Chapter 33

They gathered their weapons, donned their armor and prepared their spells. The time buzzed with anticipation of the coming eve. Tonight the question on if a dragon could retrieve his stolen treasure from the most powerful kingdom would be answered, as well as if Lyndis could slip past their defenses.

Lyndis steeled herself, attaching the last bit of her gear, the broach that Veledar had gifted her. At the time, she’d been thrilled, amazed at the gesture, but now? She thumbed over the metal, knowing now it’s value was priceless, his spirit seeping into her.

Whispers had already come to her of what would come after, would they really split this group and go their separate ways? Many years had she been traveling around and not met a bunch like this, she imagined they could have great fun, untold adventures, bonding with each passing day. As Arcturus went through his sword motions, chanting his oaths, she couldn’t help but smile.

The only person that she couldn’t immediately find was Natassa, the gryphon had been peering in and out the entire time during the mission discussion, but never voicing her thoughts. When Lyndis found her she was in the grass above, already dressed up in her gear, heavy with supplies.

“Think you could sneak out without saying a word?” Lyndis remarked coldly, crossing her arms. “I thought after the rescue, things had changed, but I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised, you’ve been good at taking care of yourself.”

Ears splayed under such remarks as she whirled around, “I knew you would keep a watchful eye, and not letting me slip out of your sights, and like we are connected by a thread, here you are, I still know you.” As Lyndis said nothing she lowered her head, “And as for before…I never meant to hurt you.”

“Is that right?”

“Have I not proven myself?” She marched her way over with a chirp, “I gathered your friends, rescued you from doom itself, is that not enough to say that I am sorry?”

“What happened then…If you didn’t wish to hurt me.” She brushed a hand along the gryphon’s back, letting her words keep her around for a few minutes more, a quick explanation then she’d send her away.

“My father. You know of him.”

“The shadow clan yes.”

“He was snooping around, getting closer, it was dreadfully dangerous.” She padded along, “I feared that should he get close, he would find a way to use you, hurt me, possibly even kill you. Lyndis, leaving you was one of the hardest decisions I’ve ever had to make, I regret it every day I gaze upon the lands. I remember the smiles, the laughter, the music, the light in your eyes.” She paused, averting her gaze as a phantom weight seemed to bring her down, “if I could take it back I would, but alas, I can’t.”

Resentment, frustration, anger, all the built up emotions she’d had over the years dulled for just a moment. She saw the wounded friend she’d run away with, shared part of herself with. It would not be enough to fully undo all the years apart, but it was a start. Without words she wrapped her arms around the gryphon’s neck and pulled her into a hug.

“Well.” Natassa blinked, wings coming to wrap around her, “This isn’t what I expected…”

“Should I stop?” Lyndis pressed her cheeks into feathers.

“No, just stating facts.”

For a time they said little, enjoying each others closeness and warmth. When they parted it was with a series of brushing off and light laughter.

“So where you off to then?” Lyndis gestured, “Unless that’s all for us?”

“People to see, business to attend to.” Sighed the gryphoness, wiggling her tail, “This entire fiasco will have pissed off several of my clients, but alas.” She bat her eyes, “Nothing we haven’t seen before eh?”

Padding a few more steps, she rose her head, taking a deep, composing breath. When Natassa turned, a sly smirk was about her beak, “Now, here is a thought. Why not come with me instead?”

“Excuse me?”

“Our skills together, we will be unstoppable once more.” With a chirp a wing was around her, pulling her close, “Just the two of use, seeing the world, every town a new adventure. It will be like the good old days.”

“Think I’m actually going to pass.” Lyndis remarked, gesturing to the lone knight in the field, “These lost strays need me, plus I owe them one. Havn’t met anyone like them before.”

She sighed, “I taught you to know better than to attach yourself to hopeless causes.”

“Suppose I’m feeling rather foolish then.” She followed the gryphoness, rolling a finger into her feathered chest, “How about this for a counter offer.”

The bard’s ear perked as she turned her head, sitting on her haunches as Lyndis placed herself in front of her.

“Instead of us going off together to gods knows where, how about you stay here with us?” She crossed her arms with a grin, “Fellas seemed to like ya, plus you can get into the habit of watching my ass again. It might not have the nostalgia of the good ole days, but these lads be better.” She brushed a hand against Natassa’s cheek, the gryphon pressing into it with a sigh, “These new days will be better.”

Natassa stayed silent for a moment, her eyes darting from Arcturus and back to Lyndis several times. She pulled away with a heavy sigh, “Oh Lyndis, still with the silver tongue. I’ll admit, you had me going, the temptation is certainly there. Alas, one has to be *alive* to spend any reward or gain.”

“Well, I tried.”

With a chirp the gryphon pressed in close, resting her forehead against Lyndis own. A moment passed between the old friends before they shared a nuzzle. Natassa pulled back, a softness behind her gaze, “It *was* rather tempting.”

“I know.” She replied, hand on the gryphon’s cheek.

“How about this.” She chuckled, “Put a pin on this reward of mine, I’ll find you and collect sometime in the future.”

“Is that right?”

“Consider it a, reason to stay alive.”

“To owe you coin?” She laughed, “I want to stay alive to owe you money?”

“I’d hope you’d like to *see* me darling.” Cooed Natassa, strutting away with a swish of her tail, “Now don’t go dying on me darling. Tata.”

With that she was gone, a final chirp passing through her beak before she slipped out the entrance. Lyndis dwelled on the emptiness, wondering if there had been any truth, would she see her again? She was brought back to reality by Arcturus’ hand on her shoulder.

“You alright?” There was an honesty in his voice.

She laid a hand on his, “Yea, alright, no rest for the wicked.” She laughed to hide the ache, “I’ll see her again, mark me, she always turns up when you least expect her.”