

# Morning mist

## Claude x Byleth | English Version

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### Morning mist

*„I'll be back before you know it. We'll only be apart for a short while. And now... I love you. With everything I am.“*

Byleth opened her eyes and looked up at her bedchamber's high wooden ceiling. It was still dark, but she quickly got used to the lighting conditions. Her heart was beating wildly as she was still caught up in her dream – repeating Claude's last words before he had left Fódlan.

She turned to the other side of her huge bed and touched the unused pillow next to her – the place where he would usually lay. Her biggest wish at this moment was, that he would return to her and greet her with a cheeky line of his. Her heart grew heavy as her hand rested on the fabric and her gaze lingered on the silver ring with an embedded emerald. His parting gift and yet a promise to return.

Before Byleth could get lost in her memories, she got up and threw on a morning gown. She opened two glass doors and stepped out on a huge balcony. The sky was already turning lilac. The sun would rise soon. Because of the cool air she pulled her clothes tighter around her. Autumn was in full bloom and would turn into winter soon. The humidity transformed the forest into a picturesque image of tree tops rising from the billowing mist. Goosebumps spread on Byleth's arms first and then continued all over her body.

*„And the next time we see each other... it will be at the dawn of a whole new world. A peaceful, happy world!“*

She couldn't stop thinking about Claude. How long had it been since he had started his travel, while she had been crowned Queen of the united Fódlan? Had it been a year already? During that time she achieved a lot, rebuilding the towns and villages that had been destroyed in the war among other things. The church was reshaped thanks to their support. All of this had only been possible thanks to the allies of the former alliance who went their own ways throughout the country now.

Although she ruled and her people supported and liked her, Byleth felt lonely on these nights watching such sunrises. On days when she had the time to think, her

thoughts were mostly occupied by *him* – Claude. Her fingertips touched her lips. Before he had left, they kissed for the first and only time. How much she yearned to lay in his arms now. A light wind blew through her hair, almost comfortingly brushing her cheek.

*„I love you.“*

Byleth stepped up to the white stone railing and gazed at the dawn. „I love you too, Claude“, she whispered to the sunrise.

For a while, she stood there and looked at the horizon. At some point, she turned away to change in her chambers in order to finally face the day. Since she had become ruler of the united kingdom, she lived in a castle away from Garreg Mach. It belonged to the territory of House Riegan, which had warmly welcomed Byleth, despite the absence of their heir - after all, Claude and she were engaged. She had the upper floor all to herself, even though she didn't need that much space. On the lower floor, there was an office, a dining room with an adjoining kitchen and a large banqueting hall. The servants who looked after the premises and her advisors as well as some knights also lived in the castle. Without them, it would have been even more lonely in this place.

Despite the early morning hours, the dining room was filled with the smell of fried eggs and fresh coffee. Byleth was greeted by the staff. The place where she always sat in the dining room was already prepared for her. A cup of steaming coffee stood beside her plate. With a smile on her face, she took the cup in both hands. The steam rose in the air and she inhaled the drink's tart aroma. The hot liquid was perfect to warm up the queen a little on that chilly autumn morning. She ate two fried eggs and freshly baked bread before heading to her office.

On the walls of the room stood massive shelves made of mahogany wood. They were full of books, weapons and small decorations as well as candles. In the middle of the room stood a large desk with her neatly sorted papers. She had already laid out matters for the day. However, a dark blue box with a pink bow greeted her that she couldn't remember from the night prior. Frowning, Byleth took the box, pulled the ribbon and opened the lid. A letter covered its content: a long silver chain with a rose quartz pendant in the shape of a feather.

The gift was from Hilda. With the letter in one hand and the box in the other, Byleth stepped up to the wide window niche behind her desk. The wide window seat was lined with cushions and invited visitors to read and relax: it was the perfect place to get a good look at the gift. The Queen settled down and unfolded the letter. Hilda wrote that she had been travelling for a while and that she had been inspired by so many places. Furthermore, she now had a goal in mind: to open a school for the crafting of jewellery. The necklace was a gift to express her gratitude that she had the opportunity to choose such a path in the first place. With a smile, Byleth folded up the letter again. Everyone in the golden deer class had dreams that they could fulfil in this

peaceful time.

Once more Byleth thought of her beloved. She turned the ring on her finger and looked out of the window. She wondered how close he was to fulfilling his dreams. She knew that the future of an entire country could not be changed in a matter of days or weeks. A heavy sigh escaped her throat at the thought of how much longer it would take until they would be reunited?

Quick footsteps echoed through the corridors. Only a few moments later, the door to her office was flung open.

"Your Majesty!" One of her advisors dressed in a noble purple tunic with a yellow sash and a heavily breathing knight barged into the room. "We have received a report from Judith. Derdriu is under attack!"

Byleth immediately rose from her seat and shook off her desires.

"By whom?" she wanted to know.

"They are the Empire's sympathisers and some pale figures." Pale figures? That description was not exactly telling.

"They need support," her advisor continued, elaborating on the situation.

"How many knights can we send?" the queen asked, looking at the armoured man.

"Not many ... most are still busy in other territories. It will be at least three days before we can summon them."

Byleth clenched her teeth. "Gather as many men capable of fighting as you can. However, some need to remain here to protect the castle," she said determinedly.

"Where are you going?" the advisor asked.

"I'm going to get my sword."

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With a dozen armed warriors and a handful of healers, Byleth rode to Derdriu to support Judith as an ally of the united Fódlan. The soldiers of the former empire had broken through the eastern gate, so the queen arrived from the west. Judith's groups had set up small temporary camps. Where possible, Byleth directed the few healers in her force to help. She met Judith at the very front, outside of a tent where she was discussing a defensive strategy with brave men and women. When the queen entered, the knights bowed, but she waved her hand away.

"I came with everyone I could spare," she explained to Judith, "and I will fight myself." She pointed to the Sword of the Creator - the weapon she had used to take down countless opponents over the years. "Where should we start?"

Judith explained the current situation. There had already been casualties and injuries during battles, but overall, the young leader assumed them to have the advantage - with Byleth's combat power in particular. Besides, they needed to take advantage of the element of surprise. The queen agreed and considered it their best chance to destabilise the enemy's ranks or crush them completely.

After the warriors and mages had been initiated into the plan, Byleth withdrew once more for a few minutes. She slipped her leather glove from her left hand and looked at the ring Claude had given her - the promise. For a short while, she allowed herself to think of his face, his smile and his words. She drew strength from these memories and the hope that they would meet again.

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Blades clashed, and roars filled the air. The queen's troops and Judith's remaining warriors fought their opponents with all their strength. The ambush had given them a momentary advantage, but the number of their enemies kept increasing. Byleth focused on the mages and healers but also protected her troops. She tried to be on several fronts at once. Although she had a long range thanks to the Sword of the Creator, she could not be everywhere at once. She lacked the commanders who defended their troops on different fronts. Like this, they were hopelessly outnumbered.

"Your Majesty!" shouted Judith from the crowd, pointing her sword to the west, where several enemy troops were retreating. Byleth tightened her grip on her sword and dashed through the warriors who opposed her. Was this a trap? The ground shook once, twice, three times in steady steps. A Titanus stepped out of the forest, controlled by a few magicians from Shambhala. Byleth clenched her teeth tightly. Cheers erupted among the Empire's sympathisers. With the appearance of the war machine, they felt certain of victory. However, the Titanus had one disadvantage: it was slow.

Byleth retreated to gather as many shield warriors and mages as she could. A wall of shields was to protect those who were in charge of summoning a mighty spell. The Queen with the power of the goddess Sothis and the mighty sword of the Creator took the front. She relentlessly kept every attacker away from her magicians until they fired the mighty fire spell that turned the sky red. The huge fireball struck the Titanus and the surrounding enemies. Directly behind the flame, the queen followed and delivered the death blow to the mystical machine.

She landed on her feet and found herself in the middle of the enemy ranks. The loss of the Titanus had left fear on their faces. But individual calls urged them to continue fighting. Byleth parried a sword attack and dodged an arrow in the last seconds. Another arrow hit her unexpectedly in the shoulder. Her opponents counted this hit as a triumph, but the queen continued to swing her sword, thinning the ranks, until yet another arrow pierced her thigh. She fell to her knee. Several axe-fighters rushed at her, wanting to deliver the final blow. The blade of her sword parted and became a glowing whip, knocking all the attackers to the ground. Another arrow flew towards her face, but she turned away just in time so that the sharp metal tip only cut a few strands of her green hair.

The swordswoman was surrounded by enemies, her allies could not get through to her and the mages were too exhausted from the previous attack. However, she would not give up. She would take anyone who wanted to harm her country and her people until her final breath.

Over her shoulder, an arrow flew directly at her feet. A flame burned on it. A few seconds later, smoke spread over the battlefield. Roars sounded above their heads. A surprise attack from above? Were their opponents that well prepared? The warriors around her screamed in panic, tramping disoriented. Byleth heard choked sounds, bodies falling dully to the ground, and more yelling.

Covered in smoke, someone landed light-footed behind her. She gripped the handle of her sword, but the wind carried a familiar scent to her nose. Her heart leapt immediately.

Suddenly, a warrior with raised axe charged through the smoke at her. An arrow hit him in the throat and he fell to his knees. Slowly the screams around them died down and the smoke cleared. The queen lifted herself onto her uninjured leg, using her sword as support. Twelve white wyverns saddled with dark-skinned riders formed a circle around her. Men and women carried various weapons and kept a wary eye on their surroundings. The queen looked slowly at everyone until she finally turned around and looked into a pair of green eyes. Dressed in gold and green, a band of oriental patterns wrapped around his head and a smile as unmistakable and honest as she knew him to be. Claude.

Byleth took a step toward him, but her injured leg caused her to stagger. She stumbled forward, falling right against Claude's chest. "You're here ..." she whispered exhaustedly against his shoulder. He wrapped his arms around her, "Just in time, it seems." His tone was serious, he wasn't joking.

"Thank you," the queen breathed, inhaling his scent once more before the last reserves of strength left her body and everything went dark.

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*„I love you.“*

Byleth slowly opened her green eyes. The space around her was blurred at first and she had to blink several times to see clearly. She looked around exploringly. She was lying on her bed in her bed chamber. The room looked the same as always. The side and the pillow beside her were empty and cold as always. Had she only dreamt of his return? Had she imagined that Claude had returned to Fódlan, to her? Of the battle in Derdriu and the rescue? Hadn't all that been real?

As she turned on her side, pain ran through her shoulder and leg. The injuries were real, and so was the pain. Not a dream after all.

She slowly pushed the blanket aside. The bandage was not visible under the long black cloth trousers, but she could still feel it. The bandage on her shoulder peeked out from under the sleeve and reached to her elbow. Carefully, Byleth sat up in an upright position. She didn't know what day or time it was. How much time had passed since the battle in Derdriu?

Outside, the morning seemed to be breaking.

How long had she been asleep? She sat up carefully and pushed herself off the mattress with her healthy arm to test whether she could walk. Her leg ached and she shifted her weight to her uninjured side. On bare feet, she stepped towards the balcony, which stood a crack open already. She breathed in the cool, moist air before letting her gaze wander over the forest shrouded in billowing mist. Everything was quiet.

A powerful beating of wings sounded, whereupon she began to look around. A mighty ivory-coloured body flew over her and performed an elegant turn in the air. Then it rushed down the castle wall. The sight of it brought back a hazy memory, her surrounded by wyverns and their riders on the battlefield. Byleth wanted to take a step towards the railing, but the steady sound of rising wings stopped her. The beast with the bright scales rose and looked at her through its yellow glowing eyes. Slowly it landed on his large paws and retracted its wings. At that moment she caught a glimpse of its rider.

Brown, dishevelled hair, just held in shape by a golden-green hair band, came into view. Nevertheless a few strands managed to fall into his green eyes. Her gaze drifted from the equally brown sideburns to the delicate beard line to his chin and finally to his small smile. Her heart leapt at the realization. Claude was here. She wanted to walk towards him, but he was faster. He needed only two big steps to stand in front of her and put his arms around her.

Immediately Byleth reached for his tunic. She pressed her face into the fabric and inhaled his scent. In turn, he gently stroke her back.

"YOU should be in bed," he breathed on her hairline. But she did not care. She would hold him close and never let him go again. "It wasn't a dream. You are here," she mumbled into the jacket, "You are really here." The queen looked up and looked into her lover's green eyes, which suddenly widened. Before she noticed the tears in the corners of her eyes, Claude stroked them away with his thumbs.

Whatever he was about to say, the sight of her caused the words to stick in his throat. Just as she cried rarely, it was unlikely to spot him speechless.

"I'm here," he replied, pulling Byleth back into his arms. He buried his face in her hair and grazed her temple with his lips. "And I have no intention of leaving again."

The queen wrapped her healthy arm around his back and held him close, enjoying this intense moment, until Claude released the embrace and smiled mischievously at her. "And now, I'm here to make sure you recover. So off to bed."

He supported her back to her bed and then slipped his shoes off his feet, finally filling the space at her side and enveloping the pillow, sheets and blanket in his scent and warmth.