

Chapter 570 Fire Proof

Lilith hadn't reacted at Finnley's words, instead taking in the surroundings.

Some of the Shadowguard had tensed up at the mention of her name but they didn't let it show on their faces.

Josie didn't question Finnley's comment. Perhaps he had met the woman before. He was a veteran Shadow after all. *How did he survive with that mouth? If the stories are true, she could shred through everyone here in a few seconds.*

Admittedly, Lilith didn't look like much to the naked eye. Her long black hair was tied into a single braid, falling down her back. She wasn't overly tall or bulky, nor did she look tense or dangerous. If anything she seemed relaxed, entirely carefree.

There was more to her and Josie didn't need Identify to realize that. *I have to answer her. We can't risk antagonizing her.*

"Greetings, Lilith," she sent and bowed lightly. Not too far but not too little either. They were both Shadows but it was obvious who ranked higher in the hierarchy.

Uriah glanced at her but didn't say anything.

"And who's this prick?" Lilith asked, walking closer to Finnley.

"Don't remember me eh?" the man asked before he laughed. "Fought together in the fields, slicing up demons side by side. I suppose I couldn't make an impression on the great and legendary ashen healer," he said.

"There were a lot of people there," Lilith said, scratching her cheek. "I do remember that guy," she said and looked at Makai. "I dig the whole Nazgul look. Very broody."

Makai bowed deeply. "I greet thee, Lilith. This one's name is Makai. I appreciate your consideration." His voice quivered lightly, his excitement near palpable.

"Lilith agreed to support us in our mission, for the time being," Sulivhaan said and stepped next to the woman. "Finnley, I would appreciate if you could keep the hostilities to a minimum."

Finnley took a step back. "Hostilities?" he asked with a mock hurt voice. "Dear Sulivhaan, I do hope you're not being serious? I'm just messing with her."

"I suggest you don't do that, lest we actually lose a Shadow to this operation," the gravity mage said and walked past the man. "Shadows only for now, form two ranks behind Lilith and stop any stragglers that make it past. Shadowguard, keep the perimeter secured and report to the city should we remain inside for more than an hour without contact."

A few of the guard nodded.

The adventurers that were present had quieted down entirely, watching the conversations take place between the Shadows.

"How did you get so much stronger since we met last time? Found some poor ass monster that couldn't fight back?" Finnley asked and laughed.

Lilith glanced at him and smiled. "Sure."

She walked past him.

Don't, Josie thought, seeing his hand move towards her ass.

A slither of ash formed from thin air, preventing the man from his daring attempt.

The tunnel was silent when his severed arm slapped to the ground, blood dripping down from his shoulder as he made a grimace.

"Alright, alright. Message received," he said with a grin and grabbed his arm, pushing it against his shoulder as he winced.

"Try that again and it's your head," Lilith said in a friendly voice.

"Now I want to try even more," he said and laughed, slapping Makai's back. "What's gotten into you. Don't tell me you've seen the light."

"She's marvelous," the robed mage whispered.

Josie gulped, watching the scene unfold before Uriah gestured them to join the others.

"Greetings, Lilith," he said, giving her a nod. "I'm Uriah. We're a rather new Shadow team. "I'm a close ranged warrior with a focus on defense."

"Nice to meet you Uriah," Lilith said.

He gestured towards Pak. "Our healer and ranger."

"Greetings," the man said, his eyes seeing more than he would let on.

"Sivya, I'm a water mage," the woman said with a smile. "It's reassuring to have you."

"And that's Josie, she's our light mage," Uriah said.

Lilith looked at them before her eyes met Josie. "Oh we've already met. Greetings to the rest of you. I'm glad you don't seem as inclined to stand in the way as our dear... what was his name?"

"Finnley, and you better remember it," the man said as he joined them, scratching his beard.

Lilith ignored him and summoned a rolled up map from a storage item. Dots made of ash moved around for a moment before they slowed down. She smiled slightly. "Okay, shall we?"

"Traps nearly ripped apart our poor scout," Finnley said. "Don't get too cocky, even if you're a healer."

Who's being cocky? Josie thought.

"He's playing with his life," Uriah whispered next to her.

"I'll make sure not to be careful," Lilith said, strolling into the entrance without a care in the world.

Finnley was about to follow when Sulivhaan gestured him to stop.

"She takes the lead," he said with a voice that suggested finality.

Even Finnley didn't argue with that.

I'm glad I met my team before becoming a Shadow, Josie thought, glaring at the man.

“Fuck are you looking at?” he asked, turning towards her.

Josie rolled her eyes and focused back on Lilith, the woman now reaching the center of the first stone hall.

She heard deep breathing next to her and glanced over, finding Makai. Josie took a step back as she squinted her eyes at him.

Lunatics.

A whistle resounded from the room ahead.

‘ding’ ‘You have heard the challenge of Lilith – You are paralyzed for three seconds’

Josie couldn’t do anything but count the seconds. *First time it’s not a hostile monster*, she noted.

She watched as around twelve mind signatures appeared, the Threshers teleporting to meet the enemy challenge. They surrounded Lilith and jumped her.

Black tendrils lashed out from her back, just for a split second.

Finnley had taken a single step towards the entrance when bloody chunks of Thresher slapped to the ground around her.

They’re all dead. That was barely a blink.

She gulped and glanced over at her team.

“We wait until she gives the clear,” Udiah said in a calm voice. He had always been reliable when an overwhelming force stood against them. It was a new experience to have that force on their side instead but the result was strikingly similar.

“Beautiful,” Makai whispered. “Death incarnate... a manifestation of darkness, ash, and the end of the world,” he added.

Josie glanced at him.

He turned his hood towards her. “Ah... apologies. I’m quite thrilled, you see.”

Is he... embarrassed?

“No worries. She *is* quite scary,” Josie said.

“**BOOH!**” a sudden voice slammed into her mind, making her stagger back with a yelp.

“Josie!” Pak called out and steadied her. “What is it?”

“Nothing... nothing, I’m alright,” Josie said.

“*Don’t shit your pants. I’m just joking around,*” Lilith said.

“*I’m not used to people initiating telepathic conversations,*” Josie said.

“*If it freaks you out so much, maybe you should get used to it. There are creatures out there who like to do it,*” Lilith said.

What creatures?

“*I understand,*” she said.

“You’re talking to her?” Uriah whispered.

“Yes. And she can hear you. She can hear all of us. And she has telepathy. Tread carefully around her,” Josie said to her team. She nodded to make sure Lilith wouldn’t immediately know that she answered with her mind. *She will know anyway.*

“Can’t find any traps here, plenty of corpses though,” Lilith said.

Sulivhaan teleported inside, gesturing to the others.

“Sure you don’t have anything better to do?” Lilith asked the masked man.

“Do you not want me here?” Sulivhaan asked.

She waved him off. “I don’t mind. Just thought you’d have to maneuver some political shenanigans, instead of exploring dungeons.”

“I can spare a few hours,” he said, sounding almost amused.

It was hard for Josie to read the man, not just because of the mask. He controlled everything about him, his body language, voice, words, and mind. Her few interactions with the man had proven as much. A monster in his own right, that much was sure.

“Scout nearly died in the next room, beams of light coming from all around,” Finnley supplied as the rest joined.

Josie noted the wet ground. *Nobody’s bothered by the blood and smell. We’re usually the veterans.*

Ilea glanced at the Shadows behind her, seeing a few of the guards glance in near the entrance, their eyes wandering to the massacre she had left behind.

Oh well.

It was fun meeting a mind mage girl at least. Her reactions whenever she spooked her were quite precious.

She unfolded her map again and focused on the new position of the cats. It was easier to track them from far below the city. With all the distractions it still proved enough of a challenge.

Eight, and nine, there you go, she thought and rolled up the map again.

“What’s the map anyway, darling?” Finnley asked.

If only you were a little more classy, she thought. “Say that again and I punch you.”

“Oh darling,” he said with a wink and broad smirk.

Ilea decked him in the nose faster than he could react.

He staggered back, half his face dented in with at least ten bones shattered.

The others looked on with various expressions.

“He’ll recover,” Uriah murmured.

Finnley was the highest leveled one in the group at level two twenty. Even if he had apparently been there at the siege of Ravenhall, he had hardly changed since.

Ilea was about to ask the robed man to stop his murmuring but somehow she knew it would just encourage him. *Damn death cults. Did Maro spawn this guy? No, I do hazily remember his robes. He fought with swords though.*

She moved to the next room without any words, appearing in the spacious stone hall where several things happened instantly.

Her sphere couldn’t penetrate the walls, enchantments preventing such.

Ilea’s armor moved out from her back, if anything to protect the leather armor.

A hundred beams of light slashed through every square inch of the room, leaving slight streaks on her armor that evened out again immediately.

That’s a lot of energy for a trap, she thought, seeing the bits and pieces of bone around her. Multi use too.

She took a step forward when the beams formed again, this time remaining for a few seconds. It wasn’t quite enough to cut through her armor. If she was honest, it wasn’t even close.

Ilea tried to redirect one of the beams with her hand, sadly failing to do so.

“Hmm... you should wait for a moment,” she said, looking at the floor. *Oh... that’s why they’re not cutting apart the room.*

Her ash lashed out, cutting into the walls and ground to disable the enchantments. When her sphere could pierce, she quickly found the source and displaced it out of its socket and into her hands.

[Call from the Light – Ancient Quality] – [Forms a scorching beam of light]

It was a cube covered in enchantments. Quite heavy and certainly unwieldy. She could tell there were about fifteen openings where the beams would form and decided against activating it right now, lest she cut up both the room and the people waiting behind.

Anything else here?

She walked around, putting weight on various enchantments before she destroyed them. *Just the laser room.*

“Should be safe,” she said, handing the cube to the appearing Sulivhaan. “There you go, maybe Claire can have it copied or something. Wouldn’t recommend it for a festival light show.”

“Incredible work. Any idea who could’ve made it?” he asked.

The others joined now too, looking between the cube and Ilea.

“Hmm. No, not really,” Ilea said. *Doesn’t look Ascended, nor Taleen, or anything else I’ve seen before.*

Josie couldn't help but stare at the ash covered monster before her. Lilith had her arms crossed, her eyes focused on the cube she had quite literally conjured out of nowhere. It looked to be the device which caused the powerful light magic she had withstood without any visible damage.

What would happen if we fought? How could we stop a being like her?

"I'm not knowledgeable on runes. Let Claire have a look," Lilith said.

The Head Administrator, Josie thought, glancing over to Uriah.

"What about your people?" Sulivhaan asked, turning towards the woman.

"They're busy with something a little more important," she said.

"Of course. But perhaps once they have achieved their goal," Sulivhaan suggested, making the cube vanish.

"Ask them, I don't mind if they can learn something from it," she said and glanced at Josie. "What about you, you're a light mage right?"

Josie stopped herself from taking a step back, her eyes automatically driven to look at hers. "I... m not particularly knowledgeable when it comes to runes and enchantments."

"Hmm, I see," Lilith said and turned towards the hallway ahead.

Josie couldn't say anything else when the woman stepped ahead, triggering several traps at the same time.

Spears slammed into her from one side of the hallway, her arm rushing out to steady herself against the other. Metal groaned and stone broke as the internal mechanisms powering the massive steel pikes lost their battle of durability against the ashen monster.

"Very Taleen," Lilith whispered with a chuckle, her ashen limbs slashing into and through the wall to her right, ripping out or bending the spears in her way.

The room ahead lit up in powerful heat and brilliant light as soon as the woman had stepped inside.

Uriah stepped in front of them with his shield held up high, the rest of the team gathering behind.

Finnley and his group did the same, the man's left side singed from the heat alone.

Only Sulivhaan stood alone, unbothered by the escaping power.

A minute passed before it all subsided, darkness returning to their surroundings.

Pak started healing everyone, focusing on Uriah who had started breathing more heavily. Plate armor and heat weren't the best combination for human skin.

"Safe," Lilith called out from beyond.

The group slowly joined her, finding the ashen healer standing amidst ripped apart plates of steel, remains of complex enchantments still visible on the parts she had spared.

Lilith summoned her map again and moved around the ashen dots, entirely unconcerned with her surroundings.

“It’s entirely excessive,” Sulivhaan said. “But it’s not of Taleen make.”

“Trap enthusiast?” Lilith asked, not looking up from her map. “It’s pretty impressive, conjuring up magic that comes close to what a three mark creature can do.”

A large steel gate barred an entrance of sorts.

Lilith walked up to it. “Wow... this is better than a city vault.”

How does she know how strong a city vault is?

Pak flinched when Lilith punched the gate.

Both mana and air rushed out in waves with each consecutive hit, the steel not moving a millimeter.

Lilith kept her map floating next to her, on a bed of ash. “That should do it,” she murmured, a loud hiss resounding when the enchantments gave up.

And that means she can break into a city vault, Josie thought.

She bit her lip. “*Did you break into a city vault?*”

Lilith didn’t turn, her next punch denting the steel. “*During the war, yes. Had to show a pirate how it’s done.*”

“*Eh... okay,*” Josie sent back and smiled. “*How did you break the enchantments?*”

Her curiosity took over, this powerful entity standing in front of her and so willing to communicate.

“*Mana intrusion. Reversed healing to be specific. Keep that to yourself. The latter part that is,*” Lilith said.

“*I will, of course,*” Josie sent. “*Do you have a mind magic Class?*”

“*It’s the third tier of Mental Resistance, allows me to establish contact,*” Lilith said.

Third... tier??

“*By the look on your face, I’d imagine you’ve never heard of it. Don’t worry about it quite yet, just work on your general skills and Classes,*” Lilith said.

She can see me, behind her... of course. Why wouldn’t she have another form of perception. It’s not that uncommon.

Josie glanced at Uriah. “Why are we even here?” she whispered to the man.

He didn’t answer, his steel visor facing the back of Lilith, her arms and ash deep inside the steel gate, prying it open bit by bit.

“Never felt so useless before,” Sivya murmured.

“Focus up. Our task is to take care of stragglers that manage to get past her, and that’s what we’ll do,” Uriah said. “If nothing else than to protect the Shadowguard.”

“She’s quite the monster,” Finnley said. “Wish I had her on my team... the things we could do.”

“The things we could kill,” Makai whispered in delight.

“Aye,” Finnley said.

“You would be nothing but dust against the creatures she fights,” Josie said, feeling her face heat up the moment the words left her mouth.

“What was that?” Finnley asked, looking at her with a slight smile and wicked eyes.

The loud creaking of the gates finally opening drowned their conversation, Lilith glancing back.

“She’s not wrong,” she said. “Now stop the bickering, you’re Shadows, act the part.”

Finnley laughed and gestured for her to go on, Makai bowing deeply behind him.

They’re beyond sanity, Josie thought and turned her attention to the large open space opening up before them. A circular stone arena with a layer of sand. The silhouettes of various statues in differing poses were barely visible to her in the distance. She couldn’t discern a ceiling above but the walls bent to the left and right, surely meeting on the other side a few hundred meters ahead.

‘ding’ ‘You have entered the Forgotten Passageway’