

## Chapter 742 Drinking

“She came to save us, back in Salia,” Lily said. She watched Edwin, his eyes focused on the large fountain before them. “Elves had attacked the city... killed nearly ever-”

“I know,” Edwin interrupted. He looked at a small rock he had taken from the ground, moving it around his fingers before he threw it into the water.

Nobody else occupied the stone benches around the fountain. People still walked through the square but there were fewer than during the day. Lily made sure to keep a watchful eye on the figures, many of them adventurers. She didn't miss the guards either, Sentinels and Shadows moving through from time to time, some on the rooftops.

*And here he goes again*, she thought, seeing the man's eyes lose focus. She grit her teeth and stood up.

“Why do you want to fight?” he asked.

She looked at him. “What do you mean? I need gold. For me and Roland.”

“No you don't,” he said. He looked at her now.

Lily took a step back. She had to remind herself that she knew him. *Do I?* He looked at her in a way that made her uncomfortable. Something she hadn't experienced in a long time. He looked at her with scrutiny. “Fuck off,” she said and walked away.

“You're lying to yourself,” he said.

*Sure. The miserable shitbag drunkard tells me I'm lying to myself.* Her eyes opened wide before she moved into the shadows. She came out a few meters away, her pack at the ready, dagger drawn. “What the fuck are you doing?”

Edwin stood where she had just been, the back of his hand where her neck would've been. He swayed a little before he shook his head. The man ground his teeth, looking at her with hard eyes. He didn't say a word and walked past her.

“What was that? Why would you just attack me out of nowhere? What's wrong with you? Did you lose your goddamn mind?” she said, her arms wide as she stared at him but the man vanished a moment later.

A few onlookers stared at her, some making comments.

She glared back and growled, her canines growing in size. *Stop it, idiot.* She walked away before anyone gave her too much attention. It took a few minutes for her to feel reasonably safe again, continuously checking the movements of the nearby guards. Looking up, she saw a black winged figure fly past with incredible speed. Lily grit her teeth, her mind going back to what the man had said. Lying to herself? In what way? Why was she even considering him? She shook her head. The tournament would start a noon. She had to get some sleep before that.

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Edwin teleported into the store, staying quiet as he crouched and looked through the various shelves. *No Pearl. This will do*, he thought and grabbed a dark bottle. He broke off the top and started drinking, ignoring the sharp glass edges pushing against his chin. The bottle done, he threw it away and grabbed another.

Five bottles later, the trap door to the damp cellar opened up.

“Who’s down there?” an angry voice called out.

Edwin grabbed another two bottles and teleported out, immediately stumbling into a nearby wall. The world spun from the impact but he just staggered back a few steps, shrugging off the dull pain. He looked down and saw shards of glass fall from his hand, a few cuts already closing up. Dark liquid mixed with his blood. “Fuck,” he murmured, looking at his other hand instead. There he still had a bottle. That was good.

He cracked it open with his injured hand and started drinking, the angle of the world changing again. He saw boots and heard something. His head hurt. Just a little.

Someone crouched down. Ash armor.

“Fuck oooff, Illea,” he slurred out, rolling onto his back before he raised the bottle to his mouth. Nothing came out. He let go of it.

“Does he know her?” a voice asked.

“Doesn’t matter. He stole a bunch of bottles. Look at him,” a woman said. “And he stinks.”

Edwin felt something warm and opened his eyes wide. “NO!” But it was too late. His world refocused. He was back. “You fucking... pieces of shit,” he said and went for his blades.

The four people moved as one, teleporting the short distance before they grabbed his arms and weapons, held him there with moving limbs of ash.

He strained against their hold but found himself unable to move. “Let... me... go,” he growled.

“You stole those bottles and you will either pay for them or you will have to come with us. Conscious and uninjured, or not,” the ash covered healer said, his voice calm.

***[Battle Healer – lvl 185]***

“You don’t know who I am...” he said through gritted teeth.

“You heard what I said,” the healer said.

Edwin strained against their hold again and failed to get out. He closed his eyes and sighed. His arms went slack. The four jumped away at their leader’s signal, making some distance. He glared at the man and slowly drew his first sword. He looked at the thing. The metal had a red sheen to it, light from a nearby lantern reflected off the blade. A few onlookers had gathered, quickly shooed away by two Shadowguard that now secured the exits from the alleyway.

*Redleaf blades.*

*The pride of our glorious House.*

He glanced at the pommel, the scratched out family crest unrecognizable. "I didn't ask to be healed," he said and threw the blade on the ground. The metal clattered. "Give that to the owner," he said in a dry tone. He slowly unsheathed his other blade and threw that one down as well. "With that. You get me a crate of those bottles."

"We don't have time for this," one of the Sentinels said.

The leader looked at him for a long moment. "The name you said before..."

Edwin looked at him and shook his head. "Just get me that fucking crate, man."

"Nathan..." one of them said. "You're not seriously going to help this guy."

"I get you that crate. You don't break into more establishments?" the man asked.

"Sentinel promise," Edwin said and showed him both middle fingers.

He expected a punch to his neck but instead the man started laughing.

"Fucking lunatic," the woman said.

"We should move on," another man said.

The Sentinel crouched down and looked at the weapons. He grabbed them and stood up. "These are well made. Worth more than a crate of booze."

Edwin just puffed.

The man signaled something to the others. All of them vanished a moment later.

*Took the blades.*

Edwin looked up and sighed. The stars were visible. He saw one of the constellations he had often used to navigate the wilderness. The coiling snake. "Degenerate Ash fanatics," he said when he heard a dull sound. He looked down and saw the Sentinel stand up again, a crate of bottles set on the ground before him.

"You don't look well," the man said and crossed his arms.

Edwin stared at him. "You don't get to tell me how I look, boy."

The Sentinel chuckled. He looked at Edwin for a few seconds, considered, then vanished.

Edwin crouched down and grabbed the crate. He teleported a few times until he stood in the cellar with Roland and Jyrai, the two engaged in the most depressing looking game of cards he had ever seen.

He cracked open a bottle and started drinking.

"Where have you been?" the fire mage asked. He glanced down. "Your swords?"

Edwin didn't reply. He drank and stared at Roland. *Bald piece of shit.* He cracked open another bottle.

Twenty minutes later and a sixth bottle done, he threw the empty thing at the man. It missed, instead shattering against the wall, drops of liquid rolling off the damp surface.

Jyraiu glanced back. Annoyed and scared.

*Like he always is. Too fucking scared to do anything. To fucking scared to leave and live his fucking life.* “Why are you sstill here?” he asked.

Jyraiu looked at him. “What do y-”

“I’m not taalking to y... you... I’m talking...” he said and stood up, nearly dropping the crate. He focused and set it down on the ground. He came up, his head swimming, vision going dark before it refocused. He pointed at Roland. “I’m talking to you. Bald shit.”

Roland glanced up but he just stared back. There was nothing there.

Edwin ground his teeth. “Berserker... what are you dooing? She’s your daughter, isn’t she?”

No response.

“And you’ve been dragging her... along. Having her care for you... like some old fucking man,” he said.

“You don’t know me,” Roland said in a quiet voice.

“I doon’t? NO?” Edwin asked, leaning forward a little. He had to steady himself against a shelf that shook lightly under his weight. “Killed everyone, didn’t they? Long ears... your wife? Children?”

Roland stood up, the cards falling from his hands.

“Edwin, I don’t think th-” Jyraiu said, stepping to the side.

*Yes. Go h... hide.*

Edwin walked a step closer. “And you did nothing. All of them slaughtered. And you’re still doing nothing.” He felt a dull impact to his head and staggered back. Edwin grinned and raised a hand to his chin. He tasted blood.

“Don’t talk about them,” Roland said, his fists raised and shaking.

“What? Why not? Have you k... killed any elves since it happened? How much stronger are you?” he demanded. *Lilith fought beings we couldn’t even imagine. What did you do?* “The least you could have done was avenge them.”

Roland growled and charged, his fist coming forward.

Edwin grabbed it and tripped the man, throwing him through the wooden door of the cellar and out against the stone stairwell. He walked out and kicked down on the berserker’s skull. The impact cracked something.

Roland got up with a push, slamming Edwin against the side of the entrance. Mana flowed now, a red aura around the man’s form as his fists crashed into Edwin. He punched six times, four hitting the noble’s head.

Edwin deflected the last punch and struck back. He stumbled sideways, his ears ringing. Up the stairs and onto the street. He watched the berserker rush up, like some wild animal. Edwin laughed, dodging backwards to avoid the swing of the small axe. “You’re weak,” he said and rushed forward,

deflecting the savage strike before he punched Roland in the stomach, lifting him off the ground with the impact.

Roland growled while in the air and slammed his axe down on his opponent's shoulder. The blade dug through the battered leather, biting into the flesh.

Edwin grabbed the handle and threw the man off. He ripped the thing out of his shoulder and threw it aside, just when he was tackled by Roland.

They fell, Edwin hitting his head before fists started to slam into his head. He blocked a few strikes but the impacts were growing stronger, his attempts to throw the wild warrior off failing. The stone cracked with another impact until it suddenly stopped. He could barely see anything, his left eye entirely gone and his right one covered with blood. He spat out a few teeth and cracked back his flattened nose, stumbling up before he fell back down.

He still heard growls from Roland, finally feeling warmth flow through him again. His vision cleared, the dull pain from his shoulder and face receding as his mind cleared in turn.

Roland was being held down by a large Sentinel, with one hand. A few more had gathered.

Edwin closed his eyes, still lying on the ground. *What am I doing?*

He rolled to his back and looked up at the stars, lanterns burning lazily at the corners of his vision. *The coiled snake.*

"Pent up anger?" someone asked. It was the same Sentinel that had given him the crate.

Edwin closed his eyes. "Fuck off."

He heard the man sit down. "That was one shit fight."

*Shut up.*

"Barely worthy of a level one hundred brawler," the man said.

*I said shut up.*

"Let alone a level two hundred sword master. Tragic really," he said.

Someone lightly kicked his side. "This shit again?" a woman asked. "Nathan, you're wasting our time with your constant want to save people. This guy is lost."

Nathan chuckled. "Exactly."

The woman groaned and stepped away. "By fucking Lilith."

"Just let him do his thing. We stopped the fight," another man said.

"Gael stopped the fight. We didn't do shit," the woman said.

"What the fuck do you want?" Edwin asked when the man still didn't leave.

Nathan stood up. "No. Edwin, the question is, what do you want?"

He groaned.

"You would normally have one option. We kick you out of the city. If you return during the festival, we'll have you imprisoned. If you resist, you will die. I will offer you a second one. You participate in the main tournament," Nathan said.

Edwin opened his eyes and glanced over. “How do you even know who I am?”

The ash covered man looked down at him. “You asked me before didn’t you? You don’t know who I am, you said. I didn’t. So I had someone ask around, had your blades checked, followed you and listened to the conversation you just had. Just because you hate us doesn’t mean we’re incompetent.”

“I don’t have my weapons,” Edwin said.

“I’m sure that’s not an obstacle for a man of your reputation. Gael will see you to the registration booth,” Nathan said and walked a few steps before he glanced back. “I suggest you show up to your fight sober. I’ve been told your sister is in town. I’m sure she’ll be watching.”

“You fucking piece of-” Edwin got out when the dark behemoth appeared above him.

The large man raised him up with one hand, his entire form shrouded in spiked ash, his eyes uncaring. “Tournament, or over the wall,” he said in a deep growl, an ashen limb pointing in the direction of the walls.

Edwin looked at the man for a few seconds, the ash around him. He was outclassed, and he knew it. *Even her fucking cult.*

“Tournament,” Edwin said through gritted teeth.

Black wings spread and he was in the air a moment later.

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Lily watched the Sentinel fly off, carrying Edwin by the neck. She stepped back into the shadow of the alley she had chosen to sleep in, sliding down against the wall. *He would’ve killed him.* And she had watched. She had watched, unable to interfere. *Did I come to sleep here to protect Roland? In case he was attacked?*

She shook her head. *Why did I come here? To get silver, for us? For him? For that man?*

A shell of her father. A shell of the last thing that reminded her. Every day.

Wolves stepped from the shadows. They moved close. Protected her while she hugged her knees.

She stayed like that for a good twenty minutes, quietly crying. She hissed at a Sentinel that asked if she was fine. He left.

Her sobs finally turned into laughter, the voice stuck in her throat before she rubbed her eyes. She took a deep breath and shuddered. One sign of her hand and the wolves stepped back into the shadow. *I can’t do this anymore.*

Lily stood up and walked to the cellar.

Inside, she found both Jyrai and Roland, playing cards as if nothing had happened. She steeled herself.

"I'm done," she said with a weak voice. Then louder. "I'm done."

Roland looked up. He didn't say a word.

"You're here now. You're safe. As safe as you're going to get. I will join the tournament, and then... I don't know. I don't know what I will do... but it won't be with you," she said and gulped. One of her ears started ringing.

The man who had been her father stood up.

"W... what do you mean? Lily... I... how... I have to protect you," he said.

"By killing other people? By playing cards? By wasting our silver? By losing yourself to your magic? By-" she stopped, her eyes wet, her words growing faster, more frustrated. She took a deep breath and raised her head. "I'm Lily... Lily of Salia, daughter to Samantha. Daughter to Sophie. Daughter to George. And daughter to Roland. They all died... a long time ago in the city that I loved. And I will find my own way," she said and waited. The man in front of her just stared. With the same look in his eyes. With the same slack shoulders. She vanished.

Lily teleported through the city and ran. She ran as fast as she could, as far away from that cellar. From that man. Tears streamed down her cheeks and her lips quivered. She felt light. So very light.