

Ashiirra stomped down the path, arms crossed, quite upset by the encounter, her head a whirlpool of thoughts, emotions, and rage. She barely even noticed where she was heading. Eventually she let out a great sigh and stopped her angry march. Looking around she realized she had wandered all the way to lower La Noscea. She shook her head her legs finally realizing how far she had gone. With another sigh she headed off towards Red Rooster Stead to find a place to sleep.

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She walked along the paths of the stead in the afternoons light looking around at all the people working. The Stead, being a large farming area, had people bustling around tending crops and animals alike. She felt a twinge of anger and a bit upset watching them. All these people, their lives filled with purpose. She sighed and continued heading to the hilltop.

As she walked she sunk back into her thoughts. Which is why she nearly jumped when something tugged on the tail of her coat. She looked back and saw nothing. Looking down though, she found the culprit. A small miqu'te girl stood there. Her hair a grassy green matching her eyes. She wore a rough linen shirt, much too big for her, and a good covering of dirt. As Ashiirra looked at the girl, bewildered at being stopped, the child held up her hands in a begging pose and asked, "Can you spare a few Gil mam?" Ash looked at her for a moment before retrieving a few Gil from her coin purse and setting them in the girl's hands. "Thank you mam!" the girl said as she bowed, she then scurried off as quickly as she had appeared. Ash stood there for a moment thinking about what just happened, then with a shrug she turned about and headed back to the hilltop.

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The next day Ash sat in a chair looking out the window of the second story room she had been offered, watching the people. Her mind wandered back to the woman who had encountered her at the spring. "Sitting here in your self-pity is forsaking those you love. Acting like this still means he has won." she had said. The words cut Ash's heart deep, she knew she needed to pick herself up, but she just didn't have the will to do so. So she sat there, watching people.

Looking towards the pumpkin patch she noticed something familiar. The little green haired lass was hard at work in the patch. Ash looked at her in wonder, such a young girl working hard in the fields. She spent the next few hours sitting there watching the little girl work, just thinking.

As the workday drew close to a close Ash got up from her lonely window. She headed down to the common area where people rest after a hard day's work, a mission on her mind. As she entered the common area she scoured the faces of those gathered. Spotting a face she had seen earlier she headed to the man. She approached him quietly.

"Hello Sir?" she asked.

The man was older, his skin sun baked from years of farming. "What can I do for you lass?" he responded.

"I was watching people work out in the fields earlier and noticed a young green haired girl working out there too. Could you tell me about her?"

"Ehh? Ariilyn?" he scratched the stubble on his chin. "Not much to tell, she's an orphan been here her whole life. Works hard for one so little. She pulls her weight."

"Ariilyn... a nice name. She has no family or anything?" asked Ash.

"Not that I know, stays over in the chocobo stables I think." replied the man.

"Thanks for your time sir." Ash said as she turned to leave.

"A pleasure to get to talk to a lovely lass."

Ash smiled as she headed away, the information she wanted obtained.

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The next day Ash awoke early the next morning. She put on some light, durable clothes from her pack and headed down stairs. Outside she quickly surmised who the foreman of the farms was. A big Sea wolf stood near the top of the hill barking out orders to those around. He must have been a ship master or some such she surmised. She walked up behind him and tapped him on the back; he spun around quick as a rabbit.

Staring down at her he said, "Ehh wot is i' now?"

Ash, having dealt with many Roe in her past was not intimidated by the big man. "I would like a job sir."

The big man looked a wee bit surprised, "Ehh? Why wou' a' 'venturer like ye wan' eh jobe 'ere?"

"I'm not an adventurer anymore sir," she replied.

"Well... we cou' use mer hands, wha' wou' you like ta do?"

"Actually... I was hoping to work some and meet the little green haired lass who works the fields." she said

"Ariilyn? Now why wou' you wan'a meet tha' squirt?"

Ashiirra shrugged at him, "She caught my eye is all."

The big man gave her a questioning look but shrugged it away, "Long as ye don' i'rupt 'er work ye' c'n go work 'n th' pumpkin patch wit' 'er."

Ashiirra nodded to him, "Thank you." she headed off in the direction of the patch, grabbing a hoe along the way. The fields were quiet so early in the morning, but the girl was already hard at work clearing weeds from the patch. Ash quietly began to pick weeds herself a little ways away.

Several hours passed before the girl noticed Ash. She stopped her work for a moment and stared at her.

Walking over she asked, "Aren't you the lady who gave me some Gil the other night?"

Ash nodded to her.

"Why are you out here then?" she continued.

Ash shrugged, "I felt like working."

"You 'wanted' to work? That's weird."

Ash just shrugged again, "Sometimes you want to do something different. Why is a little girl out here working?"

The girl's face turned into a frown, "Because they feed me if I do."

Ash paused to look at her, "Nobody feeds you? Who takes care of you then?" Ash already knew the answer but asked anyways.

"I do." the girl replied straightening up.

"What's your name?" asked Ash.

"Ariilyn. What's yours?" said the girl.

"Ashiirra, Ashiirra Azaria," she replied.

"Your name starts with an A too? That's so cool!" the girl said excitedly.

Ash just smiled and nodded at her, continuing her work.

The girl, realizing she wasn't working, began pulling out weeds again, albeit much closer to Ash this time.

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The sun was nearly set by the time they finished their work. Neither of them had spoken since their first little chat.

As they headed back to the hill Ash asked, "So where do we go to get some food?"

"On top, they cook stuff on the fires," replied Ariilyn.

"Shall we go get some dinner then?" asked Ash.

Ariilyn nodded and they headed up to the hilltop. Tomato stew was on the menu for the night, so they both grabbed a bowl and found a quiet place to sit.

"So how long have you been here?" Ash asked.

The girl shrugged, "I dunno. Forever?"

"Well you certainly work hard," said Ash.

"Yeh," was all she replied.

They sat in silence eating for a bit before Ash said, "You certainly are quiet, tell me about you."

The girl paused, thinking for a moment. "I dun'no, I live here and work and stuff. That's it."

"You don't play at all, you don't like anything?" asked Ash.

The girl shrugged again. "I like trees and plants and stuff. None of the other kids will play with me though. They all call me greeny."

"That's not nice!" said Ash, trying to get some energy out of her.

"It's ok, I don't really want to play with them anyways," the girl said solemnly.

"Well what do you want to do?" Ash asked.

"I want to go explore and learn things," the girl said, perking up a bit.

"Oh? Where do you want to go?"

"Everywhere!" The girl exclaimed throwing her arms in the air.

"Is that so? And how do you plan to do that?" asked Ash.

That stole the girls thunder, she looked confused. "I don't know..."

"Well traveling takes a lot," Ash said. "I've been all over the place."

The girl perked back up, "Tell me tell me tell me!" she said excitedly.

"Well..." they spent several hours together. Ash told the girl many stories. She told her of Gridania, of Ul'dah, of Coarthas, and of many other places. She also told her about the Path of Oschon and of the Adders. She even told her about the many people Ash knew, Vervara, Gunn, Devilish, Kiest, Liriel just to name a few.

The little girl was quite tired by the end of the tales. She had laid her head on Ash's lap quite a while ago and was nodding off to sleep. Ash just sat there rubbing the child's head. The happiest she had been in a long time. She looked up at all the stars in the sky wondering, "Was this just chance?" She sighed knowing that there would never be an answer. She smiled looking back down at the girl who was fast asleep. Picking up the girl she headed to her room upstairs.

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The next morning Ash woke up early to work in the fields again. Ariilyn, whom Ash had brought back to the bed the night before, lay curled up across the bed from her. Ash smiled, doubting the girl had slept in a bed in a long time, but it was time for work. She reached over and shook her. The girl opened her eyes sleepily.

"Com'on it's time to wake up Ariilyn," said Ash.

Ariilyn woke up quickly at the voice. "What where am I?" she asked.

"I brought you to my room when you fell asleep last night." replied Ash.

"Ohh," the girl pushed herself up from the bed sitting up. She looked around, never having been in one of these rooms before.

"C'mon Aarii, we gotah go." said Ash collecting her things.

"Ohh Yeh!" she quickly jumped down from the bed didn't know what to do. She had a different shirt on that wasn't hers. "Wh-where is my shirt?"

"It's right there with your shoes." Ash pointed to a small heap of clothes.

Ariilyn quickly changed clothes and put on her shoes, just in time to see Ash tugging on her last boot. "Ready?"

"Yes, let's go," said Ash moving to the door.

And so it went, for the next three days they worked together in the fields, had dinner together with stories, and slept in Ash's inn room.

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On the third day while eating dinner Ash sighed in the middle of her tales. "I really should go back. I'm sure they are worried about me."

Ariilyn looked up at her surprised, "But then you would be leaving."

Ash nodded, "Yes I would be."

Ariilyn looked quite upset at that and thought hard and long. "Maybe you could take me with you?"

"Take you with me? I don't know, are you sure?" asked Ash.

Ariilyn was quiet for a long while before she responded, "Yes, I'm sure. I want to go with you. I don't have anything here. You're the first person who has ever been nice to me."

Ash sat looking at the child for a long time. She didn't know if she could do it. Sure she had taken care of Lily for years, but this was a real child. So many what ifs flocked her mind. But on the other hand, these last few days had completely changed her. She felt like herself again, a weight lifted from her shoulders. She sighed, "Ok let's do it."

"Really?" Ariilyn exclaimed, "I can go with you!?"

Ash nodded at her, "But you have to promise to listen to me. Like you would your mother."

"I promise!" she said, jumping up and doing a little dance "Yay! I get to with Ashii!"

Ash smiled at the dance. She herself was quite excited. "C'mon Aarii, let's go to bed. We will tell the foreman tomorrow."

"Ok Ashii!" the two of them headed off the Ashiirra's room for one last night.