

Mindwipe Castle

Chapter 15: The final push

“So... Is this a place made by Leader then, or... Are we actually investigating a real crime scene here?” Silvia asked, hugging her staff close to her body.

“I think...” Olivia began slowly, “It... Must be real. If it was a game, Leader didn’t need to make the illusions of Drell so... Traumatic.”

So this was what Anne found yesterday. This diary... This room. This... Painting of Mistress and some other elf... This is what Anne was trying so hard to tell her about this morning and... She just blew her off.

Sure... She wasn’t in her right mind at the time, but still... She had treated Anne horribly today... She never minded being called Boss. And sure... Her teasing was a little annoying at times but... What relationship doesn’t have a few annoyances now and again?

Anne hadn’t called her by her actual name in years, and to hear it like that... Hurt. Like a bond between them had just been severed. Maybe they could still talk things out. Maybe they could make up and go back to normal... But... What if they couldn’t?

Dominya let out a low growl, “Picking on weaker realms like that... She’s nothing more than a coward!”

“Its really kinda smart.” Eliza said “Why pick fights with someone stronger than you when there’s so many kingdoms weaker than you?”

Dominya glared over in Eliza’s direction “I shouldn’t be surprised to hear that from one such as you.”

“H-Hey! What’s that supposed to mean?” Eliza replied defensively. Before Dominya could answer though, Misty burst into the room from one of the walls.

“Heeey! I finished looking around!” She said cheerfully.

“Did you find anything?” Olivia asked.

“Uhuh!” Misty replied nodding her head excitedly “There’s almost no purple in the hallways. Just around some of the rooms! I can find my way around anywhere I want!”

Anne honestly considered just throwing herself on her bed for a while and telling the others she didn’t find anything. It’s not like she actually expected to find anything up here in the barracks... She had made it halfway up the final staircase before noticing something. Another red X on one of the stones. Where did these keep coming from? Who was putting them there?

She reached out to press it, but stopped just an inch short. It might have been “purple”. Pulling out her wrench, she gave the stone a firm press, and felt the stairs suddenly begin to rotate!

In only a moment, it seemed the stairs had reoriented themselves to lead to an entirely new room rather than the dormitories. It seemed to be the general's office. Papers were littered around the place. Boxes filled with documents lined the edges of the room, and there in the center was a table with a single scroll rolled neatly with a red circle drawn around it.

Anne picked it up and unfurled it, beginning to read...

"The land is gone now. The entire population now resides within the castle. Not that it will do them any good. The realm is failing. Our queen is failing. We may have only a few days until the realm collapses into its self. If we're still here when that happens, we will all cease to be."

Anne stared at the last line of the paper... Cease to be? Is that what happened to everyone here? But then... how was the castle still here? Boss needed to see this! Anne grabbed the parchment and began her sprint down the stairs.

"Well, I think we've found everything we can here." Olivia said, looking around at the rest of the group. "Unless we want to read the entire diary."

"We could, I guess..." Silvia said softly.

"No." Dominya replied "Just turn to the last page with writing on it. We shouldn't waste time on unimportant entrees.

"Yeah, good idea." Olivia said, opening the diary back up and flipping through the pages. Something was... Wrong. This time the Diary was just... Gibberish. Page after page of meaningless scribbles from cover to cover.

"Is something wrong?" Eliza asked.

"I... Can't read any of it..." Olivia said in disbelief. "Hold on..."

She closed the diary, then turned to page 65... And... That day's entry was written there. Plain and easy to read. Was this some kind of... Defense system?

"I think... You need to know what page you want to read in order to read it. You can't just read it like a book." Olivia explained.

"A simple defensive measure..." Dominya said sternly "But I suppose if what we've read is to be believed... She may have been too inexperienced to devise a more effective one."

Anne followed the arrows in the maze at a full sprint. She was starting to get a bit winded, but she couldn't stop now. If the others were in any kind of danger, they deserved to know about it right away. She didn't know what Leader had sent them here for... But it must have been important... Right?

She rounded the final corner and burst into the Queen's bedroom. Fortunately, everyone was still there. She raised the parchment in one hand, and opened her mouth to speak, then caught herself. She was about to yell "Boss" again.

She paused and took a few breaths, then chose her words more carefully. "Olivia... I... You need to read this..." She said between ragged breaths. She had no idea what kind of distance she had covered but it was a long sprint for her.

Olivia gave her a sad look before taking the parchment and beginning to read from it. Recounting the short message she had just read herself. On the back of the parchment though... Anne saw something else. Written in red lipstick... The number 95.

As Olivia was reading the parchment out loud, Anne slid over to the diary, turning to page 95 and finding another diary entry. She scanned the text quickly then as soon as Olivia had finished she spoke.

"Listen to this..."

"I instructed my general to lead everyone on an expedition to Earth. A place far, far away from any humans so they won't risk breaking the law against using magic on humans. I told them it would be good for morale not to be cramped inside the castle."

Anne looked up from the diary. "Wait, there's a law against using magic on humans? But what about Leader? Or us?"

"Oh. I guess since you don't use magic that never came up for you." Silvia said gently. "Mistress had a talk with all the magic users in the harem about it."

"Basically, we're in a sort of loophole." Dominya added, "The Leader is human, so the law does not apply to them. And as we are in the Leader's harem, we are shielded from the law as well since Leader is ultimately responsible for our actions."

"Some kingdoms don't like the loophole..." Silvia said, "But they can't really do anything to punish Leader without violating the law themselves."

"It's enforced automatically through complex magical contracts." Dominya explained, "Apparently, it would be a diplomatic nightmare bordering on the impossible to actually change them, so... Most kingdoms are simply waiting for Leader to pass away from old age."

"I see..." Anne said. She'd never known things were so complicated... But she had wondered why other mythical species hadn't shown up to take over the Earth before Leader did it. She looked back down at the Diary and began to read again.

"The truth is..." Anne read, "I'm going to fail. This realm will collapse any day now and I don't want to take them all with me. I'm going to lock myself in the generation room and... If I can save the realm, good. If not... At least I'll be the only one who has to... Die..."

She paused again at the end. If the realm failed, the castle would cease to be. But... The castle is still here. Could that mean...?

“Does... Anyone know where this mana generation chamber is?” Anne asked, looking up from the dairy.

“Ooh! Ooh! I do I do!” Misty said, bouncing up and down cheerfully.

“Really? Can you lead us to it?” Anne asked.

“Sure thing! Follow me!”

Misty darted out of the room and began floating along the hall, stopping every once in a while for everyone to catch up.

As they walked, Anne moved next to Boss... “S-So... Bo- Um... Olivia...”

Olivia looked over at her. “Its okay. You can call me Boss like you usually do.”

Was she just saying that to be nice? She couldn't tell anymore. “No. I... Wanted to apologize.” She said, trying to keep her tone serious. “I... Shouldn't have teased you as much as I have.”

“Its fine.” Olivia said again, sounding irritated. “I shouldn't have said those things to you. I wasn't myself.”

“But...” Anne said nervously “There's some truth to it. Isn't there?”

Olivia didn't answer. Anne looked at her expectantly, but several moments passed in silence. Finally, she opened her mouth as though she was about to say something and-

“Here it is~” Misty sang, swimming in the air in front of a dead end.

“How can you tell?” Eliza asked cautiously.

“Cause there's a soul in there!” Misty replied “So there must be someone inside!”

“But... How can we get in there?” Silvia asked “Its sealed shut.”

Dominya stepped forward, and without a word thrust her hand against the wall. In an instant, the bricks shattered apart. Some disintegrating completely, some fragmenting into countless shards, and others flying from the point of impact whole.

In a single motion, she had created an entire doorway. The group cautiously stepped through and saw...