, a deity showing up was the least bizarre thing about the past half hour.

She looked around and took stock of her troops. Cordelia and Sumia were anxious, talking with their husbands while throwing looks are their supposed daughters. No surprise there. The problem was the rest of her troops. Both Cordelia's squadron and her own were talking amongst themselves about a single topic – their deaths.

Phila grimaced and had to stop herself from rubbing the phantom wounds where arrows once were fated to end her life. It was one thing to know you will die in the line of duty. Every soldier knew there was a large possibility that every fight would be the last.

It was another to witness your own death.

Twice.

She frowned as she thought about her fellow retainer. Despite all the troubles she went through, Rose still helped them. Sure, her main motivation was saving her brother and stopping Grima, but she still went out of her way to improve their situation. Not only to Emmeryn, but for the thousands more kept breathing because of her actions.

Her friends. Her family. Herself.
At the very least, she will grant them the opportunity to explain themselves. Rose saved Emmeryn, and Robin guided their army to victory. They earned the right to make their case. In the meantime, Phila had to make sure her troops were fine and didn't go around telling the whole army of what just happened. It was a division they could not afford.

The walk away from their friends did little to calm Morgan. Not only was she struggling with her emotions at reuniting with her mother and sister but had to hold herself back from attacking her friends. She knew that to lash out would only making things worse, but she was so angry at how they talked about her family. Like they were some monsters! Why couldn't they see her mom had no willing part on the wholes mess?

And her dream of meeting their father went down in flames. Well, she wasn't sure what to think. Knowing all that her mother went through for saving them, Gods, it was either this situation or Lucina and the others getting killed by Grima if their mother didn't overpower that damned lizard. Her brother and herself were only able to arrive here by tracking Lucina. Had they been killed by that attack—she didn't want to think what would've happened to them in the timestream.

The siblings made their way into a clearing near the edge of the forest when they were stopped by a woman in a cloak and boiled leather armor. She looked remarkably like their mother and was giving them an appraising look with pursed lips.

"Let me see if I have your names right. The eldest is Lucina, the boy is Marc and the younger girl is Morgan. Am I right?" she asked, catching them by surprise. At least she's not being hostile to them.

"Oh, come on! One minute--"

"FIVE--"

Luckily, Lucina was always quick to react to such situations and covered the twins' mouths.

"Ah, y-yes ma'am. But I'm afraid you have us at a disadvantage, Miss…?"

"Ah of course, silly," the woman said, before giving them a small curtsy. "Morgana Sustrai. Your grandmother," she added giving them a smile so like their mother's. "And your namesake, little one," she added with wink at Morgan.

"G-G-Grandmother?!" the three siblings shouted as one. That was something they hadn't taken into account with all that had been going on. Looking at her closely, the reason for the resemblance was now clear to them.

"I suppose that wasn't shown in your memories," their grandmother muttered in way that Morgan found familiar. "But yes. I'm the mother of Robin, the male one. But I consider Rose as my own daughter despite the whole parallel world mess that's going on," she added, shrugging. "Honestly, with all that's on our plate, this should be the least surprising."

Their grandmother stood before them. Sure, not the same timeline and all that, but Morgan didn't care. Her family was growing. Her mind filled with questions. She never had a grandmother before! This was great! Wait, did that mean that Validar was her grandfather?!

Ew. Nope. She wasn't related to that monster. Ever.

But before she could so much as utter a word, Morgana's smile dropped a little. "As much as I want to keep you to myself and squeeze each one of you for your stories, I think there is someone else that needs to speak with all of you first," she said, nodding her head to the tree line.
Rose stood awkwardly in front of them, looking at them with longing and fear. Why was she acting like that? They would all be happy to be reunited, past–ehm, future?– be damned!

"Mother..."

"Mom..."

"Mama..."

The three siblings spoke as one, each of their voices filled with emotion as they slowly made their way to their mother. The distance felt eternal. They had been embracing a short while before, but it felt like a lifetime ago. Mother also moved closer, albeit more timidly than one would expect of a queen and war veteran. She looked so vulnerable to Morgan. It was wrong. Mother had always been strong. She saw it! She fought Grima and armies! She was a super-mom! She shouldn't look like this.

"I..." their Mother stopped, taking a deep breath, seemingly to rally herself. "I'm so sorry. For your future, your father– everything. As a queen, a mother, and a person. I said as much earlier and I aim to right this at any cost to myself. I owe you all that much."

Her twin voiced their protests. "Mother, that's–"

"Marc, please. Let me do this," she pleaded. Her brother hesitated but relented at their mother's pleading tone.

Her mother unbuckled her sword and threw it at their feet. "That sword's name is Thorn," she explained and chuckled. "I know. Rose. Thorn. I'm not very creative with names," she joked before taking a more serious tone. "It was forged by Naga by using a fang from our Grima and tempering it in the flames of Aether and Ignis."

"Mother... why are you giving us this?" her brother asked, looking between the sword and their mother with apprehension.

"It can kill Grima. Or at least, me, permanently," Mother said much to their shock. "Using Falchion will only seal the power of the Fell Dragon. In my case, regular death should do the same. I'm not sure what will happen to the magic," she reluctantly admitted. "It could go to one of you, since you carry my blood and belong to the same timeline. Or maybe it will disperse... Naga said that power like that can't be destroyed but I'm not so sure. All I can be sure off is that it will not go to the Grima of this world. He has no claim to it, so to speak."

"You haven't answered the question," Lucina said warily, and Morgan was thankful no one made a move towards the sword.

The broken look in her mother face made Morgan feel like her bones had suddenly turned into ice. "I failed you and put you and your friends through so much. My life is yours if you so desired. It was and will always be, my loves. I made your lives hell and–"

"NO!" someone shouted, making everyone freeze, and it took a moment for Morgan to realize it was her.

Mother took a step towards her, trying to placate her emotions to no avail. "Morgan, please listen. I–"

"NO! NO! NO! Not after we just got you back!" she shouted, stomping her foot like a child but she didn't care. "I know everyone is angry and confused, but it wasn't your fault!" the word just tumbled out of her, driven by the boiling pot of emotions her mind had turned into.
"Morgan… I failed you time and time again. If anyone deserves to judge me is—umph!" Rose's protests were challenged once Morgan tackled her into a hug, dropping both to the ground as she refused to let her go.

"I can't do it mom! I won't do it!" she insisted, not listening to anyone's words. She had to convince her to stay. "I— You're angry at that other Lucina right!? I can't get to her, but I can beat up our Lucina!" she said with a shaking grin.

Her sister sputtered at that. "H—Hey!"

"Okay fine! Then at the other Chrom! Well, I don't think I can attack this Chrom, but I can beat up Marc for sure! That's close enough!"

"Hey!" Marc protested with a scowl.

"Ahh! Okay! I'll bully Yarne for you, then! That always makes _me_ feel better! A—And you can't die because our new uncle and grandma need your help and I—!"

Morgan stopped her mad rambling when she heard her mother laughing softly, though tears still ran down her cheeks.

"You were always the spirited one, Morgan. I can only remember how you crawled your way out of your crib and escaped to wander the castle," her mother said, running a hand through her daughter's hair with motherly affection. "I wish I had been there when you grew up into such a beautiful young woman."

Morgan blushed at her praise. Thanks to her attitude, no one had ever called her beautiful. Except for Inigo. But he's a philanderer so that's not unusual. It might just be a parent's talk but it still warmed her heart. "Just…Just don't leave us again, please…" she sniffled. She shouldn't be crying. She was a big girl now.

"I'm sorry…"

"Just promise to stay with us."

She felt her mother's hand caressing her hair with soothing motions. "As I said, my life is yours, my children. It always has been. If this is what you want, how can I deny you?"

"Good, just don't forget it," she mumbled before regaining her usual vigor and shouting at her siblings. "Marc! Lucy! Get your butts over here! Family hug!"

Her mother chuckled and looked at the two, opening her arm to give them space. "Come, my little prince. You too, Little Light."

Thorn lay forgotten on the ground as the siblings filled their mother's open embrace.

"It will be alright, mother. We're all together now and no one will tear us apart," Lucina said with the same determination that saw them through their darkest times.

"I will do my best to ensure that, my loves. And you're right, Morgan. Your uncle and grandmother still need my– our help," Rose said, before giving a weary sigh. "And to do that I need to talk to the Royal family and convince the Shepherds that we can be trusted."

The trio understood the gravity of the situation, with Marc saying, "We understand, Mother. Is there anything we can to do to help?"
Rose pondered this for a moment and shook her head. "Not with them. But maybe you can ensure your friends are willing to give me a chance?"

Lucina pursed her lips and gave her an uncertain look. "We can try. They...are having their own doubts about us too," she said with a dejected tone.

"Because of how I'm your mother, right?" their mother in a tired voice. "I'm sorry. It seems I only made things harder for you."

"It's not your fault mother," Morgan insisted. "None of us asked for this burden. The best we can do is to overcome these challenges. Together." Despite the emotional uphill of the day, a small part of Morgan wondered when did she become this sappy.

The former queen looked at them with pride. "You all have more strength than I could ever muster. You three would make fine Exalts. I don't believe there is nothing you won't be able to accomplish together."

"Eh," Morgan said with a shrug and wave of her hand. "I say we leave the leader role to Lucy. She is the one that can stand all that boring, political stuff," she added in a lighter tone.

The elder princess rolled her eyes. "Of course you would. Otherwise you would start a war with half the world in an afternoon."

They continued to trade barbs for a while longer, content in the peaceful atmosphere. She missed her sister and was glad they were back together. There were still things to fix between them that couldn't be fixed with a hug, but it was a good start.

Mother finally stood and motioned for them to follow. "Well then, let's go back. I need to find my brother and see if we can talk our way out of this."

Chrom took a deep breath, feeling the icy air in his lungs warm up with his body heat. The night's chill was nothing compared to the cold he still felt from all the events of the day. At his side, his sisters stood waiting for Rose and Robin to arrive. The others insisted that the tacticians were disarmed and that he took guards with him, but if he wanted to ensure a peaceful resolution then trust would need to be shown both ways.

Watching the three walk towards them, it was impossible to tell that this family was not only the Plegian Royal Family, but the bloodline of the Fell Dragon itself. The blue-haired children walking behind them carried both the Exalted and Fellblood lineage in them, though they looked like they had inherited their looks mostly from his side of the family.

His children with Rose.

The prince winced at the thought. That was something he wasn't looking forward to talking about but was needed to be handled all the same.

The twin crossed the distance in a too short of a time in Chrom's opinion, stopping in front of the Ylissean family as both sides looked at one another. Rose's children looked at him warily and he couldn't fault them. Having witnessed how his other self reacted, he was an unknown to them.

"So, what's our sentence?" Rose said, breaking the silence. Emmeryn raised an elegant eyebrow in response to the pessimistic tone.

"You speak as if we decided to execute you." The Exalt stated. The time traveler shrugged while her
"Wouldn't be the first time an Exalt executes me." Chrom cringed at that. He couldn't help but feel like the actions of the other Chrom were his responsibility.

"Look," he started in a placating manner, "We've discussed this between us and we're not going to take such drastic measures."

"And indeed we shall not. To judge you through your blood and not through your actions does not represent the values of the Halidom that so many lives have sacrificed for," Emmeryn stated with steel in her voice. She then looked at Rose. "Your intentions may have been selfish at the start, but I cannot blame you for your distrust of us or your concern for your family."

"You know, we might've seen your memories, but you lived through that," Lissa chimed in. "I know you and I aren't as close as you and Emm, but I trust you, Rose." The younger princess then turned to the Shepherds' Grandmaster. "And Robin...we all saw how you reacted. You clearly didn't know about this. Plus, I like you both a lot! I don't want to lose my best prank buddies, you know."

Robin nodded warily, and Rose just turned her gaze to the side. "I would've preferred he never knew about this and just lived a peaceful life," she admitted with a resigned sigh. "But as long as Grima lives, that wasn't a possibility. It was a naïve hope. I even thought about taking him in once he lost his memory but I figured it would be better for everyone if he was your tactician during the war while you offered the protection and life he needed."

"So, you were watching over me for that long?" Robin asked his sister, and Chrom could see from the tactician's expression that there was still some lingering resentment for keeping the truth from him. Something that would need to be worked on amongst them.

"I arrived two years before you lost your memories," Rose admitted. "I built contacts and kept watch over you and mother while I gathered information and improved the situation where I could without making it obvious to Grima that there was another tactician around. Devola and Popola were pretty helpful with that, despite my... personality in those times. They informed me of possible spies and issued false information about my origins to keep the Grimleal confused."

Chrom took that moment. "Many of the things you've done for us have been done out of care. You might not realize it, but it's true. You didn't have to do many of the things you did to earn our trust, but you did."

She looked at him through narrow eye, her expression pinched. "...And what about the Shepherds? There are those that had strong opinions of my brother and I before the war. I fear what progress we made with them has become undone."

He winced slightly at that. It was not an unfounded fear with those like Frederick or Sully. "It will be a challenge," he admitted, "but one we can overcome. Tempers are volatile right now, with all the revelations tonight. I can't speak for all of them, but I believe having Naga take your side will help things along."

"I see..." she said, clearly not satisfied with the answer.

"For what is worth, you have the support of House Lowell," Emmeryn declared. It was no small gesture for the crown to offer their support to someone.

"Yup! With Naga and our support, I bet we'll have little trouble convincing the others!" Lissa declared with pure optimism.
"I doubt it will be that simple..." Rose started before smiling at them. "But thank you."

Robin stepped forward and looked at the three Ylissean siblings. "I'm still coming to terms with the motives of my birth. I don't know if our future will repeat like that of my sister's, but I am my own person. In my time of need, you offered a hand and a place to belong. You could've easily just offered me some coin and sent me on my way, but you gave me a chance at life. For that, I will be forever in your debt. To the three of you," he said, bending the knee to the three. "Any bow you ask of me, I shall swear it on my life."

Emmeryn stepped forward and took Robin's hand in her own, kneeling in front of him. "Whatever debt you feel you owe us has been paid. If you have any doubt on that, just think on my son. Jon would not be part of this world had it not been for you two," she said, raising her hand to silence his protest. "Yes. Both of you. Your role was no less crucial than that of your sister. You both cover each other's weaknesses. We will need both of you in the battles to come."

"Battles that we will fight at your side," Chrom said, stepping forward and placing a hand on his friend shoulder.

"Yeah!" Lissa added cheerfully. "We'll make sure that our future is a bright one!"

The Plegian siblings looked at them and nodded as one, content with the agreement. Still, there was something else that needed to be discussed between two of those present.

"Rose, could I speak with you in private?" Chrom asked and he could see Rose tense and Robin inching closer to her. If there was ever any doubt about their protectiveness of one another, it was erased at that moment. "Look. We need to discuss..." His eyes flickered towards the blue-haired scions and gulped. "Us and them."

"Chrom--" Robin began before Rose stopped him.

"No, he's right. Might as well clarify that now. Over there?" she offered, pointing to the side.

Chrom nodded and walked with her to a secluded spot, leaving their respective siblings behind. They were still visible range of everyone but out of earshot. He could feel everyone's' eyes still on them, but that was no surprise.

"So..." Rose started, breaking the silence and crossing her arms as she looked at him with an unreadable expression.

"There is much we need to talk about, you and I," the prince started before the word became a challenge to say. "About...our children? I mean, are we married--?"

"You and I aren't, and will never be, married," she said with brutal finality, and he couldn't help but feel like his pride took a hit. "I married one Chrom. Loved another and got killed by him. I don't fancy my chances a third time."

"I wasn't trying to imply anything. And I can't blame you for having that stance but let me say this." He needed to get this out in the open. "I'm not them. I'm neither the Chrom that married you...or the one that killed you. You can trust me, and I hope you can see that."

Chrom saw how the corner of her mouth quirked into a small, sad smile. "I know. I made sure you wouldn't become like them," Rose sighed, looking at the night sky in thought. "When Emmeryn died in my other lives... it changed you. It was something you never recovered from both physically and mentally."
Images flashed before his eyes as both Rose's memories and his own experiences build the picture of a life without his elder sister. "And I thank you for that. Just the idea of losing her and realizing how close it came to pass fills me with dread," Chrom admitted before hesitatingly continuing. "I… I would like to get to know you properly. No secrets. Just… I would like us to be friends. True friends," he said, offering her his hand.

Rose gave him a real, sincere smile and the prince caught a glimpse of that young wide-eyed girl in the memories.

"Friends," she said, shaking his hand. "I will do my best to see you for the man you are, Chrom."

A sense of relief rushed through him. There was still much to work through, but Chrom believed the Shepherds would learn from their counterparts' mistakes. looked at the side of the field where three teenagers were looking at them with hopeful eyes. He didn't want to push his luck with this peace, but he still needed to ask. "And…If it's not a problem, I would like to… to talk to your children and get to know them. I know they are not exactly mine and understand if you rather I didn't but…"

"I won't ever deny them that right…or anything for that matter," Rose said, and he was only partially surprised. "It would mean the world to them to know at least a version of their father. Just… don't give them false hopes, okay?" she pleaded, in a surprisingly small voice.

"I know. You have my word," he promised. It was a delicate topic and the last thing he wanted was to hurt those three. "Though I believe we should talk more in depth about this later."

"Thanks. And I understand. I think they will like to know more about you, regardless of the situation," she added as she looked at her children with fondness. Suddenly, her eyes widened, clearly getting an idea. "Oh… Chrom?"

The prince looked at her with a raised eyebrow. "Yes?"

"Could I borrow the mess tent for an hour or so?"

"Here you go! Meat stew with potatoes and vegetables. Served with a side dish of fried rice and red beans." Rose said as she placed three steaming bowls in front of her children, all while having the brightest smile she had in years. She had discarded her usual attire and donned a simple shirt and pants with an apron she found in the kitchen. "Learned this back at Valm before your Father and I returned long ago."

Anyone that saw her in the mess tent would never think she was a mercenary, much less the Fell Dragon itself, except maybe for her ripped physique. She was just a mother. And a happy one, at that.

The royal siblings looked at the veritable feast their mother had cooked for them. They paused and stared at the meal before their eyes. Years ago they would never think that they would be able to have this moment again. A scene they associated with the warmest memories of their childhood within Ylisstol Palace's white halls. They were little more than babes but the bright memories always shined in their darkest moments. When their mother took the kitchen all for herself, telling the staff to rest. Back in an innocent past before the world was consumed in Grima's despair. A darkness now controlled by their mother.

"Well? Don't be shy, there's plenty for all of you."

The three siblings eagerly and happy dug in with gusto at their food.
"It'z delishus muhm!" said Morgan though a mouthful of potatoes.

Rose gave her a wry, motherly smile, "I'm glad you like it, honey." Her expression turned mockingly stern, as she spoke in an equally playful tone. "Still, what did I tell you about talking with your mouth full?"

"To swallow first, then talk. It's not polite to your company," the siblings uttered as if reading a script. The royal tutors had done their job.

"Good. I'm glad you remember that," Rose said. "I'll be at the back cleaning up. Your grandmother will be here with the dessert in a few minutes. There are seconds on that table so don't be shy and fill your bellies to your heart's content."

"Will do, mom!" the three children answered, receiving a smile from their mother as she left the tent.

Lucina enjoyed the meal in silence, like she was used to during the dark future, but this silence was different. It was one of peace and content until a small sniffling sound broke relaxing silence. The future Exalt looked up from her plate to see her little sister trying to stop the tears coming out of her eyes, cleaning them up with her oversized sleeve.

"Morgan? Are you ok? You're crying," said Lucina with concern, about to get up when she saw her little sister shake her head.

Marc was at her side in an instant, wrapping her in a hug with his own worried look on his face. "What wrong? Is it too hot?" asked Marc, trying to see what was the source of Morgan's distress. Despite all the annoyances she put him through, he loved her all the same.

Morgan calmed down after a moment. "No…it's just..." she replied through sniffles.

"Just what?" asked her brother with a confused tone.

"It's mom's cooking," Morgan said through her tears, flashing a trembling smile to her siblings. "I never thought we'd get to eat it again."

Marc and Lucina were stunned for a second before they too had smiles on their faces, finally understanding. Those were tears of happiness, which also started to manifest on their own eyes.

"She's mom…not some just a past version that doesn't know of us…I know…I know it's unfair to our friends, and that everyone's angry and confused and it can go bad tomorrow, but I can't help it," Morgan rambled, giving them a trembling smile. "She's our mom. And we got her back."

Looking at their own plates, they couldn't help the tears that escaped their own eyes. Their walls crumbled and the siblings laughed and cried in happiness.

This was the best meal they had in years.

Rose sat in front of the washing bin, looking at her reflection. She couldn't believe how things had worked out. All the guilt and rage inside her were mixed with joy and love. She couldn't even find it in herself to blame the other Lucina any longer. Rose started this entire mess, anyway. But at this point she didn't care. She had her children, her mother, and her brother back. Tomorrow would be a harrowing day and things could still go wrong, but she would bear any punishment if it meant her family's happiness.

"How's Robin?" she asked without looking up, feeling her mother coming to her.
"He's doing better. Tiki is keeping him company," her mother said, sitting on the crate next to her. "I think everyone needs to have some time alone to process everything and we can discuss it in the morning."

"You don't sound worried…"

"I would be lying if I said I don't have my doubts," Morgana conceded. "But I also have hope. They saw what the path of anger and rashness led to in your world. I think they are wise enough not to repeat the mistakes of their counterparts."

Rose said nothing, looking down at her hands.

"They are precious, those kids of yours," Morgana said after a minute and the tactician could hear the smile in her voice. "I'm so glad they are my grandchildren. I think Lucina has my cheeks."

A smile managed to creep on her face at that. "I always wanted you to meet them," she admitted. "I wanted to be as good a mother as you were."

"You are."

"Am I?" she said bitterly. "I fucked everything up… Some tactician I am. They are the only good thing I made in the string of fuck-ups that is my life."

"You saved them," her mother insisted, gently squeezing her hand in comfort. "You need to accept that Grima was simply too powerful for you to overcome in the past. You had no balance and the dragon overpowered you. But when it counted, you saved them and gave this world a chance. Maybe not your original world, but this is your home now."

There was a bit of silence as Rose scrubbed the pots away. Never would she think that she would have a home again. She was cooking for her children again. Her mother was ready to spoil them. They have an uncle that would no doubt pander to them.

"Why don't you go eat dessert with them?" Morgana nudged her away from the pots with a warm smile, shocking her to her core. "I'll take care of cleaning up."

Her face twisted in a myriad of emotions, as she wriggled her hands together like a child. She swallowed and looked at her mother while tears started to pool in her eyes.

"Can I… Is it really okay for me to enjoy a meal with my kids?" she asked, her face twisted by doubt and pain. "I messed up and I've tried to make things right. I… I know can never make up for my failures, but I will never stop trying...But I've earned this much, right?"

The pitiful, broken tone tugged at her mother's heart. Morgana closed her eyes and enveloped her daughter in a warm embrace.

"Oh, Robin..." Morgana called her by her true name, "You have three incredible children. And you have me and your brother. For all that you've all suffered, you still endure. Forget what tomorrow will bring. Enjoy this moment. You deserve this, and so much more."

Whatever walls remained crumbled as Robin Surana, a kind, and gentle woman, wept in her mother's arms.

Around the corner of the tent, the three Ylissean royal siblings listened to Rose crying. It was strange yet heartwarming to see her so human. After everything that happened, they were thankful she
retained her humanity.

Chrom moved to talk to her. He wanted to ensure she knew she had their support, but as soon as he took a step, he felt a hand on his shoulder stop him. Looking back, he saw Emmeryn shaking her head.

"Not now," she whispered, and he could see Lissa holding herself back too.

His drive vanished, and he slumped, following his sisters back to their tents.

Tomorrow promised to be an even more arduous day.

Chapter End Notes

So, to clarify some things. Lucina was confused about why Robin was male and her mother went by the name Rose. She never called her mother by her name in her POVs, and she was always confused by the presence of both. That's why she looked at Robin with confusion and distrust. Ever since she fought in Ferox she wondered why there were two Robins, and when Rose confronted her when she tried to talk to her, but Rose interrupted her before she could call her mother.

But at the same time, only Lucina and the twins get one of their parents back. The others can't help but be a bit resentful and realize that these are not even past versions of their parents. That makes things awkward. And Chrom now has children with a woman he is not married, despite happening in another timeline.

Other Shepherds lived and died on both worlds to adjust for the "contamination". Since things went extra bad in Rose's original timeline, that allowed her to make things better in this one.

And since this is Rose's unintentional fault, Janus is angry at her.

And super special thanks to Shipping Rates Apply for his help with this chapter. He did incredible work with beta-ing this chapter.

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