

66: A bard never tells

Later that day, after spending some surprisingly enjoyable time catching up with Kat, Scarlett returned to the mansion. By herself.

She wasn't about to come between Shin and Allyssa's first real meeting with Kat for what appeared to be quite some time, but she also didn't have much to do in the city at the moment so she hadn't wanted to just wait around either. And even though she *was* being more wary about the Hallowed Cabal in general at the moment, it wasn't like there was a high likelihood of them doing anything in the middle of the day when she was out in the open in Freybrook.

At least that's what she had convinced herself when she'd been sitting in the carriage cabin all by herself.

In the future, she might actually bring along Fynn on trips like this too, just to be safe.

Despite her—perhaps somewhat founded—worries though, she managed to return to the estate without issue. As she was crossing the courtyard towards the mansion's entrance, however, Scarlett was surprised to find Rosa sitting on one of the curved benches that encircled the fountain at the center of the courtyard. The brown-haired woman had her hurdy-gurdy-esque instrument in her lap, slowly turning its crank as she appeared to be in the process of tuning it.

Scarlett stopped for a moment to observe. Rosa seemed so completely absorbed in her work that she hadn't even noticed Scarlett yet.

Suddenly the bard swore as her hands pulled back, a grimace on the woman's face as she sat still for several seconds.

Scarlett frowned. That was odd.

"Is everything all right?" she asked, stepping closer to the curved bench.

Rosa looked up with wide eyes, and—although this might have been all in Scarlett's imagination—the woman's face even looked paler than usual. The large smile that grew naturally on the woman's face seemed to belie that impression, however.

"I'm fine," Rosa said with a light laugh, placing her hand against her chest. "At least I think I am, if my heart hasn't jumped straight out of my throat now. You sure know how to sneak up on a girl."

Scarlett took the woman in with her eyes. For all of Rosa's appearances of being playful and sprightly, Scarlett always had a hard time reading the woman.

"I made no attempt to disguise my approach. You were simply too occupied with your instrument," she said as she walked over and sat down next to Rosa, earning raised brows from the bard.

"Well, *sorry* for taking pride in my craft. I come from a long line of klert tuners, you see," Rosa said in an exaggerated voice, patting her instrument. Apparently, it was called a klert. "In fact, legend has it that my great-great-great-great-great-uncle's-cousin-twice-removed was in love with a klert, so it's practically in my blood."

Scarlett got the urge to roll her eyes. "I see. And I suppose his brother was in love with a thread of yarn?" she asked sardonically.

Rosa gave her a somewhat confused look, and for a moment Scarlett her joke had been a bit too far-fetched, but soon Rosa grinned. "Are you perhaps calling my great-great-great-aunt's-fifth cousin a spinner of yarn?"

"...You appear to have a rather complicated family tree."

"Why! I'll have you know the Hales are a prestigious house that put our esteem above all else. We don't satisfy with a mere tree! Unless you need an abacus to understand it, we aren't content!"

"I struggle to comprehend what that is even supposed to mean," Scarlett said, slowly shaking her head. "Though I imagine you have many relatives."

At that, Rosa turned quiet for a moment. She turned her head forward, towards the fountain, and spoke again with the same jovial tone as before. "Hmm, yeah. Maybe."

As the woman went quiet, Scarlett glanced at the side of her face, considering what else to say. To be honest, she wasn't quite sure why she had decided to sit down to begin with, nor why she had started playing along with Rosa's banter.

"Is there a reason as to why you are spending your time out here?" she eventually asked.

Rosa turned back to her. "Heh, not really. Sometimes you just want a breath of fresh air, you know? Tuning my klert sometimes helps me calm down and think. See things for how they really are."

Scarlett studied the woman. She was smiling, but Scarlett wasn't quite sure what to make of it. "That is understandable," she said. "However, if there are any issues with the accommodations provided to you, or if you are uncomfortable with any of the staff, there is no need to hesitate in raising your concerns."

Rosa gave Scarlett an incredulous look. "I'm being treated like a guest of honor at a noble's mansions, all the while I get to enjoy some of the best food I've ever had and get to go on exciting little adventures. You'd have to be a real nincompoop to complain about any of that."

"As long as you are content." Scarlett nodded along. "And it is true that the chef is quite proficient at his craft."

"That's an understatement if ever I heard any," Rosa said. "I'd quite literally kill for those scones I had this morning. Ah, and that beef bourguignon..." the woman trailed off with a blissful expression.

Scarlett leaned her head to the side at Rosa's use of a word that was decidedly non-English in origin. Although she usually didn't pay it much mind, things like that still came off as odd to her in this world.

"Why is it named that, would you say?" she found herself asking, despite the sudden switch in subject.

"You mean the beef bourguignon?" Rosa asked, rubbing her chin. "I don't know. I suppose it's the same reason all words are as they are. Some old coot thought to himself 'now *that's* a gobbledygook if I've ever seen one', and the rest is history. Although, I guess in this case they also happened to be voneinan."

"...As ever, your way with words astound." Scarlett gently shook her head.

She had seen Voneinan both in its written and its spoken form. She personally wouldn't really say it was similar to french, so Rosa implying that it was a Voneinan loanword felt odd to her. But, Scarlett was also pretty terrible with other languages in general, so she wouldn't really call herself an authority on the matter.

Besides, the English of this world—or rather, the Modern Imperial—would have had to get its loanwords from somewhere. She already knew that some of what she considered Latin terms came from the language of the old Zuver here, and that many of the idioms and phrases from her world existed in this world as well. Because of this, she had already guessed that the way Modern Imperial developed would have had to mirror English in some manner.

But, considering how ridiculously convoluted linguistic history became even after you just went back a few decades, she didn't really understand how something like that was possible. To her, it seemed like the evolution of a language was just too complicated and had too many factors to be able to be replicated like that, even if it was in a world like this where everything was seemingly inspired by a video game. But the other alternative was that everything had just popped into place from nowhere, which seemed even more unrealistic to her. After all, she *knew* there was history to this world. And as such, the evolution of the languages around here had to be part of that history.

God, a linguistics scholar would probably have a field day with this.

Maybe she *should* spend some time looking into the matter. Did they have linguistic scholars in this world as well? If the Modern Imperial in this world didn't evolve naturally, there should be some obvious inconsistencies in its history. And even if it *did* evolve naturally, there might still be clues as to why it was exactly like the English of her world.

She had been thinking about this for a while now, really. In fact, this might even give her some clues as to what this world actually was.

Realizing her thoughts had wandered somewhat, and that Rosa had turned quiet with her eyes turned downward towards her klert, Scarlett spoke again. "I have been meaning to ask," she said. "The magic that you perform. It is unlike anything I have previously witnessed. Where did you learn techniques such as those?"

In 'Chronicle of Realms' Rosa had a unique class, and as far as Scarlett was aware she was the only character that used music for their magic. In the game, the bard had always been pretty vague and secretive about most personal matters, so Scarlett was somewhat curious about this.

"I picked up a few things here and there," Rosa answered, turning her gaze upward. "Met this old lady who taught me a trick or two as well."

"...I see," Scarlett said slowly. Perhaps she had been expecting a bit too much. "Perhaps you know what type of magic it is? If, for example, it would be considered to belong to the same branch as aeromancy?"

It would be good to know what kind of items could improve Rosa's magic outside of just general buff items.

"Can't say I do. I'm not really much of a *mage*, you see. To tell you the truth, I would almost have expected *you* to know the answer to that," Rosa said.

Scarlett gave her an inquiring look. "And why is that?"

"What, you think a girl doesn't notice a few things just because you surround yourself with a gaggle of weirdos?" Rosa chuckled. "You've got this...*it* to you, you know? This *quality*."

Her tone had turned more solemn now. "Some people interact with the world as it is, living their lives as it comes. Others interact with the world as they think it *should* be, and they live their lives to *make* it so."

Scarlett saw the woman absentmindedly fiddling with her klert again, quite adeptly now.

"I've met those kinds of people before," Rosa said, glancing at Scarlett for only a second before turning to the fountain. "They always *seem* like they know what to do, making you think 'what is it with this person? How do I become like that?'"

"...You would compare me to those people?" Scarlett asked deliberately.

"Oh, definitely," Rosa said. "I've got a knack for these things." She let out another chuckle. "Of course, it doesn't hurt that you go around acting like you know everything, pulling out one unbelievable thing after another from out of nowhere all the time."

It looked like the woman was about to say more, but she abruptly turned silent for some reason.

"Hey, you're a noble, aren't you?" she suddenly asked after some time.

Scarlett arched a brow at her. "I am uncertain as to whether you are expecting for me to answer that or not."

"When we first met, you said something about being able to help if I ever wanted to learn anything special, right?" Rosa continued, her voice wavering slightly as her eyes were locked on the fountain in front of them.

Scarlett eyed Rosa closely for a moment, paying close attention to the area under the woman's eyes. There didn't seem to be anything particularly wrong with her at the moment. "...While those were not the exact words I used, it is not entirely incorrect," she said.

Rosa turned to look at her, the bard's violet eyes meeting hers. "Does that mean you could help me find information on...*anything*?"

Scarlett furrowed her brows. She was pretty sure she knew what this was about. "Anything within my power."

Rosa held her eyes for several seconds, before finally letting out a short laugh as she returned her gaze to the fountain. "Well, good to know. I suppose if I ever want to know how to successfully make some fairy friends I'll ask you."

Scarlett's eyes lingered on the woman. "...If there is anything else on your mind that you wish to ask me, or if there is anything troubling you, there is no need to hesitate."

Rosa shook her head with a smile. "What would I have to worry about? I'm fine. Better than fine, even!"

The woman seemed to tear her eyes away from the fountain and bring them back to the instrument in her lap as she started gently rotating the crank again, returning to her earlier tuning.

Scarlett opened her mouth, intending to prod further, but slowly closed it after a moment.

She wasn't sure how Rosa would react if she told her she knew what it was she wanted to know. Worst came to worst, it was entirely possible Rosa would decide to leave if she thought Scarlett knew her secret. The woman would definitely be uncomfortable with that fact, at the very least.

And it wasn't as if she could straight out tell the woman that she could help her. That had risks all on its own.

"If that is how it is," Scarlett began, but before she could say anything more she was interrupted by the sound of shattering glass.

The both of them turned to look towards the edge of the courtyard, where it met the east wing of the mansion. Scarlett couldn't avoid gaping as she saw *a person* flying out of one of the second-floor windows, landing in one of the flower beds on the ground a moment later.

Up next to the broken window stood a somewhat ruffled Fynn, staring down at the courtyard.

Scarlett blinked at the sight, holding back herself from crying out.

What *the hell* just happened?!