

I returned to the lantern in the middle of Oedon Chapel's dais. The little one holding it wiggled at me, and for the first time I really took note that I could only hear them when in the Dream. Its mouth was certainly moving so I expected it was trying to make those bizarrely deep moans, but silence greeted me. Must be the dimensional shenanigans, something with them not being here in their entirety. In a roundabout way it made sense, in that only I could see and interact with them but sound wasn't nearly as discriminatory.

The crippled mutant perked up, looking around in fright. "Mm? Who's there?"

"It's Taylor again. Don't panic."

His head turned on its too-long neck to face my general direction. "A-and how'd you end up in here? I certainly didn't hear footsteps." Another giggle, despite there definitely being nothing humorous in his questioning.

"It's a long story. I don't know if you're familiar at all with the idea of teleportation. Suffice to say that until I can escape Yharnam I at least have the ability to move around with relative ease to places I've already been."

"Well, well I'd appreciate it if you announced yourself on arrival. Don't know how much me insides differ from the average person's but I'm in no mood to see if I can die of fright." It was interesting that he was a little indignant but was calming down. In a way that made me a bit more inclined to trust him, that he wasn't putting on a purposeful air of obsequiousness.

"Sorry for the scare." My apology was genuine. "Can you perhaps give me advice as to where the priests might've kept chairs, tables, that sort of thing? I have a little girl with nowhere else to go so I'd like to set her up here rather than leave her with an incense dish alone."

He chewed his lip with those blunt teeth. "A little girl? How little are we talking? You do know I won't be able to keep an eye on her or give chase, for obvious reasons."

Time to see how he reacted to the next part. "Well it's either here or Iosefka's clinic..."

"A clinic? Out west, for blood ministrations? Those places have strong doors. If there's still enough staff it'd be a far better place for a little girl." And that reaction sealed it. It came out so quickly and lacking in subtlety that I couldn't imagine it to be a lie. This poor man was trying to help as best he could.

"Thanks for the advice. Sorry to say, that was just a test. Someone...someone's either kidnapped or killed Iosefka. I'm going to either rescue or avenge her, but in the meantime the girl will need to stay behind these particular strong doors."

"...I don't know if I'd be enough entertainment to keep a child occupied," he said at length. "And if she wandered off, got herself hurt... I couldn't forgive myself."

"She's a hunter's daughter," I did my best to reassure him. "She's just a little too full of hope and willing to talk with others. I'm hoping, myself, that she'll understand the seriousness of the situation especially on the walk over." I began shoving the huge stone doors shut, closing off the entrances. Even with the physical boost Doll gave me, it was back-breaking work and I grunted with the effort as stone ground against stone.

“As for furnishings, I think... Wait, no, I don’t really know what direction I’m facing.” He posed and pointed forward and to his left. “There’s a storage room over there. Think you might have to move a few urns, can’t be sure, but there should be chairs and some other things.”

“Thanks,” I smiled as I began to retrieve a few things. Some chairs, a fold-out wooden table... Now I just needed a deck of cards or some other thing to occupy someone’s time. “I’ll work on thinking up a name for you if you’re still interested.”

“Either or,” he shrugged his narrow shoulders. “Suits me just fine regardless.”

(BREAK)

I set out from the chapel on foot, hacking my way through the various beasts and monsters on the long, tedious journey from the chapel to Gascoigne and Viola’s home. By the time I reached the window I was winded, battered, and covered in blood. I still hadn’t settled on what I would tell her, so it’d have to come organically.

I rapped on the window. “Are you still awake?”

Stocking feet padded over, pulling the curtain aside hesitantly at first, then more fully once she recognized me. Now I got a good look at her. Honestly, the girl reminded me a good deal of Vista from back home. Her long blonde hair fell in slight waves down her back, tied lightly with a white silk ribbon to keep it from falling in her face. Bright blue eyes, almost cyan, glittered up at me. She was tiny but had the look of a preteen, so my estimate of around ten – a small ten, to be sure – was probably accurate. A hopeful smile adorned her face, but I could see the metaphorical cracks. Somehow, between then and now, I think she realized what had most likely happened. Or perhaps she had already by the time I’d first met her but still clung to desperate hope.

“Hello, Miss Hunter,” she chirped. “Do you have any news?”

It spilled from my mouth before I could stop it. “I-I found your mom. She...beasts got her. Your dad killed them all, but...” I was only barely able to pause myself and edit things. I wasn’t about to tell her the truth of that particular interaction. “I got to talk with him a little, before he passed. He loved you and your mom very much.”

Tears spilled from her eyes like waterfalls, absent sniffles or sobbing. It was a near certainty that she’d already acknowledged what was likely to happen but just hadn’t admitted it to herself. “I, wh-what...?” She couldn’t speak, throat closing up.

The fear that I was breaking another member of this poor family nearly overwhelmed me, but I pressed on. I withdrew the brooch from my pocket. “They would have wanted you to have this. It’s...it’s yours now.” I rested against the window lattice, feeling my body going limp as I shared in her sorrow. “I... I lost my parents too. My mom died and my dad forgot me, and evil people stole the flute I used to remind him. I couldn’t... You needed to know the truth, even though it hurts, because your life isn’t over. It’s going to hurt, it’s going to hurt every single day. But you’re still alive. Your parents’ love and dreams live on in you and you can’t give up because of the hurt. You can’t give up like I did,” I finished with a whisper.

The window slid open. Her little hand rested on mine, holding my hand as much as the brooch. What a strong girl. “Sssso what do we do now?” she asked, forcing the words out through trembling lips and a throat that kept wanting to seal up, a voice that shook and tried to hiccup.

*We...* “The beasts are getting more aggressive. Just the incense dish might not keep them back tonight. I found a place, Oedon Chapel, outside the Tomb. It has a lot of incense, enough to scare off most any beast, and huge stone doors to keep out anything else nasty. I’ll take you there to wait out the night. You don’t have the magic or weapons I can rely on, so your job is just to stay alive so you can make a new life after all this is over. My job is to kill every single beast I can and save as many people as I can manage.”

She nodded gravely, accepting the brooch. “Let me get my shoes. The front door is over this way.” The window closed.

I took off my hat, pulled down my face covering and lifted my goggles so she could see my real face. “Do I... Is it okay if I come in? My shoes are pretty nasty.”

The girl was all business now, the woman of the house. “Daddy used to have the same problem. Usually Mummy would clean it up, but for tonight I think we can leave it. Bigger issues to deal with, right?”

I nodded. “Yeah. Grab whatever food will keep, we’ll put it in a rucksack. If you have a favorite doll, or a deck of cards, anything to help keep yourself occupied. I’ll hopefully find more people but right now the only other person at the chapel isn’t going to be the best company. He’s nice enough but was born with a lot of defects.”

She looked over at me when I said that. “Defects?” The use of the term seemed strange to her, and I suppose it probably was. I described the Chapel Dweller and his eccentricities. “And he doesn’t have a name, either?”

“Yeah, we’re working on that for him.”

Her little head poked out of the kitchen from where she was folding up a tablecloth to form a sack. “I just realized, I never asked your name.”

“Heh, nor I yours. I’m Taylor.”

“That’s a pretty name,” she smiled. “I’m Siobhan.”

I took her hand and led her out. Not a moment too soon, apparently. I don’t know what was pursuing us, but as we walked away my sharpened ears picked up the sound of rummaging from within Siobhan’s home, followed by a maddened female scream. “*Where is it!?*”

We walked more quickly.

(BREAK)

Siobhan was a strong girl. She didn’t say anything about the corpses we passed. Then again, perhaps I was misjudging her stoicism. This girl was the daughter of a hunter, someone who killed these

monsters as a profession. It only made sense that she wouldn't see this as quite so horrific, much like how I would be horrified at having to slaughter a cow but a farmer would see it as a part of life. Interestingly, I still internally cringed at the idea of having to kill a cow. I guess there was a fundamental difference between killing things that mean you harm and killing something harmless out of necessity. Still, she followed behind me up the various ladders and didn't complain when her shoes and stockings got soiled. I led her to Oedon Chapel and introduced her to the Dweller, who was surprisingly cute in his nervousness over how to handle her. It made me think of C-3PO.

Once again, his impotent mother-hen attitude set me at ease. He might not be able to keep Siobhan safe, but at least I was assured that he meant her no harm. "So who could give me directions around here? I'm trying to find a few places, including the entrance to the Forbidden Woods."

He actually gasped at that. "The Forbidden Woods!? Not even beasts stray far inside there. The monsters out there are the stuff of nightmares. Why in the Vicars' good graces would you ever want to go to that hell?"

"Because the back entrance to Iosefka's clinic is through there. If she's still alive and being held hostage, I have to rescue her. If she's dead, I have to avenge her. She was my first friend in Yharnam." My voice was even, stern, resolute.

His long neck bobbed his head. He understood but clearly didn't like it. Something he had in common with Gehrman. "Well, I don't know much outside of these walls. But the streets of Cathedral Ward should surely have people still alive and possessed of their wits. You can ask around while helping people back here. I can all but guarantee at least one of them will have the answers you need. Only thing I can tell you is that the gate to the Grand Cathedral should still be shut. The leader of the Hunt is required to open that gate, or whoever to whom he gave his emblem. Last Hunt, that was noble Ludwig, but I don't know who bears the emblem of Chief Hunter since the Holy Blade passed."

I nodded, humming, seated in one of the (admittedly rickety) chairs I'd retrieved. "Any other advice?"

"Well, on the night of the Hunt, resources are going to be focused on, well, the Hunt. Plus, as an outsider, you're going to be looked down on. Whatever problems you face, you're likely going to need to negotiate with the Choir – maybe even Vicar Amelia herself. If you had something to offer in return for their help, you'd be in a better position." He smiled. "I know there's an artifact in the ruins of Old Yharnam, something that the priests have long tried to retrieve but were stymied by beasts – and hunters, of course, have far more important tasks than playing errand boy. However, if you were to bring whatever is held within the Church of the Good Chalice, I think it might earn you an audience with the Vicar herself."

I stood and stretched. "Thanks for the advice. You hold up here as best you can, Desmond."

He blinked those milky eyes. "What now?"

"Well, I was thinking of names," I smirked, "and you look like a Desmond."

A giggling guffaw bubbled up from his chest, and he beamed at me.