

Chapter 656 Treasure Island

“You know Hallowfort?” Ilea asked. *Maybe not wise to admit that I do know it too*, she thought, having found herself too surprised to not ask.

Kyrian sat down opposite Verena, as far away at the table from Pierce as he could. He nodded at the quiet Elder.

She nodded back.

“Think you’re the only one who ever went north? Most die in the storms or to the Miststalkers, but once you understand the dangers, it’s quite a lovely place,” Pierce said.

“It is. I quite enjoy the storms to be honest,” Ilea said.

Pierce smiled. “Me too! Well I’m a little privileged with my magic. But I suppose with your power, you can just ignore them anyway. Makes me shiver, just to feel your presence. I’m so glad you’re not some stuck up asshole,” she said with a smile. “Are you attracted to women?”

Ilea gave her a long look, choosing not to reply to that question for the time being. She wasn’t necessarily not interested, but the Elder came off extremely strong. And she seemed a tad too chaotic. *Not in this house. Nothing would be left.*

“So you are. Well, I’m here. Just let me know. You came here with long range teleportation? That’s so lucky. I haven’t gotten anything like that yet. Can’t believe both you and Verena got that first. I worked so hard on my teleports too!” Pierce said.

Ilea gave the other Elder a look.

“Highly limited. I’m interested in your current objectives too. Maybe we can be of service. I want to see you fight,” Verena said.

“I see. You mentioned Hallowfort?” Ilea said, trying to veer the conversation back.

“Yes. Lovely place. It’s been... a long while. I sometimes think of Catelyn... ah... that creature had a way with fire,” she said.

Ilea opened her eyes a little wider. *No. Please don’t.*

“Descent was a little too dangerous so I let that one be. But there are lots of dangerous dungeons up in the north. Ancient ruins and all. Did you know there were once humans who lived there?” Pierce asked. “Freaked me out when I found out. As if everything we were taught was a lie! Inferior species my ass, we were far more powerful then. Doesn’t matter much anyway. I love the expression on an Elf or Feynor’s face when they realize I’m not the pushover they thought me to be,” she added, licking her lips.

“You do remind me of Elves. Just missing the hisses,” Ilea said, getting a look from Verena.

Pierce giggled before she hissed, lightning cracking around her. “Ah, I wish I could convince one of them at some point. But all they want to do is fight fight fight, kill, and eat.”

Ilea was confused for a moment before she smiled to herself.

“NO!” Pierce said and stood up. “No you didn’t!”

Ilea didn't say a thing, avoiding eye contact as she glanced at Verena, the woman slightly squinting at her.

"You are on our side, I hope?" Verena asked. "You are still a Shadow, and I have seen your Sentinels, know what they stand for."

"Of course," Ilea said.

"Difficult that. Convincing someone to work with Elves," Verena said. "I never tried. But I only met a few Hunters myself. Never friendly."

Pierce dug her hands into her hair as she sat down again, her whole form sinking into the chair as she seemed smaller yet again. "You win... on all fronts... Lilith, Lilith, Lilith."

Ilea used reconstruction on the poor woman.

She glanced up immediately, her eyes wide. "Ah... it's you. Pleasant. Arcane healing. How rare. What was that healing order called, Verena?"

"I don't know what you mean," Verena said, looking between them.

"Something with rin. Rin rin. Balarin? No. Corinth?" Pierce said.

"Azarinth?" Ilea suggested.

Pierce smiled. "Yes! That's the one. Maybe."

"You met one of them? What do you know about the Order?" Ilea asked.

Pierce looked up, lost in thought for a moment. "Foundation. I think I read about them there. Ah and I found one of their temples at one point. Their blue elixir grass too, but hey, it was too late for me to eat random and dangerous elixirs. Who would do that anyway, half of them kill you instantly," she said and laughed.

Ilea smiled a wry smile.

Pierce looked at her and laughed even harder. "Hah, you damn idiot. No wonder you're so strong. Half a brain means half the fear, I say!"

"I didn't have a choice," Ilea said.

"You always have a choice. We just don't like the other option," Pierce said, her voice more serious.

"Do you remember where the temple was?" Ilea asked.

"No. But I destroyed the elixir, if that's why you're asking. Just creates trouble," she said. "So you stumbled into a temple and got the Class. At least it was good for something then. Hope you didn't share it around."

"Just one girl. She survived too, luckily," Ilea admitted.

"Good. So what are you up to?" Pierce asked.

Ilea looked at Kyrian, and then the two women. Both were intently focused on her. *What the fuck should I tell them? They broke into my house.*

"What did you say your name was again?" she asked instead.

“Dragonkiller. To be. I haven’t yet been successful, sadly. They’re... quite something,” she said and laughed.

Verena just rolled her eyes.

“You two are Elders, are you sure you should be sitting here with me? I’m sure you have more important business to attend to,” Ilea said. *Or so I would hope, but I suppose it’s better than summoning demons into Ravenhall. They’re adventurers that fit very well into the Shadow’s Hand, that much is true.*

She looked at them, waiting for an answer.

“She’s deflecting,” Dragonkiller said.

“She is,” Verena added.

And you have no right to ask anything of me, Ilea thought. They are Elders of the Hand. Hmm. Adventurers at that. Maybe I can get their voices on my side.

“Which means you’re not just wasting your time. You have a purpose, a mission. Some grand quest perhaps? Come on, out with it, we’re all adventurers here!” Pierce said.

“You put in Claire. We have no responsibilities other than killing monsters. Not anymore. Thank you for that,” Verena said.

Ilea wasn’t sure if the woman was annoyed or grateful.

“Pretty much. Adam the idiot betrayed us and left, Lucas is who the fuck knows where in the north, Urn is dead, and now we have a council and independence. Sulivhaan and Claire got more done in a few years than the previous Elders did in centuries. No offense, Verena,” Pierce said.

Verena shrugged. “I just managed the Order.”

“I always thought the Shadow’s Hand would’ve done a better job handling Ravenhall. But now you have a bunch of laws and the Shadowguard anyway. Disappointing really. Could’ve been the first truly free place for people like us,” Pierce said and shook her head lightly. “Never mind, tell us. Either you tell us or I destroy your lovely house here.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Ilea asked, heat gathering within her.

“Ah, see, now it’s getting exciting,” Pierce said. “Come on, spill it,” she added and hit the table with both her fists, a broad grin on her face.

“I’ll rip out your limbs and feed them to you if you so much as break that table,” Ilea said calmly.

Pierce just waved her off. “Empty threats. We both know a lack of pain makes that barely worth a mention. And I’ll have at least a moment to wreck this place before you kill me!”

“Are you sure about that?” Ilea asked with a smirk.

“Ask Claire to vouch for us,” Verena interrupted.

“You’re so boring today. It’s very unlike you, Verena,” Pierce said, deflating onto her hands.

“I’m actually interested. And your threats push her away. You’ve been rude from the start,” the other Elder said.

“Fine,” Pierce added.

“Got Pierce and Verena here. Can I trust them?” Ilea sent to Claire.

“I’m sorry. Yes. Shadows to the bone. Talked to both,” came the answer.

“Alright, I suppose I can trust you. To an extent. For now I’ll tell you that I’m looking for treasure. Not to get it yet but to scout out the locations,” Ilea said.

“A treasure hunt in ancient dungeons, protected by... a dragon perhaps?” Pierce asked with a smirk. “That sounds interesting enough, let’s join Verena.”

“We know the lands well, have fought many beings. We can guide you, or help you into cities and vaults,” Verena said. “If that sounds acceptable.”

“Sure, but again, why exactly do you want to help?” Ilea asked.

“Missed you the last few times I came back,” Verena said and shrugged.

“We’ve fought plenty. If we die, we die,” Pierce said. “Now let’s go. I haven’t killed anything in ages.”

“Didn’t you kill that deer?” Ilea asked.

“Ages I tell you,” Pierce added and stood up. “You coming too?” she asked Kyrian.

“No,” he answered in a court manner.

“Shame, well off then with us. Where to, Lilith?” Pierce asked while she pointed to the sky.

Verena got up and started cleaning.

Ilea used her ash to clear off the blood and mud. “It’s fine,” she said.

The woman nodded and disappeared, appearing in front of the door.

“Think you can find the way yourself?” she asked Kyrian, displacing the two of them outside after Pierce had vanished too.

He glanced over, his helmet covering all of his face. “I’ve walked these mountains, just as you have. I think I’ll find my way around.”

“Enjoy your time off, and greet the others for me,” she said and summoned the locator. “Call for me when you need to get back.”

The map flashed up when she activated the related rune.

“Flashy. What’s that?” Pierce asked, flying over with two wings of blue lightning, still wearing her dress.

“Call for us if you need help,” Kyrian said as he ascended. “And good luck.”

Ilea ignored the woman floating around her, looking at the device and the map with large eyes.

So, these are either going to be buried in random Taleen dungeons, or they’re in the pockets of an Oracle, Elemental, or Ascended. Maybe an Elemental Oracle. At least that would be interesting to see, she thought.

Nothing showed up in the vicinity, the arrow pointing to the north east. Out towards the ocean. *Wonderful start. Kraken ate it?*

“That looks Taleen,” Pierce finally said.

Verena joined them, fire burning on her skin as she hovered over.

“It’s Taleen artifacts we’re looking for after all,” Ilea said. “What do you know about them?”

“Interesting to fight. Ancient peoples like so many others out there. Hardly worth a mention to be honest,” Pierce said. “They built their machines and vanished. Or so it goes. Probably part of the dwarven kingdoms now.”

“Teleportation gates,” Verena said, looking at the map before it vanished. “You unlocked it, found a way to access them? That could be useful. Dangerous too.”

“Countries will slaughter each other to get that technology,” Pierce said. “But with what I heard about you, you’re just going to rent it out for cheap. Or just give it away for free. The latter option is certainly more interesting, but that Administrator working with you will likely prevent that.”

“She manages the contracts,” Ilea answered, not saying anything to their speculation. “Arrow points out into the ocean. Any idea what’s out there?”

“Islands. A few. High level monsters,” Verena said. “Beyond that. Death.”

“How high level?” Ilea asked.

“Three, four hundred, maybe more,” the woman answered. “I didn’t go far.”

“What if it points to another continent?” Pierce asked. “I don’t want to fly over the ocean for weeks.”

“I didn’t ask you to come,” Ilea said.

“No, no. I’ll come. I’ll come,” the woman said with a few defensive gestures.

Verena shook her head. “If it is another continent. We should turn back. Or let her go alone. We aren’t ready.”

“You went to another continent?” Ilea asked.

The woman shrugged. “So have others. Perhaps you of all people could survive. But I do not suggest it.”

“There is surely more than one other landmass than this piece of work,” Pierce said. “You’re being too pessimistic.”

“There’s more than one artifact that I need to find. I guess we can try the islands. Let’s follow the locator,” Ilea suggested.

“Follow the locator!” Pierce exclaimed, her wings flaring up with mana.

Ilea moved her own, flying out over the waves crashing against cliffs far below. Her own wings charged up as she looked at the arrow. “About there I suppose,” she said and pointed before she put away the device, spreading her ash mantle and layering it.

Pierce whistled, flying around her in a circle. “So that’s your getup. A little barbaric, but manageable. I like the tail, and it seems like your manipulation is at a refined degree. A bit shit that you’re using ash. Metal is just straight up better, but I’d guess you have some other benefits. It does explain how you’ve reached your power so quickly. Can’t have an ash mage that isn’t at least somewhat reckless.”

“Lots of Sentinels are ash mages,” Verena remarked.

Pierce smiled. "Well chosen individuals then," she said. "Let's see if you can keep up with me."

Verena sighed. "You two just make sure to wait for me."

"I can mark you guys, if you like," Ilea said.

"That's such a Lilith thing to say. What next, you turn us into slaves with your mind magic?" Pierce said. "Just start throwing some fire around if we're too far ahead, Verena."

"Never underestimate the ocean," Verena answered.

Pierce just waved her off, a shock wave extending from her wings as more power flowed through them. "Just don't go under."

A split second later the woman vanished.

Ilea could barely follow her, a line of blue flying into the distance as an explosion of air resounded a few hundred meters ahead. The Dragonkiller had just broken through the sound barrier.

"How is she only at level three hundred?" Ilea asked.

Verena shrugged. "More responsible than she seems."

"I suppose so. Sure you don't want that mark?" she said.

The woman raised a hand. "I appreciate it. And I trust you, Ilea. You're honest, I can tell. But no foreign marks."

"Understood. At least fly ahead so I can see if you need a lift," Ilea said.

Verena shot off without another word, considerably slower than Pierce, or Ilea for that matter.

She quickly caught up with the burning form, a few ashen limbs going behind her back before her wings charged and pushed them forward. Ilea had no way of catching the Dragonkiller, even without carrying Verena. *Lightning seems to be the way to go when it comes to flying.*

Ilea wondered when Trian could manifest speeds like that, though she did wonder how maneuverable Pierce was in this form. She already had difficulties with her ashen wings. Just as she had the thought, a bird exploded against her chest, everything that could've been left behind already gone when she noticed the impact. At least she could trust her defenses to overwhelm the risks that came with this kind of momentum. She hoped the same was true for Pierce's dress.

A streak of blue lightning flashed from ahead, going around far on the stormy ocean before it joined up with Ilea.

They stopped together, Pierce now covered in form fitting dark blue armor, lightning flowing on it as if she was some form of conductor. The metal flowed aside to reveal a broad smirk. "One win for the Dragonkiller."

"I suppose so," Ilea said, not much caring for the competition. All she wanted was to stay faster than Kyrian. Pierce first had to kill a few four marks and reach the four hundreds before she would even consider her a worthy opponent.

"Maybe I can convince you to show me your hunting grounds... I will come for you in no time, you lucky lucky healer," the woman said and twirled in the air, a pulse of lightning flowing out from her armor in a seamless manner.

Lightning struck a few kilometers away, dark clouds now covering most of the horizon. They had already traveled far, and yet not particularly long.

“Where does the pointy thing point to, treasurer?” Pierce asked, watching Ilea summon the device.

They adjusted course a few more times, flying over the open ocean on their approach to something that at least seemed to be getting closer, based on the course corrections they had to make.

A single island came into view about twenty minutes later. Mostly just an outcrop of rock, not a single tree or other vegetation visible on top. A large chunk of it looked wet as well, suggesting a submerged state at least in stormy weather. It was only a few kilometers in diameter, the jagged bits and deep shadows reaching below the water only hinted at its true size.

“I have not been here. Further out than the islands I meant,” Verena informed.

“New territory!” Pierce shouted. “Sense anything, girls?” she asked and crouched in mid air, looking around like some kind of hunter listening for predators.

“Nothing,” Verena said.

“I can call and see if something shows up,” Ilea suggested.

Pierce wagged around her hands. “Nononono, bad idea. Not out here, are you crazy? Any idea how well sound travels through water? You’re going to wake some things that have been sleeping for millennia. Do that when you’re a four mark, or later.”

Ilea tried to assess her level and power but she really seemed to just be a level three hundred human. Nothing about her gave her a weird feeling, except for her words from time to time. *Guess I really was lucky with Erendar and the Krahen isles.*

“Should we land?” Ilea asked.

Pierce teleported down onto the surface, several hundred meters far.

And here I thought I was the space mage, Ilea mused. No long range. No competition.

When the other two landed, Pierce had started smashing a metal pole into the stone, a black flag with the Shadow’s emblem in white attached to the top. The wind blew it around as the cracking of stone resounded, the Elder finally stepping back and admiring her addition. “Another frontier, claimed by humanity.”

“I wouldn’t say claimed. We barely just arrived,” Ilea said and looked around, trying to use Sentinel Huntress and her dominion to see if anything had been here recently. *No magic, no droppings. Just a rock.*

The locator arrow twirled, finally pointing downwards when she tilted the device to the side.

“A magnificent piece of land. So, where to?” Pierce asked, now wearing a sailor’s uniform and extending a telescope.