

## Chapter 442 Performance

Nathan walked towards the main hall, careful not to attract any unnecessary attention.

They were supposed to check the notice board at least once at noon and once after dinner, just in case something came up.

For two weeks already he had participated in the strewn together lessons this organization provided. The teachers certainly had charisma and power to boot but the topics they were talking about seemed somewhat random.

“Hey Nathan!” a loud voice resounded to his right.

“Luke,” Nathan said as he turned and nodded to the man.

*That was an awkward nod if I've ever seen one. He's a bloody farmer and what? Five, six years younger than you? Get your shit together.*

It didn't help that the man was around twice his size, his clothes barely containing the muscles below.

**[Farmer – lvl 28]**

“Did you see?” Luke asked as he approached, touching his shoulder.

“We just finished our combat lesson. I didn't have time yet to check, what is it?” he asked.

Luke grinned and took several steps back. “Classes are canceled this afternoon. We are to gather in the lowest training hall.”

That was indeed some news. “What do you think?”

“What else would it be. Lilith! The dark shadow, clad in ash with wings to darken the suns themselves! She will grace our presence!” Luke exclaimed in a mocking tone.

Some of the other students looked up from their meals or books, some smiling while others seemed annoyed.

“Or they're going to sacrifice us in some ritual,” Nathan suggested in a whisper.

“Didn't you work for her before? Show some trust at least. I'm pretty sure this isn't a scam,” Luke said.

“I worked in a store owned by her, as did many who joined. Doesn't mean I ever met her. Nor that she is trustworthy. She is rich, that much is sure,” Nathan said and checked the noticeboard.

They had all gotten high quality clothes, good beds and the food was otherworldly. Sometimes that was.

“This is directly from Trian. Sounds good,” Nathan said after reading through the short notice.

Luke stepped up to him and whispered, “Some say he's a blood mage, you know?”

“And what's that supposed to mean? Not every blood mage is automatically a monster,” he replied and stepped towards one of the empty tables in the hall.

It was obvious that this place had been furnished rather recently. That should also explain why the food came at different times and how the teachers talked about a variety of subjects in single lessons.

He would have left already if this wasn't the only place in Ravenhall that offered training in healing. Lilith's name being attached had certainly helped convince him to join in the first place.

"All I hear from you two is fucking complaining. You get your own room, a bed, clothes and good food. What more could you ever want in life," Celeste said as she joined the two with a plate piled up high with meat, potatoes and bread, all drenched in gravy.

"Don't you think it's weird though? Every store, inn and restaurant associated with the name Lilith is well run and generally of good quality. We're not learning about a Class at all. Nobody is even a healer here," Nathan said.

The woman shrugged and started eating, replying with a full mouth. "As I said, food, beds and all. Plus, the training is amazing. I'm pretty sure Sidney is a Shadow."

"How would you know? Just because we're in Ravenhall doesn't mean every other high level warrior you see is a Shadow," Luke said.

"Just a feeling. I've lived on the streets here long enough to be able to tell," she said.

"I wanted to ask you before..." Nathan started, looking around as the words got stuck in his throat.

"Spit it out rich boy," she said in between bites, barely looking at him.

"Is it true, the demon summoning?" he finally asked.

"Maybe you shouldn't-" Luke said.

He was interrupted by Celeste holding up a piece of bone. "Why? It happened. Nearly everyone died. I hid for weeks in the underground. Good thing the demons had a shit nose and eyes. The rats were a worse threat."

"They say if a demon kills you, your corpse stands up again and becomes one of them," Nathan said.

The stories that had reached his village had been horrifying. And fascinating.

"I didn't see that. But there were a lot of them... more than I saw at the beginning. And there were no corpses. Could just be they ate everyone," Celeste explained as she bit into a juicy chicken leg.

"Do you three mind if I sit here?" a new voice joined them, a woman with striking blue eyes, long black hair in a single braid falling down her back. She wore simple but high quality clothes.

Nathan felt the hair on his neck stand up but he didn't exactly know why.

**[Healer – lvl ??]**

*Ah, she's a high level too.*

"Finally, a fucking healer," Celeste said with a grin. "You're a new teacher? Nice to meet you. Celeste," she said and offered her greasy hand.

The woman smiled and sat down, grabbing the hand as she placed down a plate even more stacked than Celeste's.

"I'm a substitute teacher or something," the woman said and started eating. "Nice to meet you all," she said after swallowing.

Celeste eyed her plate but soon focused onto her own again.

"I don't think it's true," Luke said.

"What?" Nathan asked.

"That people rise again after a demon kills them," he clarified.

"I've seen it happen," the woman spoke, surprising the three.

"Really?" Nathan asked. "How could they be defeated then?"

"The demon was only level fifty after it rose. Still dangerous but it was killed by a brave warrior right after," she said.

Celeste snorted.

"Great. Just what I expected," the girl said.

Nathan could have sworn he saw a smile twitch on the healer's mouth.

"Will you teach us your Class?" Luke asked.

"No. It's a rare one. I doubt any of you could learn it. The pay is good though so I agreed. I'll show you some healing magic at the very least," the woman said.

*She doesn't look much older than me. Still feels like she's ancient.*

"Do you know what the assembly is about?" Nathan asked her.

"Assembly?" the healer asked.

"It's probably about the new healer they managed to hire," Celeste said and nodded her way. "In half an hour or so. Lowest level of this castle."

"Not exactly a castle, is it?" Luke asked.

"I believe it was a joke," Nathan said.

The healer leaned forward and smiled. "Tell me, what do you think of this place? I'm not sure if I want to get stuck here, even with the pay."

"It's... new. It's supposedly owned by Lilith," Luke said. "The food is good, the classes are interesting and I've learned more about fighting than I did in my eighteen years."

"You're a fucking farmer, Luke. Of course you don't know shit about fighting," Celeste said with a chuckle.

"Who's Lilith?" the healer asked.

"You're not from around here then?" Luke said with a smile. "She's the greatest there ever was! Providing employment to thousands. She's the richest and most beautiful woman in existence, her ashen wings are legendary. I'm pretty sure she's a Shadow too. Never met her though. A mystery really." His voice indicated he was joking.

Nathan looked at the healer before his eyes opened wide. He watched her glance at him, her eyes ice. Something in his brain told him to run but all he could do was sit there, anything he would have wanted to say got stuck.

*It's her!*

*A random healer suddenly appearing before an assembly? The first of its kind? It has to be.*

*Stay calm*, he thought and found her attention was back on Luke.

The man was babbling about the legend that was Lilith.

"... wings powerful and righteous, she landed to defend the weak!" he sang, getting boos from the people sitting somewhat close. His voice really wasn't the best.

"Do you have a singing skill?" the woman asked.

"Not yet. I won't let them discourage me!" Luke exclaimed.

She laughed. "Don't. I've seen miracles happen. Yours might just come true."

Nathan had a hard time breathing. Right until she touched his shoulder. Something warm flowed into him, his mind calming down immediately.

"Are you alright? You looked a little pale," she said.

"He has his moments. The scars should tell you enough," Celeste said.

"Don't," Luke hissed.

The girl rolled her eyes and continued eating in silence.

"It's alright. You calmed down, right?" the healer said.

Nathan nodded. It felt wrong. He touched his neck, could feel the skin, burnt and disfigured. "I'm... fine," he said.

"Well, that was interesting. Let's hope we meet her at the assembly. Sounds like a terrifically unreal person," she said and got up. "Fifteen minutes?"

"Yes, ma'am. Just take the stairs and go down all the way. Can't miss it," Luke said.

Nathan glanced at her once more. Her movements seemed different to him now. Lethal. Like the monsters he had seen in the woods. Like the soldiers.

"How the fuck?" Celeste exclaimed, looking at the empty plate next to hers.

"You got beaten," Luke said with a laugh. He patted Nathan on his back and smiled. "You okay?"

Nathan nodded. *Should I tell them? No. She'll reveal it herself. Why talk to us first? She wanted to know about the rumors?*

"We should go too, finish your plate Celeste," Luke said and got up.

The girl rolled her eyes and stood up too, taking her plate with her. "Sorry, Nathan," she said as she walked past.

*At least she apologizes. Not the reason I freaked out however.*

He followed the two in silence, glancing at the others as they fell in from the various floors.

One class looked properly battered, showing bruises from the heavy steel armor they had to wear during combat lessons. At least they had armor, otherwise the teachers would rip them apart.

Aki stepped into the broad stairwell on the fifth floor down, glancing over the students with his shining green eyes.

Many looked away, not about to challenge the being.

Nathan looked back. It fascinated him. A machine, capable of thought and as deadly as the strongest warriors he had ever seen. Nobody knew what it was or how it could exist. One of the rules was not to talk about it to outsiders. He was pretty sure Aki would actually like to face some challengers from the city.

Maybe a Shadow or two would be interested in fighting him.

They soon reached the bottom floor, much of the stairwell here not quite finished yet. Stone rubble covered the ground. It felt more like a cave than part of a building, let alone the headquarters of a healing order.

*Not order, organization*, he reminded himself. Trian made it clear that they shouldn't be associated with the known healing orders. *Good thing too*, Nathan thought.

He was there as well. All the teachers were, including the new healer. *Maybe it isn't her?* he thought, watching her greet the others. Their expressions were a mixture of confusion and understanding. Lyza was the only one that didn't seem to care at all. Nothing new there.

People were talking amongst each other, whispering about what this was all about.

"What do you think, Nathan?" Luke asked, standing next to him.

"Not sure," was all he said.

He watched the healer talk to Trian before the man nodded. She vanished and appeared in front of the murmuring students. Some heads turned to her but most people didn't even notice.

"Greetings everyone," she said, her voice barely reaching the second row of people.

Her head tilted to the side.

Nathan watched her, their eyes meeting as he saw a grin form on her lips.

He gulped.

A whistle resounded through the large stone hall, clear and with a high pitch.

***'ding' 'You have heard the call of a powerful healer. You are paralyzed for five seconds.'***

*What??*

He couldn't move an inch. The murmuring had died down in an instant, everybody frozen in place. The healer was still looking at him, her eyes soon moving over the large group of assembled people.

"Now that I have your attention. It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Medic Sentinels. My name is Ilea, or otherwise known as Lilith," she spoke.

*I knew it!*

The five seconds had passed and he could move again, taking a deep breath as he looked around at the confused group of people. Nobody dared make a sound.

“Fuck,” Luke said in a whisper.

Lilith looked at him and smiled. “I apologize for showing up so late. Now... in the coming weeks, I’ll take over your afternoon lessons. If I’m available.”

She walked a little closer and sat down on the ground. “Come on, don’t be scared of me. Form a half circle and sit down.”

*Don’t be scared? Are you kidding me?*

“Really?” someone behind him whispered.

“Yes, really,” Lilith said and looked straight at him.

*She heard that?*

“What you heard before is a skill called Monster Hunter. I got it from fighting creatures well beyond my level. Time and time again,” she explained.

Nathan gulped. “You’re a healer,” he said, looking straight at her.

She smiled. “Yes. Yes I am. Now come everyone, sit down with me. Today, I’ll show you what healers can do.”

Nathan couldn’t help but smile, pushing past some of the stunned people before he sat down somewhat close to the woman. It took all his guts but he didn’t come here to fool around. This was his chance at power and he wouldn’t waste it.

The others slowly followed suit, sitting down in a half circle as the woman had instructed.

She sat with her knees close to her chest, hugging them in a casual way.

“Why are you here?” she asked after a while.

“Free food,” someone said.

Nobody chuckled, except Lilith herself.

“We are supposed to become healers,” someone else said.

“Combat healers,” Luke said.

Now some people did chuckle.

“Combat healers... it’s the description we have. I like Medic as well,” Lilith said with a smile. “You still came here of course, even though you think it a laughable notion?” she looked at the few people who had chuckled.

“Healers are weak,” Celeste spoke, her voice serious.

“They’re supposed to stay behind walls, take care of the injured and sick,” someone else said.

“I heard healers get killed if they’re not part of the guard or an order.”

“I want to become a healer,” Luke said. “I don’t care if it’s a weak class but I want to be able to help people, protect them.”

“My father died in my arms and I couldn’t do anything,” a man said.

Nathan knew him. Ford. Didn't speak much and his level was too high for him to see. A mage, like himself.

"If we are with an organization, we won't have to fear the orders," Hadley said, a level thirty eight alchemist.

Nathan had thought her shy before but now she was speaking up.

"Why didn't you join an order then? Or the guard? The imperial military?" Lilith asked.

"Fuck the empire," someone said.

A murmur went through the group.

"The Sentinels are here to support adventurers, we should help fight monsters, not people," Luke said.

"Few healers are out there, protecting and healing the most powerful humans. The Orders don't care about adventurers and neither do the cities, as long as their walls are secure," someone said.

*That's Lorelei*, he thought. She was one of the oldest here, probably close to thirty. A warrior and nearly as packed with muscle as Luke was.

"Precisely," Ilea said. "Now I won't lie to you all. I got the healing class that I have on accident. It requires physical contact to heal and is thus not the best to support a team," she stood up and smiled.

"Those of you who think healers are weak or ineffective in combat are wrong. I'm a Shadow. I've been to the north. I have seen and fought creatures that people write stories about. And I've learned quite a bit in my journey."

"We need healers. Independent and ready to support Adventurers and Shadows in their missions. How is humanity supposed to grow and prevail if our strongest keep dying while our healers keep armies alive that fight against other humans?" she asked.

"Now, I can tell that many of you have doubts. Why wouldn't you? You should very much think for yourself. So instead, we'll try a little demonstration. Just to show you a small bit of what is possible. If you put in the work, the pain and sweat that is required. Healing magic is the most powerful thing we have at our disposal."

A single tendril of ash came to life behind her, some people shifting where they sat.

"Ash. It is the element of my second Class. Now many Classes have the ability to heighten resilience, defense, speed. Many provide powerful spells and ways to destroy. What is unique about us healers..." she said, holding out her arm as the ash suddenly lashed out.

Faster than Nathan could perceive. A sickening noise resounded when it pierced flesh.

Some people looked away. Not as many as Nathan would have expected. *We are not that different, are we?*

"This is my arm," Ilea said, holding the severed limb with her remaining one. "You might notice my lack of concern. There are skills that reduce pain. The main one is a general skill called Pain Tolerance. If a skill reaches level twenty and levels once again, it advances to the second tier. The benefit of Pain Tolerance in the second tier is the complete removal of pain. Should I choose to do so."

“I won’t force any of you to acquire this skill but the benefits are extraordinary,” she said and waved at the group with her severed arm.

“This is quite a problem, isn’t it?” she said. “I was injured. My arm taken. I can’t hold my weapon, I can’t concentrate on my spell because of the pain. I will bleed out soon. If I survive, the wound might infect. If I can’t find a capable healer in a couple days, I have lost my arm forever.”

“Watch,” she said, looking at the wound close to her shoulder, tissue reforming in an insane speed. Bone, muscle and skin, right until her hand closed once more into a fist.

“I still ruined one of my shirts but you get the idea,” Lilith said and threw the severed arm behind herself.

Nathan couldn’t keep the grin from his face. His heart was drumming in his chest as he forced himself to look, watching the blood slowly flow down the perfectly reformed arm.