

As the sun set and evening crept over the forest, Lyselle found herself sat alone beside the fire, tending to its flames as her companions continued their leisurely business in the nearby stream. Auna remained noisily fruitless in her hunt for dinner, while Talia had taken to lazing in some gently swirling current on the opposite bank while barking insincere encouragements.

“You were so close that time!” “Oh, almost.” “Fifteenth time’s the charm!”

Auna growled at the girl’s mockery. “I am working by firelight here! You’re welcome to step in any time, elf eyes!”

“Nope,” Talia rejected bluntly. “Can’t. Stuck in a current.”

“I’ll stick you somewhere,” Auna mumbled, before fruitlessly lunging at another target she’d perceived in the ripples below.

By the flickering flames, Lyselle had taken to checking the group’s findings against Evenclire’s list of sought items. Though gathering the writheweed’s materials had certainly stood out as the most memorable collection, they’d also quickly located a handful of mushrooms growing along Talia’s insisted-upon trail and a few small stones that Lys herself had declared were of alchemical value. With the materials spread out in front of her, the Terran couldn’t help but grin proudly at her decent little haul.

*Not bad for a day’s work, she thought. Maybe Evenclire does know what he’s doing. Talia didn’t notice most of these at all.*

She looked back to the list, skimming over it once again, trying to keep as much of it in her mind as possible. As she scanned from name to name, one item in particular seized her attention. Lys’s eyes widened with realization, and she turned to rummage through her bag with excited haste.

Less than a minute later, the Terran jogged up to the riverside with atypical excitement and a pair of towels in her arms. “Hey, Talia!”

The half-elf’s head cocked towards Lyselle as her body drifted in circles. “What’s up, Lys? You finally decide to join us?”

“Not exactly.” Lyselle’s mind was preoccupied enough that she was barely even distracted by the naked body rotating across from her. “I brought you two some towels.”

Auna emerged from under the water in front of Lyselle, brushing locks of soaked blonde hair away from her eyes. “How forward-thinking and considerate. And here I thought I’d need to drip-dry!” She leaned her shoulder up on the bank under the Terran, grinning up at her with a coy smirk. “At this point, I’m probably wetter than the damned fish, assuming there actually are any. I’ve certainly come up empty-handed.”

The second, closer nude woman was enough to knock Lyselle out of her focus. She blushed, glancing away from the dripping-wet demoness. “Happy to help.”

“Oh, *honestly...*” Auna rolled her eyes along with her body, turning over and leaning back on her arms, her wet bust on full display. “Why are you so uncomfortable here? You always act like you can’t handle seeing someone else’s tits.”

Lys huffed. “You mean like how I ‘acted’ like I’d never seen a satyr’s... *thing* before?”

The demoness glanced back over her shoulder with a look resembling concern. “... You’re kidding.”

“I’m not.” Lyselle shifted her weight, looking over at Talia as the half-blood spun lazily in the stream.

*Just try to be honest with yourself, for now.*

She sighed. “The kind of things that run through my mind in these situations wouldn’t have gone over well back home, is all.”

Auna cocked her head. “Like what? Don’t tell me you grew up with some ‘we are meant to breed’ shit too.”

*Right, Lys realized. Auna had her own kind of upbringing.*

“That’s not far off,” the Terran strainfully admitted. The words at the tip of her tongue were fighting to remain unsaid. After all, if she heard herself admitting how she felt, it would become real.

*What, do you intend to keep your naughty little desires at bay with raw will and shame?*

Talia’s words kept ringing through Lys’s mind, pushing her forward. “Lust of any kind was frowned upon, but pining after girls was

the sort of thing that would get you a summer locked away with the priests.”

Auna’s eyes went wide as she turned away. “Shit. That’s fucked.”

“I’m trying to accept that.” The words shook slowly out of Lyselle’s mouth. “Things are very different here. Freer. I’ve always admired that, but being comfortable around it has proven...”

“Harder,” Auna finished. “I get that.”

The demoness took a deep breath, watching the firelight flicker in the running water before her as she gathered her thoughts. “I still haven’t thanked you, by the way. Sorry about that.”

Lyselle blinked. “Pardon?”

“For helping me out earlier. Getting me away from Camilla, despite my bitching and moaning.” She paused, her lips twisting for a moment. “I know I give you a lot of shit, so it’s only fair I give credit when it’s due. Acting against any Leltwick is a bold move, never mind that one.”

Lys couldn’t help but laugh. “I’ve noticed I’m getting a lot less shit in the woods.”

Auna hummed in acknowledgement. “What am I going to do, mock you for not knowing how many leaves a given tree has? Kinda at your mercy out here, never mind miss monkey over there.”

“Not a monkey,” Talia sang out.

“Had me fooled,” Auna sang back. She settled back into her lean again, pondering her words a moment more before continuing. “I won’t pretend it makes things fair, Lyssie, but I wasn’t exactly raised to think much of Terrans. Made you an easy target, I guess.”

Lyselle grimaced. “I think your sister gave me a pretty good sense of your family’s values, yeah.”

“I guess that shit’s hard to shake, huh? What they taught us, I mean.”

Both girls stared into the dark for a time. There was certainly truth to the observation, Lyselle couldn’t argue against that. No matter how much her reservations raged through her mind and argued against her desires, the words she repeated to herself weren’t ever hers. The voice she heard them in certainly was, but the words...?

“It doesn’t matter.” Auna broke the silence with a decisive statement. “When I needed help, you gave it. We’re at this school to

learn how to be witches, and that's more what I'd want to see out of any witch than the shit I was raised to be. And while I'm at it, I would've shared the satyr dick too."

Lys turned beet red. "Jesus, Auna!"

The demoness let out a mischievous laugh. "Oh, don't act like you weren't curious. I could see it in your innocent little eyes, Alwyn. You looked just like I did the first time I laid eyes on someone I wasn't 'supposed' to touch." She accented her point with air quotes and all.

Lyselle covered her face with the towels in her arms. "Y-you can stop anytime!"

"Just imagine it. Me guiding sweet little Lyssie, helping her know what to do now that she was on her knees in front of a boy for the first time. Both of us there, drowning out the voices of our wretched forebears with the sound of throats sliding up and down a slick, throbbing—"

"I get it!" Lyselle shouted suddenly, unable to withstand any more of the Adorned's mental imagery. "Good God, I get it!!"

Auna laughed. "Gods, I fucked up being such an outright bitch to you all the time. This kind of teasing is way more fun!"

*Teasing, she calls it.* Lyselle bit her lip, trying to calm her breath and body as moisture built between her thighs. *I can't exactly let off this kind of steam out here with you two around, can I?*

"Really though," the demoness proceeded, "you do you. Maybe it's just all those years of being told exactly what to do with my body, but I've found playing fast and loose with my little rotation of partners to be extremely liberating."

Lyselle thought back to the aftermath of Camilla's rampage. "Less liberating for *them*, apparently."

"That's its own problem," Auna scoffed. "I don't get why Camilla thinks its her place to punish other people for my fucking decisions. Then again, Camilla thinks and does a lot of shit. Pretty sure she'll make up any reason to throw down with someone once she's decided she wants to."

She paused, fuming, before leaning forward and curling into herself. "I know it's not fair to my lovers. I also know what it's like to be on the receiving end of what she does to them as a price. I wish I could

stop her, but I know I can't. So, every time this happens, I try to restrain myself, to calm down and keep my legs closed, but..."

It was Lyselle's turn to finish the other's sentence. "But it's like you're lying to yourself?"

Auna looked up with a weak smile. "Yeah. I am who I am, I like what I like. And honestly it just... helps me not think about all this shit. *Their* shit. Sleeping alone just means there's nobody there to comfort me when the nightmares start digging up the shit I want to forget. Quiet places, too. Just you and the memories, then."

Lys nodded. "The woods don't seem like the best place to be if you want to escape your own thoughts, I'm learning. Sorry."

"You sure?" Auna nodded towards Talia, still turning in the water across the stream. "Look at her. No thoughts, head empty. Maybe we just need whatever she's having."

Lyselle laughed. "I'm not sure that's possible. I've never met anyone like..."

She paused, suddenly recalling what had prompted her approach in the first place.

"Talia!" she spouted as her mind pivoted wildly. "Evenclire wants avity moss!"

The half-elf finally turned upright, looking at Lys with curiosity. "What, like that dry blue stuff?"

Interpersonal growth and honesty with oneself were both lovely, but now Lys was comfortably back in her element. "It's not going to be dry. Hell, there's a chance you're standing in some right now."

Talia squinted and looked down, checking her feet under the water, before looking back at the Terran with a blank stare.

"Holy shit," Auna mumbled.

Lys sighed. "It's aquatic."

"Oh," the half-blood acknowledged, taking one more moment before more excitedly exclaiming "Ooo-oh! Say no more!"

With that, Talia Rosenblum dipped under the water, her rear end briefly breaching the surface as her body turned and dove below.

"Alright," Auna probed, "so, just between us, what's running through your mind right now?"

Lyselle's lip twitched. "Nice ass."

"Gotcha." Auna nodded knowingly. "My lips are sealed."

A few moments passed – enough for the Terran to look down at the water and wonder if something had gone wrong – before a trail of bubbles approached the bank in front of her and Auna.

Talia burst from the water, splashing the demoness in the process, with a bright blue clump of damp moss in her hand. “Yo, I got it!”

The alchemist part of Lyselle loudly and immediately overpowered her typical reservations, and in a blink she’d rushed over to the naked elf, setting the dry towels aside to examine a piece of the material up close with her freed hands.

“I, uh... I *think* I got it.” Talia’s lips danced as Lyselle checked over her haul. She waited a moment with visibly limited patience before meekly asking, “Did I get it?”

Lys held up a clump of the moss towards the light of the fire, examining its translucency for a moment, before turning back and giving her partner a reassuring smile and nod. “You got it!”

“Hell yeah!” Talia pumped her fist into the air, managing to splash Auna again before handing the rest of the moss off to Lyselle. “Here you go! Do we need more?”

Lyselle bounced the moss in her hand, feeling out its weight. “I doubt another clump or two would hurt any, if you’re up for it.”

“Leave it to mine elven eyes,” the girl proclaimed, framing her eyes with her fingers for additional flair before turning and diving back under the water, splashing Auna yet a third time.

“And try to catch us some damned dinner, too!!” The Adorned shouted after the ripples where Talia used to be. She then huffed, pulling a mess of her own damp hair back away from her eyes. “Like I’m not even here.”

Lyselle chuckled, passing Auna one of the towels from beside her. “She certainly gives her all to any given task, huh?”

“Moderation has never been Talia’s strong suit,” the demoness admitted as she took the cloth in hand. “Maybe that’s why Evenclire sent her out here with someone more reserved.”

“Maybe. Just... make sure she comes back up, yeah?”

Auna rolled her head back to look up at the Terran. “Yeah, sure. Ain’t like I’m able to get any *more* wet.”

Lyselle paused, humming to herself in thought, then slowly rose to her feet and turned away from the demoness. “You probably could if there were a satyr around,” she finally quipped as she shifted to make her way to the fire.

“What!?” Auna’s eyebrows shot up as her head spun back towards Lyselle. “Making dirty jokes? *Our* innocent little Terran?”

Lys smirked back over her shoulder. “Well, of *course* I’m dirty! I haven’t taken a bath yet!”

Auna grinned and flicked out her wrist, summoning her crystal wand with a golden flash. “We can fix that quick enough.”

With a twirl of the demoness’s wrist, a ball of water pooled at the river’s surface, following the gestures of Auna’s hand as she lifted her wand upwards. Lyselle’s pace towards the campfire picked up as she realized what was coming; with a quick flick, the wet orb was lobbed haphazardly towards her, causing Lys to yelp as the water splashed by her feet.

The Terran laughed, welcoming the somewhat forgotten feeling of playful joy, as she sprinted back towards the fire before taking up a pen and cracking open her notes. It had been months since she’d last found herself cheerfully working by the fire, and the Terran would readily admit that she’d missed that comfort. Soon enough she was scribbling away, pen against paper, with a pile of texts taken one by one out of her bag forming around her as she sat on a fallen log in front of the campfire. Lyselle Alwin was absorbed in her work, dutifully flipping through pages and jotting down notes and ideas, diagrams and directives. She was in her element, and perhaps beyond that the most comfortable she’d been since parting ways with Nidrah.

Maybe too comfortable.

“What’s all that?”

Lys jolted in place. She’d been so preoccupied that she hadn’t noticed Talia’s soft-stepped approach until the girl had already sat down next to her. The half-elf tossed a fresh pile of blue moss down to dry by the fire next to a surprisingly large fish that looked somewhat seared already. She didn’t seem to pay much heed to the Terran’s tongue being tied, instead leaning in close to look over her classmate’s shoulder. Lyselle was immediately made acutely aware of the fact that her partner was still naked and drip-drying by the sensation of the

woman's soft breast pressed gently against her arm. This did not help her find her words.

Talia cocked her head. "Oh? Well, look at that."

"What?" Auna's voice came from behind them, also much closer than Lyselle had expected. Suddenly, she felt the demoness leaning over her shoulders, the Adorned's own body barely any more robed than Talia's. The towel she'd been using to dry herself hung loosely around the back of her shoulders, effectively covering nothing and leaving her own sizeable fruit free to swing into the Terran's back.

Lyselle sat frozen on the log, gripping her notebook as if it were a lifesaver keeping her afloat in the sudden tide of naked tits. Both of the streaking maidens were intently looking over the complex diagram that she'd been working on, a swirling figure surrounded by a scattered collection of markings and symbols.

"Wait." Auna squinted down at Lyselle's notes, coming to a quick realization. "Is that the water spell I threw at you?"

The question snapped the Terran back into form enough that she at least remembered to breathe, sucking a sharp intake of air before managing to squeak out a strained "Uh-huh."

"Damn." The demoness leaned in closer, reaching an arm around Lys's opposite shoulder to trace the diagram's curvature as she analyzed the work. "You did all this in like fifteen minutes? This shit's spot on!"

That seized Lyselle's attention away from the onslaught of nude woman flesh. "Y-You think?"

"It's super detailed," Talia remarked.

"I can't read all this, though," Auna grumbled, tapping her finger against a block of text scrawled down in English. "What's that all for?"

"O-oh!" Lyselle blushed, not used to showing her work like this, never mind under such distracting conditions. "Th-those are my notes on the breakdown and flow of the..." Her words trailed off as she caught herself. "Well, the *theoretical* breakdown of the spell's components and execution."

The Terran sat quietly for a moment as uncertainty flooded into her. "I... I know I can't actually *cast* anything reliably, but I figure I can



at least study what everyone else does so that I can hopefully catch up once I... you know, figure it out.”

“Who would’ve thought? I guess you’ve been paying attention in class after all.” Auna furrowed her brow. “I’ve never seen someone who can’t cast spells while having so much knowledge about the damn things, though.”

“I understand the lectures fine enough,” Lyselle protested, “except for the parts where it comes down to ‘feel.’ Channeling, moving the energy around. I don’t really have a sense for any of that. I don’t feel anything of the sort, honestly.”

Talia glanced up at the Terran. “You don’t feel it at all?”

Lyselle gave her companion a long look before passing the notebook aside and rising to her feet. She placed her hands on her hips as she stared into the night sky away from the inquisitive pair. After taking a deep breath, her shoulders slumped as her gaze drifted down to the campfire before her.

“Someone told me once,” she started, “that they knew I could become an incredible witch. I never understood why. I... I still don’t. They must have believed it though, because they spent so much time teaching me about this world, its history and languages, its magic...”

Lys’s hand rose to her chest, her fist clenching over it as she habitually clutched for fabric that wasn’t there. It seemed silly to her how bold she’d felt that morning compared to the present evident dress code, but it still caught her off guard to have nothing there to channel her anxiety into.

“I only applied to the academy because that person told me to. She saw how well I picked up on things, how much I enjoyed studying, and she insisted I had what it took. I’ve never been able to get it, though. To *feel* it. Even if I manage to get something to come out of my staff, it’s never under my control, and I don’t really get what I did differently. A burst of fire here, a little jolt of energy there, it doesn’t matter. It all peters out right away, and I couldn’t tell you how I managed to *do* it.”

Lyselle swallowed her pride, turning to face her peers with shame in her eyes. Auna’s gaze had drifted away into thought, but Talia looked back at the forlorn Terran with an unwavering stare. The fire in the half-elf’s eyes flickered as she looked up at the human, their light

entirely separate in origin than the flames dancing at the center of the camp.

Lys felt broken as she saw that shimmer. “I can see it, you know. The light in your eyes, that spark in the other students. She told me it was the spark of a person’s spirit, the power of their deepest selves.” She couldn’t take it. Her increasingly tearful gaze trailed down to the open notebook that she’d left in Talia’s naked lap. “Is that what’s wrong? Is my light... broken?”

Talia scowled, taking in a slow, deep breath before snapping the book shut, startling both of her companions into full attention. She closed her eyes for a moment, weighing her thoughts, before her typical smirk broke back over her face. “Your light works fine, Lyssie.”

The half-elf’s eyes opened, meeting Lyselle’s with a fiery glint. “I’ve *seen* it.”

Lyselle was taken aback. Nobody had ever claimed to actually see a spark in her before.

*Nobody except Nidrah*, she realized.

Talia interrupted that thought by thrusting the notebook back up into Lyselle’s face. “It’s not just spells, right?” Her eyes glanced down at the gathered ingredients Lyselle had laid out to examine. “You’ve been scribbling away for a while over here.”

“I don’t see what that has to do with—”

“Humor me,” Talia insisted, waving the book under the Terran’s nose.

Flustered, Lyselle stood silently for a moment. She looked towards Auna, who simply responded with a small, confounded shrug. Sighing and reclaiming the book and her seat alongside their gatherings, she opened her notes to a different page, revealing a pair of detailed ink renderings depicting the mushrooms and moss. A smattering of notes in both English and Demonic lined the area around the drawings.

Auna gawked. “*Hel*, Lyselle! It was fifteen fucking minutes! Fifteen!”

Lys carried on, finding nothing particularly exceptional about her demonstrated pace. “Some of this is just lifted from the books I brought along, but I find their alchemical details to be troublingly under any kind of useful par. Obviously, I haven’t really gotten to test very many

reactions yet, though I *have* been able to see how each element responds when exposed to varying levels of heat thanks to our fire here, and I can make some assumptions regarding the moss's response to water."

Auna leaned over, tapping at a few lines of text that stood out from the others, written in its own script. "Is that the old tongue? What do you need that for?"

"Well, you saw my spellcast analysis. This is the reverse side of that same coin."

Talia had gotten in close again, leaning over Lys's arm to get a better look. "Alchemy ain't really my strong suit, sorry. Explain it like I don't know a fairy's fart from a glistening gemstone."

Lys cocked her head. "Okay...? It's simple, honestly." She began directing the other girls around the page with her hand as she spoke. "Alchemic ingredients are objects that have either become infused with or respond uniquely to magical properties. By analyzing these properties and studying how different pieces interact, one can learn to emulate certain spell effects through the utilization of physical materia—"

Lyselle was cut off as she looked up to see Talia's smug grin.

"W... What? Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I saw it again," the elf sang.

Auna leaned over to glare at her. "You're staring at *her*? I can barely keep up with what she's pointing at on the page!"

Talia shrugged. "Don't matter what you were looking at. I saw it. It's there."

Lyselle was skeptical. "Are you toying with me?"

"Not at all," Talia assured. "Now, tell me about the writheweed stuff. Let me know what I fucked a plant for."

"I assumed you did it for fun," Auna retorted.

The half-elf laughed. "Not wrong! But it also got the job done."

Lys's eyebrow rose. "Did you at any point stop to think of a way to get the job done without getting dangled and molested in the air?"

"Yeah," Talia assured, "but nothing came to mind that was as enjoyable without invoking casualties and collateral damage."

Auna snorted. "So, if you couldn't fuck it you were gonna kick its ass?"

“I didn’t say that!” The girl’s head sank into her shoulders as she crossed her arms. “I’m just saying, the most *enjoyable* solutions to most problems are sex and violence.”

“You should get a job in Hollywood,” Lyselle quipped.

Talia gave her a blank stare. “I don’t understand that reference.”

“Don’t worry about it,” the Terran sighed. “Still, you should probably show at least a *little* more hesitance before doing...” Lys’s hands grasped for a gesture, but failed to find an adequate one. “...*that* with a plant, though.”

The half-blood huffed. “Lyssie, it had the *vibes*. The vibes! We talked about this!”

Lyselle was unimpressed “Uh-huh.”

“I wouldn’t be so quick to judge, Lyly.” Auna startled Lyselle by running a finger through the Terran’s hair as she spoke, rising from her seat to circle around her with a haughty saunter. “If I recall, *one* of us was pretty engaged in something I would perhaps describe as ‘rubbing the plant’s balls’ while our travel buddy was getting railed.” The demoness’s finger traced around Lys’s head and came to a rest under her chin as she continued. “Now, who was doing *that*, again?”

Lyselle bolted to her feet, face as red as her hair as she quickly started marching towards the nearest tent. “Well, damn! Look at the time! I think I should be getting to bed, don’t you?”

Talia rose an eyebrow. “Before dinner? Besides, we never figured out who was sharing a tent.”

Lyselle froze in place, turning slowly to meet Talia’s gaze. Her voice managed to squeak out a shaky and barely audible “What?”

Talia leaned to one side, the fire highlighting her features in a way that only served to heighten Lyselle’s panic as the glistening half-blood laid out the situation. “We expected two gals. I brought two tents.” She gestured towards Auna. “We now have a third gal.”

*Oh my God.* Lyselle’s voice was officially trapped in her throat again.

“Not it,” Auna declared, grabbing a stick off the ground and skewering the fish with it. “I’m keeping my distance from both the plant-fucker *and* the girl who spent all day in the woods and was too shy to wash her stank off.”

*Oh. My God!?*

“Aw, I don’t mind a bit of Terran stink! I much prefer it to smelling like fish anyway, *Chef Auna.*”

Auna blinked. “Wait, huh?”

Talia grinned mischievously. “Grill that thing up, cook! We’re hungry over here! Right, Lyssie?”

Lyselle didn’t speak. She was still processing the idea of Talia being close enough to her to pick up her scent. *Sharing a tent? All night, in a tent!? Just us. In tent. Tent in. Us? Us in tent!!*

*Oh, God!*

“Wow,” Talia mused. “See? She’s so hungry she can’t even think straight.”

Auna rolled her eyes, leaning forward to hold the fish over the fire. “Yeah, I’m sure that’s what it is.” The towel slipped down, revealing what little had been obscured of the Adorned’s gold-streaked breasts, lines of metallic skin glittering in the dancing light of the open flames.

Lyselle absolutely noticed, even if her mind was barely keeping up with the conversation. “Te... Tuh... Tent...?”

Talia’s grin softened into a more sympathetic smile. “Yes, Lyssie. Tent. Don’t worry, I don’t bite.” She thought for a moment, then shrugged. “Not without invitation, anyway.”

Lys felt like she was being cooked as directly as the fish in Auna’s grasp. “B... bite?”

Talia laughed, her tongue switching to English for an irresistible bit of teasing. “Aye! Are ye askin’?”

That proved to be the last straw. Lyselle’s head spun, and before she knew it she found herself falling over onto the ground. The last thing she heard was the other girls reacting.

“Talia, you broke the Terran!”