

## 4 Days Left Until Reckoning

The sun cast a warm glow over the Midnight Dawn dining room, bathing everything in golden light. I sat alone at a small table, picking at my breakfast while lost in thought. Throughout the night, I struggled to shake off my thoughts about Syvis's unexpected absence. Knowing Syvis as someone punctual and responsible, it puzzled me why she failed to appear for our prearranged meeting, which is why I am quite concerned. I just hope she's okay.

As soon as I finish my breakfast, I should go look for her and hopefully find her outside her guild.

"G-Good morning, Darx," All of sudden, Syvis's voice broke through my reverie.

"Ah? M-Morning," I responded, surprised to see Syvis here.

She hesitated for a moment before making her way toward me, her eyes locked on the floor. She took a seat across from me, her usual grace marred by a subtle hesitance.

"Where were you last night?" I asked, trying to sound casual, but the tension was palpable.

Syvis shifted uncomfortably in her chair and hesitated momentarily, not meeting my eyes, "I'm sorry. I fell asleep," She replied, her voice unsteady, "I was just so exhausted after visiting the castle and a meeting I had with Agnes." Her slender fingers fidgeted with a napkin in her lap, avoiding my gaze.

I raised an eyebrow, watching as she tugged at a napkin. Her body language screamed discomfort, and I could tell there was something she wasn't telling me. My heart clenched at the thought of her hiding things from me. Am I thinking too much? Maybe my thing with the church and Harold's death is making me paranoid, and I'm overthinking. Considering the lack of rest we've had recently, it was understandable for her to be tired. A sense of relief washed over me, realizing that my worries about her well-being might have been unfounded. I was just glad to see her okay.

"You should rest more. Your eyes still look tired." I reply.

"You're probably right..." She murmured, finally looking up at me, "I've just had a lot on my mind lately."

Our conversation halted as Rania approached, placing a steaming mug of coffee in front of Syvis. The rich scent wafted toward me, momentarily distracting me from my worries. Syvis wrapped her hands around the mug, staring into the coffee.

"Thanks for your concern, Darx," She said softly, a small, sad smile gracing her lips, "I'll be fine. I promise."

"Alright," I conceded, "Just don't hesitate to talk to me if you need to."

Syvis nodded, raising the mug to her lips and taking a slow sip.

"You seem...distracted," I said, seeing Syvis's face that looked like she was thinking about something. Her expression had some kind of uncertainty that I had never seen before. It was unlike her to be so evasive, especially with me, "Are you sure it's just fatigue? You appear troubled by something. If there's something you need to talk about, I'm here. You can trust me." I inquired, expressing my concern.

"You already have enough problems without me bringing you more," Syvis said with a strange, sad expression.

"Syvis, for me, the most important is you. If you are in trouble, I would put everything aside to do everything possible to help you. You are always helping me and caring about me, so I hope you let me do the same for you." I said, looking Syvis in the eyes.

"I know, Darx. It's just... actually, there is something I wanted to tell you," Syvis finally admitted, taking a deep breath, steadying herself before continuing, "The day we arrived, and yesterday, I went to see Agnes, and I noticed she seemed... unwell. She brushed it off when I asked. She said it was just fatigue and nothing to worry about. Agnes can be stubborn, and it was only yesterday that Agnes finally revealed to me what is happening to her. S-She's not doing well. Her health is deteriorating quickly."

"Unwell? Is she sick?" I asked, my eyes fixed on Syvis's face.

Syvis hesitated momentarily, her fingers tightening around the mug, "She looked pale and exhausted as if she hadn't slept in days. Her hands were trembling, too. I've never seen her like that before."

"Did she say what's wrong?" "Can't your potions help her?" I asked.

Syvis shook her head, "There is no known potion or magic that can cure what she has, I'm afraid. Agnes is still acting as Guild Master, and her current condition doesn't prevent her from exercising her position, but from what she told me, her illness will only allow her to live 2 or 3 more years."

As I watched Syvis, her vulnerability and genuine concern for Agnes tugged at my heartstrings. I reached across the table, placing my hand over hers, offering what little comfort I could provide. Agnes had been a friend to Syvis for many years. I can't even imagine how Syvis is feeling right now.

"What does Agnes plan to do from now on?" I asked.

"From what she told me, she intends to remain as the guild master for a few more weeks to settle some of the guild's affairs. After that, she plans to retire and make the most of the limited time she has left with her family," Syvis explained with a somber and distressed expression.

The weight of Agnes's decision seemed to weigh heavily on Syvis. The most frustrating aspect was my inability to help Syvis and change the situation.

While we were both silent, the realization hit me. With Agnes retiring soon due to her illness, she wouldn't be able to participate in the upcoming war against the demons. Not having one of the S-Ranks in war will be a hard blow for humanity. This also implied that Kase would likely step into the role of the new guild master of Oblivion.

Syvis looked up at me, "Agnes means a lot to me, and I would like to keep an eye on her and offer our support in any way I can. However, now that I have spoken to Queen Zara and told her of my intentions to go see my father in the territory of the Dark Elves, I cannot simply go back on my word."

It's true. Syvis also had her meeting with the Queen yesterday, where Syvis would tell the Queen about her and my intention to go see her father. It's one of the reasons I wanted to talk to her last night.

"What do you plan to do then?" I asked, "Will you cancel the trip?"

"No. Although it pains me to leave Agnes in her condition, the most important thing now is to get allies in the war. When I told Agnes about my trip, she thought the same, and she herself asked me not to stop for her, so the plan continues." Syvis said, trying to sound confident in her answer, but I could see the doubt on her face.

"I see. I don't know Agnes personally, but that answer is what I imagined from the Agnes you've told me so much about. She seems to be a great woman and good guild master." I reply.

Syvis smiled slightly, "She is!"

"Is it true, what happened in the castle?" I asked.

Syvis continued, her voice more composed now, "I met with Queen Zara to inform her of my intention to go see my father seeking help in the fight against the demons. Queen Zara accepted my proposal and was grateful for my willingness to help," Syvis explained, "However, she requested that we delay our departure for four days."

"Uh? What's the reason for that?" I leaned forward slightly in anticipation of what she had to say.

"The Queen is awaiting her daughter, the Princess, from her journey to the territory of the beast-kind. She believes the information she will bring might prove beneficial for us on our upcoming trip."

"Ah, I see," I mulled over this new piece of information, feeling the pressure of time bearing down on me. I would have less than three days to find answers from the church before leaving the capital again. Still, I nodded, understanding the Queen's reasoning, "If it can really help us, then waiting a few more days seems reasonable."

"Exactly," Syvis agreed, her eyes briefly meeting mine before darting away again, "So, we'll wait here in the capital for now. In fact, these days will give you and me time to resolve pending issues."

"Alright," I reply.

These next few days would be crucial. With only a few days left before our departure, I needed to make use of this time to find answers.

"Take care, Darx," Syvis said softly, standing up and giving me a small smile, "I'm off to visit Agnes, and there's another matter I need to attend to."

"Of course," I said, trying to sound reassuring, "Take care, and let's keep each other updated."

"Will do," She affirmed, standing up and giving me a brief Kiss.

"By the way, what is this other matter you have? Anything I can help with?" I asked moments after our lips parted.

"Ah!? N-No... I-I'll explain to you later." Syvis responded nervously, almost making me think she said something she shouldn't have.

"O-Okay," I said while looking at her as she was leaving the dining room.

As she disappeared from view, I couldn't shake the nagging feeling that something wasn't quite right with Syvis. At that last moment, her behavior seemed off. In the quiet moments that followed Syvis's departure, I found myself lost in thought. I have too many things to think about that I'm starting to doubt everything.

Deciding to clear my head, I made my way to Oliver's Inn. As expected, once again, as I walked through the streets, I felt watched, but no matter how much I tried to find who was following me, I couldn't find it. Once inside the Inn, the cozy atmosphere of the establishment enveloped me as I entered. The smell of freshly baked bread filled the air, and soft music played in the

background, creating an inviting ambiance. I spotted Oliver sitting at a corner table and approached him with a nod.

"Hey, Darx! Good to see you, man," Oliver's cheerful voice called out to me, gesturing for me to sit down.

"Likewise, Oliver," I replied, taking a seat across from him. "How's business going?"

"Unfortunately, not as good as before. With so many adventurers going north and people heading south, the clientele has dropped considerably," Oliver said, his eyes reflecting a mix of nostalgia and worry, "With everything going on, there's been a lot to think about."

"Tell me about it," I sighed.

Oliver leaned back in his chair, crossing his arms over his chest, "Darx, there's something I need to tell you," Oliver said, his cheerful demeanor shifting to one of concern, "Darx, I'm planning to undergo the adventurer ritual. "

"UH?" What Oliver said made my eyes widen in surprise, "Are you sure? "What is the reason for this sudden decision?"

"With the lack of adventurers around who used to protect this place from Fabe and other bad people, now that most have been sent north, I can't just sit idly by while Emma and our daughter are at risk," Oliver said with determination.

Oliver is right. His concern for his family's safety should be his priority. In the face of diminished surveillance, courtesy of a scarcity of adventurers and guards, coupled with Fabe's lingering threat, Oliver's resolve to become an adventurer is a logical and necessary choice. It is a difficult alternative, but I understood why he felt the need to take action.

"Oliver, I know how much you care about your family, but Fabe is dangerous. You need to be cautious," I advised, my voice laced with concern.

"I know, Darx," He nodded solemnly, "But I can't just stand by and do nothing. I need to protect them. Besides, I'm not interested in making a living as an adventurer. I just want to have the strength to protect this place and my family if Fabe ever shows up around here again," Oliver said in a confident voice, "Also, Fabe is an E-Rank. If I manage to get a rank equal to or a little higher, it will be enough."

"Of course," I agreed, understanding the weight of his decision, "Just promise me you'll be careful, alright? And if I can help, don't hesitate to look for me."

"Thanks, Darx," Oliver replied with a grateful smile, and his eyes filled with resolve, "Your support means a lot to me."

As we continued our conversation, I couldn't help but feel a sense of camaraderie with Oliver. We both had people we cared about, and the desire to protect them drove us to make difficult choices. Oliver and I spent the entire afternoon talking about many things. The dialogue spanned a spectrum of emotions, delving into the sorrowful tales of my mother's entanglements with Kase or about Fabe, interspersed with the brighter moments revolving around Oliver's family and Syvis. And even stories from our childhood. Stories that made us remember Amelia. Because of everything that has happened, maybe I shouldn't get involved in Amelia's life, but I can't help my concern for her. I really hope she's okay wherever she is.

After sunset, more people began arriving at the Inn. Bidding farewell to Oliver to let him work, I left the warmth of the Inn and ventured back into the bustling streets.

Before returning to the guild, I thought I would stop by the Oblivion building. We don't agree to meet later today, but I want to see her. With some luck, maybe I'll see Syvis outside. When I arrived at the outskirts of her guild, as expected, Syvis was not around, and there was no point in asking people from Oblivion to tell her that I was looking for her since, as is customary, they would only chase me away.

I waited for a while until I gave up. However, when I was about to leave, an elegant carriage stopped in front of the guild doors, and soon after, Syvis came out from the carriage. As soon as I saw her, I couldn't help but smile. I was about to run to her, but behind Syvis, Agnes got out of the carriage, which made me stop. However, my shock was when Kase exited the carriage behind Agnes. The three walked to the guild's entrance and disappeared behind its doors.

I know well that Syvis and Kase are in the same guild, and I know well that Agnes was with them. In theory, what I saw shouldn't be strange, but still... Seeing Kase around Syvis makes my blood boil.

"Fuck!"

Now in a bad mood, I walked back to my guild.

The cool evening breeze brushed against my skin as I made my way back to the Midnight Dawn guild, still feeling the anger of seeing Kase close to Syvis. Upon reaching the guild, I saw a few guild members at the tables sharing tales of their quests over drinks and food. Then, I spotted Neku in a secluded corner of the guild hall. She gestured for me to join her, her expression with an air of secrecy. Intrigued, I approached her, wondering if she had been waiting for me.

"Hey!" I said in greeting, raising my hand.

"Follow me," Neku whispered, her voice barely audible above the distant hum of conversations; without saying anything else, she started to walk silently through the guild halls.

With a swift nod, I followed her, feeling a mix of curiosity and unease, "Where are we going?" I asked as I followed her, but she only replied once we reached one of the most desolate areas.

"Darx," She began, her voice low and conspiratorial, "I need your help with something."

"Ah? With what?" I asked cautiously, already sensing that this would be no ordinary request.

Neku leaned in closer, her gaze sharp and intense, "I need your assistance in stealing a medallion from the church."

"What? You want to steal something from the church? I thought you were a church believer." I reply.

"I am not a believer of the church. I am a believer in our goddess, Imris. They are two different things," Neku stated, sounding angry, "If you help me, in exchange, I can reveal information about Harold's death and other church secrets that I know may interest you."

The suddenness of her proposal caught me off guard, and I felt a knot of unease settle in my stomach. How much does Neku know? Why is she doing this? Can I really trust her? And more importantly, what does she know about me? She knows that there is information that I am looking for from the church and Harold.

"Why me? Why are you asking me for help?" I asked more seriously.

"Trust me," Neku insisted, her voice growing more urgent, "I can't reveal more than that, but trust me, Darx, the knowledge we both can win from this can be worth the risk. Besides, if what I believe is true, you are the only person who could help me with this."

"What? What do you mean by that?" I asked, confused by her words.

"If you want the answer to that, you'll have to help me," Neku replied, looking into my eyes.

"Stealing from the church... That's a dangerous game, Neku," I said, my voice wavering slightly, "You know the consequences if we're caught."

"Of course I do," She replied, her eyes narrowing, "But some truths are worth the risk, don't you think?"

"...Are you sure about this, Neku?" I questioned, trying to gauge the sincerity of her offer, "What's so important about this medallion that it's worth risking our lives?"

"I can't tell you now," Neku spoke her statement and fell into a contemplative silence, her countenance revealing no discernible emotion.

My thoughts raced as I considered the implications of her request. On one hand, uncovering secrets that could give me insight into the church was a tempting prospect. On the other hand, involving myself in such a theft would jeopardize my chances of finding answers from the church in another way. However, this may be my only option, considering the little time I have.

"Give me some time to think about it," I finally said, my voice wavering with uncertainty.

"Very well," Neku conceded, her eyes narrowing slightly, "But I can only give you until tomorrow. After that, the opportunity will be gone."

With those words, Neku left as she disappeared into the shadows of the guild. Could Neku really help me? And what will that medallion be that she seems to want so much?

I returned to my room in the guild, my footsteps echoing through the dimly lit halls. Once inside my room, closing the door behind me, I sat on my bed, my gaze fixed on the floor, deep in thought, contemplating whether I should help Neku or not. The potential consequences and benefits danced in my mind like a chaotic whirlwind.

"Is it worth it?" I whispered to the empty room, my voice barely audible, "Or maybe it's a trap...? It's no secret that Neku has a strange relationship with the church."

I have so many things to think about and do that I'm starting to have trouble focusing on myself. Even though I rested and enjoyed today, it wasn't a good idea to laze around all day.

With a heavy sigh, I lay back on the bed, staring up at the wooden beams above me. Somehow, my thoughts drifted to the goddess Imris and the strange new skill she had granted me. Despite the skill being a recent acquisition and which I have only used once, it felt oddly familiar, like an old friend returning after a long absence or as if it had always been there, waiting for me to tap into it. This is a very strange sensation.

"[Goddess's Gift of Mastery]," I murmured, closing my eyes and concentrating on the power that now is part of me.

The skill allows me to steal one skill at a time from other adventurers simply by knowing the name of the skill and touching the skill's user while activating my own. It really is an incredible power. However, I have to be careful who I use it on since the person who steals it will lose the skill forever. It's a power that I can only use on enemies. In addition, the fact that I can only steal one skill at a time means I need to be cautious, as acquiring a new skill means parting ways with the previous one, losing it permanently.

At the moment, the skill I stole from the bandit, "[Harmonic Drain]," seems like an outstanding skill, allowing me to constantly heal with the damage I deal. Until I improve [Goddess's Gift of Mastery] to be able to steal more than one skill at a time, I see no reason to copy a different skill.



Nonetheless, I can still use the other effect of [Goddess's Gift of Mastery]. This second effect allows me to copy up to two extra skills without the risk of stealing the other person's skill, though these copies are weaker than the original.

As I lay there, contemplating my newfound power, I sensed it was still developing, evolving. I could sense that soon enough, I might be able to steal multiple skills simultaneously. And that's not all. I realized that my encounter with the goddess Imris had also affected my overall abilities. My mana control had become effortless as if some invisible barrier that once held me back had been shattered. Even my basic combat skills seemed sharper and more refined. And not to mention my physical strength. I never imagined that I would have a level of strength and speed as I have now. At the moment, I feel stronger than ever; however, at the same time, I... I have a feeling of being incomplete. I feel like the goddess gave me incredible power, but at the same time, she took something important away from me.

It's tough to understand.

As I lay on my bed, staring at the ceiling. My thoughts were a tangled mess, entwined with questions and doubts about Neku's offer, the church, Harold, the danger that Fabe could mean to Oliver and his family, Syvis's behavior, and my own powers. As I was falling asleep, almost on the verge of losing consciousness, I opened my eyes slightly for a moment and saw a shadow in my window. I closed my eyes again and then opened them abruptly when I realized what I saw. When I looked at the window again, I saw how the shadow moved away. I quickly stood up and ran to the window, but when I looked out, there was nothing. Even more so, my room is on the third floor, so it doesn't make sense that someone was outside my window.

Could it be that I imagined something because I was half asleep? Or maybe a bird? That's strange...