

— *October 5th, 1914. Aigis and Frieda's Room, 11:40 A.M.* —

The weather in Ruheplatz hit a record this October. Not only was it storming in October, but it rained the most the town has ever experienced in over 100 years. The rain looked like a bucket of water pouring over the lands, so much so that the dirt-paved roads washed away into muddy pits. The wind grappled onto the houses of the town, shaking them violently, and the lightning lit up the cloudy skies with bright flashes. The flooding got so bad, Karl-Heinz's house was uprooted from its foundations and floated down the hill, only stopping before the house kissed the riverbank of the Weser.

It wasn't just the rain that was supernaturally violent. Lightning struck near the town three distinct times. One hit an open plain a ways away from the buildings. Some embers briefly flickered before the heavy rain immediately extinguished them. The second struck the old tree outside of the Schumacher house. A bunch of the leaves on top of the tree disintegrated with the stormy winds, but the fire was immediately put out by the rain. The third was the worst one yet, striking the roof of the inn, leaving a gaping hole for all the water to flow in and flood the place. Wessels had to stay on top of the counter to not get his clothes wet.

As the rain beat against the walls of the Schumacher house, and the wind rattled the windows, Aigis and Frieda were inside. Aigis read more books pertaining to psychokinetics, this time about the Mesopotamian Psychokinetics. Frieda sat in a wooden chair on her knees, looking out of the window with a fist propping up her cheek. Her eyes were glazed over as she stared into the abyss. The blonde older sister set her book down. Her attention fixed onto the bored looking Frieda, moping out of the window. The windows were so thickly coated with rain, you couldn't even see out of it.

"Don't your legs hurt from sitting like that?" Aigis finally broke the silence.

"I'm worried about Otto." Frieda despondently replied. Aigis picked her book back up.

"I'm sure he'll be fine." She casually tried to reassure her.

"After what happened yesterday, he would've immediately come knocking on our door."

"He probably hasn't shown up yet because of the rain. Only a fool would travel in weather like this."

Frieda took a finger and drew on the windowsill, parting the settling dust like the Red Sea. "Even after him finding out we're...?"

"Let's wait for the storm to pass before we start making assumptions." Aigis flipped a page from her book. More time passed. Frieda eventually got uncomfortable and switched positions to where she was now sitting criss-cross in the chair. Dead silence. Aigis tore her blue eyes away from the book and noticed Frieda fidgeting in her chair.

"You're worried about him, aren't you?" She sighed, smiling. Frieda gave a simple sad nod. Aigis had to admit. Ever since yesterday's events, she had been preoccupied with Otto and how he could potentially be taking the news. She didn't think anything bad would happen. He was a good friend to the sisters. He would at least think about it if he ever had a traitorous molecule in his body. Aigis set the book down yet again and stood up from her bed.

"Let's go find him."

Frieda perked up, showing a bit of her gapped front teeth. "Now?"

"Right now."

"But what about the weather?"

"I'll shield you from the rain." Aigis invited. Frieda hopped off the chair and followed her sister downstairs. Vergil and Irma decided to sleep through the storm, so they wouldn't have known that the girls ever left. Aigis grabbed two pairs of rain boots and two raincoats from the

closet. Frieda had a mint green raincoat while Aigis had a navy blue one. Aigis opened the door, and the sound of the pouring rain got louder. The wind carried a few rain droplets into the house and dotted the mahogany floorboards with dark, wet spots. The girls' raincoats fluttered with the gust of wind. Aigis turned to face Frieda.

“Stick close to me, alright?” Aigis reminded her. Frieda gave a confident nod. The 14-year-old stepped right by her sister's side. Aigis created an Aurae shield with her powers, and the two set off into the storm. The rain arched down the shield perfectly like an invisible bubble. The two could only see about a meter or so ahead of them, due to the pouring rain and the thick, foggy mist it created. They made giant leaps for each step to make sure they could actually make progress with the wind clawing at them. At the same time, they had to calculate those steps so they didn't leap right into a mud river where the road used to be.

“Are you sure it's safe to be using your powers out here?!” Frieda shouted, making sure her voice rose above the cacophony of the storm.

“It should be fine! The storm's too bad for anyone else to be out here, and they should be far away from all the windows!” Aigis explained, making sure she matched her sister step-by-step. A few leaps and hops later, they made it to their stop: Otto's house. If there was anyone to ask about where he last was, who better but his own mother?

Aigis pulled Frieda underneath the awning of the house so she could disable the shield. The 15-year-old pounded against the wooden door of the home. After a few seconds, Pauline opened the door. Her hair had been down, likely not expecting any visitors due to the terrible weather.

“What are you girls doing in such horrendous weather?!” She demanded. She opened the door wider. “Please, come in or you'll catch a bug.”

“We’re not staying ma’am,” Frieda announced. “We’re looking for Otto. Have you seen him anywhere?”

Pauline laced her fingers. “Last time I saw him was yesterday afternoon. I told him to get some milk from the general store before the storm came. Haven’t seen him since.”

“He hasn’t come home at all?” Aigis asked to confirm. Pauline furrowed her brow.

“I thought he was with you.” The mother replied.

“Wouldn’t you be worried if you asked him to get milk and you haven’t seen him in a day?” Frieda asked, her worry getting the best of her. Pauline sighed, wiping sweat off her forehead.

“Otto’s a good boy, but you know how he gets. Always distracted by the little things in life. It didn’t help that those soldiers were in town all week.”

Frieda sagged her head. Aigis noticed her sister’s anxiety was starting to rear its ugly head.

“Hey, cheer up.” Aigis half-heartedly punched her in the shoulder playfully, trying to lift her spirits.

“I would ask the owner of the general store. That’s the only other person who could’ve seen him last.”

Aigis nodded respectfully. “Thank you, Frau Ackmann.”

Pauline smiled warmly before shutting the door. Aigis put her ear to the door to listen to footsteps until she couldn’t hear any. She reactivated the shield over her and Frieda, and the two marched over to the general store. Marckel stood behind the counter inside of the store, still with the cigar in his mouth. The girls entered the building. They both walked to the front of the counter.

“Herr Marckel, have you seen Otto?” Frieda asked, her voice wavering a little bit.

Marckel nodded before he took his middle and index finger and wrapped it around the cigar.

Extracting it from his mouth, he uttered, “Sure did. He swung by here and asked if I got milk. I didn’t have none, so I told ‘im. Haven’t seen him since.”

“That’s it? He just left?” Aigis asked in confusion.

“Yep.”

“You don’t have anything else?” Frieda whimpered. Marckel nodded again and smacked his lips. He flicked his cigar to point towards the door, specks of saliva flying from the smoke stick.

“I did see him go t’wards ‘dat ‘dere river. Mebbe check ‘dere.”

Aigis and Frieda nodded respectfully towards the cigar fanatic and exited the store. Their only option now was to trek to the forest sitting outside of the town. The sisters stomped and hopped their way across the town to reach the forest. The rain pacified as they made the trek, and the torrential downpour became a moderate shower. When the sisters reached the forest, they traveled a good bit in when Aigis noticed something on the ground at the base of one of the trees.

“Look,” she pointed. Various footprints in the mud were leading deeper into the forest. Due to the trees providing cover, the downpour hadn’t washed away yet. However, most of them were pretty lopsided. They weren’t Otto’s footprints. He always wore his signature black loafers. “They’re boot tracks.”

“Boots?” Frieda inquired.

“More than one pair.”

“How many?”

“Don’t know. Could be three, could be four. There’s probably more, but the rain likely washed the others.”

Frieda bent over to look at the boot tracks. “Could someone else be searching for Otto?”

Aigis knelt down to get a closer look. The prints were flooded by rain, so they were pretty deep.

“No. Normal rain boots don’t make tracks this deep. They’re almost like military boots.”

Frieda clutched the buttons to her raincoat. Her eyes followed the trail of footprints leading them deeper into the forest. Aigis led the way while Frieda followed close behind. Aigis could feel Frieda’s anxiety without even looking at her. They’ve been out searching for Otto for minutes, possibly an hour by now. Not a single thing to cling onto for hope. Aigis stroked her chin as she followed the footprint trail.

“When you and Otto get married—”

Frieda immediately became flustered. “W-W-Where’d THIS come from?”

Aigis coyly smiled. “You want to travel the world, right? Marrying a tough, brave, Iron Cross holding soldier means you get to come to all sorts of various places? You could go to Austria-Hungary.”

“That sounds awful,” Frieda scoffed. “We can go to Austria-Hungary anytime by train! I mean exotic places. Someplace like...”

“Spain?”

“Spain’s nice. Italy would be a great place, also.”

“Save Italy for you guys’ honeymoon. Spain can be a good place for a hen party.”

“A party? There’s only one person I want to come with.”

Aigis stopped in her tracks. “It’s me, isn’t it?”

Frieda smirked. Aigis threw her hands up.

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell Gisela. I’m just far better than her.”

Frieda giggled and continued walking. The banter gave her a brief distraction from the worst case scenarios rising up and popping into her head one by one like an active volcano.

“How many kids do you think you wanna have with him?” Aigis asked another question. Frieda nervously twiddled her fingers.

“Three. If we’re going to be a military family, we have to make sure the kids aren’t lonely. You know, moving all across Europe, moving from school to school and never making friends because we keep moving.”

“Admirable,” Aigis nodded. “But I get to be the cool auntie who teaches the kids how to use magic.”

“One thing at a time, Aigis.” She laughed. Some more silence.

“You know in order to make that wedding possible, you have to tell him how you feel, right?” Aigis raised one eyebrow at the young, smitten sister. Frieda planted her feet into the muddy ground and looked Aigis in the eye.

“If we find Otto, will you help me?”

“WHEN we find Otto,” The 15-year-old corrected. “He still owes me a birthday present.”

The tracks came to a complete stop in front of a giant tree. The rain beat against the mighty wooden giant. Aigis and Frieda both glanced up at the longest branch of the tree. Aigis fought back the urge to vomit all over the ground, her raincoat and her boots. Her esophagus burned as she tried to fight the primal urge. Frieda’s legs crumbled under the weight of her own body as her head deflated, feeling lighter than air. Aigis clutched onto Frieda’s limp body.

On the thickest and tallest branch of the tree was a brown rope tied in a knot. The rope was tied in a noose. And hanging from that noose was Otto. His head drooped over the rope, his red hair obscuring his view. His skin had turned half-blue. One of his loafers fell off his foot and landed in the mud. The tree felt like the only thing in existence. No rain touching its shiny, dry brown bark. Frieda's inhuman wails pierced the clouds. Her shrieks were more ferocious than the lightning earlier today. More thunderous than any cannon the Empire has ever developed. Her high pitched screams threatened to deafen every living thing in the area.

Leaning against the tree, Aigis saw a white board with a message written on it. Once Aigis' vision recalibrated itself, she read its contents.

*To traitors of the German Empire,*

*Be it man, woman, adult, or child. Whomever it may be, sedition applies to all within our borders and territories. For the security of the Kaiser and all of Germany during this Great War, the Greenbloods and their conspirators will be summarily put down. Let this boy remain a memory of what happens to traitors and insurrectionists.*

— *Sergeant Ernst Kollner*

*Golden Battalion, Gibor Squad*