

Chapter 2.40 Dance with the Demon

Light washed over them as they stepped through - a brief sense of vertigo before their feet found solid ground again.

They now found themselves in a massive chamber, easily double that of the statue or lava rooms. The sides of the walls were slanted to meet the floor, giving the effect that they were in a large pool. Far above them, the ceiling was shrouded in darkness.

Around one hundred and twenty feet in front of them, a pair of wall torches flanked a small figure. A figure of red and brown, chained to two posts on either side of them.

"Lucius!" Sally called, her voice echoing down the room.

A small bubble with an exclamation mark popped up beside the figure, and he raised his head. "*Sally? It's a trap!*" His voice echoed back.

"Duh," she murmured. "Hey, Humps, you think after this, we could go back through the dungeon?"

He deflated and narrowed his eye sockets. "No, why?"

"I kinda left my bat in that room that almost killed me." It had saved her life, and she hadn't even considered saving it in return. How cruel she truly was.

"We'll find you a new one," the Death Knight sighed and looked back at the open expanse in front of them.

Slowly, they approached the slightly raised dais where the demon was restrained. Sally checked the floor, awaiting something to burst from or form from the stonework. Humphrey checked the ceiling, expecting something to drop down upon them. But gradually... they made it across the whole room without incident.

"Sorry we weren't here sooner; what was the trap?" She stabbed at the chains with her dagger, splitting them.

"Ah!" A heart appeared beside his head as his shadowed crimson eyes flooded with joy. "Thank you for even coming! I don't know what the trap is - only that they will be expecting you here."

"Ah, that's pretty simple then," Sally shrugged, "we weren't ever going not to be here, so-"

A flashing shard of light blinded them as something seemed to unravel from the very air itself. As quickly as it started - it blinked out, and two figures dropped to the floor.

One was unmistakably a cat, and the other appeared to be a Theo.

"You're back!" Sally beamed, resisting the urge to leap atop them both.

"Yes," Archie stretched out. "Good news and bad news."

Theo groaned and rolled onto his back.

“Theo successfully had a proper sleep,” the cat continued, “however... he... uh.”

The Vampire sat up and rubbed his eyes as Sally walked over and put her hand atop his head. “Wow,” he said, “what a difference a bit of sleep can have. I feel like a new...” he paused to open up his STAR, giving the zombie a brief scowl for the presence of her holding his brain container.

“Archie,” Sally narrowed her eyes and put her hands on her hips. The cat gave a sheepish grin and tried to sink into the floor.

“So, firstly,” Theo sighed as he pushed himself to his feet. “I am Level One again - I have absorbed everything, *once again*.”

Humphrey shuffled awkwardly. “Was that the good or bad news?”

“We already went over the good news,” Sally snapped. “Are you a Novice again, Theo?”

“No. I am *Unknown*, apparently.” Theo slowly turned around. “Secondly, what is he doing here?” He leveled a finger toward the tall, blue-eyed demon.

“I see having a nap didn’t shake the rocks from your head,” Edward tilted his head with a grin.

“Play nice!” Sally waved her hands in the air. “Edward is mostly a reasonable demon that has recently opened up to us and hasn’t tried to extort or kill us.”

“I don’t trust him.” Theo narrowed his crimson eyes. “And I *know* why.”

Edward said nothing but furrowed his brow at the vampire.

“He is acting as a beacon to signal when we get to this room. There would be no other way for the other henchmen to get close to us. But now we have been led to this area to be preyed upon. Either they will kill us all or try and get us to bend the knee and join with Ruben.”

Silence fell across the Party. Sally’s right eye twitched. “*Deny it* then, Edward.”

The demon didn’t respond, seemingly too stuck on chewing on something unpleasant. Eventually, his eyes dropped. “I truly am sorry. They know how many lives I have left. I couldn’t... even if I wanted to help...”

Theo spat on the floor. “Then there’s one way to settle this. Duel to the death.”

“Don’t be an ass, Theo - you’ve only just-“

“I accept.” Edward bowed. “May fate guide us to the destined outcome.”

“We both know it already has,” Theo bowed in return.

Sally shot an exasperated look at the Death Knight and raised her hands in the air. “Humps! Are we just going to allow this?”

“Yes. If it is what brings Theo some peace, it will be for the best.”

Lucius sidled along beside him. “But what if he *dies*?” A plated shrug was the only response.

Theo stretched out his tired muscles and yawned. "Oh. I don't have any weapons anymore; could I borrow one?"

Sally glared at him, half tempted to let him suffer without. "*Fiiine*. Honestly, what is it with you and duels? You don't need to impress me, you know. It's the one reckless thing about the normal you I don't understand or enjoy."

The vampire walked up and gave her a hug. "You talk too much, Sally Danger."

"Ass," she pushed him away gently, slightly flustered. "It hasn't even been a day; no need for that." She shook her head. "You can have a hug when you stop being a dingus."

"You've been here about three days, actually." Edward withdrew his thin sword and gave the air a few test slices.

Sally sighed. "Here, can you use this?" She passed him the [Demonkiller Blade], expecting to have to stow it away right away.

"Oh, yeah - perfect. That's pretty apt, too, huh?" He tested the weight of it in his grip.

"When did you get the Reputation for that? What even *is* Reputation?"

"Probably when I killed hundreds of demons." He walked across the room a little to give them both some space, giving her a brief wink. The blade was a dark metal with symbols glowing down the flat sides - pulsing between amber and crimson.

"You realize I have... quite some levels on you? If you have just been reset..." Edward tilted his head.

"Yeah. I might not even be able to damage you." Theo pushed his glasses up.

"Then why do this? Why risk your life when your Party could easily kill me?"

"Oh, I'm not going to kill you," the vampire grinned, his fangs reflecting in the light. "I'm going to humble you, and then when the other lackeys arrive, we will slaughter them in front of you. Then you can run back to your boss and tell the tale."

A sweat drop appeared beside Lucius. "Wow, he is a lot different when he is well-rested."

Sally knelt down beside the cat. "Arch, did he retain all his vamp skills?"

Archie just shrugged in return, an odd movement for a cat.

If he didn't, then he was getting himself into more trouble than she thought him capable of. Not that she truly doubted him - his Stats should hopefully still be incredibly overpowered... but with the unknown level difference...

Edward licked his lips as he used some of his abilities. [Quick Footed] [Last Laugh] [Sword Dance]

Theo just stood there, looking rather uncomfortable.

Immediately, the demon lashed forward. The attack was blocked by the vampire, the metallic clang filling the chamber, but the follow-through as the blade slipped past cut across his arm. He turned away as the next strike was already on the way, and he barely jumped back to avoid being impaled.

Edward was quite quick, even if he was lower level than most of them. Every sword attack already had a second and third planned in advance - as if he knew the best choice of action, whether his blade would land or not - and many of them did. Blood flicked to the ground as gashes were sliced through Theo. His health slowly regenerating, but with his reduced pool, it wasn't giving him a great buffer to absorb a lot of damage.

In return, he had done zero damage to the demon. Barely even attempted an attack, as he was constantly on the back foot. Clumsily he slashed forward, and Edward had already spun around the side, winding two new crimson lines across the vampire's arm.

"Are you toying with me?" The demon grinned. "Feel I'm not worthy of your time?"

"I'm just worried if I hit you, you'll die in one hit again." Theo dodged an attack, but the blade of his opponent snaked around and stabbed into his side.

"If the blade is too heavy to carry, then - here." With a lunge, Edward impaled Theo's shoulder, and the sword clattered to the ground.

"Idiot," Sally murmured to herself. Why they had to stand around and accommodate these duels, she had no idea. She would hear no end of it if she interfered, though. Plus, Theo always had a plan for these things.

Humphrey knelt down to Archie. "Anything else happen in... wherever you were?"

"No." Archie stared blankly at the Death Knight before turning back to the fight, unblinking. "No."

The vampire stumbled backward as he avoided being struck through the heart, his left arm instead taking damage as he held his bleeding shoulder.

"Well, looks like destiny was on my side after all," Edward chuckled. "Guess you shouldn't bite off more than you can chew?"

[Inevitable End]

As energy pulsed through the demon's blade, it flickered the air straight for the neck of the vampire.

Theo paused, frozen, as the attack careened towards him.

A wry smile curled at the side of his fanged mouth.