

Chapter 375 Departure

The Staff of the Chosen still provided light, a similar hue as a campfire, yet flickering less.

Ilea was happy with today's training and of course finishing the last mission. Most of all, she was glad she had found a new group of Cerithil Hunters, one a little more experienced than Elfie's.

She was watching them fly off into the distance, to return in a couple weeks, a month perhaps. Isalthar hadn't been sure.

Ilea wasn't sure if keeping the Centurion factory and Elfie mostly a secret for now was the right move. They could certainly help with that problem.

However she didn't know if she could trust them that far. Isalthar had agreed to work with Walter and hadn't attacked any humans as far as she could tell. Internal politics however, was a completely different beast and she would at least talk to Elfie before making a decision.

"You look gloomy." Maro said as he stepped up to her. "Didn't want to tell them about the dungeon?"

"You did neither." She replied, walking over to the staff and ripping it out of the ground. A pulse of mana went into it to keep it alight.

The cloak of midnight appeared on her, covering the casual clothes after she stored her Bone Armor. It reminded her of her old cloak. Ilea did like having a hood, fashion that was sadly not exactly in during her time on Earth.

With the staff in her hand, the effect of the cloak wasn't noticeable. Turning it off, she did feel like she saw a little farther in the dark cave. Just a tiny bit. *Maybe it would make more of a difference to someone who couldn't see in the dark at all.*

Maro sighed. "Yea. I didn't."

"We're done with the missions and I'm in the mood to go back north, fight some monsters. I've made zero progress in these past weeks." Ilea said, twirling her staff as it the light returned.

"Just once more." Maro said, serious suddenly.

She turned her head to look at him, walking towards the cave entrance that led them here. "Once more."

"I hope I don't die." He said in a joking voice.

"Stop that." Ilea replied, smiling at his antics.

"Would be a shame... last time in the north before I retire." Maro added.

"You won't retire. You're just not a king anymore." Ilea said and spread her wings.

"Your fault really, my tragic death that is."

"Shut it or I'll kill you right here and now." Ilea added, not really joking anymore. She wouldn't kill him of course but it did annoy her a little. Perhaps because there was always a real possibility of death. She was fine joking about herself but if he died, she would probably blame herself.

The hypocrisy wasn't lost on her. His jokes however did stop as they moved back through the tunnels, once more following the trail she had left behind. Ilea was glad about the silence.

She asked the guards and soon found Dale, busy directing various people from the warehouse above. "You're back." Ilea said and stepped up to the group surrounding the makeshift table. A medium sized crate had been used.

All eyes moved to her, many showing surprise or something akin to reverie.

"Yes. Do you need anything?" Dale asked, obviously quite busy.

Ilea stepped up and summoned the documents she had gotten from both Mauro's ring and his office. The stack appeared on the makeshift table, causing various confused stares and glances.

Storage items are rare. I remember something about that. From a long time ago.

"That's what one of the leaders had in his office. I confiscated it earlier to make sure it doesn't get destroyed. Knock yourselves out." She said and was about to step away when she felt someone appear next to the group of guards.

Kevan, the noble stepping closer. "Captain. I think I will wait nearby, should my name come up in those documents."

Dale sighed and gave Ilea a hurt and tired glance. "Of course. It's easier to arrest you when you're already here."

Kevan snorted. "I was set up!"

"I know." Dale sighed once more and gave Ilea a questioning glance.

Ilea thought about asking Dale about the Golden Lily, at least have him check the documents she just provided. The potential dangers however outweighed her gains. Ilea would find them eventually, or more likely, they would find her. There was no need for Dale to endanger himself.

"That's all, have fun." She said after a moment and motioned Maro to follow.

The necromancer didn't make a scene but definitely caught a couple glances.

"Where to now?" Maro asked as he stretched, the two walking out into the open square.

A few streetlights as well as the dim shimmers behind windows gave the area some illumination.

"Back to Walter and then, to the north." Ilea said, quickly glancing at him but not mentioning anything further than that.

"I guess it's inevitable." Maro said with a sigh, smirking right after. "I suppose I should enjoy it."

"You should." Ilea said and smiled back.

They caught Walter and the others in a conversation about their future elven trading partners, suggestions being thrown around when their heads turned towards the newcomers.

"Could you give them what they needed?" Walter asked immediately, getting up from his sitting position. He looked between them with a frantic motion.

“Yea, of course.” Ilea said. “They left already.”

Walter sighed deeply, relaxing his shoulders and arms. “Thank the gods.”

“Didn’t take you for a religious man.” Maro said and walked past, clasping Walter’s shoulder before he went behind the bar to pour himself some ale.

“We still have some few things to discuss.” Ilea said and summoned the empty storage ring of Mauro. “This, you can have. Both just because it might come in handy and because I kind of pressured you into this new endeavor.”

She smiled and held out the ring.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Walter asked.

The others moved closer to look at it.

“This...,” Lucia exclaimed. “Unholy shit!”

“Are you sure?” Walter asked. His eyes were wide, staring at the ring before he once more focused on Ilea. “This is more valuable than anything we possess.”

Ilea just waved him off. “You’re underselling your ale. Take it. It’ll make your trading easier too.”

“Aren’t we going to get in trouble if you use that with people watching?” Celene asked. She gave Walter a worried glance, unsure about the whole situation.

“Not more than being a dark sorcerer. As long as there aren’t any high level people hunting me down for it. I’ll only use it outside of town.” Walter suggested.

“Do you have some paper?” Ilea asked, looking around.

Walter deadpanned for a second before he nodded. “The letter... yes, of course. Let me just...,” he walked off and past Maro, who was still filling glasses. Searching under the counter, Walter came back up and walked out with a couple pages of paper.

“Thanks.” Ilea said and took one, her pen appearing in her hand. She started writing immediately, one letter for Alistair and one for Claire.

Ilea planned to inform Claire directly but there was a chance that Ravenhall or a Shadow could get wind of the whole thing before she had a chance to go back. *Just. In. Case.* She thought, finishing the first one to Claire.

Simple and concise, mentioning the Vultures and Walter including some descriptions and the purpose of the whole trade. “How do I sign with my mana?” Ilea asked to the group.

Maro was distributing glasses, putting one down before Ilea with a wink.

Their attention moved from the ring to Ilea, one of the plates on their desk appearing and disappearing quickly.

“I’ll take care of it.” Lucia said and moved over, sitting down opposite the Shadow. “There needs to be a light enchantment on the paper before you can sign with your mana signature. They do know yours?”

“Both had documents signed by me and both know me, is that enough?” Ilea asked.

Lucia glanced up for a second before she focused back on the paper, magic flowing from her fingers as she traced over the thin sheet. “You leave a lasting impression so I assume it is.”

Ilea took a sip of ale before she signed the paper, both with her signature as well as her mana. Putting down the glass, she continued with the second letter to Alistair.

“Walter, come and read it.” She said, giving the man a glance as she watched him move his gloves in and out of his new ring.

He seemed flustered, getting up quickly before he read over the letter.

She was still looking at him and smiled. “You can summon them onto your hands already. Takes some practice but it isn’t that hard.”

His eyes moved up. “Really? That’s amazing...,” he looked down at his ring and smiled.

I can practically hear the black riders coming. Ilea thought and finished the second letter.

Lucia enchanted it and Ilea signed it.

“Ilea.” Walter spoke, tapping the table, obviously a little unsure. “With the gold from the Shadow mission you finished... I think this is beyond too much.”

“Don’t mention it, please.” Ilea said and sat back. “I have so much gold and items as well as powerful and capable friends. Believe me when I say that this ring and the gold is just a small gift.”

“Way to brag about being fucking rich.” Maro said and sat down next to Walter, taking a sip as he smiled.

Ilea sighed. “I guess that’s one interpretation.” She smiled at Walter. “You’re a good man and you’ve been a friend to me in this strange land for a long time now. It’s really the least I can do. If you need anything else, just let me know.”

Walter smiled and shook his head. “Thank you. Truly.” He looked at the signed letters and made them vanish. “I’ll have to get used to this.” He mumbled. “I suppose being diplomatic with intruders was really the way to go.”

The door to the common room opened with a creak.

Ilea had a smirk on her face as she turned and looked at Green, the demon locking eyes with her.

He snarled and took an unsure step, moving slowly. His face was stitched together with pieces of flesh not previously a part of it. It looked a little smashed still but not entirely destroyed.

Indra stepped in behind him with a big smile. “I did it! And at a much higher level than myself.” He spoke, looking at Maro.

“Well done. The face looks... acceptable. I probably would have gone for the skeleton alone.” The ex king said, appearing near the undead demon.

[Demon Undead – lvl 123]

I suppose it is impressive, considering Indra’s level is below one hundred. Ilea thought and watched them discuss some peculiarities.

Maro touched the demon, both of their necromantic magic flaring up from time to time.

“You’re going back north?” Walter asked finally. He was trying to get on his gloves, failing a couple times.

“I am.” Ilea replied. “If we survive, I would assume we’d come for a visit again afterwards?”

“You are always welcome, as is Maro.” The dark sorcerer said.

“That is great to hear.” Ilea said and smiled. “Same of course for all of you, in Ravenhall. Should you ever need it.”

“It’s good to know... that a Shadow has our back.” Walter said.

“You’re at the same level as a Shadow.” Ilea retorted and cracked her neck before she finished her glass of ale.

Walter waved his hand sideways. “I think most of us grew up with the idea of a Shadow, a powerful mercenary here to kill monsters, or people. Reaching my current power, yea, I can match some of them but you... since coming back from the north, you truly represent this thought again. For me at least.”

“I get it.” Ilea said. Not growing up in Elos hadn’t instilled the same picture of a Shadow in her mind but there were plenty of organizations back on Earth whose members had a certain reputation.

“Sure you don’t want to stay the night at least? Move in the morning?” Walter asked.

“The storms return by day and we’ve been south for longer than I told our friends up north already.” Ilea said and turned to Maro. “Ready to go?”

He looked at her, his face turning serious before he nodded. “Anytime.”

“Good luck then, in your trading. I hope Alistair accepts the contract you had suggested.” Ilea said and shook Walter’s hand.

“He will, especially now that I helped take care of the smugglers.” The sorcerer replied with a knowing smirk.

Smart move. Ilea hadn’t even considered the good graces his help would put him in with Alistair and the city. If Dale reported it of course.

They said their farewells, to all the members and initiates as well as Weavy and Eyn. The newly undead Green couldn’t talk and Ilea was informed that there wasn’t anything left of his previous mind, neither physically nor otherwise.

Her wings moved in the dark skies, storm clouds moving above, obscuring the moon and starlight. Rain was pouring down, the water flowing past Ilea’s ashen armor as if it rejected her form.

Maro on the other hand was soaked, his robe armor and helmet taking in as much water as they could hold. With his level and stats, the added weight as well as the damp and wetness were of no concern.

The two flew in silence over the forest, soon rising up to get over the Naraza mountain chain and pass into northern territory.

The ascent brought them through and above the clouds, where a near magical sea of stars opened up to them. Storms and lightning gone as they moved northwards.

“Beautiful, isn’t it!” Maro shouted, a dozen meters to her right.

The air moved past her, little pressure forming on her small and magically enhanced form. She had to hold back with her speed to let the man keep up. “It is!” Ilea shouted back and looked up.

When they finally crossed over the mountains, the rocky terrain spread before them. For miles and miles, as far as the eye could see.

Ilea felt like she could breathe again. *Whole weeks inside of cities really is a little much.* The thought came and went quickly, a broad grin below her helmet and ash as she sped up and twirled, enjoying the sensation.

It would take a couple days of travel to reach Hallowfort once more but she was looking forward to flying all the way there.

They went on through the night, avoiding the occasional Famine Crow flock and diving through the crevices. Ilea released her Heart of Cinder from time to time in an attempt to kill whole swaths of Miststalkers, the monsters dancing through the northern landscape unperturbed by the worldly happenings.

The days and nights went by quickly, Ilea and Maro not ever stopping for more than a couple minutes, most of the time lost due to their dependency on crevices during the arcane storms.

Ilea would likely choose to travel through them if she was alone but with Maro around, that wasn’t an option.

A couple days later, they reached the mountain that marked the Tremor dungeon and with it nearby Penumra as well as the entrance to Hallowfort.

It was early evening when they landed near the cave entrance.

“Just this one mission.” Maro said, more to himself than to her.

His mood had steadily declined over the last days of travel, talking less, eating less. His jokes on the other hand hadn’t been less in number but certainly darker.

Ilea didn’t even reply and simply made her way down through the tunnels, blinking through quickly as she knew the layout.

Quickly, she reached the massive crystal lit cavern and the bridge leading over to the town built on top and inside the left behind statue of an ancient hero.

Just that there wasn’t a bridge. Not right now.

On the other side of the damn near abyss was a wall, built on top of the statue. Two dark ones resided on top of it, the bridge now fastened to the edge of the barricade and hanging loosely downwards.

Steel and wood clinked against the cliff side as Ilea and Maro approached.

“Town closed?” Ilea shouted, alarming the guards as she flew over.

They didn't attack or were in any way apprehensive. Not of her that was.

"Merely a security measure, healer of ash." One of them said.

"It is good to know you have returned." The other one spoke, both clad in full plate dark armor, wielding a halberd and a war hammer respectively.

"Why, what's happening?" Ilea asked as she landed on the barricade. She noted that it spanned around the full size of the town, nearly melded onto and around some of the buildings it now shadowed.

"It would be best if you talked to lady Elana. The Descent... is spewing up its kind, corruption spreading amongst them." He spoke.

"Where can I find her?" Ilea asked in turn. *Corruption? The blood monsters?*

The dark one pointed behind him. "The Hunter's den. May your battles be prosperous."

"Yours too." Ilea said and jumped off, landing smoothly on the stone floor as he wings slowed her down.

Maro appeared next to her and looked around. "What have we just joined into?"

Dwarves and dark ones of various races and sizes were moving through the streets, shouting and working. Weapon racks were visible, smiths and craftsmen talking to heavily geared scavengers and adventurers.

Food was being cooked in the well lit streets, new magical lights having joined the existing ones. People seemed busy, unsure and frightful.

Ilea's sphere only confirmed what she saw with her eyes.

Let's hope we're not too late.