

The morning light seeped through the dense forest as we packed our belongings and prepared to resume our journey to the capital. The strange incident of the previous night was still fresh in my mind, and I couldn't help but share it with my companions.

Curiosity painted their expressions as we settled into the carriage, and I began recounting the night's events, "I saw a strange light," I started, "Like a firefly, but much larger, almost the size of a bird. It danced among the trees and then vanished into the forest's depths. I had never seen anything like it."

Craig, who had taken over the watch after me, put his hand on his chin, "I didn't see anything unusual during my turn on watch."

Syvis, who had had her eyes closed while I talked, opened her eyes and spoke, "That description sounds remarkably similar to what fairies look like."

Surprised, I leaned forward, urging her to explain further, "Fairies? Are you saying I saw a fairy last night?"

Syvis nodded solemnly, "When I was younger and traveling through the territory of the dwarves, I encountered a fairy that bore a striking resemblance to what you described."

Shianne, her eyes alight with curiosity, spoke up, "Fascinating. From what I know, fairies are incredibly rare to see. How do they look up close?"

"My encounter with the fairies was brief," Syvis replied, "While we were walking through those forests within the territory of the dwarves, they tried to trick us into tramps and some illusion magic tricks. As Darx says, we could see them in the distance, flying between the trees, emanating a bright light, while we could listen to their tiny giggle, hoping that we would fall into some of their tricks. After a while, when they realized we were not falling for their tricks, they got lost in the depths of the forests. The closest one I saw, I noticed, looked like a tiny woman with wings similar to those of butterflies."

Craig, eager to learn more, asked, "Fairies seem interesting. Why are they so rare to see?"

Frank shared a tidbit of information, "My father once told me that most fairies died long ago, and the few that remain found refuge in the dwarves' territory."

I had already heard something about that. When I was in the village of [Yarrin] and talked to Adam, my interest in fairies began. I still vividly remember the story Adam told me, which is one reason I decided to keep my distance from the church. I didn't expect what I saw at night would be a fairy. Given what has happened to me lately, I no longer know whether to think it was a coincidence or if there is something else behind it.

Craig directed his question to Syvis, "Is what Frank says true?"

Syvis nodded and began to unravel the grim history of the fairies and harpies, "When the war between demons and other races began, the territory of the fairies and harpies happened to be right between the demon and human borders. They found themselves trapped in the midst of the conflict. The ancient forest they called home was set ablaze during the war, and their territories were eventually conquered by the demons. The survivors, the few fairies that remained, sought refuge by heading south, desperate to escape the ravages of war."

"Do some fairies also reside in human territory?" I asked.

Syvis responded straightforwardly, "No, human territory should be devoid of fairies. They harbor an intense resentment towards both demons and humans, blaming them for the destruction of their ancestral forests. It's exceedingly rare for a fairy to venture into these lands."

Given what Syvis just told us, it makes me wonder more about what that fairy was doing in these parts. As the conversation about fairies lingered in our minds, we continued our journey in the carriage for another two to three hours. Then, suddenly, without warning, Frank brought the carriage to a screeching halt, causing us to jolt forward in our seats. Craig, his voice tinged with alarm, demanded an explanation from Frank.

Before Frank could respond, Syvis, with a swift movement, opened her book. I watched her create a magical shield that materialized in front of the carriage just in time to intercept the incoming threat. Moments later, the loud sound of fireballs colliding with the protective barrier resonated through the air.

It became clear that we were under attack. In a frenzy, we clambered out of the carriage. Once outside, Craig's voice laced with urgency, "Frank, get inside the carriage quickly!"

"HYAAH! Y-YES"

Frank quickly did as Craig told him and got into the carriage.

Suddenly, arrows zip through the air, accompanied by another volley of fireballs arced toward us.

"Darx!" Syvis said, turning to look at me, and I knew well what she wanted me to do.

"[WATER BARRIER]"

Wasting no time. I conjured my water barrier, which enveloped the carriage and all of us inside. The half-sphere of water spun rapidly, intercepting the deadly arrows and dousing the fiery projectiles.

W-What? The power of my water barrier had grown exponentially since the last time I had used it. Is it because I'm a B-Rank now? I managed to make my water barrier almost instantly and large enough to cover the entire carriage without much effort. And more than that, I can feel that it is much more resistant than before. It is astonishing! I can see that Syvis is also surprised. Although she hasn't said anything, I realize she is as surprised as I am just by her expression since she knows well the level of my abilities.

After the barrage of arrows and fireballs ceased, I gradually dispersed the watery shield, revealing the grim scene before us. A group of bandits, their faces twisted with malevolence, surrounded a devastated carriage. Three lifeless bodies lay sprawled in a macabre tableau near the wreckage. My gaze then shifted to a young boy, his face smeared with blood, his trembling hands gripping a sword as he stood protectively before an older man, a woman, and two young girls who clung to each other in terror.

As I scanned my surroundings, my heart sank at the sight before me. There were around fifteen bandits, their faces concealed by tattered cloths and their eyes filled with a sinister glint. It was clear that these ruthless individuals were relishing in the chaos they had created. The sheer joy they derived from causing pain and suffering was evident in the twisted smiles that adorned their faces as they mercilessly attacked innocent people.

"Let's kill those bastards!" Craig said, looking quite angry.

Shianne nodded in agreement, "We have to help them. Those children shouldn't have to witness such violence."

Syvis's fingers tightened around the leather-bound book she held, ready to unleash her magic once more, "Darx, can you create a barrier around the survivors? I don't want them to be hurt by accident since they are very close to the bandits."

"Leave it to me!" I reply.

Without hesitation, I took the lead. I ran against the bandits while simultaneously creating a water barrier around the survivors, encasing them in a protective shell. A bandit tried to react by stretching out his hand, trying to put it inside my water barrier, but his arm was fractured as soon as he touched my barrier because of how fast the water was spinning.

Some of the bandits, armed with swords and filled with overconfidence, rushed towards me, but to me, they seemed slow and clumsy in their movements. With incredible ease, I sidestepped the first attack of one of the bandits and, without even giving them time to understand what had happened almost simultaneously, swiftly struck down two of them with my two swords.

As I stood there, panting and adrenaline coursing through my veins, I couldn't help but wonder if these new abilities were a result of my recent promotion to B-Rank or if there was something

else at play. My strength, reflexes, and even my mana felt far superior to how they had been before I entered the cave. Right now, I feel strong.

Behind me, Syvis stepped forward. Her book crackled with flames as she conjured a massive ball of fire, ready to unleash its destructive power upon our adversaries. The smiles of the bandits began to disappear as they saw how a huge fireball was about to fall on them. The closest ones tried to retreat, but Syvis showed them no mercy, and the fireball fell on several of them. The explosion sent them scrambling in all directions, knocking a few of them out with the impact while others were screaming because the flames were burning their bodies. The screams of agony that could be heard among the flames seemed to be enough for the rest of the bandits to understand the difference between them and us. However, their reaction was slow.

Craig had already reached for his pouch of projectiles— kunai and shuriken. With deadly accuracy, he struck two bandits in the chest, sending them toppling to the ground. At the same time, Harris drew his bow and nocked an arrow, finding its marks. Two of the remaining three bandits met their end this way, and now only one more was left. The tallest and most muscular of them, the one I assume is the leader, brandished a massive greatsword.

"WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?" The bandit screamed, looking angry and scared at the same time.

Without giving any response, Shianne eyes focused on the bandit in front of her. She slowly raised her hand and began to channel an ominous magic, forming a sphere of darkness that crackled with power. The sphere pulsed with an otherworldly magic, growing more intense with each passing moment. Without warning, Shianne launched several dark spheres at the remaining bandits with incredible force. The magic sphere streaked through the air like a comet, leaving a trail of dark energy in its wake. The bandits barely had time to react before the sphere collided with them, sending them flying.

Shianne stood motionless, her hand still outstretched as the dark magic dissipated into the air. All the bandits lay crumpled on the ground, their bodies smoking from the impact. The impact was powerful, but one of the bandits managed to cover himself with his greatsword, mitigating the impact a little. Still, his body was quite damaged and covered in blood. As he lay on the ground, groaning in pain, I couldn't help but think that the fight was almost over.

However, to our shock, the injured bandit rose to his feet. As the wounded bandit struggled to his feet, his face contorted with pain and fury. He glared at us with pure hatred in his eyes, "YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS, BITCH!!!" He sneered, spitting a mouthful of blood onto the ground, "YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU'VE MESSED WITH!!! You're nothing but a bunch of weaklings and cowards."

Craig responded in kind, "Weaklings? Cowards? Look at you, bleeding and crawling on the ground like a wounded animal. You're the one who's done for."

I looked at the bandit, struggling to comprehend why he would still seem so confident when he stood on the precipice of death. My momentary confusion faded as Shianne prepared for another attack, convinced that one final strike would end the bandit's resistance. But then, in an inexplicable turn of events, the bandit swung his greatsword toward my water barrier with all the strength he could muster, causing practically nothing. Only making his face disfigure more with anger. My companions and I were taken aback by this bizarre action. I couldn't fathom why the bandit would attempt to harm the people inside my barrier when his demise seemed imminent. It appeared that this bandit was indeed scum, willing to cause harm to innocents even in his final moments.

Shianne had begun to gather her dark magic once more, her eyes narrowed with anger, ready to deliver the finishing blow to the defiant bandit. However, just as she was about to unleash her power, I noticed something peculiar. The bandit, despite his injuries and weakened state, was scanning his surroundings frantically. He moved with difficulty, making his way to another bandit who lay dying on the ground, an arrow embedded in his chest. With a twisted smile, the injured bandit plunged his greatsword into his comrade's chest without hesitation, extinguishing the dying man's life in an instant.

"This guy is crazy." I heard Harris say.

The sight left me stunned, struggling to comprehend the bandit's erratic actions. It was only when we witnessed what followed that understanding began to dawn. As the bandit's greatsword skewered his fallen comrade, a strange, green energy began to emanate from the wound. It flowed like a shimmering river, wrapping around the bandit and infusing him with its eerie glow. Moments later, the green energy coalesced, surrounding the bandit in a radiant aura. To our astonishment, the bandit's grievous wounds began to close, the torn flesh knitting back together and his vitality returning. The green energy healed his battered body. The bandit's twisted grin widened as newfound strength coursed through his veins.

I-I think I understand now. The bandit had sacrificed his fellow outlaw to harness some mysterious, life-restoring power. For that same reason, he tried to attack the people within my water barrier. He must have wanted to kill someone inside my water barrier so he could heal himself.

"What the hell did he do?" Craig said, looking shocked.

"It seems that harming someone somehow causes a healing in him," Syvis replied, "It must be a rare skill."

Our moment of shock allowed the bandit to evade Shianne's subsequent attack, narrowly dodging the dark magic. Our enemy, though gravely wounded just moments ago, now stood reinvigorated, a sinister glint in his eyes.

"Who are you?" Harris asked the bandit.

"I'm the one who will kill all of you. It doesn't matter if you hurt me. You'll never be able to kill me! Hahahaha"

"From what I see, he must be a C-Rank adventurer with melee skills and a rare skill that allows him to heal himself from the damage he causes," Syvis spoke, "He doesn't seem very smart, so as long as we don't get close, killing him shouldn't be difficult."

"Leave it to me!" Shianne responded, "I missed my previous attack because I was distracted by being surprised by what he did, but I won't miss my next attack."

"WAIT!" I said.

"Darx?" Syvis asked, looking confused.

"Please let me face him. There is something I want to try." I said, taking a few steps forward.

"Darx, we don't have time for this. Let's kill that trash quickly and avoid any more trouble." Craig said, sounding a little annoyed.

"It won't take long," I said as I looked back at Syvis, who still looked confused, "So please let me fight him alone."

"O-Okay..." Syvis responded as she closed her book.

"Agg, if I see that you are taking too long, I will intervene and kill him myself," Craig said, also lowering his weapons.

Harris also lowered his bow, and the dark magic in Shianne's hand began to fade. I started walking towards the bandit while my companions looked at me with confusion.

The bandit seemed happy, knowing that he would fight one on one. It appears that, as Syvis said, he is not very smart and doesn't realize the difference in level between me and him.

As the bandit leader lunged at me with his greatsword, I moved nimbly, sidestepping his attack with ease. In my mind, the fight had become a secondary concern; I was more interested in learning about the mysterious skill the bandit had used to heal himself earlier. It was essential that I know the name of the skill.

I taunted him, goading him into revealing the coveted information, "Come on, big guy," I goaded, my voice dripping with sarcasm, "What was that skill you used to patch yourself up earlier? Don't keep it all to yourself."

The bandit leader's face twisted with anger as he gritted his teeth, "Why should I tell you anything, you scum?"

I smiled, a hint of mischief dancing in my eyes, "Because I asked nicely."

The bandit continued brandishing his greatsword, which I dodged with ease while I saw how he became more and more frustrated because he couldn't hit me, "Are you envious that I have such a rare skill? You can never beat me as long as I can always heal myself."

I swiftly sidestepped his greatsword, leaving him swinging at the air. His overconfidence was palpable as he sneered, "You can dodge all you want, but it won't save you. With [Harmonic Drain], I'll heal any wounds you give me, and you'll never defeat me."

"So [Harmonic Drain] is the name of the skill," I chuckled softly.

As he lunged forward once more, I moved to the side, narrowly avoiding the blade's deadly arc. In the split second that followed, I seized my opportunity. My hand stretched, fingers splayed, and made contact with the bandit's shoulder.

"[Goddess's Gift of Mastery]" I said out loud while I had my hand on his shoulder.

I used my new skill. A brilliant burst of light enveloped my hand, blinding in its intensity, before vanishing as quickly as it had appeared. The bandit leader staggered back, his eyes wide with shock and confusion. I stood my ground, a satisfied smile playing on my lips.

"W-What did you do?" The bandit leader gasped while checking his body for signs of any damage.

Before the bandit could react, I attacked him with my sword, causing a light cut on his chest, from which a little blood began to flow.

"Ha, an injury like this is nothing. With [Harmonic Drain], I'll heal any wounds you give me, and you'll never defeat me." The bandit said with a big smile.

"Let's put that theory to the test, shall we?" I reply.

As the bandit swung his sword once more, I did not evade. I allowed his blade to slice into my hand, creating a gash that immediately oozed crimson. The bandit's laughter filled the air, but it was short-lived. His expression shifted from triumph to bewilderment as he realized his wound wasn't healing.

Panic set in as he muttered, "W-What's happening? W-Why isn't [Harmonic Drain] working? W-Why am I not healing?"

"Because it's no longer your skill," I responded, looking at him intently.

"W-What...? W-What do you mean? Why, Why don't I feel my skill? WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?" The bandit yelled, looking even more panicked, "WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME?"

"I stole your skill," I reply.

The bandit's shock was evident as he stammered, "You... You stole it?"

I nodded, "That's right. And now, it's my turn to use [Harmonic Drain]."

The bandit leader stumbled backward, his disbelief turning into sheer horror. He clutched his chest where he had the cut I did with my sword as if trying to grasp the vanishing remnants of his stolen skill.

"GIVE ME MY SKILL BACK?" He croaked, his voice trembling with fear and desperation.

Normally, I'd rather avoid killing other people, but guys like this don't deserve mercy. I stared him down, my expression unyielding, my grip firm on my two swords. But instead of offering an explanation, I decided to let my actions speak for me. With a swift and deliberate movement, I lunged forward, my blade sinking into the bandit leader's chest. A gasp escaped his lips, and his eyes widened in shock as he gazed at me in his final moments, seeking answers that I had no intention of providing. As the life drained from his eyes, he realized the cruel irony of his own skill being turned against him. The cut on my hand, once bleeding profusely, began to mend itself, and the bandit breathed his last, robbed not only of his life but also of his precious skill.

This skill that I think the goddess gave me actually lets me steal other people's skills.