

Chapter 368 Blissful Edge

Mauro woke up with a massive headache. *What the fuck happened?* He felt like he was mauled by three bears, healed back to health and mauled again. It felt like he was floating.

Ash... I feel... ash. He remembered then. Lilith, she was the Shadow. His eyes opened wide as he turned his head and looked around. They were still in the tunnels of their hideout and he was being, carried?

He looked down on his own body and saw the thick ashen ropes around him. *Limbs?* He asked himself as he followed them, finding their origin to be none other than Lilith.

She was walking in silence, glancing his way when she realized he was awake.

No words were spoken, neither by him nor her. The situation was clear. He had lost and would face the guard. *She didn't kill me yet. Did I injure her?* He had activated all his skills, had pushed himself further than he ever had. No memory remained from what happened after but he knew he had tasted blood.

Maybe she realized I'm of more use alive. Or... He stopped himself from smirking, the thought flashing through his mind. There was a chance but first he would wait and see.

Mauro could bide his time, he knew how to talk, if anything and he knew there were things she wanted. His storage ring was gone of course but she had no access to it, not until he was dead or gave her access.

Waiting for his ownership to fade was likely not an option for the impulsive woman. He heard steps, dozens of people walking through the corridor, led by himself and Lilith.

Zair was there too, looking his way with a frightful expression.

That rat. I knew it. Mauro wasn't too surprised or annoyed about it. If cooperation had secured his life he would have sold out his own mother. His crimes were too severe however, the evidence damning. No reasonable guard would let him loose, nor was there much leverage he had with the city. Nolan perhaps could convince Alistair but himself, not likely.

They were walking up now, to the exit that led into the warehouse. *She's taking us out first.* He was getting a little nervous but stayed focused. Every word he now uttered, every action could be fatal.

Lilith stepped up to the exit, a closed off section of wall. Some of her ashen limbs moved and cracked through the stone as if it was paper. A couple strikes later and the passage was open.

"Where are the guards?" She asked, looking at the empty table.

Those fucking lazy bastards. Maybe they heard it... an ambush? No, unlikely. If anything, they fled already.

"Come on. Careful with the barrels, there's poison and acid inside." Lilith said and looked at him. "Don't do something stupid now, or you're dead."

Don't worry, healer girl. I'm not about to risk my life. Mauro thought.

Dale gripped his sword once more, forcing himself to ignore the pain. His health was dwindling, the poison taking a toll on him.

“Come on old man, are you really giving up already?” Kevan asked as he chuckled and vanished, cutting through the steel armor of one of the smugglers with a scraping noise.

“Hold out a little longer.” Kevan said when he appeared once more next to him.

“You two will die here.” The gray haired spear master said, ignoring the four dead smugglers in the hall around them. “Don’t dare fleeing now Kevan. We worked so hard to set all of this up.”

Kevan spat and whispered to Dale, “I won’t accept flight. Not now. Kill a couple more and I’ll take care of him.”

“I can hear you Kevan. Your body next to his, killing the last honorable guard that came to investigate this mysterious case.” The spear master said as he twirled his two weapons, one of them vanishing before he threw it towards them.

Dale jumped to the side and rolled to avoid the ice magic from one of the mages as well as the spear. He sped up and dashed forward, using his rush skill to close the distance to the nearby warrior. A feint got him an opening before he activated another skill. A quick slash bit into his opponent’s neck and ripped through his spine.

He grabbed the body and turned it to block another ice spell coming his way. Coughing up blood, he felt his arms cool down, nearly freezing before he threw the body towards the mage.

The woman vanished and appeared on top of a bunch of massive crates. Dale ignored her and focused on the rogue that rushed him.

Kevan appeared behind the rogue, his clawed hand slashing into his back before he vanished again in a red smoke.

The spear master followed Kevan, appearing and disappearing after each other.

I should get a skill like that too. Dale thought as his blade slammed into the dazed rogue’s skull. A heavy strike, going through and killing the man instantly.

He had to rip out the blade with quite a bit of force, jumping to the side again when a barrage of ice bolts bit into the stone floor. A crackling noise of ice crystals breaking resounded, some of them biting into his thick leather armor.

A few drew blood but it was nothing compared to the injury on his side. The wound was getting worse, the pain would inhibit him soon. His body enhancement skills could only take him so far.

“The guard knows I’m here!” He shouted, another effort to stop the fight.

“You are near dead, captain!” The spearmaster shouted, his weapons appearing and disappearing as he blocked the clawed strikes from the angered Kevan.

He jumped back and twirled his weapons, cutting through the blood spikes Kevan had sent his way.

If he kills Kevan and I die too, they will pin it on him. Dale thought about leaving but that would mean the ice mage and the remaining warrior would all focus on Kevan. He was struggling against the spear master as it was.

The spearmaster might go for me too if I try to flee. He held his side now, switching his short sword to his left hand. "Kevan, the ice mage!" Dale shouted and jumped back, avoiding the heavy axe strike from the remaining warrior.

At least the warriors had been slow, allowing Dale and Kevan to cleave through them early on. With fewer targets, the ice mage could rain her magic down freely and Dale's injury was getting worse.

"I never liked them." The warrior said in a deep voice, a wicked smile on his face. He was tall, two meters at least and broader than most men Dale had known.

He jumped back once more but found his feet losing purchase. *Ice.* Dale slipped and fell, rolling before he came up again. The massive two handed ax was coming for his head.

His blade moved up and deflected the heavy blow, jumping to the side once more. *They're focusing on me.* He noted, his sight blurring as he ground his teeth at the pain. Already at half health, Dale decided to distract them.

The man moved behind the crates, running and checking behind him from time to time to make sure at least the warrior was following.

Ice spells occasionally flew his way, confirming his hopes. *They're sure that the spearmaster will win. Where the hell is Ilea.* He moved through the halls before he found some stairs leading down.

"Found you." A deep voice said as the warrior walked out from behind a set of crates. "You can go down there if you like. Death awaits you either way."

The ice mage appeared next to the warrior, her short hair revealing a scar on her skull. She had yet to speak a word.

Dale glanced back towards Kevan and the spearmaster but saw nothing, only hearing distant noises of a high level battle.

He didn't have to think twice, quickly rushing down the stairs and opening the door.

His blade flashed as his eyes opened wide in surprise. *Too many.* Finally his brain recognized the familiar armor of bone. "Oh thank the gods..." He whispered and collapsed onto Ilea, trusting her unnatural strength and power. "Abby would have killed me if I had died."

Instantly he felt healing magic flow through him, the wound closing nearly as quickly as it had formed.

"Why the fuck are you here? I told you two to wait." Ilea said and held him up.

"No time, he's fighting a powerful warrior, above two hundred. There is a warrior and mage coming for me too." Dale quickly spoke, getting as much info to her as possible. There was not time for questioning.

"Protect the people here. These four worked for the smugglers but they surrendered." She said, ashen armor forming on her before she walked up the stairs, a man held by ashen limbs to her side.

Dale felt his strength returning and grasped his blade once more. He turned to the group and recognized a face. "Eli, you survived!" He exclaimed.

“Dale... so it was you.” The man said, a tired smile on his face. “Do you have another sword?”

He didn't change. “You fucking moron.” Dale replied and laughed.

“That the friend you told me about?” Eli asked as he pushed forward through the scantily clad people.

The four indicated smugglers stepped aside.

Dale just nodded, a big grin on his face.

“You didn't exaggerate. She's fucking crazy.” Eli said and chuckled.

He moved closer and whispered to Dale, “Is she alright?”

Dale nodded again. “How we found you.” He looked at the smugglers but they tried hard not to get any attention to themselves. Nor was there much chance of them hearing anything with the sounds of battle above. Not with any related skills at least. “A friend of hers is protecting them.”

“Good. Should we help?” He asked.

“And leave you lot unprotected. I think I underestimated her again, let her handle it.” Dale said and focused on the entrance. *I should really stop thinking of her as the lost level twenty healer. She's a Shadow... an exceptional one at that.*

Ilea simply stood there as the axe slammed into her side, barely biting into her ashen armor. “Is that all?”

Ice magic slammed into her but it was some of the weakest spell power she had experienced. She just glared at the woman. “Drop it or I'm going to kill you two.”

The mage took a couple steps back and lowered her hands.

The warrior however shouted loudly, his axe shining in a deep red glow as he collected his strength. His muscles bulged, veins showing on his forehead and hands before he moved the weapon down on her.

An ashen limb punched through his face and skull, splattering blood and brain matter onto the floor and crates behind.

The mage staggered back a little farther, droplets of blood splashing on her face.

'ding' 'You have defeated [Axe Raider – lvl 133 / Blood Enhancer – lvl 128]

Boring. Ilea thought. “Go down and join the survivors. If you attack any of them, I will find you and I will rip you to shreds. Understand?”

The mage nodded quickly and ran towards the stairs, stumbling before she caught herself.

Black wings spread before Ilea flew through the halls, led by the sounds of battle.

She found Kevan facing off against a spear wielder.

The noble was injured, bleeding from several cuts and wounds. His teeth were elongated as were his claws.

His opponent jumped down from one of the crates, landing casually. He looked middle aged but certainly not weak. Even in his light metal armor he looked strong.

“Another opponent?” He asked, looking towards Ilea.

She dropped Mauro on the floor and extended an ashen limb to Kevan, taking care of his wounds. “Wow, he fucked you up vampire boy. How are you alive?”

Kevan groaned and hissed at her, blood splattering onto her ashen armor. “Don’t call me that!”

“Ok, calm down.” Ilea said and glanced at the spear wielder.

“Nolan... don’t underestimate her.” Mauro said as he crawled to the side.

“Pathetic. You should have died like a man. Look at you.” Nolan spat before he focused on Ilea.

“And you, a healer... no. You’re more than that. A Shadow perhaps? Alistair is no fool then. And neither are you. Seeing through our little game with Kevan. You lot are usually more thick headed.”

“Kill Kevan and get out of here, get paid and don’t return. We can end this without suffering.” Nolan suggested in a casual tone.

Ilea shrugged and appeared in front of him, his spears crashing into her armor as her ashen limbs grabbed around his arms and legs.

He smiled, a powerful thrust suddenly pushing his spears forward.

His smile vanished when nothing happened.

“That’s it?” Ilea asked.

[Warrior – lvl 230]

I would have destroyed this punk even when my level was that low. She punched his head but found it surprisingly sturdy.

“That’s... it?” He spat, blood landing on her armor.

“Oh... now you did it.” Ilea murmured, Destruction and Storm of Cinders slamming into his head.

The mana surged into him, his head exploding out behind him.

His limp body sagged down, held up by her ashen limbs.

Ilea let him fall and took a step back. “Ah, fuck.”

“Don’t fret it.” Kevan said and appeared above the corpse, kicking his side with enough force to sent the body flying into a nearby crate. “The cunt deserved it.” He spit on the floor. “Fucking would be noble.”

“Can’t you drain health?” Ilea asked Kevan as they walked back to the underground entrance.

“I would have been dead five times over without that.” Kevan replied. “He was pretty strong.”

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Prodigy of the Spear – lvl 230 / Child of Lightning – lvl 224]

Now I feel bad for killing such a rare specimen.

“It’s clear, you can come out.” She said down into the stairwell.

“You killed the spear wielder?” Dale asked as he stepped out.

A man was following close behind, one of the officers who had been in a separate cell. “Told you she’s crazy.”

“Not the first to suggest that.” Ilea said, once again dragging Mauro behind her.

Dale nodded. “I will notify the guard, we will dig through this place.”

“Plenty of traps. Make sure to ask the surviving smugglers for help. I’m sure they’d prefer to not die today. The one with the burnt face has interesting classes. Might be useful for your hunters.” Ilea suggested.

“I will do so.” Dale said, speaking loudly to make sure they heard him. “Perhaps Alistair will consider their sentence to be less than death if they cooperate.” He glared hard at the ice mage.

The woman gulped and looked to the floor.

“What about that one, he’s one of the leaders.” Eli said and pointed at Mauro.

“He still owes me something.” Ilea said with a smile.

Dale nodded. “I’ll let you handle him then.”

The other man chuckled. “Doesn’t sound like you.” He clasped Dale’s shoulder. “Thanks for saving us.”

“Of course.” Ilea said and looked at Dale. “A word.”

The captain nodded and walked a little farther away with her.

She formed a dome of ash around Mauro before she talked, “There’s a healer down there. Corinth order. She was hired by the Gray Company.”

Dale frowned. “I see.” He thought about it, “Alistair wouldn’t want to offend them, neither would anybody in the guard. She will be let go with a warning.”

“I wouldn’t like that... at all.” Ilea said in a menacing tone.

Dale sighed. “I understand. Me neither to be honest but it would spell trouble to antagonize a big healing order. Some of our own best healers are hired.”

“What if you pin it on me? I could do it.” Ilea suggested.

“Murder her in cold blood?” Dale shook his head. “Without a trial?”

“She worked for slavers.” Ilea hissed. “I don’t want to know what else they used her for.”

Dale glanced back to the survivors. “Can you make her vanish? Leave no trace?”

Ilea nodded.

“They will investigate. Will ask questions. Will ask me questions.” He said.

“Don’t lie. Tell them it was the smugglers or Lilith, the Shadow you had hired. She acted on her own, as Shadows do.” Ilea suggested.

Dale gulped, "That might work."

"You have witnesses." Ilea said and stepped past him, stopping next to the man. "We will not talk of this again. Unless you feel like you're in danger. In that case, seek out Claire, head administrator of Ravenhall or go find Walter in the Calys mine. Either will give you and your family shelter until you manage to contact me." She paused. "If they come for you, I'll have a little... talk."

The hairs on Dale's neck stood up as he nodded. "Good. Now go."

"I'll see you later, for the report. Captain."

Ilea moved past the group of people, leaving the rest to Kevan and Dale as well as the other officer. Her eyes were focused forwards as she walked down the stairs, straining her nose. Poison and acid flowed onto the floor after she ripped through the barrels with her ashen limbs. It would make sure the guards who came to investigate knew about the dangers as well as provide some more time for her to snoop around herself.

When she reached the lowest step behind the destroyed wall, she turned her head and focused.

"You do want to meet the elves still?" Mauro asked, his face a mask that revealed nothing.

Ilea could imagine the hopes he held. Hopes of survival, of turning them against her. A part of her hoped they would. An interesting fight perhaps after all this boring slaughter.

Visiting Ravenhall had been fine but now she longed to go back north. Tired of playing the exterminator, finding filth and vermin under every bit of stone. The last thing she would do was crush his head, even if it turned out the elves were hostile towards her, would overwhelm and trap her. She would make sure he wouldn't get away.

Ilea smelled it then. Perfume.