The Sound of Arendelle

by H20loo

Summary

Anna-Maria is a postulant at one of Arendelle's oldest abbeys, but her spirited ways make for a poor fit with the religious order. The sisters send her to become a governess for the family of Captain Elsa Von Trapp, a career military woman with seven children who is known for being ice-cold. The children fall under Anna-Maria's spell almost instantly, but will their mother follow suit?

Cover Art at taniahylia.tumblr.com

Dedicated to the memory of Charmian Carr, the loveliest Liesel of them all.

Notes

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A/N: So, welcome to my self-indulgence. I am a sucker for musicals, always have been, and the Sound of Music has been an inexplicable favorite of mine since childhood. This idea came to me when I remembered that the Baroness Schrader had the first name of Elsa and yeah, off went my imagination. I hope you like it as much as I am going to enjoy writing it.
The beautiful landscape of Arendelle and the bright sunny day beckoned, and before she knew it, the postulant Anna-Maria was slipping through the open gates of the abbey and escaping to the hills. Taking off her wimple, she wandered through the forest that surrounded the abbey, crossing brooks and climbing the North Mountain until she stood at its very peak. The vivid sunshine and the gorgeous landscape inspired her, and she began to sing an old song about the hills and the music that could be found within them. She wasn't allowed to sing outside of the chapel when she was in the abbey, and she missed it, so now that she was alone, she was going to seize the opportunity.

The song continued as Anna-Maria continued to explore, relishing her time outdoors after so many days of being behind the abbey walls. She loved the Maker, the abbey and the sisters, she truly did; after all, she had chosen to give up her freedom for the pursuit of religious fulfillment. But, her free-spiritedness often rebelled, and she felt the need to escape the life she had chosen to simply be free. Anna-Maria took a deep breath and sang the last notes of the song with gusto. She, if only for the moment, was free, out here in the wilds of Arendelle.

The peak that Anna-Maria was standing on gave her a breathtaking view of the town of Arendelle below. The spires of churches rose up, many different denominations that ultimately professed the same faith. Amongst the places of worship, there were also the neat and tidy row houses of the city's prosperous merchant and labor classes. Farther out, towards the river, there were the magnificent mansions of the city's nobility, barons, dukes and earls among them. In the center of town, the domes and fountains of the city's administration buildings stood, reminding all that Arendelle was an orderly jewel in the crown of the province. In the same area, art museums and concert halls, the legacy of the city's world-famous artists and composers, gleamed with gold filigree and white marble. Anna-Maria took it all in, sighing in happiness as the breeze rose and caressed her face.

The breeze brought something else though; the distant clang of the abbey's bells sounded on its swirling air. It took Anna-Maria a second to comprehend what she was hearing, but when she did, she snapped out of her reverie at once and took off running for the abbey. She had only gotten a few steps away when after feeling her head, she realized she no longer had her wimple. She looked around frantically for it and finally spotted it. Anna-Maria ran back, snatched it off the ground and bolted for the abbey as fast as she could go.

The litany for morning prayers sounded and sisters of all ages and ranks began to file through the abbey on their way to the chapel. One by one, they knelt as they came into the consecrated place, paying homage to the altar at the front of the church. At the front of the church knelt the three most powerful women of the abbey, the Reverend Mother, the Mistress of Postulants and the Mistress of Novitiates. Strains of ceremonially-sung Arendellian prayers wafted through the scared space until at last the Reverend Mother rose. She blessed the congregation with the sign of the Maker, and once the blessing had been received, the choir sang the joyful benediction that signaled the end of the morning worship.

As silently as they had filed in, the sisters filed out of the chapel, until only the Reverend Mother and the two Mistresses remained. They too left the church, and as they were walking in the courtyard, one of the other sisters came rushing up to them.

"Sister Bernice?" Mother Gerda questioned, alarmed at the slight panic on the other sister's face.
"I simply cannot find her," Sister Bernice said breathlessly.

"Anna-Maria?" Mother Gerda guessed with just a hint of exasperation, and Sister Bernice nodded.

"She's missing from the abbey again," she confirmed.

"Perhaps we should've put a cow bell around her neck," Sister Bertha, the Mistress of Novitiates, snarked, and even Mother Gerda had to suppress a chuckle.

Sister Marguerite, the Mistress of Postulants and overall kind soul, ignored the remark and tried to help the situation. "Have you tried the barn?" she asked. "You know how much she adores the animals."

"I have looked everywhere," Sister Bernice insisted. "In all of the usual places."

The Reverend Mother smiled, a gentle, yet wry smile. "Sister Bernice, considering that it's Anna-Maria, I suggest you look in someplace…unusual," she advised. The other sister blinked as a look of bemusement overcame her face, but she bowed to Mother Gerda and exited.

"Well, Reverend Mother, I hope this latest infraction ends whatever doubts you may still have about Anna-Maria's future here," Sister Bertha said caustically. The elder nun had been one of Anna-Maria's biggest detractors from practically the moment the young woman had got here, and now that Anna-Maria was making the potential leap from postulant to novitiate, she was being especially ruthless. Sister Bertha had nothing personal against the young nun-to-be; however, she firmly believed that Anna-Maria did not belong at the abbey, and she, for the love of the Maker, firmly did not want to have Anna-Maria as part of her novitiate class.

"I always try to keep faith in my doubts, Sister Bertha," Mother Gerda responded evenly as the three of them crossed the courtyard.

"After all, the wool of a black sheep is just as warm," Sister Marguerite pointed out. She, too, had her doubts about Anna-Maria's potential for success at the abbey, but as Mistress of the Postulants, she had grown much closer to Anna-Maria than Sister Bertha had, and she knew that the young woman had a good heart and was truly there for the right reasons, even if her behavior didn't always show it.

"We are not talking about sheep, black or white, Sister Marguerite!" Sister Bertha snapped. "Of all of the candidates for the novitiate, I would say that Anna-Maria is least likely…"

"Children! Children!" Mother Gerda interrupted scoldingly before addressing a group of three senior nuns that stood on the other side of the courtyard. "We were speculating about the qualifications of some our postulants," she explained. "The Mistress of Novices and the Mistress of Postulants were trying to help me by expressing opposite points of view. Tell me, Sister Catherine, what do you think of Anna-Maria?"

"She's a wonderful girl!" the bespectacled nun said enthusiastically, before she thought it through. "Some of the time," she added.

"Sister Agatha?" Mother Gerda prompted, turning to another sister.

"It's very easy to like Anna-Maria," Sister Agatha replied. "Except when it's, um, difficult."

Mother Gerda turned to the last sister, Sister Sophia, the Mistress of the Choir and the finest singer in the abbey. Anna-Maria had wanted to join the choir, and she had the voice for it, but her undisciplined ways had brought a premature end to her music studies. "And you, Sister Sophia?" the Reverend Mother questioned.
"Oh, I love her very dearly," the Choir Mistress said truthfully. "But she always seems to be in trouble, doesn't she?" she finished regretfully.

"Exactly what I say," Sister Bertha said triumphantly. "For the love of the Maker, she climbs a tree and scraps her knee like a four-year old at every opportunity, and she tears her dress when she does so."

"She also tends to dance the waltz on her way to Mass and she whistles on the stairs," Sister Sophia added reluctantly.

"I've even heard her singing in the abbey," Sister Catherine mentioned, which drew tsks and eyerolls from all of the nuns assembled, even the sympathetic Mother Gerda and Sister Marguerite.

"She always late for chapel..." Sister Agatha began.

"...but her penitence is real," Sister Sophia finished.

"She's always late for everything," Sister Bertha sniffed.

"Except for every meal," Sister Catherine muttered as an aside, and the remark drew knowing smirks and snickers from the rest of the sisters.

"I hate to have to say it, but I very firmly feel that Anna-Maria is not an asset to the abbey," Sister Bertha declared, and Sister Sophia, Sister Catherine and Sister Agatha nodded their heads in agreement.

"I'd like to say a word on her behalf," Sister Marguerite interjected.

"Then say it, Sister Marguerite," Mother Gerda encouraged.

"Anna-Maria makes me...laugh," Sister Marguerite stated with just a bit of a giggle, and the other sisters not named Gerda and Bertha joined in.

Shaking her head, Mother Gerda asked the question that had been plaguing them. "How to you solve a problem like Anna-Maria?" she asked, with a frustrated yet wistful tone. "How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?"

"How do you find a word that means Anna-Maria?" Sister Marguerite asked.

"A flibbertigibbet," Sister Agatha and Sister Catherine said at the same time, much to their own surprise.


"A clown," Sister Bertha sniffed.

"There are so many things we need to tell her, so many things she ought to understand," the Reverend Mother sighed.

"But how do you make her stay to listen to all you say?" Sister Bertha asked in frustration.

"The same way you keep a wave upon the sand," Sister Gerda answered with sanguine wisdom. "Or perhaps the same way you hold a moonbeam in your hand."

The sisters debated back and forth amongst themselves for a few minutes, and words like
"unpredictable", "flighty", "darling", "demon," "lamb," "pest", "riddle," "headache," and "angel" were tossed about. Finally, Mother Gerda put an end to the discussion with a single declaration. "She's a girl, my children; she has a lot of growing up to do." The sisters nodded, and Mother Gerda sighed. "But we still haven't answer our initial inquiry. What do we do with…" she started, and stopped when a door slammed and frantic footsteps sounded just outside the courtyard.

Anna-Maria sprinted into the courtyard and made for the water pump, completely oblivious to the group of high-ranking sisters who were watching her with various degrees of amusement, annoyance and disapproval. She pumped the handle until the water flowed, catching some of the water stream to wash her hands and face. She took off running again, but as she did so, the group of sisters finally caught her eye and she stuttered to a halt in front of them. Anna-Maria glanced at them, her cheeks reddening, before she rolled her eyes at her own stupidity and left, quietly chastising herself as she went.

"Anna-Maria," Mother Gerda finished, and the sisters watched her go with affectionate annoyance.

Anna-Maria paced nervously outside the Reverend Mother's office before coming to a standstill outside of her door. Anna-Maria shifted her hands a bit and then turned as Sister Marguerite emerged from the room. "You may go in now, Anna-Maria," she said, with a gentle, reassuring squeeze on the shoulder. Anna-Maria managed a weak smile of thanks before she hesitantly walked into Mother Gerda's office.

Upon seeing her, the Reverend Mother put down the correspondence she had been reading. "Come here, my child," she requested, and after a moment's nervous pause, Anna-Maria did so, kissing Mother Gerda's hand as was the custom. After she was finished, Mother Gerda indicated the chair. "Now sit down," she ordered in an even tone.

Anna-Maria started sputtering apologies even as she went to her chair. "Oh, oh, Reverend Mother, I'm so sorry," she apologized. "I just couldn't help myself. The gates were open and the hills were beckoning, and before I…"

"Anna-Maria," Mother Gerda interrupted, "I haven't summoned you here for apologies."

"But I should still ask for forgiveness," Anna-Maria protested.

"Well, if it would make you feel better," Mother Gerda said, with understanding.

"It would," Anna-Maria confirmed. "You see the sky was so blue today, and everything was so green and fragrant I just had to be a part of it."

"But child, suppose darkness had come and you were lost?" the Reverend Mother chastised.

"Oh, Mother, I could never be lost out there," Anna said earnestly. "That's my mountain; I was brought up on it. It was the mountain that led me to you."

"Oh?" Mother Gerda said interestedly, not having heard this bit of Anna-Maria's story before.

"When I was a child, I would come down the mountain and climb a tree and peer over into your garden," Anna-Maria explained. "I would see the sisters at work and I would hear them sing on their way to vespers." Anna-Maria took a breath and looked down into her hands. "Which… brings me to another transgression, Reverend Mother," she confessed. "I was singing out there on the mountain today without permission."
Mother Gerda shifted in her chair and tried her best not to let the wry grin take over her face. It was true the abbey had rules about postulants being forbidden to sing, but with the seriousness of Anna-Maria’s tone indicated a far more serious offense. "Anna-Maria, it is only here in the abbey that we have rules about postulants singing," she reminded the nervous young woman.

"But I can't seem to stop singing wherever I am!" Anna-Maria said worriedly. "And what's worse, I can't seem to stop saying things, everything and anything I think and feel."

"Some people would call that honesty," Mother Gerda pointed out.

"Oh, but it's terrible, Reverend Mother," Anna-Maria insisted. "You know how Sister Bertha makes me kiss the floor after we've had a disagreement?" The Reverend Mother nodded. "Well, lately I've taken to kissing the floor when I see her coming, just to save time!" Anna-Maria wailed.

Mother Gerda sighed. "Anna-Maria," she began, and Anna-Maria braced herself for the worst. "When you saw us over the abbey wall and longed to be one of us, that didn't necessarily mean that you were prepared for the way we live here, did it?" she asked gently.

Anna-Maria shook her head. "No, Mother, but I pray and I try. And I am learning, I really am!" she insisted hopefully.

"What is the most important lesson that you have learned here, my child?" Mother Gerda asked.

"To find out what is the will of the Maker and to do it wholeheartedly," Anna-Maria answered promptly.

Mother Gerda sighed again and rose from her desk. "Anna-Maria, it seems to be the will of the Maker that you leave us," she said simply.

"Leave?!" Anna-Maria parroted, alarmed.

"Only for a while, Anna-Maria," Mother Gerda assured her.

"Oh, Mother, please don't do that. Please don't send me away," Anna-Maria pleaded. "This is where I belong; it's my home, my family. It's my life," she finished in a softer tone.

"Are you truly ready for it?" the Reverend Mother asked, looking at Anna-Maria critically.

"Yes, I am," Anna-Maria said firmly.

"Perhaps if you go out into the world for a time, knowing what we expect of you, you will have a chance to find out if you can expect it of yourself," Mother Gerda hypothesized.

"I know what you expect, Mother, and I can do it, I promise I can," Anna-Maria said beseeching.

"Anna-Maria," Mother Gerda said simply, and Anna-Maria settled down, knowing that the Reverend Mother’s mind was made up.

"Yes, Mother," she answered, returning to her chair. "If it is the Maker's will."

"There is a family near Arendelle that has need of a governess until September…" Mother Gerda said, reading from the letter on her desk.

"Until September?" Anna-Maria echoed.

"…to take care of seven children," Mother Gerda continued.
"Seven children!" Anna-Maria exclaimed.

"You like children, Anna-Maria," the Reverend Mother reminded her.

"Well, yes, but seven!" Anna-Maria emphasized, her face contracting into a grimace.

The Reverend Mother politely ignored her. "I will tell Captain Von Trapp to expect you tomorrow," she stated.

"Captain?" Anna-Maria questioned.

"A retired officer of Her Majesty's navy, a fine woman and a brave one," Mother Gerda replied. "Her husband died several years ago leaving her alone with the children. I understand she's had a most difficult time keeping a governess there."

Anna-Maria paused at that. This whole situation was not to her liking and now Mother Gerda had given her even more bad news. "Uh, why difficult, Reverend Mother?" Anna-Maria asked as carefully as she could.

"The Maker will show you in Her own good time," Mother Gerda replied with a hint of a smile, and Anna-Maria sighed.
Anna-Maria shuffled forlornly out of the convent, delaying her exit by listening to the sounds of the sisters singing and by looking at all of the pictures and artifacts that the abbey had to offer. "When the Maker closes a door, somewhere She opens a window," Anna-Maria said, trying to convince herself that the life she had always wanted was not dying with her every step out of the abbey. She took a few more steps. "I wonder what this day will be like?" she thought. "What will my future be?"

Anna-Maria opened the gates she had come to, and with a hesitant pause, she walked out of the convent and closed the gate behind her. "It could be so exciting, to be out in the world, to be free," she decided. "In fact, my heart should be wildly rejoicing. I've always longed for adventure, to do the things I've never dared. But now that I'm actually facing it, I'm so scared I don't know what to do with myself." She looked back longingly at the abbey before her natural optimism reasserted itself. "A Captain with seven children," she mused. "What's so fearsome about that?" The seven children, her fears pointed out.

"Oh, I must stop these doubts, all these worries; if I don't I just know I'll turn back," Anna-Maria chided herself as she walked through the streets of Arendelle to get to her bus stop. "I have to find the courage that somehow I don't have anymore. I have to be able to follow rules for once in my life, and I have to face my mistakes without defiance." She nodded, staring determinedly at the horse fountain she had found herself in front of. "And while I show them, I'll show me," she stated, splashing the horse with his own water.

Her good spirits returned, Anna-Maria marched off towards the bus. "Let them bring on all their problems," she challenged. "I'll do better than my best. I have confidence they'll put me to the test, but I'm make them see I have confidence in me." She boarded the bus, and her thoughts continued to race about what the day had in store for her. "I will be firm but kind, and all those children—heaven, bless them—they will look up to me and mind me," she decided.

The bus came to her stop, and Anna-Maria disembarked with vigor, stopping suddenly as her guitar got stuck in the doorway. Blushing slightly, she un-wedged it, stumbling a bit as she made her way down the stairs. Once she was outside, the bus closed its doors and drove away, and Anna-Maria waved at the driver enthusiastically. Turning down the gravel road, she spied the address she was looking for, and she skipped down the path towards it. "I have confidence; I have confidence," she repeated over and over to herself, completely believing it until she stood in front of the imposing gate that guarded the entrance to the magnificent, but forebodingly large house that stood behind it. "Oh help," she breathed.

Tucking her guitar under her arm, Anna-Maria reached for the gate's handle, and after turning it, she pushed the heavy gate open. Once she was inside, she backed up to shut the gate behind her, and she studied the house for a few seconds more before her confidence came back. "I have confidence in confidence alone," she declared, and in a fit of spontaneous emotion, she went running off towards the front door of the house, stumbling on the gravel a bit before stopping at the front door and ringing the bell emphatically.
The door opened as Anna-Maria caught her breath, and she straightened up as a white-haired older lady came into view. "Hello!" she chirped. "Here I am!" At the lady's puzzled look, Anna-Maria continued. "I'm from the convent," she explained. "I'm your new governess, Captain!"

A look of understanding passed over the older woman's face. "And I'm the old housekeeper, Fraulein," she said with wry humor twinkling in her eyes.

"Oh," Anna-Maria said embarrassedly, as a blush covered her cheeks. "Well, how do you do?" she asked, taking the other woman's hand and shaking it energetically while giving the lady one of her brightest smiles. The housekeeper's response was a raised eyebrow before she dropped Anna-Maria's hand and went back into the house. "Hm," Anna-Maria commented, picking up her things and following her.

The front door led to a white-tiled landing. To the left and right, graceful staircases wound upwards to the upper floors where intricate metal railings lined the outside hallways and where the bedrooms presumably lay behind the doors. In front of Anna-Maria, six steps with a grey carpet runner descended into a receiving area where white scalloped doorways and tall white doors promised parlors and sitting rooms behind their pale façades. Columns connected the bottom floors to the upper floors, and above it all was a crystal chandelier that sparkled with the intricate handiwork that it took to create it.

Anna-Maria looked around, her mouth dropping open at an opulence that she had never seen before. She had gone from being a farm girl to a potential nun, and neither one of those lifestyles ever came near the type of grandeur that she was seeing. "Uh, wait here, please," the housekeeper requested, looking at Anna-Maria quizzically as the dazed young woman followed her down the steps into the receiving area. The housekeeper went through a doorway off to the left, and Anna-Maria set her things down on the floor as she continued to look at the house in astonishment.

In spite of the housekeeper's admonition to "wait here", Anna-Maria found herself wandering deeper into the receiving area, looking in wonder at all the beauty around her. She looked into the doorway the housekeeper had disappeared into, but seeing nothing, the redhead twirled around and went to one of the doorways on the right, peeking through the crack to see what might be behind the door. Nothing was visible, and when her curiosity got the better of her, Anna-Maria opened one of the double doors to glimpse inside.

What she saw was a grandly appointed ballroom, and her mouth dropped open again as she stepped inside. Even with the poor natural lighting, Anna-Maria could tell it was magnificent, with elaborate paintings, sculptures, tapestries, mirrors and gold leaf covering the walls. It looked like a ballroom in a palace, and Anna-Maria gave into her temptation to curtsey to some invisible aristocrat. Next was a bow, and just as her head was nearest the ground, the door flew open, slamming against the wall and sending sunlight flooding into the room. Anna-Maria startled and stood up at once, her surprise and slight terror evident on her face.

A woman stood at the doorway, tall, fair and impeccably dressed in a grey suit. The blue lapels of her blazer offered some color to the ensemble, but the finely-tailored and severe cut of the coat and the matching skirt spoke of an authority that dared not be challenged. At the end of her impossibly-long legs were black heels, and even in the muted light that concealed some of her beauty, she was a goddess whose very presence rendered Anna-Maria speechless.

After a moment's awkward pause, the woman moved away from the doorway and Anna-Maria came back to herself. She smoothed down her dress as best she could and hurried across the ballroom to its door, skittering across the doorway nervously to stand back in the receiving area. "In the future," the aristocratic woman said sternly as she started to close the doors, "you will kindly remember that there are certain rooms in this house which are not to be disturbed."
Anna-Maria took a deep breath. "Yes, Captain. Yes ma'am," she stuttered. The Captain glanced her way before firmly shutting both the doors. The woman turned back to her, and Anna-Maria found herself unable to do anything but stare. Her blond, almost white, hair was painstakingly braided and coiffed into a bun that sat at the nape of her neck. Her eyes were blue, a deep but icy blue in a shade that Anna-Maria had never seen before but now found herself adoring. A few lines of age surrounded those eyes, but those were one of few indications that Captain von Trapp was any older than Anna-Maria herself. A quick survey of the Captain's body, a survey that Anna-Maria's traitorous eyes made without her permission, revealed a toned and trim body with perfect curves, and Anna-Maria quickly snapped her eyes back to the Captain's face before her wandering eyes could get her into any more trouble.

"Why do stare at me that way?" the Captain demanded.

Anna-Maria winced; apparently her too-long looks at been noticed. "You don't look anything at all like a sea captain, ma'am," she said truthfully.

The Captain's biting reply was immediate. "Well, I'm afraid you don't look very much like a governess," she countered with a false smile. Anna-Maria frowned briefly at the jab, and her jaw tightened almost imperceptibly at the polite insult. She was mere seconds away from speaking when the Captain spoke first. "Turn around please," she ordered.

"What?" Anna-Maria asked, perplexed.

"Turn," the Captain simply repeated, and Anna-Maria haltingly did as she was bid, not liking it but realizing that the military woman was doing what came naturally, namely inspecting her newest sailor.

Elsa regarded the young woman who was reluctantly pirouetting in her receiving room, taking in everything about her form and bearing. The young lady was a spitfire, of that there was no doubt. Her hair, though hidden underneath an unattractive hat, was fiery red, and from the little Elsa had seen, the potential nun had an attitude to match. Elsa felt a tug of something in her chest, and although she didn't like it, she had more than enough life experience to realize what it was: attraction and intrigue. Elsa found this young woman physically attractive, and she was spirited enough to be intellectually attractive as well, which made her instantly intriguing.

Only one other person had ever sparked her interest like that, Elsa mused as she continued to inspect, and that had been her husband Georg. Elsa Schrader, the 1st Baroness Schrader, had been headstrong and entitled from the moment she was born, a consequence of being the Queen of Arendelle's youngest granddaughter and the daughter of one of the country's most decorated naval captains. She was also a heartbreaker, leaving a trail of male and female suitors in her wake. She had to mature quickly when her parents died in an accident when she was eighteen, and her newfound maturity had led her to the Royal Navy.

Being a granddaughter of the Queen did have its perks, and Elsa started her career as a commissioned officer. Soon after she joined, the Great War started, and it was in some of these great battles that her reputation for intelligence and bravery was cemented. It was also in these circumstances that she met Georg, and the one-time heartbreaker had been instantly smitten. With the permission of the Queen, they had married when Elsa was nineteen, and within the year, she had become pregnant with her firstborn, Liesel. Elsa thought about resigning her commission, but Georg, ever incisive and empathetic, knew how much serving in the Navy meant to her and happily resigned his commission instead, becoming their household's caregiver.

After Liesel's birth, Elsa returned to the Navy, and when she did so, she took Georg's last name as a way of thanking him for all he had done for their family. She was under no obligation to do so,
but it only seemed right, and Commander Schrader became Commander von Trapp. Years passed and the war raged on, and with each passing battle, Elsa's military reputation only grew, especially since for many of the battles, Elsa had been pregnant. She and Georg had never quite gotten over the lust of their early years, so practically every time she was granted leave, Elsa was either giving birth or conceiving another child, sometimes both on the same leave, as was the case with Friedrich and Louisa and Kurt and Brigitta.

By the time the war had ended, Elsa was a Captain and she and Georg had seven children. Soon after the war's end and Gretl's birth though, Georg became ill, and the finest doctors in Arendelle could do nothing to save him. He died in Elsa's arms, and she was left with both a broken heart and with seven children who adored their father but who barely knew their mother. She retired from the Navy to care for her children, but she realized quickly that she was no parent. The only thing that had made sense to Elsa was for her to run her household like one of her ships, leaving any true nurturing to the myriad governesses that she had hired over the last three years.

None of them had been anything like what she saw before her eyes now though. The young woman was lovely, even in a hideous dress that did nothing for her form, and the feisty, rebellious attitude, though chafing to Elsa the Captain, was enticing to Elsa the Woman. Elsa sighed. "She's barely older than Liesel," she chastised herself. "And she's lived her entire adult life in a nunnery. Stop being a fool." Out loud, she gave another command. "Hat, off," she said, and her potential governess took off the ugly hat. Elsa took in a sharp breath. "It's the dress," she decided. "You'll have to put in another one before you meet the children."

"But I don't have another one," Anna-Maria protested. "When we enter the abbey, our worldly possessions are given to the poor."

"And what about this one?" Elsa inquired.

Anna-Maria glanced down at herself. "The poor didn't want this one," she admitted. Seeing the Captain's disapproving look, she continued. "Well, I would have made myself a new dress, but there wasn't time. I can make my own clothes," she finished proudly.

"Well, then I'll see that you get some material," Elsa stated, taking another long look at the unsightly dress. "Today, if possible." Elsa strode out into the middle of the room. "Now, Fraulein...," she paused, looking at the young woman whose name she realized she didn't know.

"Anna-Maria," Anna-Maria finished helpfully.

"Anna-Maria?" Elsa questioned.

"Well, um, my first name is Anna," Anna-Maria replied. "The 'Maria' part was added when I entered the abbey."

"Fraulein Anna, I don't know how much the Mother Abbess told you," Elsa began.

"Not much," Anna-Maria interrupted pointedly.

Elsa ignored her. "You are the 12th in a long line of governesses that have come to look after my children since their father died," she stated. "I trust that you will be an improvement over the last one. She stayed only two hours."

"What's wrong with the children, ma'am?" Anna blurted out, alarmed.

The Captain's glare was icy. "There is nothing wrong with the children," Elsa said coldly, her protective instinct flaring at once. "Only the governesses," Anna gave a huff of skepticism, but the Captain continued. "They were completely unable to maintain discipline; without it this house..."
cannot be properly run. Please remember that, Fraulein," she ordered.

"Yes, ma'am," Anna-Maria said at once.

"Every morning you will drill the children in their studies," Elsa said. "I will not allow them to dream away their summer holidays. Each afternoon, they will march about the grounds breathing deeply. Bedtime is to be strictly observed, no exceptions."

"Excuse me, ma'am, when do they play?" Anna-Maria asked in concern.

Elsa ignored the question. "You will see to it that they conduct themselves at all times with the utmost orderliness and decorum. I'm placing you in command," she finished.

"Yes, ma'am!" Anna-Maria replied with crisp sarcasm, even adding a salute.

Elsa looked at her in shock, but Anna-Maria only offered her a challenging smirk in return. Elsa frowned and then reached for her whistle, blowing a loud, sharp note. It was Anna-Maria's turn to be shocked, and she looked at the Captain with wide eyes and a slightly open mouth. Another long blast from the whistle started a stampede on the floor above her head, so Anna-Maria took cover under one of the balconies. Doors opened and shut, but within seconds, there was a lineup of children at the railings. Anna-Maria counted them, but there were only six, not seven, and there was a noticeable hole in the line.

Two whistle blasts caused the children to turn, and a series of them caused them to march down the staircase and stand in line. One last toot and they stood at attention, still only six of them and still with a noticeable gap. Behind them trailed a younger sibling reading a book. Elsa wordlessly held out her hand for the book, and her daughter handed it over. Sometimes it hurt to even look at Brigitta she was so much like her father, but Elsa managed a loving tap with the book as her daughter got to her place in line.

"Now, this is your new governess, Fraulein Anna," she stated, and the children gave Anna-Maria a sidelong glance. "When I sound your signals, you will step forward and give your name. You, Fraulein, will listen carefully. Learn their signals so you can call them when you need them." A series of blasts too quick for Anna-Maria to follow sounded, and one-by-one, the children introduced themselves. "Liesel, Friedrich, Louisa, Kurt, Brigitta, Marta," came out in rapid succession. The youngest child, a girl, stepped forward on her signal, but didn't give her name. "That's Gretl," Elsa supplied. She handed Anna-Maria a whistle. "Now, let's see how well you listened," the Captain requested.

"Oh, I won't need to whistle for them, Reverend Captain," Anna-Maria said, before realizing what she had said. She decided to press on. "I'll use their names. Such lovely names," she concluded in admiration.

Elsa sighed. "Fraulein, this is a large house, the grounds are quite extensive, and I will not have anyone shouting," she said tightly. "You'll take this, please. Learn to use it. The children will help you," Elsa stated, and Anna-Maria reluctantly took it. "Now, when I want you, this is what you will hear," she said, putting the whistle to her lips and playing a unique sequence.

Anna-Maria's outraged response was immediate. "No, ma'am; I'm sorry, ma'am," she shouted over the sound of the whistle. "I could never answer to a whistle. Whistles are for dogs and cats and other animals, but not for children and definitely not for me," she said indignantly. "It would be too...humiliating."

"Fraulein, where you this much trouble at the abbey?" Elsa asked in controlled exasperation.
"Oh, much more, ma'am," Anna said with earnest honesty.

Elsa nodded her head and dropped her whistle. She turned to leave, and she had only gotten a few paces away when a shrill blast sounded from behind her. She turned around in irritation, and Anna-Maria gave her a challenging, unapologetic smile. "Excuse me, ma'am, I don't know your signal," Anna-Maria said pleasantly.

Elsa glowered at her. "You may call me 'Captain'," she said, annoyed, glancing at Anna-Maria one more time before she left the room.

Anna-Maria watched her go, a small smirk of defiant amusement on her face as she put away the whistle she would never use. After she had left, the children began to giggle nervously amongst themselves; they had never seen anyone stand up to their mother like that. Anyone from the Navy deferred to her automatically because of her rank, and anyone from the general populace deferred to her because she was a Baroness and Her Majesty's granddaughter. Fraulein Anna didn't seem to care at all about either.

Anna-Maria stood before them, and the children instinctively straightened up and stood at attention. Seeing their still posture, Anna-Maria sighed a bit. "At ease," she said, figuring the military command would work, and it did. The children relaxed somewhat, placing their feet shoulders' length apart and clasping their hands behind their back. "Well, now that there's just us, would you please tell me your names, and how old you are?" Anna-Maria requested, signaling what seemed to be the eldest child, a girl.

"I'm Liesel," she said, stepping forward. "I'm sixteen years old, and I don't need a governess,"

"Well, I'm glad you told me, Liesel," Anna-Maria said with a hint of a smile. "We'll just be good friends."

She stepped back and her brother stepped forward. "I'm Friedrich," he said. "I'm fourteen, and I'm impossible."

Anna-Maria laughed. "Really?" she questioned. "And who told you that, Friedrich?"

"Fraulein Josephine, four governesses ago," he replied, and Liesel nodded in agreement as he stepped back.

The next daughter stepped forward. "I'm Brigitta," she said, not saying anything else about herself, even the age that Anna-Maria had asked for.

Anna-Maria's eyebrow rose. She knew this wasn't Brigitta; Brigitta was the dark-haired girl who had been reading when she came in. The blonde's little ruse was also being undermined by her siblings' not-so-subtle giggling. "You, um, didn't tell me how old you are, Louisa," Anna-Maria said with a smile on her face.

Louisa looked down, embarrassed to have been caught, as the real Brigitta stepped forward. "She's Louisa; I'm Brigitta. She's thirteen years old, and you're smart," the child complimented her. "I'm ten, and I think you dress is the ugliest one I ever saw."

Anna-Maria glanced at her dress as the younger boy spoke up. "Brigitta! You shouldn't say that!" he admonished.

"Why?" Brigitta challenged. "Don't you think it's ugly?"

"Of course," he answered. "But Fraulein Hilda's was ugliest." He stepped forward. "I'm Kurt; I'm eleven, and I'm incorrigible."
"Congratulations," Anna-Maria said cheerfully without missing a beat, causing Kurt to sputter in surprise.

"What? Incorrigible?" he clarified.

"I think it means you want to be treated like a boy because you act like a boy," Anna-Maria answered, and Kurt nodded in friendly agreement.

The second-to-youngest daughter stepped up to Anna-Maria, tugging on her pocket shyly. Anna-Maria looked down and smiled. "I'm Marta, and I am going to be seven on Tuesday, and I'd like a pink parasol," she said in a clear, sweet voice.

"Well, pink's my favorite color too," Anna-Maria fibbed. Blues and greens were typically her favorite colors, but the little girl was so sweet that Anna-Maria wanted to share something with her. The little girl stepped back, and the littlest girl stomped her feet in childish impatience. "Yes, you're Gretl," Anna-Maria acknowledge. The little girl held up five fingers. "And you're five years old?" Anna-Maria asked. Gretl nodded. "My, you're practically a lady," she said, causing Marta and Gretl to giggle.

Anna-Maria took a deep breath. "Now I have to tell you a secret," she confessed. "I've never been a governess before."

Judging from the sly, crafty looks that now came over the children's faces, that had been the exact wrong thing to confess, Anna-Maria decided. They gave her a few pieces of incredibly bad advice before Gretl shushed her older siblings. "Don't you believe a word they say, Fraulein Anna," she said, speaking for the first time.

"Any why not?" Anna-Maria prompted.

"Because I like you," she answered, and Anna-Maria smiled.

The white-haired housekeeper who had answered the door for Anna-Maria came bustling into the receiving area. "All right now, children," she said as she clapped her hands. "It's time to go outside for your walk, Mother's orders." The children quietly complained, but she turned them towards the door. "Quick, quick," she encouraged, and the children slowly shuffled off towards the door. "Fraulein... Anna?" she said, and Anna-Maria nodded. "I'm sorry I was so short before, but I'm Frau Schmidt, the housekeeper."

"How do you do?" Anna-Maria said politely, reaching out to shake her hand again, this time a little less enthusiastically then she had at the door.

"How do you do," Frau Schmidt responded, returning the shake this time. "I'll show you to your room. Follow me." She picked up Anna-Maria's bag as she started to climb the stairs, leaving Anna-Maria to grab her guitar.

Anna-Maria followed Frau Schmidt up the stairs, noting that the children seemed to be pausing at the front door. Just then her pocket started moving, and Anna-Maria realized why they hadn't left yet. She carefully set down her hat and guitar and reached into her pocket, drawing out a decent-sized frog. She looked at it, and it looked at her, and she rubbed its slippery head affectionately before heading down the stairs. She handed the amphibian to Friedrich. "Please make sure it gets back to its pond," she requested mildly, enjoying the dumbstruck look on the children's faces as she went back up the stairs to follow Frau Schmidt.

"You're very lucky," Frau Schmidt commented, frankly impressed at Anna-Maria's non-reaction. "With Fraulein Helga it was a snake."
"The Maker loves all creatures, great and small," Anna-Maria responded cheerfully, and she winked at the children as they walked out the door, disappointed that their prank had failed.

The family von Trapp sat around dinner table somewhat patiently as they waited on their new governess. Loud steps sounded out in the hallway, and they all turned as Anna-Maria appeared at the door. She stopped, smoothed down her dress and casually walked to her chair, even though she could feel the Captain's beautiful blue eyes watching every step. "Good evening," she said to the Captain. "Good evening," she repeated to the children.

"Good evening, Fraulein Anna," they said in unison.

Anna-Maria sat down without looking, and she jumped up immediately with a loud exclamation as something hard and pointy assaulted her backside. The children giggled, and looking down, she saw that it was a pine cone.

"Enchanting little ritual," Elsa said in polite annoyance. "Something you learned at the abbey?"

"No, um, it's um," Anna-Maria stammered, looking around at faces that expected her to tell on them. Knowing that would play right into their hands, she patted some feeling back into her posterior and brushed aside the pine cone. "Rheumatism," she lied badly, sitting down.

The children looked surprised, but everyone picked up their forks and began to eat. Anna-Maria looked around in disapproval before addressing the Captain. "Excuse me, Captain," she said. "But haven't we forgotten to thank the Maker?"

Elsa stopped chewing and rolled her eyes; she hadn't had much use for the Maker ever since Georg had died. But, their new governess was one of Her devoted disciples, so to be polite, she set down her fork. The children followed suit, and everyone folded their hands. Seeing as the Captain didn't seem to be clambering for the invocation even though she was the head of the household, Anna-Maria took it upon herself to give the blessing. "For what we are about to receive, let the Maker make us truly thankful, amen," she recited.

"Amen," the Captain intoned, her eyes never leaving Anna-Maria's.

"Amen," the children echoed.

As everyone started to eat, Anna-Maria spoke once more. "I would like to thank each and every one of you for the precious gift you left in my pocket earlier today," she said sweetly.

The children looked around nervously, and Elsa knew a pointed remark when she heard one. "What gift?" she inquired.

Anna-Maria glanced around at stricken faces. "It's meant to be a secret, Captain, between me and the children," she said, and the children breathed a soundless sigh of relief.

"Well then," Elsa said crisply, her deep irritation showing, "I suggest that you keep it a secret and let us eat."

Anna-Maria continued on blithely as though she hadn't heard a single word the Captain had said. "Knowing how nervous I must have been, a stranger in a new household, and knowing how important it must have been for me to feel accepted, it was so kind and thoughtful of you to make my first moments here so warm and happy and pleasant," she said warmly. Anna-Maria glanced up at the Captain and smiled, and Elsa smiled back with one of the most insincere smiles that
Anna-Maria had ever seen.

It didn't take long for Marta to start crying. Brigitta and Louisa followed shortly thereafter, as did Gretl and Kurt. Anna-Maria smirked a bit before focusing in on her dinner. Noticing that all of her children save two were crying their eyes out, Elsa turned to her new governess. "Fraulein," she said, and Anna-Maria focused her attention on her employer. "Is it at every meal or only at dinner that you intend to lead us all through this rare and wonderful new world of indigestion?" she asked acidly.

Anna-Maria glanced around. "Oh, they're all right, Captain," she assured the older woman. "They're just happy." Elsa scowled as a chorus of crying answered her words.

As all this was going on, a bicycle messenger rode up to the von Trapp mansion. Parking his bike near the door, the young man rang the bell, and Kai, the family's long-time butler, answered the door. "Ah, Hans, good evening," he said.

"Good evening, Kai," Hans replied. "I trust everything is under control?"

"Yes, yes," Kai assured him.

"Good," Hans answered.

Kai looked around him and stepped out of the house, shutting the door behind him. "Are there any developments?" he asked, stepping closer to Hans.

"Perhaps," Hans said coyly. "Is the Captain at home?" he asked,

"She's at dinner," Kai replied.

"With the family?" came the odd, slightly unnecessary question.

"Yes," Kai responded with a quizzical look.

"Please give her this telegram at once," Hans requested, handing him a small square of paper.

"Certainly," Kai agreed and went back into the house as Hans collected his bike and rode to his next appointment. Kai went straight to the dining room and handed the telegram to the Captain.

"Telegram for you, ma'am," he said.

Liesel looked at Kurt, and he silently encouraged her to ask. "Kai, who delivered it?" she asked. Elsa, engrossed in her telegram, merely grunted an approval. Anna-Maria looked at Liesel critically but said nothing, knowing she would just get herself into even more trouble.

"Children," Elsa announced after she had finished reading, "in the morning I shall be going to the Southern Isles."

The table broke down into a cacophony of childish exasperation. "Not again, Mother," was the phrase most often heard until a stern look from Elsa quieted them down.

"How long will you be gone this time, Mother?" Gretl asked plaintively.

"I'm not sure, Gretl, not sure," Elsa replied, pretending that the sorrowful tone had gone unnoticed.
Liesel got up to refill her water glass, and Louisa spoke up. "To visit the Baron again?" Louisa asked accusingly, and Friedrich shushed his sister frantically.

"Mind your own business," he hissed.

"As of a matter of fact, yes, Louisa," Elsa answered.

"Why can't we ever get to see the Baron?" Marta questioned.

"And why would he want to see you?" Kurt added.

Elsa put down her cake fork. "It just so happens, Marta, that you are going to see the Baron," Elsa informed her daughter. "I'm bringing him back with me to visit us all." Elsa took a breath and a sip of her wine. "And Uncle Olaf," she added with an eyeroll.

"Uncle Olaf!" the children said with excited happiness.

Well, whomever this "Uncle Olaf" was, the children seemed to adore him, mused Anna-Maria as she finished her cake and watched Liesel slip quietly out the door.
My Favorite Things

Chapter Notes

A/N: Just wanted to say thank you for reading and commenting/reviewing. :)

Liesel slipped out of the back door of the house and quietly shut it behind her. Grinning in delight, she pranced through the moonlit gardens, making her way towards their prearranged meeting place. "Hans!" she called as she came near the gazebo, and Hans stepped out from behind the tree. They embraced joyfully, as young lovers tend to do, but after a few moments, Hans pulled away. "No, Liesel," he said anxiously. "We mustn't."

"Why not, silly?" Liesel asked.

"I don't know. It's just that…" Hans stammered.

"Isn't this why you're here waiting for me?" Liesel asked shyly.

"Yes, of course," Hans answered. "I've missed you, Liesel."

"You have?" Liesel questioned. "How much?"

"So much that I even thought of sending you a telegram just so I'd be able to deliver it here," he said bashfully.

"Oh, that's a lovely thought!" Liesel said excitedly. "Why don't you? Right now?"

"But I'm already here!" Hans laughed.

"Please, Hans, send me a telegram," Liesel encouraged. When Hans looked at her perplexedly, she flounced away from him. "I'll start it for you," she decided, as she made her way to a stone bench. "Dear Liesel…" she began, sitting down.

"Dear Liesel," Hans echoed. "I'd like to be able to tell you how I feel about you. STOP. Unfortunately, this wire is already too expensive. Sincerely, Hans."

"Sincerely?" Liesel inquired pointedly.

"Cordially?" Hans offered, and Liesel turned her back to him.

"Cordially," she sniffed.

Hans tried again. "Affectionately?" he asked sitting down beside her, and Liesel turned his way once more, throwing out her arms and embracing him. "Will there be any reply?" he murmured into her ear.

Liesel thought briefly and released him to look him in the eye. "Dear Hans. STOP," she began. She smiled and then threw her arms around him once more. "Don't Stop! Your Liesel," she finished impishly. She embraced him for a few seconds more and her smile faded. "If only we didn't have to wait for someone to send Mother a telegram," she said wistfully. "How do I know when I'll see you again?"
"Let's see," Hans answered, rising from the bench to pace and think. "I could come here by mistake," he reasoned. "With that telegram for Colonel Schneider. Schrader and Schneider are close enough for it to be a reasonable mistake. He's here from Weselton, staying with…" Hans trailed off, knowing he had said too much. He looked at Liesel. "No one is supposed to know he's here," he admitted. "Please don't tell your Mother."

"Why not?" Liesel questioned.

"Your Mother's so, so Arendellian," he answered.

Liesel laughed. "We're all Arendellian," she replied.

"Well, some people think we ought to be Weselton, and they're very mad at those who don't think so," Hans stated. "In fact, they're getting ready to…well, let's hope your mother doesn't get into trouble," he finished vaguely.

"Don't worry about Mother," Liesel assured him. "She's a big naval heroine. She was even decorated by the Queen herself."

"I know," Hans said reassuringly. "I don't worry about her. But I do worry about her daughter."

"Worry about me?" Liesel asked. "Whatever for?"

"Well," Hans said. "You're such a baby!"

Liesel took almost immediate offense, but she decided to give Hans a way out before she got angry. "I'm sixteen," she informed him. "There isn't much 'baby' left in me."

Hans heard the snappish tone to her reply. "No, not a baby," he corrected. "You are definitely, um, mature. But your life is an empty page that men will want to write on."

"To write on?" Liesel echoed naughtily, leaning in much closer to Hans.

Hans leaned back, a little alarmed at her forwardness. "You are sixteen, going on seventeen," he reminded her, slowing leaning back to upright. "So it's time to think. You had better be wary, be canny and careful because fellows will fall in line, offering you anything and everything to make you choose them."

"Well, obviously," Liesel said dismissively, drawing closer to him. "I'm a Schrader-Von Trapp. My family is wealthy, titled and my great-grandmother is the Queen. If that weren't reason enough, Mother and Father were a stunning couple, and they made equally beautiful daughters."

Hans laughed. "Well, you have no shortage of your family's famous pride," he said affectionately. "But maybe you aren't as assured and proud as you appear. Maybe you are timid and shy of things beyond your ken. I think you need someone older and wiser telling you what to do. I am seventeen going on eighteen; I'll take care of you."

Liesel's haughty right eyebrow arched so high that Hans swore it disappeared. "Well, you are welcome to think that, sir," she said frostily. "But you would be wrong, stunningly wrong. I need no one to take care of me. Not you, not another one of those silly governesses that Mother keeps insisting on hiring, not even my mother herself. No one. Is that clear?"

Seeing her face, Hans backpedaled quickly. "I was only joking, Liesel," he pleaded, even though he had been halfway serious. Liesel turned away from him and he reached out for her hand. She took his, giving it a solid shake before she dropped it and marched back toward the house. Hans
reached out again, this time for her shoulder, and the apologetic look on his handsome face made Liesel soften a bit. She took his hand in hers as thunder rumbled in the skies over their heads. Drops began to fall and they made their way toward the covered gazebo that was a few steps away.

Once inside, they brushed off the drops that had fallen on their clothes. Liesel studied Hans briefly before speaking. "Yes, I am sixteen, going on seventeen, but I'm anything but naïve," she said. "I am sure there will be people that will tell me I'm sweet, but I know better than to believe until they've gotten to know me better."

"I know, Liesel," Hans said apologetically. "I was just trying to be the big, strong man who would protect you."

"I don't need one of those," Liesel said firmly. "My mother is one of the strongest-willed and most independent woman in Arendelle, and she taught me well. I don't need a protector. I need a best friend." Liesel's eyes grew wistful. "Mother and Father were the best of friends," she reminisced. "Only Father could ever make Mother laugh. They loved each other, and they loved us. I want some like that to share my life with, not someone who wants to take care of me."

"I will be whatever you want me to be," Hans promised. "Just allow me to be with you, to get close to you. Don't be too independent." Liesel looked at him and then smiled. "Dance with me?" Hans requested. "The storm makes for such lovely music." Liesel nodded and held out her hand.

Their dancing started out as a simple waltz, but soon they picked up the pace, using the whole of the gazebo to perform even more intricate steps. They twirled off benches and stepped in time with each other and the storm, the joy at being with each other showing in their faces. Hans spun Liesel in a circle and she laughed. Finally, after several minutes of spirited dancing, they broke apart and sat on benches opposite one another, panting slightly.

They both got up and spun, ending up facing one another at the far end of the gazebo. A brief pause happened, but then they both spun away from each other. Once again, though, they ended up facing each other, but once again, they spun away. After they had spun to face each other a third time, Hans decided to be bold. Just as Liesel was falling away again, he grasped her arms and kissed her full on the mouth. He smiled mischievously and then bolted for the outside and his bicycle. Liesel stood stunned for a few seconds before a smile spread across her face. She touched her lips in wonder and dazedly left the gazebo to wander back to the house.

Thunder rumbled outside seconds after the lighting crashed, and Anna-Maria hurried over to close her windows before rain could get into her room. There was a polite knock at her door, and Anna-Maria turned around from the window she was closing. "Come in?" she asked hesitantly. The door opened, and Anna-Maria smiled. "Frau Schmidt," she said warmly.

The older woman strode over, several bolts of material in her hand. "For your new dresses, Fraulein Anna. The Captain had these sent out from town," she explained, handing Anna-Maria the cloth.

Anna-Maria inspected the cloth admiringly. "Oh, how lovely," she said. "I'm sure these will make the prettiest clothes I've ever had," she said excitedly, and Frau Schmidt smiled indulgently. "Tell me," Anna-Maria continued, tucking the material under her arm. "Do you think that the Captain would order me some more material if I asked her?"

"How many dresses does a governess need?" Frau Schmidt asked with mild disapproval.
"Oh, not for me, for the children." Anna-Maria explained hastily as the other window in the room started to bang against the wall from the severity of the stormy wind. Frau Schmidt went to close it, and Anna-Maria continued to explain. "I want to make them some play clothes," she finished.

Frau Schmidt turned to her. "The Von Trapp children don't play; they march," she stated as she closed the window.

"Surely you don't approve of that?" Anna-Maria questioned.

"Ever since the Captain lost her dear husband, she runs this house as if she were on one of her ships again," she said sadly. "Whistles, orders; no more music, no more laughing. Nothing that reminds her of him, even the children."

"But that's so wrong!" Anna-Maria said, aghast.

Frau Schmidt shrugged, knowing there was little that could be done. "Do you like your room?" she asked, deftly changing the subject. Anna-Maria nodded and smiled enthusiastically. "I've ordered new drapes for the windows," she said.

"New drapes?" Anna echoed. "But these are fine."

"Nevertheless, new ones have been ordered," Frau Schmidt said.

"But I really don't need them," Anna-Maria protested.

Frau Schmidt politely ignored her. "Good night, now," she said warmly.

"Frau Schmidt," Anna-Maria said suddenly, stopping the housekeeper's exit. "Do you think I could ask the Captain tomorrow about the material?"

"Well, she's leaving for the Southern Isles in the morning," Frau Schmidt reminded the new governess. "Oh, yes," Anna-Maria murmured. "Well, how long will she be gone?"

Frau Schmidt glanced around nervously, making sure there was no one else in the hallway. "Well, that depends," she replied, "the last time she visited the Baron, she stayed for a month." She looked around again. "I shouldn't be saying this, not to you, anyway, seeing as I don't know you that well, but if you ask me, the Captain's thinking very seriously of marrying the man before the summer's over," she divulged.

"Oh, that would be wonderful!" Anna-Maria gushed. "The children would have a father again."

Frau Schmidt looked like she wanted to guffaw at the naivety, but she kept her response to a mild chuckle. "Yes, well, good night," she said, and she turned to leave.

"Good night!" Anna-Maria called after her, and shut her bedroom door.

Anna-Maria took off her robe and laid it on a chair before she knelt beside her bed to pray. She crossed herself and clasped her hands, beginning her nightly ritual of conversing with the Maker. "Dear Mother," she began. "Now I know why you've sent me here: to help these children prepare themselves for a new father, and I pray this will become a happy family in thy sight. Please bless the Captain, Liesel and Friedrich; please bless Louisa and Brigitta, Marta and little Gretl. And oh, I forgot the other boy. What's his name? Well, please bless what's-his-name," Anna-Maria concluded. "Please bless the Reverend Mother, Sister Marguerite, and everyone at Nordfell Abbey." Anna-Maria paused, sensing movement behind her. She turned to see a soaked Liesel.
tip-toeing across her room, a trail of water highlighting her path from the open window to the middle of the bedroom. Anna-Maria smirked. "Now dear Maker, about Liesel," she said. "Help her to know that I'm her friend, and help her to tell me what she's been up to."

"Are you going to tell on me?" Liesel asked anxiously.

"Shh," Anna-Maria chastised. "Help me to be understanding so that I may guide her footsteps. In the name of the Maker, the Daughter, and the Sacred Spirits, Amen," she finished, crossing herself as she named her Deities and crossing her arms to look at Liesel when she was done speaking.

"I was out taking a walk," Liesel explained hastily. "And someone locked the doors earlier than usual, and I didn't want to wake everyone up, so when I saw your open window…" Liesel paused, seeing the non-judgmental, almost-amused look on Anna-Maria's face. "You're not going to tell Mother, are you?" she realized.

Anna-Maria sighed and got up from her knees. She walked over to the window and looked down. "How in the world did you climb up here?" she asked, astonished at the distance between her window and the ground.

"The drainpipe," Liesel answered. "It's how we always get in this room to play tricks on the governess. Louisa can make it with a whole jar of spiders in her hand!" she said proudly.

Anna-Maria's eyebrow rose. "Spiders?" she questioned, and Liesel nodded enthusiastically. She sighed and made a mental note to check her bed later. "Liesel, when you were out there walking, were you all by yourself?" she asked. Liesel hesitantly nodded. Anna-Maria smirked. "So your sudden disappearance from dinner had nothing to do with that 'nice young lad Hans' that Kai mentioned was delivering the telegram?" she continued and Liesel's mouth dropped open.

"You're smarter than other governesses we've had," Liesel mumbled, looking down.

"Maybe just more observant," Anna-Maria replied with a smile. 'You know, if we wash out that dress tonight, no one would notice it tomorrow," she hypothesized. Liesel looked up and smiled shyly. "You could put this on," Anna-Maria continued, going to her wardrobe and pulling out a robe. "Take your dress into the bathroom and put it to soak in the bathtub. Come out here and sit on the bed, and we'll have a talk," she instructed, flipping on the light and leading the soaking wet teenager into the bathroom before exiting to give Liesel her privacy.

Liesel glanced down at the robe and looked back up at Anna-Maria. "I told you today that I didn't need a governess. Well, maybe I do," she said with a soft, shy giggle. Anna-Maria smiled at her and closed the door.

Anna-Maria went back towards her bed. Just before she climbed in, however, she glanced at the bedroom door, remembering what Liesel had said about spiders. She didn't really have a problem with one spider, but a whole jar of them was something else. She hesitantly flipped up the bottom of the comforter, but there was nothing there. A quick peek under the top also yielded nothing, so she breathed a sigh of relief and went to climb in. Just then, her door was flung open and a terrified-looking Gretl stood behind it. "Gretl?" Anna-Maria questioned. "Are you scared?"

The little girl shook her head, but another flicker of lightning and crash of thunder had her running for the safety of Anna-Maria's arms. Anna-Maria returned the embrace, and she knelt down to look Gretl in the eye. "It's okay to be afraid," Anna-Maria assured her, picking her up and sitting them both down on the bed. "You can just stay right here with me." A small voice in her head reminded her about the Captain's rule about bedtime, but Anna-Maria ignored it. Gretl needed comfort now, not rules. "Where are the others?" Anna-Maria asked.
"They're asleep; they're not scared," Gretl answered, burying her face into Anna-Maria's chest when the thunder crashed again.

With the crash, the rest of the Von Trapp girls, Louisa, Brigitta and Marta, appeared in her doorway. Anna-Maria chuckled, and tapped the top of Gretl's head. "No? Look," she requested, and Gretl looked up to see her sisters. "All right, everybody, up here on the bed," Anna-Maria ordered good-naturedly.

"Really?" Marta asked incredulously as they all ran towards the bed.

"Well, just this once," Anna-Maria decided, and all of the girls climbed in. "Now all we have to do is wait for the boys."

"You won't see them," Louisa pronounced. "Our brothers are terrified of girls." Another crash of thunder pealed and the girls hid. As it was ending, though, Louisa was proved a false prophet when the boys came running through the doorway.

"Well, apparently, they are more scared of the storm then they are of us," Anna-Maria hypothesized with a grin. "Are you boys here to join us?"

"Um, no," Friedrich stuttered, blushing slightly at her attention. Anna-Maria hid a smile at what appeared to be the beginnings of a crush. She would have to be careful with Friedrich so she didn't break his heart. "We just wanted to make sure that you ladies were all right," he explained.

"That's very thoughtful of you, Friedrich," she complimented him.

Friedrich blushed even further. "It wasn't my idea; it was Kurt's," he deflect.

Anna-Maria smiled. "Kurt! That's the one I forgot!" she said excitedly. "Please bless Kurt," she asked the Maker as more lightning flashed and thunder rumbled through the bedroom, causing the boys to jump on the already-crowded bed.

"Why does it do that?" Marta asked plaintively after it had passed.

"Well, you know how when you rub your feet on the carpet, you can touch someone and shock them? And how there is a little crinkle afterwards?" Anna-Maria inquired. The children nodded, all of them fans of this particular prank. "Well, that's what lightning and thunder are, only much, much bigger. The lightning is the shock, and it makes the air move so fast that it crackles. There is just so much shock and so much air that the crinkle is really big, and we call it thunder," she explained.

The explanation was simple to understand, but it didn't really make the noise any less frightening. The storm raged on, and the children hid their faces again. "Well, when anything bothers me, and I'm feeling unhappy, I try to think of nice things," Anna-Maria continued, coaxing the children into revealing their faces once more.

"What kind of things?" the children asked simultaneously.

"Well, let me see," Anna-Maria answered. "Nice things. Daffodils, green meadows, skies full of stars." She thought some more, remembering a song that her mother had sung to her long, long ago. "Rain drops on roses and whiskers on kittens," she said, speaking the line before singing the next. "Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens," she sang, and the children broke out into smiles at her sweet voice. "Brown paper packages tied up with strings; these are a few of my favorite things."
flipped the comforter back and continued the song. "Cream colored ponies and crisp apple
strudels; doorbells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles. Wild geese that fly with the moon
on their wings; these are a few of my favorite things," she sang, and the children slowly lost their
fear, paying more attention to her than to the storm. "Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes,
snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes; silver-white winters that melt into springs; these
are a few of my favorite things!"

The thunder sounded again, and the children cowered with it, but Anna-Maria rolled with it and
continued the song. "When the dog bites, when the bee stings, when I'm feeling sad; I simply
remember my favorite things, and then I don't feel so bad," she sang in conclusion, and the
children smiled and giggled.

"Does it really work?" Marta asked.

"Of course it does!" Anna-Maria said emphatically. "You try it. What things do you like?"

"Pussywillow!" Marta responded.

"Solstice!" Louisa added.

"Bunny rabbits!" Gretl offered with a giggle, and the rest of the children giggled with her,
grabbing pillows and smacking each other and Anna-Maria with them.

"Chocolate frosting!" Brigitta said.

"No school!" Friedrich replied.

Liesel emerged from the bathroom, coaxed to come out from all the noise she heard. "Pillow
fights!" Kurt said boisterously, throwing a pillow towards Liesel to prove his point.

"Telegrams!" Liesel answered, catching the pillow and throwing it back.

"Birthday presents!" Louisa said.

"Any presents!" Brigitta countered.

"Yes!" Anna-Maria agreed. "See what fun it is?" She began to sing again. "Raindrops on roses
and whiskers on kittens..." she started, hopping off the bed when the window blew open and
began to bang against the wall. She continued to sing as she closed it, and turning around, she saw
seven expectant faces. She smiled and went back to them and the bed, still singing.

Just outside the doorway, Elsa stood quietly watching the frivolity. It was much too early for her
to go to bed, and the sound of singing and laughing had been difficult to miss. She had come to
the room to see what the commotion was about, and she had been stopped dead in her tracks at the
sight of her children, smiling for the first time in ages and happy, listening rapturously to their new
governess. Elsa's heart had warmed at the sight; it had been so long since she had seen her
children truly happy, and she was truly happy to see it.

Elsa's eyes left her children to look at her new governess, and in spite of her heart's reluctance, she
felt something she hadn't in a very long time. It wasn't love; it couldn't be, not this soon, but it was
affection that she simply couldn't deny, an affection borne from Anna-Maria's interactions with
Elsa's unruly children. In spite of her assertion to Fraulein Anna that there was nothing wrong
with her children, Elsa knew of their mischievous ways, and she knew they had played their
pranks on Fraulein Anna. Frau Schmidt had told her about the frog, and Elsa had found the pine
cone lying on the dining room carpet after everyone had left the room. And yet, here Anna-Maria
was, singing to them, calming their fears of the storm as if none of it had ever happened. Such
kindness was rare, and it made a part of Elsa long to know more about this woman. Quickly, though, her mind rebelled against her heart. It had nearly killed her when Georg died, and she couldn't risk feeling anything like that again. The ice froze back into place, and she marched into the room, intent on castigating Fraulein Anna for breaking her rules.

Anna-Maria twirled around, playing with each of the children, "...these are a few of my favorite things. When the dog, ba, bites..." she stuttered to a halt, coming face-to-face with an ice-cold and stone-faced Captain. The children's eyes widened, and they ran to the other side of the room, getting quickly into their line. Anna-Maria glanced at the children and then at the Captain. "Uh, hello!" she perkily, gamely trying to pretend nothing was wrong.

"Fraulein, didn't I tell you that bedtime is to be strictly observed in this house?" Elsa asked coldly.

"Well, the children were upset by the storm, ma'am, I, I thought that I..." Anna stammered, trying to explain herself. Seeing it was having no effect on the steely gaze, she gave up. "Yes, you did, ma'am," she admitted.

"And yet you seem to have difficulty following such simple instructions," Elsa accused angrily.

"Only when frightened children are involved, ma'am," Anna responded tartly.

They stared at each other heatedly for a few seconds, but it was Elsa who ended up having to look away. The earnest anger in the governess' gaze made that damnable affection well up again, and Elsa had to turn away to maintain her poise. "Liesel," she barked, and Liesel jumped.

"Yes, Mother?" she replied.

"I don't recall seeing you anywhere after dinner," Elsa said coolly.

"Oh, really?" Liesel said as innocently as she could. "Well, as a matter of fact..."

"Yes?" Elsa prompted.

Liesel faltered and Anna-Maria came to her rescue. "What she would like to say, Captain, is that she and I have been getting better acquainted tonight," Anna-Maria explained hastily, and Liesel nodded enthusiastically. "But, it's much too late to go into all that," Anna-Maria said hurriedly. "Now children, you heard your Mother, go back to bed immediately," she encouraged, waving them towards the door and smiling at them all as they passed.

Now alone with the Captain and feeling vulnerable, Anna-Maria reached for her robe, using it to cover the somewhat thin material of her nightgown. That, of course, drew Elsa's attention to her governess' body, and she frowned as attraction joined the affection she was already fighting.

"Fraulein," Elsa began, "you have managed to remember that I am leaving for the Southern Isles in the morning?" Anna-Maria nodded. "Is it also possible that you remember that the first rule in this house is discipline?" she continued. Anna-Maria nodded again. "Then I trust that before I return, you will have acquired some," she concluded pointedly, turning towards the door.

Anna-Maria scowled after her, annoyed at the insult, before she remembered what she had wanted to ask the Captain. She knew it really wasn't the time, but she was already in trouble, and she figured one more request couldn't hurt her standing very much. "Captain!" she called, and Elsa turned back toward her. "I wonder if before you go, I could ask you about some clothes for the children," she stated. "For when they play, if I could just get some material."

Elsa rolled her eyes. "Fraulein Anna, you have asked questions about their playtime before," she said. "And as I have said before, their time is better spent doing other things."
"But they're children!" Anna-Maria protested.

"Yes," Elsa agreed. "And I'm their mother," she stated pointedly. "Good night." Elsa left, shutting the door behind her.

Anna-Maria stared after her in stunned outrage before flinging her robe away in anger and frustration. She took a deep breath to calm herself and then sat down in one of her chairs by the window. She stared out it, thinking, and absentmindedly, she undid the curtain to keep her hands busy. It fell before her eyes, and she studied it, remembering that Frau Schmidt had said these were to be replaced. She reached out to feel it, and she smiled. It was thick but not rough, and it would do nicely for play clothes. The next thought would be if she would have enough material for seven, but looking around the room, she saw she had six eight-foot lengths of curtain. She smirked and wrapped herself up in the green and white draperies. "I simply remember my favorite things, and then I don't feel so bad," she concluded with a defiant look towards the door.
A/N: Thank you for reading! I hope that everyone likes the chapter.

Anna-Maria opened the gate and gestured to the children to follow her out to the road, the skirt of her newly-made brown dress twirling as she turned back and forth to gesture. Her red hair was held back by a cream-colored handkerchief, and in her left hand she held her guitar. One by one, the children came out; Liesel was first, carrying one of the picnic baskets. Friedrich was next, and attached to his waist was a ball that could be thrown or kicked. Louisa followed him, and she carried another picnic basket. Kurt and Brigitta, the next two, carried a basket between them, and the little ones, Marta and Gretl, were the only ones empty handed.

Anna-Maria looked on proudly as her charges bounced out of the gate in happy excitement. There had been more than enough material, and now each child had a slightly different design of the same green and white fabric. The older girls, Liesel, Louisa and Brigitta, had proper dresses, but Liesel's had white cap sleeves, while Louisa's was sleeveless, and Brigitta's had a neckline ruffle. Marta had a dress-like top, but she had curtain-based short pants underneath, and Gretl's curtain allotment had been made into short-pant overalls that covered a yellow blouse. Friedrich looked dashing in his curtain-derived lederhosen, and Kurt's shirt and short pant set matched his siblings while giving him a style all his own. The children skipped down the road to the bus stop, and after closing the gate, Anna-Maria smiled and ran after them.

The bus brought them to the edge of Arendelle proper, and after they disembarked, they ran across the bridge that ran across the fjord. The children excitedly pointed at the ships that were sailing into Arendelle's harbor, and Anna-Maria smiled at them before pointing out the even more impressive ship that was sailing out of the harbor to places unknown. "That's Great-Grandmother's ship!" Brigitta exclaimed, and all of the children clustered around to see. Anna-Maria chuckled. Of all of the children, Brigitta was the most observant, and Anna-Maria was not surprised the young girl had noticed the royal crest.

"Come on!" Anna-Maria said cheerfully when the ship sailed out of sight, and the children followed her like little ducklings, except for easily-distracted Gretl who needed to be collected by Liesel.

They crisscrossed through Arendelle, looking at churches, fountains and frescos until they came to the open-air market. Being as it was summer, it was brimming with fresh fruits and vegetables, and Anna-Maria chose the one with best looking produce. She handed the stand owner a stack of coins, and with the children's help, she started picking out oranges and apples, as well as some tomatoes to be sliced for their sandwiches.

Anna-Maria looked at the children and decided to be playful. She grabbed two of the tomatoes and pretended she had no idea how to juggle them. The children laughed at her and her antics, so she winked at them, added another tomato and skillfully kept all three of the round globes circulating through the air until the children's eyes rounded in delight. She let the tomatoes fall at that point, catching all of them with a flourish. The children clapped and Anna-Maria took a bow. She carefully threw one of the tomatoes to Gretl, only for it to roll through her fingers and down her yellow shirt to splat on the ground. Gretl looked terrified, and Anna-Maria pretended to be
displeased by putting a stern look on the face. It lasted all of two seconds before Anna-Maria broke out into a wide smile, and Gretl shyly smiled back.

Their grocery shopping done and their lunch supplies complete, Anna-Maria and the children skipped along the path that led to the train that would take them up the North Mountain. Anna-Maria paid the conductor from the purse that Frau Schmidt had given her for expenses, and all of the children boarded the train excitedly. Anna-Maria followed, and the train began its slow ascent up the mountain. The children waved enthusiastically at the porter who remained at the bottom of the hill, and he good-naturedly waved back.

The train let them out near some of the prettiest meadows on the mountain, and Anna-Maria took a deep breath of contentment when she disembarked. It felt so good to be back up here, and it was even more special now that she had others to share it with. The children went running off through the wildflowers to find a good picnic spot, and smiling, Anna-Maria went running off to join them.

The picnic blanket was spread out, followed by the food, and all of them grazed happily as they soaked up the beautiful summer sun. After a while, the boys grew restless and rose, using the ball that Friedrich had brought with him to begin a game of catch. Brigitta and Marta rose as well, eschewing catch for picking wildflowers out of the grass around their blanket. Liesel and Gretl played cards, and Louisa, lacking any energy at all, merely lounged with her head on one of the picnic baskets, watching her siblings play. "Fraulein Anna?" she asked sleepily.

"Um-hum?" Anna-Maria acknowledged, looking at her with a gentle smile.

"Can we do this every day?" Louisa asked wistfully.

"Don't you think you would get tired of it, Louisa?" Anna-Maria challenged cheerfully.

"I suppose so," Louisa admitted. "Every other day?" she added impishly.

Anna-Maria laughed as Kurt ran past to fetch an overthrown ball. "I haven't had so much fun since the day we put glue on Fraulein Josephine's toothbrush," he said gleefully, and Anna-Maria's nose scrunched up in dismay.

"I have a good idea as to why, but I wish children as nice as you wouldn't play such awful tricks on people," she said disapprovingly.

"How else can we get Mother's attention?" Liesel replied, confirming Anna-Maria's hypothesis.

"Well, we will have to think of another way," Anna-Maria said firmly.

"Why?" Brigitta questioned. "None of our tricks worked on you anyway."

"That's not the point, Brigitta," Anna-Maria answered. "We have to think of a better outlet for your creativity, one that will hopefully get your mother's attention." She thought for a couple of seconds. "I have it!" she decided excitingly. "We will learn something to sing for the Baron."

"Mother doesn't like us to sing," Marta pointed out.

"Well, perhaps we can change her mind," Anna-Maria said hopefully, getting out her guitar. "Now, what songs do you know?"

"We don't know any songs," Friedrich said, putting his ball down and sitting on the grass in front of Anna-Maria.
"Not any?" Anna-Maria questioned, aghast.

"We don't even know how to sing," Louisa added, and Anna-Maria rolled her eyes at the hyperbole.

"Of course you know how to sing," Anna-Maria said with good-natured exasperation, sitting down on a large rock. "All the Maker's creations know how to sing. They may not sing well, but they know how to sing. I think what you mean is that you've never had formal singing lessons where you learn about harmony and scales and such."

"Yes, that's what she means," Liesel confirmed. "I received formal lessons, but so far I have been the only one."

"Well then, we must not waste any more time; you must learn," Anna-Maria declared.

"But how?" Marta asked.

Anna-Maria started strumming her guitar, and after she tuned it, she kept strumming as she talked. "Let's start at the very beginning," she said. "A very good place to start. When you read you begin with…" she prompted.

"A-B-C," Gretl helpfully supplied, and Anna-Maria nodded.

"When you sing, you begin with do-re-mi," Anna-Maria answered, singing the notes.

"Do-re-mi," the children dutifully echoed.

"Do-re-mi, the first three notes just happen to be, do-re-mi," Anna-Maria repeated.

"Do-re-mi," the children echoed once more.

"Do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do!" Anna-Maria finished. The children looked at her blankly, so she paused. "Hm, let's see if I can make it easier," she said. Remembering Sister Sophia's lessons, she recalled the tune the Choir Mistress had taught her, and she knew it would be perfect for teaching the children. She took a breath, and the magic of the North Mountain made her guitar sound like a whole orchestra as she began to sing. "Do, a deer, a female deer; re, a drop of golden sun; mi, a name I call myself; fa, a long, long way to run; so, a needle pulling thread; la, a note to follow so; ti, a drink with jam and bread; that will bring us back to do, oh, oh, oh."

Anna-Maria started the chorus again, and this time the children joined in with her. One by one they sang the notes, laughing and smiling as they learned something new. Eventually, Anna-Maria gave up playing the guitar and let them sing acapella, but they were having so much fun it seemed as though the music was playing on. The children got up and pulled Anna-Maria with them, singing the song and dancing around the meadow. It was only after they had exhausted themselves that they returned to the blanket, and it was only then that the music lesson concluded for the day. After a few more hours on the mountain, Anna-Maria and the children headed back down for home, but the children were humming to themselves all the way.

More summer days brought more outings, and with them the music lessons continued. Now confident that they knew their scales, Anna-Maria decided it was time to expand their learning as they wandered through Arendelle. "Now children," she began, "Do-re-mi-fa-so and so on are only the tools we use to build a song. Once you have these notes in your head, you can sing a million different tunes by mixing them up, like this: so, do, la, fa, me, do, re. Can you repeat that for me?"

"So, do, la, fa, me do, re," the children parroted.
"So, do, la, ti, do, re, do," Anna-Maria finished.

"So, do, la, ti, do, re, do," the children repeated.

"Now, put it all together," Anna-Maria instructed. "So, do, la, fa, me, do, re; so, do, la, ti, do, re, do," she and the children sang together.

"Good!" Anna-Maria praised, as she sat down on a bench on the path.

"But it doesn't mean anything!" Brigitta protested, sitting down beside her.

"So we put in syllables," Anna-Maria explained. "One syllable for every note, like this. When you know the notes to sing, you can sing most anything!" she sang, as all the rest of the children crowded on to the bench. "Together!" she encouraged.

"When you know the notes to sing, you can sing most anything!" the children sang, and Anna-Maria beamed with pride.

The next day found them riding their bicycles, and still the music lessons went on. That day's lesson was on harmony, and Anna-Maria used their bicycles' speed and position to mimic the layers of sound that a good vocal group could accomplish. The next lesson, on yet another day, taught them to listen to each other when they sang so that they could utilize each other's strengths. They were in a carriage, with the clopping of the horse's hooves and the noise of Arendelle around them, and they had to listen carefully. That had been Anna-Maria's intent all along, and the indulgent cab driver didn't seem to mind the presence of exuberantly-singing children in his cab.

Finally, after practicing daily ever since the visit to the North Mountain, the children put all of their lessons together in the most splendid place Anna-Maria could find. As members of the Arendellian royal family, the children were permitted on the palace grounds, and Anna-Maria had written to the Court to see if they might use Her Majesty's gardens for a picnic. The Court had agreed, even though Her Majesty had to send her sincere regrets about missing their visit, so Anna-Maria brought her charges to the Palace as a way of rewarding them for all of their hard work.

They had a splendid lunch courtesy of Her Majesty, and afterwards, they explored the grounds while working on their music. Anna-Maria couldn't keep the proud smile off of her face as the children sang beautifully, their notes true and their harmonies tight. They finished their song, and Anna-Maria hugged the children, tightly embracing each one in turn, congratulating them personally on their success. Caught up in their celebrations, none of them saw the older, yet regal figure that observed the group from her window, a contemplative smirk on her face.

AAAAAAAAAA

The open-top automobile turned off from the paved highway on to a well-kept gravel road. Sitting in the right hand driver's seat, Elsa took in a contented breath as she saw her beloved mountains and smelled the fresh, familiar scents of home. To her left, in the passenger seat, sat a broad-shouldered blonde man with dark brown eyes, and he smiled at her obvious joy at being home. "The mountains are lovely, Elsa," he said. "Really magnificent."

Elsa smiled, looking over at one of her oldest and dearest friends in the world. "I had them put up just for you, Kristoff," she teased with a sarcastic smile.

"I'm flattered," he teased back.

The older gentleman from the backseat decided to join the conversation. "Even at a height of
10,000 feet, Elsa always believes in *rising* to the occasion," Olaf joked, drawing groans from his traveling companions.

"Unless the jokes improve, Olaf, I'm taking back my invitation," Elsa warned, only partly joking herself. "I don't care if you *are* my father's brother."

Olaf chuckled. "You didn't invite me to your villa," he reminded her cheerfully. "I invited myself. It has been far too long since I have seen my wonderful nieces and nephews. Besides, I wanted a place to stay where the cuisine is superb, the wine cellar is exquisite and the price is, eh, perfect."

"Father always said you were a leech," Elsa muttered.

"At least I'm charming, and your children adore me," he offered, and Elsa scoffed with a resigned smirk. As they continued to drive, rich singing could be heard wafting through the countryside. Olaf stilled. "Listen," he requested, and Elsa turned her ear to the sound.

"It's the Nordfell Monastery Choir," she said, after listening for a moment.

"They're good," Olaf complimented them. "Very good. I shall have to explore this territory in the next few days. Somewhere there is a hardworking singing group that needs Olaf Detweiler to pluck them out of obscurity and make them famous at the Arendellian Folk Festival."

"They get the fame and money, and you get nothing; that's why you are always leeching off of your relatives," Elsa grumbled. Olaf blithely ignored her with a smile.

They continued to drive down the gravel road, and soon a copse of trees appeared on the right-hand side. Swinging from them was a group of children of various ages, all dressed in an odd green and white patterned material. They were yelling and hanging from the trees, and Kristoff's eyebrow rose in amusement. "Good heavens, what's this?" he asked.

"It's nothing; Just some local urchins," Elsa replied, before a spark of recognition flashed. Her eyes widened, but she shook her head. They had passed by far too fast, and she was mistaken. There was no way those could be *her* children.

They drove on, and within a few minutes, the three adults came to Elsa's estate. Frau Schmidt and Kai took care of the guests immediately, showing them to their rooms and handling their luggage. Olaf claimed hunger and went to the kitchen to get something to eat, but Kristoff and Elsa freshened up a bit before they met outside to stroll around the gardens. "This really is exciting for me, Elsa," Kristoff gushed. "Being in this beautiful place with you."

Elsa chuckled. "Trees, lakes, mountains; you've seen one, you have seen them all," she replied.

"That's not what I meant, and you know it," Kristoff chided.

"Ah, you mean me," Elsa deduced playfully. "*I'm* exciting."

"Is that so impossible?" Kristoff challenged teasingly.

"No, just highly improbable," Elsa answered.

"There you go, shooting yourself down again," Kristoff tutted.

"Well, I'm an excellent shot," Elsa said wryly, and Kristoff laughed before he enfolded the smaller woman into an embrace. She hugged him back, enjoying the feel of his strong arms. It was truly too bad that neither one of them had ever been the least bit attracted to the other. She and Kristoff had been the best of friends since their induction into the Royal Navy had made them classmates,
and they would have made an excellent couple, but there was no spark, no passion. There was only an easy friendship that the both of them treasured. Elsa knew that many in Arendelle and the Southern Isles expected them to marry now that their close friendship had become closer after Georg’s death, but they were never that type of couple, and they were never destined to be.

"You know, you are more like the real you when I see you here, Elsa," Kristoff said, as their hug ended and they resumed their walk.

"My natural habitat," Elsa said with a smile.

"Exactly," Kristoff agreed.

"Are you trying to say that I am more at home here, among the birds and the flowers and the wind that moves through the trees like a restless sea?" she asked with a smirk.

"How poetic," Kristoff gushed sarcastically.

"It was rather, wasn't it?" Elsa questioned wittily. "But to answer your question, am I more at home here than in the Southern Isles, at all your glittering parties, gossiping gaily with bores I detest, soaking myself in champagne, stumbling about trying to remember names of waltzes written by people I care so very little about? Is that what you're asking? Then yes."

Kristoff looked at her. "If you didn't want to come to my parties, you didn't have to," he chastised. "You know I love having you there, but you are always welcome to hide away until it is only me."

"I know," Elsa admitted. "I was only teasing you, Kristoff."

"I know," Kristoff replied with a smile. He turned to the river. "I do so like it here, Elsa," he said contentedly. "It's so lovely and peaceful. How can you leave it as often as you do?"

"By pretending that I always have some place else I have to be," Elsa replied jauntily, but her oldest friend could hear the sadness in her tone. "If you have some place to be, then you have a purpose."

"Do you have any place to be?" Kristoff asked gently. "Or are you just running away from memories?"

Elsa smiled sadly and nodded. "That, and perhaps just searching for a reason to stay," she admitted.

"So that's why you've been coming to my estate in the Southern Isles so often," Kristoff decided, and Elsa nodded again. "Well, I am always happy to be your distraction, my dear..." he said warmly.

"You were more like my savior, Kristoff," Elsa interrupted.

"You are giving me far too much credit, Elsa, but let me finish," Kristoff requested. "What I was going to say was that, while I am always happy to be your distraction, we need to find something else, someone else to distract you." He paused and a sly grin lit up his face. "So, what about this new governess that got under your skin so badly that I have heard of little else this trip? The one you have only known for what, only about a day?" he inquired knowingly.

Elsa glared at him. "I was giving you far too much credit, you wretch," she grumbled.

"And the lack of acknowledgement is more than enough confirmation," Kristoff crowed.
Elsa glared at him some more before she noticed Olaf had emerged from the house and was munching on something. She turned her back on Kristoff and went to meet Olaf on the terrace. "Still eating, Olaf?" she asked. "You must be unhappy."

"That marvelous mixed quartet I have been trying for weeks to represent for the Festival has signed with one of the most unscrupulous managers out there," Olaf huffed. "If there is one thing I dislike, it is a manager who takes advantage of his or her acts." He pouted some more, and then dug into the strudel he had brought with him from the house. "Oh, dear, I so like good food," he said, happily letting the food soothe his annoyance.

"I wonder where the children are?" Elsa asked, having finally settled in enough to notice the time.

"Obviously they must have heard I was coming and went into hiding," Kristoff joked.

Elsa frowned. "I was hoping they would be here to welcome you," she said, annoyed at Fraulein Anna and her deviation from the children's schedule. The children should have been marching about the grounds right now. "Please excuse me," she said to her guests as she went back into the house.

When she left, Olaf glanced in her direction, and then hurriedly left his seat. "Well?" he asked Kristoff.

"Well what?" Kristoff prompted.

"Did you find out more about her?" Olaf asked excitedly.

"Her who?" Kristoff replied, playing dumb.

"Her. The beautiful, frustrating governess we've been hearing so much about," Olaf answered.

"A little," Kristoff admitted. "And I know Elsa well enough to know that she is interested. But we have to be careful, or Elsa will shy away."

"Understood," Olaf said, nodding solemnly, before breaking out into excited giggles. "I'm so excited! After all this time, my stubborn niece actually might like someone again," he gushed. Kristoff glared at him, and the giggles subsided, but Olaf's grin remained.

AAAAAA

Hans pedaled up to the Von Trapp estate and circled around to the side, carefully putting his bicycle on the ground. He picked up a few stray stones and started to pitch them at Liesel's window, hoping that she was in her room and that he could get her attention. Elsa, still looking for Anna-Maria and her children, emerged from the house and heard the noise, turning her head to see the young man throwing rocks at her windows. She strode over to the railing. "What are you doing there?" Elsa demanded in loud, imperious voice, and she startled Hans so much he dropped his stones.

"Captain Von Trapp!" Hans said, coming to attention and saluting. "I was just looking for…I didn't see…I mean I didn't know you were ho…um, hail Weselton!" he finished, adding the Weselton salute. Hans' ramblings caught the attention of Olaf and Kristoff, and they came to join Elsa over on that side of the terrace.

"Who are you?" Elsa demanded, now furious. She despised any Arendellian that would support Weselton. Those weasels were trying to trade Arendelle's sovereignty for security, and she, a proud member of the Royal Navy and the Royal family, would fight to the death for Arendelle's
independence.

Hans knew he had made a grave mistake at the way the Captain's face darkened. "I have a telegram for Herr Detweiler," he said hurriedly.

"I am Herr Detweiler," Olaf said, stepping up.

"Yes, sir," Hans said, running up to hand the telegram to Olaf.

Elsa snatched it out of Hans' hand angrily, giving it to Olaf herself. "All right, you've delivered your telegram. Now get out," she stated coldly. Hans looked at her, his face growing angry before he retreated to his bicycle without a word. He picked it up and got on, pedaling his way off of the property.

"Elsa, he's just a boy," Kristoff reminded her.

"Yes, and I'm just an Arendellian," she countered.

Olaf, sensing the awkward tension, looked down at his telegram. "Um, I believe I'll go read this in the house," he decided, and he made a dash for the safety of the indoors.

Elsa sighed and leaned against the railing, her gaze turning deep and unfocused. "Hello," Kristoff said softly. "You just went so far away. Where are you?"

"Into a world that's disappearing, I'm afraid," Elsa answered distractedly.

"Is there any way I could bring you back to this one?" Kristoff asked with a small smile. Elsa smiled back, but before she could respond, a commotion from the river caught both of their attentions.

A boat came into view, and as Elsa left the railing and went down the steps of the terrace to the landing, she realized the boat held her children and their governess. She put her right hand on the landing's gate and the other hand on her hip, watching the revelry and listening to the boisterous singing with an unreadable expression. At just that moment, the children realized that their mother stood on the landing, and they all jumped up to shout greetings and welcomes with huge smiles on their faces. Anna-Maria did the same. "Oh, Captain, you're home!" she said happily, before the motion of eight people standing in the boat threw off everyone's balance and they ended up in the river.

Elsa's eyes widened as the boat tipped over, but her expression contracted into a resigned frown as they went into the drink. "Come out of that water at once!" she ordered, throwing the gates to the landing open.

The children splashed their way to the landing, and Anna-Maria grabbed the tether for the boat. "Oh, you must be the Baron!" she realized excitedly, waving to Kristoff. Kristoff started chuckling and waved back, but a stern look from Elsa made his hand drop. He also reduced his chuckles to a wide smile, but there was no way to take the smile away completely. He was going to have so much fun setting up his best friend with this redheaded spitfire.

The children climbed out of the water, excitedly chattering about how wet they were after falling into it. Elsa waited until all of them had climbed out before she blew her whistle. The chatter stopped instantly, and the children scurried into their line. "Straight line!" she barked. Elsa went down the line inspecting them, looking over their clothes carefully. She removed the head scarf from Louisa's hair, and then turned towards Kristoff. "This is the Baron von Groff," Elsa said, her voice tight with her displeasure as she looked down the line. "And these are my children," she told Kristoff.
"How do you do?" Kristoff asked politely, his friendly smile still in place. The children inclined their heads, careful to stay in their line.

"All right, go inside, dry off, clean up, change your clothes and report back here," Elsa ordered her children. "Immediately!" The children shuffled away, their sandals squishing on the pavement as they did so. Anna-Maria glared unapologetically at the Captain, contempt and exasperation exceedingly apparent on her fair features. Anna-Maria debated saying something but decided against it, instead sloshing by the Captain to join the children in the house. "Fraulein, you will stay here, please," the Captain demanded in her coldest tone. Anna-Maria stopped and turned back towards the Captain, her gaze turning more and more defiant the more she looked at Elsa.

Glancing at Elsa and seeing the anger there, Kristoff decided he really did not wish to be a part of the inevitable awkwardness and ensuring argument. "I think I'd better go see what Olaf is up to," he decided, hurrying off to the house before the war began.
A/N: Here is next chapter, and it is the one with my favorite song. I hope everyone likes it.

Anna-Maria breathed a small sigh and turned to face Elsa. Elsa calmly put her whistle back into her jacket pocket, snapping it closed with purpose before looking at her governess for a brief moment. Finally, she spoke. "Now, Fraulein," she began, "I want a truthful answer from you."

"Yes, Captain?" Anna-Maria prompted.

"Is it possible, or did I just imagine that my children were climbing trees today?" Elsa asked evenly, keeping her anger in check.

"No, it's completely possible," Anna-Maria answered cheerfully, with no embarrassment or remorse in her tone. "Your children were climbing trees today."

"I see," Elsa replied, her mind at war with itself about whether the response was infuriating or adorable. Elsa dangled Louisa's dripping-wet head scarf from her left hand. "And where, may I ask did they get these, um…" Elsa inquired, her distaste for the clothing evident in her disgusted look and her pointed pause.

"Play clothes," Anna-Maria helpfully supplied.

"Oh, is that what you call them?" Elsa asked condescendingly.

Anna-Maria ignored the remark. "I made them," she explained. "From the drapes that used to hang in my bedroom."

"Drapes," Elsa echoed with incredulity and contempt coloring her every word.

"The fabric still had plenty of wear left," Anna-Maria continued, purposely ignoring the upper-class outrage she could sense coming from the Captain at the choice of such common material. Feeling annoyed and feisty, the governess decided to poke the bourgeoisie bear even more. "The children have been everywhere in them," she finished proudly.

Elsa's face grew chilly. "Do you mean to tell me that my children have been roaming about Arendelle dressed up in nothing but some old drapes?" she asked indignanty, throwing the scarf to the terrace in anger, her royal blood boiling that the populace of Arendelle might have seen her children in anything but their finest.

"That they have," Anna said, nodding merrily. "And they've been having a marvelous time doing it."

"They have uniforms!" Elsa angrily pointed out, as she turned to walk back into the house.

"Straightjackets, if you'll forgive me," Anna-Maria muttered.

Elsa's scowl deepened. "I will not forgive you for that," she warned, turning back towards Anna-
Maria.

Anna-Maria realized she might have gone a bit too far, so she tried to explain herself. "Children cannot do all the things they are supposed to do if they are worried about ruining their precious clothing," she said, trying to keep her voice steady.

"I haven't heard them complain yet," Elsa challenged, and the mocking tone of her voice made Anna-Maria's temper snap.

"They wouldn't dare!" she said, her voice rising with her anger. "They love you too much. They also fear you too much."

"I don't wish you to discuss my children in this manner," Elsa stated firmly, trying to shut down the discussion before too much was said in anger, either by her or by Anna-Maria.

"Well, you got to hear it from someone," Anna-Maria answered, her anger taking over. "You're never home long enough to even know your own children, much less talk to anyone about them!"

Elsa knew that Anna-Maria's statement was true, and the knowledge caused the verbal arrow to pierce deeply. Now feeling wounded and trapped, Elsa's anger started to control her. "I said I don't want to hear anymore from you about my children!" she said, the volume of her voice rising to reach the same volume as Anna-Maria's.

"I know you don't, but you've got to!" Anna-Maria stated, emphatic both in her statement and in her volume. The vehemence of her governess' statement stung Elsa, and her angry retort died on her lips. Anna-Maria sighed, calming herself before she took the opportunity Elsa's temporary silence afforded her. "Now take Liesel," she began cautiously.

"You'll not say one word about my daughter," Elsa warned, pointing her finger at Anna-Maria for emphasis before turning away.

Anna-Maria, too fired up to listen or care, ignored her. "Your daughter is still a child, but one of these days, you'll wake up and find she's a woman. You won't even know her! And Friedrich, he's a boy, but he wants to be a proud sailor like you and there's no one to show him how!" Anna-Maria shouted.

"Don't you dare tell me about my son!" Elsa demanded, turning back towards Anna-Maria.

"Brigitta could tell you about him if you'd let her get close to you," Anna-Maria countered. "She notices everything. And Kurt pretends he's tough so he doesn't show how hurt he is when you brush him aside the way you do all of them."

"Fraulein, that will do," Elsa said, her tone low and warning, her anger about to boil over into rage.

Anna-Maria pressed on. "Louisa I don't know about yet," she admitted, "but someone needs to find out about her."

"I said that will do!" Elsa interrupted, but once again, Anna-Maria showed no signs that she had actually heard anything.

"And the little ones just want to be loved," she finished. "Please, Captain, love them. Love them all," the governess pleaded, coming up to stand close to Elsa.

Elsa turned away quickly, walking away from Anna-Maria. The governess' sincere care for her children, her righteous anger on their behalf, and the stinging truth of Anna-Maria's words about
her deficiencies as a mother were unleashing a torrent of emotions, and they were threatening to overwhelm the Captain. Once she was far enough away, she spoke. "I don't care to hear anything further from you about my children!" she stated with finality.

"I don't care; I am not finished yet!" Anna-Maria countered, and Elsa's patience snapped.

"Oh, yes, you are, Fraulein," she said, her voice lowering almost to a growl in her rage. "Now, you will pack your things this minute and return to the abbey."

Anna-Maria's face fell. Her temper and proclivity for saying what she felt had gotten her in trouble once again, and once again, she had failed at something. She took a deep breath, planning to say something to the Captain. What, she didn't know; an apology, maybe, even though she wasn't sorry; a defense of what she had said, perhaps; or maybe just a request to say goodbye to the children. Anna-Maria didn't get the chance to say anything, though, as they both caught a tune wafting out from the house. "What's that?" Elsa asked, her emotions settling a bit.

Anna-Maria listened. "It's singing," she replied absentmindedly, distracted and sad about being asked to leave.

Elsa sighed and rolled her eyes. If she had thought Anna-Maria was being sarcastic, she would have yelled some more, but the young nun's tone indicated she was merely answering Elsa's question. "Yes, I realize it's singing," Elsa said in mild exasperation. "But who is singing?"

"The children," Anna-Maria replied truthfully.

Elsa looked towards the house. "The children?" she echoed, an unreadable expression on her face as she looked back towards Anna-Maria.

"I taught them something to sing for the Baron," Anna admitted, knowing that the Captain disliked the children singing, and thus probably disliked her even more now. Elsa looked back towards the house, pausing for just a moment before marching off with her heels clacking on the terrace. Anna-Maria watched her go with a sad frown.

Elsa pushed open the door and strode in, following the sound of singing to the parlor. She slowed her pace as she came closer; she didn't want to startle the children or disturb their singing. She merely wanted to observe and listen. Just outside the doorway, she stopped, peering in as her children sang about their hearts wanting to beat like the wings of the birds that rise from the lake to the trees. Her children sang another stanza, and the familiar words of the old song started to come back to her. It was an Arendellian favorite; practically everyone in the country had heard it as a child, and they taught it to their children as a part of tradition. Elsa had learned it from her father, and Georg had taught the words to Liesel. Now Anna-Maria had taught the song to the rest of her children in her late husband's stead, and Elsa was perceptive enough to understand the significance of that. But before she could get lost in her thoughts, another stanza caught her attention. "To laugh like a brook when it trips and falls over stones on its way," her children sang, and Elsa found herself singing along.

"To sing through the night, like a lark who is learning to pray," she sang, coming into the room as her volume grew louder. Completely astonished, the children stopped singing, looking at each other in trepidation, so Elsa kept singing, her beautiful but rarely-heard mezzosoprano ringing throughout the room. "I go the hills, when my heart is lonely. I know I will hear, what I've heard before. My heart will be blessed..." she sang, holding the note, and she smiled when her children snapped out of their surprise to provide accompaniment. Anna-Maria had taught them well, apparently. "...with the sound of music. And I'll sing...once... more," she finished, unaware that Anna-Maria had silently come up to the doorway and was now watching her with a mix of surprise and hope.
There was a brief, awkward pause before Elsa hesitantly and stiffly reached out for her children. They hesitated, but then all of them responded at once, and Elsa found herself being enveloped by seven pairs of arms. She hugged back, fiercely, and for the first time in forever, they finally felt like a family again.

From their places in the parlor, Kristoff and Olaf looked on in happiness. They had heard the women quarreling before the children had come down and started singing, and for the most part, they had agreed with everything that the young governess had said. Apparently something had gotten through, because strict, emotionless Elsa looked like she was about ready to cry, and she was hugging her children as if her very life depended on it.

Anna-Maria smiled in relief as she looked down. Something within had told her there was a warm-hearted mother under the cold Captain façade, and Anna-Maria was proud that her music lessons had allowed that part of Elsa to be revealed. Anna-Maria noticed that some of the children, Kurt in particular, still looked a little apprehensive, like this was some sort of weird trick or dream. To Anna-Maria's joy, Elsa caught the look, pinched him and laughed, causing Kurt to laugh, and the apprehension was broken.

Gretl, being on the outside of the huddle, saw Anna-Maria at the door and looked over to her governess. Anna-Maria gestured towards the Baron with two of her fingers, and Gretl nodded, wiggling free from the rest of the group. She presented the Baron with a bunch of small white flowers, accentuating the gift with a small, polite curtsey. Kristoff laughed, lifting the little girl on to his lap and into a hug. "Edelweiss!" he exclaimed happily. "I love edelweiss." He turned to Elsa, who was still surrounded by her remaining children. "You never told me how enchanting your children are," he scolded good-naturedly.

Elsa looked at her children with pride before realizing that the person most responsible for this moment was missing. She looked towards the door, and saw Anna-Maria watching happily from the doorway. Anna-Maria froze, and her smile faded from her face at being spotted. She was supposed to have been on her way back to the abbey by now. Thinking she was in trouble, Anna-Maria quickly hurried past the doorway and up the stairs. Within seconds, Elsa realized why her governess had fled, and the contrite Captain knew she had to stop her. "Wait here," she told the children. "Don't go away." They all nodded, suddenly concerned, and Elsa rushed out of the parlor.

Anna-Maria had just started climbing the stairs when a quiet voice stopped her. "Fraulein," Elsa said gently. Anna-Maria went up a couple more steps, undecided about how to respond, before she stopped completely and turned back towards the Captain. Elsa took a breath. "I…behaved badly," she said apologetically. "I apologize."

Anna-Maria looked at her, not quite believing what she was hearing, but the Captain seemed sincere, so Anna-Maria gave her sincerity in return. "No, I'm far too outspoken," Anna-Maria admitted. "It's one of my worst faults."

"Not when you are right," Elsa disagreed. "And you are. I don't know my children," she confessed quietly.

Anna-Maria frowned in sympathy before her natural optimism kicked in. "There's still time, Captain," she encouraged with a hopeful smile. "They want so much to be close to you."

"We'll see," Elsa demurred. "But, I did want to say thank you for bringing music back into the house. I had forgotten." The Captain didn't mention what she had forgotten, but the look she was giving Anna-Maria made the governess happy and a little nervous all at once. Her heart started beating a little faster, and not knowing what else to do, Anna-Maria blushed and started to walk
back up the stairs. "Fraulein," Elsa said, stopping her again. "I want you to stay," Elsa stated, trying to ignore the way her heart was silently and unashamedly pleading for Anna-Maria to say yes. "Please stay," she requested simply.

Anna-Maria's beating heart sped up at the intent but vulnerable look on the Captain's beautiful face. There was no way she could refuse that face, so she didn't. "Of course I'll stay," she answered, and Elsa smiled in relief. "Just let me know how I can help," Anna-Maria requested.

Elsa's smile faded, and she looked at Anna-Maria with another unreadable expression, the second Anna-Maria had seen that day. "You've already helped far more than you know," Elsa said cryptically before she offered Anna-Maria a small, reassuring smile and went back to the parlor.

Anna-Maria stood there stunned, her mind trying to puzzle out the Captain's odd statement. After a few moments, though, she gave up. Happiness was taking over now that she had been asked to stay, and she couldn't focus. Her face spread out into a wide grin, and she skipped up the stairs to get out of her wet clothes.

Over the next few weeks, the family adapted to a new routine. It was true that Elsa had thawed somewhat, but she was still Captain Von Trapp, and the changes came slowly. The children's schedule tightened back up from its carefree Anna-Maria style, and they went back to having lessons in the morning. Anna-Maria being Anna-Maria, though, made those lessons fun, and the children minded them less than they had before. On the other hand, afternoons changed completely, as "marching about the grounds breathing deeply" was replaced by play time, music lessons, and occasional picnics to the North Mountain. Anna-Maria always sought out the Captain and asked her to join them, but in the beginning, the Captain politely declined. Then Anna-Maria hit upon the idea of sending Marta and Gretl to ask, and the adorable girls managed to persuade their reluctant mother. Now more often than not, Elsa joined them for music, and Anna-Maria felt odd flutters in her chest and stomach every time that sweet mezzo filled the room after the children had somehow managed to convince the Captain to sing.

For her own part, Elsa was immensely enjoying the changes. Her house felt like a home again, and her family was an actual family rather than a collection of parts. Elsa knew that the credit for that belonged to Anna-Maria, and the affection that had been there from the very first day started to blossom into love. Still fearful after losing both her parents and Georg, Elsa tried to stop it, avoiding the governess when she could in an attempt to stop her growing feelings. But, fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you looked at it, Anna-Maria was always with the children, and Elsa was desperate to be with them, so she was spending a lot of time with Anna-Maria too. Spending more time with her only confirmed how truly special the governess was, and Elsa knew her don't fall in love plan was doomed.

Kristoff and Olaf knew it too, and they subtly encouraged it the best they could. Along with Elsa, they were always asked to join in the afternoon activities, but unlike her, they always accepted. When Elsa joined them, they were stealthy love experts, trying to gently push the women together. It was obvious that Anna-Maria loved Elsa's singing, so they would join the children in pleading for the Captain to sing. Elsa seemed to enjoy Anna-Maria's laugh, so Olaf would constantly be joking and teasing her to make her giggle.

The routine came to a slight halt at the beginning of one week. Elsa, Kristoff and Olaf were sternly, but lovingly and politely, told that they were no longer welcome to join the music lessons, and they were banished from the ballroom in which the lessons were taking place. All of three of them protested, but all three of them knew that it probably had something to do with the puppet show that had been delivered to the house the previous week. So, they did as they were asked, and after two weeks of banishment, Kurt and Brigitta delivered handcrafted invitations to their mother, the Baron and their Uncle inviting them to the world premiere of *The Lonely Goatherd*. 
Performance time came, and with Kristoff and Olaf already seated, Elsa peeked behind the miniature stage. She was promptly yelled at, so she covered her eyes and tiptoed away. When she was safely away from the stage, her hand fell away from her eyes, and she made a shushing gesture towards Olaf and Kristoff. Elsa started clapping as she took her seat, prompting the men to follow her example, and the show started to the sound of raucous applause.

In the rafters of the miniature stage, four of the seven children plus Anna-Maria prepared their puppets. On the stage level, Marta was in charge of the main curtain and scenery changes on the right, while Gretl was responsible for ancillary characters on the left. Louisa was a roamer, switching between left and right or upstairs depending on where her character was at a given moment. "Marta!" Anna-Maria whispered. Marta looked up. "Curtain!" Anna-Maria said in a louder voice. Marta dutifully pulled the cord, and the main curtain slid open.

A blond-haired goatherd puppet was lowered onto the stage, and Anna-Maria started singing. "High on a hill was a lonely goatherd, lay-ee-oh-dee-lay-ee-oh-da-lay-hee-hoo," she began, with the puppet's mouth opening and closing in time with her singing, even on the song's distinctive yodel. "Loud was the voice of the lonely goatherd, lay-ee-oh-de-lay-de-oh-da-loo," she continued, and Brigitta, Liesel, and Kurt lowered their puppet goats to the stage for her puppet to herd. "Folks in a town that was quite remote heard, lay-ee-oh-dee-lay-ee-oh-da-lay-hee-hoo," Anna-Maria singing, maneuvering her puppet to pet the goats. "Lusty and clear from the goatherd's throat heard, lay-ee-oh-de-lay-de-oh-da-loo."

The children joined in the singing, yodeling along with her as their puppet goats pranced about. The scene ended, and Anna-Maria stage-yelled for Marta. "Marta!" she called. Marta was too busy singing to hear her, so she yelled again. "Marta!" she called a little more forcefully. Marta gasped and pulled the cord, changing the scenery to the castle scene. "Gretl! The Prince!" Anna-Maria whispered to the other side of the stage, and the little girl dutifully pushed the prince out onto the stage.


"Men drinking beer with the foam a-float heard…" she began, but Marta impishly decided to blow the fake foam in her face and she sputtered on the yodel.

A side panel to the stage opened and a puppet polka band started playing as the song continued. "One little girl in a pale pink coat heard, lay-ee-oh-dee-lay-ee-oh-da-lay-hee-hoo," Anna-Maria sang.

"She yodeled back to the lonely goatherd, lay-ee-oh-de-lay-de-oh-da-loo," Brigitta sang, having been given the solo amongst the children.


"What a duet for a girl and goatherd, lay-ee-oh-de-lay-de-oh-da-loo" the children concluded.

The show went instrumental for a bit, with the goatherd, the girl in the pink coat and her mother dancing off stage, while dancing puppet couples replaced them. Elsa, completely charmed and delighted by the music and her children's talent, laughed, and Kristoff and Olaf joined her. The principal characters returned, and the children and Anna-Maria yodeled in every increasing
harmony and complexity. Elsa sat back and allowed herself to listen. Anna-Maria had a lovely, enchanting soprano, and Elsa was become as fond of it as she was of every other part of her governess.

The final scene came, and Louisa went to the top to help. It was basically a repeat of the third stanza, but now the background was the same mountains it had been in the beginning. Anna-Maria gestured to Marta and the mountains came into view, and instead of human puppets, the lonely goatherd, the girl and her mother were now goats. He and the girl in the pale pink coat fell in love once more, but this stanza had an extra verse. "Happy are they, lay-dee-oh-lay-dee-lee-oh, oh-lay-dee-oh-lay-dee-lay-ee-ee-oh," everyone sang, as Anna-Maria put down the final puppet.

"Soon the duet will become a trio, lay-dee-oh-de-lay-dee-oh-dee-low," the baby goat that sounded suspiciously like Anna-Maria concluded.

Anna-Maria and the children sang a few more yodels, finishing with an emphatic "wooh!", and Elsa broke out into applause before giving them all a standing ovation. "Bravo!" she shouted as her children appeared from out behind the stage with curtseys and bows. Kristoff and Olaf joined her, calling out bravos and compliments. The children all beamed, and Elsa went up to the stage to give them kisses and hugs.

Gretl happily accepted her hug and kiss before running up to her Uncle Olaf. "May we keep the puppet show, Uncle Olaf?" she asked, and her siblings added their voices to the pleas.

"Of course, you may, my darlings," he assured them. "Why else would I have told Professor Pabbie to send the bill to your mother?" The children squealed, and they happily followed Olaf out of the room, chattering to themselves about their next production. Elsa rolled her eyes, but she managed a wry smile.

Anna-Maria, still in the rafters of the puppet stage turning off lights and securing things, heard the children's laughter, and it made her smile. Looking around and being satisfied with what she saw, she descended the stairs to find the Captain and the Baron still waiting for her. "Well done, Fraulein," Elsa said warmly, and Anna smiled at her. "I am really very, very much impressed," Elsa told her sincerely, and Anna-Maria's smile grew embarrassed.

"They're your children, Captain," Anna-Maria said, deflecting the praise. They looked at each other affectionately for some time, until they both came to their senses and realized Kristoff was still in the room. There was an awkward shuffle on both their parts, and Kristoff hid his grin. These two were way too adorable and obvious for their own good, he decided.

He took Elsa's offered arm, his mind plotting. "My dear, is there anything you can't do?" he asked rhetorically, trying to showcase Anna-Maria's almost perfection to Elsa. Elsa glared at him, and he smiled at her charmingly.

"Well, I'm not sure I'll make a very good nun," Anna admitted unexpectedly, and Elsa chuckled in surprise.

"Then maybe the Maker has different plans for you," Kristoff offered, jumping when Elsa pinched him roughly.

The three other adults joined Olaf and the children just as Olaf was making an announcement. "Attention!" he said. "Attention everyone! I have an important announcement to make. Surprise, surprise, today, after a long and sometimes fruitless search, I have finally found a most exciting entry for the Arendelle Folk Festival."

"Congratulations, Olaf!" Elsa congratulated him facetiously. "Who will be exploiting you this
Olaf merely laughed at her obvious disapproval. "I have made a much better choice this year," he said.

"Tell us," Liesel pleaded.

"A singing group all in one family," Olaf said, with a playful smirk on his face. Friedrich and Louisa looked at one another, already knowing where this was going, as did Anna-Maria and Kristoff. Elsa had an inkling, and she wasn't happy about it.

"What a charming idea," she said suspiciously. "Whose family?"

"Yours," Olaf confirmed with a happy grin. "They'll be the talk of the festival."

Elsa laughed derisively. "You're funny, Olaf," she complimented him sarcastically. "Expensive, but very funny."

"But you heard them. They'll be a sensation!" Olaf protested, as the whole group left the receiving hall and entered the parlor.

"No, Olaf," Elsa said firmly, and the children groaned with disappointment.

"It's a wonderful idea!" Olaf insisted. "Fresh, original."


"Well, you can't blame me for trying," Olaf shrugged, disappointed but hopeful that Elsa would come around and see how wonderful it would be.

Anna-Maria felt the positive energy of the puppet show dissipating into annoyance and dissatisfaction, so she decided to rapidly change the subject. "Children!" she said, clapping her hands to get their attention. "Who shall we hear a song from next?" she asked, starting the nightly ritual of ending their day with music. Liesel had an idea, and she whispered it to Anna-Maria. Anna-Maria looked doubtfully at Liesel, but after the oldest daughter had shared her idea with her siblings, they all nodded. Anna-Maria shrugged, picked up her guitar and did as they asked. She walked over to the Captain, holding out the guitar. "The vote is unanimous; I guess we picked you, Captain," she said with a smile.

"Me?" Elsa questioned, looking around at the expectant faces of her children. "I don't understand."

"Please," Anna-Maria requested, knowing that this was unusual. It was usually her or one of the children that sang.

"Well, I am very honored, but I will have to say no," Elsa said, smiling at everyone to ease the sting of rejection, as she went to go sit down.

The children and Anna-Maria followed her. "But we have heard you in our music lessons; you are a wonderful singer," Anna cajoled. "And I've been told that a long time ago, you played the guitar very well."

"Well, that was a very, very long time ago," Elsa answered, sitting down.

The children sat down surrounding her. "I remember, Mother," Liesel said. "Please play for us." Her younger siblings echoed the plea for Elsa to play, and at last she reluctantly took the guitar
"Well, if you insist," she said, positioning her hands on the guitar. She strummed a few bars to get the feel for it again, and when she was comfortable, she played a song that the children were sure to know. "E-del-weiss," she started, and the children smiled, instantly recognizing the national anthem of Arendelle. Elsa smiled back at them as she looked around the group. "Edelweiss, every morning you greet me. Small and white, clean and bright, you look happy to meet me," she sang, and at the word "happy", she glanced over at Anna-Maria. The governess brightened at seeing the Captain's look, and her smile deepened; without thought, Elsa's smile deepened to match. Kristoff and Olaf, sitting on a couch opposite to them, looked at each other and smirked. Even when the Captain looked back towards her children, the loving gaze on Anna-Maria's face remained, and the men were now convinced she shared Elsa's feelings. "Blossom of snow may you bloom and grow, bloom and grow forever. Edelweiss, edelweiss, bless my homeland forever," Elsa sang, the notes on the guitar true and the notes of her voice clear.

Elsa repeated the verse, and at her mother's prompting, Liesel jumped in to provide accompaniment and harmony. Anna-Maria wasn't hearing a note of the music or a word of the lyrics, though. The Captain was focused on Liesel, so Anna-Maria could watch her without being noticed, and oh how she looked. Anna-Maria lost herself in the beauty of the Captain, seeing the sparkle in her blue eyes as she sang, and watching the light glint off her white-blond hair as she turned her head to look around. When Elsa reached the last line of the song, she looked up towards Anna-Maria, and Anna-Maria realized she had been caught staring. Her breath caught in her chest.

Elsa had felt Anna-Maria's eyes on her for most of the song, but she focused on the children, knowing that she had almost given herself away on her first glance, and that she would give herself away if she dared look a second time. The lovely face and body, those beautiful blue-green eyes and those freckles were going to be her undoing, especially if Anna-Maria kept wearing dresses like the pretty ice-blue one she was currently wearing. It was only on the very last line of the song that Elsa dared look, and she saw how Anna-Maria was looking at her. Her breath escaped with the last note of the song, and it was some time before she drew another, saved only by the delighted clapping of her children.

"Say the word Elsa, and you can be a part of the group," Olaf said, after Elsa had put down the guitar. Elsa merely rolled her eyes at him.

"I have a wonderful idea, Elsa," Kristoff announced, getting up from the couch. "Let's really fill this house with music. You must give a grand and glorious party for me while I'm here."

"A party?" Elsa questioned, considering it. The children voiced their approval, resulting in a cacophony of young voices. Anna-Maria shushed them.

"Yes, I think it's high time that I met all of your civilian friends here in Arendelle, and they met me. Don't you agree?" Kristoff asked.

Elsa couldn't think of a reason to refuse, so she shrugged. "I can see your point," she admitted.

The children's voices grew loud with their approval, so once again, Anna-Maria gently corrected them. "Children, it's time to go to bed," she told them. "Come now, say good night."

The children groaned in annoyance, but they all did as they were told. They kissed their mother goodnight and politely wished the Baron and their Uncle Olaf the same. They excitedly followed one another out of the parlor, eager to go upstairs to start talking amongst themselves about the party. Anna-Maria followed, and Gretl, the last to leave, turned around to face her mother as she left. "It'll be my first party, Mother!" she said excitedly, almost tripping over her own feet as she
went to bed.
The night of the party came, and by the time night had fully descended, a small ensemble played in the gilded ballroom that Anna-Maria had stumbled upon on her first day with the von Trapp family. Now open and brightly-lit, as it was meant to be, the marvelous room welcomed the guests of Captain von Trapp, while on its dance floor, couples twirled elegantly to an instrumental version of "My Favorite Things." The song wouldn't have been Elsa's first choice for a sophisticated ball, but her children had insisted, and the sheet music had been given to the musicians with little fuss. Out in front of the house, a charming collection of old and new vehicles, mostly cars with some horse-drawn carriages mixed in, made their way around the semi-circular driveway and dropped their high-class passengers off at the entryway. From the entryway, guests entered into the foyer, where after descending the stairs, they were formally greeted by the Captain and the Baron. From there, the guests were free to join the other guests already in the ballroom, or they could simply roam about the house and grounds enjoying themselves.

From her place in the foyer, Elsa looked around with sophisticated grace as she charmingly and politely welcomed her guests and introduced them to the equally-charming Baron von Groff. For her next guest, though, mere politeness would not do, so Elsa carefully grasped the edge of her sparkling blue gown and curtseyed deeply. "Your Majesty, you honor my house with your presence," she said, giving her grandmother the respect she deserved as the monarch of Arendelle.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Elsa," the older woman chastised with an affectionate eyeroll. "Please do get up. I told you when I accepted your invitation that I was attending as your grandmother, not as your queen."

"Yes, but I can still give you the respect you deserve," Elsa countered, rising. The older woman held out her arms, and Elsa automatically went into them, giving her grandmother a vigorous hug. "Oh, how I've missed you, Nana," Elsa murmured. "It has been far too long."

"That it has, dear," the Queen agreed. "But I hear you've been rather busy lately, hm?"

Elsa looked at her grandmother with a puzzled expression. "I hesitate to ask, but in what way have I been busy, Nana? And who informed you of my supposed busyness?" she asked with suspicion.

The Queen glanced at the long line. "We will talk later, Elsa," she replied, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. Taking her eyes off of Elsa, she fixed the man standing next to her granddaughter with a glare. "I may have relieved my granddaughter of her formal obligations, but I do not remember giving any such dispensation to you," she said tartly, though a wry grin could be seen peeking its way through.

Kristoff coughed. "Of course, your Majesty, please forgive my impudence," he said hastily, bowing as deeply as he could.

"And whom might you be?" the Queen asked pointedly.
"Baron Kristoff von Groff, your Majesty, late of the Southern Isles," he answered with another bow.

"I know of your family, and of your friendship with my granddaughter; you seem forthright, and you come from good, kind people," she said, and Kristoff was relieved that he had seemingly passed inspection. "However," the Queen added in a tone that he had to strain to hear, "if you come between my granddaughter and that delightful governess that I have seen and heard so many good things about, I will personally make sure that you and my dungeons become well-acquainted."

Kristoff blinked and then stared the Queen. Her polite smile remained, but there was a frost in her ice-blue eyes that was deadly. "Never, your Majesty," he said back, quickly and quietly. "In fact, I have spent most of my time here devising ways to bring them together."

The frost melted at that statement. "Well done, young man," the Queen complimented him before moving away towards the ballroom. Kristoff breathed a small sigh of relief that the scrutiny was over, only to suck it back in when he saw the next guest in line. It was the Duke of Weselton, a person that he suspected Elsa only invited because it would have been improper not to.

Elsa smiled politely at the Duke, and her tone was cordial as she welcomed him and introduced him to Kristoff, but inside her deep loathing for the man churned through her body. This was the weasel who wanted to take over Arendelle, to join her beautiful country with his abysmal one, all in the name of security. He was gaining support, too, and Elsa did not want him anywhere near her house or her children, but propriety was propriety, and she had invited him. Thankfully, he quickly kissed her hand genteelly, shook hands with Kristoff and then removed his repugnant self from her presence.

The Duke looked around the house, impressed by the beauty and the obvious show of wealth, but a bit angered by the prominent Arendellian flag displayed in the foyer. He frowned and then made his way into the ballroom, spotting a colleague. "I supposed you noticed the obvious display of the Arendellian flag in the hallway?" he questioned, and his companion grimaced as he shook his head yes.

The couples continued to dance, and the curious von Trapp children peeked in from the terrace doors. They had never seen this room open and active, and it delighted them all, especially when they saw their great-grandmother come into the room. They wanted to call out to her, but they knew such a thing would be impolite, so they refrained. The Queen quickly noticed them, though, and she weaved her way through the crowd to greet them. "Hello, my darlings!" the Queen exclaimed, embracing them one by one. They hugged her back with vigor. "My, how big you have all gotten!" she said, looking over them with pride. "I wanted to come see you when you were practicing at the palace some weeks ago, but I was detained. I did watch you and your new governess briefly from the window, though. You all seem to like this one," she concluded.

"We do, very much, GeeGee," Liesel confirmed.

"We want Mother to marry her," Marta added with a child's candor.

The other children looked stricken that their hidden wish had been revealed, but the Queen just laughed sweetly. "Don't we all, sweetheart," she agreed. "Don't we all. If this party is any indication, she's been good for your mother."

"Because of Fraulein Anna we sing again, GeeGee!" Gretl told her with excitement.

"And I hope to hear you sing someday soon, my loves," the Queen replied.
"You will tonight, GeeGee," Louisa said. "Fraulein Anna has written a song for us, and we will be performing it later."

"Then I look forward to hearing it," the Queen said sincerely. She looked around and gave them all a kiss on the forehead. "Well, my darlings, I can't be impolite. I must join the party," she said, honestly regretful. "I will see you at your performance." The children echoed her goodbye, and the Queen glided back into the ballroom.

The children continued to look into the ballroom. "The women are so beautiful," Brigitta said.

"I think they look ugly," Kurt disagreed.

"You just say that because you're scared of them," Louisa countered.

"Silly, only grownup men are scared of women," Kurt retorted, and Louisa rolled her eyes.

"I think the men look beautiful!" Gretl piped up.

All of her siblings chuckled indulgently. "How would you know?" Louisa challenged with a smile on her face. Gretl didn't reply, but haughtily returned her gaze to the dancing.

Growing tired of watching the dancing, Liesel wandered away from the doorway and out onto the terrace. She looked surprised when an invisible suitor, who in her mind's eye was Hans, asked her for a dance. After looking around to make sure he was asking her, Liesel said yes to the imaginary Hans and curtsied before putting her arms on his transparent shoulders. Her antics caught the attention of Brigitta, who wandered over herself when Liesel began dancing to the music. "Liesel? Who are you dancing with?" Brigitta asked, puzzled.

"Nobody," Liesel responded, still dancing.

The talking got Friedrich's attention, so he turned around and noticed his older sister dancing by herself. Overcoming his teenage proclivity to not do anything embarrassing, he decided to be nice and come over so that she would have a partner. "May I have this dance?" he asked with a bow.

"I'd be delighted, young man," Liesel replied with a curtsy and a smile, and the two of them began to dance.

Anna-Maria picked just that moment to emerge from the hedge-lined path that opened up on the other side of the terrace. She watched them for a few moments before a wide smile spread out over her face. "Why didn't you children tell me you could dance?" she demanded good-naturedly.

Liesel chuckled and Kurt stepped up. "We thought you would make us all dance together. The von Trapp family dancers," he said, emphasizing his answer with a twirl. His siblings all laughed at him, but they were distracted by a familiar, yet unfamiliar melody coming from the ballroom. They turned around as one and went back to the terrace doors.

"What's that they're playing?" Gretl asked.

"It's the Laendler," Anna-Maria replied. "It's an Arendellian folk dance."

"It sounds a lot like The Lonely Goatherd," Brigitta pointed out, familiar with the tune after all of their practicing for the puppet show.

"As it should," Anna-Maria agreed. "When a tune becomes popular, people like to add words to it, and that's what happened to create our song. Sometimes doing that can even create a national anthem."
They looked at the couples performing the intricate steps, and suddenly Kurt was struck by an idea. "Show me," he requested. "Show me the steps."

"Oh, Kurt, I haven't danced that since I was a little girl," Anna-Maria demurred.

"Oh, you'll remember. Please?" he asked in a pleading tone, complete with a pout, and Anna-Maria gave in.

"Oh all right, come on over here," Anna-Maria answered, ruffling his hair and leading him to the middle of the terrace. "Now you bow and I curtsey," she began, and mirroring the people in the ballroom, she and Kurt did just that.

"Like this?" Kurt questioned.

"Exactly," Anna-Maria assured him. She took his hand, and they stood side by side. "Now we are going to go for a little walk. This way," she explained, showing him the steps as she counted them out. "One! Two, three. One! Two, three," she counted, taking larger steps on the one and smaller steps on her toes on the two, three.

As they were finishing the step, Kristoff, standing in the doorway of the ballroom, noticed the motion on the terrace. He turned around, watched briefly, and then gestured to Olaf who came over to look. "I'm going to ask the Fraulein to dance," he whispered to the shorter man as they watched. "I need you to get Elsa out here so she can see the two of us dancing."

"For what purpose?" Olaf asked quizzically.

"Jealousy, my good man," Kristoff responded with a smirk. "I wager Elsa will not take kindly to seeing Fraulein Anna in my arms. Maybe it will finally motivate her into doing something."

Olaf smiled. "I like this plan," he stated, before disappearing into the crowd. Kristoff smiled and adjusted his gloves.

Meanwhile, the dance lesson still continued on the terrace. "Now step together," Anna-Maria instructed, turning them so they were facing each other. "Step, hop; step, hop; now turn under," she continued, trying to turn them but Kurt's shorter arms made the motion awkward. They managed to get facing one another again, and the step, hops went well, but the turn under went awry once again. "Kurt, we'll have to practice," Anna-Maria laughed, not knowing that Kristoff had stepped up behind her.

"Do allow me," he requested, and Kurt agreeably got out of the way. Anna-Maria smiled at him as he offered his hand. She genuinely liked the Baron, and she was more than happy to dance with him, even though she wished it was the Captain who had asked her to dance.

Kristoff was a good dancer, Anna-Maria mused. He was smooth with his steps and graceful, and in spite of her protestation to Kurt, Anna-Maria remembered the steps quite well, so she matched him step for step. They made an elegant couple, and most of the children were looking at them in delight. One child was not, though, and that was Brigitta. She liked the Baron more than she thought she would, but she loved Fraulein Anna. Through her careful observations, she could tell Mother was falling in love with Fraulein Anna as Fraulein Anna was falling in love with Mother. The Baron had better not mess that up, or she would rally her siblings and find a way to drive him from the house like one of their old governesses, she thought darkly.

Anna-Maria was thoroughly enjoying herself as they glided around the terrace, but her mind kept coming back to her desire to be dancing in the Captain's arms. If she ignored the broad chest and the bulky arms, she could almost pretend that the tuxedo that the Baron wore wasn't a tuxedo at
all, but rather the dress uniform of the Arendellian Navy. The children had proudly shown Anna-
Maria a picture of the Captain in her full dress uniform, her medals gleaming off her chest as the
perfectly-tailored coat and pants complimented her body flawlessly. Anna-Maria's own body had
responded immediately in such a visceral way that it had shocked her, and the image had been
burned into her mind. It was this image, and not the true identity of her dance partner, that made
the dance very enjoyable for the young governess.

Kristoff danced around her and stood before her with his back to her as the steps of the dance
called for. He noticed Olaf and Elsa making their way towards the terrace doors, and he grinned.
One of the more intimate parts of the dance was coming up, and if seeing Fraulein Anna and
himself that close did not make Elsa jealous, then nothing would. Just about the time he saw Elsa
come to a displeased halt in the doorway, he felt a hand on his shoulder, exactly where and when
it should be. He led Fraulein Anna to stand before him, and their hands clasped. Lifting their right
hands, Kristoff gently twirled Fraulein Anna, and when she stood to face him once more, their
right hands went back in the air. Kristoff's left hand went around her waist to draw the governess
closer, and Anna-Maria put her unoccupied hand behind her back to clasp his hand. Another
series of twirls brought them even closer together, and before Anna-Maria had realized it, their lips
were almost touching. Her fantasy evaporated, and she came back to herself in an instant, her
mind and body rebelling at having someone not the Captain that improperly close. She dropped
her hand and backed away quickly. "I don't remember anymore," she lied breathlessly, her cheeks
red.

Brigitta stepped up, looking at Fraulein Anna critically. "Your face is all red," she said accusingly,
not liking the way her governess had seemingly been enjoying her dance with Kristoff.

"Is it?" Anna-Maria asked, her hands coming up self-consciously to her cheeks. She glanced over
and saw the Captain looking at her with a cold, dispassionate gaze, and her heart sank. It was
obvious that the Captain shared Brigitta's displeasure, and Anna-Maria's heart was breaking. "I
don't suppose I'm used to dancing," she mumbled quickly.

"Well, that was beautifully done," Elsa said bitingly, coming up to the couple. Her outward visage
was cold and reserved, but inside, Elsa was seething. Jealousy was the main emotion coursing like
molten lava through her veins, but anger at Kristoff, heartbreak at Anna-Maria's affection for him,
and fear that she was losing Anna-Maria were present as well. "What a lovely couple you'll
make," she said with venom before she could stop the remark. Knowing she was close to losing
her temper, Elsa took a small breath to calm herself before she continued. "I think it's time the
children said goodnight," she told Anna-Maria much more calmly.

Even though her heart was distraught at the Captain's words and actions, Anna-Maria put on a
happy face for the sake of the children. "Um, yes, we'll be in the hall in a moment. We have
something very special prepared, right?" she asked excitedly, clapping her hands.

"Right!" the children all chorused, and Anna-Maria led them out the rear entrance to the terrace.

Elsa and Kristoff watched them leave, and Kristoff offered Elsa his arm. She refused coldly, and
he scratched the side of his head. "It's suddenly chilly out tonight, isn't it?" he asked slyly.

"I don't know; it seemed rather warm to me," Elsa retorted with frost in her voice.

"Before you rip my head off and serve it to the guests at your party, answer me one thing, Elsa,"
Kristoff said calmly, making Elsa turn sharply to look at him. "All I did was ask a beautiful,
unattached woman to dance. Why are you so angry right now?"

"Because I love her," Elsa snapped, her anger and jealousy making her careless with her words.
"And you know I love her. You aren't even attracted to women, Kristoff. How in the world could
you be so unkind to me?"

Kristoff’s smile threatened to split his face in two, and Elsa realized what she had just said. Her hand flew to her mouth in dismay, causing Kristoff to chuckle with delight. "And thus I have ensnared the mighty Captain von Trapp," he said proudly. Elsa glared at him. His smile softened at her look, and he looked at his best friend with unabashed affection. "You are my favorite person in the world, Elsa," he said sincerely. "I could never be unkind to you. I just wanted to show you how much she means to you, and how foolish you are being by not telling her so."

Elsa pondered that, and her face relaxed. "I still dislike you rather intently at the moment," Elsa told Kristoff gruffly, her glare fading.

"No, you don't," Kristoff disagreed with a smile, and Elsa begrudgingly smiled back.

The conversation would have continued, but an announcement from the entryway captured everyone's attention. "Ladies and Gentlemen," Anna-Maria's voice called. "The children of Captain von Trapp wish to say good night to you." The partygoers followed the sound of her voice, and soon the guests were assembled in the hall just below the entryway steps, with Elsa, Kristoff and the Queen in front. The children organized themselves like they had practiced, with Liesel on the top stair, Friedrich and Kurt two steps below her, Louisa one step below them, Brigitta and Marta one step below her, and finally Gretl being on the bottom step. Their music started, and they all clapped their hands behind their back and started to sing.

"There's a sad sort of clanging from the clock in the hall, and the bells in the steeple too," they sang. "And up in the nursery an absurd little bird is popping out to say 'cuckoo'." As they sang the word "bird", Louisa stepped in front of Gretl, and the boys stepped in front of Marta and Brigitta. The three younger girls echoed the "cuckoo" by popping their heads out from behind their older siblings, and the crowd, including Elsa, Kristoff and the Queen, were completely charmed, and they all laughed. "Regretfully they tell us, but firmly they compel us, to say goodbye…to…you," the children concluded.

The children came down from the stairs, and after a few choreographed marches, they ended up in a line with Marta on one end and Gretl on the other. They turned to face the crowd, and the song opened up its second movement. "So long, farewell, auf Wiedersehen, goodnight," they sang, waving and bowing/curtseying in unison. Marta stepped forward and sang her line. "I hate to go and miss this pretty sight," she concluded, and various motions by her siblings behind her in the line ended with her getting a gentle kick in the seat of her pants.

That was her cue to leave, so she did, and the remaining von Trapp children sang the opening line again. "So long, farewell, auf Wiedersehen, adieu," they sang. This time Friedrich stepped forward. "Adieu, Adieu, to you and you and you," he sang with an incline of the head on each "you". The motions from the line repeated themselves, and after his kick in the pants, Friedrich exited up the stairs.

"So long, farewell, auf Wiedersehen," they sang, drawing out the auf Wiedersehen this time. Liesel stepped forward. "I'd like to stay and taste my first champagne," she sang. "Yes?" she hopefully asked her mother standing in the front.

"No," Elsa replied with a smile and a shake of her head, and the crowd chuckled. Liesel pouted as she was kicked off stage.

"So long, farewell, auf Wiedersehen, goodbye," they sang, and now it was Kurt's turn. "I leave, and heave, a sigh and say goodbye. Goodbye!" he sang, hitting a very high note on the last goodbye with his impressive boy soprano. Elsa looked at him mock-chidingly for his sassiness and then shooed him off to bed to the laughter of her guests.
For the next two children, Brigitta and Louisa, there was no opening chorus, and they went directly into their lines. "I'm glad to go, I cannot tell a lie," Brigitta sang, and from her place at the side of the room, Anna-Maria smiled at her sweet sincerity.

"I flit, I float, I fleetly flee, I fly," Louisa responded, and the girls did a few basic dance steps before exiting up the steps.

Gretl followed them and sat down on the bottom step. "The sun, has gone, to bed and so must I," she sang, laying her head on the step above her. She pretended to go the sleep, eliciting "awws" from the audience. Liesel came down to get her, and the children started singing the last chorus.

"So long, farewell, auf Wiedersehen, goodbye," they sang, as Liesel picked up Gretl and brought her up to the rest of her siblings. "Goodbye," they continued, moving up the stairs and down the upper balcony towards the nursery. "Goodbye," they repeated as they slowly made their way. "Goodbye," they said once more as they disappeared behind the door, and Elsa looked around in amusement when the crowd around her sang back their goodbyes and waved.

"They are extraordinary! What they would do at the festival!" Olaf gushed to whichever party guest was standing closest to him. He spied Anna-Maria accepting some compliments from guests before trying to inconspicuously make her way up to the nursery, so he threaded himself through the crowd and gently clasped her by the arm. "Fraulein Anna!" he said. "I must have a word with you." He guided her over to Elsa over her protests, and he tapped Elsa on the shoulder. Elsa, who was receiving congratulations and compliments from guests, turned to face them both, and Anna blushed, still regretting the dance with the Baron that caused things between her and the Captain to be awkward. "Elsa," Olaf said, breaking into Anna-Maria's thoughts. "You're not going to let this girl get away. She has to join the party!" he insisted.

"No, really, I need to see to the children," Anna-Maria protested, wanting to get away from the Captain and her piercing, almost accusatory look.

"No, you don't," Olaf disagreed. "I insist; you'll be my dinner partner."

Elsa looked at Anna-Maria, her face still unreadable. "You can if you want to, Fraulein," she said evenly, betraying nothing.

Anna-Maria tried one last excuse. "But I'm not suitably dressed," she pointed out.

"Then go change," Elsa replied. "We'll wait for you." She turned back to her guests, and out of excuses, Anna-Maria nodded her agreement and headed up the stairs.

Elsa finished with the people she was talking to, and she smiled as her grandmother stepped up. "You must be very proud, Elsa," she said.

"I am, thank you, Nana," she replied.

The older woman looked at her granddaughter for a few seconds, then looked at the redhead escaping up the stairs. Elsa followed her gaze, and when she spotted Fraulein Anna, she smiled a bit before carefully concealing it again. Her grandmother smirked and spoke her mind, as queens were wont to do. "So what's the issue, dear?" she asked. "Why are you holding back from such a woman?"

Elsa looked at her in mild shock. "I beg your pardon, Nana?" she asked.

"Don't play dumb, Elsa," her grandmother chided. "Why haven't you asked that extraordinary young woman to marry you? Your children want you to, and if the lovestruck gaze you had on
"She is my employee, Nana, nothing more," Elsa stated. Her grandmother didn't respond, but fixed her with a skeptical look, and Elsa sighed. "All right, yes, I have managed to perhaps fall in love with her," Elsa admitted reluctantly. "But I do not know what her feelings are."

"Then ask her, you silly child," the Queen admonished. "From what I have heard from the children, you will not be disappointed. Stop being a coward, and be the brave person you have shown yourself to be." Elsa hesitated, the past and Fraulein Anna's recent dance with Kristoff causing anxiety. "Do not make me order you, Captain," her grandmother warned with a smile, causing Elsa to realize her somewhat foolish behavior.

"You are right, as usual, Nana," Elsa said. Glancing up to the doorway where Fraulein Anna had disappeared to, Elsa smiled. "Please excuse me; I will return shortly," she said politely, as she turned to leave.

Watching her go, the Queen smiled, but it turned into a frown as she saw the Duke of Weselton approach her. "You must be very proud, Your Majesty; your great-grandchildren were remarkable," he said, oozing smarmy politeness.

"I am very proud, Weasel-ton," she said, purposely mispronouncing his name. "Is there a more beautiful expression of what is good in this country of mine than the innocent voices of its children?"

"Weselton," the Duke corrected through gritted teeth. "And come now, Your Majesty, would you have us believe that Arendelle alone holds the monopoly on virtue?"

"When in comparison to Weasel-town, it indisputably does," the Queen replied with a steely tone.

"The ostrich buries his head in the sand, and sometimes, in the flag," the Duke replied. "Perhaps when you are told that the Annexation is complete, and it is coming, Your Majesty, we will get further with you and your people by setting your surrender concession to music?" he asked mockingly.

"If the Weasels try to take over Arendelle, Weasel-ton, the only music you will hear will be that of your own funeral dirge," the Queen replied, her tone friendly in spite of her dark words. She lifted her hand, and one of her guards came over immediately. "Get this weasel out of my presence and out of this house," she ordered. "It is far too happy of a gathering to have the likes of him here."

The guard saluted, and the Duke was ushered out the door with the Queen looking thoughtfully after him.

Anna-Maria clutched her dress to her chest, feeling very exposed. Only a few moments before, the Captain had knocked on her door offering her assistance, and in the hopes of repairing whatever had been damaged by the dance, Anna-Maria had let her in willingly. Now that they were alone together, with her dress unbuttoned and the Captain looking directly at her, Anna-Maria felt more vulnerable than she had ever felt before. "It's very kind of you to offer to help me, Captain," she stuttered out, lowering her eyes.

"I'm delighted to help you, Fraulein," Elsa replied, wanting to say more but failing. She hadn't considered the fact that Fraulein Anna would be changing when she arrived, and now the sight of her governess in her slip and petticoat was distracting Elsa from what she really wanted to say.

Lost in her own embarrassment, Anna didn't notice the Captain's ogling; instead she kept her eyes
glued downward as she took off her dress and shook it out. "I really don't think I have anything that would be appropriate," Anna-Maria said embarrassedly, putting her other dress on the hanger and buttoning it up.

Elsa went over to Fraulein Anna's wardrobe and began flipping through the dresses. "We'll find something," Elsa said reassuringly. "Now where is that lovely ice-blue dress you were wearing the other evening?" she mused. "I…um, the Baron, could barely keep his eyes off you." Elsa cursed herself internally before looking over to Fraulein Anna to see if her slip had been heard.

Anna-Maria had heard the barely-spoken "I", and her heart skipped a beat in its excitement, but deciding to be cautious, Anna-Maria pretended that she hadn't heard the pronoun. "Couldn't keep his eyes off me?" she echoed, making sure to use the proper gendered pronoun.

Elsa heard the emphasis on the pronoun, and she knew that Fraulein Anna had heard. Deciding it was now or never, Elsa took a breath and brought the ice-blue dress out to give herself a few seconds before she spoke. "Come my dear, we are women," she said at last, placing the dress on the bed. "Let's not pretend we don't know when someone notices us."

Anna-Maria looked at the Captain, and it was clear to Anna-Maria that they were no longer talking about the Baron being the one that had noticed her. Even still, she did not want to misread or mess up the situation, so she decided to make sure. "Well, if he did notice me, I was not aware," she said carefully, before deciding to take the risk her heart was pleading for her to take. "There is only one person whose notice and regard I want, and it isn't him."

Elsa took in a sharp breath at hearing that, and she started moving towards Fraulein Anna without even consciously thinking about it. Just before she reached out for Anna-Maria though, her mind recalled the dance with Kristoff, and her jealousy reared its head. "Are you sure?" Elsa challenged softly. "You blushed in his arms as you were dancing just now."

Anna-Maria, now just a few inches away from the Captain, blushed again. "I wasn't thinking about him," she answered honestly. "The children, um, they had shown me a photograph of a stunning naval officer in her dress uniform. I wanted it so much to be her that I was pretending that my dance partner was her."

The bright red tint to her cheeks and the unmistakable love shining from her eyes told Elsa that Anna-Maria was telling the truth. She took a willing Anna-Maria into her arms, and she brought their faces so close together that their lips were almost touching. "And who would this imaginary dance partner be?" she whispered, needing to hear Anna-Maria say it.

Anna-Maria brought her hand up to her Captain's cheek, reveling in the sensation of having her this close. She smirked playfully. "Come my dear, we are women. Let's not pretend we don't know when someone notices us," she recited, her smirk becoming a smile when Elsa laughed.

"Cheeky as always," she muttered affectionately before closing the small distance between them and kissing Anna-Maria on the lips.

The kiss was soft and sweet; Elsa was mindful of Anna-Maria's likely inexperience, and Anna-Maria was still a little too overwhelmed and shy to be the aggressor. It only lasted for a few seconds, and then Elsa drew away, fearful of scaring Anna-Maria by going too fast. Anna-Maria opened her eyes and smiled, and when she saw no regret but only love on Elsa's features, her natural courage took over. "I wasn't finished yet," she declared, moving her hand from Elsa's cheek to her the back of her neck and gently bringing them back together.

This kiss lasted longer, long enough that both women could feel the tug of desire through the sweetness of love's kiss. At about the same time, they both realized that they were alone in Anna-
Maria's bedroom, and that Anna-Maria was wearing little else but a slip. Elsa broke away with an embarrassed gasp. "I'm sorry, Fraulein," she said, dropping her gaze, only to blush deeper when her eyes fell on Anna-Maria's barely-covered breasts. Her eyes dropped to the floor. "I should have waited to come talk to you about…everything. I'll see myself out," she mumbled, dropping her arms and turning.

Anna-Maria used her arms to keep Elsa where she was, and she put her hand back on Elsa's cheek, causing the embarrassed Captain to look up. "Don't you dare apologize," Anna-Maria demanded, kissing the cheek her hand rested on. "This has been the happiest night of my life." Elsa smiled at that, and Anna smiled back. "But, yes, you probably should go," Anna-Maria said regretfully. "Your dinner guests are waiting for you. And, please tell Olaf that I thank him for his invitation, but I don't think I want to join you. I'm tired, I'd be completely distracted by the gorgeous hostess and would probably make a huge fool of myself, and honestly, right now, I just want to be alone to think about how unbelievably happy I am."

Elsa nodded, agreeing with and understanding Anna-Maria's thoughts. "You are right," she said. "I should get back to my guests, and I respect your decision not to come back down. But," she paused, kissing Anna-Maria once more, "I am completely envious."

"Well, with as happy as I am, I probably won't sleep much tonight," Anna confessed. "You are welcome to come back up to talk when your party is over."

Elsa's face lit up at the suggestion. "I would like that," she said happily. She kissed Anna-Maria once more, meaning it as a quick goodbye, but the quick kiss lingered. Finally, they broke apart, and Elsa went to the door. "Goodnight, Anna," she said, purposely calling her love by her common, not formal name.

"Elsa," Elsa corrected with a quick smile before she disappeared out the door.

"Elsa," Anna-Maria echoed, staring at the door that Elsa had closed behind her. In a happy daze, she moved the two dresses off her bed and collapsed on it, smiling up at the ceiling in happy wonder.

Elsa pranced into the ballroom looking for Olaf. When she spotted him, she walked over to him, grabbing two glasses of champagne from a wandering server when she did so. "Champagne, Olaf?" she offered with a smile. "I feel like celebrating." Olaf looked at her quizzically, but he took it, clinking his glass with hers. "Cheers," Elsa said, still smiling.

"Where is Fraulein Anna?" he asked, intrigued at Elsa's behavior.

"Fraulein Anna will not be joining us," Elsa answered. "She is, um, tired."

"And you are lying," Olaf said succinctly. "What happened up there?" he asked. Elsa didn't answer, but her grin grew wider. With that smile, Olaf finally figured it out. "You told her about your feelings!" he guessed, and Elsa nodded happily. "Did you propose?" was his follow up question, and Elsa frowned.

"Be reasonable, Olaf," Elsa chastised. "I have to court her first." Olaf looked skeptical at that statement, but he remained silent. "None of your silent sass," she warned him. "Anyway, where is Kristoff? I need to tell your non-subtle partner-in-crime that your scheming paid off."
"He's right over there," Olaf pointed out. Elsa smiled, handed him her glass of champagne and went to go talk to him. Olaf shrugged and downed both glasses.

"Please tell me that your obvious happiness means you've told her, and she loves you in return?" Kristoff begged when Elsa came up to his side.

"Yes, I've told her, and yes, she feels the same way," Elsa confirmed, her eyes and smile brimming with happiness.

"Then you have to tell me everything," he insisted, leading her out to the dance floor where they could waltz and have privacy in a room full of people.

Anna-Maria looked at her ceiling in happiness, losing all track of time and completely not caring. Finally, she started to come out of her happy daze, and she rose from the bed to take off her slip and put her night clothes on. After she had finished, she got out her rosary like she always did, but before she knelt to begin her evening prayers, she stared at the beads. At the sight of them, thoughts of her life at the abbey came rushing back, and she realized, with considerable guilt, that she had not considered her vows to the Maker even once since Elsa had come to her room. She had been so happy at the prospect of being loved by Elsa that she had completely forgotten what she had promised herself and the Maker. Troubled, Anna-Maria kept staring at the beads, and as she stared, the feelings of guilt only got worse. It felt like she had betrayed the abbey, the Reverend Mother and the Maker by loving Elsa, but her heart refused to budge. She did love the Captain, and all of the guilt she had did nothing to stop that.

Thinking some more, Anna-Maria realized she had to make a choice. If she stayed here, with Elsa so near, there would be no way for her to resist. Her life as a servant of the Maker would be over, for Anna-Maria knew she would willingly break every vow she had made to be Elsa's wife and lover, to be a mother to the children. If she left, there was still a chance that her heart would forget, that she could forget Elsa and reconcile with the Maker, and that she could live the life she had thought she had always wanted. Anna-Maria sank to the ground in despair, not knowing what to choose, and tears came to her eyes at the thought of leaving either Elsa or the Church.

Finally, it was her vows that compelled Anna-Maria to rise from the floor to grab her satchel and begin packing. She had promised herself to the Maker, and as much as much as it pained her, Anna-Maria knew she had to keep her promises. She packed quickly and then sat at her desk to write the Captain a note. She placed the note in the middle of her bed, and with a last regretful look, she left the beautiful bedroom.

Anna-Maria hurried down the hall of the nursery with her bag and her guitar, glancing unhappily at the children's rooms. She wanted to say goodbye, but she knew that seeing the children again would make her stay. She peeked over the balcony railing into the entryway, but it was empty, so she hurried down the stairs to the front door. Setting her guitar down for a moment, Anna-Maria took one last sorrowful look before she picked up her guitar and left.

Elsa bid her last guests goodnight, waving politely as they got into their carriage. Once they were seated and the coachman had started the horses, Elsa went back inside and closed the door. A smile came over her face, and she practically sprinted up the stairs, eager to get out of her finery and eager to spend time with Anna. She went to her room first and undressed, slipping on some comfortable pajamas and a robe after everything had been put away. She crept down the hallway of the nursery, mindful not to wake the children. Elsa knocked at the door and waited, but there was no response.
Unwillingly to knock again for fear of disturbing the children, Elsa quietly opened the door and looked in to see if Anna had perhaps fallen asleep. It didn't appear that she had, however, for the lights were on in the room, and the bed had not been slept in. Confused, Elsa entered the room completely, and that was when she saw the note on the pillows. She knew instantly that the note was most likely bad news, but she opened it and read it anyway. Pain ripped through her chest as she read Anna's words, and after she had finished, Elsa could do little but collapse on the bed. She hugged the note to her chest, and for the first time since Georg had died, Elsa wept.

INTERMISSION
The von Trapp children, along with Kristoff, stood in a circle on the boat landing, bouncing a ball and counting off their numbers. The ball stopped with Louisa, and after half-heartedly announcing a number, she threw the ball to Liesel, who in turn called out a number and threw it to Kurt. While Olaf watched from the terrace, Kurt announced Kristoff’s number and threw it to him. Kristoff caught it easily, then announced Gretl’s number and gently threw it to her. It slipped past her, and she ran after it. By the time she had gotten back, children and adult alike had already grown tired of the simple game, and by common consent, they decided to abandon it.

“Thank you for playing with us, Baron,” Liesel said politely.

“It’s no trouble,” Kristoff said sincerely, and he looked around at them all. “I only wish I could do more,” he admitted regretfully, and all of the children knew he was thinking of Fraulein Anna, as were they. With a sad smile, Kristoff retreated to join Olaf on the terrace, and the children sat dejectedly on the stone bench on the landing.

“Have some lemonade,” Olaf offered, trying to cheer Kristoff up as the burly man sank gloomily into the patio chair.

Kristoff sighed and took the glass filled with the pink-colored liquid. He took a sip and sighed again. “I just wish I knew how to get her back, Olaf,” Kristoff said. “This house is not the same without her. The children are listless and unhappy, and Elsa, well Elsa has turned silent and emotionless. She will barely speak to anyone, even the children.”

“She’s heartbroken, Kristoff,” Olaf replied. “She’s lost practically everyone she has ever truly cared about.”

“But Fraulein Anna isn’t lost to her; I can feel it,” Kristoff protested. “I don’t know what changed between when Elsa came down and when Fraulein Anna left, but I feel like it’s something fixable, if we could only get her back.”

The children, hearing snippets of the conversation from where they sat, perked up at the suggestion of trying to get Fraulein Anna back. They looked around at each other and nodded, getting up from their benches and coming to the terrace. “We heard what you were discussing, and we want to help,” Brigitta said bluntly. All of her siblings nodded enthusiastically, and Kristoff smiled, happy to see the children taking an interest in something.

“Then help you shall,” Kristoff declared, encouraging all of them to gather around. “Does anyone have any ideas?” he asked.

“Go to the Abbey and talk to her,” Louisa said promptly.

“Send a telegram that she is urgently needed back here,” Liesel offered.

“Sing outside her window at the Abbey?” Kurt suggested.
“Go to the Reverend Mother and ask her to return our governess,” Friedrich declared imperiously. “We are a part of the royal family, after all.”

“No, not the Reverend Mother,” Brigitta disagreed, obviously thinking. “We need someone with even more power. We need…Great-Grandmother. She wants Mother to marry Fraulein Anna just as badly as we do, and she’s the Queen. If anyone can get her back for us, it’s her.”

Her siblings all nodded in agreement, and Kristoff was impressed with the rather brilliant thought. “Yes, Her Majesty was quite obvious with her admiration for Fraulein Anna,” he allowed.

“No, she actually agreed with us when we said Mother should marry Fraulein Anna,” Marta informed him, adding information that Kristoff didn’t know.

“Well then, she would be the perfect ally,” Kristoff agreed. “So what should be our plan? Perhaps see if we can visit Fraulein Anna to see why she left, whilst notifying Her Majesty?” Smiles broke out as the children considered and embraced the plan, and Kristoff was glad to see their renewed happiness. “Should we tell your Mother?”

“Absolutely not,” Olaf stated firmly, rejoining the conversation. “Elsa is still angry and heartbroken. The only way to get her over the heartbreak is to have Fraulein Anna here. All the pain won’t matter quite as much if she is actually standing in front of your Mother. If we just talk about her, Elsa is likely just to get angrier.”

Kristoff and the children considered this and quickly realized that Olaf had a point. “Okay, so we don’t inform your mother,” Kristoff reiterated.

“Inform me of what?” Elsa queried with suspicion in her voice as she strode out from the house and onto the terrace. Surprised and caught in their scheming, the whole group jumped, making Elsa even more suspicious. “What are all of you plotting?” she asked, critically looking at them all.

“Nothing,” Liesel said quickly. The glare she received from her mother instantly informed her that her lie had not been believed.

“Would anyone else like to try?” Elsa asked acerbically.

The children shifted around uncomfortably, trying to think of another lie as their Mother scrutinized them. Olaf sighed dramatically, drawing her scrutiny to him. “We were discussing our rehearsal schedule for the Festival auditions,” he lied, his face falling in convincing faux remorse and shame at being found out. “We were hoping that if the children auditioned and won a spot, then you would let them compete.”

“You know of my views on my children singing in public, Olaf,” Elsa said angrily. Olaf fought to keep his face melancholy even though he was celebrating the fact that the lie worked. “Well, yes,” he admitted, still trying to sound contrite, “but the children needed something to cheer them up, and I thought that this would be a good way.”

Elsa sighed, softening her gaze slightly. The children were as saddened by Fraulein Anna’s sudden departure as she was, but where Elsa had her anger to fall back on, the children only had their sadness. “I can understand that, Olaf,” she said, her tone much more calm. “But that doesn’t change my feelings about the subject. Besides,” she continued, looking first at her children and then at her houseguests with obvious unease, “if everything goes to plan, no one but Olaf will be here to attend the Festival anyway.”
“What plan, Mother?” Liesel asked, immediately wary of Elsa’s pensive look.

Elsa straightened her shoulders, and the pensive mother troubled by her decision disappeared behind the mask of the stoic sea captain. “With the escalation of the Weselton menace, it is apparent that the Arendellian Navy will soon be called into action,” she said, her face almost completely emotionless. “There is a lack of qualified Captains, so I have petitioned the Navy to reinstate my commission. Once my petition is accepted, I will be returning to active duty.”

The children looked shocked, and Kristoff looked at his best friend in sadness. Like she often did, Elsa was running away, trying to find solace in the familiar confines of the Navy. He went to say something, but Liesel spoke before he had the chance.

“And what of us, Mother?” she asked, her anger obvious in the tone and volume of her voice. “What will happen to us now that you are running away for good?”

Elsa paused; Liesel’s sharp, perceptive question hit its mark, and Elsa had to swallow down the guilt. “You all will be enrolled in boarding school by the fall,” she stated, keeping her face neutral at the betrayed looks on her children’s faces. “I realize that boarding school is not something that we have traditionally done in this family, but the war is coming, and my loyalty to Arendelle is required, so it’s what is best for our family at this juncture,” she concluded.

Liesel laughed mockingly at her mother, emboldened by outrage and anger. “No, it’s not,” she declared. “You abandoning us at boarding school so you can hide behind the Navy is not what's best for our family, Mother. It's what's best for you.” Having said everything that she wanted to say, Liesel turned her back on her mother and stormed off into the garden. One by one, the rest of her children looked at Elsa, some with anger on their face, some with betrayal, but all with sadness before they turned and followed Liesel into the garden.

Elsa sat down heavily at the table, the guilt of thoroughly disappointing her children weighing her down. She had fully expected them to be upset, but she hadn't expected the depth of the disappointment and hurt she had obviously caused them. “I didn't think they would take it so hard,” she admitted quietly to Kristoff and Olaf.

“How were they supposed to take losing their mother after only just getting her back?” Kristoff challenged with quiet anger much more subtle than the children’s. “How were they supposed to take losing yet another person they loved? First it was their father, then it was Fraulein Anna, and now it’s you.”

“They aren't losing me, Kristoff,” Elsa protested weakly.

“Of course they are,” Kristoff retorted. “I never thought I’d see the day when you would be this cowardly and selfish, Elsa. You’ve disappointed me too,” he said, getting up from the table and following the children.

Elsa put her elbows on the table and buried her head in her hands. Olaf took pity on her and came around the table to sit beside her and put his arms around her. She returned his embrace and put her head down on his shoulder. “We were a family again, Olaf,” Elsa sighed. “How did it go so wrong? And why am I the one that’s being blamed when she’s the one that left?”

“Because you aren’t doing much to bring her back,” Olaf replied with maddeningly simple logic. “Everyone in this house loves her, including you. The children don’t understand how you can just let her go so easily.”

“I didn’t want to let her go,” Elsa protested. “She left!”
“But why did she leave?” Olaf prompted.

“Her note said that she missed her life at the Abbey too much, and she had to leave us,” Elsa replied.

“And why would she write such a thing right after she told you how she felt?” Olaf inquired.

Elsa thought about that question. She had been avoiding thinking about Fraulein Anna entirely, so she hadn’t thought much about the governess’ motivations. “She is a postulant, and she has promised her life to the Maker. She must have realized she loves the Maker more than me and my children, so she went back.”

“Oh, perhaps she realized she loves you and your children more, and after a lifetime of devotion to the Maker, it frightened her. Maybe that, plus the burden of vows and promises already given made her go back,” Olaf hypothesized.

Hope blossomed in Elsa’s chest at Olaf’s suggestion, but just as quickly, she tamped it down. “There’s no way to know that, Olaf,” she said dejectedly.

“Of course there is,” Olaf disagreed. “You find a way to talk to her, and you ask her. And if she truly left because she loves the Maker more and wants to become a nun, so be it. But, if she left because she’s trying to decide between her dreams, then convince her she can have both. Be her Georg.”

Elsa’s head snapped up at the mention of her late husband. “Wait…what?” she questioned.

“Fraulein Anna is twenty, the same age as you were when you gave birth to Liesel,” Olaf replied. “When you were twenty, you thought you were going to have to give up your dream of the Navy to follow your dream of being a wife and mother. But you didn’t have to, because you had Georg. He allowed you to have everything. Find Fraulein Anna; talk to her and convince her that she doesn’t have to completely give up one dream for another. She won’t be able to become a nun if she marries you, obviously, but she doesn’t have to give up her faith in the Maker. Convince her she can have both. Become her Georg.” he repeated. Elsa looked at him in consternation, but he gave his niece a lopsided grin, and she gave him an affectionate smile back. Olaf glanced at his watch and sighed, giving Elsa a soft kiss on the forehead and a gentle squeeze before he got up from his chair. “I apologize, but I have to leave. I have a meeting with the festival organizers,” he said, purposely leaving out that the Queen was one of the organizers, and he was going to have a long talk with her about everything. “Think about it, Elsa,” he advised, before he took his leave. Elsa didn’t reply, but she watched him go, a pensive look on her face as thoughts chased themselves around her head.

AAAAAAAAAA

After all of them had stormed off the terrace, the children and Kristoff spent a few moments talking and strategizing. By common consent, they agreed that they needed to get Fraulein Anna back sooner rather than later, and all agreed that Louisa’s plan of going to the abbey to talk to her was best. The group skirted around the house and entered through the side door, gathering their hats before catching the bus to Arendelle. When they got to town, they hopped off the bus and started walking up towards the imposing convent nestled in its foothills.

Nordfell Abbey was large and daunting, and even Kristoff felt a little intimidated as they timidly walked up to its gates. The gates were locked, and as they peered through them, Kristoff could see the sisters scurrying about. Shouting at one of them seemed rude, so Liesel looked around, spotting a chain off to the side of gate. She pulled it twice, and a chime rang out twice, alerting the sisters to their presence. One of the sisters came strolling over, and by habit she addressed the
oldest female in the group, namely Liesel. “Yes, my children?” she asked courteously.

“My name is Liesel,” Liesel answered.

“Yes, Liesel?” the sister prompted.

“We, my brothers and sisters and I, we want to see Fraulein Anna, please,” Liesel requested politely.

“Fraulein Anna?” the sister questioned, looking puzzled, until she realized who these children probably were. “Oh, you mean Anna-Maria,” she guessed. The children nodded happily. “Come in please,” she invited, opening the gates. The children followed, but she put up a hand when Kristoff came after them. “I’m sorry, sir,” she said, “but adult men are not allowed in here unless they are in the service of the Maker.” Kristoff nodded in understanding, and the children went in without him. The sister didn’t not take the children very far before she put up her hand to signal them to stop. “Wait here please,” she instructed, before going over to a different sister that stood some distance away.

The two sisters had a brief conversation, and the older sister, the one who hadn’t opened the gate, came over to the group of children. “I’m Sister Marguerite,” she told them with a friendly smile on her face. “I understand you have been inquiring about Anna-Maria.”

“We have to see her,” Friedrich stated emphatically. “Will you tell her we’re here, please?”

“I’m afraid I can’t do that,” Sister Marguerite replied regretfully.

“Oh, but you’ve got to!” Louisa insisted. “We have to speak to her!”

“She’s our governess!” Marta explained.

“We want her back!” Gretl added.

“She didn’t even say goodbye!” Kurt said, adding his voice to the conversation.

“It’s very important,” Brgitta pleaded.

Liesel quieted down her younger siblings before speaking herself. “All we want to do is talk to her,” she said imploringly.

“I’m very sorry, children, but Anna-Maria is in seclusion,” Sister Marguerite explained. “She isn’t seeing anyone.”

“She’ll see us; I know she will,” Friedrich said confidently, and his siblings nodded vigorously.

“I’m very sorry, children, but Anna-Maria is in seclusion,” Sister Marguerite explained. “She isn’t seeing anyone.”

“‘What was that all about, Sister Marguerite?’ Mother Gerda asked, as they watched the children file forlornly away.

“The von Trapp children, Reverend Mother,” Sister Marguerite replied, as the two sisters turned back towards the interior of the abbey. “They wanted to see Anna-Maria.”
Mother Gerda started to say something, but the gate bell ringing drew their attention to the front again. “What now?” Mother Gerda wondered.

Sister Marguerite went to the gate and opened it quickly when she saw the uniform of a royal messenger. The older man bowed and handed her an envelope. “A message for Her Highness, the Reverend Mother,” he said respectfully.

“That title has held no meaning for many years, Stefan,” Mother Gerda chided, coming up beside Sister Marguerite and taking the envelope from her. Flipping it over, she was unsurprised to see the Queen’s seal.

“And yet her Majesty the Queen insists on it, your Highness,” Stefan replied with a small smirk. Mother Gerda sighed in affectionate exasperation. “Give my annoyance of a sister my love,” she requested.

“Of course, Your Highness,” Stefan said with a crisp bow and a smile before he turned and left. Mother Gerda opened the envelope and read what the Queen had written. She frowned and turned to Sister Marguerite. “Has Anna-Maria spoken yet?” she asked. “Has she told you anything?”

“She doesn’t say a word, Reverend Mother, except in prayer,” Sister Marguerite replied. “Poor child,” Mother Gerda said, glancing at the note again.

“It’s strange, Reverend Mother,” Sister Marguerite said. “She seems happy to be back here, and yet, she’s unhappy too.”

“It seems I have been wrong in leaving her alone so long,” Mother Gerda decided, pondering the children’s visit and the letter she had received from the Queen. “I think you’d better bring her to me, even if she doesn’t feel like she’s ready.”

“Yes, Reverend Mother,” Sister Marguerite answered with a small bow.

Mother Gerda rose from her desk, taking off her glasses and closing her sacred text. “Sister Augusta, take our new postulant to the robing room,” she requested of the other nun in the room. To the new recruit, she offered her congratulations. “The Maker bless you, my daughter,” she said warmly. The newest member of her convent blushed shyly and nodded, leaving with Sister Augusta. Just as they left, a quiet knock sounded at the door. “Come,” Mother Gerda replied, and the door opened, revealing Sister Marguerite. “Sister Marguerite, good. Bring her in,” the Reverend Mother said.

Anna-Maria came somberly into the room, and when Mother Gerda had closed the distance between them, Anna-Maria knelt and kissed her hand as was the custom. “You’ve been unhappy,” Mother Gerda observed. “I’m sorry.”

“I will be fine, Reverend Mother,” Anna-Maria replied as she rose to her feet.

“Why did they send you back to us?” Mother Gerda asked.

“They didn’t send me back, Mother,” Anna-Maria replied truthfully. “I, I left.”

Mother Gerda studied her postulant, thinking about the visit from the von Trapp children and the
note from the Queen. “Sit down, Anna-Maria,” she said, indicating a chair with an incline of her head. “Tell me what happened.”

“Well, I…I was frightened,” Anna-Maria admitted reluctantly.

“Frightened?” Mother Gerda said in alarm. “Were they unkind to you?”

“No, no,” Anna-Maria replied immediately with a shake of her head. “No, it was me. I was confused by how I felt. I’ve never felt that way before. I couldn’t stay; I knew that here I would be away from her. I’d be safe.”

With a single gender-specific pronoun, Anna-Maria confirmed what Mother Gerda had suspected based on her instincts and the message from her sister. “Anna-Maria, our abbey is not to be used as an escape,” the Reverend Mother said sternly. “What is it you can’t face?”

“I can’t face her again,” Anna-Maria said, with a sad shake of her head. With that statement, thoughts of Elsa came flooding into Anna-Maria’s mind, and in spite of what she had just said, her whole being ached with its desire to go running back to the Captain.

Mother Gerda saw the conflict and the ache. “Her?” she said with a pointed emphasis. Anna-Maria didn’t answer, but bowed her head. Mother Gerda sighed sympathetically. “Thank you, Sister Marguerite,” she said, and the other nun, knowing she had been dismissed, bowed her head and left, closing the door behind her. “Are you in love with Captain von Trapp?” Mother Gerda asked when she and Anna-Maria were alone.

Anna-Maria hesitated, knowing if she admitted it, the longing for the Captain would become almost unbearable. But, she couldn’t lie to Mother Gerda. “Yes!” Anna-Maria finally admitted with a small sob. “And she is in love with me. After she came back and thawed out and showed me what a wonderful person she is, I, I just couldn’t help myself, Mother. She’s beautiful and smart and funny, and even with as awkward and outspoken and headstrong as I am, she loves me. In fact, I think she loves me because of all of that, which no one in my life has ever done. Ever.”

“Then why did you leave her?” Mother Gerda asked.

“I was there on the Maker’s errand, Mother,” Anna-Maria replied with anguish. “That’s what been torturing me. To have accepted her love would have been wrong. I couldn’t stay, I just couldn’t.” Anna-Maria spun away from Mother Gerda before coming to a stop in front of the small altar that the elder nun had in her office. “I’m ready at this moment to take my final vows,” Anna-Maria said softly, even though she knew it to be a lie. “Please help me, Mother,” she concluded.

Mother Gerda knew a falsehood when she heard one, and she came over to her obviously-distressed postulant. “Anna-Maria, the love of two people is holy too,” she said soothingly. “You have a kind heart whose capacity for love is almost limitless. What you need to find out is how the Maker wants you to spend that love.”

“But I’ve pledged my life to the Maker,” Anna-Maria protested. “I’ve pledged my life to Her service.”

“My daughter, if you love this woman, it doesn’t mean you love the Maker less,” Mother Gerda stated. Mother Gerda walked away, thinking. “No, you cannot stay and hide here,” she decided as she reached her desk. “You must go back.”

“Oh, Mother, you can’t ask me to do that,” Anna-Maria pleaded. “If I go back, then I won’t be
coming back here. If I see her again, I won’t be able to leave her or the children.”

“The fact that you know that means your heart has already made its decision,” Mother Gerda observed with a small smile. “And that decision means you would never truly be happy here. Anna-Maria, these walls were not built to shut out problems or hard decisions; you have to face them. You have to live the life you were destined to live, even if it is not the one you always envisioned for yourself.”

When Anna-Maria still looked doubtful, Mother Gerda took a different approach. “Think of your new pathway as a mountain, Anna-Maria, one that you must climb in order to know your true self,” she encouraged. “Climb that mountain. Search high and low. Follow every byway, every path you know. Ford every stream that may come across your path.”

“But what if I fail, Mother?” Anna-Maria asked. “What if she no longer loves me because I’ve left her, or what if our love isn’t strong enough to succeed? Then I will be left with nothing.”

“But as much as you love her, you will have nothing if you don’t return to her. You have to try, Anna-Maria,” Mother Gerda admonished gently. “Where is that fearless courage I know you have? Use it to follow your rainbow, until you find your dream. True, it will be a dream that will need all the love you can give, every day of your life, for as a long as you live, but you need to climb that mountain, Anna-Maria. You need to follow your dream and find yourself.”

“But what of the abbey, Reverend Mother?” Anna-Maria asked, even though every part of her wanted to follow Mother Gerda’s inspiring advice. “What of my vows to the Maker?”

“Like I said before, you can still love the Maker even though you love this woman,” Mother Gerda replied. “The Maker is Love, Anna-Maria. She would never condemn her disciple for following love and allowing herself to love and be loved.”

Anna-Maria thought that through, and Mother Gerda’s words spoke to her troubled mind and heart. She realized quickly that the wise, older woman was absolutely correct, and her heart soared with joy. A smile, the first on her face in days, emerged and grew, and before the Reverend Mother’s eyes, Anna-Maria turned back into herself. Mother Gerda smiled at her warmly, and without warning, Anna-Maria crossed the room and enveloped the older woman in a hug. “Thank you so much, Mother,” Anna-Maria said emotionally.

Mother Gerda hugged her back and then released her. “Go pack, Anna-Maria,” she said simply. “The robing room will have a dress for you to wear.” Anna-Maria nodded ebulliently and left the room. Mother Gerda looked after her with a fond smile before she sat down to write her response to the Queen.

AAAABBBB

Elsa, her hands clasped behind her back, inspected her children and Kristoff as they stood in an uneasy group on the boat landing. Even though they were still mad at her, her scrutiny was getting to them, and knowing they would be in trouble for attempting to visit Anna-Maria, they all shifted around uncomfortably. “It’s not like my children to be secretive,” she stated in a firm voice.

“We’re not being secretive, Mother,” Louisa disagreed.

“Of course you’re not,” Elsa said dismissively. She looked at the group for a few more seconds. “Well then, if there are no secrets, why were you all late to dinner? It’s definitely not like my children to be late for dinner,” she said pointedly.
“We lost track of the time,” Friedrich said, somewhat honest in his response, and Kristoff and his siblings enthusiastically agreed with him.

Elsa sighed. “Ok, who is going to be the first one to tell me the truth?” she stated with a Captain’s authority. “Friedrich? Brigitta? Liesel?”

Her oldest looked at Elsa with a defiant smirk. Elsa saw herself in that smirk, and she knew no straight answer would be forthcoming. “Where do you think we were, Mother?” Liesel challenged lightly, and Elsa sighed again as her prediction came true. She narrowed her eyes at Liesel in her ire, but the teenager just continued to smirk back. “Well, if you don’t believe us, you must have some idea where you think we were,” Liesel pointed out.

Elsa looked to the heavens as though she was beseeching the Maker for strength. Unexpectedly, Marta giggled, and Elsa turned to confront her second-youngest. “Ah-ha!” she said. “Marta, you will tell me where you were.”

“Yes, Mother,” Marta replied, still smiling, as her siblings looked at her in alarm. “We were berry picking,” she stated, and Kristoff and her siblings hid their surprise that a seven-year old had come up with such a plausible lie that quickly.

“Oh, you were berry picking,” Elsa said, playing along even though she knew Marta’s story to be another invention, albeit a clever one. Her children nodded back enthusiastically. “‘All afternoon?’ she asked innocently, setting her trap. Kristoff noticed the smirk and realized it was a trap, but the children spoke before he could stop them.

“We picked thousands of them,” Louisa stated.

“Thousands?” Elsa questioned. “What kind of berries did you pick?”

“Blueberries, Mother,” Friedrich stated.

“It’s, um, too early for blueberries,” Elsa reminded him, her smirk still in place.

Friedrich froze, knowing they had been caught in their lie. “Um, they were strawberries,” he corrected.

“Strawberries?” Elsa echoed in mock surprise.

“Yes, it’s been so cold lately they turned blue,” Friedrich explained, glancing over at the rest of his siblings in apology. Liesel and Louisa rolled their eyes, and Brigitta looked at him incredulously, completely in shock that he had made that dumb of a statement.

Elsa looked at him, slightly impressed that her son had managed to make that statement with a straight face. “Very well,” she said evenly. “Show me the berries,” she requested.

“Well, um, we don’t have them anymore,” Kurt stuttered.

“You don’t have them anymore?” Elsa parroted. “Well, what happened to them?”

“We ate them!” Brigitta announced suddenly, and relieved at the reasonable response, her siblings quickly agreed with her.

“You ate them?” Elsa responded. “All of them?” The children nodded happily in agreement. “Very well, since you’ve obviously stuffed yourselves full of thousands of delicious berries, you can’t be hungry anymore, so I’ll simply have to tell Frau Schmidt to skip your dinner,” Elsa said, snapping the trap closed.
The children looked at her in sight horror, but she merely smiled at them and turned to walk into the house. Kristoff followed her, hoping to convince her to reconsider. “Of course you are welcome to join me, Kristoff, but since you were on this little berry-picking expedition, you can’t be hungry either. It looks like Olaf and I will be dining alone,” she said pleasantly before he could get any words out. Kristoff glanced back at the children with an apologetic look before he trailed behind her into the house.

“This is all your fault!” Kurt accused Friedrich as soon as their mother and Kristoff had walked back into the house. “We should have told her the truth.”

“And made her boiling mad at us,” Friedrich countered.

“It’s better than starving to death,” Kurt answered melodramatically.

“We didn’t do anything wrong,” Louisa countered. “We just wanted to see her.”

“My stomach’s making noises,” Kurt complained, unable to concentrate on anything but his hunger.

“The least they could have done was to let us say hello,” Marta said wistfully.

“I wonder what grass tastes like,” Kurt mumbled, still distracted.

“I feel awful,” Gretl said forlornly.

“When Fraulein Anna wanted us to feel better, she sang us that song, remember?” Brigitta asked, trying to cheer everyone up.

“Yes!” Liesel interjected, hoping Brigitta’s idea would work.

“Let’s try it,” Brigitta suggested. She and Liesel started singing the words. “Raindrops on roses, and whiskers on kittens…” they sang.

“Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens,” the others sang, joining in. “Brown paper packages tied up with string; these are a few of my favorite things.”

“Why I don’t I feel better?” Gretl asked dejectedly.

Liesel offered her little sister a hug as they continued to sing, and the little girl went over to her oldest sister. “Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes,” they sang. They began to sing the next stanza, only to trail off when a new voice joined in.

“Snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes,” a familiar and badly-missed voice sang, and the children turned towards the sound of the voice.

“Fraulein Anna! She’s back!” came the cry, and the children went running down the river path to join her as she continued the song. She embraced them joyfully, and together they sang the last words. “I simply remember my favorite things, and then I don’t feel so bad!” they finished, as the boys picked up Anna-Maria’s luggage and the girls led her jubilantly back to the house.

“Oh, children, I’m so glad to see you!” Anna-Maria exclaimed.

“We missed you,” Marta said.

“Oh, I missed you,” Anna-Maria replied, looking at all of them lovingly. “Kurt, how are you?” she asked, noticing him standing there.
“Hungry,” he said promptly. Even in the excitement of Fraulein Anna’s return, his hunger had not been dissuaded.

His siblings laughed at him. “Liesel? You alright?” Anna-Maria asked as they walked back to the house. “Any telegrams been delivered lately?”

“None at all, Fraulein,” Liesel answered. “But I’m learning to accept it. I’ll be glad when school begins again.”

“Oh, Liesel, you can’t use school to escape your problems. You have to face them,” Anna-Maria said knowingly. She looked around again. “I have so much to tell you all,” she said.

“We have things to tell you too,” Louisa said.

“I’m sure you do,” Anna-Maria replied with a smile.

“The most important thing is that Mother has decided to send us to boarding school so that she can rejoin the Navy,” Brigitta said, causing Anna-Maria to frown.

“Rejoin the Navy?” Anna-Maria questioned in alarm.

“Yes, because of the war,” Louisa confirmed.

Knowing she was the likely cause, Anna-Maria sighed. “Oh, I see,” she said, realizing that reconciling with the Captain was going to be harder than she thought.

Just then, one of the smaller girls realized they weren’t alone. “Oh, Mother, look!” she cried, calling to Elsa who had come out to the terrace to see what all of the commotion was about.

“Fraulein Anna has come back from the abbey!” Elsa stood at the top of the stairs, looking coolly at the woman who had broken her heart. In truth, she was as excited as the children, but her heartbreak was refusing to let her feel it.

Anna-Maria met the cool look with a polite look of her own. “Good evening, Captain,” she said formally, knowing she deserved every bit of the frosty distain she could see in the Captain’s eyes.

“Good evening, Fraulein,” Elsa responded politely before addressing her children so she could talk to Anna-Maria alone. “All right, everyone go inside and get your dinner,” she ordered, and the children yelled in delight as they took Anna-Maria’s things and ran into the house. When they had gone, Elsa walked slowly down the steps. “You didn’t say goodbye, even to the children,” she said accusingly.

Anna-Maria bowed her head in shame. “That was very wrong of me,” she admitted freely. “Please forgive me,” she pleaded.

“Why did you leave?” Elsa asked, her voice cracking slightly with emotion she couldn’t keep in.

Before Anna-Maria could answer, they were interrupted by another person coming out on to the terrace. “Fraulein Anna! You’ve returned! Isn’t it wonderful, Elsa?” Kristoff exclaimed, sincerely happy and relieved to have the young governess back. Anna-Maria smiled at him, but it faded when she glanced at Elsa and realized she hadn’t answered. Not wanting to reveal her feelings in front of the Baron, Anna-Maria gave Elsa an apologetic glance and walked towards the house to follow the children.

Elsa watched as Fraulein Anna started to leave, desperate to know what the governess’ answer would have been if Kristoff hadn’t interrupted. Her mind was at war with itself about how she should feel about the young woman’s return, but Elsa still had questions. One particular question,
quite unexpected, popped out of her mouth without her permission. “Are you back to stay?” Elsa asked softly, causing Anna-Maria to turn back towards her.

“I want to stay, forever, if possible, but since I was heartless enough to leave, I know that decision is no longer mine to make,” Anna-Maria replied with honesty and regret. Stunned by the redhead’s admission, Elsa said nothing as Anna-Maria smiled at her sadly and went into the house after the children.

After a moment’s pause, Elsa glanced at Kristoff. “We should be getting back in; dinner is about to be served,” she said, her emotions carefully back under control as she turned toward the house. Kristoff nodded, keeping quiet to allow his best friend her space, and together they went into the house.
By the time the family finished up their dinner, night had fallen, and Anna-Maria put the children to bed with contentment and joy. She had missed them so much, and it was wonderful to be back with them. When they were all tucked in, Anna-Maria went back to her former room, and much to her surprise and delight, all of her things were still there. She took off the dress she had brought with her from the abbey and hung it up. She grazed her fingers over the rest, and they came to land on the ice-blue dress that Elsa had been so fond of. It wasn't like Anna-Maria to be purposefully tempting or seductive, but she wanted to win the Captain back. If wearing the dress would help, then Anna-Maria was willing to use whatever tools she had in her arsenal. Anna-Maria dressed quickly, leaving her room and going down the stairs. After a short walk through the hall, she exited out of the house onto the moonlit terrace, unaware that the Captain was on the balcony above watching her.

Elsa's eyes followed Anna's beautiful form as the governess descended the steps and went to look out over the river. Elsa's heart pleaded with her to forgive and forget and to join Anna out on the terrace. From her statement earlier, it was clear Anna regretted leaving, and she wanted to stay, so Elsa's heart was willing to put everything in the past. Her mind, however, was not so easily persuaded, so Elsa stayed where she was and continued to watch.

"There you are!" a voice from behind her called, and Elsa turned to see Kristoff joining her on the balcony. She smiled at him briefly before turning back to look out over the terrace, and Kristoff followed her gaze to see the gorgeous, penitent woman on the terrace below them. Fraulein Anna walked away from the river, and Elsa's eyes followed her, causing Kristoff to smirk. So Elsa was still deeply in love, he mused, and he was happy and relieved to see it. Now, he just had to get Elsa down to the terrace so she and Fraulein Anna could wend their way towards reconciliation. "I really must speak to Cook about the Weiner schnitzel," he said, avoiding the topic of Fraulein Anna altogether. "It is simply too delicious for my figure."

Elsa glanced away from Anna to look at him, chuckling softly. "Quit trying to distract me, Kristoff," she ordered with affectionate gruffness. "We both know you can eat a small cow and not gain a gram."

Kristoff laughed at that. "True, I am very fortunate that way, and yes, I was trying to distract you," he admitted. "I was only trying to get your mind off of things. But I am more than willing to talk about anyone or anything."

Elsa sighed and looked back over the lip of the balcony. "I still love her, and I still want to ask her to marry me," she confessed without preamble. "It's no use trying to deny it or claim otherwise."

"Then what is stopping you?" Kristoff asked. "From what she told us before, it's your choice to make. She wants to stay forever, but she knows she hurt you, so she's leaving it up to you."

"I know what she said, but I don't want to be hurt again," Elsa stated. "With the exception of you,
my children and Nana, everyone else I've ever deeply loved has left me. I couldn't bear it if she left me again."

"Fair enough," Kristoff allowed. "But she will leave you again if you don't at least talk to her. I'm not saying that you need to fall to your knees and propose, but talk to her. See why she left. See if the problem can or already has been overcome." Elsa sighed, and Kristoff took her hands. "You are miserable, Elsa," he said matter-of-fact, ignoring Elsa's glare. "Even though she hurt you, she still offers the chance at happiness. Please try to take that chance."

Elsa glared at him some more before her gaze softened. "All right," she said at last. "I will go talk to her and see why she left. I will see if she really wants to stay." Elsa looked down from the balcony once more, thinking about the advice that Olaf had given her earlier. She was still being passive, she realized. Olaf had advised her to give Anna a reason to choose her over the Maker, and it was excellent advice. Yet here she was, still passively hoping that Anna had already chosen her. If she really wanted Anna to stay, Elsa was going to have to show her why she should stay. She needed to be proactive, not passive. "Be her Georg," Elsa whispered to herself, finding her confidence at last.

"What was that?" Kristoff questioned, unable to hear.

"I don't need to know why she left," Elsa said loudly and decisively. "Now that she's back, I don't want to let her go again. If I want to protect myself by making sure she doesn't hurt me again, then I need to convince her to stay. I am finished with allowing circumstances to dictate my life."

"Excellent," Kristoff said proudly. "I knew my Captain was in there somewhere." Elsa smiled at him, and he smiled back. "Now my dear, I am going to go back into the house. Somewhere out there is a young lady who will never be a nun, and vows of chastity no longer apply. It could get very awkward," he teased with a saucy wink. Elsa blushed and swatted him on the arm. "Good night, Elsa," he said, giving her a hug. "Go find your happiness, my friend." Elsa squeezed him tightly and then let him go. She turned back towards the terrace to see where Anna was, and when Elsa had spotted the red hair, she smiled and left the balcony.

Anna-Maria wandered around the estate grounds debating about what she wanted to do. She needed to talk to Elsa, but she also knew that she had done something really stupid, and Elsa probably didn't want to talk to her. She sighed and looked at the gazebo she had wandered up to. After another sigh, she sat down on the stone bench at its entrance, looking down at the ground. A movement to her right startled her, and Anna-Maria looked up to see Elsa there. "Hello," Elsa said softly, "I thought I might find you here."

"You" was the first reply that sprang to Elsa's mind, but she bit her tongue and considered her reply more carefully. "I just wanted to talk," Elsa answered. "Please sit down," she requested, indicating the bench that Anna had risen from. Anna timidly sat down and Elsa joined her. "I was wondering two things," Elsa said, trying her best to keep her voice even and conversational. "Why did you run away to the abbey, and what was it that made you come back?" she asked, her barely-quavering voice betraying her anxiety about Anna's answer.

Anna-Maria looked into those intent blue eyes, and she wondered how she could have ever been foolish enough to leave this extraordinary woman. Dropping her gaze, Anna-Maria started to nervously play with her hands as she answered. "I left because I was frightened by how much I
loved you, and I was crushed by the guilt I had for abandoning the Maker," she confessed. "When you came to my room and kissed me, I was so happy that I completely forgot who I was and who I had always thought myself to be. And, even when I went to say my evening prayers and I came back to myself, my heart still wanted you. It wanted to be your lover and your wife, to be a mother to the children. That caused the crushing guilt, and I knew I had to get away if I wanted to salvage anything of the life I had planned for myself."

Elsa took a deep breath, letting the joy and relief wash through her. Olaf had been right; Anna hadn't run away because she loved the Maker more. She had run away because she had loved Elsa more and it had frightened her. "Why did you come back?" Elsa asked, gently reminding Anna of her second question.

"Because the Reverend Mother showed me how foolish I was being," Anna-Maria replied honestly. "She wisely made the point that I wouldn't be much of a servant to the Maker because of how much I loved you. She also convinced me that I didn't have to give up my love or faith in the Maker to marry you."

"She's right, you know," Elsa said, causing Anna to look up for the first time. "I would never ask you to choose between loving me and your faith. It's true that the Maker and I haven't been on the best of terms since Georg died, but I know how much your faith means to you, Anna. I also can't promise that I will become more religious, but I'll always respect your faith and love for the Maker."

Anna-Maria smiled. "Thank you," she said sincerely. "Your understanding means a lot."

"You don't have to thank me," Elsa said, capturing Anna's undivided attention with the seriousness of her tone. "If I truly love you, and I do, then I have to love that part of you as well. It's something I freely give, although I would give you everything else in the world if I could."

"There's only one other thing that I want," Anna-Maria replied, drawing closer. "I would like you to forgive me for leaving and hurting you."

"I've already done that," Elsa answered with a smile, her lips drawing closer to Anna.

"Oh," Anna-Maria stated, her breath hitching as Elsa grew near. "Um, perhaps a reconciliation kiss, then?" she invited with a slight blush.

Elsa chuckled. "You need to think bigger, my love," she said in amusement before she honored Anna's request and captured Anna's lips with her own.

Both women sighed into the kiss, and without thought, Anna-Maria looped her arms around Elsa's neck to bring her closer just as Elsa's arms wrapped around Anna's waist to do the same. Their bodies merged together as the kiss deepened, and it quickly became less chaste than the one in Anna-Maria's bedroom. Anna-Maria parted her lips in invitation, and Elsa took the opportunity, allowing her mouth to explore Anna's mouth as Anna explored Elsa's own, the both of them reveling in the taste of each other.

After a few moments, Anna-Maria could feel desire and passion threatening to take over, and the close press of Elsa's body indicated that she was feeling it too. Anna-Maria gently pulled back to break the kiss; although she wanted Elsa more than anything, she wanted to wait until they were properly married. Well, that, and until they were undressed in a comfortable bed, Anna-Maria mused to herself with her typical candor. "Elsa, we should slow down," she said breathlessly, as she gently pushed Elsa away.

Elsa felt the gentle push and heard Anna-Maria's words. It took a second to filter through, but
when it did, Elsa pulled back sharply, letting her hands fall. "I'm so sorry, Anna," she apologized immediately. "I didn't mean to push you." She slipped out of Anna's grasp and rose from the bench, taking refuge in the nearby gazebo.

Anna-Maria looked at her in concern before rising from the bench and following her. Elsa turned to look at her, but her expression was almost fearful. Anna-Maria smiled reassuringly and went to her, putting her arms back around her Captain. "You have nothing to apologize for, Elsa," Anna-Maria assured her. "I was just as willing a participant as you. I just wanted to stop us before we crossed a line that I want to cross after we are married." She glanced around. "And maybe want to cross in a nice bed and not in the gazebo," she joked, vocalizing her thoughts from before.

Elsa looked at Anna-Maria in mild shock. Considering Anna-Maria's former occupation, the waiting until marriage request was completely expected. The slightly improper teasing was not, and it gave Elsa pause, at least until her face broke out into a smile and she started chuckling. "I love that you always speak your mind," she said affectionately, drawing her Anna back into her embrace.

"And I love that you love me for it," Anna-Maria replied with a smile, snuggling in to the embrace. "Not many people do."

"I love a lot of things," Elsa mused. "Like when you sit on pine cones and lie brazenly about it."

Anna-Maria blushed. "I was trying to protect the children," she muttered embarrassedly.

"Exactly," Elsa agreed. "I love how much you love them. I also love that you were never intimidated by my title or my cold attitude. Very few people can get past those things, but you didn't seem to care."

"I didn't care about the title or the attitude, no, but I cared," Anna-Maria disagreed. "I cared that there was this beautiful, remarkable woman who was hiding herself away, even from her children. I really wanted to find a way to set her free. And I did," Anna-Maria said proudly, reaching up to stroke Elsa's cheek. Elsa smiled and leaned into the touch. "But then I caused my own downfall, because she was even more beautiful and remarkable than I had anticipated, and I fell in love with her," Anna-Maria concluded, her expressive eyes fixed on Elsa.

"Downfall?" Elsa teased. "I am your downfall?"

"That was a poor choice of word," Anna-Maria admitted with another blush. "No, not downfall. You are more like my...North Mountain," she decided. "From a distance, you are cold and intimidating, but up close, you are warm and beautiful. Like my mountain, you are strong and proud, but more importantly, you are my refuge. The North Mountain has always been my home, but if you'll have me, I want to make you my home forever."

Elsa couldn't help the stray tears that slipped down her cheeks at Anna's unexpectedly beautiful words. "I will be your home, if you will be my heart," she offered tenderly, gently lifting Anna's chin to look her in the eye. Anna-Maria's face lit up, and tears sprang to her eyes as she nodded yes. Elsa kissed her lips and then her forehead, drawing her into a tight embrace. They stood like that for a while, but Elsa had one more question to ask. "Anna, is there anyone I should go to in order to ask for your hand in marriage?" she asked, kissing Anna's forehead once more.

"No," Anna-Maria replied. "But maybe we should ask..."

"...the children?" Elsa finished with a smile, causing them both to chuckle. 

AAAAAA
In spite of Anna's answer that there was no one to ask for permission to marry her, Elsa knew that propriety and tradition dictated that there was one person that she had to ask, and another whose permission would be welcome. So, the morning after their garden walk, Elsa showered, put up her hair in its formal braid, and dressed herself in her Arendellian naval uniform. It wasn't her full formal-dress uniform, with its bowtie, epaulets and sword, but it was her sharpest service-dress one, black and double-breasted with gold buttons and braids crossing her chest. The four gold braids on her cuffs indicated her rank, and she straightened them to make her uniform perfect. Her polished boots were next, and Elsa completed her uniform by placing her black cover with its purple and green ribbon and gold crocus on over her hair and braid.

Elsa slipped out of the house before most in the household awoke, wanting her errand to be a surprise. She told Frau Schmidt that she would be missing breakfast, and, noting the uniform, the older housekeeper gave her employer a knowing smirk. Elsa swore her to secrecy before grabbing the car out of the garage and taking off for Arendelle, leaving the top up so that neither her uniform nor her hair were mussed. She debated whom she should call on first, but after glancing at the time, she realized that only one of the people she intended to meet with was probably awake. So, her first stop became Nordfell Abbey.

The sister who answered the gate seemed surprised to see a finely dressed naval officer at the convent that early, but she let Elsa in, asking her to wait while she retrieved one of the senior nuns. The first one she found was the Mistress of Postulants, Sister Marguerite, and after the sister spotted Elsa, her lips quirked up into a gentle smile. "Welcome to our abbey, Captain," she said politely, hiding her mirth at the likely reason for this visit. "I am Sister Marguerite, Mistress of the Postulants. How may we help you this blessed day?"

"I have come to see the Reverend Mother, if she is available," Elsa answered, with a polite incline of her head.

"For what purpose?" Sister Marguerite asked. "I will need to tell the Reverend Mother when I announce you." It wasn't a lie; Sister Marguerite did need that information, but she was also extremely eager to confirm her hypothesis.

"I wish to speak with her regarding one of your postulates, the one that has been employed at my estate," Elsa answered. "There have been developments, and I need her guidance."

"You are here to ask permission to take her away from us," Sister Marguerite said succinctly with a knowing smile. Elsa's cheeks turned a light shade of pink, and she nodded. Sister Marguerite's smile deepened, and she laid a caring hand on Elsa's arm. "I love Anna-Maria with all my heart," she said honestly, "but she was never meant to be one of us. She will do far more good in this world by being your wife."

Elsa smiled. "Thank you, Sister," she said.

Sister Marguerite smiled back and knocked at the Reverend Mother's office door. A call told her to enter, so she did, and when she came back out, she opened the door for Elsa. "She will see you now," the nun said. Elsa nodded and entered, and Sister Marguerite closed the door behind her.

"Well, this was quicker than I anticipated," Mother Gerda said with amusement, indicating that Elsa should sit. "We sent Anna-Maria back to you only yesterday."

"Our estrangement was short-lived, and now I ask your blessing for our marriage," Elsa replied evenly, taking off her cover and tucking it under her arm in respect as she sat down.

"Short-lived indeed," Mother Gerda said with a smirk. "But in regards to the blessing, you have to know I wouldn't have sent Anna-Maria back if I didn't approve of her love for you. Why did you
"Because you are the closest thing to a parent that she has, Reverend Mother," Elsa answered respectfully. "And though my relationship with the Maker is not the best, I am still taking Anna away from serving our shared Deity. I thought it best to ask for your blessing in person."

"I see," Mother Gerda said, impressed by Elsa's show of respect. "Well, if that is the case, I give you my blessing as Anna-Maria's surrogate mother, and I also give you my blessing as a servant of the Maker," Mother Gerda declared with a happy smile. She rose from her desk and came to stand before Elsa, putting her right hand on the top of Elsa's head. "All love is holy in Her Sight, and I know that your love for each other is deep. May the Maker bless you, and make your marriage happy and fruitful," she intoned, lifting her hand to trace the Maker's symbol at the conclusion of the blessing.

Elsa looked up. "Thank you, Reverend Mother," she said sincerely, rising and putting her cover back on.

"You are more than welcome, my child," Mother Gerda said warmly, as she opened the door. Elsa gave her a respectful bow and then left the office. Within seconds, Sister Marguerite was by her side, and Elsa was escorted to the gates. After a shared goodbye with the sister, Elsa retrieved her car and went to her next destination, the Royal Palace of Arendelle.

Elsa pulled up to the vehicle entrance, and as soon as he saw her, the guard waved her in. She parked on the gravel and entered through the gardens, easily finding her way until she came to the receiving room. The guard at the door looked bored, and Elsa surmised that he hadn't had much to do this morning. "Is Her Majesty in?" Elsa inquired politely.

The man snapped to attention and looked her over, noting the impeccable uniform. He was a relatively new hire, however, and was not yet familiar with all of the Queen's extended family. "Yes, she is, Captain," he responded with politeness, using her military title instead of her royal one and tipping Elsa off to the fact he did not know who she was. "Whom may I announce is calling?" he asked, ready to escort her out if she was not worth Her Majesty's time.

"Her Ladyship, the Baroness Schrader, Captain of Her Majesty's Navy and youngest granddaughter to the Queen," Elsa responded with authority in her voice. She rarely used all of her titles, but seeing the man go pale with fear was more than worth the breath it took to say them. Elsa hid her amused smirk as the man suddenly could not open the door fast enough. As the door opened, the Queen looked up to see her youngest granddaughter stroll authoritatively into the room. Her guard followed her into the room, and it was clear to see he was shaking. The Queen rolled her eyes; Elsa must have put the fear of the throne into him as she liked to do with newer staff. He opened his mouth to announce Elsa, but the Queen forestalled him. "I know who she is, Johan," she told him. "Please return to your post." The guard nodded gratefully and scampered from the room. The Queen turned her attention to her granddaughter. "So why have you graced me with your presence, Captain?" she asked.

"I have come regarding two matters, Your Majesty," Elsa said formally, taking off her cover. "The first is my petition for reinstatement into Your Majesty's navy."

The Queen frowned; she had hoped this impromptu visit by Elsa was to ask the Queen's permission to marry, not to further that ridiculous petition to run away from her heartbreak. "I am afraid to inform you that your petition has been summarily dismissed and will not be considered further," the Queen said, frosty authority dripping from every word. "It is true that there is a dearth of qualified officers, but the Throne has decided Arendelle is better served having you as a civilian."
Elsa could feel the frost from where she stood, and she was sincerely glad that she was not here about advancing her petition. Nana had never been this cold with her, and it was clear how her grandmother felt about her rejoining the Navy. "That is excellent news, Your Majesty," Elsa said, surprising her grandmother. "I was hoping to ask your assistance in withdrawing it, but now I see that it is not necessary."

"And why were you interested in withdrawing it?" the Queen asked, hopeful that Elsa was here for the reason she wanted her granddaughter to be.

"Because I have found that the Navy is no longer where my heart lies," Elsa replied truthfully, "and that brings me to my second matter. I have asked for a beautiful woman's hand in marriage, Your Majesty, and she has said yes. I humbly request your permission and blessing to marry her."

The smile on Elsa's face was radiant, and the Queen smiled back. "It's about time," she huffed before getting up from her chair. "Come here," she ordered, opening her arms to Elsa. Elsa came to them willingly, and her grandmother hugged her with vigor. "Congratulations, my dear," the Queen gushed as she let Elsa go.

In a playful mood, Elsa decided to tease. "You have not technically given me permission yet, Nana," she reminded her grandmother lightheartedly.

"Well, perhaps I do not wish to give it," the Queen jested. "What of her family name? Is she nobility? Will she increase the splendor and majesty of the Arendellian throne?"

"She comes from a long line of farmers with no noble blood," Elsa said honestly, her smile turning wry. "But, she is the most kind and loving person I have ever met, and she will only be an asset to our family."

"I know she will be, my dear; I know it, and my permission is granted," her grandmother assured Elsa cheerfully with another hug. "And it's about time we got some new blood in our stodgy old line. When should I expect my newest great-grandchild?" she asked, causing Elsa to freeze in alarm.

"Great-grandchild, Nana?" Elsa sputtered incredulously.

"Of course. We only have blondes and brunettes in the family," the Queen explained. "I should like to have a redhead. A girl if possible."

"I already have seven children, Nana, and we are both women," Elsa pointed out.

"So another will only add to the joy," the Queen said blithely. "And as far as both being women, there are ways around that. Just come and see me when you and your wife decide it is time for another." Elsa looked at her grandmother with a raised eyebrow, but the Queen merely smiled serenely. "Now my dear, you must go home and tell Fraulein Anna to pack," she ordered.

"Wait…what?" Elsa questioned. "She only just returned to my house."

"Now that you are engaged, it would be improper for her to live there," the Queen tutted. "She will live here until the wedding."

"But Nana," Elsa started to protest.

"None of your whining," the Queen admonished. "My carriage will come to fetch her this afternoon."
Elsa sighed. "Of course, Your Majesty," she acquiesced with a bow before flashing her grandmother one more smile and exiting the room. She gave a curt nod to the guard, chuckling to herself a bit when he paled, and made her way back to her car. A short drive later, she was back at home, only to find herself confronted with seven accusing faces as soon as she walked in the door.

"Why did you leave so early?" Brigitta asked accusingly. "And why are you all dressed up in your uniform?"

"I needed to see your Great-Grandmother, and I needed to be properly dressed," Elsa replied truthfully.

"What were you seeing GeeGee about?" Liesel questioned further.

"Our future," Elsa replied concisely, and her children glared at her, thinking her visit to their great-grandmother was about rejoining the Navy.

At just that moment, Anna-Maria came into the room. "Children!" she exclaimed. "There you are. Why did you all leave the breakfast table so abruptly? You know you should ask per…" Anna-Maria trailed off as she caught sight of her uniformed fantasy brought to life. Uniformed Elsa was even more stunning in real life than she had been in the photo, and Anna-Maria was struck instantly mute.

Elsa smirked, appreciative of her uniform's power over her future bride. She wanted so much to kiss Anna, but it wouldn't have been proper in front of the children. "Let's go out to the terrace," she suggested to everyone. "All of us need to have a talk about what is about to happen." She gestured with her hands, herding the children towards the back. With all of them in front of her, Elsa took the chance and gave Anna a quick kiss on the lips, rousing her from her stupor.

Anna-Maria kissed Elsa back lightly before breaking out into a wry grin. "You really have to warn me when you are going to wear that," she said in mild embarrassment.

"Duly noted," Elsa replied affectionately as they followed the children out on the terrace.

The children sat on the benches, still looking at their mother with suspicion. Anna-Maria went to join them, but Elsa caught her by the hand to keep the redhead by her side. Anna-Maria smiled and intertwined their fingers, and Elsa smiled back at her, causing the children's looks to go from suspicious to confused but hopeful. "Children," Elsa began, "I visited your Great-Grandmother this morning for two reasons. The first was to withdraw my petition to rejoin the Navy. Liesel was right; it was not what was best for this family, and I am sorry I made such a selfish decision.

The children sent glances around to each other, and all of them gave small sighs of relief. "We forgive you, Mother," Marta said instantly, and all of her siblings nodded in agreement.

"Thank you," Elsa said, smiling at them all.

"What was the second reason, Mother?" Louisa asked cautiously.

"To ask her permission to remarry," Elsa said simply, and the children's mouths dropped open in happy shock and anticipation. "Last night, I asked Fraulein Anna to marry me, and she said yes. If it is all right with all of you, she would like to join our family," she concluded, bringing up Anna's hand to her lips and kissing it softly.

The cacophony of happy squeals was deafening, and Elsa and Anna found themselves surrounded by seven ecstatic children giving them hugs and kisses. They hugged and kissed back until Elsa quieted them down, needing to tell them one more thing. "There is a small bit of bad news," she said, getting everyone's attention quickly. "Since Fraulein Anna and I are to be married, the Queen
has decided that she and I need to be apart before our wedding. It's an old tradition, and one that we have to follow. Fraulein Anna will be leaving us and living at the palace until the wedding," she explained. Eight faces fell, so Elsa worked quickly to cheer everyone up. "But, the Palace is not far away, and everyone is still on their holidays, so we will go every day to see her. And we will get to visit GeeGee at the same time," she offered. Her children's faces brightened, and Elsa smiled at them. "All right, you lot," she declared. "Find your Uncle Kristoff, Uncle Olaf, Frau Schmidt and Kai and tell them the good news. I have to talk with Fraulein Anna alone for a bit." Her children gave her one last hug and ran off for the house.

"Must I leave?" Anna-Maria asked disappointedly after they went into the house.

Elsa put her arms around her fiancée and drew her in. "It's only for a short time, my love," she promised. "Nana was most insistent. But, I will make sure we can be married as fast as we can be."

"When do I have to leave?" Anna-Maria questioned, distracting herself by playing with the buttons on Elsa's uniform.

"Her carriage will arrive this afternoon," Elsa replied.

"Then I guess I had better go pack," Anna-Maria said resignedly. She went to step away, but then caught another glance of Elsa in her uniform. She stepped back up and kissed Elsa deeply. The kiss lasted far longer than propriety would deem proper before Anna-Maria drew away reluctantly. "Maybe Her Majesty has a point," she said irreverently. Elsa chuckled, and Anna gave her another quick kiss before she left to go into the house to pack.

Just as she promised, the Queen's carriage came for Anna-Maria in the afternoon, and she was ready for it. She said a reluctant goodbye to everyone and climbed in as the coachman loaded her two small pieces of luggage. Everyone waved as the coach pulled away, and everyone consoled themselves that the separation would be brief.

The Queen looked up from her desk when the door opened. Johan came in and he stood at attention. "You have another visitor, Your Majesty," he said.

Thinking it was Fraulein Anna, the Queen didn't even bother to ask for a name. "Please show her in," the Queen requested. Looking surprised, Johan did as she asked, but when her visitor entered, it was the Queen's turn to be surprised. Instead of the vivacious redhead who was to marry her granddaughter, it was the Reverend Mother for the abbey at Nordfell. "Please return to your post, Johan," the Queen ordered, and the guard bowed. After he had left, the Queen continued to study her guest, until at last she spoke. "It is good to see you again, sister," she said with a small smirk.

"As it is good to see you, Your Majesty," Mother Gerda responded with a bow.

The Queen sighed. "Really, Gerda?" she asked incredulously. "After all this time, you address me by my title?"

"You started it, Bulda," Mother Gerda responded with her own smirk. "You called me 'sister'," she pointed out.

"If I were addressing you by your title, I would have called you 'Mother'. But I didn't. I called you 'sister', because you are my sister, you nitwit," Bulda said affectionately irritable. "Come here," she ordered gruffly, getting up from her chair and offering her twin sister a hug. Her sister, younger by mere minutes, came over without hesitation, and the two sisters embraced for the first
time in forever. The hug was heartfelt and strong, washing away years of separation and vastly different lives.

When it was finished, Queen Bulda offered Mother Gerda a chair. "What are you here for?" she asked as they sat down. "Based on your note, I have my suspicions, but I had no idea you would come in person."

"I have come to name my heir," Gerda said, confirming her sister's hypothesis. "And when that is done, I wish to abdicate so she may inherit my estate at once."

"And is your heir who I think it is?" Bulda asked.

"Well, she is redhead, headstrong and soon to marry my grandniece, who of course, is also your granddaughter," Gerda replied.

"A simple yes would have sufficed," Bulda grumbled, and Gerda smirked. "Don't look so smug," Bulda chastised. "It makes me suspicious that you planned all this from the start."

Gerda laughed. "No, you are the planner in the family, Bulda, not me," she reminded her sister. "And it was you who wrote to me asking if I could spare some help for Elsa."

"I was thinking you would send one of your older disciplinarians, Gerda," Bulda retorted. "Not the young, free-spirited postulant who happened to be one of the loveliest women at the abbey."

"Yes, I know," Gerda admitted with chuckle. "But, I did think that Anna-Maria needed to go back out in the world to explore. I had no idea the entire household would fall in love with her."

"Perhaps," Bulda allowed. "But I'm still suspicious."

Gerda laughed outright at that. "Well, has it turned out so bad?" she challenged good-naturedly.

"No, of course not," Bulda answered. "Fraulein Anna is a wonderful girl, and she is perfect for Elsa."

"She is," Gerda agreed. "Which is why I want to start them out on even footing."

"By giving Anna your title, your land and your inheritance money," Bulda stated, and Gerda nodded. "You do realize that by making her Duchess of Nordfell, she will control all of the abbey's lands?" Bulda asked, just because she had to.

"Of course," Gerda answered promptly. "But there is no one I would trust the abbey's lands with more, especially since Elsa will be there to help Anna-Maria navigate the treacherous waters of the nobility."

"Speaking of which, when all of the legalities go through and it is official, Duchess Anna will outrank Baroness Elsa," Bulda mused.

"From what I've seen it won't matter," Gerda said. "It was clear when Elsa came to me to ask for Anna-Maria's hand that she is completely devoted to her. The title will mean little."

"Elsa came to you?" Bulda questioned, surprised.

"Yes, this morning," Gerda confirmed.

"She is supposed to come to me first," Bulda harrumphed.

"The sky was barely awake, Bulda, so you would not have been," Gerda responded. "Elsa knows
Gerda responded. "Elsa knows this, so she just decided to come to me first. Quit being petty."

"Queens are not petty," Bulda retorted, but Gerda just rolled her eyes.

A knock sounded at the door, and the sisters looked towards it. "Come, Johan," the Queen called.

"The carriage with your guest is here, Your Majesty," he said.

"Very well, send her up to me when she is settled," the Queen ordered. Johan saluted and left.

"And that is my cue to exit," Gerda said, rising.

Bulda rose with her and gave her sister one last hug. "It was very good to see you, Gerda," she said sincerely. "Please don't stay away so long."

"I won't," Gerda promised before she took her leave.

Queen Bulda smiled after her and returned to her paperwork, keeping herself busy until the newest member of her family arrived.

True to her word, Elsa, with the help of Kristoff, Olaf, her grandmother and the considerable fortunes they had between them, arranged for a lavish wedding in near-record time. Elsa and the children called on Anna every day, and within a week, the cathedral was obtained, flowers and dresses ordered, invitations sent, and the wedding jewelry picked out with an expediency and efficiency that rivaled that of a military operation. The next week was spent bestowing and arranging Anna-Maria's new title and inheritance, and with her new status and the reality that she was no longer in the service of the Maker, the former postulant, with a small pang of emotion, dropped the "Maria" from her name to become simply Anna once again. The kiss on her cheek from Elsa soothed the brief pain, though, and the hugs of the children made it disappear entirely.

Within days, the nobility of Arendelle and beyond started to RSVP, and the guest list grew to a capacity to fill the cathedral. The reception was to be at the palace, and all of the servants were busily scurrying about to make preparations. Gifts and wedding items started to arrive, and the whole family descended into organized chaos, working hard to make sure everything was perfect. Everything went mostly smoothly, so that when the wedding day dawned, everything was in place.

With wedding bells clanging around them, the sisters of Nordfell Abbey circled around Anna like hummingbirds, making sure that her beautiful white dress was perfectly arranged, and the crown of flowers that held her veil was seated perfectly on her head. They straightened out her gossamer train and helped her down the stairs, where Anna knelt before Mother Gerda to receive her blessing. Much as she had done with Elsa, Mother Gerda placed her hand on Anna's head, wishing her happiness in her married life.

Rising, Anna exited the small room and walked through Nordfell Abbey with the sisters trailing behind her. Church bells gave way to the cathedral pipe organ when Anna reached the gate separating the abbey from the cathedral. The Reverend Mother opened the gate for her, and Anna smiled at her. After receiving her wedding bouquet from her maid of honor Liesel, Anna sniffed its pleasant fragrance before turning back to the gate. The sisters all smiled at her fondly, and Anna smiled back, trying to convey all of the love and gratitude she felt for them. She held their gaze until the music changed, and only after the flower girls Gretl and Marta and her attendant Liesel had gone did Anna turn forward and begin her walk down the aisle.
At the end of the aisle, Elsa waited, resplendent in her full formal dress uniform. The uniform was black, with tails and a double row of shining gold buttons. Because it was her formal uniform, she wore a purple and green sash draped diagonally across her chest, pristine white gloves and instead of a high collar, an elegant bowtie emblazoned with the family crocus tied around her neck. On her shoulders she had epaulets of gold braids, on her chest her many medals for bravery, and at her side hung her ceremonial sword. She was a gorgeous sight to behold, and as Anna neared the altar and saw her bride, her steps nearly faltered at her beauty.

For her own part, Elsa was glad she was already at the altar with Kristoff at her side as best man. The sight of Anna in her flowing white dress was making her weak in the knees, and Elsa knew she could barely stand, let alone walk. Her eyes drank in the sight of her bride, and Elsa gave a silent prayer of thanks to the Maker, her first in many, many years, that such a wonderful woman was becoming her wife. As Anna climbed the steps to the altar, Elsa smiled radiantly and held out her gloved hand. Anna smiled back, her look of joy just as bright, and together, they walked further up the altar to the priestess. They, along with Kristoff and Liesel, knelt before the priestess, and with the sisters of the abbey looking on in pride, the priestess blessed their union in the eyes of the Maker and the esteemed assembled company.

The reception was a grand affair, and hundreds of people milled around the palace ballroom and its elegant dining halls. The brides were introduced with much fanfare, and Her Grace, Duchess Anna Schrader, the Duchess Regnant of Nordfell was escorted to the dais by her wife, Her Ladyship, Baroness Elsa Schrader, the Duchess Consort of Nordfell and Captain of her Majesty's Navy. There had been much talk about what their titles and surnames were going to be, but after much discussion between them and with the children, it was decided that Elsa would revert to her royal name of Schrader, and Anna, now that she was a royal herself, would take the same name. The children would remain Von Trapp to honor their father.

Food, chocolate and alcohol flowed, and the night slipped away. After saying good night, the children were put to bed by the palace servants, except for Liesel, who Anna convinced Elsa was old enough to stay. A few more hours passed, but finally, the brides, eager to start their honeymoon, bade everyone good night. The Queen's own carriage, the same one that had paraded them through Arendelle to the cheers of the crowd as they went from the cathedral to the palace, stood waiting, and the brides got in. The driver took them to the Queen's Royal Summerhaus, where they would spend a night before starting on their honeymoon proper. After she helped Anna out of the carriage, Elsa left her briefly to open the door before coming back to her side. Unexpectedly, Elsa swept Anna up into a bridal carry, causing her new bride to squeal with surprise. "You stinker; warn me next time," Anna chastised with a laugh.

"I make no promises," Elsa replied with a smirk before kissing Anna and carefully bringing her over the threshold. The driver watched as the door shut, and she smiled to herself as she clicked to the horses to get them going. The moon shone peacefully over the city as she drove back to the palace, and it seemed as though the whole country was content. Little did most know that within two weeks, the peace would be shattered, and everyone's lives would change forever.
Two weeks after one of the grandest weddings Arendelle had ever seen, shots rang out in the dead of night all around the Arendellian capital city, and shouts of angry officers ordered their soldiers to lay siege to the castle. Caught off guard, the palace militia was no match for Weselton's highly-organized forces, and within minutes, the palace had been subdued and Queen Bulda had been captured. Preening with his victory, the Duke of Weselton offered his terms to the Queen, and she laughed in his weasel face. By the morning, though, the church bells were pealing all over Arendelle, and her throne room was filled with her family. Among the company were her still-living sons and daughters, most of her grandchildren, and her twenty five great-grandchildren, including seven youngsters whose mothers were safely out of the country. With the Duke of Weselton’s armed soldiers menacing her family, the Queen had no choice. With a heavy heart, she signed the papers binding Arendelle to Weselton, her hope now resting with the one granddaughter that was missing, and the feisty young woman who had become her wife.

Anna felt soft kisses on her forehead and the top of her head, which was Elsa's gentle signal that it was time to wake up. Anna always slept later than Elsa, but since Anna had taken to using her wife's chest as a pillow, Elsa waited in bed patiently until Anna's usual wakeup time. Then, Elsa woke up her wife with kisses, and since Anna never failed to have a huge smile on her face when she woke, Elsa surmised that Anna was happy with their wakeup routine. Anna stretched a bit before putting her arms back around Elsa and snuggling back into her chest. "Good morning, sweetheart," she mumbled sleepily.

Elsa chuckled. "Good morning, my love," she replied, hugging her back. Anna's breathing started to slip back into its sleep cadence, so Elsa resumed her kissing. "You need to wake up, love," she coaxed with another kiss. "The breakfast tray is almost here, and I ordered chocolate croissants." The mention of chocolate got one blue-green eye to pop open, and Anna started to stretch again, this time stretching far enough to give Elsa a good morning kiss. Elsa kissed back, but before things could go any farther, a knock sounded on their guest cottage's front door. Elsa slipped out from under Anna and picked up her sky-blue robe from its chair, putting it on as she went to the front room. When she opened the door, though, it wasn't a servant with their breakfast food. It was the mistress of the estate, Marchioness Belle de la Bête, and her expression was grim.

"I hate to disturb you, but I have received news over the wireless that is of utmost importance to you both," she said. "May I come in?" she asked.

"Of course, my lady," Elsa said immediately, opening the door and gesturing for her to come inside. "Anna!" she called, turning towards the bedroom. "We have company. Please join us in the front room." Anna, still on the bed waiting for Elsa to come back, jumped off of the bed at once, not liking the sense of urgency she could hear in her wife's voice. She grabbed her emerald-green robe and put it on, making sure everything was covered before she went to the front room.
"Marchioness de la Bête?" she questioned, noticing the serious faces on both of the women. Belle had seated herself in the wingback chair, and Elsa was had seated herself on the couch. "Is everything all right?" Anna asked, sitting closely by Elsa.

"No, Your Grace, it is not," Belle confirmed. "The reports from the wireless have announced that Arendelle has agreed to be annexed by Weselton."

"What?!" Elsa shouted, jumping up from the couch in a fury. "How? The Queen would never have allowed such a travesty."

"From the reports, she had no choice," Belle responded. "The wireless is saying that there was an armed invasion force, and that shots could be heard in the capital city. They also said that, um, that…" Belle hesitated, knowing that news of the capture of her children would make her guest even more distressed.

"That what, my lady?" Elsa growled, sensing what Belle might have to say.

"That the invading force had rounded up all of the royal family, including all of the Queen's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren," she stated. "Everyone is under house arrest at the Palace until the treaty is signed."

Anna gasped. "Our children," she said, her voice almost a whisper because of her distress. "They are threatening our children, Elsa."

Elsa turned towards Anna, and her face was a cold mask of rage. When she saw Anna's distress, though, her features softened a bit, and she returned to the couch to take Anna in her arms. "And they will pay, my love," Elsa swore as they held each other. "They will pay."

"There is supposed to be some sort of formal announcement at 10:00AM," Belle told them. "You are welcome come up to the main house to listen."

"We will get ready and join you shortly," Elsa said decisively.

Belle nodded. "I'll have the servants set out some breakfast for you," she said, getting up from her wingback chair. She looked at them in sympathy. "I am so sorry that I had to bring you this news," she said with sincere regret.

"No, please don't feel bad, my lady," Anna said, immediately getting off of the couch. She laid a caring hand on the noblewoman's forearm. "We needed to know, and we sincerely appreciate you bringing this news to us," Anna thanked her.

"Well, I hope my husband and I will be able to do more," Belle replied determinedly, placing a friendly hand over Anna's. "I will see you both at the main house shortly." She gave Anna's hand a squeeze before turning around and leaving through the front door.

Elsa stood up from the couch, still seething about the invasion and terrified for her children, and she walked silently back into the bedroom. Elsa always fell silent when upset, and now was no exception. As she soundlessly gathered her clothes, Elsa felt two arms slide around her waist, and a newly-familiar body press into her back. Anna said nothing but merely held her, her slender arms surprisingly strong in their embrace. The firm, warm hug reminded Elsa that she wasn't alone in this, and for some reason, that knowledge gave her permission to feel, rather than to conceal everything like she usually did. Elsa started sobbing, the agony of being away from her children when they were in danger tearing her apart. The hug grew firmer, and Elsa wrapped her arms around Anna's, drawing them even closer. Elsa's terror receded with the flow of her tears, and when she was done, she felt infinitely better, ready to do whatever it took to get her children and
"Arendelle back. She loosened her grip on Anna's arms and turned around, facing the person she was discovering she loved more than life. "Thank you," Elsa said simply, reaching down to kiss her.

"You are more than welcome, sweetheart," Anna replied, kissing back. Elsa smiled, kissing her one more time before they got dressed and made their way up to the main house.

Belle was waiting for them, and as promised, breakfast was waiting for them as well. Elsa, her stomach tied in knots, was planning to make do with coffee, until a china plate with a small amount of fruit and a croissant were handed to her. "You'll do no one any good by going hungry," Anna chided.

"Yes, Mother," Elsa sassed.

Anna raised her eyebrow, but she didn't comment further as she cut her croissant in two and stuffed it full of soft-scrambled eggs. Belle took a pastry and a cup of coffee for herself, and the three of them nibbled, listening to the wireless as it rehashed information that Belle had already given Elsa and Anna.

When the clock struck ten, the reporter signed off and the broadcast switched over to the live feed of the press conference from Arendelle. The Duke of Weselton went first, and Elsa nearly crushed her china coffee cup upon hearing that sniveling voice. "People of the Weselton and Arendelle!" he said. "It is a great day in the history of our two nations. For too long, our nations have been separated, small, vulnerable, and subject to the whims of the larger countries on the Continent. Today, though, we join forces, and we become great, strong, and in command of our own national destiny. We are one, united, secure, and I am sure this day will forever be a shining one in our nation's history. Long live Weselton! Long live Arendelle!"

On the broadcast, the boos and mocking catcalls of the people of Arendelle could be heard, and Elsa smirked at the resolve and pride of her people. The announcer announced Her Majesty, Queen Bulda, and there was a pause as she slowly came to the microphone. "People of Arendelle," she said, capturing her people's attention. "In spite of what has just been said, today is not a day for celebration. Today is a day for mourning. Our beautiful country has been taken from us, taken by weasels who have underhandedly been planning this day for months. I am sorry, my people, that we were not able to stop them, and I ask for your forgiveness. I had no choice; their men have captured all of the royal family save two, and I was compelled to sign the treaty to end the threat against my family. But stand tall, people of Arendelle, help will be coming, and when it does, we will rise up and break the yoke of the weasels forever. Be strong, my people, and we will be victorious. Long live Arendelle!"

"Long live Arendelle! Long live the Queen!" her people responded loudly and vehemently, breaking into loud cheers and applause. Elsa smirked again, pleased with her grandmother's show of defiance.

There was another long pause as someone else stepped up to the microphone. When the first words left his mouth, Elsa realized it was the Duke of Weselton again, and her face drew itself back into a scowl. "Yes, um thank you, Queen Bulda, for that rousing speech," he said, and his annoyance and anger at her words bled into his tone. "People of Arendelle," he began. "As we bring this unification ceremony to a close, I just want to remind everyone of one thing: nothing in Arendelle has changed. Your beloved Queen will still rule; as we speak your royal family are returning to their homes. Your laws and precepts will remain intact; Parliament will meet as it always does today and in future days. Your lives will not change. The only difference you will feel is your increased sense of security now that our military forces are one. Good day to you, People of Arendelle, and may today live on in our glorious history!"
There seemed to be more boos from the audience, but the broadcast of the live feed stopped and the reporter in the studio came back on. Elsa, Anna and Belle listened for a few minutes, but when he had nothing of import to say, Belle turned it off. All three of the women sat in silence, all of them thinking about what could be done.

"We need to summon help," Elsa said at last. "Grandmother knows of my naval connections, and she was telling me to rally our allies. But, it will take some time to sail to them all, and I deplore the idea of being away from Arendelle when my children are being menaced."

"Sail?" Belle questioned. "Why on Earth would you take the time to sail? We have a telephone, and there is a telegraph office in the village. We can send the messages out at once. It might take a few days to coordinate with everyone, but not the weeks it would take to sail."

"It might seem improper to ask for aid by correspondence," Elsa hypothesized.

"Nonsense," Belle replied. "It is an emergency, and these are modern times we are living in. We should use the modern conveniences available to us. Cogsworth!" she called, and a short, stout man entered immediately. "Fetch the carriage. We are going into the village at once," she ordered. "And please find the Marchioness and tell him his assistance is needed at the main house."

"Yes, Marchioness," the man said and disappeared.

Belle left to fetch a few things, and Elsa and Anna were left alone. "You could stay here, my love," Elsa offered.

"Why?" Anna questioned, puzzled. "Why wouldn't I go into the village with you?"

"Not the village," Elsa said, realizing her abrupt offer had been misunderstood. "I meant stay here when I return to Arendelle with our allies," she explained.

"No," Anna said flatly.

"But…” Elsa began.

"No," Anna repeated emphatically.

Elsa sighed. "Very well," she acquiesced, knowing there was no way to change Anna's thoughts when she was this determined about something. Belle came back into the room a moment later, and three of them left for the village, determined to start the process of driving the Weasels out of Arendelle.

AAAAAA

Two weeks had passed since the annexation of Arendelle to Weselton, and surprisingly, just as the Duke of Weselton had predicted, very little in Arendelle had changed. The two most notable exceptions were the Weselton soldiers marching through the town square and the Weselton flag flying from every building, reminding the people of Arendelle exactly who was in control of their country. Smiling in delight, the Duke of Weselton drove through the streets of what was now his capital city, taking pride in his soldiers marching as he passed them. His car stopped at the back entrance to the Felsenreitschule, the traditional location for the Arendellian Folk Festival, and his driver got out to open the back door. The Duke got out of his car and strode in, easily spying the person he had come to talk to.

With the melody of the Laendler being played by a rehearsing quintet, the Duke strode to the front of the stage. "Herr Detweiler!" he called, and Olaf looked up from the program he was showing to the von Trapp children to look at him in annoyance and dismay. "Hail Weselton!" he saluted.
"Oh," Olaf commented, not returning the salute. "Good Afternoon, Your Grace," he said with no cheer to his usually-bubbly tone.

"Perhaps you have not heard," the Duke said. "The salute has become official. Hail Weselton!" he repeated, giving the salute.

"Hail Weselton," Olaf echoed, giving a half-assed version of the salute that ended with him scratching his nose. He looked the children and rolled his eyes, causing them to smirk.

"I have just come from the house of Captain Schrader," the Duke said. "While attempting to locate her and her wife, I noted that theirs was the only house in the neighborhood not flying the flag of Weselton since the Annexation. But, we have dealt with that situation." Olaf shrugged, planning on telling the children to completely ruin the flag that had presumably been displayed once they got back to the house. "The housekeeper told me that I would find you here," the Duke continued. "It was the only information the woman would give me."

"Well, what kind of information are you looking for?" Olaf asked, pretending to be interested.

"We want to know when the Captain and the Duchess will be returning," the Duke replied.

"Well, they are on their honeymoon trip; uh, they haven't been in touch with us," Olaf said honestly, a smile playing on his lips as he glanced at the children.

"Are you asking me to believe that the Captain and the Duchess have not communicated with their children in over a month?" the Duke inquired incredulously.

"Um, Your Grace, have you chanced to see the Duchess of Nordfell? Would communicating with your children be a priority if you were on a honeymoon trip with either of them?" Olaf retorted.

The Duke thought that over and realized Olaf had a point. He nodded his head in agreement. "When the Captain and the Duchess do return, they will be expected to take their proper place in the new order," he declared.

"Naturally, naturally," Olaf agreed disingenuously. "And may I congratulate you, that is, your people, on deciding to let the Festival go on tonight as planned?" he complimented him, hoping to get the loathsome Head Weasel to leave by being nice.

"Why should it not go on?" the Duke replied. "Nothing in Arendelle has changed. Singing and music will show this to the world. Arendelle is the same. Hail Weselton!" he concluded emphatically, turning away from Olaf and heading to his car.

"Long live the Queen," Olaf responded under his breath. He looked at his seven temporary charges. "Come on, children; let's go home," he offered.

"Why was that man so cross?" Gretl asked curiously.

"Everybody is cross these days, darling," Olaf replied, gathering up their sheet music.

"Maybe the flag with the black weasel on it makes everyone nervous," Marta hypothesized.

"Is Mother going to be in trouble?" Liesel asked.

"Well, she doesn't have to be," Olaf mused. "But knowing your mother—both of them, actually—they will be sooner or later," he admitted with a smirk.

"Are we really going to be singing before a whole lot of people at the Festival tonight?" Brigitta
asked, abruptly and purposefully changing the subject before the talk of Mother being in trouble frightened the little ones.

"Of course. Look," Olaf requested, pointing to the official program. "The von Trapp Family Singers. And here are your names: Liesel, Friedrich, Louisa, Brigitta, Kurt, Marta and Gretl."

"Why am I always last?" Gretl asked plaintively.

"Because you are the most important," Olaf said promptly, tweaking her nose. She smiled, and the rest of her siblings laughed.

They walked out of the venue, and Brigitta had another question. "Uncle Olaf, are you sure Mother will approve of our singing in public?" she asked doubtfully.

"Oh, she'll be pleased and proud," Olaf stated without hesitation.

Brigitta turned back to look at her oldest sibling. "Liesel, do you think so?" she asked.

"Don't you trust me?" Olaf asked, pretending to be offended.

"No," Brigitta stated bluntly.

"You're a very intelligent girl," Olaf complimented her as he opened the car door, and she giggled.

One by one, the siblings plied in, but before Liesel could get in, she heard a familiar voice calling her name. "Liesel!" Hans shouted. "Liesel!"

Liesel smiled and turned around. "Hans!" she said excitedly, walking towards him. Olaf allowed it, but he glared at the young man as his dormant paternal instincts flared to life. "Hans! I'm so glad to see you. It's been such…"

"Good afternoon," Hans said brusquely. "You will take these telegrams, please, and deliver them to your mother and her wife as soon as they come home."

"They are on their honeymoon," Liesel said, uneasy and hurt at the way Hans was treating her.

"I know that," Hans said dismissively. "We make it our business to know everything about everyone."

"We?" Liesel questioned, before noticing his uniform. She gasped softly. Hans had become a member of the Weselton Youth.

"Just see that they get them," Hans said coldly, any traces of affection gone now that she was looking at him with a mixture of betrayal and disgust. She was as foolish and arrogant as her mother, and Hans was now bigger than the both of them.

Liesel's heart was breaking at the cold look in Hans' eyes, but she tried one more thing. "Don't you want to come over tonight and deliver it yourself?" she offered, hoping that if she could get him alone and if they could talk, she would be able to get him away from those people and get them back together.

Hans sighed in annoyance. "I am now occupied with more important matters," he spat, "and your mothers better be too if they know what's good for them!" He turned around, leaving a stunned Liesel holding the telegrams. She looked after him sadly and then got into the car with her siblings.
A ship bearing the insignia of the Marquis de la Bête sailed into Arendelle harbor, and after receiving permission from the port master, it docked at one of the slips reserved for Her Majesty. In short order, the Duchess of Nordfell and the Baroness Schrader disembarked, thanking the crew profusely. After a fond farewell to the Marquis and Marchioness, a porter loaded their luggage into a waiting taxi, and Elsa and Anna were on their way back to the Schrader estate.

Everything about their arrival had been purposeful; the time, date, and conveyance were all carefully chosen. They had sailed in during broad daylight because Elsa wanted the Weasels to know that they had returned. That way, it would make it appear as if they had nothing to hide. They had specifically chosen the date because it was the day of the Arendellian Folk Festival. That evening, when the navies and soldiers of the Southern Isles, Dunbroch and Corona, Arendelle’s staunchest allies in the Great War, sailed into the harbor, most everyone in the city would be in the Felsenreitschule attending the Festival. It would keep the civilians away from the fighting and away from harm, and if the Head Weasel attended like he was supposed to, he would be easy to capture after his forces had fallen. They had come on the Marquis’ ship so that he and the Marchioness would be near to assist in the organization and coordination of the fighting force, and Elsa was satisfied with their preparations, at least as much as she could be, considering war was never straightforward.

When the taxi turned into their circular driveway, Elsa looked as angry as Anna had ever seen her. Concerned, Anna looked at the house, and she instantly saw the issue. "We will take it down as soon as we get out, sweetheart," she soothed. "That flag will come down immediately." Elsa nodded as the taxi rolled to a stop. He unloaded their luggage and took it into the house, and Elsa paid and tipped him. As he drove away, Elsa violently tugged on the odious banner hanging from her house. With a satisfying rip, the flag came down, and Elsa turned it ninety degrees after she had caught it. With another show of strength, she ripped it in half. Anna smirked. "Feel better?" she asked.

"Very much so," Elsa replied with a smirk of her own. Sudden yells of "Mother! Mother!" caught their attention and they turned to see Olaf and the children circling the driveway. The shouts continued until the car was parked. "Hello there!" Elsa responded, opening the car door for them.

"We didn't expect you so soon!" Friedrich exclaimed as they all piled out.

"Did you bring us anything from the Continent?" Kurt asked excitedly, coming around the car to hug his mother. Elsa chuffed his ear affectionately before firmly hugging all of her children that she could reach. She had been so afraid for them, but all seemed to be well. They happily returned her hugs, until a new voice reminded them there was someone else they needed to welcome home.

"Hello!" Anna said merrily from her place in the doorway, just as happy as Elsa to see the children safe, sound and happy. The juvenile mob surrounded her in an instant, and she hugged them all, lovingly ruffling hair and caressing cheeks as they all welcomed her back.

Elsa smiled at her children and her wife for a second before she glanced down at the flag she still held. She frowned, and she turned that frown on Olaf. "I had nothing to do with that, Elsa," he assured her.

Elsa dumped the ruined flag into the backseat of the car. "We had some planning to do, but we came back as fast as we could," she said, giving him a hug.

"Planning, eh?" Olaf questioned with a sly grin. "I told the children you would be getting into trouble sooner or later." Elsa smiled at him and went to join her wife and children.
"Well, well, well," she said, moving through the happy crowd to stand beside Anna. "We missed you!"

"We missed kissing you goodnight," Anna added.

"We missed all the noise you make in the morning telling each other to be quiet!" Elsa joked, and the children laughed.

"Most of all, we missed hearing you sing," Anna concluded.

Upon hearing the word "sing", Brigitta was reminded of something important that they needed to share with their parents. "Oh, you came back just in time," she said, happily grabbing a program from Olaf. "Look, Fraulein Anna..." she started before pausing to think. "...I mean, Mama," she corrected herself shyly. The children had discussed at length what they were going to call Fraulein Anna when she got home, and since they already called Mother, well, "Mother", they had decided that Mama suited Fraulein Anna best. Anna smiled, completely charmed, and Elsa smiled proudly from her place beside Olaf. Brigitta blushed a bit before she continued. "We're going to sing in the Festival tonight!" she announced, showing Anna the program.

"What?" Anna questioned, knowing how reticent Elsa was about the children singing in public. Many different enthusiastic voices confirmed what Brigitta has said, but they all fell silent as a disapproving Elsa confiscated the program and turned to glare at Olaf.

Olaf grimaced before putting on his best charming grin. "Uh, surprise, surprise!" he chuckled.

Elsa plastered on the false smile that Anna remembered unpleasantly from her first days as a governess. "All right, there are surprises for everyone on the terrace," she announced, still looking at the program and thinking. The children yelled in delight and took off, and after they had gone, the fake smile faded. "We'll talk about this inside," she told Olaf brusquely, turning to go inside the house.

"Elsa, I would have told you, but you were away," Olaf protested, following her. "I had to make a last minute decision. I was fortunate to enter them at all."

"Olaf," Elsa said evenly.

"They'll be the talk of the festival," Olaf wheedled.

"Olaf," Elsa said again.

"But the committee heard them, and they were enchanting," Olaf whined.

"Oh, Olaf, what did they say?" Anna asked, eager to hear what professional musicians thought of her music lessons.

"I have never heard such well-taught enthusiasm," Olaf replied, hopeful that Anna could convince Elsa.

Anna smiled and took the few steps separating her from her wife. "Oh, sweetheart, don't you think just this once?" she cajoled before putting her arms around Elsa and lowering her voice. "It would keep them safer tonight," she whispered.

Elsa looked at her wife and smiled wryly. "We haven't been married long enough for you to be able to read my thoughts," she chastised affectionately, giving Anna a small kiss. "But yes, it would, and that's exactly why I was considering breaking my own rule about them performing. But I think there would be only one thing that would convince me," she decided.
"What would that be?" Anna prompted.

"You would need to join them," Elsa stated. Anna started to protest, but Elsa forestalled her. "You are not a soldier or a sailor, my love," she said honestly. "I know you want to help, but I really do think that this is the best way for you to help. We can all go to the Festival, making the Weasels think nothing is amiss. I'll slip out during the performances to meet our allies, while you stay to make sure our children stay safe."

"And keep me out of the way in the process," Anna pointed out in irritation. Elsa didn't answer, but merely looked at Anna, and the pleading and worry in those vivid blue eyes did Anna in. "Very well," she conceded with a sigh. Elsa kissed her gratefully, and Anna kissed back. At Olaf's embarrassed clearing of his throat, the two women separated, and he looked at them hopefully.

"The children will sing tonight," Elsa informed him, causing his face to light up. "But you will have one more performer. Anna will be joining them."

"Of course, of course!" Olaf gushed. "Her presence will be more than welcome! Wait," he said suddenly. "Where will you be?" he asked suspiciously.

"Oh, I will be there," Elsa assured him. "For part of the time."

"You are using my Festival as a cover, aren't you?" Olaf accused, although there was more resignation than anger in his tone.

"Yes," Elsa replied succinctly.

Olaf sighed. "Sometimes you are worse than my brother," he grumbled in mock annoyance. "And I knew you were up to something when Kristoff ran back to the Southern Isles the instant you telephoned. But regardless, let me know what I can do to help," he requested with a proud smile. Elsa nodded at him, and he left the room.

"Mother? Mama?" a voice behind them called out, and Elsa and Anna turned around to see Liesel. "I was so excited to see you that I forgot about these," she said, taking two paper squares out of her pocket and handing them over.

"Why weren't they delivered?" Anna asked, knowing who usually delivered them and why Liesel looked forward to it.

"The messenger was in town when we were rehearsing, and he said he didn't have the time to come by," Liesel responded sadly.

"Was that his only reason?" Anna asked, ignoring Elsa's pointed stare.

"Yes, but he wasn't being completely truthful," Liesel replied dejectedly.

Anna reached out to give her daughter a hug. "I'm so sorry, sweetie," Anna murmured as Liesel hugged her back tightly.

"It's okay, Mama," Liesel answered. "With the uniform he was wearing today, he wasn't the boy I thought he was. I'll find someone better."

Anna smiled. "That's the spirit," she encouraged, and Liesel smiled as she let her new Mama go and went back out to the terrace.

"And what was that all about?" Elsa asked pointedly.
"Liesel had been seeing the telegram delivery boy, but he apparently joined Weselton and broke up with Liesel. Liesel is understandably heartbroken, but she wouldn't want to be with someone like that anyway, so she is sanguine about the breakup," Anna summarized.

"Liesel was seeing someone," Elsa repeated, her voice growing outraged. "And you knew!?"

"Yes," Anna said truthfully. "She confessed it to me the night of the thunderstorm. But you left the next day, and by the time you came back, the boy hadn't been here in a while. Then everything started happening between us, and I became more occupied with my own romantic issues rather than Liesel's. I'm sorry; I should have told you, and I promise not to keep anything concerning our children away from you ever again."

Elsa let out a huff of anger, but she knew why Liesel, especially back then, would have confided in Anna rather than her, and she knew why Anna would have kept the information from her. "Please see that you don't," she requested, her voice cold more out of habit rather than disapproval.

Anna winced at the cold tone, but she impetuously grabbed the lapels of Elsa's suit jacket and pulled her into a kiss. After a moment of shock, Elsa melted into the kiss, and her arms went around Anna. "Please don't be cold with me again," Anna demanded when she slackened her grip and broke the kiss. "Please don't shut me out. It was a different time, and we had a much different relationship. It won't happen again."

"It's all right, love," Elsa said calmly, not liking the subtle distress in Anna's tone. "I understand why you didn't tell me. All is forgiven, I promise you." She reached down to kiss Anna once more. "Besides, if you keep kissing me like that, I wager there is very little I would not forgive," she purred, and Anna blushed as she kissed back. Their telegrams were completely forgotten, and both of them slipped to the floor. When the paper struck the tile with a subtle "whap!", the two women came back to reality. Elsa sighed and reached down for them, handing Anna hers before opening her own.

Within a few seconds, Elsa growled and crumpled the telegram in her hand. Anna looked up from her own telegram in alarm. "What is it?" she asked.

"Weasel-town," Elsa spat. "They've offered a commission in their navy. I've been 'requested' to accept immediately and report to their naval base in Weasel-town tomorrow. As if I would ever join them and their navy."

"Well, as of tomorrow, Weasel-town probably won't have a navy, so I wouldn't trouble yourself too much, sweetheart," Anna said optimistically.

Elsa smiled at her wife's typical optimism. "What does yours say?" she questioned.

"Oh, it's from Weselton, too. Apparently they want my signature on some sort of official document," Anna replied. "They already have the Queen's approval, though; I'm not sure why they would need mine."

"Because the Duchess of Nordfell is the largest landowner in Arendelle after the Queen," Elsa told her. "You control a considerable amount of land, including the North Mountain and the Nordfell Abbey grounds. If you don't sign, then you potentially have enough leverage to start a revolt against them. Since you weren't here to intimidate like the other Dukes and Duchesses, you have not yet signed whatever they were forced to, and Weasel-town wants to rectify that."

"Too bad I won't sign, then," Anna said unconcernedly. "As of tonight, their threats mean
"Speaking of tonight, we need to get the children ready," Elsa said, giving Anna a small, proud kiss to the temple after her statement. "We need to tell them that you are going to perform with them, and that things will be...unsettled tonight."

"Unsettled?" Anna questioned. "I suppose that would be one way to put it. But you are the mistress of understatement."

"Just as you are the mistress of hyperbole," Elsa teased back.

"Then it seems we are a perfect pair," Anna declared with a smile, and the two of them went upstairs to get themselves and their children ready.

Night fell, and it was time for everyone to make their way to the Festival. They went to the garage to get the car, and all ten of them managed to squeeze themselves into a car designed for six. The gate was still closed, so Kurt disentangled himself from his siblings and went to open the gate. Elsa drove out of the driveway and then stopped, waiting for him to close the gate and get back into the car. Just as the gate clanged shut, though, two pairs of headlights illuminated their car from behind. From his window in the mansion, Kai smiled. He had done his job well; the traitors would be captured and Weselton would rule Arendelle forever.

The Duke of Weselton stepped out from behind the headlights just as Elsa got out of the car. "Baroness Schrader!" he saluted. "So nice to see that you have returned from your honeymoon."

"I wish I could say it is nice to see you, Your Grace," Elsa replied icily.

The Duke ignored the comment. "But what of your bride? Where might the Duchess of Nordfell be?" he asked, and the soldiers he had brought with him snapped to attention.

"I am right here, your Grace," Anna said, getting out of the car herself.

The Duke of Weselton studied them. "You both received telegrams, but neither one of you answered. Telegrams from Weselton explaining how you could assist in the joining of our countries," he stated.

"We will assist in our own good time," Elsa said dismissively. "But we thank you for your concern."

"I'm afraid your assistance is needed now, Captain," the Duke said with smarmy triumph. "So we are here to escort you and the Duchess to Weselton tonight where you, Captain, will accept your commission, and you, Your Grace, will sign your oath of allegiance."

Elsa blanched. The thought of either or both of those two things happening was repugnant in and of itself, but she also needed to be in Arendelle to lead the incoming liberators. Thinking fast, she went with the almost truth. "I'm afraid that's going to be quite impossible," she informed him. "You see, we and our children are singing in the Festival tonight, and we need to be going or we will be late."

"And you ask me to believe that, you, Baroness Schrader, Captain of Her Majesty's Navy, are singing in a concert?" the Duke asked cynically.

"Yes," Elsa said simply. "Like you, Your Grace, I am a person of hidden talents."
The Duke remained highly skeptical, so Anna intervened. "Here is a program," she offered, walking over to the Duke and handing it to him.

The Duke used the headlights to read the paper. "It says here only the names of the children," he pointed out with suspicion.

"We were on our honeymoon; Olaf had no guarantees we would be back," Elsa lied smoothly.

Anna glanced at her watch exaggeratedly. "We really must be going, Elsa," she said with mostly-false impatience. "We are going to be late, and this night air is not good for the children's voices."

The Duke looked at them and made a decision. "Well, a slight delay in bringing you to Weselton will not be serious. Therefore, you will sing. You will all sing," he declared. Elsa hid her frown. It would be impossible for her to slip away during the performance now, but somehow they would manage. Perhaps Olaf could keep the others apprised of the changes. "But only because that's the way I want it to be," the Duke continued. "It will demonstrate that nothing in Arendelle has changed. And when you are finished singing, you both will be taken to Weselton. Now, if you two ladies will get back in your car, we will escort your family to the Festival."

"No escort will be necessary, Your Grace," Elsa replied coldly.

"It's a pleasure, Captain," the Duke assured her smugly. "After all, we wouldn't want you to get lost in the crowd."

Elsa glared at him but said nothing. She caught Anna's eye over the top of the car and gave her a reassuring smile. Anna smiled back, and they both got into the car. Elsa put the car into gear, and with the Duke and his henchmen trailing behind them, they drove to the Felsenreitschule.

"With A, B, C…." Anna sang, harmonizing with the stanza of Do-Re-Mi that the children were singing. As she sang, she looked around, seeing a Weselton soldier everywhere she looked.

"With jam…." Elsa followed, thankful for the times that Marta and Gretl had convinced her to join their music lessons. Elsa knew her voice was good, but she never would have been able to follow the layers and the harmonies if she hadn't attended. She looked around much as Anna had, but her military eye caught cracks in the defenses that Anna hadn't seen. Her smile turned into a smirk, and she nodded happily at Anna. Reassured, Anna smiled brightly and sang the last few lines of the song with enthusiasm.

The crowd broke out into raucous applause as the children bowed and curtseyed. The Duke, sitting in the front row and wanting to keep up appearances, begrudgingly smiled and started clapping along with the crowd. The Queen, sitting in the royal box, clapped and smiled as well, happy to see Elsa and Anna back and genuinely enjoying her family's performance. Elsa and the family had been running late, so they hadn't had the time to talk before the performance, but the few words and gestures Elsa had managed to exchange with Bulda gave the Queen confidence that plans were afoot.

The applause died down, and the spotlight shifted to Elsa as she broke away from her family to stand at the microphone alone. From just offstage, Olaf offered to bring the guitar, and she nodded her head. "My fellow Arendellians," she said, "our country is facing challenges the likes of which we have not seen since the Great War ended. There was one song that united us as a people then, and it has united our people for generations. It will unite us now, because at its heart, it is a love song, and I know that you share this love. I pray to the Maker that you will never let it die." She took Anna's guitar from Olaf, and after strumming a few bars, she began to sing.
"Edelweiss, edelweiss, every morning you greet me," she began, and the crowd fell into a reverent silence as her beautiful mezzosoprano and its simple guitar accompaniment filled the amphitheater with Arendelle's national anthem. "Small and white, clean and bright, you look happy to meet me," she continued, skillfully playing the guitar while she sang. The Duke of Weselton shifted around uncomfortably, and he glared briefly at the stage. Elsa paid him no mind, deciding to focus for the moment on a beautiful redhead she had once unknowingly wooed with this same song. Anna smiled, remembering the moment, and Elsa smiled back before she returned her attention to the crowd.

The rest of the stanza went smoothly and the crowd sat transfixed, but when Elsa went to repeat the verse, she faltered. She loved Arendelle and her family so much, and so much hinged upon tonight that the pressure caught up to her, making her voice trail off. The orchestra had joined her on the repeat, and so it played the melody without her until a strong soprano rang out from the wings. "Small and white, clean and bright, you look happy to meet me," Anna sang, coming over to Elsa and taking her arm.

Elsa smiled at Anna, all the love she felt for her wife shining in her eyes. She rejoined the song, and Anna beckoned the children to join them as well. The children came over and put their arms around their mothers, joining the song and singing as loudly as they could. With her one free arm, Elsa encouraged the crowd to join in, and soon everyone, from the Queen herself to the stage sweeper, were singing along. The only exceptions were the Duke of Weselton and his men.

When the song was finished, the crowd broke out into applause once more, and the family bowed before moving off stage. Olaf passed them as he went to go back out on stage, and he pressed a note into Elsa's hand as he did so. "Contacted allies. All is well. Be prepared for encore," it said. Elsa smiled and quietly told her family of their plans. They would sneak out of the amphitheater after the encore, with Elsa going to the docks and Anna and the children going to Nordfell Abbey. If Elsa disappeared, Anna and Elsa knew the Duke would not hesitate to use the children as leverage, so they needed to be away from him and his men.

"Thank you ladies and gentlemen, thank you," Olaf said, quieting the crowd. "The Festival Competition has come to its conclusion. Except of course, we don't know what that conclusion will be," he joked charmingly. "And while the judges are arriving at their decision, I have been given permission to offer you an encore. This will be the last opportunity the Schrader family will have of singing together for quite some time. Even now, officials are waiting to escort the Duchess and the Baroness to their new places in the service of Weselton." The crowd murmured its loud disapproval at that statement, and the Duke of Weselton cowered behind his soldiers. "And so, ladies and gentlemen, I give you the family Schrader again, to bid you farewell," Olaf concluded, blowing the family a kiss.

The selection for the encore was, appropriately enough, "So Long, Farewell," and with the addition of their parents, the children's setup for the cuckoo clock was a little different. Elsa and Anna stood in front this time, and the children popped out from the sides and top. Much as it had done at the party, the song charmed the crowd completely, and they happily laughed along as the children sang their parts and were guided off stage. After Gretl sang her part and left, Anna and Elsa were left by themselves, and holding hands, they sang the last goodbyes as they walked off stage to the applause of the crowd.

When they had all disappeared down the tunnel, Olaf came back up on stage. A page brought him the envelope from the judges table, and an excited murmur wafted up from the crowd as they speculated about the winners. Moving his microphone to the center of the stage, Olaf opened the envelope. "Ladies and gentlemen!" he announced. "I have here the decision by our distinguished judges. We will start with the award for third prize. For this honor the judges have named the first soloist of the choir of St. Idina's Church, Fraulein Schweiger!"
The orchestra played a fanfare, and the ecstatic Fraulein came out. She bowed to the crowd and Olaf energetically and often, which Olaf encouraged to give Elsa, Anna and the children more time to escape. He handed her a bouquet of flowers, and she bowed again. Finally, a page came to escort her off the stage, and she continued to bow as she was led off.

Olaf returned to the microphone. "The second prize goes to the Bell Quintet," he announced. Another fanfare played, and this time a much more demure group of four men and one woman came to claim their prize. All five of them heartily shook Olaf’s hand, and Olaf flexed and shook his hand out to get some feeling back into it.

There was only one prize left to be given, and the buzz in the arena was strong. Olaf stepped up the microphone. "And the first prize, the highest honor in all of Arendelle, goes to…the Schrader Family Singers!" Olaf announced with pride. The fanfare played and the crowd applauded, but no one came out of the tunnel. Ignoring the Duke of Weselton's stare, Olaf tried again. "The family Schrader!" he called, and the fanfare played again. Still no one came out of the tunnel, and the Duke started to rise from his seat. Footsteps finally sounded in the tunnel, but instead of a family of nine, it was a single man in a Weselton officer's uniform. "They're gone!" he yelled, and the Duke leapt from his seat. Outside the arena, the booms of ships’ cannons started sounding, causing the Duke and his men to flood out of the exits.

"And so it begins," thought Olaf, sending up a silent prayer to the Maker.
So Long, Farewell (Reprise)

Chapter Notes

A/N: So here is the last chapter. Thank you so much to everyone who read it.

Elsa couldn't help but smile a bit when she spotted the hull of her destroyer H.M.S Crocus. The Crocus had been her ship all throughout the Great War, and when she had contacted its current commander, her cousin Captain Jack Schrader, during the planning for the liberation of Arendelle, the officer had been only too happy to provide the ship. Now her ship, and as much of the Arendellian Navy that could be mustered was waiting for her just outside Arendelle Harbor. As she came aboard, Jack proudly provided her with one of his Captain's uniforms, and Elsa, touched by his show of respect, spared the time to change into it. Now properly dressed, she came onto the bridge, only to find every man and woman standing at attention and saluting her, including Jack. "Welcome aboard, Captain," Jack said with a smile as she returned his salute. "I hereby relinquish command of the Crocus to Captain Elsa Schrader. The ship and its crew are yours to command, Captain," he said bowing his head in respect.

Elsa looked at him, letting her gratitude show in her eyes for the briefest of seconds before her expression changed, and her well-known battle visage emerged. "Thank you, Commander Schrader," she replied crisply, temporarily demoting him for the sake of the operation. "And thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for allowing me to be your Captain. Please return to your stations so we can get rid of these Weasels once and for all," she ordered. Everyone snapped off sharp salutes and returned to their seats. "Helmsman, lay in course for the harbor," she commanded.

"Aye, Captain," the young woman responded.

"Radio operator, I want the Captains of Corona, Dunbroch and the Southern Isles on an open channel at all times. Radio these captains as well as the other ships in the Arendellian fleet that we are moving in." Elsa ordered.

"Aye, Captain," the sailor responded.

The ship began to move, and the blood started to sing in Elsa's veins. It felt so familiar, and Elsa was reminded of how much she loved the Navy and how she could leave her home and children as often as she did. But just as quickly, she thought of Anna and the home they had made together with their children, and the longing was muted. Yes, she loved being here, Elsa realized, but she wanted to be home with Anna and their children more. "Then we had better get these Weasels out as soon as possible," Elsa decided with a smirk. "Artillery!" she barked. "Focus all weapons on the Weasel-town ships. They only have a few ships in that pitiful navy of theirs, and I want them all destroyed. Fire a few warning shots to make anyone aboard evacuate, then hit them with everything you've got."

"Aye, Captain!" the artillery lieutenant replied.

"Radio! Open the channels to the captains!" Elsa ordered.

"Channel open, Captain!" the sailor responded.

"Fellow Arendelle Captains and honored Captains of the allies of Arendelle," she said. "Focus all
your fire on taking back Arendelle Harbor. Force evacuations and then sink Weselton's navy; it won't be hard considering they took over Arendelle for her naval might. When the harbor is secure, anchor at the docks and spread your men and women out into the city. Secure the Parliament building and the Palace first. Most of the civilians, including the Queen, are in the Felsenreitschule, and this building must be surrounded as well. Because I was delayed, the Duke of Weselton is most likely no longer there, but I promise we will flush out the Weasel. It goes without saying that casualties must be kept to a minimum. Shoot to injure, not to kill, if it becomes necessary to engage. When everything is secure, the Captains will meet me at the Felsenreitschule. Good luck everyone, and thank you for your service to Arendelle."

"Understood, Captain Schrader, and it is an honor," Kristoff radioed in proudly, and the rest of the Captains, both Arendellian and foreign, echoed his response.

"Then let's move in, people," Elsa said decisively. The Crocus, its Arendellian flag flying proudly, took the lead, and the other ships fell into formation behind her. Within minutes, the Crocus sailed into the harbor, and the artillery officer, following Elsa's orders, fired warning shots across the Weselton ships' bow. Alarms blared and Weselton sailors flooded out onto the docks as the other ships followed the Crocus' lead. "Fire!" Elsa commanded when the last of the sailors staggered off. All around them, cannons boomed and shook, tearing into the Weselton ships. When the smoke cleared, the Weselton Navy lay in ruins, and with a shout of victory, the allied fleet sailed into the harbor and weighed anchor. Allied sailors and soldiers went ashore immediately, and under the command of their officers, their squadrons and platoons went to secure the city. Elsa joined them, taking command of twenty, and she blew a kiss towards Nordfell Abbey as she ran into the city.

AAAAAA

Anna drove the car as quickly but as carefully as she could through the streets of Arendelle. She took the mountain road up into the foothills and drove straight for Nordfell Abbey. The sister at the back gate opened it immediately and led them all straight to Mother Gerda. The older nun led them further into the abbey. "We left right after the encore to the Festival, Mother," Anna explained. "Elsa is leading the liberation force, and she made me promise to seek shelter here where we would be safe. Presumably, the Weasels will be too distracted to come looking for us, and I don't think they know where we are, so we will just be here a short while."

Just then, the screeching of tires could be heard out front, and the gate bell rang loudly, announcing the arrival of a Weselton Youth squadron. Mother Gerda rolled her eyes and sighed. "You should know better than to tempt fate like that, Anna-Maria," she chastised with just a bit of humor.

"I apologize, Reverend Mother," Anna said sincerely.

"At least it's the young ones," the Reverend Mother replied with another sigh. "Quickly, quickly," she prompted Anna and the children, opening a side door for them all to go through. "I have a place you can hide," she told them. She gestured to Sister Bertha. "Answer the gate, Sister Bertha, but as slowly as you possibly can," she requested. Sister Bertha smirked and went to the gate as she was told. Mother Gerda followed Anna and the children.

Sister Bertha strolled as slowly and nonchalantly as she could, exuding the mellow peace of the Maker with every step. She was enjoying this with everything that she was. Like all of the other sisters in the abbey, she was a proud supporter of Arendelle and the Crown, and with the Maker's help, she and her fellow sisters would make the Weasels of Weasel-town suffer the Maker's judgment for annexing Her beautiful country. She turned into the entryway hall, and at the end of the hall was a group of about twenty young people in brown shirts. It wasn't a very large group for a capture operation, and Sister Bertha surmised that this tiny group of untrained, youthful soldiers
were all that Weasel-town could spare with the main fight waging down in Arendelle.

"Open this gate!" one of them demanded.

Sister Bertha composed her smirk into a serene smile. "Good evening," she replied evenly, stepping up to the gate. Taking some time to fiddle with the set of keys that she held, she at last turned to the right one, and ever-so-slowly inserted it into the keyhole. She turned the key with agonizing slowness, and the baby soldier grew impatient.

"Hurry up, woman," he commanded. Sister Bertha stopped turning the key and fixed him with her finest school-disciplinarian glare. The young man gulped and capitulated instantly, his boots suddenly becoming the focal point of his attention. "I'm sorry, ma'am, um, Sister," he mumbled contritely, his head bowed. Sister Bertha nodded with her stern look still on her face and started turning the key again. The lock clicked, and she opened the gate. The Weselton soldiers paused, and Sister Bertha hid her smirk.

"You may go in," she said, granting them permission, and only then did they enter the abbey. After they all filed past her and were out of earshot, she glanced over to Sister Marguerite who had come to join her. "We have our ruling Duchess and her children within our walls, Sister. Don't you think we and our fellow sisters should do something to safeguard her security?" she asked, her smirk appearing at last and growing wicked.

Sister Marguerite always suspected Sister Bertha disliked Anna-Maria because they were very alike in certain ways. The mischievous smirk was a nice piece of verifying data. "I always knew you secretly liked her," Sister Marguerite stated. "And yes, I think that is a fine idea, Sister Bertha. What did you have in mind?"

"Just gather most of the sisters up," Sister Bertha answered enigmatically. "Leave enough behind so that the abbey doesn't look suspiciously empty."

"As you wish, Sister," Sister Marguerite replied giving her fellow nun once last smile before she spread out to find her fellow sisters.

While the sisters were plotting and the Weselton Youth fanning out and covering the yard, Mother Gerda, Anna and the children hurried along in the inner recesses of the abbey. It was dark, and they couldn't really see where they were going, so when Kurt realized they were hurrying past tombstones and graves, he let out a small squeak of fright. That alerted his siblings to where they were, and the little ones, Marta and Gretl, huddled closer to Anna. Louisa, on the other hand, mocked him for being a coward. "They're already dead, Kurt," she pointed out. "They don't care about you, and they can't do anything to hurt you."

"That doesn't mean I want to keep their company," Kurt grumbled.

The group came to a gate which separated a few of the graves with larger headstones away from the general population. "Were they bad?" Marta asked Liesel when they came to a stop. "Is that why they are in jail away from the others?" she asked.

"No, these are the super important people," Liesel replied. "The bars are there to keep other people away from them."

"Like GeeGee's guard?" Marta clarified.

"Exactly," Liesel confirmed, and Marta nodded.

"I can see now why you and your new children get along so well," Mother Gerda chuckled, overhearing the conversations.
Anna didn't know whether that statement was a compliment or a slight insult, so her only response was to blush. Behind them, they heard the heels of the soldiers' boots on the bricks of the courtyard, and Anna tensed. "I'm sorry, Reverend Mother," she apologized. "We didn't realize we put the abbey in such danger."

"No, Anna-Maria, it was right for you to come here," Mother Gerda said reassuringly as she opened the gate. "Besides, we aren't in any danger. Because of who I used to be, we are prepared for certain things, and even without that, the Maker protects those who are in Her service. Stay hidden here; I will come to get you when it is safe for you all."

"Yes, Mother," Anna said, giving her hug. Mother Gerda smiled and gave Anna the key to the gate, ensuring they could get out if they needed to. After one last hug, she left them, and Anna herded the children to hide behind the tombstones. When they were all concealed, Anna locked the gate, and she crouched behind the stone closest to her.

Elsa ordered five of her people to surround the latest group of Weasel-town soldiers that had surrendered. So far, the "battle" had been laughably easy; no shots had needed to be fired, because Weasel-ton's people had proved to be as sniveling and cowardly as he was. When they were aggressors, taking over a city that was sleeping, war had been fine; but now, with Arendelle full of allied troops willing to fight, the battle grew too real and too fierce for them. They laid down their arms and surrendered en masse without a second thought.

"Captain!" a voice called out, and Elsa turned to the messenger that was running up breathlessly. "Captain Fitzherbert has received reports that soldiers have been sent to Nordfell Abbey," the man explained. "He told me to tell you at once."

Elsa's chest seized up in fear, but she put the fear aside so she could think clearly. "Find Captain Jack Schrader and tell him to come here immediately," she ordered him. The man nodded and ran off. Elsa waited impatiently for about ten minutes, but at last her cousin and his troops came around the corner. "Some of Weselton's men have been sent to Nordfell Abbey," she said, and Jack understood immediately why he was there. "I am taking my people to intercept. I need to tell you to stay here and help with all of the unconditional surrenders."

"Understood, Captain," Jack said immediately. "Go."

Elsa nodded and ordered her people to follow. They confiscated the nearest military transport and sped off towards the hills.

"Come, Your Grace! I have a perfect hiding spot for you and your children over here!" Sister Bertha called overly loudly. The two Weselton Youth who had been searching for the Schrader family smiled and followed the sound of her voice, too inexperienced to realize they were heading right into a trap. As soon as they walked into the room, the door slammed behind them, the lights were extinguished, and bodies surrounded them. A couple of minutes later, the lights came on, and the two Youths were sitting on the floor with their hands bound behind them. "Well done, Sisters," Sister Bertha complimented them. "Sister Augusta, please take these gentlemen to the courtyard and put them with the rest of the people we've captured. Sister Sophia, Sister Catherine, take several of the sisters with you and see if you can find the one Youth that we are missing. Sister Marguerite, you are coming with me," she stated.

"And what are we doing?" Sister Marguerite asked curiously.
"Making sure the Weasels can't escape," Sister Bertha replied smugly.

As all of this was happening, the one Weselton Youth that the sisters hadn't managed to capture wandered into the graveyard. He got out his flashlight and swept it around the graves, looking for anyone who might be hidden amongst the tombstones. When that search yielded nothing, he shone his light on the back wall, illuminating the wrought-iron gate that separated some tombstones from the rest. He walked towards it, and Liesel involuntarily gasped. Anna looked at her, and from her face, it was clear that this was the young man Liesel had once been in love with.

Hans heard the gasp, but he didn't let on. He merely went down the length of the gate, shaking it to see if he could open it and trying to use his flashlight to see if there were people behind the stones. Anna and the children artfully avoided the light beam, and at last Hans seemingly gave up. He retreated to the far end of the graveyard, but he was only pretending to leave. He hid behind a large grave marker and waited.

Deciding that encounter had been too close for her liking, Anna made the choice to leave where they were. It was too constricting, and Anna wanted some place less claustrophobic. She slowly stood up and encouraged the children to do the same. She walked towards the gate, but when she went to put the key in the lock, Hans reappeared from behind the tombstone and turned on his flashlight. The sudden light startled everyone, and they froze.

Hans went to grab his whistle to call for backup, but after a moment's thought, he put it away. It would be so much more impressive if he brought the Duchess to the Duke on his own. "Come out of there!" he ordered. At his pompous tone, Anna unfroze, and she looked at him critically. Mindful of the children, though, she did as he asked, but she directed the children to wait for her just outside the graveyard and down the stairs. All did as she asked except for Liesel, who stayed by her side.

"It's you we want, not them," Hans said, as if giving Anna permission to do something that she had already done.

"Well, you are never going to arrest any of us, so it doesn't really matter who you want, Weasel," Anna said unconcernedly.

"My name is Hans," Hans said through gritted teeth.

"Is it now?" Anna mocked. "I'm sorry, but in my family, anyone who sides with Weasel-town is automatically a Weasel."

"Don't mock me, Your Grace," Hans said threateningly. He stepped up to Anna, but Liesel stepped in between them.

"Hans, please," she pleaded. "Please remember how you once loved me. Leave my family alone."

"I never loved you," Hans spat angrily. "My only thought was that being married to you would help me get the money and power I always wanted."

Liesel looked shocked for a second, but then she slapped Hans in the face. Hans made a move towards her, so Anna reached for her and pulled her back. "Go, join your brothers and sisters," Anna murmured. "I'll take care of him for you." Liesel angrily nodded and did as she was told. "Just when I thought you couldn't get any weasel-lier, you show how truly despicable and weasel-like you are. You are contemptable," Anna stated.

The insult caused Hans' temper to snap. "Stop calling me a weasel!" he demanded petulantly, charging Anna. She calmly stepped out of his way, and his momentum carried him to the ground.
The tombstone he landed on did his head no favors, and he lay there dazed. Coming to, he finally decided that backup might be a good idea, so he reached for his whistle and blew it loudly. "Lieutenant! Lieutenant, they're here!" he shouted, not realizing that his entire company had been already captured by the Sisters of Nordfell.

From their place in the courtyard, those same sisters heard the whistles and the yells. "That's our missing Weasel," Mother Gerda guessed. All the sisters assembled nodded in agreement, and they all went rushing out of the courtyard. Seeing their chance now they were unattended, their Weselton Youth prisoners stood up and ran to the gate for their transports, untying their bonds as they went.

Anna waited patiently for the rest of the soldiers, but moments passed and no one came to Hans' aid. "Seems like your compatriots are just as weasely as you," Anna commented. "They must have decided you aren't worth it."

"I am not a weasel!" Hans yelled, staggering to his feet.

Anna reached out a hand and grabbed a fist full of his brown shirt to steady him. "Yes, you are, and if you ever come near me, my daughter, my wife, my other children, the abbey or any of my family again, you will be sorry," she warned.

"What will you do, Your Grace? Sing me a threatening song?" Hans taunted.

Anna's lips pursed for just a second before the fist holding Hans' shirt brought him within range of her other fist. She socked him right between the eyes, and he tumbled head-over-heels into one of the nearby gravestones. She glared at him, her fists still cocked and ready, but he stayed on the ground. Her children, especially Liesel, cheered her from the pathway, and to Anna's surprise, another group joined in from the other entrance to the graveyard. She turned around to see most of the sisters of the Abbey assembled, including Mother Gerda, Sister Marguerite and Sister Bertha. "Well done, Anna-Maria," Sister Bertha said, giving Anna the first complement she had ever bestowed upon the young woman.

Anna smiled at her. "Thank you, Sister Bertha," she said warmly.

Sister Bertha smiled at her before turning to another sister. "Help him up and escort him to the courtyard so we can put him with the others," she requested. Looking around, she noticed that almost every sister was there. "Who remained with the prisoners?" she asked. Panicked looks crossed several faces. "You left no one with the soldiers," she deduced, and several sisters hung their heads. "Then it was a good thing Sister Marguerite and I took precautions. Let's intercept them before they flee," she said, as she turned and left. The sisters restraining Hans followed her, along with the rest of the sisters, Mother Gerda, and Anna's family.

When they got to the gate, the members of the Weselton Youth realized with dismay that Sister Bertha had locked it. Two of their burliest men tried shaking it, but the iron was well-crafted, and the lock didn't budge. Desperate, they looked around for escape, and they noticed a small gap between the top of the gate's doorway arch and the spikes at the top of the gate. It looked big enough for them to wiggle through, so they helped each other climb the fence as footsteps sounded closer. It seemed that luck was on their side, for they all made it up and over, and they ran to their cars just as the sisters made it to the locked gate. They all jumped in, and the drivers inserted the keys and turned them to start the cars…only to have the engines whirr and sputter without turning over.

Sister Marguerite and Sister Bertha looked one another and smirked. "Reverend Mother, we have sinned," Sister Marguerite said with mock regret.
"And what is this sin, my children?" Mother Gerda asked, amused. Sister Bertha and Sister Marguerite didn't answer but took vital car parts out from behind their habits. Mother Gerda chuckled. "I'm sure the Maker will forgive you, my children," she said wryly.

The Weselton Youth continued to try to start their cars, but they realized it wasn't working, and when Sister Bertha started to unlock the gate, it seemed foolish to try anymore. They abandoned ship and went running down the darkened street. Or rather, they would have, except a military transport, a group of soldiers pointing their weapons at them and a platinum-blond naval captain with a frigidly-menacing glower blocked their path. Turning around, their path was blocked by a group of sisters who had already subdued them once. Knowing they had no other options, the Weselton Youth squadron held up their hands in surrender.

"Surround them," Elsa barked to her people. "Make sure they don't move a muscle."

"Aye, Captain," her company responded, surrounding the Weasels at once.

Elsa nodded and stalked past the group, paying them little mind as her gaze sought out people that were far more important. She found them standing in a line near the gate, not the formal military one that they used to align themselves in, but a looser one full of happy eyes and welcoming smiles. Elsa took a deep breath, holstered her weapon, and held out her arms. Her children ran to her immediately, and she embraced them fervently. Looking around the group, she realized someone was missing. "Where is your Mama?" she asked in concern.

"Right here, sweetheart," Anna answered affectionately from just outside the group.

"What are you doing all the way over there?" Elsa questioned. "This is a family hug."

"Yes, it is," Anna agreed, "but the rabble have you surrounded. I'll wait."

"Nonsense," Elsa contradicted promptly. "Children, make some space for your Mama," she requested. The children parted like a wave, and Elsa grabbed Anna's right hand to pull her in. Anna let out a yelp of pain at the contact, and now concerned, Elsa loosened her grip but guided Anna in anyway. She brought the hand up to look at it, and even in the bad lighting of the street, she could see the swollen knuckles. Elsa kissed Anna's hand carefully and tenderly before taking her wife into her arms with a wry smile. "And just what have you been up to, my love, that your hand should be so damaged?" she asked with wry curiosity.

"Mama punched out a Weasel!" Gretl announced proudly.

Elsa paused at the unexpected response, and then she chuckled. "Did she now?" she asked the children. All of them nodded happily. "I knew you were the perfect woman for me," Elsa said lovingly. Anna blushed, and Elsa kissed the injured hand once more before kissing her wife on the lips briefly. "Which one was it?" she asked. Anna pointed, indicating the Weselton Youth being held by the Sisters Catherine and Agatha. His nose was crooked and swollen, and the bruises were starting to make their appearance. Elsa chuckled again. "Remind me not to make you mad," she joked. Anna blushed again, earning her another kiss from Elsa. When that was done, Elsa hugged her family once more and let them go. "All right!" she announced. "I believe we have bothered the kind Sisters of Nordfell enough. You five, load the prisoners into the military transport and wait for me to join you," she ordered some of her people. "The remaining ten of you will stay here to protect the Sisters and my family, although it doesn't seem like they need it. They did rather well on their own," she said proudly. Her people scattered, and Elsa gave everyone in her family one last hug before she climbed into the driver's seat of the transport. "The liberation is almost complete," she told Anna confidently. "I will send someone for you when Weasel-ton has surrendered."
"Stay safe, sweetheart," Anna responded. Elsa smiled at her warmly and started the transport, turning around carefully to head back down into Arendelle.

When Elsa arrived back in Arendelle, the "battle" was even more lopsided than it had been before she had left. Row upon row of enemy forces were lined up, weaponless and being guarded by allied forces. Spotting Jack, Elsa stopped the transport, and her people got out, leading their prisoners over to join the rest. "How goes everything, Commander Schrader?" Elsa asked.

"All precincts and neighborhoods have been cleared of Weselton forces, Captain," Jack stated. "The only outstanding concern is that the Head Weasel has not been located, but his top advisors and military commanders have been captured, and they were most helpful in divulging his location. I expect his capture within the hour."

"Excellent," Elsa commented.

"And what of the Duchess and your children, Captain?" Jack asked.

"Well, when I got there, the Weselton Youth assigned to their capture were running away from the abbey, weaponless and panicked," Elsa said, her lip curling up in a smile. "And, my wife's right fist was painfully swollen because she had knocked out one of the Weasels. It seems like they had the situation well in hand, and my only contribution was providing transport for their prisoners."

Jack laughed. "Never underestimate women of the cloth," he advised, amused.

"Indeed," Elsa agreed.

A shout caught their attention, and they looked to the other side of the square to see the Duke of Weselton being led into the area. The forces of Arendelle and their allies began to cheer, Elsa and Jack included, and soon the noise became deafening. The soldiers who had captured him scanned the crowd, obviously looking for someone, and when they saw Elsa, they found her. They brought the Duke over to her at once, saluting when they stood before her. "You should have the honor of bringing him to the Queen, Captain," their commander said with a respectful bow. "If not for you, Arendelle would not have her liberty."

"I am one of many that brought Arendelle her liberty, Lieutenant, but thank you," Elsa replied, sincerely touched as she returned his salute. "Will you and your squadron do me the honor of accompanying me to the Felsenreitschule?"

"Of course, Captain. The honor would be ours," the man said immediately.

"Good," Elsa said. Turning to her cousin, she made another request. "Commander Schrader, would you send some of your people to fetch the Duchess and my children?" she requested.

"With pleasure, Captain," Jack replied. A small gesture of his hand was all it took, and two of his sailors were running for a transport.

Elsa firmly took the Duke's arm from the soldier holding him, and she steered him towards the Felsenreitschule. "I am sure my grandmother will tell you much of the same, but if I ever see you again anywhere within Arendelle's borders, I will kill you on sight with my own bare hands," she promised. The Duke paled but said nothing, and the soldiers and sailors who accompanied her puffed their chests out with pride.

The allied forces guarding the Felsenreitschule let out a cheer when they saw Elsa and the Duke approaching, letting the Captains assembled under Elsa's orders know that the Captain and the Duke were near. They in turn spread the news to all of the civilians who were being kept safe in
the structure, including the Queen. She left her royal box immediately and went down to the bottom floor, intending to speak to the crowd from the stage where her family had sung only hours before. Olaf quickly figured out her intentions, so he clambered on to the stage first, determined to give Her Majesty the proper welcome. "People of Arendelle!" he called to the crowd through the microphone. "Please welcome our Queen, Her Majesty, Queen Bulda the Third!"

The Queen climbed the steps to the stage, and the crowd, in spite of their fatigue at spending many hours in the amphitheater, cheered loudly as she crossed the stage to the microphone. The Queen let them cheer, and she smiled indulgently when the cheer became a roar when Elsa entered with the Duke in tow. Elsa brought the Duke on to the stage, followed by the company that had captured him, and the Captains of the ships that had come to Arendelle's aid. They formed a crisp line, and when they were settled, the Queen lifted her hand to ask for silence.

"Arendelle would not be free without the help of her allies," Queen Bulda continued. "My people, please join me in honoring them." She brought the microphone with her and started from the far end. "The Marquis and Marchioness de la Bête!" she announced, and the crowd cheered. "Her Highness, Captain Merida of Dunbroch!" was introduced, and another cheer sounded.

As "Captains Eugene and Rapunzel Fitzherbert of Corona!" were introduced to another cheer, Elsa began to grow anxious. Jack's people should have been able to make the round trip from the abbey by now, and she was anxious to be reunited with her family. Just then a familiar collection of people came quietly into the theatre through the tunnel, and Elsa smiled as Anna blew her a kiss. "Now see, aren't you glad Olaf and I schemed to get the two of you together?" Kristoff teased her from his place beside her in line.

"Hush, you," Elsa admonished embarrassedly. "You're about to be honored."

"And finally, Baron Kristoff von Groff of the Southern Isles!" the Queen concluded. Kristoff bowed, and the crowd cheered loudly for him.

"Now, my people, we have one last person to honor," the Queen said, and the crowd grew quiet once again. "As many of you know, Captain Elsa Schrader fought hard and valiantly for Arendelle during the Great War, and once again, she has shown her bravery and commitment to Arendelle and her Queen by leading the fight for liberation. As her grandmother and her Queen, I declare before you all that she is one of the best officers Arendelle has ever had to offer, and my love for her and my pride in her accomplishments is limitless. People of Arendelle, please help me honor my granddaughter, Baroness Elsa Schrader, Admiral of Arendelle's Naval Forces!"

The roar of the crowd filled the amphitheater, and Elsa stood at attention, masking her shock at the promotion and her other emotions as she usually did. She looked around at the crowd, all of them cheering for her, and Elsa started to feel overwhelmed, at least until she saw the proud, joyful faces just off to the side of the entrance tunnel. She smiled then, and the roar of the crowd got louder. It lasted for a while, until the Queen held up her hand, quieting the crowd. "Now my people, as a new day dawns in Arendelle, I have one last proclamation. We have spent a sleepless night, one in which the future of our county was held in the balance. We have emerged victorious, and so today shall be now and forever more, a national holiday. Go to your homes, rest, and
emerge refreshed so that we may celebrate. Long live Arendelle!” she proclaimed proudly.

"Long live the Queen!” they replied, and with one last cheer, people started to file out of the Felsenreitschule.

The ceremony over, Elsa went over and shook her allies' hands one-by-one, thanking them personally and sincerely. When she got to Kristoff, he gave her a hug and shooed her off to the people he knew she really wanted to be with. Elsa did not argue, eschewing the steps to jump off the stage in a show of athleticism. Anna and their children met her halfway, and after she and Anna shared a thorough kiss, she hugged and kissed her children. "You did it, sweetheart!” Anna said happily, as Elsa wrapped her up in another hug. "I am so proud of you."

"We did it, my love," Elsa contradicted, holding her tightly. "We could not have done this with out you."

"You're sweet," Anna said affectionately. "You're wrong, but you're sweet."

"She's not wrong, lass," a new voice interrupted, and Elsa and Anna turned to see the allied Captains around them. "The frosty, prickly Ice Captain was much easier to deal with this time 'round," Captain Merida teased. "It was like she had melted or somethin'. And from the way she kissed ya, I would think that's your doin'." The other Captains chuckled as Elsa glared at them. "Put the glare away, Admiral,” Merida said wryly. "We know you're fakin'. Just tell us what we need to do to help you rid yourselves of the Weasels completely."

Elsa glared at her for a second longer, but then relaxed and gave Anna a kiss on the forehead. "Please take everyone back to the house and get some rest," she requested. "Captain Merida is right; there are still several things to be done, not the least of which is ferrying the Weasels back to their own country now that we have destroyed their navy. I'll be home as soon as I can."

"Is there any way we can help?" Anna asked.


"All right," Anna said reluctantly. "But come home as soon as you are able."

"I promise," Elsa said, kissing her gently and ignoring the wry grins of her fellow captains when they parted.

Anna gathered up the children and Olaf, who presented her with a large bouquet of flowers. When Anna looked at him questioningly, Olaf shrugged. "You won the festival," he explained with a smile. "Your engraved medals from the Queen will be arriving shortly. Probably with all of your "Liberators of Arendelle" ones," he joked.

"We won?" Brigitta questioned in delight.

"Yes, darling, you did," Olaf said, and all of the children smiled, chattering excitedly as they went back to the car to go home.

Elsa smiled after them as they left, but when they were gone, she got down to the business of organizing and ordering people around. As the Queen had promised, the Duke of Weselton was escorted immediately back to the palace, and a new treaty dissolving the union between Arendelle and Weselton was hastily drafted, reviewed and signed. Within its words, it was made explicit that Arendelle would no longer have any diplomatic ties with Weselton, and any Weselton citizen found within Arendelle's borders would need to have a very good reason for being there or face imprisonment. Any of the Weselton soldiers or sailors that took part in the invasion, however, were permanently banned, including those Arendellian-born like Hans. When the treaty was
witnessed and signed, Elsa and the other Captains escorted the Duke and all of the other Weselton prisoners onto the allied ships to dispose of the refuse back on its own soil.

From her place at the palace window, Queen Bulda could see the people being loaded on to the ships. She was happy, of course, but also relieved. There had been no loss of life on either side, and she was grateful. "All praise be to the Maker," she whispered.

"That is usually my thought," a voice behind her said wryly, and Bulda spun around.

"Gerda! What are you doing here?" Bulda asked, trying to calm her surprised and quickly-beating heart.

"You said I shouldn't stay away so long," Gerda replied drily.

"I can't believe that is the only reason," Bulda answered pointedly.

"No, it's not," Gerda confirmed, coming over to the window. She gazed out and watched the departing soldiers much as her sister had. "I came to ask why there were armed soldiers at my abbey today. Granted, they were inept, but they were still there. Why did you let the annexation happen, Bulda? You could have stopped it as soon as it started. Why take the risk of having war?"

"If a single Arendellian had fallen, I would have stopped everything immediately," Bulda assured her. "But I had faith in Elsa to bring it to a natural end."

"Are you still so afraid of your powers?" Gerda asked sadly.

"I have never been afraid of my powers, Gerda," Bulda corrected her defensively. "I only fear people's reaction to them. The Snow Queens of Arendelle have been gone for generations, so long that their deeds are now legend and myth. The age of reason is upon us, and magic has no place in it. The Snow Queens and their magic need to remain legend and myth. But, if Elsa had failed, the whole world would have known that a new Snow Queen had arisen."

"Well, I suppose I understand your reasoning, but I would have loved to see you as you were meant to be," Gerda admitted. "Your powers are beautiful, and it has been years since I've seen them."

Bulda smiled. "Just for you then, little sister," she said, lifting her hands. Within seconds, snow started to fall, and Gerda laughed in delight. Bulda laughed along with her, that was until a snowball to her face started an epic snowball fight that was years in the making.

One Year Later

Anna, Elsa and their children, along with Her Majesty Queen Bulda, sat quietly in the front pew of the cathedral waiting for the entrance of the Reverend Mother. Traditionally a priestess would have overseen this rite, but Mother Gerda's familial relationship, plus the insistence of Anna and the Queen, had ensured the Reverend Mother's participation. When the music stopped, the Reverend Mother rose and stepped up the altar. "Let the new servant of the Maker come forth," she intoned.

With a smile, Queen Bulda rose, bringing with her the white lace clad bundle she was so carefully cradling. The bundle gurgled, waving her chubby little fists in happiness, and Bulda laughed as she kissed the scattered copper strands on the top of her newest great-granddaughter's head. Normally her mothers would have been the only ones to bring the baby to the altar, but the Queen finally had her redhead, and she was not letting her go. And since she was the Queen, she could do whatever it was she felt like, so it was Bulda who brought the infant to Mother Gerda.
Elsa and Anna rose right after her, and they accompanied the Queen and their child to the altar, standing to the right of the naval bell that was serving as the baptismal font. When the ceremony was over, the baby's name would be inscribed on its surface as was the naval tradition, and then it would be returned to the *Crocus*. Dipping her two fingers into holy water held in the bell, Mother Gerda wetted her fingertips before making the symbol of the Maker on the baby's forehead. The baby's face scrunched up, and Mother Gerda smiled. "In the Name of the Maker, the Daughter and the Sacred Spirits, I welcome you into our fellowship, Gerda Marguerite Anna-Maria Schrader," she blessed the baby as she took some water in her palm and poured it over the wispy red strands.

The littlest Schrader let out a disgruntled cry at the cold water, and everyone in attendance at her baptism let out a chuckle. Now that the baby was no longer needed over the bell, Queen Bulda brought her up to cuddle and soothe her as the Reverend Mother called up her Maker-parents, Liesel and Kristoff. After Elsa, Anna, Kristoff and Liesel reaffirmed their commitment to bring up Maggie (as she was already being called) in the service of the Maker, Mother Gerda blessed them all and dismissed the congregation.

Normally, there would have been a grand party celebrating the baptism, but since the whole of Arendelle was already celebrating, another party seemed superfluous. Officially, it was "Annexation Liberation Day", but the name that had stuck was Wieselstampfentag, or "Weasel Stomp(ing) Day". The City of Arendelle had turned into a festival with delicious food and dancing, as well as more than a few stands where harming a stuffed weasel was the goal that earned the victor a prize. The family Schrader went back to the palace to change out of their cathedral finery, and once the children were in their play clothes, their mothers gave them money and let them go.

Elsa and Anna strolled together along the city streets, with Elsa proudly holding Maggie and Anna holding her other arm. Many people stopped them, both to congratulate them on the new arrival and to thank them for making the day possible. Anna and Elsa thanked them all, but after a while, the busy atmosphere made them want some place quieter. They moved away from the bustle of the interior of Arendelle out towards the hills, and without thinking, the three of them ended up in front of Nordfell Abbey. Anna studied its iron gates for a long time, until a soft, contemplative smile crossed her face.

"What is it, Anna?" Elsa asked, curious.

"I am so glad I was a horrible nun," Anna confessed.

Elsa laughed. "As am I, my love, as am I. Aren't we, Maggie?" she asked, gently squeezing the baby in her arms who giggled.

Anna smiled at them both before giving each one a kiss. "Let's go back down," she offered. "I want to be with the rest of my family." Elsa nodded her agreement, offering Anna her arm as they headed back down into the city.

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