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This short story **Verdict: Kiki the Dryad** is a direct prequel to the role-playing game **Verdict of Silence**.

Join Kiki on one of her misadventures, as she explores the world around her, all while discovering herself.

Kiki is such an interesting character, brimming with possibilities and contradictions. Thank you for supporting us, we really appreciate this opportunity to continue expanding the world of *Asalthana*

Thank you for believing in us.

This story is dedicated to you, our fans, and to our families, whose love of all things fantasy and encouragement has given us the strength to pursue our dreams. Without your combined support, the world of *Asalthana* and stories like these might never come to life.

Thank you for being a part of this journey. We hope that you continue to enjoy the world that we are creating together.

With heartfelt gratitude,

The VerdictGames Team

&

Seth Holloway

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Chapter I

Awakening

Amongst the grass, a pink haired woman woke to the sweet sound of birds chirping, the gentle morning sun filtering through the lush canopy of leaves overhead.

She blinked her eyes open, feeling the dew-kissed grass beneath her bare skin. As she sat up, the birds continued their melodic "kiki-kiki," and she giggled, admiring the sound.

"Are you talking to me, Mr Bird?" she queried the light through the trees.

"Kiki," she said aloud. "That must be my name!"

Looking down at herself, she noticed she was covered in leaves. They clung to her skin and tangled in her vibrant pink hair, which cascaded down her back like a waterfall of colour.

She admired the way the sunlight caught in her hair, and with a playful shake of her head, she scattered leaves everywhere.

"I must be a dryad," Kiki declared, standing up and twirling around with arms wide open. She felt an exhilarating rush as she spun, the world around her blurring into a kaleidoscope of colours. Her laughter was infectious, echoing through the forest as the birds joined her in a jubilant chorus.

Her first steps were tentative, but each new sensation was a marvel. She loved the feeling of cool earth beneath her toes, the tickle of grass against her skin, and the gentle breeze that played with her hair. Every moment was an adventure, every sight and sound an endless delight.

"I can talk to trees!" she announced to the forest, patting a nearby oak as if it were an old friend. "And I can make flowers bloom with a touch!" She waved her hands dramatically over a patch of wildflowers, watching as they swayed in the wind. When nothing else happened, she shrugged and moved on, undeterred.

Kiki wandered deeper into the forest, pretending to command the plants and animals around her. She practised her "magic," tossing leaves into the air and

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commanding them to dance. She threw sticks, imagining they were arrows of light, soaring through the sky.

As she continued her playful exploration, she encountered a Skrack, a helpless seeming creature like a ball of fur with sharp teeth. "Hello, little friend!" Kiki called out, extending her arms wide. "Do you want a hug?"

The Skrack tilted its head, seemingly intrigued by her approach. Kiki edged closer, arms still outstretched, and the Skrack hopped toward her with a cautious step. However, as she attempted to embrace it, the Skrack darted forward and bit her on her left breast.

"Ouch!" Kiki yelped, stumbling back in surprise. She rubbed the sore spot, looking at the Skrack with a mix of confusion and amusement. The Skrack chattered, almost as if laughing, before scurrying up a nearby tree.

Despite the unexpected bite, Kiki felt a strange sensation, a tingling warmth spreading from where the Skrack had bitten her. She looked at her hands, feeling an unfamiliar energy coursing through her veins.

"What is this?" she wondered aloud, flexing her fingers experimentally. A spark of light flickered at her fingertips, and she gasped in awe. Her heart raced with excitement as she concentrated, the light growing brighter until it danced like tiny stars around her hands.

Kiki laughed, exhilarated by this newfound power. "I really am a dryad!" she exclaimed, twirling again and sending a shower of shimmering light around her. She imagined the forest was responding to her joy, the leaves rustling in applause.

With her powers now awakened, Kiki felt more alive than ever. She continued her exploration with newfound enthusiasm, determined to learn more about herself and this magical world she had awakened to.

As the day wore on, she encountered various creatures, each interaction more whimsical than the last. In her mind, she befriended a family of rabbits, shared stories with a wise old owl, and even convinced a lazy turtle to race her to the riverbank.

Every creature she met seemed to try to escape her manic energy, undeterred Kiki would attempt in greater means to force her friendship upon them as she revelled in their company. Her laughter was a melodic demonstration of her

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joy, though its sporadic nature and intensity often made the creatures around her uncomfortable.

As the sun began its descent, painting the sky with hues of orange and pink, Kiki found herself at the edge of a sparkling stream. The water flowed gently, invitingly, and she waded in with a delighted squeal.

The cool water was a balm to her skin, and she marvelled at the way it shimmered with her light. She danced in the stream, her movements graceful and fluid, as if she belonged there among the water nymphs and river spirits.

In her heart, Kiki felt a deep connection to the world around her, a sense of belonging that filled her with warmth. She was Kiki, the dryad with pink hair and an endless capacity for wonder, and she was ready for whatever adventures lay ahead.

As twilight descended, Kiki settled on the riverbank, gazing at the stars that began to twinkle overhead. Her heart was full, her spirit free, and she knew that tomorrow would bring even more wonders.

With a contented sigh, she closed her eyes, letting the gentle sounds of the forest lull her into a peaceful sleep. Her dreams were filled with laughter and light, of adventures yet to come, and of a world waiting to be discovered.

And so, Kiki's journey began, a tale of magic and mischief, of joy and discovery, in a world as vibrant and wondrous as she was.

Chapter II

Companions on the Road

Kiki awoke to the soft light of dawn streaming through the trees, her dreams still clinging to her mind like wisps of mist. She stretched lazily, feeling the cool morning air on her skin and listening to the symphony of nature around her. Today was a new day, full of promise and excitement.

As she wandered along the path beside the stream, she hummed a little tune, her heart light with anticipation. Her pink hair shimmered in the sunlight, a beacon of colour among the greens and browns of the forest. She felt alive, every sense attuned to the world around her.

It wasn't long before Kiki heard voices up ahead, mingling with the sounds of nature. She paused, her curiosity piqued, and crept closer to investigate. Peering through the bushes, she saw a couple of young men travelling along the path.

They were handsome, each in their own way, with an air of confidence and mystery about them. One had hair as dark as midnight, his eyes gleaming like stars, while another sported golden locks and a smile that projected quiet confidence.

Kiki's heart skipped a beat. She was captivated by their presence, intrigued by the energy that seemed to surround them. She stepped out from her hiding place, a broad smile on her face.

"Hello!" she called out, waving enthusiastically.

The men halted, surprise etched on their faces as they turned to face her. Their eyes widened as they took in her appearance: her naked body barely covered by small leaves, her vibrant pink hair, and her unabashed grin.

"Who are you?" the dark-haired one asked, his voice deep and resonant.

"I'm Kiki!" she replied cheerfully. "I grew this whole forest, and I am a magical dryad!" she said with a loud, shrill squeal as she flung a handful of leaves in the air.

"Are you guys ghosts?" she giggled.

Verdict: Kiki

The golden-haired one chuckled, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "Not exactly. We're mages, travelling to the city of Vasalthein for a gathering of spellcasters. My name is Alaric," he said, gesturing to himself. "And this is Edrin." he pointed to the dark-haired one.

"A pleasure to meet you," Edrin said with a playful bow, his voice smooth and melodic. "A dryad, you say? We've never met one before."

Kiki giggled, twirling a leaf in her fingers. "Well, I think I am."

With a look of concentration on her face, she began to wave her arms in a mystical seeming manner. After a short moment of nothing, a look of disappointment crossed her face, before an idea happened upon her.

"Hmm. It's not working... wait!" she exclaimed. "I know! I just need one of you to bite me on the tit!"

The two men exchanged worried glances with one another. "Did she just say... tit?" Alaric stared at Edrin, who had a look of confusion on his face.

"Oh gods no." responded Edrin. "I would never! Keep those things away from me!" he gasped, mortified and shielding his eyes from Kiki's ample bosom.

Alaric roared with laughter.

"Titty magic, you don't say! That's impressive." Alaric said with a wide smile. "We could always use more magic on our journey. Would you like to join us?"

Kiki's eyes widened with excitement. "Really? I'd love to! Where is Vasalthein?"

"It's a grand city, full of wonders and mysteries," Edrin explained, his eyes lighting up at the thought. "There's a gathering of mages happening soon, and we're hoping to learn new spells and techniques."

Alaric leaned closer, whispering cheekily, "And perhaps have a bit of fun along the way."

Kiki clapped her hands in delight. "That sounds amazing! I've never been to a city before. What's it like?"

Alaric chuckled, adjusting the strap of his satchel. "You'll see soon enough. There's much to discover and many people to meet. Just be prepared for anything."

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As they walked together, Kiki felt a sense of belonging she hadn't known she was missing. The men regaled her with tales of their travels, of magical duels and enchanted creatures they had encountered. She listened with rapt attention, her imagination painting vivid pictures of their adventures.

In return, she shared her own stories, embellishing them with wild gestures and laughter. She told them about her encounter with the Skrack, her pretend powers, and the very real magic that had awakened within her.

Alaric grinned, his eyes filled with admiration. "You have a spirit that shines, Kiki. It's a rare gift."

Kiki blushed, feeling warmth spread through her at his words. She skipped along beside them, her heart singing with joy.

As the sun climbed higher in the sky, they reached a clearing where they decided to rest. The men set up a small camp, lighting a fire and preparing a simple meal. Kiki watched with fascination, eager to learn everything she could.

"Here," Edrin said, handing her a bowl of steaming stew. "It's not much, but it'll keep us going."

Kiki accepted the bowl gratefully, savouring the aroma. She took a bite and closed her eyes in delight. "It's delicious! Thank you."

Edrin chuckled, now lounging against a tree. "Cooking can be a form of magic too, you know. It takes skill to create something from raw ingredients."

Kiki nodded, savouring each mouthful as if it were a feast. Every moment felt magical, and she was grateful for their company.

After they had eaten, Alaric produced a lute from his pack, strumming a lively tune. Kiki clapped along, dancing spasmodically like a drunk. The forest seemed to come alive with music, and she danced with abandon, her laughter mingling with the melody.

As the song ended, Edrin looked at her with a thoughtful expression. "Kiki, we want to help you understand your gifts. It's clear that you possess some real magic and a talent for the dramatic." he smiled.

Leaning forward, he continued "I think if we go to the college of mages, we might be able to learn more about you." He considered his next words carefully.

Verdict: Kiki

“You don’t look like a Dryad. And I think the mages in Vasalthein might be able to teach you more than the forest creatures could.” he spoke gently, as if trying to comfort a child.

Kiki nodded, her eyes shining with determination. "I want to learn. I want to see everything the world has to offer."

Edrin smiled, his eyes softening. "Then we’ll teach you. You have a rare gift, and with guidance, you can achieve great things."

Kiki beamed, feeling a sense of purpose welling up inside her. She was ready for the adventure ahead, ready to embrace whatever challenges lay in wait.

As the sun began to set, casting a golden glow over the land, the group continued on their journey. Together, they walked along the winding path, their laughter and camaraderie filling the air.

Kiki’s heart swelled with hope and excitement. She knew that with her new friends by her side, anything was possible. The city of Vasalthein awaited, a realm of wonder and mystery, and she was eager to discover its secrets.

And so, with a skip in her step and magic in her heart, Kiki ventured forth into the world, ready to face whatever adventures came her way.

Chapter III

The Alchemist's Deception

The journey to Vasalthein was filled with laughter and camaraderie, the kind that makes time seem to fly by in a blur of joy and adventure. Kiki cherished every moment with her newfound friends, learning more about the magical world that awaited them.

As the sun began its descent on another day of travel, the group found themselves at the edge of a dense forest. The trees were tall and imposing, their leaves casting long shadows across the path.

“This looks like a good spot to rest for the night,” Alaric suggested, glancing around with an appraising eye.

Edrin nodded in agreement. “We’ll need our strength for the final stretch to Vasalthein.”

As they prepared to set up camp, a figure emerged from the trees. He was tall and slender, with sharp features and piercing green eyes that seemed to glow in the fading light. His clothes were a patchwork of earthen red tones, he wore a distinctive poncho with a large brimmed hat and he carried a satchel filled with vials and strange herbs.

“Greetings, travellers,” the stranger said with a nod. “I am Laeven, Alchemist of the Borderlands.”

Edrin, ever the diplomat, smiled and extended a hand. “Pleasure to meet you, Laeven. This is my partner Alaric, and our newfound friend Kiki. We are mages on our way to Vasalthein. Would you care to join us for the evening?”

Laeven’s lips curled into a smile. “I would be delighted. Perhaps I can repay your hospitality with a meal. I have gathered many rare ingredients on my travels.”

Kiki, always eager to make new friends, clapped her hands in delight. “That sounds wonderful! I’ve never met an alchemist before.”

Kiki bounced over to the man, attempting to hug him. The man eyed her with some disdain, stepping back and raising his arms to prevent her touch. “*Do not touch me!*” Laeven shouted with a hoarse voice.

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After a brief moment he recomposed himself “Please be careful, some of the compounds I carry are combustible. I must repeat, do *not* touch me.” he said coldly, glaring angrily at the pink haired woman.

“Please forgive our friend, Sir. She means no harm, she is just very... unique.” Alaric said apologetically, raising his arm between Kiki and Laeven.

As night fell, Laeven set to work preparing a meal. He moved with practised grace, mixing herbs and spices with a careful hand. Kiki watched in fascination, her senses enthralled by the fragrant aromas wafting through the air.

“This will be a feast to *remember*.” Laeven promised, his eyes glinting in the firelight.

The group settled around the campfire, their stomachs rumbling in anticipation. Laeven served each of them a steaming bowl of stew, the flavours rich and exotic.

“Thank you, Laeven,” Alaric said, raising his bowl in a toast. “To new friends and safe travels.”

“To new friends!” Kiki echoed, her voice bright with enthusiasm.

They ate with relish, savouring each bite. The conversation flowed easily between Alaric and Edrin, occasionally peppered by nonsensical statements from Kiki who was eager to participate.

Meanwhile, Laeven listened with interest, though barely speaking again.

As the night wore on, Kiki felt a strange sensation creeping over her. Her eyelids grew heavy, and her limbs felt as if they were made of lead. She glanced around at her companions, noticing that they too seemed to be succumbing to an unnatural fatigue.

“Is anyone else feeling... strange?” she murmured, her voice slurring.

Edrin tried to respond, but his words were lost in a yawn. First Alaric, then Edrin slumped to the ground, their eyes closing as they drifted into unconsciousness.

Kiki’s vision blurred, her mind swirling with confusion and fear. She fought to stay awake, but the pull of sleep was too strong. As darkness closed in, she caught a glimpse of Laeven’s face, a cold smile playing at his lips.

Verdict: Kiki

“Death is too good for you.” he whispered, his voice laced with malice.

When Kiki awoke, the forest was silent, save for the gentle rustle of leaves in the breeze. She sat up, blinking in the dappled sunlight that filtered through the trees. Her heart raced with a sense of urgency, though she couldn't quite remember why.

Looking around, she found herself alone, the clearing empty save for the remnants of a campfire. Her mind was a haze, and she struggled to piece together the fragments of her memory.

“Where am I?” she wondered aloud, a chill running down her spine.

She rose to her feet, brushing leaves from her skin. The forest felt both familiar and alien, as if she had walked this path before but could not recall when or why.

Her eyes caught on something glinting in the grass, and she stooped to pick it up. It was a small vial, the glass stained with a dark, viscous liquid. She turned it over in her hands, trying to remember its significance.

A voice echoed in her mind, soft and distant. “I am Kiki,” she murmured, the name feeling both right and strange on her tongue. “My friends... the mages?”

As she walked, a sense of familiarity washed over her. She was drawn to the path as if by an invisible thread, her heart urging her forward toward an unknown destination.

Her mind raced with colours and sounds, images of faces she couldn't recall and words as if spoken in a foreign language. For a moment it all seemed overwhelming until she happened upon a small, furry Skrack.

“Hello Mr Skrack!” she cooed softly, “I'm so confused and lost. Can you help me?” kneeling down to meet the Skrack's gaze, the creature lunged forward and bit her on the right breast.

Kiki reeled back, surprised by the creature's bite, she placed a hand over her chest - a warm glow of healing magic extended from her fingers.

“I'm a Dryad!” she gasped, amusing herself with thoughts of her healing magic and her forest surroundings.

Verdict: Kiki

Kiki set out to discover more about her mysterious powers, and to find her place amongst the Dryads.

The life that she had left behind was now completely unknown to her, all she knew was that she was Kiki, the dryad with pink hair and an indomitable spirit, and her adventure was just beginning once more.

THE END