

Fake It Til You Make It

Taenya looked up at the guard captain that was talking to her. She didn't even remember his name, the high elf had been questioning her about what had happened. She could barely focus. She watched him sigh and sit on the top of the desk, his hands folding over his lap, he gave her a look. One that she knew intimately, a look of understanding. The elf was a man who had also lost people.

"Ms. Taenya, please. I understand your situation, but again, can you go over how you were attacked?" He pleaded.

Taenya didn't want to be there, but she knew it was required of her. She was the head guard for Onas. The high elf merchant would file his report later with the Guild. She had to deal with the guards. Especially, since it was their land.

I had just left his room...

"Captain, can we do this later?" she finally asked.

"Ms. Taenya. No one has told me what happened yet. Please, I won't keep you long, but I need to know. I don't like it any more than you. Keep it brief, but give me something."

Taenya nodded and took a deep breath. "It started when we came upon a tree that had fallen across the length of the road. It was big enough that our wagon could not simply roll over it, and with the trees lining the sides, we couldn't go around. After we stopped, we were accosted by seven men. The leader was a big orkun—I didn't get his name. With him were a raithe, four telv, and another orkun. I tried to talk him out of attacking or even paying him, seeing as how we only had three guards. He didn't bite. We fought, and managed to kill five of them."

The captain's brows raised. "An orkun leader, a raithe, and another orkun? That sounds like Winton the Reaver's group. We've been hunting them for months. You truly killed him? How?"

Taenya paused. She knew without a doubt, that she could *not* tell the elf guard captain about Gwyn's use of magic. *Absolutely not. I won't betray her.*

She had to lie, but how. She looked around the office, thinking. She looked over and saw a lamp on a table. A small flame inside. Taenya focused on it, her mind going back to the fight. The fire looked so calm and peaceful compared to the small raging suns that Gwyn had conjured from nothing. The scared girl's face filled with anger and fury as if she were the personification of Alos himself.

I was so close to being taken or dying. The things he said he would do...

“Ms. Taenya?”

Taenya jolted at the sound of his voice. She looked at him and saw nothing but concern. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Opening back up and seeing the guard captain sitting there patiently.

I know what I have to say.

“Raafe, my man, was injured and used a torch to kill the orkun that stabbed him. After the orkun fell, Raafe tossed me the torch as I was making my way toward them. The girl that was with us screamed and distracted the leader... Winton. I used that distraction to get him in the neck with the torch. He died shortly after.”

The high elf's eyes went wide. “You two used a torch, to kill two of their men?”

Taenya shrugged. “We used whatever we could. He spoke of things he would do to me and the girl. I couldn't let those happen.”

The captain gave a knowing nod. “For what it's worth, I am sorry, Ms. Taenya. Thank you, for telling me. I will file the report. We can speak more at a later date.”

Taenya just nodded, not wanting to speak any longer. She got up and walked out, knowing that she needed to find Keston and talk to him. Taenya would discuss the situation with Onas... especially Onas... to clear everything up before either of them spoke to anyone about it. She knew Keston wouldn't talk if she asked him. However, Onas... He was probably going to tell the baron. *Shit.*

* * *

Keston was sitting on the ground in an alley behind the inn Onas had procured, just leaning against the wall with Taenya next to him. She had informed him of the lie that she told the guard captain. He agreed with her, that was knowledge, that in his opinion, no one needed to know.

The two guards had been sitting there, in silence, just processing everything that had occurred that day since. Keston's mind was filled with regret. He had lost a friend just an hour prior, and he didn't know what to do. It just wasn't right, Raafe was the better swordsman, the better guard. *If only I had gotten to him when he called for help.* Keston felt the pain bubbling up within him. *I failed him.*

He held back the grief, locking it away as one should, Keston couldn't afford to make mistakes anymore.

"Keston. We should talk," Taenya spoke into the silence. Her voice was barely above the distant sounds of the active town. "I—I don't know how to tell her."

He turned and looked at the telv head guard. Taenya Shavyre was a woman who was always sure of herself. She always had the answers and direction. She was organized and loyal to a fault. *If she doesn't know, how can I?*

Keston sighed. "I don't know either, Taenya. Raafe—" He paused and collected himself before continuing, "Raafe was my friend, and I saw how much that little girl meant to him. She lit a spark in him and gave him something to strive for. He was ready to leave the company and follow that girl all the way to her mother."

Taenya choked back a sob, her eyes going to the sheathed sword she had leaned against the wall next to her. "He really was, wasn't he?"

He nodded. "What now, Taenya? You've lost people before, haven't you? I haven't."

"I have, and it's never easy Keston. But none of those had a child involved. We have been fortunate in that none of the company guards that died during a route had left behind any children. This... is so much more difficult."

“It really is...”

They lapsed back into silent sorrow and contemplation. Keston wasn't sure how much time had passed, but something he hadn't had time to process before worried him. He recalled the fight. Everything that had happened, the... magic... was something that they hadn't had a chance to talk about yet. Keston wasn't sure, but he knew that it was important.

He called out to the telv next to him, “Taenya?”

“Mm?”

“Maybe we should talk about the other things from today?”

Taenya took a deep breath, and he shifted his body so he could face her. “We both saw what she did,” he added.

She closed her eyes for just a moment and replied, “Yes. We did. That little girl conjured up some fire and used it to kill two grown men. Right in front of us.”

“She saved our lives.” Keston pointed out.

“She did.”

“What does it mean?”

“What do you think it means, Keston?” She shook her head and continued, “The girl can clearly use magic. Onas was terrified of her and I had to talk to him about it, but you're right. She saved us.”

He leaned back against the wall, remembering the look of the fire as it exploded against the two bandits. He hadn't seen too much of the first, but the second he had watched the entirety of. Keston remembered how the orkun had died, just before he could attack Taenya. That image hadn't left him since it happened, but something else hadn't left since the ambush.

“I felt something. I still feel something.” Taenya said.

“What do you mean?” Keston asked.

“When I killed those bandits. The raithe and the other one that died later. When they died, I felt a rush. I felt almost refreshed.” She looked down at her hand and curled it into a fist. “I feel stronger, Keston. Different. It’s not much, but I am not the same I was yesterday or even this morning.”

“What do you think it means?”

“That, maybe, the thing that brought that little girl to us did a lot more than we had thought. Was it the gods? I don’t know. I’m not a huge believer, but I know what I saw, and that was a little girl using magic.”

He nodded. “She did. We can’t let anyone know, Taenya. Raafe asked us to watch over her.”

He watched her sigh. “Onas is going to talk to the baron about it. Of this I’m sure. They’re too close of friends.”

Keston shook his head. “Do you think the baron will tell anyone?”

Taenya shrugged. “I don’t know. Despite how often Onas has met with him, I’ve only spoken with him once. Other times, I simply saw him from a distance or hadn’t joined Onas.”

“Taenya, this is going to change so much. I—I don’t see a future that isn’t filled with trouble for that girl.”

“I know.” She took a deep breath before continuing, “Trust me, I know. That girl, she’s going to go far though, Keston, and her magic is going to be a key part of it. However, it’s not just that. She’s genuinely an amazing young girl, one who naturally draws people in. That’s a trait that many search for and many fight for.”

“What do you want to do?”

“I think—” Taenya looked up toward the sky. Keston let her think, not wanting to interrupt. He watched a slew of emotions wash over her face, and he saw the tears well up in her eyes as she seemed to conclude a thought.

“I think that I want to finish what Raafe started, Keston. I feel like something in me changed, and I think that girl is key. I think the world is going to change, I don’t know how—”

“But you can feel it.” He finished for her. With a shake of his head, he felt like he should continue, “A moment that changed everything. A girl used magic. I don’t know what it means now, but in the future, this is it. I don’t know what a world with magic looks like, Taenya. However, I think you’re right about one thing. Gwyn’s the key. I also think the princess is the key to our lives changing as well.”

He absently patted his leg as he considered his future. What his path would be. “I think I’m going to continue what Raafe started. I’m going to stay with her. It’s the least I can do for him.”

Taenya stood up and reached out to help him up. He grabbed her hand and she looked him in the eye. “I understand. That girl is going to need so much help, Keston.” Taenya placed a hand on his shoulder and leaned close, whispering, “She’s going to be a target. Are you prepared for that?” She asked him.

Keston shook his head. “Honestly? No, but someone has to do it. This world is changing, she’s going to be right in the middle of it all. She needs a trustworthy person to watch her back and help find her mother.” He explained.

Taenya nodded, looking a bit lost in thought. “You’re right. Onas will be okay without us. Gwyn though? She’s going to need help. Let’s be honest. Onas is *not* going to be able to keep her hidden, and he doesn’t have the clout to go against any nobles.”

“We don’t either, Taenya.”

“Yeah... That’s the challenge.”

“You’ll figure it out. Just like you always do, boss. I’ll be right there to help.”

Taenya’s shoulders sagged. “I need to go tell her now don’t I?”

“Yeah. I’ll get things ready so we can go see him.”

Taenya nodded before she walked away. Keston sighed. The world was changing, or rather, it *had* changed and he had meant everything he said. Gwyn was the key to understanding and adapting to this new world. It wasn’t just her magic that made him want to help her. It wasn’t the fact that she was some princess from another world, because if anything was honest? That didn’t matter at all. It *only* mattered because of her magic. No, Keston was going to help

that guy because she had such a pure heart and needed her mother, and because Raafe would have done it without a second's hesitation. He had said as much as he lay dying. His last moments were spent trying to help a child he barely knew.

Honor. You died more a knight than many can claim my friend.

He just needed to figure out how to put on a brave face for the princess, because he knew she was going to be devastated. It was okay. He'd shove his emotions down and fake it for her. It was the least he could do.

* * *

Raafe was dying. Taenya, Keston, and Onas all knew it. Even Raafe knew it. Gwyn knew it, she really did. However, that did not stop Gwyn from hoping and praying to anyone listening that he would be okay.

Ms. Taenya, Mr. Onas, and Mr. Keston were all really nice and wanted to help. But Raafe? He was her friend. He didn't just treat her like a kid. Now, Gwyn *knew* she was just a kid, but she felt like so much more, here.

She had used actual, real-life magic. She had made fire and stopped the bad men from hurting everyone—*well, not everyone.*

The thought made her sad again. *If only she had not made Raafe need to save her. If only she had called to the magic sooner.*

The first time was difficult, she had to think *really* hard. The magic sang, and she listened. It was difficult at first, like quietly listening to the TV on the weekends when Mom was still asleep. The more she tried, the easier it got to hear it. She realized it was like listening to different types of music at once, but then one of them sang a little louder.

Finally, Gwyn told it what she wanted, and it had listened to *her*.

The second time was much easier.

Everything seemed to get a little clearer after that.

It took a while for her to realize exactly what she had done, and she didn't mean with the magic—she had hurt them. *Killed them.*

Gwyn sniffled.

She wished her Mom were with her. She needed her. Mom could make everything better. She always knew the right things to say. Gwyn really missed her.

Gwyn had messed up. Bad.

She didn't think Onas and Taenya would believe her when she had kidded about being a princess. Everyone pretends to be a princess back home. After that, everyone started acting so serious around her, like they would get in trouble if they said anything wrong. They did act like they would help her even more though. Raafe even said he would be her knight and protect her. Gwyn had laughed because she thought he was just kidding.

Normal people don't help random kids to find their parents absolutely anywhere they may be. The kids get thrown into an orphanage.

The people she had met were *so nice.*

Gwyn felt a tear slowly slide down her cheek.

There was something Mom would always tell Aunt Katie—fake it til you make it—and Gwyn knew she would need to...*a lot.* She just had to keep faking it, until they helped find Mom.

Gwyn could do that. She could be strong. Gwyn had magic, and it listened to her.

She was still crying when Taenya came to talk.

Gwyn knew what she was going to say.