

"Syvis," My voice laced with the confusion and concern swirling inside me, "What do you mean?"

Syvis stopped and turned to me. Even without saying anything, I quickly notice her face reflecting a turbulent mixture of sentiments as though grappling with a profound inner struggle.

"Darx," She began slowly as if choosing her words carefully, "For most of my existence, I've strived to disown my heritage, living life on my terms, guided by my own principles," Syvis looked down at the ground, making an expression almost like she was in pain, "B-But these recent days have been a harsh lesson, a reminder that no matter how resolutely I attempt to sever those bonds or deny my origins, I cannot escape who I am."

I reached out and gently took Syvis's hand, trying to convey my support through touch when words seemed insufficient, "Syvis," I began, my voice steady but filled with genuine affection, "I love you just the way you are. You don't need to change for anyone, not even for this war."

Syvis opened her eyes a little more, looking slightly surprised by my words, and then a faint smile formed on her face, "It is ironic. I remember saying similar words a long time ago to someone."

As Syvis began to speak, her voice took on a distant quality, as if she were transporting herself back to those long-gone days of her past.

"After I left the territory of the Dark Elves," Syvis began, her voice soft but filled with emotion, "I wandered through the lands of the Beast-Kind for a few years. Those were trying times, Darx, as I struggled to find my own path. A few years later, I found myself in human territory, where I stayed for another couple of years until fate brought me to that pivotal moment."

Syvis's voice grew more animated as she delved further into her tale, the memories of her past intertwining with the present. The firelight danced in her eyes, reflecting a mixture of emotions as she continued her story.

"It was shortly after Agnes had undergone her awakening in the ritual, an event that would change both our lives. We were in the midst of a quest, hired to eliminate a chimera that had been terrorizing the region. I was on my own, and Agnes, well, she had her own party at the time." Syvis paused, a hint of mischief in her eyes, "The reward for that quest went to whoever managed to kill the Chimera first. So, as fate would have it, we became rivals at that moment. I was the one who found and killed the Chimera first. Sometime later, Agnes suddenly appeared in front of me, offering me to join his party. In truth, I initially declined. Every adventurer wanted to be in her party since being with a Noble S-Rank, fortune, and recognition were certain, so why would Agnes invite me? It seemed strange to me that a noble S-Rank would want me in her ranks. Especially when I knew that many nobles did not look favorably on people of my race. But Agnes was persistent, and eventually, I agreed to become a part of her party."

So that's how Syvis and Agnes met. Whenever Syvis speaks of Agnes, it's clear that she holds her in high regard. I can tell that she appreciates her. I've always heard nasty rumors about Oblivion, so I thought their leader would be the worst of all, but it seems that's not the case.

"As the years went by," Syvis began, her eyes gazing into the distance, "Agnes and I forged an unbreakable bond, and many other adventurers joined our party. We were an unstoppable force, taking on quests and facing challenges that most could only dream of. Together, we traveled far and wide. Agnes was not just a leader to us; she was our friend, our confidant. Her charisma drew people to her, and her enthusiasm for adventure was contagious." Syvis's expression darkened slightly as she reached a pivotal moment in her narrative, "But one day, everything changed. Agnes gathered us and announced her decision. She told us it was time for her to return to the capital and join Oblivion."

I couldn't help but interject, my curiosity piqued, "It seemed like she was living the life she wanted. What prompted such a decision?"

Syvis's gaze met mine, and I saw a complex mixture of emotions in her eyes, "At the time, I didn't fully understand, just like you don't understand now. Agnes's decision seemed sudden, and we were all taken aback. She had always been adamant about her desire to lead a life outside the confines of nobility, away from the strict rules and expectations. Agnes explained that, despite her dreams and desires, there were responsibilities she could not escape. She spoke of her duty to her family, her people, and her kingdom. It was a burden she had carried secretly, and it had finally come to the forefront. She disbanded our party, inviting its members to join Oblivion. Some accepted, others did not."

Syvis paused, her gaze now fixed squarely on me, her expression tinged with a mixture of sorrow and understanding, "Then it was my turn. Agnes and I were especially close, so she asked me to join her in Oblivion. At the time, I didn't fully comprehend her decision. I couldn't fathom why she would willingly return to the life she had once sought to escape. She had to leave the life she loved and the man she loved to return to a life she didn't want and marry someone she didn't love, and that was when I told her the exact words that you just told me. 'You don't need to change for anyone, not even for this war.' I questioned Agnes about her decision for hours, and it became clear that there was a depth to her situation that I hadn't grasped. At least until now. Agnes understood that Oblivion was indispensable. Despite the bad rumors about Oblivion, that guild is essential to keep the kingdom informed and control what the kingdom cannot. Agnes understood that it was her turn, and for that reason, she put aside her desires for the greater good."

"Agnes was satisfied with your decision even now?" I asked.

"Not long ago, Anes and I talked about this topic, and she seems happy with her decision. She made the best of her situation and lived as happily as she could. And more than anything, she never regretted her decision."

"So, with what you've just told me, are you implying that you'll accept the Queen's request? That you'll go to the Dark Elf territory to speak with your father and convince them to aid in the war against the demons?"

Syvis nodded solemnly, her gaze never leaving mine. "Yes, Darx. I've evaded this duty for far too long. I will request a meeting with the Queen when I get to Riledo, and if the Queen tells me that it's necessary for me to talk with my father, I will do it."

Her admission that she was willing to go to her homeland to seek help for the war against the demons was a heavy revelation. The silence stretched between us, and I felt a growing unease within me, the fear that I might lose her taking hold. I knew that among the conditions the Dark Elves had set for their assistance was that Syvis return to marry the S-Rank who had appeared there. The mere thought of it gnawed at my heart. I couldn't bear the thought of losing Syvis, not after all we'd been through, not when our love had grown so deep and enduring. With a heavy heart, I spoke, my voice tinged with a hint of desperation.

"Syvis, I can't stand the idea of losing you. The thought of you marrying someone else, especially under those circumstances, it tears me apart," My words trembled, echoing the turmoil in my soul, "I won't let you face this alone. If you go, I'll go with you to the Dark Elf territory. We'll find a way to navigate this together. I love you, Syvis, and I will be the one who marries you."

Suddenly, Syvis's eyes, glistening with tears, met mine, her expression a mix of sadness and pain. Seeing Syvis with tears in her eyes was a stark contrast to the strong, stoic woman I knew. Without a second thought, I reached out and pulled her into a tender embrace, enfolding her in my arms. The warmth of her body pressed against mine. I stroked her hair gently, trying to offer comfort.

"It's alright," I whispered, my voice soothing and filled with love, "We will always be together, Syvis. No matter what comes our way, we'll face it together."

Syvis trembled in my embrace, and she finally managed to speak, "I-I'm so sorry, Darx... I'm really sorry..."

Seconds later, Syvis and I heard a branch break, which made our heads turn towards the source of the noise, and we saw Craig's marten staring at us. The little creature stared at us, moving its head in a funny way, which made Syvis smile slightly.

Seconds later, Craig emerged from the dense forest, "Oops, am I interrupting?" Craig said, surprised to see Syvis and me hugging each other, "Shianne sent me to look for you because you two were taking so long."

"Oh, I'm sorry, we're coming back," I said.

"Okay, well, I'll get ahead," Craig said, turning to look at his marten, "Come on. I'm sure you are hungry too."

Syvis and I let go and began to grab the wood we had gathered to return to where the carriage was.

"Syvis," I began cautiously, "Is what you told me just now the reason you've seemed so distant and strange lately? I recalled you mentioning in the cave that you had something important to discuss once we escaped. Was this what you wanted to talk about?"

It seemed logical to assume that this was what had been weighing on her mind. However, Syvis's reaction was unexpected. She dropped the wood she had been holding, her eyes wide with surprise, as if my words had caught her off guard. Her initial shock left me feeling puzzled and a touch uneasy.

After a few moments, Syvis regained her composure, bending down to pick up the fallen wood. She carefully stacked it in her arms before finally responding, "N-No, Darx," She replied, her voice strangely sounding a little shaky, "What I told you just now is different from what I wanted to discuss in the cave. I-I'll explain everything when we return to the capital. "Once you listen to what I have to tell you, you can decide what you want to do."

Her words left me with a mixture of confusion and curiosity, but before I could seek further clarification, Syvis turned and began walking back toward the carriage. If this wasn't what she wanted to tell me, what else could it be that has her like this? I don't understand anything... I finished collecting the wood I had and walked behind Syvis, reaching where the others were who were waiting for us. Shianne and Harris already had everything ready, so Syvis set it on fire after placing the wood using her magic. Shianne prepared a broth for us using the rabbits Harris caught and several plants that Craig put together. Once the broth was ready, we sat at the bonfire to enjoy the food.

Between bites, I turned to Frank. I was curious about something, and Frank probably knew the answer, "Frank," I began, "Do you know anything about what happened eight months ago about the two adventurers who disappeared inside that cave? Specifically, do you know who came looking for them?"

Even though they don't seem like bad people and I trust them, I prefer not to tell them that it was Syvis and I who were lost for 8 months since I don't want more rumors about me spreading out and causing us more problems. Still, I am curious to know what happened during that time and if he has any information about my mother.

Frank paused for a moment, chewing thoughtfully on a piece of rabbit, "I heard bits and pieces," He replied, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, "About eight months ago, there were several adventurers from the capital hired to search for two lost souls trapped in that cave. The

word on the road is that it was none other than the notorious S-Rank Kase who footed the bill for that search."

At the mention of Kase's name, both Syvis and I exchanged surprised glances. This just doesn't add up. Kase... paying for the search of us? It doesn't make any sense. He loathes me, and I don't have any reason to believe he would want to help me. My thoughts raced, and I couldn't help but wonder. Why in the world would Kase be searching for us? He despises me. Unless it was Agnes who sent Kase to look for Syvis. It's the only explanation I can find.

Frank, sensing our unease, leaned forward, his weathered face etched with concern. "Well, I can't say I know for sure that's what happened," He admitted, "But that's the word on the road, my friends. In addition to that, Kase also helped in the search. In addition to that, I heard that Kase was helping the desperate mother of one of the missing people."

"T-The mother of one of them?" I asked, "What do you know about her?"

"Not much. It seems that she spent months searching for her son. Even though almost all the adventurers gave up since they searched the entire cave and found nothing, she continued searching for months, but I don't know what happened next." Frank reply.

Damn... I just hope my mother is okay.

"Darx, is something wrong? You seem very interested in the topic." Craig asked me.

"I-It's nothing. Just curiosity." I reply.

I turned to see Syvis, who was eating in silence with her gaze fixed on the flames of the bonfire. I'm sure she has hundreds of questions, too. Once we are back in the capital, we will be able to understand a little more about what happened during this time.

The night settled in, and one by one, my companions drifted into slumber, cocooned in their sleeping bags around the warm embrace of the bonfire. I couldn't help but feel that sleep would be hard for me tonight, with the weight of recent revelations and mysteries pressing upon my mind. After the bandits' rumors, we decided it was best for someone to stay guard. I volunteered for the first watch, my unease serving as an anchor that kept me tethered to wakefulness. As the others slipped into their dreams, I kept a vigilant eye on our surroundings, the crackling flames the only company to my troubled thoughts.

A few hours passed. The forest around us was an eerie canvas of shadows, the nocturnal chorus of unseen creatures serenading the night. Then, like a spark of intrigue in the darkness, I saw it—a peculiar light flickering among the trees. At first, I mistook it for a firefly, a lone sentinel of the night, but as I watched, I realized it was a lot bigger than a firefly.

The light moved with an eerie grace, weaving through the trees. Against my better judgment, curiosity stirred in me, and I ventured closer, but as I approached, the light darted further into

the forest, its glow winking out of existence. Confusion knitted my brow, and I was left standing amidst the silent, enigmatic woods, haunted by the spectral dance of that strange light. I wonder what was that.