

[Kase point-of-view]

Syvis jumped after Darx, and they were both pulled through the portal, which disappeared shortly after, leaving an eerie silence in its wake and no trace of her. Simultaneously, the biting cold wind that emanated from the portal dissipated, and the traps that had once guarded this cave seemed to deactivate, too. W-What happened? Where is she? Where did Syvis go? Is she dead? Is she gone forever? It just can't be... I-I can't lose Syvis... I'm not going to allow it!

"SYVIS!!!" I screamed, running to where the portal was, hoping to hear her voice answering me back, "SYVIS!!!"

I turned my body, scanning my surroundings, trying to find whatever would give me a clue to where Syvis was. I searched the entire area just as the Midnight Dawn members were desperately searching for Darx, but there was no sign from either of them.

"This quest turned out to be a colossal waste of time," Maya declared, her voice tinged with frustration, as her guild members started readying themselves to depart, "We're leaving. With the traps deactivated, there's no reason for us to linger here any longer."

Seeing that Maya and her guild members were preparing to leave, Celeste approached me with an irritated expression, "The Dark Elf is dead. There is no point in staying here. Let's get out of here too." She spoke, looking disinterested in Syvis' disappearance.

"SHUT UP! We will not leave this place until we find her!" I responded, shouting, starting to feel more desperate, not knowing what happened to Syvis.

I had never heard of magic that could create a portal like that. What kind of magic is it? There's no way Syvis is dead or gone forever. There must be a clue or something in this place that will open the portal again.

"The girl's right," Maya spoke, looking at me, "Those two are dead. You're not going to find anything here."

"I don't need the opinion, Beast-Kind!" I retorted dismissively, "The truce ends here. You can leave unless you want to finish the fight we left unfinished."

"Kase, stop!" Arthur intervened, "There's no point in fighting anymore."

Maya stared at me briefly before speaking, "You can waste your time looking for those two if you want. I don't care at all. However, you don't really want to restart the fight with me," Maya crossed her arms and smiled, "You talk too much, but you are undoubtedly the weakest S-Rank. You turned out to be more disappointing than I thought."

"What did you say?" I said, annoyed, making my dagger appear in my hand.

I'm not going to let this bitch laugh at me!

"I have no interest in fighting you in your current state, but if you insist, I assure you that you will die," Maya responded as she smiled, and the rest of her party laughed.

Artur, who was next to me, intervened, "Maya, you can be very confident about yourself, but let's not overlook the significant numerical disadvantage you're facing here, plus each of the adventurers on our side is of high rank," He spoke, "I remind you you're trespassing in our territory without permission. It would be wise to retreat to your own side of the border without escalating the situation further, and let us search for our missing people in peace."

"For now... We'll see how long this will be human territory," Maya said provocatively.

"Is that a threat?" Dante, who was listening to everything, spoke.

"You can take it however you want," Maya replied, "After the demons annihilate all the humans, we, the Beas-Kind, how will be the ones who will repel the demon's attack and claim what is rightfully ours."

Before I could say anything, Arthur stepped forward, positioning himself in front of me, "Kase, we can't afford to waste time on them. Syvis and Darx are missing, and our rations are running low. The time for settling scores will come, but it's not now. Let's focus on what truly matters at the moment. Or don't you want to find Syvis?"

I really wanted to kill Maya, but my mind kept wandering to find Syvis. Ultimately, I turned away, ignoring Maya and the laughter of her group, promising that the day would come when I would slice her throat. But for now, my priority was finding Syvis.

The members of Midnight Dawn, as well as those of Dark Dragons, also joined to investigate the place, looking for clues that could tell us what happened to Syvis while Maya and her group left the cave. In our party, as expected, only I, along with Arthur, Gin, and Elan, were helping search for Syvis without any luck. There were many adventurers with different sensory abilities and other types of skills useful to find someone, but there was just no trace of Syvis left. After hours of scouring every nook and cranny, the majority of the Dark Dragons members, along with Celeste, Valeria, and Diva, opted to depart the cave. Despite Arthur's initial desire to stay, he ultimately chose to accompany them, wanting to make sure they would exit the cave safely. The remaining Dark Dragons members joined the Midnight Dawn party and took a different route than ours. I spent three more days desperately scouring the cave with Gin and Elan, searching for Syvis.

"Kase, we can't continue this search anymore," Gin voiced during a break after facing a group of monsters, "Even though the cold is more tolerable and the traps are disabled, there's still an

abundance of monsters lurking around. Moreover, our remaining rations will only suffice to escape this cave."

"I know you want to find Syvis, but there's no way just the three of us can search every corner of this huge cave full of multiple paths," Elan added, "Besides that, Tricia and Amelia are waiting outside, aren't they?"

I fuck it up... my preoccupation with Syvis had caused me to overlook that the effect of my skill on Amelia has expired. I never imagined we would spend so much time locked up in this place. Fuck! It is too late now. I went through so much trouble to keep my skill on her, and now I have not only lost Syvis but also Amelia. I will need to get out as soon as possible since the last time the effect almost expired on Amelia, she went crazy. I needed to know what is happening outside urgently.

"You okay? You look dismayed." Elan asked.

"Grab your things," I responded, standing up, "We're getting out of here."

It took us a couple of days to get out of the cave, even though we took the route we came on to avoid having to clear another path full of monsters. Throughout the journey back, my mind remained unsettled, consumed by thoughts of Syvis. She was the only woman I had ever truly desired by my side, the one I could confidently say I loved was now out of my reach. I just couldn't accept that reality. I really wanted to continue looking for Syvis, but I also had the anxiety of needing to know what happened to Amelia now that she was not under the control of my skill anymore. What can I do? Maybe I can return to the capital and bring more people to help me search the entire cave. But how long will that take? If I managed to find Syvis after all that time, would she still be alive? Shit... I don't know what to do.

After what seemed like an eternity in that cave, my eyes finally saw the sun's light. My skin felt the sea breeze, and I heard the birds singing. However, I didn't have time to enjoy that. At an accelerated pace, We descended the mountain towards the coastal village to search for Tricia and find out what had happened to Amelia.

The closer I got to the village, the louder the seagulls' cries became, merging with the distant rumble of the waves. I quickened my pace, eager to reach the Inn. Stepping into the village, Gin and Elan went to take care of their own stuff. At the same time, I strode through the streets until I finally reached the Inn where Amelia and Tricia had taken up temporary residence, my heart thrumming with a mixture of anxiety and unease. I enter, scanning the dimly lit area—no sign of them.

"Room four," I muttered to myself, bounding up the stairs two at a time. My heart hammered against my ribs, a metronome to my mounting dread.

The door to their room was open, which was unusual, "Tricia? Amelia?" My voice echoed through the empty space. However, Beds were made. No luggage. No Tricia. No Amelia.

"Damn it," I yelled, raking a hand through my hair. Where could they be?

"Looking for someone?" The Innkeeper's voice came from behind me, a tinge of sorrow in his tone.

I turned, "Y-Yes, two women. One Dark hair, one Blonde. This was their room."

"Ah," He sighed, running a hand over his weary face, "Those two girls... t-there was an incident..."

"An incident?" I echoed, my throat tightening.

"Days ago," He continued hesitantly, "One girl... the blonde one, she was found dead. Murdered by her roommate, we believe."

A lead weight settled in my stomach. Tricia? Dead? It couldn't be. Did Amelia...?

"E-Exactly, what happened?" My voice cracked despite my efforts.

"Several days ago, an outrage was heard, screams and things breaking in this room. It seemed that both girls were having a heated argument. Shortly after, everything went quiet, so I thought they had calmed down; however, shortly after, the black-haired girl came down the stairs covered in blood and with a knife in her hand. The girl had a crazy look. No one dared to approach her. Shortly afterward, she fled before we could do anything, and no one saw her again in the village," He started to answer me, "Luckily, that same day, several of the adventurers who had entered the cave returned. I informed them what happened, and they took care of the girl's body."

"Tricia... Amelia..." When my control slipped away when my skill no longer tethered her...

"Are you alright, sir?" The Innkeeper reached out as if to steady me.

I needed air. I stumbled out of the room, down the stairs, and into the street. Syvis was gone, Tricia was gone, and Amelia... I had no idea where to begin. My plans, my ambitions—everything paled in the shadow of this loss.

Hours passed—or was it minutes? Time had lost its meaning. The salt air stung my throat and eyes, but the sting of failure that burned fiercer. I could not find Syvis. Tricia was dead, and Amelia was gone. Eventually, I found myself at a tavern, the raucous laughter from within an insult to my turmoil. Ignoring the festivity, I pushed through the doors, "One here," I barked at

the barkeep, slamming coins on the counter. He eyed me, then poured a generous amount. The first gulp seared, the next few blurred, and by night, I was sinking into oblivion.

"Should've kept them closer," A whisper in my head accused, "You let them slip away."

"Talking to yourself now?" The barkeep raised a brow as he refilled my glass.

"None of your business." My words were as empty as my heart.

The loss of Tricia and Amelia was painful, but losing Syvis was something that was destroying me.

"Kase!" The familiar voice cut sharper than a blade. I lifted my head, turning to see Ashalala, "Where's Syvis?" She demanded, her hands clenched at her sides.

I drained my glass and signaled for another before answering, "She's not here," I said, my voice flat, void of the charm I usually wielded so effortlessly.

"Explain. Now." Ashalala's command was laced with pain, with an expression different from her usual flirtatious expression twisted in desperation, "What I heard from the other adventurers who came out of the cave is a lie, right? You brought Syvis back as you promised, right!?"

I took a breath, feeling the weight of each word, "We were separated... in the cave. There was this portal, and—" My throat tightened around the confession, "—and she vanished."

"Vanished?" Ashalala said, sounding more angry than confused.

"Into thin air," I whispered.

"Damn you, Kase! You promised me!" Ashalala raged, her expression contorting further as tears spilled over her flushed cheeks, "You assured me you would keep her safe! We had a deal! Now, what am I supposed to tell her father?"

"Believe me, I—" But what could I say? That I wished it were different? That the guilt was eating me alive?

"Save your excuses," She spat, "You always think you're above everything and everyone. Look where that got us." Her voice broke on the last word, a sob ripping through her anger.

I reached out, but she recoiled, swatting my hand away, "Don't touch me!" She cursed me then, "May you suffer as we have suffered because of you."

With that, Ashalala turned and fled into the night, leaving me to drown in a sea of guilt and licor. I doubt this will be the last time I see her, but that doesn't matter to me now.

The next day, I found myself confined to a room at the Inn, suffering from the hangover but more so from Syvis's absence. The following morning, the confines of the Inn felt suffocating, prompting a swift decision. Before the sun could fully rise, I resolved to depart from this place. Meeting up with Elan and Gin, we embarked on the journey back to the capital, a journey that spanned several weeks.

Already in the capital, I knew what I had to do, but it was not something I really wanted to do. Agnes must be aware of everything; I'm sure she is waiting for me. I know very well that Agnes's future plans with the guild depended quite a bit on Syvis and not just that. I know how much Agnes adored Syvis.

Before I even sought rest at my mansion following the arduous journey, I made my way straight to the guild building. Standing before the Guild Master's office door, I knocked firmly, though Agnes remained silent. Even so, I know very well that she is inside. I opened the door, and there she was, sitting in front of her desk amidst a sea of documents, her focus entirely consumed by the task at hand, her gaze fixed upon the parchment before her.

However, I noticed something strange about Agnes's appearance. Agnes is a thin woman, but now she looks thinner than usual. Her skin is unnaturally pale, and her hands are trembling slightly as she holds the parchment. It was evident at a glance that Agnes was not in good health, and the gravity of her condition seemed to extend beyond the mere weight of the news regarding Syvis.

"Agne-" I try to speak.

"What are you doing here?" Agnes asked me without turning to see me.

Agnes's question surprised me since I had no idea what was going on in her head, "...I came to tell you what happened in the cave." I answered, my voice not sounding confident.

"Arthur arrived in the city yesterday. He already told me everything in detail," Agnes said, still without turning to look at me, "Now I ask you again. What are you doing here?"

"What do you expect me to tell you? Do you think I am okay? What happened to Syvis is also breaking me! I tried to look for her for several days, but there was nothing, no clue or trace, that would tell me what had happened to her," I responded, raising my voice.

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Agnes hit the desk with her fists and finally turned to see me looking angry.

"THE ONLY THING I ASKED OF YOU IS THAT YOU KEEP HER SAFE!!" Agnes yelled, sounding furious, "I DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR EXCUSES OR WHAT YOU FEEL!"

"What could I do? Syvis suddenly jumped into the portal behind stupid Darx." I reply.

"Don't make me repeat myself! I don't care about the circumstances," Agnes continued, looking at me menacingly, "I have no use for you here. Go back to the cave and scour every corner, turn over every stone if necessary. Arthur told me that time inside that portal seemed to pass more slowly, so there is hope she is okay. Bring Syvis back!"

"That was my intention all along. I've returned because I'll need more people," I replied firmly.

"Oblivion has the necessary resources," Agnes reiterated her voice firm, "Gather any available members and enlist aid from allied guilds. Head north of the city and recruit all those mediocre adventurers, no matter their skill level, who do any kind of work for some coins. I want you out of the city by tomorrow afternoon," After saying that, Agnes returned her gaze to her documents, "Now go away. Just seeing you puts me in a bad mood."

Frustration boiled within me as I stared at Agnes, but I knew arguing further would be futile. Without another word, I turned and left her office, determined to carry out her orders. Enlisting the help of Oblivion's staff, I ensured that preparations were underway as per Agnes's instructions. Exhausted both physically and mentally, I exited the guild building and made my way to my mansion, eager to rest before the next day's tasks.

Now that I think about it, Arthur and the rest left the cave days before us. Why did they arrive in the city only yesterday? Bahh... I don't care...

I thought my day would soon end, but when I arrived at the outskirts of the mansion outside the gate, there was someone who I didn't expect waiting for me, "Ilene!?" I spoke in a low voice.

It's true. I still have Ilene...

I exited the carriage, and Ilene quickly came closer, dressed in casual clothes, her expression worn and fatigued.

"Kase, what exactly happened to my son? TELL ME!" Ilene begged, her dark eyes filled with worry and desperation, "You were there, right!? Tell me it's a lie and that Darx is okay, PLEASE!"

I hesitated momentarily, feeling a mix of guilt and empathy for Ilene. I took a deep breath and told her everything we experienced in the cave – how Darx disappeared, just like Syvis, when they entered the portal, and the portal vanished.

Ilene listened intently, her hands shaking as she clung to every word I spoke. When I finished, she looked up at me with tears streaming down her face, "N-No... I can't accept that... D-Darx is fine... I'm going to bring him back..."

Ilene, shaking, turned around, almost seeming like she was going to run out of the city right now in search of Darx, so I grabbed her hand, restraining her, "I won't let you do it alone," I said, my voice softening, "I'll help you look for them." I told her I would accompany her to the cave and also hire more adventurers to explore the entire place.

Ilene was in shock, repeating Darx's name multiple times. I wonder when she found out.

"Everything will be ready to leave tomorrow afternoon," I said, putting my hand on her shoulder, but Ilene seemed in a trance, not even noticing it, "In the portal, time passes differently, so there is a possibility that we will bring them back. We will explore every corner of the cave. I promise you!"

Ilene stood frozen for a moment before finally looking back at me. Her eyes red and swollen, she nodded her head slowly, "I understand... I'll be ready..." Ilene's sad look suddenly changed to a determined one, "I'm going to bring my son back!"

Ilene turned around and started to walk away. I tried to call her several times but was ignored.

"Ilene, this time, I won't let you go," I said, looking at her.

I entered the mansion, going directly to my room on the second floor, but passing through the windows that overlook the rear garden, I saw next to the flowers the figure of someone that I did not want to see now.

What is my father doing here?

I descended the steps, my footsteps echoing softly against the marble floor. Exiting through the back door, I strolled down the long, wide hallway of the back patio, adorned with a well-kept garden on either side. Eventually, I reached the spot where my father stood, his gaze fixed upon the blooming flowers, "What are you doing here?" I asked.

"Do I need a reason to come see my son?" My father responded, keeping his gaze on the flowers without turning to see me, "After all, you were away for a long time."

"...I don't have time to entertain your farces. We both know you wouldn't be here unless you weren't up to something, so just tell me what you want." I retorted, my tone laced with impatience and skepticism.

After smiling slightly, my father spoke, "It's a shame what happened to your ex-fiance. A young noblewoman should not die like that."

"You've come to offer your condolences!? How thoughtful of you. Now, spare me the theatrics and get to the point of your visit," I retorted, my patience wearing thin.

"But it's better this way, don't you think?" My father's voice rang out as he finally turned to face me, his signature smile lighting up his features—a grin he tends to make after closing a good business deal, "After all, Tricia ceased to be relevant once you attained S-Rank status."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, my voice carrying a note of suspicion, unsure what he was referring to.

"Oh, please, Kase. I taught you better than that," He interjected, his smile fading, replaced by a stern expression, "Tricia was merely a convenience when you were just my illegitimate son. Her value lay solely in the fact that she was the only noblewoman who would agree to marry you due to her family's terrible financial difficulties. It was challenging to secure a noble match for my bastard son, and they knew it. Her family wanted me to save them from bankruptcy, and in exchange, they offered their daughter in marriage, but more importantly, they still possessed valuable land that could be of use to me, so I accepted since it was the best I could get from you."

I already knew that. To my father, I was always just a pawn he could exploit for his convenience. Before my rise to S-Rank status, he used to entertain the idea of allowing me to ascend as the head of the family, but it was all a game for him. Any supposed gestures of goodwill towards me were merely attempts to irritate my older brother. It's no secret that my father has a penchant for manipulating others. The real challenge lies in deciphering how he intends to do so.

"However, now that you're an S-Rank, that marriage was a waste," My father continued, "Luckily, Tricia disappeared off the map on her own, sparing us a great deal of trouble."

Could it be...?

"Did you have anything to do with her death?" I asked, becoming suspicious.

"Not at all," He responded, smiling cynically, "I was planning to free you from Tricia, but Amelia beat me to it. I suppose Amelia got tired of being Tricia's toy."

So, he also knew the dynamic between Amelia and Tricia. I had already surmised that my father had bribed my own servants as spies to keep tabs on me, "You seem well-informed about everything that's going on around me." I reply.

"Indeed. After all, information is the most potent weapon," My father replied, his tone carrying sarcasm, "It's a lesson I've instilled in you since you were a child. Unfortunately, your brother was better than you in that regard. That's why he and his mother are still alive after you tried to get rid of them."

"They tried to do the same thing to me multiple times, so I thought it was time for them to go through the same thing, but as you said. They managed to escape." I said, tired of playing

along, "But I'm getting tired of this. This is the last chance I'm giving you. Tell me why you came or I'll leave. I don't have much time."

"I only come to advise you and prevent you from doing something stupid," My father said, locking eyes with me, "I heard that you plan to accompany Ilene to look for her son. You are very similar to me, so I know what you are looking for, but let me tell you that even though Ilene is a very beautiful woman, she is from a lower class and much older than you, but more than that, Ilene doesn't bring anything to the table. Even if you use potions to keep Ilene young and beautiful over the years, you will soon realize that choosing a woman who will benefit you and take you to even higher places is better. If you want Ilene as a concubine, that's fine, but don't even think about anything more than that."

He is more well-informed than I thought if he already knows something I just discussed this afternoon, "I'm not like you and as you said it yourself. I'm now an S-Rank, and soon, I'll also be the guild master of Oblivion, so why should I listen to you?" I retort, my tone firm, "I know what I want and won't let anyone tell me what I must do."

"Think with your head and not what's in your pants, son," My father continues, "You're in a position that can elevate our family name to unprecedented heights," My father smiled shady again, his twisted face reflecting his greed, "Isn't it time to consider ascending to royalty? Despite being a bastard, as my son, you hail from one of the most esteemed noble houses. As an S-Rank adventurer and a future Guild Master, I'm confident we can broker an agreement with the Queen to marry the Princess."

"I won't do it!" I responded sharply.

"So what's your plan? You've already lost your two women, and now you're looking to heal your mother complex with Ilene?" My father responded, his smile fading away, replaced by a tone of irritation, "Let me give you some advice that took me a long time to understand. Even if you don't want to accept it, you and I are very similar. And people like us are not meant to be loved, no matter what you do or how hard you try. People will approach you with kindness and a smile on their faces, but always with a hidden intention, trying to get something from us. For that reason, I recommend that you don't make your decisions with your heart and, on the contrary, be the one who is always in power to get what you want from others."

"Is that what you did with my mother? Did you take her by force?" I reply, "Too bad you lost interest in her; otherwise, you wouldn't have left her to her fate when the village was destroyed. You escaped on your own, leaving her to die there."

"I-I have my own mistakes, but I'm not here to discuss them. I-" My father was trying to say, showing shock at my words.

"ENOUGH!" I replied, fed up with this conversation, "As I already told you, I will do whatever I want. I don't need your advice," I turned around and started walking back to the mansion, "If you

don't want to make me the family head, I don't care anymore. I can achieve anything I want by myself. I don't need you anymore."

As I left, my father said a few last words before I walked away, "You may have it all now, but a single bad decision can take it all away from you. Don't forget that."

He is wrong. I don't have everything now. Without Syvis, Amelia, and Tricia, I feel like I've lost a lot of what I desire. However, a bright future still awaits me. I promise not to make the same mistake with Ilene. Ilene will be mine! I will also do everything possible to bring Syvis back! And in the end, I will have everything!