

— *October 3rd, 1917. Werder Hotel Room, 8:00 P.M.* —

The decorative flower-painted walls of the hotels looked to Aigis as if they were actually wilting. She sat in her hotel room chair with both legs in the seat cushion, knees bent, and her arms wrapped around them. Her eyes hyper focused on each fiber in the carpet. Each individual thread sticking out from the top. She could still hear the gunfire and the smashing of the porcelain and china replaying in the back of her mind. No amount of bashing her head against the chair made it go away. She was glad she refused to look at the carnage. She didn't want to imagine the way that old man plopped to the floor. It was her finger that doomed him. It was her finger that took his life.

A soft knock at the door. Aigis slightly lifted her head. Her legs fell asleep from how long she kept them in the same position. She didn't care to stand up. She didn't care who was at the door.

"Go away." She shouted to the door, not lifting up her head. The voice behind the door didn't respond.

"You're really mean." A young man's voice sulked. It almost sounded like he wanted to cry. Aigis perked up. It was Oswald. She shook her legs to get some circulation back into them. Leaping out of the chair, she waltzed to the room door and opened it. Oswald held something in his hand wrapped in paper.

"Oh, Oswald. I— I didn't know that was you." Aigis rubbed the back of her neck. She couldn't help but smile and be happy to see him. He was the only one from the Battalion Aigis who could actually tolerate seeing.

Oswald brought up what he was holding. "Here. This is for you."

"What is it?" She questioned.

“It’s an apfelstrudel. I spent the last of my papiermarks on it.”

Aigis accepted the gift, cupping it with both hands. “What’s this for?”

Oswald tugged at his uniform collar. “I remembered it was your birthday today, so I got you a present to help you feel better.”

Oh right. Today was her birthday. She forgot completely. The gunshots and the dead man erased any thoughts of celebrating.

“Thank you, Oswald. I really appreciate it.”

Oswald bowed. Aigis turned around and returned to the inside of her room, but paused. She looked back at Oswald.

“Wanna split it?”

“A single strudel?”

Aigis shrugged. “Feels more like a birthday party with someone else eating it. It’s not exactly a cake, but it’ll do.”

Oswald gave his usual sheepish smile. He rotated his body sideways to slip in the room door and sat on his knees across from Aigis’ seat at the coffee table. Unwrapping the strudel, Aigis broke it in half and handed the other half to Oswald. Taking her first bite, Aigis was hit by an overwhelming amount of sweetness. Oswald, on the other hand, bit into it slowly, like a little rabbit.

“Kinda cold.” Aigis smacked.

“Sorry. I bought that when Schultz dragged me to that bakery earlier.”

“It’s not a bad thing. It’s still very sweet.”

They continued eating the strudel in silence, except for the smacking of their mouths. Aigis sat her half of the strudel down on the table. Oswald glanced up, noticing that she stopped eating.

“Oswald, why am I such a fucking idiot?”

Oswald swallowed. He was confused.

“You seem pretty smart to me.” He innocently remarked.

“No, I—” Aigis shook her head, her short hair bouncing side to side. “I would’ve never been in this situation if I just listened to Frieda.”

“Is it related to why you’re working for the Battalion?”

Aigis didn’t say anything. The image of the dead man was already starting to creep up in her brain. She shook her head again.

“About three years ago, the Gibor unit took a good friend of ours. Not just that, they turned all my friends against me thanks to their anti-psychokinetic propaganda. Frieda told me not to go. She wanted me to stay for her birthday. But I let my thirst for revenge take over, and look where it brought me!”

Oswald shrugged. He took a small bite of his half. “I understand why you were mad. I’d probably do the same in your position.”

“You’re different. I have a sister who depends on me. She’s probably worried sick not knowing where I am.”

Aigis laid her chin on the table and stared at her reflection in the polished wood. She wondered if Frieda was thinking about her. If Aigis found Frieda again, she would be furious for about ten minutes, then be glad she had her sister back. If only.

“Either way, I’d be glad to meet your sister if we ever find her again. I’m an only child. My parents said one of me was enough, so they didn’t have another kid after that.” Oswald joked, sucking the cream off his fingers before wiping them off with a napkin.

“Where are you from again, Oswald?” Aigis questioned, changing subjects.

“Munich.”

Aigis perked up. “I’ve always wanted to go to Bavaria.”

“It’s a nice place. I can show you some cool places there one day.”

“Sounds nice.” Aigis warmly replied. Oswald returned the same smile, though his was more timid and less enthusiastic. The exchange is interrupted by Sergeant Kollner barging into the room.

“Schumacher, Volkmann!” He shouted. Aigis and Oswald shot up to attention.

“Yes, sarge?!” They both barked in unison.

“Be ready to leave at 0600 sharp tomorrow morning.”

“I thought we didn’t check out of the hotel until ten.” Oswald interjected.

“The situation’s changed. We received another tip. This time, it’s in Berlin.”

Aigis raised one eyebrow. “What’s so different about Berlin? Why is it more urgent?”

“Psychokinetics are infested throughout all of Europe. Like it or not, that’s just true. But Berlin is our Empire’s capital. It doesn’t matter if we’re on the other side of the country. Any report from the capital, we go there IMMEDIATELY. It’s not just about our mission, it makes our reputation look bad if we let one roam around there.”

“Understood.” Oswald saluted, chopping his helmet again. He clutched the sides to keep it from ringing.

“And be careful,” Kollner warned. “From what I’ve heard, this is no normal Psychokinetic. We could be dealing with one of the strongest ones.”

Koller marched out of the room, leaving Aigis and Oswald alone once more. A strong one? From the way Kollner described them, they could be strong enough to rival Aigis’ strength. Maybe even more powerful.