

## Chapter 2.25

### No Emotion

“What the-“ Sally was interrupted as Humphrey struck the cube of ice with his blazing sword.

It cracked and split, aided by the constant heat from the sun above. The cat jumped out as the two halves slid across the heated rock. Shivering and wet, he shook himself before turning to the Party.

“Hello.”

“What happened?” Humphrey growled.

“Oh. It was Edward; he came and took Lucius.” Archie continued shivering as he slowly warmed up.

Sally kicked up some dust. “But why? Just because we wouldn’t give him some gold?”

“*We wouldn’t bend the knee,*” Theo slurred from behind them, still on his knees. He looked half-melted as if the heat was sapping his energy. “*Dragon gonna get us. Gonna get ussss.*”

“Bed thing not a good idea, then?” She sighed at Humphrey with tired eyes. “Oh, what’s this, Theo? A clue to Edward?” She pointed at the floor where Lucius had laid.

The vampire crawled across the floor on all fours, dusting up his suit. He sniffed around the area indicated, where some dark crimson lay drying in the light. With a shaking finger, he scooped up the bloodied dust and stuck it in his mouth.

“I was about to say that is super gross,” Sally grimaced, “but I’ve done that a few times, so who am I to judge.”

“No,” Archie said, “that *is* super gross.”

Theo sat down and crossed his legs. Running his tongue around in his mouth with a furrowed brow as if trying to taste it like a sommelier.

“It’s a good thing you guys came when you did. Otherwise, Theo would have had to fight a werewolf for my hand or something.” She stuck her tongue out as if she were about to throw up. It was much cooler when Lucius emoted it.

“*I’ll kill him. Kill’em all. Haha.*” Theo nodded to himself, but his eyes remained glazed over as he thought.

“As fun as that would be,” Humphrey sighed. “Better we have some allies for the struggles ahead, right?”

Sally wasn’t so sure. It did help them out in the fight for Sanctuary, but then the other two villages were mostly just her Party alongside whatever Uniques fancied becoming a Leader - if even they were combat-orientated. If their success depended on a narcissistic werewolf, then they had failed already. Maybe they should kill him now just to make sure that never came to pass.

“I think this is... blood.” Theo shrugged and laid back on the ground.

“Oh. I’m not sure what I was expecting, really.” Sally exhaled. It’s not like he was a tracking hound or mentally stable currently. She drummed her fingers on her dagger sheath. Theo had known that Edward was nearby - like he did in Bordertown. There was some way he was able to be aware of his presence.

She walked over to him and crouched beside his head. “Hey, pup. Warm day out, huh?” Did you know that Edward was a demon?”

“Yes.” He remained impassive, his eyes closed.

“Didn’t you want to kill all demons?”

He lay there for a handful of seconds in silence. Eventually, he opened his eyes and turned to her - slight confusion across his brow. “*I killed... all demons?*”

“You left *one*, pup. Just one single one.”

“*Fuuc-*“ he was silenced as the zombie put a finger on his lips.

“Language. Firstly, he has taken our friend we need to save, and secondly, we need to locate where he is. Can you help with either without going crazy?” She removed her finger.

“*It’s possible.*” He frowned and rolled up to his feet as Sally stood too. “*Or not impossible. Or plausible - but not-*“

“Shhh. Or you have to be wrapped up again.” She sighed. “Why does the saloon not have a coffin?”

Humphrey shrugged. “It’s not exactly something that- *Theo!*”

The vampire had begun to jog off away from them and slid to a stop, turning dramatically with eyes wide. “*WHAT?*”

“What did I just say?” Sally put her hands on her hips. This was getting ridiculous, like trying to train a naughty puppy. “Get back here.” Putting him on a lead was out of the question; they already got enough weird looks as it was. Part of her was tempted to find out how long it’d take to learn carpentry and make their own place for him to sleep.

Archie sat preening himself, seemingly not too bothered about current events.

With the flash of blue light, the familiar figure of Edward appeared atop the awning of the saloon, catching their glares immediately.

“Hello again, friends! I thought I best put a little distance between us so your pet bat doesn’t attack me before I-“

Theo growled and ran towards the building in an attempt to climb up one of the supporting pillars.

Edward sighed. “I guess I should be quick then. Kidnapped your boy, won’t give him back until you meet our demands. The meeting place is Sands of Eternity, and-“

He vanished in another flash of blue as the vampire slid across the top of the awning to where he had stood. Theo paused, waiting just in case the demon suddenly reappeared.

“Well, that sucked.” Sally rubbed her forehead. “He didn’t say Lucius was at the meeting place, so that wasn’t exactly too informative.”

“Nor what the demands were,” Humphrey agreed.

She watched the vampire twitch in place for a while. Although Lucius was a relatively fresh addition to their roster, they should still try and rescue him. It would have been more effective if Edward had taken Theo or Archie - but neither of them were easily contained. If anything, it was a shame there were no System-created around to have helped them get a teleport stone bound to the demon. Then they could just pop to the location and have fun.

Although, if Edward had any brains, then they’d be prepared for that. He hadn’t shown much evidence of having any common sense - but perhaps it was just his inevitable nature that caused him to be lazy. If only he could-

“Theo, get down from the roof already.” She sighed and tapped her foot. This wasn’t going to work. As she eyed up the Death Knight, he nodded in understanding.

It took a little coercion, but once they had coaxed the vampire down from the roof and over to them, Humphrey had pounced and wrapped him up. Sally knew part of Theo accepted and wanted it, as he didn’t fight it as much as he was able to. If he really didn’t want to be contained, he could turn into a flurried assault of crimson and light pink. But he did not, and now he was bundled upon the plated shoulder of the ex-Observer. Still had the look of annoyance in his eyes but was contented enough to stay.

She brushed her face and groaned. Where to even start?

[Sally: now my demon was stolen by the other demon]

[Sally: all the problems coming to a boil]

[Chuck: we got to eleven, but it’s hard to find mobs]

[Sally: noobs, we are level twelve]

The STAR span closed as she didn’t wait for his response. There wasn’t a great deal of point in harassing Chuck about things, but sometimes it was nice to expel some steam to an outside source rather than keeping it building around the Party.

On the Map, it appeared that the meeting place was somewhat close to, but not quite in the direction of, the pyramids.

“Why can’t they be narratively useful and put things in the same place?” She whined to the Death Knight, who was reading over her shoulder.

“It could have easily been in the opposite direction, so we are somewhat lucky.”

Luck didn’t seem to have much of a factor in it. Ever since stepping forth in the second area, she had felt cursed, and she would repeatedly complain about it until she escaped or things got better. Neither seemed currently likely.

She knelt down to give Archie some pets. "Do you know what kind of magic they used to break the weather?"

He purred briefly and then looked up into the sky. "Something big and bad. If it has been going on before the Archie-tect died, then that seems odd."

"Surely," she nodded, not quite understanding. If things were broken when the Architect was still in control, then they would have tried to fix it. Unless they couldn't?

There were definitely a lot of missing puzzle pieces that they were trying to work with and guess at the intended final picture. It would be nice if there was just a reset button somewhere that could be pressed to bring about a proper weather system here - some rain or a nice cloud cover - even a dramatic storm would be lovely.

"So what's the plan then? Just walk in that direction until something bad happens?" She folded her arms and looked between the two members of her Party who could actually talk.

They both shrugged in response, deflating her. It may have to be something that rested on her shoulders. Time seemed to be ticking by as they stood out in the heat, frozen with indecision.

Finally, she threw up her hands. "Let's ask around in the Saloon; maybe someone in there has something useful between the ears. And the ceiling repair money is coming out of your counting stash, Theo!"

*"Hmff bff."*