

— April 24th, 1917. Cafeteria, 12:00 P.M. —

Following the search the previous day, Kollner allowed the Gibor unit to spend the day in Eisenach before taking off to their next location. There was a cafeteria that served a variety of lunches, so the men in the squad decided to perch there and eat. Most of them were pretty surly after they failed to apprehend their rumored psychokinetic yesterday.

Aigis brought her tray of food and sat down in an empty spot on the bench. The other soldiers stared daggers into the young girl. She ate her food slowly and cautiously as their hate-filled states continued to burn holes into her.

“So...” She trailed off, tapping the fork against the table. “Crazy day yesterday, huh?”

Schultz pinched a piece of gravy-slathered meat and flicked it at Aigis’ forehead.

“Don’t think just because we’re on the same squad, that makes us equal,” He scowled. “You’re still a Greenblood to us. And no amount of ass-kissing will change that.”

“I’m still trying my best. Can’t we at least *pretend* to like each other?” Aigis asked, exasperated.

“You know,” Schultz closed his eyes and shrugged. “Erich was going to visit his girlfriend. Talking about maybe starting a family soon. But because of SOMEONE, he’s currently in a hole in the ground.”

Before Aigis could retort, Schultz flipped his tray of food over and flung it at her. It was mostly soup, which splashed all over her white shirt and face. The other soldiers laughed and hooted at her misfortune.

“Sometimes I wish we *weren’t* ‘allies’. I could do anything to you without the sarge getting on my back.” Schultz bared his teeth. They were crooked and golden yellow from the lack of hygiene. His breath rotted with the smell of dead fish. Oswald came by holding his tray.

“Leave Aigis alone. She’s doing her best.” He staunchly defended. Schutlz stood up and looked Oswald in the eye. He slapped his hand on him.

“Oswald, Oswald, Oswald. You sweet summer child. Thanks to you, we spent ten minutes running around the city and we were following nothing.”

“I said I was sorry for that.” Oswald defended.

“No, no. I should THANK you for what you did.”

Oswald’s worry melted into confusion. “Thank me?”

“Yep. Lemme give you a token of my appreciation.”

Oswald grinned from ear to ear. He eagerly awaited whatever present Schultz was about to give him. Schutlz balled up a fist and wound it up. Without hesitation or mercy, he clocked Oswald square in the jaw as the man staggered and fell down. Aigis shrieked. Schultz kicked him in the side, making the poor boy sputter out blood.

“Dumbass.” He spat on Oswald before gesturing for the other soldiers to follow him. They left the two kids to clean themselves off. Oswald got up and slinked back into his seat.

“Are you okay?” Aigis asked with concern.

“I’ll be fine.” Oswald replied, dabbing a napkin to the corner of his bleeding lip.

“What was that about?”

“I don’t know, I thought he had an actual gift for me—”

“I mean yesterday. About the psychokinetic.”

“Oh, that,” He nodded. He sat the bloodied napkin down, smacking his lips. “I didn’t like how they put so much pressure on you to point out a random person. I wanted to get them away from you.”

“Thanks to you, I could warn the family in time.”

Oswald looked up at Aigis. “What’s a psychokinetic girl doing here, if you don’t mind me asking?”

Aigis stared down at her half-eaten loaf of bread. A few of the crumbs broke off and fell into the tray.

“Touchy subject? We can talk about something else if you want?”

Aigis shrugged. This man saved her from the pain of betraying her own kind. The least she can do is tell him the truth.

“They threatened to kill me if I didn’t join them. I’m just playing along with what they want until I can find an escape and reunite with Frieda.”

“Frieda?” Oswald asked.

“My younger sister. Six months younger, to be exact.”

Oswald took a drink from his water, letting the cool liquid trickle down his throat. He wiped his mouth with his whole arm. Smacking his lips again, he questioned, “Last time I checked, doesn’t it take nine months for a baby to come out?”

“Half-sister, technically. We have different mothers.” Aigis corrected herself. Oswald leaned back. Even back in sanitation, he was hearing stories about Psychokinetics being these misanthropic demons who only cared about their own survival. But Aigis was more human than even the fellow soldiers.

“I see. I hope I get to meet her someday.” He chuckled lightly, smiling faintly as he did so.

“Random question, but how old are you?”

“I turn 18 in July. Why?”

“How did you end up in the army? No offense, but,” She gestured toward his general body, specifically his youthful face and slim build. “You don’t exactly strike me as the military type.”

Oswald sighed and folded his arms across his chest. Aigis watched as the man gazed up at the ceiling, trying to figure out where he should start.

“Technically, I *chose* to join the imperial army, but I was heavily persuaded to enlist. My dad always wanted me to get into manly stuff like sports and hunting. Y’know, outdoorsy things. Ever since the start of the Great War, he’s done nothing but pressure me to enlist.”

“So what happened?” Aigis leaned in.

“He cut me off financially. Stopped paying for my food, only got groceries for himself and my mom, and he refused to let me sleep in the house. He made me go sleep at the church. The only way to be let back into my own home is to get into the army. It was either this or sleep in the streets and beg for money. At least here, I get to eat, drink, and have a bed. So I chose the latter and got enlisted.”

Aigis picked up her glass of water and brought it to her mouth. “Your dad reminds me of my own.”

“In what way?”

“They’re both assholes.”

Oswald laughed lightly. He always laughed quietly, with very limited movement. For how friendly and extroverted he was, Oswald was weirdly restrained. Almost as if he was afraid to make a wrong move. As he stopped laughing, he brought both of his elbows on the food table, lacing his fingers.

“Chin up, Aigis. This war will end soon, we’ll all get to go home. And you’ll get to see Frieda again. I’m praying to the Lord that it happens.”

Aigis licked her lips. “Tell you what. When I get home, I’ll invite you to dinner at my place. I have a feeling that my sister and my stepmom would love you.”

“Looking forward to it,” Oswald nodded. He offered her a hand to shake. “Between my distraction skills and your quick wit, our time in the Battalion won’t be so bad.”

Aigis accepted his hand, firmly accepting his grip. “It’ll go by so quick.”