

— *April 16th, 1917. Schumacher Dining Room, 10:30 A.M.* —

Frieda was in the dining room, laying on the table with her cheek resting on her arm. She didn't think much this morning when Aigis' bed was empty. She assumed that Aigis probably went to the store to get her birthday present or something to help bake the cake with. Two hours had passed since the last time Frieda checked, and she didn't have much hope.

Frieda heard a china plate drop on the table. Her eyes shifted to the plate. A small slice of bee sting cake lay on the plate. Irma bent down behind Frieda and hugged her, pecking her daughter on the head.

“Happy birthday, herzchen.”

Frieda sighed, her head sinking back down to her arm. “Thank you, mama.”

Irma walked off, leaving Frieda alone with her cake. Bereft of anything else to do, she grabbed the cake and a silver fork and slowly began to eat the cake with a shaky arm.

— *April 17th, 1917. Hanover, 11:30 A.M.* —

The Golden Battalion made a quick stop in Hanover to accommodate their newest recruit. Aigis spent a couple of hours following them as they walked all the way from Ruheplatz to Hanover, to the point where she had to take off her ballet shoes and walk in her socks, which eventually got holes torn into them.

Sergeant Kollner borrowed an abandoned office no one was using. He measured Aigis' body to outfit her for an infantryman's uniform. He sat at the desk and smoked a pipe. Aigis sat in a chair with a long cloth draped over her body. A barber wielding a pair of scissors circled the chair, cutting down her shoulder-length blonde hair.

“Is this really necessary?” Aigis questioned, looking up to give the barber room to work.

“We’re already taking a huge risk letting a Psychokinetic join our ranks. But a female as well? We’d be the laughing stock of the whole Imperial German army!”

“The helmet will cover my hair anyway, won’t it?”

Kollner took another drag of his pipe. He let the smoke linger in his mouth before blowing it out. The smoke blew through his nostrils. “We can’t take any chances. At least the uniform is baggy enough to hide your physique. Besides, you will have a better chance of going unnoticed with short hair. The helmet will do the rest.”

Some minutes later, the barber finished cutting Aigis’ hair. Kollner handed her the gray infantryman uniform and her golden pickelhaube helmet. For the most part, Aigis had an easy time putting it on. The boots gave her the most trouble. They were much heavier and more cumbersome than the rainboots she was used to wearing. Aigis then slung the pickelhaube over her head and fastened it tightly with the strap. She moved her body around to adjust herself to the uniform. Kollner picked up two guns and stood face-to-face with Aigis. He first presented her with the wooden rifle.

“This is a Gewehr 98, the standard rifle of all in the imperial army,” He stated. “Keep it with you at all times.”

Aigis accepted the bolt action rifle with both hands. Guns were heavier than she thought. The craftsmanship on it was immaculate. The way the metal complimented the wooden stock was breathtaking. She threw the rifle over her hand and strapped it to her back. Kollner then grabbed the pistol in his hand by the barrel and stuck the handle out for Aigis.

“And this is the Luger P08. If your rifle is out of ammo or doesn’t work, this right here is your plan B. Don’t hesitate to use it if things go south.”

Aigis slowly accepted the pistol and looked it over. It was small, but fit right into her hand. The entire thing was completely black, and was very smooth and sleek. The gun itself was about as heavy as a loaf of bread, but the clip added some weight to it. She slipped the pistol in the holster strapped to her right thigh.

“Your job is simple. Basically, we follow rumors to potential Psychokinetics. You use your psychic sensing abilities to locate them, and we’ll do the rest.”

“Sounds simple.” Aigis smirked. It probably wouldn’t be too difficult to trick these men.

“And before you get any funny ideas, let me lay out some ground rules. You are to stay with the unit at all times. While in public, don’t you ever take off that uniform or helmet. If word gets out you’re a woman, it will not end well for you.”

The sergeant brought up a hand. “Finally, three conditions. If you try to escape, you die. If you ever rat us out, you die. And finally, if you disobey us too many times or if we find you’re not useful to us after all, you die. Any questions, soldier?”

“No, sarge.” Aigis shook her head, wanting to placate the man. Kollner pulled out his own Luger, the only difference being his was a shiny silver. He glanced over at a mannequin in the corner of the office.

“See that mannequin over there?” He asked. The man then flashed his Luger in front of Aigis’ face, making the poor girl jolt back a bit. “You even THINK about betraying us,” He aimed the pistol at the mannequin and unloaded the whole clip into it. Chips and splinters flew from the doll as a hail of 9-millimeter rounds ripped into it. The entire front of the dummy was filled with holes, and the back was splattered with bits of cotton and polyester. Kollner whipped the pistol between Aigis’ eyes. Smoke sizzled from the barrel. Aigis could feel the heat on her skin. The acrid scent of gunpowder invaded her nostrils.

“And that’ll be you.” He threatened in a gravelly voice. Aigis’ eyes crossed to look at the barrel, her heart thumping like a drum. The sergeant tucked his pistol back in his holster and turned away. He waved his hand.

“Now come on. The other men are waiting for us.”

Aigis followed Sergeant Kollner out of the office and led her to the other seven men still in the Gibor unit. She chose to stand next to a soldier she had never seen before. Even compared to the other twenty-year-olds in the squad, he looked pretty young. Maybe even around Aigis’ age. From what she could see under the helmet, he had caramel-brown hair and light-colored eyes. He also had a severe case of babyface, and had a small frame and a slender build.

“Hey there.” He cheerfully greeted her. Aigis just stared at him, trying to get a read on the young boy. For a Golden Battalion soldier, he was unusually friendly.

He extended a hand. “My name’s—”

“VOLKMANN!” Kollner snapped. Oswald yelped and whipped around to face the sergeant. The man had his arms folded, his face twisted in a snarl.

“Uh, sir!”

“Oswald, this isn’t a grade school playground. Don’t go talking to the new guy like he just transferred from another class.”

“Sorry, sir!” Oswald profusely apologized, bowing.

“You will have time to talk to the new recruit later, but for now, keep your mouth shut until I say otherwise!”

Oswald shrank back down, nodding. Aigis looked at the angry sergeant.

“Who’s he?” Aigis questioned.

“Introduce yourself, soldier!” Kollner shouted at the despondent lad. Oswald stomped once, standing up straight.

“Oswald Volkmann, sir!” He barked.

“Aren’t you forgetting something, soldier?!”

“I am?” Oswald nervously asked, twiddling his thumbs.

“The SALUTE, dummkopf!” The officer shoved Oswald lightly. Oswald snapped his hand up to his forehead, his thumb and fingers touching in a salute. However, he saluted so fast, he chopped his helmet too hard, causing the whole thing to vibrate. Oswald shouted and he held his metal pickelhaube, forcing the ringing in his ears to stop. Aigis cringed. She stepped closer to Kollner and whispered into his ear.

“A little... excitable, isn’t he?”

Sergeant Kollner scoffed. He spoke out loud so the others could hear him. “The Kaiser doesn’t believe the Battalion is worthy of more funding, so we barely have resources as it is. And thanks to you killing three of our men, we’re even shorter-staffed. Volkmann’s the best we could get.”

“Where was he before he joined the Battalion?” She questioned him. Kollner gave her a deadpan look.

“Sanitation.”

Aigis looked at Oswald. He pointed his rifle at random places, pretending to shoot it and making mouth noises to simulate gunfire. She thought *she* wasn’t built for the army, but compared to this guy, Aigis looked like a war veteran.

“Sanitation? Does he even have any rifle training?” She shout-whispered. Kollner rubbed his temple, exasperated.

“We can show him the basics at our next stop. Right now, he’s basically our pack mule. Carries the food, equipment, spare ammo, you name it. Oh, just don’t tell him I said that. He’s got the emotional resilience of a woman. A complete sissy.”

Kollner clapped his hands. He raised his voice. “Okay, let’s move out!”

All of the Golden Battalion soldiers began to march in a straight line. Their left and right legs moved in perfect synchronization, Gewehrs pointed up towards the sky their bayonets pierced. Aegis began out of rhythm. She tried to keep pace with the others, but found the boots were very hard to move in. She was only able to manage a slow, clumsy walk.

“I’m very excited to work with you.” Oswald exclaimed cheerfully behind her, his voice soft yet loud enough to be heard over the sound of 16 boots thudding on the pavement.

“Likewise.” Aegis responded, although a little less enthusiastic.