

## 1035 SIDE STORY (NERA): LOVE

Nera didn't know where she should go from here, because this was the first time she was in the town, though she had lived here for years, but she had never stepped out of the area that Rei allowed her to go. Therefore, the bustling streets and loud noises from all the people bothered her. She was overwhelmed, she couldn't even think straight. The spirit couldn't come to see her, since they hated noise. People who looked at her with a curious look in their eyes and asked whether she was alright, looked scary in Nera's eyes, even though they did nothing to her. The only thing that Nera had in her mind was how to get away from this situation, because she felt suffocated to be surrounded by so many people. Nera didn't even know why she ran away from Rei when he kissed her, but that was her first instinct to get away as soon as possible from his clutch.

"What are you doing here?" A young boy around the age of seven stood in front of Nera when she finally found a quiet corner in this lively town. It was already late at night, but people only became even more excited. "You shouldn't be here. This is my place."

"I am sorry." The little boy feigned to be tough, as he crossed his arms. He tried to glare at Nera to scare her, but he failed miserably. His innocent eyes couldn't lie that he didn't know what fear looked like.

"Adie, what are you doing there?" A young man around Nera's age approached them. Probably he was older by a year or two from her.

"Brother! I think she lost!" The little boy approached his older brother and pointed his finger at Nera.

"Lady, forgive my brother's rudeness." He looked polite, but also sensible enough to immediately realize Nera's state. "Are you, okay, lady?" Nera nodded, but she didn't say anything. She still looked mortified and he noticed that.

"Do you have somewhere to go?" He asked and Nera shook her head. "Do you want to come with me? You look very shocked." Nera thought about that for a while and immediately nodded. She actually approached the brothers and came with them. The older brother then told her his and his brother's name. He was Dan and his little brother was Adie. They were merchant. They came here from Karam continent with their father to trade their commodity. Nera was impressed of how well they treated each other and how they conversed and teased one another. Was this how it looked like to have a family? They were very open about themselves, as they told her that their mother was waiting for them to return with their little sister, who was only one year old. They also told Nera about their baby sister.

"I am sorry, this conversation must be boring you," Dan apologized, as Adie kept gushing about how cute his little sister was.

"No." Nera shook her head. "Please, tell me more. I want to know more." They looked surprised by her request, but they must have seen the sincerity in Nera's eyes that she was genuinely curious to know more, thus they talked more about it, until it was very late at night. Once it was time to sleep, they graciously let her to sleep inside the carriage.

"Lass, I don't know who are you or what happened to you, but if you have somewhere to go, I will take you there, but if you didn't have anywhere else, you can come with me." The father gave Nera a blanket as they talked a little bit more. "But, you need to help. Of course, I will pay for your help." Nera had a night to decide about it. She was very grateful that she met with these people, they were nice people, the spirit liked them too. Therefore, the next day, Nera decided that she wanted to go with them. Travelled to many places, to see the beauty of the world and Nera had never been so happy. She forgot about Rei and somehow, her life before this didn't feel matter to her. She thought, she would miss the comfort of the manor and her bedroom, where everything was handed to her and she didn't need to do anything. But, sleeping under the stary sky was great too. And under this stary sky as well, six months later, she shared a kiss with Dan. It was not terrifying like how Rei did it and Nera felt her heart would burst with happiness. Ardie kept his word, where he said he would pay Nera and this was the happiest moment when she received her own money and bought a candy for her, Adie and Dan. Nera had never been so proud of herself when she got the money for her hardwork. Nera met so many people, most of them were merchants, because they interacted with them so often.

"Nera!" Adie called her, he rushed toward her with a big fish in his arms. "Look! We will eat fish!" he exclaimed happily. Dan immediately approached his brother and helped him, since the fish looked bigger than himself.

"How do you want the fish to be cooked?" Dan asked, as he skillfully cleaned the fish, while Nera and Adie squatted down at his left and right. They had watched this countless time, but they always looked astounded to see how great he was when it came to knife. Dan had a knack for it.

"You are so great, brother! I am so proud of you." Dan laughed. "I will take that as a compliment." Nera felt so happy. The three of them had never asked her why she came with them, they tried to make her felt comfortable and one day, Nera asked were they curious about her background?

"I don't know what happened to you, but you are not a child, you know what you should do or what you shouldn't do. More so, as a merchant, we have met countless people with different backgrounds, some they didn't proud of and didn't want to talk about it." Dan caressed her head lovingly and Nera liked it. She felt safe with him and comfortable.

"People had their own past that they are not proud of and father always taught me and my brother not to pry. But, aside from that, I am sure that my father and my brother agreed that you are harmless to us." Nera bit her lip, she felt like she wanted to cry. The more she spent her time with them, the more she realized how messed up the environment where she grew up and how shady the way Rei treated her.

"Thank you." That night, under the same stary sky, Nera gave herself to him and she didn't regret it at all, because she wanted it. She wanted to be with him.

"I really want you to meet my mother and my sister. I am sure, they would adore you like we do." Dan helped her to get dressed and kiss her shoulders. He loved this woman and he had said it a few times, reminded her of how precious she was and Nera could feel it. She learned how it felt like to have... a family.

"I hope they like me," Nera said nervously.

"Of course, they will," Dan said with a chuckle. The sound of his voice was akin to a sing in her ears. This man was so beautiful, even more his soul. The spirit liked him too. However, the day where Nera would meet with Dan's mother and his sister had never come, because on the nine months she had gone missing, Rei finally managed to get a hold of her. As a merchant, they moved from one place to the other relatively quick, thus it made it difficult for Rei to find Nera, despite his effort to dispatch all of the people under his command.

"We will go home! We will go home!" Adie said joyfully when their father purchased a ticket for them to return to Karam continent. Their ship would be here in two weeks and they would leave Andel Continent after being here for almost a year. This was Adie's first time to come with his brother and father to do trading and even though he was excited, but the little boy missed his home.

"Are you sure, you will come with me, Nera?" Ardie asked Nera when Dan listened to his little brother's rambling.

"Will I be a problem if I came?" Nera was still uneasy. Not because she didn't want to go, she loved to go with them and left this continent, but she didn't want to be a trouble for them.

"I would love you to come and I am sure, Dan is very impatient to introduce you to his mother." Ardie could see how much his son in love with this lovely lady. "Here, your ticket. I wish you to come."

"Thank you so much for what all of you have done for me," Nera said, she had tears in her eyes and Ardie hugged her.

"Don't cry." He patted her back and then showed her something that he took out from his pocket. "I saw this hair piece and I thought it looked beautiful. Do you think my wife will like it?"

"Of course, it's so beautiful." Ardie beamed to hear that. He loved his wife and was ready to go home to his girls. But, the next day, Rei knocked on their door.