

“You will have all the support we can give but first we must rebuild, look for survivors and clear out the rest of the demons.” Collin said as he walked through the square with Ilea. “You have the corpses?”

“I do.” She said, looking at the people celebrate. “Do you really want to stay? There aren’t a lot of you left.” She added, estimating the survivors to be barely a hundred.

Collin smiled, turning to look at the Lady as she talked to each of them. “Any many more will leave. But this is our city. Here we will stand, here we will remain.”

“I can give word to Riverwatch. Maybe you have some refugees there that would like to return.” She said, following his gaze.

“I would very much appreciate that. The tunnels here are vast, well known by us and filled with enchantments. We will move down as we rebuild. Winter will come to an end soon, a blessing amongst all the loss.” Collin said and smiled at her.

He bowed to her then and spoke. “Should we remain in power here, you will always find refuge within these walls. Aid and whatever else you might need. Ilea, medic sentinel and savior of Stormbreach.”

She turned and shook her head, walking towards the cheerful people, finally freed of their monster king. *Back to their spirit queen.* She chuckled and glanced at Collin.

“You dislike the attention?” He asked rhetorically and smiled. “A true hero.”

“Don’t call me that. Not ever.” She stopped and said it seriously. “No.” She added when she saw him opening his mouth once more.

Green had been a demonic monster who had been partially responsible for thousands of deaths. Killing him however wasn’t heroic, not in Ilea’s mind. He was misguided, barely intelligent enough to understand his own dream. To create and shape these lands into something his kind could enjoy, live in. Under his iron rule.

There were better leaders in the world, that much was true. There were worse ones too. *It was justified and perhaps even necessary. To protect humanity or at least Stormbreach, yet it wasn’t heroic. Heroic would have been if I had convinced him, had stopped him without killing. But that isn’t me.* She smiled and looked at the Lady. *To his kind, I’m as much a monster as he was to ours.*

“We only have another hour or two of daylight. We should find shelter, for the night.” Collin said as they reached the spirit.

“And so we will.” She replied and nodded. “Will you remain with us tonight?” She addressed Ilea with a warm smile.

“I’ll report to Riverwatch and I have a date with a friend.”

“The fallen?” The Lady asked, concern in her eyes.

“I can leave them somewhere.” She replied.

“The temple.” The spirit spoke with a quiet voice and led the way. “We will burn them. And cleanse this city of the demonic corruption.”

“Some still remain.” Ilea said. “I wasn’t perfectly thorough with my hunt.”

“Of course.” The Lady said and opened the heavy gates.

Ilea quirked up an eyebrow, watching the slender spirit move the massive steel doors. *Spirits. Well, she is a dark one.* Having her test her hammer flashed through her mind but the situation was wholly inappropriate. That much was clear, even to Ilea.

*I shouldn’t hang out with Maro so much.* She knew the necromancer wasn’t really to blame. Her dark sense of humor had only gotten darker with everything that happened, one of the few things keeping her sane through all the slaughter.

Either that or she was really hallucinating in that ancient temple, high on Bluemoon grass.

“Here.” The word brought her back to reality.

Light fell in through the ruined ceiling, rubble littering the beautiful carpet in the vast hall. Various statues decorated the wall. Some of them were destroyed, others merely chipped.

They stood in front of an altar of sorts and Ilea quickly summoned all the demons she had killed in and around Stormbreach, placing them on top of the flat stone surface. Blood started to leak. The smell was terrible. Rotten despite the theoretically fresh state of the bodies.

Many of the survivors had followed the group into the temple. Be it out of interest or merely to stay safe with the most powerful beings in town.

“I can collect some wood.” Ilea said.

The Lady smiled and shook her head with closed eyes. “That will not be necessary, Sentinel.”

She turned and floated upwards, stopping when she was above the lined corpses. “Citizens of Stormbreach. Your suffering ends today. You will not be forgotten. May you find rest.” With that, a pulse of mana flashed through the temple.

Ilea wasn’t sure what had happened until she saw the bodies light up in her sphere. A moment later, flames flickered through life. Bound to their blood.

Quickly, the whole altar was aflame, the Lady of Stormbreach floating above it all. Tears of blood fell from her face, hissing as they landed in the flames.

Ilea walked to the altar and touched the stone, unbothered by the flames before she walked out. The air was cool, a breeze flowing through the main square, still marred by blood and guts.

The city looked deserted, lost. And yet the warmth of the flames could be felt all the way to her. The smoke rose in the evening sunlight, a contrast to the mostly clear sky.

“A little dramatic.” The lizardman said as he joined her, stretching before he checked his belt and weapons.

“She means well.” Ilea said and smiled. “But yes.”

“Tearss of blood? To each their own.” He commented and stepped past her. “Will you remain here, Shadow, Ssavior of Stormbreach? I’m sure you could become pretty high up in this town if you did.”

Ilea shook her head lightly. "I don't plan to settle in the near future."

He moved his head back slightly. "I see. Monsters to hunt. Citizens to save."

She didn't comment on it. "You're staying?"

"Not much of a builder, me. More towns remain to be looted in the west. I will be interesting to see what remains." He said with a smirk.

She nodded. "I see. Let's hope there isn't a maniac demon king there too."

He chuckled. "I cannot say that this won't make a good tale. It had to end, one day or the next. Either that or he would have taken all the lands. I would have been a captain at least." He mused.

"Or demon food." Ilea said, noticing Collin walking out of the temple to join them.

"Aye, or demon food." The lizardman said.

Collin stepped up to her and bowed. "Thank you again." He glanced at the lizardman but didn't comment. "Can we expect your return in the near future?"

"Probably not in the near future." Ilea replied. "But you never know what comes up. A representative of the sentinels might come. If they can provide my name and some of my abilities, I ask you to share information with them."

"Of course." He bowed once more. "We will not delay you any further."

"Give the Lady my regards." Ilea said and walked down the stairs that led up to the temple, her wings spreading.

The way back was covered in considerably less time than it had taken to get there. The weight of carrying the team hadn't slowed her down as much as the additional navigation as well as the sheer wind resistance of their bodies.

The suns had nearly set when she landed again near Riverwatch, covering the last bit of distance on foot. The sky was colored in a dark red, nearly purple. Big storm clouds were visible in the north.

Birds still chirped in the forest around the big sprawling city, unbothered by the cold or the people. Spring was on its way.

Ilea reached the gates and was let in, most of the guards knowing her ashen form after today.

*No sight of Maro.* She noted, looking around. She decided to wait for a while and have dinner. If he didn't show up, she would go look for him.

"We made it." A familiar voice came from near the gate, the heavy metal door opening wide enough to allow the people inside.

Around twenty minutes had passed and Ilea was just about to go look for Maro. The sunlight was gone, lanterns and torches carried by guards the only light remaining nearby. She stored the empty box of food in her necklace and jumped down from the roof.

No guard had actually bothered her up there, despite the clear rule violation.

“You’re alive.” She said to the group of hunters and guards that came in, mud and blood covering their gear.

“Fuuck, I have to get this clean by tomorrow.” One of them whined before he noticed Ilea.

“We did.” The hunter said, the woman who had pretty much taken the lead of the group. “And you’re back too. Did you find out anything about the demons and Stormbreach?”

The rest walked closer, interested in what she had to say.

Ilea stepped to one of them and healed the wound on his arm, in the meantime forming an ashen mist she casually moved over their gear to clean them off. She winked at the man who had complained afterwards, seeing his big grin.

“A high level demon in company of two Mind Weavers had taken the city. Called himself king and forced the survivors that had remained within the walls to play along. Good thing I think, otherwise they would have all been dead.” Ilea explained.

“Thank you. This would have taken me an hour of cleaning.” The guard said, ignoring what she had just explained. He got hit by one of his colleagues immediately.

“No worries. I got you involved. The king is dead and the survivors are trying to rebuild and take back what was lost under the Sanctuary healing order.” Ilea said and glanced at the huntress.

“Could you report this to Alistair? As well as spread word to any refugees from Stormbreach? The Sanctuary order is alive and will try anything to get the city back in order.”

She nodded and smiled. “Of course ma’am. I will get word to him immediately.”

“Don’t call me ma’am.” Ilea replied and rolled her eyes.

“Sure, Shadow.” The huntress once more nodded and then ran off.

“What about beers?!” One of the men shouted after her.

“Tomorrow!” She answered.

He looked at Ilea angrily. “Ruined my fucking date. I was so close.” He showed two fingers being close together.

Ashen limbs moved out behind her as she took a step closer to him. “Want to take me out instead, sweetie?” She asked in a whisper.

The man stuttered and stumbled back as the others laughed at the scene.

“Cleaned your gear. And you have a date tomorrow it seems. Don’t blame me.” She said. *Now... where do I find a runaway necromancer.* “Ah, before I forget it. Did you get paid for this?” Ilea asked.

One of them nodded. “It’s work, so yes.”

“We do appreciate tips, miss scary ash shadow healer.” Another said. He got hit. “What? She asked.”

“I did.” Ilea said and smiled. She did feel a little bad that they had to walk back all the way just to show her the way. None had died and for that she was grateful. Still, she summoned ten silver coins and handed them to the man. “Distribute it in the team. I’ll find out if the huntress doesn’t get her share so don’t try to cheat.”

“No need to threaten me.” The man said and handed each of the others two silvers. “I can tell who I want looking for me. And you, my lady. Are not one of them.”

She rolled her eyes again. *Ma'am, my lady, scary Shadow. What's next? Bone lord?* She sniffed the air and checked the mana around her. There was no trace of Maro around but it was way past their agreed upon time. “Any gambling halls around here?”

“Yea, follow the main road until you hit the second square. Then take the road right, you'll see it. Magical lights all over, as well as banners.” One of the guards said. “Should we guide you?”

“That's fine, thanks. A good night to you all.” Ilea said and vanished, appearing thirty meters above, her wings spread. She flew the distance over the dirt road, quickly finding the indicated spot.

It wasn't far into the city but it likely wasn't the only gambling area either.

Casual clothes appeared on her right before she landed quietly amidst the people. Some eyes glanced her way but people generally gave her little attention.

Again, she checked the area. A faint trace remained, leading away from the area. Ilea followed, rushing through the dirt roads as fast as her sense of smell allowed.

The trace got stronger, more of an actual lead now. Maro had been here recently. Sometimes it vanished entirely but picked up again a couple dozen meters away. *Teleportation.*

Finally, the trace led her to a restaurant or bar, warm light glowing behind the murky glass windows. Ivy was growing along the facade of the building, at least two stories part of the establishment.

The door creaked as it was opened, a jingle audible above as the woman stepped inside.

It was a bar, small but cozy. Warm light came from oil lanterns placed in various spots. The walls were mostly lined with wood as well as paintings depicting both violent battles as well as various adventurers in armors, mages in their intricate robes.

“Evning.” The man behind the bar said with an accent she couldn't place.

She nodded his way and found Maro in her sphere. “What beers do you have?”

“Various. Wheat, ale, something darker?” The barkeeper asked, looking at her with a smirk.

“I prefer ale.” Ilea said.

The man nodded and got a glass. “Riders is pretty good, brewery is nearby too.”

She gave him a nod and watched as he poured the ale.

*On tap. Looks nearly like a pub from Earth.* She looked around once more. *No oil lamps and the smell is definitely worse. They haven't heard of window cleaning either. Cool vibe though.* She placed two copper coins on the counter. “Thanks.”

Few patrons were occupying the two floors.

Ilea walked up the stairs and found another nearly identical looking space as below.

Loud laughter came from one of the corners, a group of four men and women all looking rather rough were listening to none other than the king of Rhyvor. Even the barkeeper had joined them it seemed. A slow night.

“Turns out they were wrong. Not only is fighting in underwear a bad idea, it’s even worse when three Shredders appear out of nowhere.” Maro said and lifted his glass to take a deep sip.

“Aren’t those the wind magic worms? They surround you and then attack.” One of the adventurers said, summoning a small flame in his hand. “I’d have a hard time against one.”

“No.” A woman said and frowned. “They attack with their bones, hundreds of little teeth.”

“Either of one ever seen one?” The barkeeper asked.

Neither replied.

“Ah fuck.” Maro said and shot up, spreading his arms. “There she is, Lilith herself. Demon slayer and Shadow of the North. And I, am late.” He smiled brightly.

Ilea lifted her glass and grabbed a chair. “No worries. Finish your drink, underwear necromancer.”

The group looked at her with various expressions.

“That’s her? Doesn’t look so scary to me.” A big man said. “Healer too... I can see that being nasty. You regenerate lass?”

Ilea looked at him and smiled. “I do. Want to see?”

He grinned but the man next to him chimed in. “Don’t make a mess here please.”

“Thanks Daniel.” The barkeeper sighed.

Casually sipping her beer, Ilea listened to the rest of Maro’s story. He had winked at her and sat down again to finish his tale and drink.

If it had been anybody else, she would have likely questioned some of the circumstances but with him, she assumed he even toned it down a little. The audience was around level one hundred, most below. If anything, they had little understanding of the power the necromancer or herself wielded.

“Fucking hell. I wish I had been there.” One of the women said, obviously infatuated with the charming necromancer.

“It was... a while ago.” Maro said and glanced at Ilea.

She chuckled and took a sip of her ale. *We need all these brewers in the north.* She mused.

“That’s it for me though.” The necromancer said and finished his drink, standing up.

“Already?” Another one of the women said. “I know some places you might like.”

“Some other time. But duty calls.” He added and teleported behind Ilea.

The group blinked at the quick movement.

Ilea finished her ale too and stood up, “Enjoy your evening.” She said and watched Maro wave at the group.

She blinked out and up before her wings spread. “You could have stayed you know.” Ilea said, the man flying up next to her.

He didn’t say anything for a moment. “It’s...,” Maro started but didn’t finish.

“I finished two of the three Shadow jobs already. Monster hunt and the rogue adventurer group.” Ilea said. “Do you still feel like meeting the necromancers?”

His face lit up and he smiled. “Very much so. I’m sorry I wasn’t there to help. I heard about the guard bet and your participation already. You’re already somewhat of an urban legend here.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m a big girl.” Ilea said simply. She knew that someone having her back would have helped but somehow, she felt that Maro needed this. *I’ll still force him to come north once more.*

“What are you scheming?” He asked, sensing her intent as they flew westwards and towards Karth.

“Nothing sinister.” She said truthfully.