

# おぼれ姫と

伯爵の切札

石田リンネ

Rinne Ishida

# おぼれ姫と

OKOBORE  
HIME TO  
ENTAKU NO  
KISHI

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**OKOBORE HIME**  
**TO**  
**ENTAKU NO KISHI**

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*The Leftover Princess and the  
Knights of the Round*

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*Book VIII: The Trump Card of the Earl*

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**Story by: Rinne Ishida**

**Art by: Ichiko Okiya**

Translated by: [CrystalHikari](#)

Translator's note:

The Japanese honorifics were kept in the translation of the dialogues of the characters to show the respect or adoration of the characters. Footnotes were provided upon the first appearance of the honorific in the chapter to explain it.

Thoughts are signified by *italics*.



*Leticia Elle  
Kreutzer*

★  
*The "Leftover"  
Crown Princess of  
the Kingdom of  
Solvella*

## Okobore Hime to Entaku no Kishi Character

*Duke  
Barchet*

★  
*The serious First  
Knight of Leti's  
Knights of the Round*





**Willard Orlandi**

*Heir of the Earldom of Orlandi under the Friedhelm faction. He is known to have peculiar preferences.*

## Okobore Hime to Entaku no Kishi Character

**Marianne  
Bussell**

*Inherited the title of countess from her maiden family under the Guido faction. She had only worn mourning clothes ever since her husband died.*





### *Astrid Gall*

*He adores Leti and has finally been knighted as the third knight of her Knights of the Round. He is Duke's junior and had a part job he cannot tell anyone.*

## Okobore Hime to Entaku no Kishi Characters

### *Craig Barde*

*He is the former Vice-Commander of the Royal Chivalric Order, but is now the Second Knight of Leti's Knights of the Round. He is known before as the noble knight, "Border General".*





**Xien Lan Liu**  
**Wan Zhong**

★  
*Nickname: Shelan. Eighth Prince of the Empire of Ling in the far-eastern side of Solvelle. He is Leti's Fourth Knight and is studying about the world by her side.*

## Okobore Hime to Entaku no Kishi Characters

**August Karlzen**  
**Northruth**

★  
*Ambitious monarch of The Duchy of Northruth and is now Leti's Fifth Knight due to some circumstances. His alias "Silver Wolf Duke" came from his dauntlessness to face big countries.*





## Friedhelm

★  
*Solvelle's First Prince and Leti's older half-brother. He is a charismatic prince and stands as the head of the House of Lauenstein, one of the Three Grand Marquises. He is Guido's equal.*

# Okobore Hime to Entaku no Kishi Characters

## Guido

★  
*The younger one of Leti's older half-brothers. His birth holds a secret. He has a prime minister-type of personality and stands as the head of the House of Eulenburg, one of the Three Grand Marquises.*







## Prologue

The life of Solvelle's First Princess, Princess Leticia, a lovely and kind young lady said to be the epitome of a princess, changed drastically on her seventeenth birthday when the present king, her father, declared that she will be his heir.

No one foresaw this decision the king made – even Leti was surprised. She had never been given education on becoming a ruler because she had two older half-brothers who were more than adequate to inherit the crown.

Leti's two older brothers, First Prince Friedhelm and Second Prince Guido, were so capable that their competition had escalated to a point that if either one inherits the crown, a civil war between the faction of the princes was likely to happen. As the strife between the two eldest princes widened, Leti, on the other hand, was busy trying to bridge the gap between them and act as their mediator.

This was the situation when Leti received the title of Crown Princess Leticia. As such, she also garnered herself another moniker, the Leftover Princess – the princess who inherited the leftover crown. From being the epitome of a

princess to an uneducated, leftover heir.

However, Leti did not have the time to mull over the fact that she was inheriting the crown. She had to act immediately and fulfil one of the requirements for her to be queen, to gather her own Twelve Knights of the Round.

After overcoming several difficulties, gaining more experience and knowledge, she now had five knights.

Leti's First Knight of the Round was Duke Barchet, a former knight of the Royal Chivalric Order. Duke initially rejected Leti's initial invitation for him, but eventually agreed out of his own volition to be Leti's knight. He was won over by her earnestness and unceasing overbearing invitations. Duke had the aptitude for leadership, enough for him to be rumoured as the next commander of the Order. Now that he had resigned from the Order, he was busy with attending to Leti and studying to gain the knowledge expected of him as the First Seat Knight of the Round.

The Second Seat Knight of Leti's Round is the Border General, Craig Barde. Craig was the vice-commander of the Knights of the Round when Leti recruited him to be her knight. The personal connections, reputation, and debt of gratitude Craig had established during his days as the vice-commander were now being useful in giving support to Leti's foothold, which was still weak because of many still looking down at her as the Leftover Princess. Ever since he had

resigned from the Order, he had been sent to different places to help Leti with her work.

Leti's Third Knight is Astrid Gall. Astrid is a commoner and a knight in the Order. His genius skills had been Leti's arms and feet on several occasions and his noble spirit had been Leti's light whenever she feels lost. Though he still has a long way to go, he was one knight with a bright future.

The Fourth and Fifth Knights, the Eighth Prince of the Empire of Ling – Shelan, and the Sovereign Duke of the Duchy of Northruth – August, were knights in name only. They were only knighted to give prestige to Leti.

Making royalties of other countries as knights were unheard of, and Leti somehow thought she might have overdone this. However, she convinced herself that she had to do this much to clean her name since she was being called a leftover after all.

Keeping together these five highly individualistic knights was already difficult add to that the problems arising as she was filled in the seats in her Round.

What she thought to be a simple task of attending the wedding of her cousin, Charlotte, ended up being a complicated visit. That wedding chaos was followed by the wildfires at Mount Gran and she had been busy with meetings and negotiations needed to address this matter. As soon as things had calmed down with Mount Gran and

returned to Solvelle, she had to welcome a guest from the far Empire of Ling who had brought his own problem with him. Right after solving that problem, it was immediately followed by a forged invitation to the Foundation Festival of the Kief Empire. During her stay in the cold, northern empire, she got caught up in the empire's internal conflict and even had to come up with a strategy to avoid a war from happening between Kief and Northruth. She had no time to even take a break from all the happenings and finally, things have settled down.

Leti was savouring these days that were going by slowly. She wanted to use these precious days to continue some of her long term projects and recruit some new knights.

She was currently working on the development and maintenance of Solvelle's highway, the main road connecting the country's major cities. This meant it crosses along different territories and she had to coordinate with the different landowners. She wanted to standardized the roads and have a proper maintenance program for it to make travelling faster. Pushing through with this project was easy with the territories directly under her control, but those owned by others were a different story.

She had been going around meeting with the landowners, convincing and negotiating with them to get their cooperation. As expected, things were not going smoothly,

but this was a preparation needed to fulfil her dream. She could not just give this up.

Leti was now on her way to Weiher, Earl of Wahlstatt, to talk with him and convince him of the merits of her plan.

“But what can we gain from this plan? I have my duties to protect the people of Wahlstatt from any disadvantages,” said Weiher as he intentionally dropped down the papers Leti had given for him to read. He was sending his message clearly – he was not willing to lend an ear and listen to what a girl has to say.

Leti was used to this kind of treatment, of being looked down as if she was a stupid, little girl. This was nothing new that she would lose her composure for.

“The benefits of your people and of Wahlstatt is written there in my proposal. Are you saying that is not enough?”

“But those are all just calculations. Your Highness is still young and inexperienced. I am sure you have not considered what may happen if things do not go as planned.”

“What do you mean by planned? If the proposal does not go as planned? Or about the profits after this proposal pushes through?”

“Both.”

Leti wanted to shove the proposal papers to Weiher’s face. Everything he was asking for was written in it.

Leti’s proposal was indeed looking far, even too far, in the

future. It was a proposal only someone like her, a future monarch, could come up with. This was the reason why she was going out of her way to get the agreement of the persons to be involved in her plan. Besides, if things did not go as planned, Weiher could just keep the present state of things. He had nothing to lose in this plan.

With regards to the profit if the plan becomes successful, Weiher was just lamenting about the fact that he would not get taxes from the road. This road would be a way to push forward the country's economy, leading to the prosperity of the citizens, and to the nobles getting taxes from them. However, nothing else matters to these nobles aside from directly getting the money, if they do not get it straight to their pockets, then it is not profit for them.

*So I need to explain again this proposal from the beginning and convince him about it.*

While Leti was being annoyed at having to do this over and over again, an unexpected visitor came.

“Good day, Your Highness, Lord Weiher.”

Leti almost screamed Marianne when she saw the new visitor – her old friend, Marianne, Countess Bussell.

“I have come bringing good news. I hope you do not mind me disturbing you,” Marianne's seductive bottle green eyes smiled at them.

“Oh, no, no, no, not at all. It is my pleasure to welcome

the beautiful Lady Bussell. But, as you can see, I am currently having a discussion with Her Highness,” greeted Weiher.

Weiher was asking Marianne to come back some other day, while Leti was asking her silently what she was doing here.

Marianne replied with a wink, her way of saying leave it to me.

Leti decided to let Marianne do what she planned. She also wanted to see her ways on how she had kept herself alive in this patriarchal society of the peers.

Marianne was widowed young. They had no children, so she was forced to go back to her maiden home, to Bussell, which was under Guido’s faction. But her parents also died due to sickness and she was left with no choice but to inherit her father’s title Earl of Bussell. Hence, she was known now as Lady Bussell. Ever since her husband died, Marianne had only worn mourning clothes. Men were attracted to the ephemeral air of the widowed and orphaned Marianne, but she never remarried and kept her ground as a countess.

Marianne continued the charity works for children that her late beloved husband supported. That was how she became acquainted with Leti.

“I believe this is good news for you, Lord Weiher. You see, Lord Kraiburg had agreed to this proposal. I think connecting His Lordship’s land and yours with a road has

many advantages, do you not think?"

Dyes were the main produce of Weiher's land while the march of Kraiburg's land's chief product is silk. Their lands are adjacent to each other, but due to the complicated terrain, Kraiburg purchases dyes somewhere else and not from Weiher. But if this terrain will be tamed by a road to be developed by the kingdom, then this proposal may just be profitable after all.

"Your Highness, please allow me to once again read this proposal. In fact, I had been thinking before that we are in need of a road wide enough for large carriages to pass through. If Your Highness will allow it, I think we can even start first with the road connecting my land with His Lordship's land."

With Weiher sudden change of opinion, Leti could only smile and tell him to take his time and read carefully again her proposal.

"Lady Bussell, to what do I owe again this visit?" asked Weiher.

"Her Highness had promised to have tea with me this afternoon, and have come to fetch her," smiled Marianne and asked Leti if they could go if she was finished talking with Weiher.

Leti invited Marianne to ride with her in her carriage since



they were headed to the same place. Marianne's carriage followed Leti's.

"Marie, that was a lie, was it not?" Leti asked Marianne about what she said to Weiher during her negotiation with the earl as they endured the slightly bumpy carriage ride.

"Whatever do you mean?"

"About Lord Kraiburg. My negotiation with him already failed. Why did you say something like that?"

"You only need to make it true. Oh, and I came upon some news about the marquis," said Marianne as she gave Leti an envelope.

Leti opened and read it. How Marianne could get hold of such information amazed her.

"So the tax evasion suspicions about Lord Kraiburg is true?"

"The information came from one of the children I took care of. He was unsure who to trust and came to me seeking help."

Marianne told Leti to use it for blackmail, and Leti gladly accepted her offer.

"I owe you one."

"I would like to say yes, but the development of the main road is also my dream. I am willing to do what I can for it," said Marianne as she leaned forward to Leti and continued, "Leti, you are young and beautiful. Why do you not try to be

more determined in your negotiations? Like showing some skin.” Marianne reached out for the ribbon on Leti’s dress and pulled it.

“Marie!” reprimanded Leti, but Marianne only chuckled at seeing Leti flustered.

“I was joking. It will be the end of Solvelle if its next queen will do that kind of negotiation tactic. Just do as you always do. You need not to demean yourself.”

“Good grief,” exasperated Leti as she tied her ribbon.

“By the way Leti, what was your business with me? I would give you some considerations with our negotiation if you will call me you big sister.”

“Be careful, I might just take your word for that,” warned Leti and with a serious face continued, “this is about something important.”

“It is such an honour for me, but I am afraid I have to decline your offer.”

It was such a clear day for winter, no clouds in sight and no harsh, cold wind blowing.

Marianne was out in her garden and enjoying her afternoon tea surrounded by the last blooms of winter. It was like the ideal young widower’s afternoon. Such a warm scene and yet Marianne’s refusal of Leti’s offer was like that of a



cold winter's evening.

“Can you tell me again your answer?”

Leti had always planned on recruiting Marianne to be the Sixth Knight of her Knights of the Round.

The present Solvelle is divided into two factions, the House of Lauenstein pushing for Friedhelm to be the next king and the House of Eulenburg backing up Guido for his fight for the crown. Then, there is also the neutral faction centred on Leti.

Keeping this balance between the factions is not enough to make politics go smoothly. To make that possible, Leti would need a negotiator between her and the other factions.

In selecting her negotiators, Leti had three conditions – the person should have wide connections, tactful in handling situations, and lastly trustworthy. She was aware that her last condition was hard to satisfy, so after careful deliberation, she was able to find two people whom she thinks satisfy all three. One of them was Marianne. She thought Marianne would understand her vision and agree to be her knight, but she seemed to be wrong about it.

“It would be an honour to be your knight, but I have to refuse.”

Leti was silenced by Marianne's straight refusal.

She was prepared to persuade Marianne to be her knight. She knew she would not agree right away, but she did not

expect Marianne flatly rejecting her. Somehow, she assumed Marianne would ask for some time to think about it and it never crossed her mind that Marianne would say no.

“Oh, do not get me wrong, Leti. There is nothing wrong about you. It is truly an honour for me, to have someone from Bussell become a Knight of Round would raise the family name. I, personally, had always wanted to support Crown Princess Leticia.”

“Then why not accept my offer?”

“I, personally, want to assist you, but I cannot due to personal reasons.”

Upon hearing personal reasons, Leti tried to remember the details about the investigation she had about Marianne’s background. She had no problems financially nor was she having any trouble with her personal relations. She did have a problem regarding who will inherit the title, but this could be solved easily if she would adopt someone. Besides, Marianne was only nine and twenty. She was still young and could get remarried if she wishes to. Leti could not think of any personal reason that could prevent her from accepting her offer.

“May I know what is it about?”

“Forgive me, but I cannot tell it to anyone, not even you,” smiled Marianne and continued, “It is getting late. Besides, His Highness would definitely scold me if you stay here any

longer.”

Marianne was currently a part of a national operation spearheaded by Guido. Leti was aware about this and could not complain about it. She agreed to leave for now, but said she would still come back.

Marianne went out to see Leti ride her carriage. After Leti went inside, Marianne greeted Leti’s knight who had been standing on guard quietly.

“Good day, Duke. It has been a while.”

“Good day, my lady. I am sorry for my late greetings.”

Duke’s and Marianne’s families were both under the Guido faction. They were not particularly close, but they were acquainted with each other.

“How are you doing as Leti’s knight? Are you doing your job well?”

“I am giving it my all.”

“I see. Be sure to protect her at all costs. Not only her body, but also her mind and heart.”

Leti’s physical safety was within Duke’s expertise. Leti’s mental and emotional health, however, was something he was not sure of.

“Leti is lonely now that Princess Charlotte had gone to Illstra.”

“Truly?”

Duke thought Leti was relieved after being dragged into Charlotte’s troubles. He had also seen her write he replies to Charlotte’s letters, but she did not seem sad whenever she did. She seemed to write them effortlessly.

“Leti had passed on to Princess Charlotte much of the things she had given up. Princess Charlotte, in turn, let Leti experience that happiness through her.”

Leti passed to Charlotte her dream of being a princess – to fall in love, to be loved by family, to live in the moment, to smile, to cry, to live as if nothing else matters but her heart. Charlotte accepted it and realised it for Leti.

“Their relationship may look like it is one-sided, but they were truly friends. It may be hard for you, a man, to replace Princess Charlotte, but please try to comfort Leti once in a while.”

Duke was not sure how he could do Marianne’s request. Leti was not someone who would honestly admit she was lonely if asked. Instead, she would definitely look at Duke with an odd stare as if he asked something he should have not dared ask.

The people who could deftly deal with someone difficult like his master was someone like Charlotte who would not mind what the other was feeling and just do as they will or someone who is sensitive to other’s feelings and could

skilfully guide the other's emotions.

*Lady Bussell is the latter. Her Highness does need someone like her.*

Marianne noticed something about Leti that none of her knights were able to see. Then, she also knows of ways that could lift up Leti's loneliness, something even her knights were unaware of.

"Lady Bussell, if you are worried about the factions," started Duke.

"Ah, yes. You were like that. You were so serious and took the factions to heart that you refused Leti continually because of it. Thank you for providing us with a particularly entertaining story that time. But it is different for me. It is truly because of personal reasons. Be sure to take care of Leti," requested Marianne.

Duke felt like he was given such a difficult task.

After leaving Marianne's residence, Leti was again on her way to her next destination, the home of her planned Seventh Knight.

Originally, Leti was supposed to recruit her candidate for the Seventh Seat after she knighted Marianne.

"The order might get reversed. My Sixth and Seventh would be performing the same duties, so I thought to give the priority to the more senior, but," sighed Leti. There was



nothing much she could for now for Marianne.

Leti's candidate for the Seventh Seat was Willard Orlandi, the eldest son and heir of Lord Orlandi, an earl under the Friedhelm faction.

The House of Orlandi only held an earldom, but they were an old family that could be traced back to the time of King Christian, Solvelle's first king who is also known as Knight King.

Willard was of the same age as Friedhelm and was the schoolmate of the eldest prince. Many wished him to be Friedhelm's knight, but due to the mismatch of their personalities, this future never happened.

One of the reasons why Willard and Friedhelm were not in good terms was Willard's extreme preference for the opposite sex. Based on Leti's latest investigation about him, there were no problems about that as of the moment.

*Marianne for the Guido faction and Willard for the Friedhelm faction. I think I made such excellent choices here, but I did not think I would be having a hard time with Marianne.*

Though the negotiation with Willard would not be that easy, he had never flatly refused Leti. She had sent him signs about her plans of making him her knight. His expression sometimes show he was amused by Leti's efforts of recruiting him and he had never denied her. In other words, if he was already satisfied with this game, then he would gladly agree to

be her knight.

While Leti was busy thinking of a way how to bring up this topic to Willard, she arrived at her destination.

However, when the gatekeeper saw Leti's carriage, it hurried inside to call someone. This could either mean their preparations to receive her were not yet finished or they did not receive information that she would be coming for a visit.

While they were waiting in the carriage to be shown inside, a servant came out of the house and gave a letter, not to Leti, but to Duke.

“For me?”

“Yes. Young Master said to give this to Sir Barchet.”

Duke glanced at Leti. She nodded, an order for Duke to read the letter and report it to her.

Leti, who was sitting inside the carriage, could not read Willard's letter, but she could see it only had a few lines.

“Uh, Your Highness, Lord Willard is,” started Duke, unsure of how he should relay Willard's message.

“Do not bother euphemising it. What did he say?”

“The letter says, “Tell Her Highness in a polite and beautiful way that I am not presently available for negotiations due to personal reasons.””

Personal reasons again. Leti could not understand why someone like her, a princess with only the king as the sole person above her had to endure being rejected like this when

she had informed them beforehand about her visit. Having to experience twice in a day did not anger her anymore. She did feel exasperated about it, but she was also interested what those personal reasons could be.

“We are going back to the castle.”

Leti looked at the clear sky and weakly whispered, “Today might have just been a bad day.”

The travel back to the castle was too short. It ended quickly as Leti thought of the things she would do for the rest of the day after failing with her efforts to recruit her two prospect knights.

As she was about to get down the carriage, Leti placed her hand on the cushion. She heard the sound of paper. She thought she might have left some documents, so she lifted up the cushion. She found a letter beneath it.

“Mine? Or Marianne’s?”

The white envelope did not have an address nor was it sealed.

While felling a little guilty of being privy of a letter if it was Marianne’s, Leti opened it to learn to whom it belonged.

Leti blinked twice upon seeing the contents of the letter.

*Be careful. Three children under the Bussell's care had disappeared. Do not trust the countess.*

Is this a prank or a warning to Leti?


“The carriage was parked at Marianne’s home for a while. This could have been placed here easily by someone acting like a servant and was taking care of the carriage.”

There were not enough clues to search who wrote the letters even if she told Marianne about this.

Leti shook her head. This was not the time for her to search who wrote the letter. She needed to know what Marianne’s personal reason was.

She thought she would have no troubles in recruiting her next knights, but things were not looking easy at the moment.



Chapter I:

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## Heart: Beginning with the Church Boy

Leti returned to her room in the royal palace and let the maid take off her coat. After she saw the maid leave her room, she threw herself on the couch and kicked off her beautiful, high-heeled shoes.

Without any complaints, Duke picked them up and placed them side by side. He had already understood that taking care of the aftermaths of his master's temper was still a part of his duties as her knight.

"I have no plans on giving up Marianne."

"I know. I have experienced Your Highness' persistence first hand."

Duke decided to be Leti's knight because of his desire to see the same things Leti sees. However, Leti's persistence in recruiting him to be her knight definitely contributed much when he made that decision. If Leti did not ask him to be her knight, he would probably have not even thought about it.

"First, I need to reinvestigate about Marianne. I thought everything would be fine since she had no problems with her family. I also need to know what Willard's personal reason is. If I can make them indebted to me, further negotiations will be easy."

Instead of sulking because of rejection, Leti was already preparing to make her next move. This kind of quick recovery from a failure was one of Leti's talents.

"I am sorry for dragging you out. I know you are busy. You may return to the Order."

"Your Excellency, please send information when to resume the attack on the earls," saluted Duke.

"I shall light the beacon. Keep your eyes opened, soldier" said Leti playing along with Duke.

After Duke left her room, Leti sat up thinking of what she should do for the remainder of the day. In her original plan, she was supposed to be back here late night, however, it was just slightly past noon. Swinging her feet back and forth as she waited for the maid to return, she decided to just do the things she had planned to do tomorrow.

The Royal Chivalric Order of Solvelle was busy at the moment. The raiding operations that took eight years of preparation would soon commence.

The head of this operation was Second Prince Guido. He thoroughly knows the operation's procedure and tactics. He revised and revised the strategy until all risks were addressed and the operation plan was perfect. No one else in Solvelle could match Guido when it comes to commandeering a perfectly planned operation.

—Dragons rule the mountains. Krakens rule the seas.  
Humans rule the lands.

The target of this raiding operation was a multi-national organisation known for cruel human trafficking and its customers. If this operation finished successfully, it was possible for numerous orphans to be discovered. Leti was the one tasked to make plans and negotiate with the other countries regarding the care and assistance to be provided for the casualties of the organisation. She accepted the task as well since she had much experience in dealing with these kinds of matter because of her past efforts of supporting medical and welfare causes.

To be honest, Leti wanted to do many things before she becomes too busy with her own job, but due to the raiding operations, the Order was busy and she could not make them do anything big. The only things that she could do now was the negotiations about the creation of the main road and recruitment of her own knights.

Furthermore, Leti had loaned her first three knights to the Order to assist in the raiding operation. Because of this she had no knights by her side for her protection, and therefore she could not go around unescorted. Her Fourth Knight, Shelan, was a prince under Solvelle's care and someone she should be protecting, while her Fifth Knight, August, was clearly busy in Northruth.

After Leti decided to do the things she had scheduled to accomplish tomorrow, she changed her shoes to a pair more comfortable to walk on and picked up some documents. She was headed to Guido's room, who was probably busy, unlike her.

“Prince Guido, I have finished arranging the schedule of meeting with Illstra.”

But there was no one inside Guido's office.

Guido was supposedly busy listening to the reports regarding the preparations now that the day of the raiding operation is fast approaching and would make himself available anytime to receive the reports. Something probably came up that he had to leave his office.

Leti decided to wait for him for a while instead of just leaving the documents since he might have some other requests for her. She did have more time than he did, so she thought she should help him with things she could manage to do.

“This room is just as plain as usual. Every corner is just dull.”

Guido's office did not have a flower to brighten it up nor was there any painting hanged to decorate the wall.

Since there was nothing else to look at, Leti's eyes were drawn on the documents on Guido's desk.

“Hmm? Empire of Kielf?” Leti was piqued by the word



she found on one of the documents.

This raiding operation was headed by Solvelle with the cooperation of Illstra, Northruth, and Napaña – Solvelle’s neighbouring countries. Kief, at the moment, was currently busy with its own affairs that they opted not to join this operation.

So why is Kief written on a document related to the raiding operation?

“This is not for the raiding operation. What is this non-aggression treaty?”

Upon scanning the document, she found out it contained a strategy not related to the raiding operation. It was a completely different plan. Leti picked up the document and read it carefully, after reading it, she checked for a date when it was written but found none.

“A non-aggression treaty without a date? So this is not yet fixed, is it? This treaty may be possible with Kief now, but,” Leti thought of the reason behind this treaty.

Kief, now ruled by Anastasia and her husband and Prime Minister, Cyril, were putting in their efforts to improve the empire’s internal affairs. If Solvelle will be offering them a treaty that would grant peace for both countries, it was possible for them to sign the treaty if the conditions will be favourable. But the question about this was why now.

With some questions still in mind, Leti carefully returned

the document on the desk when noticed the word Illstra written on the next page.

“A military alliance with Illstra?”

Leti tilted her head on one side and thought why they would make a military alliance with Illstra.

In between Solvelle and Illstra was a sharp mountain range. Direct travelling between the two countries is difficult, therefore sending reinforcements between them would take time and would not be efficient. What was the point of making this document for a military alliance that will be on paper only?

“The third page is,” Leti scanned through the last page, “A plan to invade Northruth? What in the world is this?”

Leti was surprised upon reading the contents of the third page. The plan was intricately detailed. It had information who among the Royal Chivalric Order will be the head of the operation, which unit at what scale will be stationed where, and the duration of the attack. It was so specific, Leti wanted to search for Guido and press him to answer if he was really sure about this plan.

If this third page was the original first page, then the non-aggression treaty with Kielf and the military alliance with Illstra would make sense.

While Leti was trying to understand why Guido made this plan, Guido came back to his office.

“Ah, Leticia, you have come.”

Upon seeing Leti, Guido looked at his knights and silently ordered them to stay outside.

As soon as they were left alone, Leti brought up the papers she found and asked Guido, Prince Guido, what is the meaning of this?”

Guido quickly looked at the papers and replied, “Ah, that. I was taking a break.”

“Taking a break?”

“I had been very busy with the raiding operation. If I do not take a break, the exhaustion might lead to a critical failure.”

These plans with no date written on them were Guido’s imaginary strategies.

Leti sighed, now convinced they were truly created just for leisure.

Guido was someone who tells jokes with a face so straight, it was impossible to know if he was joking or telling the truth. If he says these plans were just for fun, then it truly was something he created to take a break.

“But why plan to invade Northruth? I do not think we will gain anything from invading them.”

Northruth’s monarch, August, was a treasure – a genius even Leti recognizes. His innovative mind and the abilities to realise his ideas is what made Northruth prosper in a short

span of time. However, that is also Northruth's weakness. Once August goes down the throne, Northruth would most likely return to being a small buffer country situated in between two large territories with no other natural resources. Aside from that, the problem of it sharing borders with Kief remains.

“You made Duke Northruth your knight, did you not?”

“Yes, I did.”

August Karlzen Northruth, The Duke of Northruth was known for his dauntlessness. His tenacity to even face bigger countries garnered him the nickname, The Silver Wolf Duke. However, this fearless monarch agreed to become Leti's Fifth Knight and he was knighted during their stay in Kief for the empire's foundation festival.

When news about Crown Princess Leticia's newest knight reached Solvelle, many were surprised – they said it was impossible.

But for those who knew Leti was not just the beautiful Leftover Princess, like Friedhelm and Guido, they understood the reason why August became Leti's knight and thought she should be grateful for Kief for giving her the chance to get August.

“I thought of that plan just in case.”

“Just in case of what? I will not give August any trust for him to betray. I have absolutely no plans of letting him

interfere with Solvelle's affairs."

"I was not referring to political relationships. I was thinking more of a personal one." Guido paused, thought for a moment and continued, "But if that happens, I do not need to resort to such a roundabout manner. I will deal with it personally," and with a far-off look murmured, "how should I break his neck."

Leti knew well about Guido's propensity to tell incomprehensible jokes, so she just ignored what he said and decided to take her leave. "I see you are quite exhausted. I will leave you to rest. I just came to give you the documents about the schedule with Illstra you asked me to arrange for you. Do read it and confirm if it is all right."

"I will. I will send a messenger if there is anything else I would need."

"Be sure to take some rest," bid Leti as she left the room – an unusual show of care from her part.

*And I finally ran out of things to do,* thought Leti.

In comparison to Guido who seemed to be so busy, Leti had nothing else to do until tomorrow. And it was just past noon.

Recently, whenever she had some extra time in her hands, something unexpected happens and she ends up becoming busy as she deals with it. However, there was not even a trace such a thing was about to happen. Leti, after some time, truly

had some free time.

*Should I play the piano? Or maybe read some poetry?*

Leti thought of what she could do. She could let herself become idle because whenever she was not doing something, she finds herself thinking about *it*.

She was looking out the window but not really looking at something, did not even notice Shelan approaching her.

“You seem bored, Leti.”

Leti only noticed Shelan when he called her. Shelan was carrying some books. He probably just came from the library.

“Do I look I am bored?”

“Yes. How about we take a walk? I am capable of protecting you. Leave it to me.”

However, Shelan was not just some knight she could ask to protect her, so she at least asked him to have a picnic with her.

Today was a fine day. There was no cloud in sight and the wind was not blowing. If they bring blanket with them, it would be enough to have tea outside.

Leti headed to the pavilion situated at the villa she used to live at and have a personal tea there.

After the maids finished the preparations, she asked them to leave her and Shelan and told them they could handle it by themselves. Leti picked up the teapot and poured it to their cups. It seemed she her mind was still capable of enjoying the

fragrance of the tea.

“Thank you very much. I feel so lucky to have Leti serve me tea.”

“This is the first time I did this for someone not family. You can brag about it.”

Leti and Shelan were having their tea on a table covered with white tablecloth embroidered with dainty flowers, the tea set was made of white porcelain with pale pink filigree for design. The pastries prepared to go with the tea were some fresh berry tarts and cookies decorated with flowers and fruits drawn by sugar icing.

The tea arrangement was fit for a tea party between ladies, but Shelan did not mind it. He even praised it to be charming.

Leti found Shelan’s kindness comforting.

“Leon is quite busy recently. He could not even spare a moment to greet me.”

Solvellé’s Third Prince, Leonhardt, was Leti’s full brother. He was also a famous historian. He had learned numerous languages in order to understand different literatures. He usually puts his researches into a halt during these cases his expertise is needed in checking documents due to communication with other countries, like the present raiding operation.

“He is currently busy with making of the official document for the raiding operation. It needs to be translated

into several languages, and he is the one in charge of checking them. I think he will be staying at Prince Guido's side for some time.”

The translation is not simply writing the same thing in a different language. They need to be careful of how it is written so that the person who will receive the document would understand what the operation is about and what are its objectives. They would need the other parties to be on the same page as Solvelle.

Leonhardt had to keep in mind the details of all the reports that land on Guido's hands and tell them if anything changed with regards to the other countries.

*Leon probably know more about this raiding operation than I do,* thought Leti.

If this raiding operation is completed successfully, it will be a big achievement.

To be honest, Leti wanted to be more involve with the operation, but there are things suited for one, but not for the other. For this case, the raiding operation was for Guido and Leti could not poke her nose in it. She was well aware how long they had prepared for it and how important this operation was.

First Prince Friedhelm also understood this. He decided not to get involved with this operation and went abroad to a country south of Solvelle for some diplomatic visit.



Leti made the same decision and focused on recruiting her sixth and seventh knight. However, one of them rejected her and she could not meet the other.

As if reading her mind, Shelan asked, “Leti, may I ask about your Sixth Knight? I think you already have someone in mind. If it were me, instead of having someone with prestige, my Sixth would be someone who can perform more of a political role.”

“Oh, I see you have read my mind.”

Duke and Shelan may be the same future Knights of the Round, however, the lessons and training they had were different. Duke was trained to be a knight who would serve his master. Shelan, on the other hand, was schooled in the ways of someone who would rule. Because of this, it was easy for him to come to the same conclusion as Leti.

The present Knights of the Round of future Queen Leticia already has more than enough prestige thanks to Ling’s Eight Prince, Shelan, and Northruth’s Duke, August. As for the Round’s military power, she has Duke who was part of the core of the Royal Chivalric Order, the former vice-commander of the Order, Craig, and Astrid who also serves to show that Leti was also open for commoners to hold post in her office.

So what lacks in her Round was political power, just like what Shelan said.

“Shelan, what else do you think my Round needs?”

“A strategist and a prime minister, and maybe someone to assist the prime minister. Maybe someone knowledgeable about economics and have some connection with merchants will be good too.”

“I could expect no less.”

“Ah, I only patterned it with Ling’s system and see what else is missing.”

Shelan said he did not think about it from scratch, but his answer was perfectly on point.

“The strategist can be considered later. The prime minister as well. What I currently have would be the assistants. I thought negotiating with them would be easier compared to my previous ones, but I was wrong.”

“So it will be quite a challenge then?”

“Both of them are refusing me due to personal reasons. Thanks to that, I was able to go home yesterday earlier than expected.”

Leti just wanted to vent out her frustration, but Shelan was thinking seriously about it.

“Hmm, personal reasons...do they already have someone else in mind?”

“That may be possible for one of them, but the other one is a lady. I do not think she had even thought of becoming a knight for someone.”

“A lady...how about she has plans of eloping with someone?”

“I did not even thought about that.”

Marianne was young and beautiful, she could get remarried whenever she wanted. If she fell in love with someone of lower status and was asked to go somewhere far to live happily ever after...

“I think that may be possible.”

Romantic relationship is a personal reason. If Marianne rejected Leti's offer because she would be gone soon, then her refusal may be justified.

However, this was Marianne who deeply loved her late husband. She had worn mourning clothes ever since his death, her way of telling the world that she had no plans of remarrying. Unless she stops wearing them, it was not likely she had fallen in love with someone else.

*Forbidden love and elopements...maybe I could ask Shelan about it*, thought Leti as she calmed herself. They were already on the topic, it would not sound strange if she would brought up this forbidden love of someone that she had been doing her best to keep at the back of her mind.

“Shelan, what would you do if someone whom you are sharing a forbidden love with asked you to elope?”

“I would be glad if I do have someone to share that kind of relationship,” wryly smiled Shelan. “I am sure my older

brothers would have that kind of partner though. Anyway, I will give my sincerest answer if that happens.”

“I see.”

This was what Leti wanted to ask Shelan.

On the night after the coronation ceremony in Kielf, Leti heard Duke’s secret feeling for her.

Duke thought Leti was already asleep, that she would not hear the words he had vowed never to speak in her hearing. Leti understand that. How should she answer him? But Duke did not say it to have answer. So what she should do? This question had been plaguing her since that night.

*The sincerest answer.* Leti repeated Shelan’s words in her mind and carefully thought about it.

She was not yet decided on what to do, but she thinks she should not just ignore Duke’s confession. They should face each other and talk about it.

Not giving up easily was one of Leti’s specialties. She was once again on her way to visit Marianne’s residence the next day without any prior appointment. There were not many who could turn away one of the country’s princesses. This was one of those times Leti appreciates the power of status.

After receiving a warm welcome from Marianne and

sharing some refreshments and small talk, Leti once again invited Marianne to be her knight.

“My answer is the same as yesterday,” smiled Marianne who was once again clad in a black dress.

Leti nodded, “But you know I am not someone who easily gives up.”

“I know,” said Marianne as she looked down at her hands. She looked so attractive with her face slightly peeking out of her black veil.

“Leti, you know I am currently occupied with the raiding operation. How about recruiting your other candidates first?”

“I understand that. I just came to declare my intentions.”

Leti had decided not to do anything further about Marianne until the raiding operations were over. However, once that is over, she would come back again for her.

A knock cut their conversation. A maid came in and bowed, “My lady, a letter for Your Ladyship has arrived.”

“Who is it from?”

“From Lard Kassel.”

“Then it is just some greeting. Please put it in my room.”

Marianne apologized to Leti for having their conversation cut.

Leti’s attention, however, was caught by the maid’s face that she kept on staring at the door even after the maid left.

*I have met her before, a long time ago. If I make her eyes a bit bigger*

*and change her proportions.* Leti imagined how the maid would look like if she were younger and finally found her answer. The reason why she did not remember right away was because she met the maid, not here in the Bussell's home, but in the home of Marianne's late husband, at Verdal.

"Is the name of the maid a while ago, Edelle?"

Marianne was surprised at hearing Leti speak her maid's name. "I hired her recently. Do you know her?"

"I have seen her once, nine years ago at the Verdal's residence. Did you bring her here with you? I think this is the first time I have seen her here."

"Edelle married two years ago and left her post as a maid at Verdal's. However, she was widowed and came searching for a new job, so I invited her to work here. I am surprised you remember her. Did something memorable happen for her to be in your memory?"

"Nothing in particular. I just heard the late older Lord Verdal call her by name once. I am certain she does not even remember meeting me."

Leti simply heard the girl being called by her name nine years ago. They did not even share any conversation and yet Leti remembered her.

Marianne was completely amazed at Leti's superb memory.

"That is amazing. Do you remember anyone just by

seeing their face?”

“I can if I decide to remember them. If I am just looking at them, I tend to remember some and forget some.”

“If you remember them, then can you tell who they are even after they have grown up, just like Edelle?”

“Identifying a lady with cosmetics on will be difficult.”

Marianne nodded at Leti’s answer. She seemed to start of thinking about something else and asked, “Leti, are you part of the raiding operation?”

Leti was surprised at the sudden change of topic, but still answered Marianne.

“Then you are aware of the incident eight years ago?”

“Yes.”

The incident Marianne referred to was the kidnapping of a boy, who was given to church and known for his voice and unusual colouring. He had white hair and red eyes. This incident happened eight years ago at Solvelle.

Eight years ago, the slave traders decided the boy would sell for a high price. They forced their way in the church, kidnapped the boy, and sold him through an auction. The Order did went after the boy and searched for him, but they were not able to get any leads and had to give up on the case. This incident was the motivation behind the raiding operation.

“Have you heard him sing?” asked Marianne.

“I have, once.”

“How I wish I had the chance to listen to him. I am sure it sounded lovely. Poor boy.”

Leti saw how Marianne closed her hands as if in prayer and how they shook slightly.

“Leti, what if I tell you that I will agree to be your knight if,” Marianne hesitated to continue.

“Marie?”

“Ah no, no, no. It is nothing. Let us pray for the success of the operation and talk about me being your knight after that.”

Marianne urged Leti to go home for now, so Leti did as she was asked. Not because she accepted Marianne’s words, but because she noticed her friend was somehow not herself.

On her carriage ride home, Leti played again in her mind the conversation she had with Marianne and where Marianne did started acting strange.

It was during the time she correctly remembered the name of the maid and that she first saw her at the home of Earl Verdal. This might have triggered the sad memory of Marianne’s late husband. After that conversation, their topic suddenly jumped to the kidnapping of the church boy. After that, Marianne was about to say something, but decided not to and then she asked Leti to go home.

What was Marianne thinking? What was she about to say?



Is this related to her personal reason that prevents her from being Leti's knight?

These questions were running inside Leti's head, but just as Marianne suggested, she should focus first on the raiding operation and hope for its success. She will go back to recruiting her knights after a fortnight.

Once Leti had reached the royal castle coming from her visit to Marianne's residence, her maid came running to her informing her that someone had come to visit.

After hearing the news from the maid, Leti could not help but think how such a good day today was even though the sky was filled with clouds.

"Prince Friedhelm is not here. Maybe he came to visit Duke."

Leti was referring to her Seventh Knight candidate, Willard Orlandi.

She was refused a meeting yesterday even after going all her way to visit him in his residence. Now, he had come out of his own volition to the royal castle. She would definitely catch him and have the conversation they were supposed to have yesterday.

Leti was about to go immediately and search for Willard when she remembered something about the man.

Willard was a fashionable person and particular about the latest trends. This is the reason why Leti knew she should be more careful about her appearance if she would meet him, as compared to when meeting other ladies.

Leti looked at her present clothes. She was wearing a fresh green dress accented with layers of drapes made out of thin fabric. The repeated layering of fabric created a depth in colour so it was not too bright. Her whole ensemble was reminiscent of spring, but not a representation of spring – it was perfect for the present season. The dress had a white collar with a blue-green ribbon. She noticed how the ribbon danced in her every step and thought it was somehow childish. But since she was going to see Willard, she decided looking a little bit childish was all right, even though Willard would not really care for any girl once her age had turned two digits.

Once she was satisfied with her look, Leti asked the maid to go and search for Willard. She thought of brushing her hair as she waited for the maid, so she headed to her office. On her way, she heard some voices in the receiving room for knights.

“You are a former knight of the Order and at present a knight of Her Royal Highness, Princess Leticia. You are the future Knight of the First Seat of the Knights of the Round.

You can do many things, can't you?"

"I'm sorry, but I currently don't have that power you're expecting of me. Her Highness's part in this operation will only be after it is over and is not participating much in the operation itself."

Leti was surprised at her good luck. She did not even have to search for Willard. Just as she thought, he was here to meet Duke. But they seemed to be arguing about something. Duke mentioned something about the operation. It was probably about the raiding operation.

*But Willard is not involved in it.* Leti thought of listening more into their conversation, but decided it would be faster if she asked them directly.

"Excuse me for butting in," Leti said as she went inside the room without even knocking.

Duke immediately apologized for their loud voices. "The maid told me Your Highness would not be back soon so I brought him here. Let us go to a different room."

"No, Duke. This might just be fate. I should have thought about this before. There is someone else more powerful than you that I could have talked to directly.

"Your Royal Highness, Princess Leticia, I hope the day has been good. I almost thought a fairy of spring has come to visit us. If Your Highness was walking in the garden, I am

sure some flowers would have bloomed earlier than they are supposed to because of Your Highness's presence.”

Willard was able to immediately come up with metaphors to praise Leti's appearance just by seeing her for a moment. That was one of the main traits of this man, Willard Orlandi.

He was a young man with amber-coloured hair that is evidently well taken care of, jewel-like aquamarine eyes and a handsome face. His particularly beautiful features and elegant manners were more than enough to attract the attention of young ladies. However, because of his peculiar tastes in *women*, the number of ladies with sufficient courage to wish to become more than his friend could be counted by hand.

“Good day Willard. If you have some request, it will be faster to ask it from me than Duke.”

“Your Highness, everyone, except for Will, has already accepted this.”

Duke tried to tell Leti that this conversation was already over, but Leti directed her question to Willard.

“I shall be kind and listen to what you have to say. Make it brief.”

Willard smiled and stood in front of Leti. “Your Highness, the Orlandi blood that runs through my veins is far older than the Lauenstein backing up Prince Friedhelm and the Eulenburg supporting Prince Guido.”

“Yes, I know. That is why your family had been serving

an important role for the royal family.”

“Aside from that, I, as the heir of Orlandi, am extremely social. My connections are wide. I am in good terms with many, not only within the Friedhelm faction, but also with members of the Guido faction and the Neutral faction.”

“That you are.”

“My first-class tastes and profoundness. I am not exaggerating when I say I am one of the pillars of Solvelle’s fashion.”

“I find your proud humility to say at least one of the pillars to my liking,” coldly replied Leti as she tried to keep her attention in listening to Willard’s roundabout way of saying things. She did, however, find his manner of speaking slightly odd. Many of his sentences were direct, unlike his usual penchant for metaphors. She usually have this strong urge to butt in and ask him to summarize everything he had said, but that does not seem to be happening right now.

“I am valuable for you.”

“Yes, you are.”

Leti knew Willard was already aware of her intentions to make him her knight. He was a man who clearly refuses anything not to his liking. The fact that he did not do that to Leti meant he was willing to entertain the idea of it. He was only probably wanting to keep the formality as a nobleman. Leti would set a meeting with him, ask him to be her knight,

and then give his reply after a few days. This was also Leti's plan. But based on how Willard was acting right now, he might forgo all of those steps. He seemed to be in a hurry about something.

"Will this still continue? My feet are starting to go numb and I might end this conversation now."

"Then I shall skip all of the procedures," said Willard. He had now lost all composure and simply looked like a man.

"I wish for Your Highness to face danger in order to save a girl."

"Willard, you are overstepping your bounds!" warned Duke as he understood first what Willard wish was.

But Willard did not let that deter him. "I only wish for Your Highness to take part in Fenrir's auction and successfully win her."

The auction hosted by Fenrir, the organization of slave traders, can only be attended by the people they invited. The attendee is also not allowed to have a guard with them.

Marianne, the asset for the raiding operation, was prepared to go to the auction without any protection.

But Willard's wish was for Leti, Solvelle's crown princess, to face danger alone and attend Fenrir's auction.

"What will I get in return? I believe my worth is not that low that I will put my life on the line out of charity."

"Your Highness, reject this right now."



“Do not misunderstand me, Duke. A negotiation starts after the demand and payment has been laid down. We are still just having small talk at the moment and there is no need for me to give a reply yet,” said Leti and continued as if taunting Willard, “I am getting bored.”

She told Duke that they were just having small talk, but the negotiation had, in fact, started already. She had no plans of letting Willard control their conversation. She would keep her hold in their discussion to guide the flow and get the best possible outcome in this negotiation.

“Then how about presenting to Your Highness the Orlandi Family heirloom, a portrait drawn by Knight King, King Christian?”

“Oh? Do I seem so cheap? This conversation is over. You may go.” Leti’s tone was clear. Do not think my worth is equal to a painting. She was raising the stakes.

“Then how about some lands down south best for taking a vacation?”

“I have several of those lands. If you think exchanging my safety for something I already possess or something I can get if I want to, then I suggest you go back to the Knight Academy and study what a royalty is.”

She would never say what she wants. She would wait for Willard to offer it to her, and she would just accept whatever was offered to her.



The difference between her status as a princess and Willard's status as the son of an earl is not something that should be easily ignored.

"Then I," started Willard.

"What will *you* give to me?"

"I shall offer you everything. My honour, my power, my loyalty. I offer all of these to Your Royal Highness, Crown Princess Leticia."

Willard finally said the return she was waiting. But she did not let any emotion show. She only flipped her hair and acted uninterested. She would appear too eager if she accepted Willard's offer right away. She should act first like it was not that much of an enticing offer.

"I find what you are offering dull, but my interest is piqued by this girl whom you are willing to sacrifice everything for. I am willing to listen about her," said Leti and told them they should continue the conversation in her office.

After changing the place of conversation, Leti sat in her chair with her legs crossed, showing that she was completely at ease.

Willard, on the other hand, was almost leaning forward on his seat.

Duke stood near the door, thinking he no longer had any part to play here since the negotiation already started.

“Your Highness is aware about the raiding operations, am I correct?”

“Yes. I think they are only finalising the details.”

“How much is Your Highness’s participation in it?”

“My name is included as a part of the people in charge of it, but nothing else. My job is to take care of the children that will be rescued after the operation.”

This information was nothing new to Willard. This could be found out easily by doing some research. He wanted to know something deeper.

“Does Your Highness know about the details of the operation?”

“I know some of it. I am aware they have been preparing for this for eight years and I have read the strategy and plans regarding the operation.”

“How about the Knight Academy student, Airiche Cherni?”

“I remember her name and her face.”

Airiche is the sole member of this operation who was still a student. Her role also is the most important and most dangerous.

“Airiche is the girl to be sold in the auction, correct?”

The slave trade is an entertainment prepared by Fenrir for its guests to enjoy. However, a simple auction for beautiful girls and boys is dull for their highly esteemed guests. In

order to answer their guests' expectations, they would always prepare a special item with a special price.

It could be a prince or a princess of a fallen country. It could be a child with an unusual appearance and myth, like how the meat of a child with golden eyes is said to be the key to immortality.

“She is a beautiful girl born in the east and her colouring is similar to that of the Shiko<sup>1</sup> Clan. She is enough to be an item for this auction.”

If Airiche was born into some village in a small country, she would have already been kidnapped and sold somewhere. It was fortunate she was born in Solvelle, a relatively peaceful country and she was in the capital. After she entered the Knight Academy, her safety had become more secure.

“If she was a civilian, the Order would have immediately stopped this plan. However, she is at present student at the Academy, and therefore is qualified to be a knight of the Order.”

But this does not change the fact that she was still a student and this mission is filled with danger. Her agreement to participate in the operation was needed for this to proceed.

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<sup>1</sup> Shikō 紫紅: Literally translates to “purple red”

“Then, how are you related with Airiche? I do not think you have anything in common.”

“Our relationship is deep enough for me to be a recipient of her will. She asked me to read it if ever anything happens to her. I have it here with me, please read it, Your Highness.”

Wills written by the knights of the Order are sent to their recipients once the operation starts.

Leti was not sure if it was right of her to read Airiche’s will, but since Willard, the original recipient asked her to do so, she decided to scan through the letter, taking care not to read it thoroughly.

The letter was written on a plain white paper with a steady and beautiful script.

*Dear Mr. Willard Orlandi,*

*The Order told me to write a will, but I have no fortune or family. I did not know what I should write so I decided to write my memories of you.*

*Our first meeting was at the Main Road leading to the Royal Castle. I found someone who lost their purse to a pickpocket so I ran after the thief to get it back. Our eyes met that time. You told me that whenever you pass by this street, you are always on*

*the lookout for children who might have been separated from their parents. You said you always wanted to hold the hands of those lost children and bring them home to their families.*

*Our second meeting was at the church. I guided some people asking for direction to the church and I saw you again there. You told me afterwards that you liked watching young girls being excited about wearing their church dresses that you tend to spend some time around the vicinity.*

*We meet again for the third time at the plaza. I was about to stop two men fighting when you brought with you a knight from the Order. When I asked why you were there, you told me that seeing girls playing innocently made you smile. I am glad they made you smile.*

*And for the fourth time, we met at a tea house. You asked if it was all right to share a table with me and I was surprised to see you again. We talked about different things. You told me how the place was popular as a meeting place for young mothers and how it provided you with the perfect opportunity to invite to play the children who were*

*getting bored waiting for their mothers.*

*You were the first person I have met this much within a day that I felt something ominous about it.*

Leti looked up at Willard after reaching this point in the letter. She wanted to tell something to him, but decided not to. She was somehow glad that the girl who wrote this letter had a foreboding feeling about their frequent meetings.

*But, to be passionate about something, I think now, is a good thing. I have never been passionate about something and simply accepted my fate. I think I had been drawn to how passionate you were since the beginning, even if your passion is quite eccentric.*

Based on the letter, Willard and Airiche were lovers with different social status and *that* Willard chose a girl more than ten years of age. Leti thought that this could be nothing else but true love for this man with extremely odd taste in women.

The rest of the letter explained briefly about the operation and the young girl's determination to do her best for the success of her mission. She closed it with a wish for Willard's happiness.

The business-like tone of the letter made Leti worry. This young girl sounded like she had already given up on her future.

*I see now why Willard was desperate.*

The reason why Willard was not available to meet her yesterday was most likely because he was frantically searching for a way to save his love.

“When did this arrive?”

“Four days ago, Your Highness. The raiding operation has already started. She is most likely in Fenrir’s hands now.”

If Willard received this letter before the operation started, he probably would have shut her inside his mansion and would not give her up to the Order. But it was too late now to do that.

Airiche, with her false background, was now an item for Fenrir’s exclusive auction.

“Your Highness, I will give anything just to save her.” Willard pleaded in a low voice as he looked straight at Leti, “if Your Highness will go to the auction and successfully get Airiche Cherni.”

The auction was exclusive for the people who have received invitation for it. But, that is not the only way one can participate in it. Willard was most likely asking Leti to do that.

“Why are you asking me this?”

“Because someone as beautiful as Your Highness can go

to the auction even without an invitation. And I also know that Your Highness can win Airiche. For some strange reason, I know Your Highness can do it.”

Is this flattery? Or is he telling the truth?

“Any proof for that strange reason?”

“I have seen Your Highness once when you were still younger than ten years old.”

“Really? I do not need to hear your thoughts about it though.” Leti was not aware about such meeting and should Willard say something like how she was charming back then just like what that older brother of hers says, she might ask him to leave immediately and no longer proceed with their negotiation.

“Your Highness is the only girl I have met not and not felt the presence of that soothing innocence.”

“Is that so? It is an honour then.”

Leti did not understand how Willard’s answer connected to her question about the proof behind his assertion. She no longer felt the need to prolong their conversation, so she decided to end it.

“I have heard about your request and your payment. I shall think about it and inform you about my decision.”

“I await for a favourable answer, Your Highness.”

Leti shrugged her shoulders and Duke opened the door for Willard.



Leti then asked Duke to go out of the room to leave her alone as she recalled her conversation with Willard a while ago.

*Willard's request and his payment was clear. It is not a bad deal.*

Someone else other than the princess of the country is better suited to go to an auction. Willard's request was for Leti to be the one to do so, but she was already thinking of having someone else go for her. She was not worried about her safety since she can keep herself safe. Her worry was that this could start a rumour about Princess Leticia of Solvelle being Fenrir's customer and this could result into problems.

While thinking of what she should do, Duke came in again announcing the arrival of another visitor.

“Your Highness, Lady Bussell wishes to speak with you. Should I let her in?”

“Marie?”

They already decided yesterday that they would discuss again the matter about Marianne being Leti's knight once the operation was finished. Wondering what might be her friend's reason, Leti asked Duke to let Marianne in.

“Good day, Leti,” greeted Marianne who was, as usual, in her mourning clothes.

“Good day, Marie. Have you finished your business with

Prince Guido?”

Marianne was the raiding operation’s asset in infiltrating Fenrir’s auction. She must have come to the palace to discuss some things about the operation with Guido and only came to Leti for greetings.

But Marianne shook her head. “No, I came to see you. I know I should not be coming into the palace at this crucial time, but,” Marianne clenched her fist tight and continued. “Leti, you said you were involved in the raiding operation. May I know what will be your role on the day of the raiding?”

“I will be waiting here in the palace. My duty starts after the raiding is finished.”

“I see. Leti, I have a request only you can fulfil. Please save that child.”

“That child?”

“The Knight Academy student, Airiche Cherni. She is the bait the Order had prepared for this operation.”

Airiche Cherni, Willard’s lover, was once again brought up in conversation.

“Are you acquainted with Airiche?”

“Yes. About a year ago, the Order requested me to look after her for some time. That was how I came to know her. The travelling entertainers she was with were attacked by robbers and she was the only the Order was able to save.”

When the Order asked Marianne’s opinion on what to do

with Airiche, she made a hard decision.

Airiche was from the east and was particularly beautiful. If she was sent to some household to be a maid, she was likely to be sold or kidnapped sooner or later. Therefore, there were only two choices left for an orphan girl – to send her to church and offer herself to God as a nun or to pass the examination for the Knight Academy and offer herself to the country as knight while acquiring the skills needed for her to protect herself.

“She was stronger than how she looked. She chose to be a knight.”

Airiche chose to be independent and Marianne supported her as much as she could.

“I have spent six years to be able to get an invitation from Fenrir. I am prepared to face all the dangers that this entails. But Airiche is not like me.”

Marianne pleaded to Leti that Airiche was only a child, someone that should be protected and not lead to danger.

Leti calmly observed Marianne as she did her pleas.

“The Order promised to save Airiche. But what if the operation stops before the auction even started? What if the raiding failed? The Order might fail again just like how they did eight years ago and they could no longer get her back.”

Being the decoy for the operation was a dangerous role. This was the reason why they selected Airiche who was a

student in the Knight Academy.

“Please Leti, I want to save her! Come with me to the auction and let us win her. Only you can do it.”

“But even if you say only I can do it, I,” Leti was unsure what Marianne really wanted.

“I will protect you with my life. If we succeed in winning Airiche, I promise to be your knight. Please, Leti.”

Willard came to Leti asking her to save Airiche and in turn, he would be her knight.

Now, Marianne was saying the same thing.

There was something Leti noticed about Marianne, probably because she talked with Willard before her.

Willard was desperate. He truly wanted to save Airiche that he accepted Leti’s taunting. If he was his normal self, he could have been smarter in his negotiation, but he was not. Airiche’s letter did nothing but to further aggravate Willard’s concern.

It was because she saw the seriousness and sincerity in Willard’s eyes that she was able to notice that Marianne’s true intentions lay elsewhere.

*This is too late. Marianne knew about Airiche’s role earlier than Willard. If she truly wanted to save her, she should have taken action before this. I think she is only using saving Airiche as an excuse for something else.*

Marianne does not simply take in abandoned children and

take care of them on her own. Airiche, for example, was sent to the Knight Academy. Marianne knows that being kind to the children is not real charity for them. This was the reason why Marianne supposedly already accepted Airiche's fate – that she would do everything in her power to help the poor child, but did not become almost hysterical like Willard.

Airiche's role was simple – to be one of the items for Fenrir's auction and in turn saving a civilian who could have taken on this role.

Airiche was able to enrol and study in the Knight Academy thanks to the money from the taxes paid by the citizens. To repay this, she had the duty to face some dangers for the country. That was why Marianne did not do anything about this before.

So there was something that happened and it pushed her to take this action.

“I will think about this,” replied Leti.

The two persons Leti wanted to be her knight came to her, offering themselves as payment for their requests.

Willard's wish was clear – he wanted Leti to save Airiche.

Marianne's wish, on the other hand, was enveloped in mystery. She did not truly wish to save Airiche. She wanted something else that required Leti to be there in the auction.

*What does Marie want me to do?*

It was definitely something important that she even

brought up the topic about her being knight which she had been steadily refusing due to personal reasons.

After Marianne left, Leti started to contemplate what her next moves would be.

Willard and Marianne had presented their demands and the price they were willing to pay.

Leti's train of thoughts were cut by the voice of the maid who accompanied Marianne out.

"Your Highness," bowed the maid as she presented to Leti a slightly crumpled, dirty, white envelope. "This letter was found at the place where Lady Bussell's carriage was parked. We found it after the carriage had left, so we were not able to ask Her Ladyship to confirm if this was hers. May I ask Your Highness to check it?"

While feeling proud at how her maid handled this situation – of not simply opening the letter considering the possibility of it to be confidential and bringing it to her master for confirmation, Leti took the letter and scanned through it. She immediately put back the letter and assured her maid that she would take care about it.

"Thank you, Your Highness. Please excuse me," bowed the maid, her expression showed relief after hearing Leti say she would take of the letter.

After seeing the maid leave, Leti once again took out the letter and read it.

*Only misfortune awaits the children taken in by Marianne Bussell. The same fate will befall that child.*

This was the second mysterious letter.

Leti assumed the child the letter was referring to was Airiche. She flipped and turned over the letter to see if there were any clues on who wrote it, but found none. This letter might not just be a prank after all.

