
Nighttime Escapades

Gwyn was nestled comfortably on the plush, cushioned bench by the window, her legs gracefully folded beneath her. A soft, contented smile graced her lips as she watched a pair of blue and yellow birds land upon the railing of her balcony and nuzzle into each other. The open window beside her welcomed a gentle mid-afternoon breeze, which danced through the room, playfully tousling both her hair and the curtains in a sweet, harmonious ballet.

Calista, her adorable little dragon sister, lay sprawled out on Gwyn's bed, succumbing to a well-deserved nap. The young dragon had worn herself out from a morning filled with soaring through the skies and practicing her dragon breath, a task that proved both exhilarating and exhausting.

Especially since smokey breath stunk.

Calista was still super excited.

She had a feeling there would be at least a small ember soon.

Gwyn's attention, momentarily captivated by the tranquil scene outside, now drifted back to the task at hand. Her gaze settled upon her sketchbook, open and inviting on her lap. With delicate precision, she resumed her work, her hand moving gracefully over the page as she drew the essence of her latest piece.

It was another picture of Roslyn, frozen in a moment of intense focus from their time together the previous day. The image on the page depicted her best friend practicing her magic, a look of deep concentration etched on her face as she swirled a bunch of dirt and stone together before shooting it off like a bullet. Gwyn could almost feel the energy emanating from Roslyn as she worked, and she strived to translate that intensity onto the paper before her.

She took great care in detailing the furrow of Roslyn's brow, the slight parting of her lips, the cute itty bitsy bit of her tongue sticking out the side, and the unwavering determination in her eyes. Every stroke of charcoal showed Gwyn's admiration and affection for her friend, as she sought to immortalize the moment in all its raw, genuine beauty.

The soft knock at the door drew Gwyn's attention away from her artistic endeavor, her charcoal pencil pausing mid-stroke as she looked up, awaiting the entrance of her visitor. The door swung open gently, revealing Sansa.

Her ladies-in-waiting were transitioning into different positions, adapting to the evolving needs of the House—just as she had expected.

Manabound - Resilience

With that, Gwyn had required new personnel to fill positions close to her. Taenya had made an announcement to all those affiliated with the House within the capital and people jumped at the chance.

So, over the past week, Sansa and her family had wasted no time, meeting with Taenya, Friedrich, and esquire Niles to discuss the possibility of the older girl becoming Gwyn's personal assistant.

This was not a servant's role, but rather a well-compensated position of a retainer aimed at helping Gwyn manage her day-to-day responsibilities outside of the Academy.

Kind of like a secretary.

Sort of.

Gwyn wasn't really sure.

I think mom had an assistant, but I can't really remember.

While House Reinhart was taking over the tuition for Sansa, everything that had happened had pushed all of her family into wanting to leave as soon as possible—which meant as soon as the school year ended for Sansa. And so, when she was given the offer, she had joined as one of Gwyn's personal retainers, and would stay at Gwyn's side.

“Princess?” Sansa's voice broke through her thoughts.

“Hey, Sansa. How's everything going?”

“Everything is well. Lady Roslyn is here to see you.”

Gwyn couldn't help but wince at the mention of her friend's name. “Does she look mad?”

Sansa raised an eyebrow, curiosity piqued. “Should she be?”

The princess let out a sigh, her gaze drifting back to the window for a brief moment. “I never know anymore.” Closing her sketchbook, she turned her full attention back to Sansa. “How's your family doing?”

“They're well, thanks. I think they're really looking forward to moving back to Strathmore at the end of the school year. I'm going to miss them.”

“I can imagine. Though, Strathmore has its own... charm. I prefer it over the capital.”

Sansa offered a small smile. “I think they just want to put everything that happened behind them.”

“That's completely understandable.”

“Do you want to meet with Lady Roslyn in here?”

“Yeah, but she’s probably—”

Before she could finish her sentence, the door swung open once more, and Roslyn made her entrance, her blonde locks framing her face.

“Yup, there she is,” Gwyn remarked, a playful tone in her voice.

Sansa chuckled softly. “So you say.”

Roslyn looked between the two, her expression one of mild confusion. “Miss Sansa, hello. I wasn’t expecting...”

Sansa quickly regained her composure. “My apologies, Lady Roslyn. Her Majesty—”

“Gwyn.”

“Yes, Her Majesty...” Gwyn couldn’t help but groan in exasperation. “Shh! I’m conducting official business here!”

Gwyn couldn’t help but snicker at the exchange. “Fine, fine.”

Roslyn’s confusion only deepened as the conversation unfolded.

Sansa continued, unperturbed, “As I was saying, Gwyn needed a new attendant, or a ‘personal assistant’ as she calls it. I’ve been hired and accepted as one of her retainers.”

“Oh! Like Ser Janine!” Roslyn exclaimed, her face lighting up with realization. She turned to Gwyn with a playful glint in her eye. “Does this mean you’re going to knight Sansa?”

Sansa, caught off guard, stammered in surprise, “W-what? K-Knight?”

Roslyn’s laughter filled the room, light and melodic. “Of course. A retainer in such a prestigious position should be knighted, don’t you think, Gwyn?”

Gwyn facepalmed, dragging her hand down her face in exasperation. Thankfully, Calista’s snores from the bed offered a timely distraction. Roslyn immediately lowered her voice, “Sorry... I didn’t see her sleeping there.”

Sansa, sensing the shift in the atmosphere, took a step back. “Do you need anything else, Your Majesty?”

Gwyn shook her head, offering a reassuring smile. “No, thank you, Sansa. We’ll talk later. And don’t be nervous; we’re all friends here, right?”

“O-Of course, Your Majesty.”

With a swift exit, Sansa left the room, leaving Gwyn standing and shooting a pointed glare at Roslyn. “Really?”

Roslyn had the grace to appear embarrassed. “Sorry, I thought she had already been informed.”

“Uh huh,” Gwyn responded, her tone laced with skepticism. “I was going to break it to her slowly.”

Roslyn wasted no time in closing the distance between them, wrapping Gwyn in a warm, comforting hug. Gwyn couldn't help but return the embrace.

They hadn't hugged much recently, and it felt good.

It felt right.

Roslyn had grown a bit too. So Gwyn didn't tower over her friend. Roz's head ended just below Gwyn's lips.

So... still short.

But not super short.

She closed her eyes, taking a moment to just breathe and enjoy the embrace. Roslyn's hair brushed against her cheek, and Gwyn couldn't help but inhale the familiar and comforting scent. It was a sweet, floral fragrance, a mix of lavender and something uniquely Roslyn. Gwyn had always loved that smell; it was soothing and always managed to bring a sense of calmness over her, no matter how chaotic the world around them seemed to be.

In this moment, wrapped in Roslyn's arms, Gwyn felt a profound sense of gratitude for their friendship. The physical closeness, the shared warmth, and the comforting scent of her best friend's hair—it was all so reassuring.

Gwyn knew that no matter what challenges they faced, she had Roslyn by her side, and that was something she cherished deeply.

As they pulled away from each other, Roslyn's eyes caught sight of the sketchbook that lay nearby, her curiosity instantly piqued. “So, what are you drawing today?” she asked eagerly, her fingers already reaching for the book. “I had that one you did of me framed and put right in the manor's entryway. You wouldn't believe the number of compliments I get!”

“Roz!”

Undeterred, Roslyn flipped through the pages, expertly dodging Gwyn's attempts to reclaim her sketchbook. Her eyes lit up with delight as she reached the latest drawing. “Oh my goodness. You really need better subjects, another of me? I mean, I will admit this is *amazing*, cause... Ahem, I am amazing...”

“Rozzz, come on. Stop bullying me,” Gwyn grumbled, though she couldn't stop the hint of a smile on her lips.

Roslyn paused, looking up at Gwyn with a frown. “Really? Bullying? I love your art, Gwyn. I'm your best friend. Plus, I'm the subject—I should be able to see them.”

Oxylus

Gwyn couldn't help but laugh, her initial annoyance melting away under Roslyn's earnest gaze. "Okay, okay, you've got a point. But you could at least ask first, you know?"

Roslyn's face broke into a grin, her eyes twinkling with mischief. "Where's the fun in that?" she teased, finally handing back the sketchbook.

Gwyn shook her head, unable to suppress her own smile. "You're impossible, you know that?"

"But you love me anyway," Roslyn shot back, her tone playful.

Gwyn couldn't argue with that. "Yeah, I guess I do."

She looked away and tossed the sketchbook down, only to turn around as Roslyn pulled her into another hug.

"Firebug?"

"Yeah?"

"You sure everything's alright?" Roz asked, her expression laced with concern as she craned her neck to better meet Gwyn's gaze.

"I'm fine."

"You *sure*?"

No. I don't know what's wrong with me. It's like my heart hurts. I need something. It's like it's just out of reach and I don't even know what it is.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Gwyn reassured her, offering a gentle smile as she peered down into those captivating amethyst orbs. She had just the right distraction. "Hey, Roz, do you trust me?"

Roz quirked an eyebrow, a hint of mischief playing on her lips. "Yeah, I do. Though sometimes I think I really shouldn't..." She gave Gwyn a playful nudge.

"You and me, what do you say we do something tonight? Just the two of us," Gwyn suggested, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

Roslyn pulled back, her eyes narrowing in suspicion. "...Gwyn? What are you scheming?"

"I might have overheard some of the combat instructors and a few guards talking... Apparently, there have been monster sightings in the woods just outside Aldon. What do you say we go play heroes for a night? Take on the monsters, earn some steps, really put our magic to the test," Gwyn proposed, her voice filled with anticipation.

Roslyn took a hesitant step back, her eyes widening as she processed Gwyn's words. "Gwyneth..."

She winced at the use of her full name, knowing she was treading on thin ice.

“That sounds incredibly reckless. What about—”

But before Roslyn could finish, Gwyn placed a finger gently against her friend’s lips. “Shh, don’t overthink it. I’ll have your back, and you’ll have mine. It’ll be like our own little adventure. Plus, I’ve already got our gear sorted out. It’s just us, Roz. We’ll be back before anyone even realizes we’re gone.”

“This is a terrible idea,” Roslyn muttered, though her voice lacked conviction.

“Let me show you the gear.”

“No. Gwyn. We’re not...”

Gwyn raised an eyebrow, a mischievous twinkle in her eye. “Come on, Roz. Since when have I ever led you astray?”

Roslyn shot her a flat look. “Do you really want me to answer that?”

Gwyn burst into laughter. “Okay, okay, maybe I have a slight history of... impulsive decisions. But I’ve really thought this one through, Roz. Plus, it’ll be just you and me against the world. Like we’ve always talked about. Let’s prove it.”

Roslyn sighed, crossing her arms as her expression softened, though she clearly remained unconvinced. “Gwyn, we’re not protected by the city’s walls out there or our retainers. It’s dangerous. What if something goes wrong?”

“I’ve got us covered. I’ve been training, you’ve been training. We’re more than capable,” Gwyn assured her confidently.

Roslyn bit her lip. “I... I don’t know, Gwyn. It just feels like we’re asking for trouble.”

Gwyn closed the distance between them, extending her hand towards Roslyn. In response, Roslyn gently leaned forward, allowing Gwyn to take hold of her arm in a supportive grip. “Roz, I need this. I need to feel like I’m making a difference, like I’m doing something worthwhile. I’m always fighting people, I want to fight *for* people. And I can’t think of anyone else I’d rather have by my side.”

Roslyn looked into Gwyn’s eyes, searching for something. After a moment, she sighed, her shoulders slumping in defeat. “This is a bad idea... but I can’t let you do it alone. Alright, I’m in. But if things get too dangerous, we’re out of there. Deal?”

Gwyn’s face lit up, a beaming smile spreading across her face. “Deal! You won’t regret this, Roz. I promise.”

Roslyn shook her head, a small smile tugging at her lips despite her reservations. “I already do, Firebug. I already do.”

Oxylus

“Come on, look!” Gwyn said excitedly, moving towards a trunk. “I got us gear. Told them we needed it for our practice sessions,” she explained, pulling out armor pieces. “For you, I’ve got these hardened leather pieces. They’re light, leave you plenty of mobility for casting.” She laid out the armor for Roslyn to see before moving to another trunk. “And for me, I’ve got plate armor. So, for our little adventure tonight, you get to play the spell-slinging princess, and I’ll be your knight in shining armor.”

Roslyn rolled her eyes as she took in the armor laid out before her. “Ugh, fine. Just put it away for now. We’ve still got a few hours. How are we even going to get away without being noticed?”

Gwyn grinned. “Leave that to me. I’ve got a plan.”



As Gwyn and Roslyn emerged just outside the estate walls through Gwyn’s use of her **[Blink]**, Roslyn instantly doubled over, a look of sheer discomfort plastered across her face.

“Roz?” Gwyn asked, her voice laced with concern as she watched her friend struggle.

Roslyn, managing to lift a hand in a weak attempt to signal that she was somewhat okay, spat onto the ground before straightening up, only to bend over once more, heaving. Gwyn quickly moved to her side, her arms ready to steady Roslyn if need be.

“Ugh. That... oh, my stomach. Why?” Roslyn managed to gasp out between heaves, her voice filled with both pain and a hint of annoyance.

“Sorry, I forgot it does that to people not used to it,” Gwyn apologized, her face scrunching up in a wince. She hadn’t anticipated that her magic would affect Roslyn so strongly.

Roslyn just shook her head and spit again.

Finally, her friend stood up straight, taking in deep breaths as she tried to steady herself.

Her leather armor hugged her form, and the skirt paired with Gwyn’s staff in her hand gave her the appearance of a warrior mage, ready for battle.

She looked adorable.

Except for the almost puking part.

Looking around, confusion painted across her face, Roslyn asked, “Where are we?”

Gwyn, keeping her voice to a whisper, responded, “Outside the estate. Let’s get moving.”

She knew they needed to put some distance between themselves and the estate before anyone realized they were gone. They would have to move slowly for a bit, especially since Gwyn would likely be clanking around in her armor.

Think, Gwyn... Think...

She recalled the concepts of mana she had been delving into, the need to hide both herself and Roslyn from any prying eyes. The memory of conjuring shadows in Eldenthor with Neira flashed in her mind, a perfect example of what she needed to do now. She began to pull strands of black mana through her core, focusing intently on the concept of Conceal.

Pumping mana into her own form, she allowed it to spread outward, touching and drawing the shadows around them into a darker embrace. “Come closer. Put an arm around me,” she whispered to Roslyn, her voice low and urgent.

Roslyn’s eyes widened in confusion. “W-What?”

“Just come here!” Gwyn urged, her tone slightly more insistent.

As Roslyn moved closer, Gwyn slipped an arm around her friend’s waist, feeling Roslyn do the same in return. She [**Focused**] deeper, drawing more heavily from the black mana and watched as their surroundings seemed to darken even more. A click formed in her mind followed by a rush through her body, and she smiled.

I’m on the right track.

Then, using her [**Telekinesis**], she skillfully manipulated the mana to create a cocoon around her armor, holding it firmly in place to minimize any noise.

At least she hoped.

It was very draining.

They began to move, slowly and cautiously. “Why are we moving like this?” Roslyn whispered, her voice filled with curiosity.

“We don’t want to get caught,” Gwyn responded, her voice just as low.

“Why not just [**Blink**] again?”

Gwyn couldn’t help the smirk that played on her lips as she answered, “Do you want to puke again?”

“No...” Roslyn admitted reluctantly.

“Then let’s go. Just one block, then I can stop.” Gwyn assured her, confident in their clandestine escape.

When they successfully made their way from the estate without drawing any attention, Gwyn felt a surge of triumph as she released the magic, allowing the shadows to fade back to their natural state. She couldn’t help but smile, feeling a sense of freedom she hadn’t experienced in a while.

Let’s gooo!

She felt *amazing*. For the first time since she arrived, she was truly doing something completely of her own accord. No one directed, guided, or forced her to do this.

Gwyn was able to do what *she* wanted.

It was so liberating.

With a playful twirl, she came to a stop in front of Roslyn, executing an elaborate bow with a hand outstretched toward her friend. “Alright, milady. As your knight, let us embark on a grand adventure!”

Roslyn couldn’t contain her giggles, her eyes sparkling with amusement. “Why, what a gallant knight I have! Yes, Ser Gwyn, let us depart posthaste!” She lifted the staff and pointed forward.

Their laughter mingled in the air as they shared a moment of unbridled joy, momentarily forgetting the potential dangers of their escapade. Falling into step beside each other, the girls made their way toward the Westerly Gate, their spirits high.

Gwyn mused that they could probably slip through the Queen’s Gate, reserved for nobility, without much issue. However, she wanted to avoid any unnecessary risks that could lead to them being discovered. So, the normal gate it was, blending in with the commoners and other people that frequented the area.

As they walked, the excitement bubbled within Gwyn, her heart light with the thrill of their secret adventure. She couldn’t help but feel grateful for Roslyn’s presence, her willingness to join in despite her reservations.

Walking through the bustling streets of the city, Gwyn and Roslyn seamlessly blended into the crowd of the city folk. The atmosphere was lively, filled with the sounds of chatter, laughter, and the occasional street performer playing a lively tune.

Even if it was things both of them had seen before, being able to see it without guards watching over them was so much better.

As they made their way through the throng of people, Roslyn turned to Gwyn, her eyes filled with curiosity. “So, do you actually have a plan for tonight, or are we just winging it?”

Gwyn shot her a confident smile. “Of course I have a plan! I’ve packed food, water, and some supplies in my bag. I’ve got some money too, just in case we need it. And who knows, maybe we can hitch a ride on a wagon or something.”

Just as she finished speaking, a city guard moved to step in front of them, seemingly not noticing their presence at first. His eyes widened in surprise when he finally saw them.

“Hey, watch where you’re—” he began, but his tone changed as he took in Gwyn’s armor and Roslyn’s gear.

He quickly nodded his head, stepping aside to let them pass. "My apologies, ser knight."

Gwyn couldn't help but smile, her mood lifted even higher as she rested a hand on the hilt of Raafe's Legacy. "It's quite alright! Have a good night!"

"Y-You too," the man stammered, still seemingly caught off guard. "A bit late for the young one to be out, innit?"

Gwyn smiled and looked back over her shoulder. "That's why I'm here! Thanks for asking though! We appreciate your concern."

The man nodded and mumbled something under his breath, but Gwyn didn't slow down.

"..Young one? I'm older than you!" Roz hissed.

Gwyn's smile was unwavering. "See? Everything is going smoothly. This is going to be a night to remember."



Easing her horse through the Westerly gate and into the bustling city, Sabina's eyes scanned the crowd as she navigated toward the townhouse. The day had been long, and all she wanted was to collapse into bed and get some much-needed rest.

However, as she made her way through the throngs of people, a sudden sense of familiarity washed over her. It was a feeling she couldn't quite place, but it tugged at her senses, urging her to pay attention. Instinctively, she reached out with her **[Detect Emotions]**, **[Focusing]** her magic to sift through the sea of emotions surrounding her.

Amidst the chaos of the crowd, she felt a presence she recognized, one filled with <<Excitement>> and <<Determination>>, coupled with a warm, oh-so-familiar <<Affection>>.

Her eyes darted around, searching for the source, but just as quickly as it appeared, the feeling vanished, as if it had slipped through the gate and out of her reach.

Confused and slightly frustrated, Sabina turned her horse around, her gaze scanning the area near the gate. But there was no sign of anyone she recognized.

That felt like her...

She frowned and turned around. Just then, another familiar presence caught her attention, and she turned to find Amari and Khalan emerging from an alley, both dressed in plain clothing with short swords at their sides.

Sabina guided her horse toward them, her expression serious. "I thought I felt her." She nodded to Khalan. "And if you're here, then it's definitely both of them. Where are they?"

Amari sighed, her face a mask of exasperation, while Khalan chuckled, clearly enjoying the situation. "The girls are on a little nighttime escapade," Amari explained, her tone laced with irritation.

"They don't know you're here, do they?" Sabina pressed, her eyes narrowing.

Khalan shook his head, his laughter subsiding. "Nope! Oh, this is fun. I feel like you, Sabina! Following in the shadows all secret like. Tell me, is this what it's like?"

Amari shot Khalan a sharp look, elbowing him in the side before turning back to Sabina. "I have no idea where they're going, but if they're leaving the city... you should come with."

Sabina sighed, her exhaustion momentarily forgotten. "Fine. Let's go..."

Amari raised a hand, and Vicori Rollo appeared from the crowd, his eyes widening in surprise as he saw Sabina. "Take Sabina's horse to the estate. She's with us."

Sabina groaned, dismounting with a huff. "This kid better have a good reason. I'm exhausted."

Amari patted Sabina on the shoulder, her expression sympathetic. "You know she doesn't. She's a teenager."

Sabina couldn't help but roll her eyes. "Fuck. I need sleep. I'm going to kick her ass."

"Great, then you can tell Taenya," Amari suggested, a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Wait... Taenya doesn't know?"

Amari shook her head, her smile growing wider. "Nope!"

Sabina groaned again, her frustration mounting. "And why do I have to tell her? Isn't that your responsibility?"

"Because you two are *much* closer than she and I! She'll hesitate before trying to punch you."

"First, of the two of us, you're the one that can beat her in a spar. Second... I don't know what you're talking about..." Sabina mumbled, her cheeks heating up at the insinuation.

"Oh, don't be like our little Gwyn. Yes, you do. You look like you could relieve some stress. I'm sure she'll help."

Sabina felt her cheeks burn even hotter, and she quickly turned away, trying to hide her embarrassment. "Stop prying. That's my job. Come on, let's just get this over with..."

She could hear Amari and Khalan snickering behind her like school children, but she chose to ignore them, focusing instead on the task at hand. She had a princess to find and, apparently, some explaining to do.



Gwyn's eyes sparkled with gratitude as she addressed the older man who had kindly given them a ride. "Thank you for the ride!" she exclaimed, her voice filled with sincerity.

The man's chuckle was soft and warm, filled with amusement as he watched the two young women hop down from his wagon. "Of course, young lady," he responded, his eyes twinkling with mirth.

Gwyn, ever the defender of her honor, frowned slightly, straightening up as she corrected him. "I'm not young, I'm a knight."

The man couldn't help but snort at her declaration before he winked conspiratorially. "Of course you are. You two be careful. Stay away from the northern parts of the town, alright?"

Gwyn opened her mouth to respond, but Roslyn was quicker, interjecting smoothly, "We will. Thank you, mister. Please excuse my... knight. She's a bit overprotective of me."

"As I should be, milady!" Gwyn declared proudly, striking a gallant pose.

Roslyn groaned. The man, however, seemed to find the whole exchange amusing, shaking his head in amusement.

"Allow me to pass on a bit of wisdom," he said, his tone becoming more serious. "Don't let it be known that she's a noble, young ser. Just two young warriors out at night."

Roslyn gave Gwyn a pointed elbow to the side, whispering a curse under her breath as she did so. Gwyn gasped in surprise, both at the contact and her friend's choice of words. "Roz! You cursed!"

"Your armor hurts!" Roslyn shot back, wincing slightly.

"You're the one that hit me!" Gwyn retorted, her voice filled with mock indignation.

The man chuckled once again, clearly entertained by their banter. "Have a good night you two. Please... stay safe."

The girls exchanged smiles and waved their thanks, calling out in unison, "We will!"

As the man's wagon disappeared into the night, the two of them turned to face each other, the adventure lying ahead of them, and the excitement of the unknown filling the air around them.

"I'm surprised he let us go so easily," Roslyn said.

Gwyn shrugged. "We did pay him some silver for a ride across the bridge into town."

"True."

“Alright! To the woods!”

“After you, ser knight,” Roz says with a cute smirk.

Gwyn and Roslyn continued walking through the dimly lit streets, their steps echoing off the cobblestones as they navigated the labyrinth of the city. The excitement of their clandestine adventure mingled with the cool night air, creating a sense of exhilaration that neither of them had anticipated.

As they rounded a corner, Gwyn realized they had taken a wrong turn.

The city's layout was more complicated than she had thought, and they were headed in the opposite direction of where they needed to go.

“Whoops. Wrong way.”

Roslyn narrowed her eyes. “Are you sure you know where we’re going?”

“Of course I do!”

Determined to get back on track, she steered Roslyn into a narrow alley, hoping it would serve as a shortcut.

Their footsteps were muffled in the confined space, and the shadows seemed to dance along the walls as they moved. The alley was eerily quiet, and Gwyn could feel her senses heightening, attuned to every sound and movement around them.

Suddenly, three figures stepped out from the shadows, blocking their path.

Gwyn's hand instinctively went to the hilt of her saber, her eyes narrowing as she assessed the situation. The men were rough-looking, their faces hidden in the darkness, and Gwyn could feel their malicious intent like a palpable force in the air.

“Hand over your money, and we might let you leave this alley in one piece,” the tallest of the three men sneered, his voice low and threatening.

Gwyn's grip on her sword tightened, her heart pounding in her chest as adrenaline surged through her veins. She could feel Roslyn's presence behind her, and she knew she had to protect her friend.

“You really don't want to do this,” Gwyn warned, her voice steady as she drew her sword in a whisper of metal on leather as it left the sheath.

The man chuckled, a dark, sinister sound that made Gwyn's skin crawl. “You're a scrawny thing,” he taunted, pulling out a dagger as the other two men brandished cudgels. “Give us your coin, and we won't leave your bodies in this alley.”

Without hesitation, Gwyn darted forward, her movements swift and precise. She caught one of the cudgel-wielding men off guard, bashing his weapon away before slamming her gauntleted fist into

his face. A crunch and a spray of blood followed before he crumpled to the ground, unconscious, and Gwyn quickly jumped back to avoid the dagger wielding menace.

“What the fuck!?” the man snarled. “You’re going to fucking pay for that, bitch.”

Backing up to Roslyn, Gwyn took a deep breath, **[Focusing]** as she tapped into her **[Arcanomancy]**. She could feel the mana flowing through her, a powerful current that she harnessed with practiced ease. Drawing on her knowledge of spells, she began weaving together a new spell, one that tapped into both evocation and abjuration.

This time, she leaned on her red mana. These were criminals. Thugs. Who knows how many people they’d hurt, how many they’d robbed. What they were doing was against the *Law*. They deserved to be in prison.

Justice demanded it.

If she hadn’t already spent time making sure she had open slots for new imprinted spells, this would have been more difficult and time consuming.

She released the mana as she formed the spell she wanted, a rune lighting up and imprinting in her mind, as an immobile, purple-shimmering, cube-shaped prison of magical force sprang into existence around the men, trapping them inside.

The men’s eyes widened in terror as they realized they were imprisoned by Gwyn’s **[Arcane Cage]**. One man bashed his weapons uselessly against the magical barrier, while the others were cursing and looking around fearfully.

Roslyn gasped.

But Gwyn just reveled in the feeling that the rush of power gave as it coursed through her, the satisfaction of having successfully cast a new spell filling her with a sense of accomplishment.

“Stay,” she commanded, her voice filled with authority as she turned to Roslyn, a triumphant smile on her face

“Wow, Gwyn. That’s amazing.”

“Yup! But, let’s go! Our adventure continues!” she exclaimed, her excitement palpable as she grabbed Roslyn’s hand, leading her away from the trapped men and deeper into the night, their adventure taking on a new level of intensity.



“Gwyn,” a whisper came, hushed and filled with more than a bit of nervousness.

Gwyn halted, her instincts kicking in as she instinctively crouched behind the gnarled trunk of an ancient tree, her senses on high alert. "What is it?" she whispered back, her gaze scanning the dense foliage around them.

"I think I feel something..."

She looked around, before gesturing Roz to come closer. Her friend's eyes had a *very* slight glow to them. "What is it?"

"I feel like there's a... mass of green mana being used."

Gwyn's heart raced as she extended her own magic, reaching out with her **[Mana Sense]** as far as she could. Almost immediately, she felt the unmistakable pulse of mana being used, vibrant and potent, emanating from somewhere nearby.

She nodded to Roslyn, signaling her to follow, and they began to creep silently towards the source.

Gwyn's hand tightened around the hilt of her sword, her other senses heightened as she readied herself for whatever they might encounter. "Stay close, milady."

She could *feel* Roz's eye roll.

It's just too fun to be the knight! Maybe this is what I should have done instead of princessing.

Utilizing her **[Mana Sight]**, Gwyn caught a glimpse of Roslyn also drawing mana through her core, her form shimmering faintly in the spectral light. A warmth filled Gwyn's chest. Her friend had taken so well to magic and it was amazing.

Seeing all that magic surge through her, the green and yellow with a tinge of black that just positively *glowed*?

Beautiful.

Gwyn blushed and turned away quickly, causing a lock of hair to fall into her face. She quickly brushed it aside and refocused.

They maneuvered around a particularly dense bush, and the silhouette of something in the distance made Gwyn's arm shoot out instinctively to halt Roslyn, but her aim was off.

And she punched Roz right in the boob, eliciting a hushed yelp of surprise.

"Gwyn—"

"Shh!" She grabbed her friend and yanked her down and toward a fallen tree. As they crouched down, peering into the clearing ahead, what they saw made them both draw in sharp breaths.

Right there... was a spider.

But not just any kind of spider. No.

It was a creature of nightmares; something that fantasy and movies and TV always liked to pretend was real but never was. When Gwyn was little, she'd always wanted a tarantula. Her mom had shut that down *immediately*. Mamma was deathly afraid of spiders, to the point that even at nine, Gwyn had to kill them for her.

This though?

Its size defied belief. It almost towered over them, well, at least in mass... the thing was probably a bit shorter than Gwyn, which still... was huge. Its massive body was covered in a green fur that shimmered in the moonlight. But what truly set this creature apart were the horns that adorned its head, giving it a demonic appearance that sent shivers down Gwyn's spine.

"Gwyn, what in Eona's name..."

"Shh... just watch. I think that's what we have to kill."

Roz's focus snapped to Gwyn, but the mesmerized lover of fuzzy things kept her eyes on the monsterized spider. And in what that spider was currently doing.

She pointed and whispered, "Look. That's why we sense the green mana..."

In front of it was a goat, struggling weakly as it was being ensnared not by webs, but by what appeared to be thin, verdant vines. Gwyn's mind raced, recalling everything she knew about arachnids. Tarantulas, she remembered, didn't typically use webs to capture prey.

This was something different, something more sinister.

The scene before them was both fascinating and horrifying.

I wonder if I could ride it...

She dismissed that thought with a mental chuckle. Layla would never forgive her for such an affront.

Yet, there was something mesmerizing about the spider, its every movement exuding a primal grace and power. Gwyn couldn't help but feel a mix of admiration and fear as she watched the creature at work, the twin moonlight casting eerie shadows across its green, horned form.

Roslyn's gasp brought Gwyn back to the present.

"It can use magic... this is going to be... tough," Gwyn murmured, eyes narrowing as she assessed their adversary. "But I think you should do most of the work here, Roz. It'll be better for your steps."

Roz exhaled a resigned groan, but her nod was decisive. "Alright. But you'll help, right?"

A fleeting smirk crossed Gwyn's lips, swiftly replaced by a determined gaze. "Of course, milady. Protecting her mistress is a knight's sacred duty."

She could see the struggle on Roslyn's face. It was that constipated look she got when she was struggling to simultaneously not roll her eyes in amusement and snap at Gwyn to be serious.

It was adorable.

With a shared glance of understanding, Gwyn unsheathed Raafe's legacy. "Let's do this," she said, her voice low and steady. "I'll stay close, you attack it from afar," she instructed, watching Roslyn nod in agreement. "Don't worry... I won't let it get close to you."

Her friend gave her a nervous smile.

The monstrous spider, preoccupied, failed to notice the two teens.

"Ready?" Roz whispered.

Gwyn nodded. "Ready."

Roslyn's initiation of the fight was abrupt, her elemental magic manifesting as a volley of baseball-sized rocks. One rock struck the spider's pedipalp with a thud, drawing a hideous shudder from the creature. Another crashed into the earth beside its entangled prey, a cloud of dirt and debris mushrooming into the air.

But the spider's response was swift and shocking. Vines, like living entities, shot up, intercepting the third rock with an agility that was frankly scary.

Caught off guard by this display of vine manipulation, Gwyn and Roz momentarily faltered. Before they could react, vines erupted from the ground around them, their sudden appearance leaving little room for evasion. Gwyn's wrist was ensnared by a sinewy vine, its grip tightening with a will of its own.

What the— Shit!

Without hesitation, Gwyn tapped into her **[Pyromancy]**, her arm erupting into vibrant flames. The vine recoiled from the searing heat, releasing its grip as the spider let out a pained cry.

"Hurting the vines hurts it!" Gwyn called out, her revelation cutting through the chaos of the battle.

As the battle with the monstrous spider intensified, Gwyn watched, her heart pounding, as the creature desperately tried to retreat with its ensnared prey. The vines, once an extension of its menacing form, fell limply from its back, and it attempted to scuttle away. Gwyn felt a surge of determination.

Not so fast. We're not done yet.

"Don't let it get away!"

She incinerated the entangling vines at her feet with a burst of flames, her **[Pyromancy]** responding instantly to her will. Advancing towards the spider, she noticed its apparent indifference to the pain. Her brow furrowed in confusion. *Why isn't it reacting?*

Before she could ponder further, Roslyn called out while launching another volley of rock projectiles. "It only hurts if the vines are connected to it!"

The spider, agile despite its size, dodged the barrage of rocks. Its thorax then lowered, pressing close to the earth, as it pushed more vines into the ground. *It's preparing another attack.*

"Get ready!" Gwyn shouted, gripping her sword with renewed focus.

The ground erupted with vines.

Gwyn slashed at them, but they were relentless. Some wrapped around her sword, yanking it from her grasp. She reacted instinctively, her **[Pyromancy]** flaring to life to burn away the vines.

A scream came from behind her.

As she turned, her heart skipped a beat.

Roz was in trouble—vines had wrapped around her ankle. Gwyn's protective instincts kicked in. With a **[Blink]**, she was at Roz's side, mana flowing into her hand.

She concentrated, her **[Cryomancy]** responding, and formed a blade of pure ice. She pushed more mana into it, solidifying it until its form was almost mirror-like in appearance, its edge sharp and gleaming. The ice felt alive in her hand, a cool, solid manifestation of her will.

A click, followed by a rush through her body made her smirk.

With a swift, clean motion, Gwyn used the **[Ice Blade]** to slice through the encroaching vines.

"Thanks!" Roz exclaimed, relief evident in her voice as she quickly formed a small platform of stone around herself to stand on.

Gwyn's smile was a fierce slash across her face as she expertly wielded her ice blade, slicing through the encroaching vines with ferocity, ensuring none would get to Roz.

Beside her, Roslyn's earth magic was surging to form barriers of soil and stone as the spider tried to get to them with its vines. Bursts of wind magic shot out at the vines as they whipped toward Gwyn and compacted dirt and stone shot around as Roz played whack-a-mole with the vines.

Gwyn could feel the raw power emanating from her friend, the earth responding to her will with a primal force.

And it was so *awesome*.

With her sword and a burst of fire magic, Gwyn kept the vines at bay, her flames licking hungrily at the green tendrils as her friend stood in the spotlight.

Then she had a realization.

It can't move if it's shooting the vines at us...

“Roz! Focus on the spider!”

Roslyn complied, her hands shaping the air as she formed rocks and propelled them towards the spider. Vines leapt up to intercept the projectiles, their movements unnaturally swift.

More vines hurtled towards them, but Roslyn's wind magic diverted them, her frustration evident. “I can't get through!” she yelled, her voice tinged with desperation.

“Grab tight!” Gwyn commanded, reaching out to her friend.

In an instant, they **[Blinked]** to the opposite side of the spider.

Luckily Roz didn't get sick.

Instead her hands whipped out and spun as she worked her wind magic, shaping it into a swirling tornado. “Use your fire!” she urged.

Gwyn didn't hesitate. Her **[Pyromancy]** ignited, and fire roared into the tornado, creating a spiraling inferno. She glanced at Roz, seeing her eyes looking as if they were replaced by a glow of pure green mana.

As the mana surged, the tornado expanded, engulfing the spider in a maelstrom of wind and flame. The creature screeched, a sound of agony and rage, as it broke free from its own vines and lunged towards them, its green fur singed and smoking.

Gwyn's snarl was feral. “Oh no you don't.”

She summoned her **[Arcane Cage]**, bars of crackling purple energy shooting up to ensnare the spider. Then, with a focused intensity, she unleashed a **[Pillar of Flame]** within the cage. The spider's screams pierced the night as the cage shattered under the heat.

But Gwyn was relentless.

They didn't want it to stop and use its magic again.

As she prepared a barrage of **[Fireballs]**, Roslyn's rocks smashed into the spider's face, pulping several of its eyes.

The creature reeled, screeching in pain, only for more rocks to pummel it mercilessly. With a final, decisive motion, Roslyn conjured a spike of stone that erupted from the earth, impaling the spider with unyielding finality.

Gwyn lifted a hand and a **[Pillar of Flame]**, resplendent in scarlet and gold, descended upon the creature, incinerating it in an all-consuming blaze. The fire crackled and hissed, devouring the spider until only ash and the stench of charred flesh remained.

Not taking any chances, she summoned the full might of her [**Draco-Pyromancy**] and fueled the pillar, letting the fires linger until the spider started to char.

Roz placed a hand on Gwyn's shoulder, her touch grounding. "It's done," she said, her voice a mixture of relief and exhaustion.

Gwyn sighed, the adrenaline fading, leaving a trail of exhaustion in its wake. She released her magic, the flames dissipating into the night.

Roz stepped next to her, staring at the big spider laying on its back with its legs curled up to the sky. The two best friends stood together. Now companions in battle and Gwyn couldn't help but smile.

"You did it," she whispered.

Roz sighed and leaned her head on Gwyn's armored bicep. "*We* did it."

Gwyn put an arm around Roz and pulled her close. "You okay?"

Roz nodded. "That was a bit scary. I don't know how you do it all the time."

She glanced down at her friend with a sad smile. "This is the first time I got to choose."



Emerging from the dense woods, Gwyn and Roslyn came to a sudden, startled halt. The sight before them was unexpected, to say the least. Lined up in a show of silent authority were a group of familiar faces in plain clothes..

Their paladins.

And Amari's face looked serious.

Before they could react further, the rustle of leaves and the sound of approaching footsteps from the woods *behind* made Gwyn turn sharply.

The emerging figure from the shadows spoke with a tone laced with exasperation and concern. '***You've got a lot of explaining to do, young lady,***' came a voice in her head.

Gwyn's heart sank. "H-Hey there... Welcome home, Sabina," she stammered, trying to muster a smile that felt more forced than genuine.

Ah, crap. I'm in trouble.

She quickly grabbed Roslyn's hand for support.

Roz squeezed and straightened her back.

Side-by-side.

The mind mage stepped into the moonlight, revealing her features.

The light accentuated the lines of fatigue on her face, her eyes reflecting a mix of relief and weariness. “Gwyn... I...” she began, her voice trailing off, laden with unspoken words.

Before the tension could escalate, Amari intervened from behind them, her voice calm and pragmatic. “Let’s get them to the estate, cleaned up, and let them sleep. We can all talk in the morning,” she suggested, her words a subtle reminder of the need for rest and reflection.

Sabina’s gaze softened as she moved forward, Roslyn gave Gwyn’s hand a small squeeze before stepping aside to let the knight envelop Gwyn in a weary embrace.

‘We have much to talk about, but Amari is right. Let’s go.’

“I missed you,” Sabina murmured, the fatigue in her voice unable to mask the affection she held.

Gwyn’s smile, this time genuine, was a small light in the darkness. “Missed you too, Auntie,” she replied, feeling a brief moment of comfort in the embrace.

That comfort was short-lived, however.

As Gwyn turned, a sharp smack landed on the back of her head. “Ow!” she yelped in surprise and pain.

“Don’t do that shit again,” came the stern, yet relieved reprimand.

“Ser Sabina—” Roz started before wilting under the knight’s glare. “Sorry...”

Rubbing the back of her head, Gwyn grimaced apologetically. “Yeah, me too...” she mumbled.

Roz stepped next to her as they followed the others and leaned close while they walked. “Thanks, Gwyn. Our adventure was fun. You were quite the knight.”

Gwyn chuckled and bumped shoulders with her bestie. “Anytime, milady.”

The arrival back at the estate passed in a blur of exhaustion and reprimands, particularly from Taenya, whose scolding was as fierce as it was filled with concern.

By the time Gwyn and Roslyn were cleaned up and tucked into Gwyn’s bed, they were beyond spent. The events of the night, the battles fought and the emotions endured, all culminated in a deep, unyielding fatigue.

Roslyn was the first to fall asleep, but in those brief moments between Gwyn’s own wakefulness and dreams, Roslyn shifted closer to Gwyn.

With a gentle movement, Roslyn draped her arm over Gwyn, pulling her closer in an instinctive search for comfort. Gwyn, feeling the warmth of her friend’s embrace, nestled back into

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Roslyn's arms. The softness of Roslyn's breathing caressed the back of Gwyn's neck, a soothing rhythm in the quiet of the room.

It was a moment Gwyn wanted to never end.

As sleep started to take her, Gwyn surrendered to the comfort and warmth of her friend's hold. In that soft call of slumber, with the gentle rhythm of Roslyn's breathing lulling her, Gwyn drifted off.

And listened to Mana speaking her successes.

[Spell – Arcane Cage created!]

[Elementalist – Step 62 attained!]

[Spell – Ice Blade created!]

[Elementalist – Step 64 attained!]

[Path Refinement Available!]