

Chapter 2.24 Unquenchable

Sally rolled her eyes. "That's a little cliché."

"I wonder how literal it is?" Humphrey rubbed his chin with his free hand.

It could just be some manner of trap. Although, a trap for who? Sally tilted her head at the ladder, which led up to a hole in the top of the cave. A brief hint of light could be seen at the edge. At this stage, anything would be preferable to wandering the boring caves for a minute longer.

"Let's check it out, gang. There may be clues!" She hopped forward and began to climb up the ladder.

"Er, okay." Lucius shrugged. "I don't believe I know of this place."

Sally burst through the top of the climb, the slats of thick wood pinned into place through the rock as it emerged back into the outside world. The sun overhead burned at her eyes as she stumbled onto the dusty floor. As she turned, behind her sat a wide wooden building. Dark wood planks and carved edges. A sign stood atop the swinging doorway, stating very simply, 'Saloon.'

Archie hopped up beside her next, having ridden awkwardly across the Death Knight's face and shoulders. Humphrey came up next, a glower in his empty sockets as he hefted the limp vampire up beside him, dumping Theo unceremoniously onto the floor so that he could pull himself up.

"Hey, don't scuff the merchandise," Sally tutted.

Lucius was the last and didn't look too pleased at having to follow the large plated figure up - probably figuring he would be crushed if the Death Knight had fallen. The repeated sweat drop emojis followed along beside him until he collapsed on the hot earth.

"Well. That looks as advertised, I suppose." Humphrey tilted his head with a sigh. "It says they have rooms to let - maybe I can try getting Theo to sleep."

"Like, wedge him between two beds like a sandwich?" Sally licked her lips. "My mouth is dry; I'll start drinking for clues at the bar."

Lucius remained on the floor like a pancake. "I may need a minute."

Archie hopped atop the demon's chest and began to alternate pawing on his cloak. "I'll keep Lucius company; we haven't had much chance to talk anyway."

Sally clicked her fingers with a smile. "Alright - that almost sounds like a plan where we all know our places, and nothing can go wrong."

"Almost." Humphrey agreed, lifting the vampire back up with a grin.

Immediately, the shade of the overhanging upper was a delight, and the zombie paused at the swinging doors. Music could be heard inside - some piano if clichés were anything to go by. The low murmuring of voices accompanied it, and for a second, she was worried about whether it could be Players or Monsters in there. In the end, it didn't matter too greatly.

She pushed the doors wide and strode into the saloon, soon followed by the Death Knight. Just as she expected, aside from the piano, everyone in the room went silent and looked their way. She made the show of tipping a hat that she didn't have.

Around twenty or so figures sat amongst groupings of tables and chairs. Even with a brief glance, she took the educated guess that these were Unique Monsters - in that a few of them weren't humanoid. Straight ahead of them was the bar itself, where the barkeep stood cleaning out a glass. A wide mirror extended across behind him and the whole area was filled with stacked mugs.

The barkeep himself was a slim man, tall and with a huge beard, almost excessively so. His tiny eyes sat behind large glasses, and his purple robe seemed more fitting for a mage than someone running a bar.

As the general chatter resumed, Sally stomped up to the counter and gave the man a nod. "Howdy. Ah, sorry - is that a bit reductive?"

"It's fine, little lady; we accept all types here." He gestured as if a wink followed that statement, but his eyes were too small to properly make out the action.

"Could we get a room for my buds here? Maybe a drink for myself?" She squinted at the taps on the other side of the bar, but none of them looked to be fresh Player Brains flavor.

"Certainly, that'll be fifty gold for the room - and the first one is on the house." He turned to grab a key for room number two and slid it across the counter for Humphrey.

"It's a medical thing," the Death Knight narrowed his eyes at the inquisitive stare of the barkeep.

"Of course, name's Duncan, by the by." A smile grin appeared from within the massive beard.

"Sally," Sally said. "You had this place long?" She watched Humphrey meander off to the staircase to attempt to put Theo to bed. A lot cuter said in her head than the visual reality of the situation.

"About a week actually. It's a little refuge for those of us still around after... well, you're new to the area, correct?" He grabbed a mug and began filling it with some ale, probably - Sally wasn't much of a drinker.

"Yeah, couple of days, actually." She pulled a face. It seemed like forever like that had left the verdant greens and soft grasses of the first area.

"Don't get many new Uniques. Ruben either puts them to work, or the dustbowl takes them." He placed the filled mug in front of her. "Best keep your head down and don't invoke the ire of the tax collectors."

"Definitely," Sally nodded slowly, cupping the mug with a smile as Duncan moved away to talk to another patron.

She instead focused on the frothy liquid in front of her. There was zero desire in her heart, nor her stomach, to actually drink it. It just seemed like the done thing to order up a beer or mead or whatever they drank in this world. Perhaps if she just stared at it long enough, it would either vanish or she would have an excuse to throw it at-

"Hey, you're pretty strong for a woman."

Slowly, her glare turned to meet the man who was now standing beside her, leaning against the wooden bar. He looked human but for some reason, was not wearing a shirt. Undoubtedly to show off his six-pack and chiseled physique. His bright hazel eyes matched his trim haircut.

"What?"

"Sorry, I get tongue-tied. I meant you look strong, and you're a pretty woman." The man scrunched up his almost perfect face in awkwardness.

"That's barely any better; what do you want?" She began to deflate already, but her glare bore into him.

"We just don't meet many Uniques. It's always good to get... acquainted." He pouted.

"No offense, but I'm more attracted to brains." She started to wonder where slaughtering the saloon occupants would fall on her morality scale.

The sound of shuffling, followed by a deep thud, came from the rooms above, knocking down a brief cloud of dust.

"I'm not asking for much, just a little of your time. I can change, you know." He flexed his muscles and made the show of looking... cute? It came off more pathetic than anything.

Sally worked her jaw - both in frustration and in preparation for attempted violence. "You seem pretty misogynistic - and I'm guessing you're a werewolf?"

The man looked slightly taken aback but posed dramatically to show off his jawline. "But how did you guess?"

From above them, the sound of scraping wood was accompanied by a raised, deep voice.

Her eye twitched. "The smell of wet dog, for one. Also, you're a walking cliché. You literally disgust me. I can't believe you haven't gotten the hint yet. If you like, I can beat your skull in."

"I... uh, perhaps we got off on the wrong foot. My name is-"

A hideous creak reverberated through the saloon, and the ceiling burst through. Shattered wood and plumes of dust struck the middle of the floor. A figure silhouetted in pure black, crimson electricity crackling across their body, stood up from the wreckage.

Eyes of bright red scoured the room before resting on Sally and the werewolf.

"Where is he?" The vampire hissed.

The werewolf started to slide along the bar away from her. "Is... is that your boyfriend?"

"Sure," Sally rolled her eyes. "Theo, what are you doing? Go to bed."

"I heard someone talking sssssshittttt," his mouth opened wide, and his fangs caught the light despite the rest of him still being shrouded in darkness.

Loud stomping came from the staircase as a very annoyed Death Knight came back into the saloon proper, his own helmet blazing with red fire and a determined scowl across his empty skeletal face.

Whatever the werewolf was called, he now recoiled as far from the situation as possible - continuously making an eep sound as he did so.

Theo's head snapped to the doorway, and he ran towards it. Sally and Humphrey followed suit.

"Get back here!" The Death Knight growled, the slashed red cloak still in his hands.

The vampire made it through the doorway just before they did, almost slamming into the back of him as he had stopped just beyond the porch, still under the awing.

"*Too late*. He was here, but we were too late, *toolatetoolatetoolate*," he held his head and growled, sinking to his knees as the other two looked ahead.

Where they had left the other two, Archie now sat encased in an ice cube.

Lucius was gone.