

Unfilial Creatures

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Unfilial Creatures

by [wadi_river](#)

Summary

Upon her death, Edelgard passes the throne to the most qualified individual like she said she would. Her daughter, bereft of her mother, her mother's ambition, and her mother's throne, is determined to at least have her mother's minister.

Notes

I live. I fully expect to finish this monstrosity. Stay tuned.

The original kinkmeme prompt, which I've followed somewhat loosely:

Edelgard succumbs to the burden of having two Crests shortly after the war, but not before giving birth to a daughter. Hubert raises her on the same politics that Edelgard believed in, hoping to convince her to enact the same reforms on succession that Edelgard hoped to, but as their daughter grows to resemble Edelgard both in appearance and personality, he finds himself distressingly attracted to the liege he misses so much.

+ if their daughter doesn't actually know that he's her father, for whatever reason

++ if she initiates

+++ if Hubert refers to her as Edelgard or titles he might have used for Edelgard during sex

Chapter 1

Sieghild von Hresvelg fights resentment at how easily the Emperor approves her travel to the Isle of Lycaon. But why wouldn't he? Why would he ever feel threatened by her request? He is Dietfried II of Adrestia, hand-chosen successor of the late beloved Emperor, who has demonstrated his political acumen with the neutralization of the late Emperor's powerful in-laws, his impartial justice with his prosecution of the very Minister of the Imperial Household for his bloody deeds, his prowess at war with the successful repulsion of the Dagdans, his dedication to peace in the ten year since.

And she is only Edelgard's daughter.

They're in his office. "I'm happy to see you in a better state these days," Dietfried says seriously. On her deathbed, Edelgard had asked him to be as a brother to Sieghild, and he has never, in his life, disappointed Edelgard's expectations. "This trip will do you good."

"You think so?" Sieghild says ironically.

Heavily, Dietfried removes his signet ring. "My actions ten years ago were necessary for the future of the empire...but I've always regretted all I've taken from you. I only hope this trip can bring you some small measure of the peace you seek. I would have suggested you visit sooner, but it would have been...improper for me to be the one to bring it up."

He believes the old rumors, Sieghild muses, as she watches him imprint his seal at the bottom of the writ of travel. As for herself? She'd tried to convince herself, when the idea first germinated in the dark soil of her mind, how terrible it would be if she later received incontrovertible evidence that Hubert von Vestra was her biological father. How utterly horrible. How scandalous.

It hadn't stuck.

Emperor Edelgard was wise, to choose her successor based on merit, not blood. Sieghild is enough her mother's daughter that she can face this truth head-on as it bludgeons her day in and day out.

"You should conduct your travels as soon as possible," says Dietfried. "The waters up north grow treacherous later in the year. I'll send Imperial Guards to accompany you, if you wish--"

"That won't be necessary," Sieghild laughs, as she tucks the writ safely away. "Bandits and pirates under your rule? Perish the thought!"

#

A week later, Sieghild watches the Isle of Lycaon approach from the bow of a ship. The north seas are as gray and miserable as the books say, the island as pitiable. From this distance, she can blot out that glorified pebble with her thumb--if her arm remains steady. This entire voyage, her stomach has heaved with the sea.

A fine place for an exile.

When she was younger, her rhetoric tutor had made her study Dietfried's speech from the trial. The listing of Hubert von Vestra's crimes, the kidnappings, the torture, the killings in the night--note the skillful use of parallelism. The reprehensible services of House Vestra had no place in the new Fodlan. Neither his noble blood nor his favor with the former Emperor were sufficient reason to stay his execution.

However, Dietfried had added, the Marquis Vestra's role in the overthrow of the Church could not be understated, nor the desperate deeds committed by many others at the time. Dietfried would not sacrifice him as a scapegoat; his blood could not wash others' hands clean. The sins belonged to all the empire, and it was the duty of all to atone for and transcend them in the dawning new world they had wrought. The Emperor suggested exile for the remainder of the marquis's life, a proposal which was readily taken up and ratified by both Councils.

This will be the first time in ten years that Sieghild has seen Hubert von Vestra.

The subsequent bolt of terror sends her retching over the side of the ship. Oh, saints, what is she doing?

All the fear that she should have felt earlier seems to be making up for lost time. She wobbles into the cabin to make herself presentable. Wobbles back out. The island crawls toward them at a snail's pace. She pulls her cloak tightly around her and feels cold to her guts anyway.

The guards on the dock accept Sieghild's letter with nothing more than a cursory glance. Behind them is a rotund, middle-aged matron, who rushes forth to clasp Sieghild's hands warmly. "Oh, welcome, milady!" Sieghild hopes the woman can't feel her sweating through her gloves. "We've been waiting for you! I'm Clotilde, housekeeper to Marquis Vestra. He wanted to come down and greet you in person, but I'm afraid he can't make the trip today." Clotilde tilts her chin up meaningfully at the lead-gray sky. "Milord's old wounds flare up in this weather."

Understandable, if less than ideal. The path leading to the old stone tower is a long and narrow one, snaking up the side of a steep, rocky hill, and it drags out Sieghild's ordeal. She replies only halfheartedly to Clotilde's chatter, her chest tight with more than exertion.

They still frighten children with stories of Hubert von Vestra, back home. His cat feet, which could pad up walls and over roofs without a sound. His witch eyes, which could see through your skin and tell your lies by the twitching of your heart. The legend had only grown in his exile.

When he looks at her, he's going to see a farce.

But, Sieghild thinks grimly, putting one foot in front of the other, what else is new?

She's shaky enough that she keeps her gaze fixed on the ground, the better to watch her footing. So she doesn't realize she's at the top until she nearly runs into the man.

Startled, apology at the ready, she looks up into wide, shocked eyes.

"Edelgard?" he says.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See bottom of post for content warnings. Please accept the premise that there's birth control but no paternity tests in Fodlan. I promise to drop the bombshell at a dramatic later point.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Is this what it felt like to be her, thinks Sieghild, a little stunned. There's alchemy enough in Hubert von Vestra's brimstone-colored eyes to make a tigress out of a bad-tempered housecat. Someone worthy of devotion, reverence, longing—

But he's so tall that she has to look up at an untenable angle to meet his eyes. Her hood topples back, revealing drab, sparrow-brown hair.

Slowly, he blinks, as if waking from a dream. His expression morphs into a far more familiar one, one of somewhat awkward courtesy: *I know you're supposed to be someone I feel some way about*. How do you greet a princess in a world where princesses are obsolete? Your lover's daughter, whom your lover so nobly placed a distant second in her priorities? Possibly *your* daughter, if the Emperor had been truly, uncharacteristically reckless with her marriage alliance, when there's no way to know for certain, when it's never been in anyone's interests to know for certain?

"My lady Sieghild," Hubert says. "I apologize. My eyes aren't what they used to be."

His mistake is forgivable. *Every bit as lovely as Edelgard in her youth*, the courtiers say about Sieghild—for lack of anything else to praise. She shares the same slight build, the delicate features, the pale violet eyes. Hubert hasn't seen her since she was a girl, and even then, only rarely. Natural, that he'd associate this face with another.

But it's also clear that ten years have left him much diminished, as he said. His hair has gone ashen gray; overgrown and tied back, it brushes the collar of his longcoat. The northern wind has scoured lines across his face and hollows under his stark cheekbones. In a few more years, it may leave nothing but a skull. The earlier light has dimmed from his gaze; if eyes are windows to the soul, he's a house long abandoned by its master. Sieghild remembers what Duchess Aegir had said, the words she'd overheard those months ago that had spurred her on this mad undertaking. *He looks like a man waiting to die*.

A thrill of strange tenderness replaces Sieghild's earlier fear. She accepts his apology graciously, following him into the tower. He walks with a limp, she notes. It's been many years since Hubert von Vestra scaled citadels in the dead of night. "I hope I haven't made you stand out there for long."

"Hardly, compared to the trouble you've gone to, journeying all this way to the home of a disgraced exile. To what do I owe the honor?"

"Oh, the honor is mine," she insists. "Can't I pay my respects to my Emperor mother's faithful and best-beloved servant?"

He hesitates at this response, but happily, they're interrupted by men from the ship bringing up her luggage. She jumps into directing them about with Clotilde's help. Her personal belongings go in the guest room; her gift remains downstairs.

"A small token of thanks for your hospitality," she says, turning to Hubert with hand on hip. "Morfis plum wine, 1198 vintage."

He's not looking at the crate. He's watching her, eyes haunted.

Sieghild smiles. "Shall we sit down?"

#

The rain considerably waits until evening to announce itself, muffled to a distant murmur by the tower's stone sides. Inside, Sieghild makes herself at home. The tower is sparsely furnished, yet the chairs in front of the fireplace are surprisingly well-made and soft-padded. She suspects intervention on the part of the marquis's old friends.

"I was surprised to hear that you're staying for the remainder of the month," Hubert says. "There's not much to do on the island, especially for one accustomed to the entertainments of Enbarr."

Sieghild laughs, and takes a sip of the plum wine—served piping hot, as is traditional. "Do you think I'll grow bored? Seems unlikely, when I'm in such excellent company."

It may just be the alcohol, but she swears she sees a faint heat on the marquis's cheeks. "You flatter me, my lady."

"Never! I hope you'll show me around. It'll be a refreshing change of pace from the capital."

"That was my original plan for today, but regretfully, the weather failed to cooperate." He inclines his head toward the window, and the rain outside. "Hopefully tomorrow. I can easily show you what little there is of the island in a morning."

The conversation proceeds. They're virtual strangers, with nothing in common but the despair of certain mutual acquaintances, but Sieghild at least wields the latest news from Enbarr. And certainly, it helps that the wine is excellent. Hubert is a rusty conversationalist—she supposes he's not had much opportunity in the last ten years—so she has to expend a little extra effort, smoothing over pauses, leading them into fruitful topics.

The sound of his quiet, disused voice is more than worth it. She remembers exploring the

forgotten passages of the Imperial Palace as a child, the delight of running one's hand over some dust-encased relic and finding a sculpted face underneath, a painted eye. She's uncovering something here, too, excavating something faded and buried out of Hubert von Vestra.

It's funny how things work out. She couldn't have skipped the miserable mired years and come here earlier; a younger, less determined, less-experienced-in-every-sense Sieghild von Hresvelg wouldn't have stood a chance against a younger Hubert von Vestra not yet worn down by grief and exile.

But now? She leans in, hand tucked under chin, the better to watch firelight flash across his gaze. He's *looking*, whether he wants to or not.

He averts his eyes, and takes a long drink from his glass.

#

When it's time, when they stand, Sieghild feigns a stagger. "Oh dear," she says breathily, clutching her chair. "I've drunk more than I should have, I think. Could you help me up those stairs?"

Slowly, the marquis proffers his arm. Sieghild's hand closes around it with the triumph of talons.

She finds every excuse to sway drunkenly against him as they climb the stairs. "So sorry," she simpers, pressing against his side as if for support. He stares ahead, but doesn't pull away. She watches the mesmerizing flutter of pulse at his bone-white throat.

They reach the landing. Hubert allows himself to be led a little further, through the open doorway of her room. Then a little further.

She turns to him, drawing her thumb meaningfully over the inside of his wrist. Their gazes meet.

"I am not known for mercy," he rasps. "But for the sake of your mother, I will inform you that you are dangerously naive if you think I can be seduced into disloyalty."

Sieghild stares.

Then she bursts into laughter. "Oh. Oh, saints. You think I'm here because I want you to help me overthrow Dietfried."

She's not even offended. In that moment, with that glitter in his eyes, Hubert von Vestra had never more looked like how she remembers him—not the old, tired exile, but the terrible, magnificent man who'd stood at her mother's right hand. That expression, for her! She's honored, truly.

Though his expression is rapidly sliding into one of confusion. Sieghild affectionately takes

his hand in both of hers. "I suppose you've been away from Enbarr," she sighs. "No, heavens, no. Dietfried has been doing wonderfully, while I, infamously, have not been. I'm neither selfish nor skilled enough for an usurpation. He sits safe on his throne, where you and my Emperor mother labored so valiantly to place him.

"No," she says again, leaning in, looking up into his dilated eyes. "He can have my mother's throne. My mother's respect and regard. They will never be mine. But I refuse to be left empty-handed. *I will have my mother's Minister of the Imperial Household.*"

"Absurd," he says, breathing sharply. "How absurd."

"Is it?" Sieghild reaches up, cups his face in her hand. "You could've summoned Clotilde to help me to my room. Really, you could've called a stop to my little game at any point this evening. Surely it didn't take so long for you to discover my intentions. So," she challenges, "why didn't you?"

When she kisses him, he doesn't resist.

#

Hubert von Vestra looks as spectacular as she remembers, spread out naked on a bed.

There had been a particular wardrobe in the Emperor's rooms—she wonders if Dietfried kept it. Her mother was supposed to return at vespers that day, but of course some official business or another had held her up. Sieghild's bedtime had come and gone, and her governess was calling her name. Sieghild had hidden herself in there, curled up in a pile of silks, breathing in the rose-and-violet of her mother's perfume.

She doesn't remember falling asleep, but she must have. Next she knew, she was opening her eyes to the sound of soft laughter, from the hair's breadth that lay between the wardrobe doors. Black hair, bare skin, luminous with sweat and firelight. The laugh trailed off into a gasp.

She'd bitten her own wrist to keep from making sound.

This is far better, because it's her on top of him this time. He's older, and grayer, but that's what makes this feel—right, fair, fitting. A shadow of his past self, to complement a shadow of her mother.

He lies there stiffly. His prick is having some trouble, between age and the alcohol, Sieghild supposes, but she doesn't mind. She plans to take her time. What are minutes, even hours, compared to years?

Her teeth graze his jaw and throat, drawing hoarse little sounds from him. He tries, desperately, not to look at her; his hands curl, as if to keep himself from reaching out.

She marks her place with bruises before trailing lower. He's grown so thin, his ribs stark under bloodless skin. She likes the way they shudder and heave when she finds a sensitive

spot—and he's very sensitive. "How long has it been?" she murmurs. He only pants, but she can guess.

She maps his skin, his scars like frost on glass. By the time she leaves, she wants to have known every inch of him, taken every liberty there is. Her blood runs hot with the idea. Strands of brown hair escape from her hairstyle, straggling over her face; she straightens and yanks out her pins, to be done, tossing her head so her hair unravels in a wild cascade.

Hubert, staring, makes a sound of physical agony.

This is what breaks him, this unintentional, unerring echo of a dead woman. Suddenly he's surging up, reaching for her, clutching at her, as if he's on the brink of drowning. His eyes are wild. His erection burns against her knee.

"Please," he says.

A roaring fills her ears—

She rides him. Her nails score his shoulders. Her harsh pants mingle with his frantic animal sounds. His eyes are glassy, his lashes wet with tears.

For once, she thinks.

For once in her life, she is Edelgard's inheritor. Someone looked at her and saw—enough.

That thought is the one that takes her over the edge.

Afterwards, Sieghild topples off him and sprawls bonelessly across the bed. Vaguely, she recognizes that she's sticky and sore, but she couldn't get up if she tried. Everything is a haze of rare, unfamiliar contentment.

Hubert lies beside her, staring at the ceiling. She wiggles closer, nestling herself against his bony side.

He might have said something; she's not sure. She's already drifting off into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings: dubcon, reference to accidental voyeurism by then-underage character, father/daughter goes without saying.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

If you've read this far I probably don't need to give further content warnings.

Sieghild wakes to sunlight on her face.

Scrunching her nose, she throws an arm over her eyes and rolls over—and finds the bed empty. Hubert had left her while she slept.

But when she puts her hand to the indentation, she finds it still very faintly warm.

She smiles to herself. She shifts over, nestling her cheek where his had rested, and slips effortlessly back into sleep.

#

By the time she gets up, half the morning is over—but at least it's still morning. She was worse in Enbarr. What was there to get up for, after all?

Here, at least, anticipation tugs her toward her dressing table. She'd derived weeks of entertainment from planning her wardrobe for this trip: how to gird herself for the unfriendly weather of the Isle of Lycaon without sacrificing her vanity? In the end she'd erred on the side of practicality when choosing the cut of her dresses; her face would be doing most of the work for her, after all. She dabs perfume at her pulse points, rose-and-violet, before departing her room.

"Good morning!" she calls out cheerfully, but Clotilde alone awaits her downstairs. "Where's Marquis Vestra?"

"I'm afraid milord is indisposed this morning," Clotilde says, smiling. "He left me with instructions to show you the area around the tower in his stead. Would you like some breakfast first?"

Sieghild doesn't bother with concern for his "indisposition"; she has no doubt he's making excuses to avoid her. She'll indulge him for the moment, she decides. She's still in a good mood from the previous night, and on such a small island, it's not like he can run very far. "Breakfast will be lovely," she says, smiling back.

Breakfast is not lovely. Clotilde brings her tepid porridge and salt fish gone faintly rancid, poor fare for one accustomed to Enbarr cuisine. Sieghild's hungry enough to dig in gamely anyway, reminding herself of the limitations of an exile's lifestyle, but nonetheless feels a sense of relief when her spoon scrapes the bottom of her bowl.

After that, she's eager to head out into the morning. Sunlight dazzles her eyes as she emerges; after the rain, the sky is blue and clear as crystal, the distant waves as glittering. Dark forest circles the hill they're on, circled in turn by a strip of rocky shore. "The outbuildings are all on the leeward side of the hill, to protect them from the storms," chatters Clotilde. "Can you imagine what a fright it would be to have the greenhouse anywhere else?"

A row of storehouses and barracks come into view first as they stroll along the ridge of the hill. Most of them sit weather-beaten and abandoned; the detachment of Imperial Guards stationed here has been much reduced in recent years. The concern was never that the former Minister of the Imperial Household would try to escape the island, but that someone would make a go of assassinating him. In the early days of his exile, his unnatural death would have looked terribly suspicious for the Emperor—had he wanted to silence a keeper of dangerous secrets, despite all his noble words? Nowadays, with Dietfried secure on his throne and Hubert von Vestra fading from memory to legend in Enbarr, the man is increasingly free to live and die as he wishes.

"It's not an easy posting, four months at a time in this lonely corner of the world," Clotilde says, and waves at a passing guard. He waves back, calling out something in heavily accented Adrestian. "The night before they rotate back to the mainland, every time, you can hear them drunk and celebrating from all the way inside the tower. They're never bad folks, though. They help out around the place. They have respect for milord. They don't make trouble."

Sieghild smiles and nods vaguely. Something's nagging at her. But before she can figure out what it is, Clotilde's striding forward. "Marcellius! Don't just hide away!"

The storehouse on the far side of the row has been converted into a greenhouse, its structural beams and timbers retained, its original roof and siding material replaced with glass. Men are at work expanding the end closer to them, extending two of the walls so that they abut the storehouse next to it.

A small, balding man stands in front, supervising two burly soldiers as they lift a pane of glass into place. He turns to them at the sound of his name. "Ah, hello, Clotilde. And—" he peers uneasily through his glasses—"our fabled guest, eh."

"Sieghild von Hresvelg," she says graciously.

For some reason, her attention makes Marcellius's shoulders draw up defensively, like a turtle trying to duck into its shell--should she be flattered? "Well, this is the greenhouse. I would show you our plants, but I'm afraid I'm otherwise occupied at the moment. Perhaps some other time. Clotilde, could you—"

Then one of the soldiers says something to the other, and Sieghild's heart skips a beat.

Oh, she's dense, to have taken this long to realize. The guards speak Adrestian with the harsh vowels of the hinterlands, but both Clotilde and Marcellius's accents are pure Enbarr. They're not part of them. They don't rotate four months at a time with them. For all she knows, they've been here since the beginning. They're—

She looks up sharply. Marcellius is watching her, Clotilde too. Her smile is unchanged, but there's *something* in her eyes that make three words go through Sieghild's mind: *Vestra Sorcery Engineers*.

Well. Sieghild will have to assume they saw quite a bit.

"I don't suppose you're as happy to see me as Marquis Vestra is," she says, keeping her voice light. Clotilde's smile doesn't budge. "But I hope you'll respect his wishes regarding me."

"Wherever his wishes may turn, Lady Sieghild," Clotilde says, and that's definitely a threat no matter how pleasant her tone. But Marcellius's gaze darts past Sieghild, toward the tower.

She turns to follow his gaze. High up on the roof, a thin, dark figure faces their way, silhouetted against the sky.

She smiles and waves.

"Wherever his wishes may turn! Now, I think that's enough of an outing for today, don't you? I'm going to burn if I stay out any longer, with all this sun!"

#

Clotilde tries to stop her from going up the tower, of course. "Oh, I'm sure milord wouldn't wish to be disturbed," she says with a laugh, inserting herself between Sieghild and the stairs.

Sieghild's been trained in the basics of swordplay like most noblewomen, but she acknowledges she probably wouldn't come out on top against this middle-aged matron, even if she had a sword. "Why don't you ask him?" she suggests. She puts her hand over her heart. "I would naturally abide by whatever he says."

Clotilde is up there for quite a while. When she returns, she's no longer smiling.

#

Hubert von Vestra is still staring out over the parapet when Sieghild joins him. The wind is stronger up here on the roof, whipping at her skirts and his coat, carrying the cries of gulls and terns.

"Good morning," she says. "I hope you slept well."

He turns to look at her. The muscles around his mouth are drawn tight. His eyes are sunken in shadow. But then, they'd been like that yesterday, too. If the black bruising under his eyes has grown blacker, she can't tell.

Moreover, he looks—*present*. There's a spark of life to his wary, searching gaze. If eyes are windows to the soul, she's taken her grubby hand and banged it on the glass, and something on the other side has stirred.

"I won't beat about the bush," he says. "I spent in you last night. I want to know—"

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that." She puts two fingers to the inside of her left wrist and concentrates for a moment. The prophylactic tattoo there shimmers into visibility for a moment, before fading once more. "I won't let another child go through what I've gone through."

His jaw only tightens further. "And what hardship has the sole daughter of Edelgard of Adrestia gone through? You who were born to ease and prosperity, all your wars already fought for you?"

"Asks the man who made me an orphan at twelve."

"Severin von Gerth died in a perfectly ordinary housefire," he says automatically.

"Have some respect for my intelligence. My father *just happened* to die within a month of my mother? Alongside several of his prominent supporters? Right as his challenge to my mother's succession decree was gaining traction? I may have been a child, but I'd heard the mutterings even then!"

She's genuinely angry now—not on Severin von Gerth's behalf, but on her own, because in her eagerness to score a hit on Hubert she was willing to refer to that man as her father.

Edelgard, she can acknowledge, had at least tried. Sieghild remembers the way her mother would drop into her rooms at odd hours, one week late in the evening, another week over the lunch hour, to keep her company for a little while as she played or studied. Over the years, under the grinding torment of her two Crests, Edelgard had gone from walking to limping, limping to a wheelchair, the fire in her eyes dimming, the blankets on her lap multiplying. Sieghild had learned not to go up to her, knowing she would only get a few preoccupied words or an absent nod in response to whatever childish marvel she wanted to share. It was easier to keep her eyes on her task; that way, she might imagine that her mother's attention was still on her, or at least, that her mother had yet to close her eyes and doze off.

Severin von Gerth, on the other hand, had never regarded his marriage as more than a political contract, and Sieghild as the stamp on it.

Hubert regards her coldly. "Do you think your life would have been *better* if he'd lived? Do you hunger for the throne that desperately?"

"So you admit you killed him," she presses.

"You would have been a *puppet*," he spits out the word, ignoring her, "on House Gerth's string. I cannot expect consideration for the *empire* out of you, but do you imagine they would have treated *you* kindly? They would have wrung every drop of use out of you. Do you not know your history? Do you not know what happens when the Imperial in-laws infest the palace like grave-worms—"

Realization, a truly incredible realization, hits Sieghild. She laugh aloud. "Oh, saints, you've been projecting all along!"

Is there anything better than leaving him at a loss? Her anger puffs away. She reaches out and strokes an idle finger down his lapel. "I know my history, I assure you. My tutor taught me everything of Emperor Edelgard that Emperor Edelgard did not teach me. Of course you don't feel any guilt toward me—you think you killed my Lord Arundel."

He has no reply to that. Sieghild fingers the first brass button on his coat. She undoes it, in a flash of sunlight on metal, and moves down. Hubert's eyes cling to her hand; the rest of him is frozen motionless. "I can't complain," she continues. Flash. "I've never been smuggled across countries like a crate of goods." Flash. "I've never been given over for experimentation by my own uncle." Flash. "I didn't live a decade under the thumbs of my exploiters." Flash. "That's the benefit of having outlived the point of my existence by the age of twelve, I suppose."

She meets his eyes. "No, I can't complain," she says softly, hooking a finger under the exposed buckle of his belt. "It would be so crass to complain. I should find something better to do with my tongue."

In one swift motion, she drops to her knees.

She takes him into her mouth under broad daylight. The sun warms her shoulders; the wind chills her spit. She looks up through her lashes, and he's looking at her too, his expression akin to agony. She takes him deeper.

His hands grip the crenelations, the tendons standing out. When it's over, there's a small smear of blood where his fingertips had clung.

Sieghild takes out a handkerchief and wipes her mouth neatly. The taste of semen lingers in her mouth, bitter and faintly salty, like tears.

"I'll have to write to the capital," she tells him. He doesn't respond; his eyes are closed. "They were going to send a ship for me a week from now, before the autumn storms. I need to tell them that won't be necessary. I think now that I'll stay for good."

She looks out over the parapet, at the gray, empty sea. "We obsolete relics ought to stay together."

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I will finish this fic, hopefully by the end of the month, definitely by the end of the year. It might not be the most polished but by god it will be done.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

All mail on the island goes through the captain of the garrison. “Standard policy,” he tells Sieghild, sliding a knife under the wax seal with an expression of utter boredom. His gaze scans down the page. “We have sealing wax here. Next time, just leave your letter unsealed until—”

He stops. Then he yells, “Schmied!”

He has to yell the name several times before a woman in rumpled mage’s robes shuffles into the office. She straightens, however, seeing the captain’s expression. “Schmied,” he says. “Thoroughly examine the lady Sieghild for dark magic.”

Sieghild endures the extended poking and prodding that follows. “No illusion magic,” Schmied reports. “No marks of coercion or mind control.”

“Is it so unbelievable that I would want to extend my stay of my own volition?” Sieghild says, more amused than annoyed.

Both the captain and the mage give her a look.

“What can I say?” she sighs. “I have my tastes.”

#

Clotilde’s good-natured act wears thinner by the day, but Sieghild isn’t too concerned. Both of them understand that when Sieghild returns to the capital—or fails to return to the capital—she’s capable of bringing down a great deal of trouble on Marquis Vestra’s head.

For many years, she’s been an inconvenient bit of gristle to stick in people’s craws. No one particularly wants her around, but no one can afford the last Hresvelg’s blood on their hands, politically speaking. Thus she can continue defiling Marquis Vestra without concern for her personal safety.

There really isn’t much else to do on the island. She’s made a game out of catching him in different locations: in his rooms, on the stairs, in front of the fireplace. It had taken her nearly a week to lure him into the kitchen; she suspects that he’d walked into her setup in the end just to get it over with. The effort paid off handsomely—ah, the thrill of braving the lion’s

lair! They didn't encounter Clotilde while they were there, but judging from the strain in her expression the next time they crossed paths, she knows.

Thus Sieghild gilds her days with a glitter of variety. She's close to completing the set.

But, until now, she's yet to catch the marquis in the greenhouse.

It seems his habit is to go there early in the mornings and return before she rises. The simplest solution, of course, would be to rise earlier herself, but she considers such a sacrifice strictly a last resort. Instead, she simply bides her time until the day a storm forces him to delay his trip till the afternoon.

He refuses to acknowledge her as she trails after him over the crest of the hill. Sluiced by the rain, the glass panes of the greenhouse catch the sun with the brilliance of a beacon.

The building breathes warmth over her as she steps inside. One side of the greenhouse is dedicated to foodstuffs: herbs, spices, vegetables, even a few small citrus trees, to bring a taste of the Adrestian heartland to these harsher climes.

When she moves to inspect the other side of the greenhouse, something catches her eye. In one large pot is a rose.

It is truly a rose, singular: the cutting grows thin and scraggly, struggling in its exile from familiar soil and water. Its fragile canes offer only a single bloom, past its prime, spilling raggedly out of its calyx. But the color is exquisite. Even the petals fallen into the dirt blaze, in the sunlight, the red of heart's blood.

She turns. Hubert is watching her.

As soon as their gazes cross, he looks away, reaching for his spectacles. Entertained, she strolls over to take a look at his work.

She has more trouble recognizing the plants that line the walls of this side of the greenhouse. The renovated structure has room for a worktable, and on the worktable are two rows of potted plants with glossy pointed leaves and purple flowers. Hubert is performing hand-pollination: dipping a fine-tipped paintbrush into the flowers of one plant, transferring the yellow pollen to another's.

A letter rests on the table, next to his journal. *Approved* is scrawled across the top in red ink, followed by date, signature, seal. The main text consists of instructions and observations written in a tiny, rounded hand, accompanied by meticulous drawings.

Sieghild recognizes the handwriting. "The plants are from Lady Varley, then?"

The paintbrush twitches. In the enclosed timelessness of the island, he seems to have forgotten that they share mutual acquaintances.

Naturally Sieghild continues. "She gave me a beautiful sundew when I was a child, with purple patterns along the stem. Its name was Almandine. I must have caught every spider and fly in the Imperial residence to feed it."

"That was ill-advised of you. Carnivorous plants are vulnerable to overfeeding."

"I discovered. Almandine died within the fortnight. I'm not sure Lady Varley ever forgave me."

He's unwilling to dwell on the subject of Sieghild's childhood, volunteering a change in topic. "To answer your question, the seeds were indeed from Lady Varley—a rare perennial native to northern Almyra. An alkaloid extracted from the berries shows promise in the treatment of various disorders of the heart; the project I participate in is one of breeding in a higher concentration of the beneficial alkaloid and a lower concentration of the toxins."

"Surprising, that she'd have you as part of the project," Sieghild remarks. "Your circumstances make communication inconvenient, and even if you share an approximate latitude with Almyra, the facilities available on the island are hardly ideal."

"She considers the work a form of...atonement," he says. "A way to save lives where we took them in our youth. One feels one's ghosts more strongly with age. I suppose in her eyes I need the atonement more than anyone."

Sieghild laughs. "And in your eyes? Don't tell me you've ever regretted what you've done in her name."

He says, "I have an abundance of free time with which to bring peace of mind to a friend."

He sets down the paintbrush, then rubs at his hand. She's familiar, these days, with the thin lines of scar tissue ridging his palm, his long fingers. When he writes, he alternates between using his right hand and his left.

He reaches for the brush again, but she's already taken it up in his stead. "These two plants?"

He hesitates, then says, "Yes."

Under his gaze, she delicately ferries pollen between the pair.

It's the most pleasant experience Sieghild's had with a paintbrush in hand; she was a distressingly bad watercolorist, when she'd tried, nothing like her mother. This work is simple, yet...purposeful. The blossoms smell faintly sweet, up close; the sun is warm on her face.

Lightly, almost imperceptibly, Hubert touches her hair.

A pleasurable little thrum goes through her. It's not like him to take the initiative. She doesn't turn, continuing to work. Turning would no doubt send him retreating like a feral cat. She touches the brush to a new set of stamens. He runs his fingertips down the strands. Returns again to the top. She closes her eyes.

At last he lets the ends slip from his fingertips. "Did you finally notice the color?" Sieghild says. Belatedly, she goes looking for the next flower.

His voice is rough. "This color provokes a worse madness, I've discovered."

She sets down the brush. She turns. "I can hear the name you cry out, my lord."

"Yes," he says, with a faint lift of his chin. "I have no master but my Emperor, for whom I made war on heaven and for whom I'll gladly burn in hell. You make at best a passable shadow, but a...phantom that will haunt me."

"And what's the difference between a shadow and a phantom?"

"Your hair. Your lack of scars." He speaks the words as if they're forcing their way out of him. "You look like her, but born into a better world, the world she deserved. You look like *what could have been*."

A pain fills her chest at the words. No—the premonition of pain, she thinks. When you put down your foot and find the stair missing. He said too much, revealed the *depth* of how much he does not understand.

But he has the lost look in his eyes now. He leans over her like night descending.

Like draws to like; they can sink into their complementary madnesses together. She pushes her thoughts aside. The pain doesn't arrive until you stop falling.

There's room for her on the worktable.

When she comes, she bites him very hard.

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't fit the scene I planned this entire fic around in this chapter, but it'll be going into the next one. I expect the full fic to be somewhere between 10-15k words.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The sea beyond the shore roughens with the advent of autumn.

Sieghild finds it soothing to watch the waves. Sometimes, if she stands out there long enough, an optical illusion occurs: it's the sea that's standing still, while the island is drifting, unmoored.

The days slip through her fingers. The leaves on the trees turn from green to yellow seemingly between one glance and the next. She sleeps the day away and wakes with night always closer on the horizon than she expected. She, too, has begun to experience the blurry twilight of exile.

It's only in the greenhouse that the sense of unreality abates.

Hubert waits to go down with her these days, in an unspoken understanding. She helps him with the work on Lady Varley's plants—with her superior strength and youthful joints, she can carry the pots two at a time.

This corner of the compound is a secluded one, tucked away beyond the storehouses, and the plants, when replaced on the shelves along the glass, form a very adequate privacy screen.

It takes three days between the petals unfurling and falling from the stem. The charming little berries they reveal reach their full size only in the third week, and then are stubbornly slow to change color. It gives her something to look forward to. Heaven knows such things are thin on the ground.

The plants flower in a steady succession rather than all at once; buds are still opening on some of the specimens. She rather delights in the continued opportunity to play fairy godmother, dispensing offspring with waves of her magic wand—or rather, paintbrush—with pollen for fairy dust. Maybe this is what passes for maternal instinct in her. She contentedly tallies each new berry in the journal.

It's on one such occasion that he asks, suddenly, "Do you truly hate her so much?"

Sieghild abruptly looks up from her work.

Goddess forfend, his face is all serious. A laugh escapes her, a laugh with an edge.

"Ten years since you were Minister of the Imperial Household, yet you still see enemies of the Emperor in every shadow. Is that what you've thought of me all this time?"

He gestures sharply at her handiwork, her notes. "You are capable of contentment and honest work. Your nature is not an irredeemable one. Could any lesser fixation drive you a thousand miles to such madness?"

“Perhaps I’ve simply long harbored an unspeakable passion for the illustrious Marquis Vestra,” Sieghild says, letting her gaze fall on the red bite mark peeking from his collar.

“Don’t be absurd,” he snaps. “I can see that I’m your game, not your prize.”

“Oh?” Her fingertips venture along the path her gaze had traced.

The tendons rise under her fingers. “You’re trying to distract me,” he grits out.

“Am I?”

He takes her wrist and pulls her hand off him. She marvels that all these years later something of the Emperor’s hound can still be roused. He says, with infuriating doggedness, “You have everything you could want in Enbarr. And you threw it all away for this sordid farce.”

“Everything I could want?”

No good can come of this conversation, yet she finds herself pulled in anyway. “Everything I could want? The one thing I want, I can never have.

“Here’s a childhood story for you. You wouldn’t know it; it’s after your time. When I was fifteen, I got it in my head that I wanted to attend Garreg Mach Officers Academy like my mother before me. They’ve changed to purely examination-based admissions since your time—there would be no help from my parentage—and I was never the most talented at academics. But the determination consumed me. I *dreamed* of it. I would become a student at an even younger age than my mother had, become an officer of her Empire. I threw myself into my studies, history and classics and magic theory. I trained with the axe until my hands bled.

"And then one afternoon dear Uncle Ferdinand took time out of his busy day to invite me to tea. He was very awkward about it, poor man. He said he'd heard of my sudden enthusiasm for my studies. He asked, delicately, if I'd had much contact with my father's side of the family lately. If they'd said anything to me. He asked me how I felt about my current status at court. I was young and stupid enough that I didn't realize what he was going for at first. And then it struck me—he wanted to know if I'd gotten myself involved in some rebellious plot. That was his first association, upon hearing I took a sudden interest in the military arts."

She laughs bitterly. "We finished our tea. I never touched an axe again. I learned, that day, that the best way to serve my mother's memory is not to serve. My grubby Hresvelg-Gerth paws must not besmirch my mother's meritocracy."

"There are other sources of purpose in the world than the Empire," he insists. "Could you content yourself with nothing else?"

"Could *you*?" she counters. "Could you content yourself with any tedious path? Could you be just another noble, inconsequential and spoiled rotten—"

One moment he'd been holding her wrist; the next, his back hits the shelves behind him, violently, as if flung by heaven's thunder. A pot tips and explodes at his feet.

He's staring at her, his face utterly bloodless.

Right then, Sieghild realizes two things.

The first:

Hubert von Vestra had never thought of her as his daughter. Likely he had never thought of her as *any* father's daughter; she is Edelgard's, and that subsumes all other claims.

The second:

Somehow, in the words she spoke, he has seen just what father's daughter she is.

He's shaking. He tries to speak; no words come out. Like something hunted, he turns and makes for the door—

Sieghild slams into him.

"No, you don't," she snarls.

He never could have stood a chance, not even if both he and she were ten years younger. She bears the Crest of Seiros, the last one in the world. Once, it would've made her either a commander or a commodity; in her mother's Empire, she uses it to overpower an old man. Ink spills and papers scatter as she shoves him down on the table.

"How dare you," she says. *How dare you run.*

"Sieghild, I'm your father—"

"And?" Her fingers tighten around his wrists. She wants to hurt him. "You knew from the day I was conceived that this was a possibility. At any point you could have acted upon it; you never did, not in all the long years. At court, I recall you speaking to me perhaps twice. The *Prime Minister* was more of a father to me than you were."

"The political situation at the time—"

"Of course. Perhaps you didn't want to fuel rumors of my bastardy. Perhaps you thought distance would make it easier if you had to kill me to clear the succession. You would've killed me if it became necessary; I know you would have."

She leans in. "Because you and Edelgard von Hresvelg had a daughter of the soul, and her name is Adrestia. *I* am the child of your bodies, a lesser form of incest."

And she kisses him, plundering and vicious, like a wolf descending into the viscera of its prey. She makes him choke on her; when she lifts away she tastes blood.

The sight of his pale face fills her with hate. She wants to do worse, but then she'd have to keep touching him. Revulsion swells. She pulls away and spits over her shoulder.

Small victories: she gets to be the one to walk away.

Chapter End Notes

I had that research tab open to the Hubert-Edelgard C support transcription for literal months.

It took me over a year to get to the reveal. Lies down.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Final! Push!!!

Theoretically, Sieghild won that conversation. The Marquis Vestra certainly did not.

It doesn't feel like victory.

She goes to her room. She stares into the mirror.

Her features remain unchanged. Her mother's violet eyes and delicate mouth, webbed by spilling-loose strands of her mother's fine, straight hair.

There is not a trace of Hubert von Vestra in her looks. There's no evidence. Could even Edelgard say for certain, if she'd lived?

But he believes, utterly.

She believes. She saw his reaction.

Funny—she can laugh off sin and crime and offense against nature (perhaps this is an inheritance of her blood.) It's her father's hypocrisy, his self-serving rejection, that sticks in her throat. It repels her. It dispels all illusion. She can no longer see him as her mother's minister when she hates him like a father.

She had dreamt they could rot together. Now she demands that they rot separately—she will not let him stain the hem of her skirts.

But it's too late.

She can see the waters outside the one lone window, wracked by winter's coming. The ship has sailed. There will be no more until spring.

This is no temperate Enbarr; the Isle of Lycaon will become a place of ice and howling winds. She has sentenced herself to a long winter in this desolate prison with the present despised company.

What a fool she is. She'd jump out the window, if only she fit the narrow slit. She's shattered her sweet self-deceptions like a tantruming child's baubles, and now sits helplessly amid a sea of shards.

She goes to her bed and pitches down on the covers, and watches the room darken with the coming of the night.

At some point she falls asleep. It is not an escape. She dreams of currents and mist. Of wading blindly in endless waters, cold seeping up her skirts, dragging at her steps—

She wakes, and is disoriented. The pre-dawn light is the same as it was in her dreams.

A dark figure stands at the foot of her bed.

“Marquis Vestra,” she rasps, sitting up. “Father.”

She says the word with a bite, but he stands unflinching.

“What are you doing here? I did not expect our conversation to give you newfound enthusiasm for trespassing upon a lady’s bower, but there you are.”

He says, “A Vestra’s day begins at dawn.”

She stares.

And then she sees.

She laughs, sharply. “You have some nerve!”

“So I’ve been told.”

“You’re decades late to be taking responsibility. It’s not a debt that can be forgiven.”

“I come with that understanding.”

“To do what? What’s there to offer me? Will you teach me your dark poisons, your secrets of espionage?”

“If you wish.”

“Your sinister magics?”

“You’d likely possess the aptitude.”

“Will you instruct me in scaling citadels in the dead of night?”

“Don’t be absurd. The winter nights here would freeze solid your Enbarrian blood.”

And she laughs, for real this time.

“This is not forgiveness,” she tells him.

“I expect none,” he answers.

“Well, then. Allow me to get dressed. Unless...” she looks at him sidelong, under her lashes.
“You’re welcome to stay, of course.”

He squirms, just a little. “I will await you downstairs,” he says, with a bow.

He closes the door behind him. She listens to his footsteps retreat.

Sieghild falls back upon the bed, and laughs until she cries.

Afterward, she wipes her face, changes her clothes, and follows him down the stairs.

Chapter 7

The others are breakfasting with Hubert when Sieghild arrives downstairs—Marcellius, who greets her entrance by stuffing his face like a hamster, in his eagerness to escape the situation; and Clotilde, whose smile bears an iron stiffness.

There's porridge and salt fish, as she's accustomed to. There are also hot oatcakes with dried fruit and honey.

"You rascal," Sieghild says to Clotilde, delighted. "Have you been hiding these from me the entire time?"

"The leftovers available are limited by the time you normally rise," Clotilde informs her.

"Really—" But Hubert cuts himself off, to protect the guilty.

Sieghild blithely fills her plate.

#

"The point of the art of letter-folding," Hubert says, "is to make evident when a letter has been tampered with by an unauthorized party." He looks down his nose at the wrinkled mass in Sieghild's hands. "Your letter already looks quite tampered with."

"I'm quite aware," she sighs.

"Let me demonstrate," he says. He presses sharp creases into his sheet of paper with a bone folder, then takes up the penknife. "You must cut a longer strip from the top, though still taking care to leave one end attached—"

His penknife slips.

Sieghild makes an undignified snort.

Annoyed, Hubert flicks the severed sliver of paper aside with the tip of the knife. "I confess I'm out of practice. There's no point in taking such precautions with my letters when they'll all be opened by the garrison."

"I'm in a similar situation, I confess. My minders are more discreet, but if I suddenly started taking security measures with my letters, I'd fear another chat with Uncle Ferdinand."

"Then I'm impressed that you put so much effort into an art utterly useless to you."

“I simply intend to get all I can out of my inheritance,” Sieghild says lightly. “After all, the Vestras have no lands or great fortune. I won’t even get another fine empty title out of it.”

“No,” says Hubert. “It would be hardly be wise to acknowledge your paternity publicly.”

“Then all I have will be these family secrets. The family arts and crafts. But—” Sieghild prods at her sad wad of letter paper. “Perhaps it’s best if you teach me something else,” she concedes.

#

Hubert takes her into the woods. “The garrison may have questions if they see you performing magic,” he says.

The trees are cold and quiet. The birds have left; the bare branches let through shards of pearl-gray sky. Sieghild had not thought to pack for winter; she pulls her cloak tightly around herself.

They come to a stop in a clearing. “How much do you know about reason magic?”

“You might as well ask how much I know about military engineering. It’s hardly something one can pick up on one’s own.”

“It’s still regarded in much the same way as it was in my day, I see. But there is a simplicity at its core, an elegance. More beautiful, I’d always thought, than faith magic.

“Feel the cold against your face,” Hubert says. A loose strand of Sieghild’s hair stirs in the breeze, brushes against her cheek. “See the leaves on that branch.”

A few brown leaves still cling there, rattling gently. “Cause and effect,” he declares. “Sense the unseen cause that connects the effects, and draw upon it.”

“That’s still terribly mystical,” Sieghild remarks.

And yet...a deeper part of her understands.

She stands in the clearing, a distance neither close nor far from Hubert. There’s enough room between them for one other person.

Enough for her to reach out a hand, toward that unseen cause.

Something subtle and shadowy ripples between her fingers, like a heat shimmer, then subsides.

Her hand tingles, like pins and needles. “You were able to Manifest on your first try,” Hubert murmurs. “That is exceedingly impressive.”

Sieghild's face warms. Her heart is beating too quickly. How extraordinary, this feeling of pride, both his and hers. "Not afraid I'll turn my gift to nefarious purposes?"

"No," he says. "Because you are, truly, my daughter."

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

On the winter solstice, it's old tradition to hold a vigil for the dead. The solstice night is long and cold; the sleep of the shades beyond the veil is longer and colder yet. By candle fire and the love of the living, their bones may be warmed.

Sieghild follows Hubert onto the roof of the tower. Having neglected to pack winter clothes, she wears an overcoat and heavy cloak borrowed from Hubert, which leave her quite swamped in black wool. At least her fingertips will be warm, with the way the sleeves fold over them. With one hand, she lifts the cloak to keep its hem from trailing on the stone; with the other, she holds onto a bottle of the remaining Morfis plum wine, the only other company they'll have tonight.

They emerge into deepening twilight. "I'll let you do the honors," Hubert says. He holds out the unlit candle without removing its cover.

Sieghild focuses. Calling on her magic has grown easier with practice.

Under the glass, the candle flickers to life.

"There," she says with satisfaction. Hubert sets the candle on the parapet; they settle in for a long night.

Sieghild is accustomed to holding the vigil indoors, the candle set upon the windowsill. But the Vestra tradition, it seems, is to find the highest point one can climb to.

"The highest point in the palace at Enbarr was atop a nearly inaccessible spire," Hubert says. "When I was young, my father would leave me with my mother while he went to hold vigil for my grandfather."

"Another relative I have little knowledge of, I'm afraid."

"I didn't know him either—at least, not personally. He died before I was born. Minister of the Imperial Household is a hazardous title to hold." He pauses, tilts his head. "Do you know, somewhere along the way, I've become the longest-lived head of the family in four generations. It's not a distinction I'd have expected to fall upon me."

Sieghild hands him the wine. He takes a drink. "Hmm. Regardless. When I was seven or eight, I insisted on following my father to his vigil. He simply showed me the gap between roofs that I would have to cross to reach the spire, and challenged me to jump with him if I dared. Needless to say, I spent that solstice night with my mother.

"It was many years before I made the jump. I'm sure I could have managed it by fourteen or fifteen, even without magic, but by then I had a more pressing vigil to attend than the one for

a man I'd never met." His eyes were distant. "Solstice nights were a difficult time for Edelgard. After she returned."

"I only remember my mother performing the formal Imperial vigils in Wilhelm's Hall," Sieghild confesses. "I had to wear a terribly scratchy gown, the one time I insisted on attending." She remembers her mother standing before the ranks of clerics, straight-backed, her face the same still, composed mask she always wore in public.

"Yes, an Emperor must mourn the previous Emperor foremost. My duties used to include the preparation for the ceremony; no doubt my old assistants have done the same for Dietfried. He must be in Wilhelm's Hall at this very moment, in front of the Ever-Burning Candle."

"I've always wondered," says Sieghild. "How does the Ever-Burning Candle work?"

"It doesn't," he answers promptly. "The wick is fed from an internal reservoir of oil that I kept cleaned and refilled."

Sieghild snorts in amusement, and takes the bottle. The plum wine sends a glow of warmth through her, fortifying her against the night's chill.

"But you did eventually make it to the spire?" she asks.

"Yes. The solstice night after my father's...untimely passing, I made a point of taking on the climb. I made the jump handily, and went up to the top of the spire, and sat where my father must have sat...and having proved myself to my own satisfaction, I did not light a candle all the night."

Sieghild laughs out loud. "What an unfilial creature you are!"

"The father makes the child."

"Oh, hardly a rejoinder that flatters you, my dear Marquis Vestra."

"I did not intend it to," he replies. "Like my father, I will have no candles when I'm dead."

He takes a deep draught of the wine before he speaks again. "He's been buried for decades. I have not forgiven his crimes, and I never will. I understand him better now. It is not to his credit that I can understand him, but to my debt."

For some time, neither of them speak. The wind blows. In the distance, the waves wash against the shore.

"I'll keep vigil for you," Sieghild says.

That startles a laugh out of him, a creaking, disused thing. "Do I deserve it?"

"You are an embarrassment of a father," she says cheerfully, "and it makes me come out far more favorably in comparison than I'm accustomed to. A candle for you would spite you better than the lack of one. Mother already has the Ever-Burning Candle; she can stand sharing my humble little taper with you."

His face is softly limned in the light of the single flame. “What an honor you pay me.”

They while away the night, passing the bottle back and forth, in the company of their memories and their ghosts, until the sky reddens with the coming of the dawn.

Chapter End Notes

Ugh okay my brain is not functioning on all cylinders anymore and I'll need some sleep before I can put up the last bit. Procrastination is a curse.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

GODDAMN I'M FINALLY DONE WITH THIS FIC

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The winds of spring brings ships from Enbarr. A new garrison debarks; the old garrison prepares for departure. The winter tranquility of the island breaks like pond ice under the shouts of sailors and the busy activity of twice as many soldiers as usual.

It's slow going down to the docks, with the number of times Sieghild and Hubert have to stop to let men and cargo past. "I do hope Lady Varley will have forgiven me for the sundew after all this time," Sieghild says. "She will give me a chance, surely?"

Hubert snorts. "I have full faith in your force of persuasion. I only hope that you'll take mercy on her."

"I have no idea what you mean," scoffs Sieghild. "I only wish for a fruitful working partnership. I expect I can be of great assistance to her in her work on alkaloids."

"And that will be enough for you?"

She turns to him, beholding his expression. "Is that fatherly concern I detect? It's an honor ___"

"Sieghild."

It truly does warm her.

"Last year, it would not have been enough," she acknowledges.

She gazes out at the sea as they approach the docks. "I recall the presentation of evidence at your trial. They had some very detailed records, in your own hand, of your extralegal activities spanning the past two decades. Records that could not have been found, I believe, if you had not wished them to be found."

"Yes," Hubert says, simply.

Sieghild splays out her hand, feeling the thrum of magic at her fingertips. She could reach out, if she chose. "There is a difference between understanding oneself as useless and set

aside, and understanding oneself to be—a sharp blade, sheathed and put away with intent. The difference between a failed princess, and a scion of House Vestra.”

She closes her hand. “I am your daughter, in the end. The war has been over for decades; this is what our service looks like in this time of peace and prosperity. In our own way, we remain the preservers of Edelgard’s empire.”

They stand there, by the water, looking at each other. What a strange, mismatched set they make. She'll miss him.

Slowly, he bends down.

His gloved fingertips gently tilt her face toward him. His lips meet hers in a kiss of peace.

“I’ll write,” she says, after.

“I know.”

“I’ll visit again—if not this year, then the next. I’m sure I can badger Dietfried into another permit.”

If eyes are windows to the soul, there’s a candle’s worth of light behind Hubert’s, these days. “His loss shall be my gain.”

She’d say more, but a sailor is calling to her. “My lady! We’re preparing to depart!”

“Until next time, Father,” she says.

And she turns toward the journey ahead.

Chapter End Notes

Whew boy, writing this reminded me I'm not cut out for multichap fic. But after a year and a half, this weird little story is done at last. Thanks to the original prompter, and to everyone who's followed along. I hope the ride was worth the while!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!