

Ilea led Maro into the forest, the trees hiding their flight through the more and more rocky terrain.

She landed near the hidden entrance to the Calys mine. "Should be around here."

"They're in hiding, aren't they? Sure you just want to bring in a stranger?" Maro asked.

"Are you nervous?" Ilea chuckled. "What are you going to do? Report them for being necromancers?"

He sent a beam of death magic at her, slamming into her face. The black beam turned purple as she laughed.

"Stop it, you're going to give away our position." She said, her skin regenerating as quickly as it decayed.

"Your regeneration is insane." Maro sighed and stopped his attack, shaking his head.

***'ding' 'Death Magic Resistance reaches 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1'***

***Death Magic Resistance – 2<sup>nd</sup> lvl 1***

***Common in the deepest and most depraved parts of the world, the magic of death itself seeks nothing but to destroy, to rot and kill. It is difficult to survive but to someone like you, what is death but another challenge?***

***2<sup>nd</sup> stage: Necromancers, Blood- and Death mages hate you. Your blood, bones and your body are mostly unusable in their rituals.***

"Well that's stupid." Ilea grumbled.

"What?" Maro asked, looking around.

Ilea walked to the hidden entrance and blinked into the cave, followed by the necromancer. "I just got the second tier to Death Magic Resistance."

"From that spell?" Maro asked. "Of course you did." He rolled his eyes. "And there go all my plans for an Ilea undead."

"I could have just removed my head and left you with the rest of the body." Ilea joked.

"Doesn't work sadly. Good thing too, otherwise there would be some pretty fucking gruesome practitioners. The being needs to be dead to be resurrected as an undead." He explained.

*Yea, I can imagine how that would be fucked up.* "Good to know."

"Your blood is useless too now, that's a shame. Congratulations though. You're now even harder to kill." He bowed with a chuckle.

"I was hoping for *you cannot die.*" She said and walked towards the Vulture's secret entrance in the cave.

“Maybe at the third tier.” Maro replied in a dry tone. “That entrance is enchanted.”

“I can see that.” Ilea said and blinked inside. Nothing seemed to happen and Maro followed.

“Just to hide it?” He commented and looked back. “They will be found if the city guard ever looks for them.”

Ilea shrugged. “No reason to. They mostly just live here. Plenty of corpses to get from all the battlefields and the cities in the west, I’m sure.”

He nodded and followed her down the stairs.

“You have returned.” The voice spoke directly into her mind, the demon waiting for them in the rough stone corridor leading further into the hideout.

“They were taken over?” Maro asked. “A shame.”

“That’s Weavy. He’s part of their group.” Ilea said. “How have you been? You detected us so quickly?”

The demon spread his arms, sharp claws on his hands. “I was merely on my way to hunt tomorrow’s breakfast. Everyone must contribute. They do not allow fish summoning inside anymore. Not after... the incident.”

“Fish summoning?” Maro asked. “That sounds interesting. Weavy, was it? I’m Maro. Nice to meet you.” He walked up to the demon and grabbed his hand, shaking it with enthusiasm and a big smile on his face. “You weren’t kidding. This is amazing.” He said, looking back at Ilea.

Black lightning cracked when Walter appeared, his eyes completely black and his voice resounding with an ethereal power. “Who trespasses in this crypt?”

Ilea lifted a hand, her ash receding and her bone armor replaced by casual clothes. She noted that his entrance would have been intimidating more than comical if she didn’t know the man.

Maro changed his attention to Walter and let go of the demon, patting him on the back. “A Dark Sorcerer above two hundred... fascinating. This place is great. Nice to meet you.” He walked up to him and went for an actual hug. “I’m Maro, necromancer and former king of Rhyvor. Dark sorcerer... can you believe it?” He asked as he glanced back at Ilea.

“Ilea... who is this guy?” Walter asked before he sighed. “I’m Walter. Please refrain from hugs. My betrothed dislikes it when others touch me.”

Maro laughed, the sound reverberating through the caves before he patted Walter’s shoulder. “I can show you some tricks to get rid of smells.” He whispered. “My wife hated it when I came back with the smell of smoke and sex on me... oh, that must be her.”

“A beauty, fierce and unbent. I am at your service.” He bowed deeply at the approaching woman.

“Who the fuck is this clown?” Lucia asked, her green eyes fierce and focused on Walter. They softened immediately when she glanced at Ilea. “You’re back!”

She grinned and rushed her, grabbing Ilea in a strong hug. “Wow, what the fuck. You are nuts. What happened to your body? You feel like steel.” She squeezed Ilea’s arms and chuckled.

“Nice to see you too Lucia.” Ilea said and smiled, swatting away the grabby hands. “Walter, Lucia, Weavy. That’s Maro. Former king of Rhyvor, a kingdom far north. Fellow necromancer and apparently very interested in meeting you all.”

Maro looked up and frowned. "You should think about using marble. Gives a nicer atmosphere than stone." He tapped the walls. "Who are your construction mages? The ceiling isn't even."

Walter shook his head before he smiled. "You'll have to take that up with Neeto but he's very bad with criticism so I suggest you give it some time. Any particular reason you've come? Is Riverwatch in danger?"

"Quite the opposite." Ilea said. "No, we're just visiting. Going north in a couple days again."

"As I've come to know you." Walter said, his eyes reverting to normal. "Well then, be our guests."

"A demon, a dark sorcerer and a beautiful enchantress. What else have you hidden down here?" Maro asked, sounding downright giddy.

"Come, let's move to the common room. There's still some dinner left for you, Ilea." Walter said.

Maro was talking to the demon behind Ilea, the previously mentioned hunt not relevant anymore. "About your summoning. I'm interested to see the runes you use."

"Your mind will crumble as you look at them, human." Weavy replied.

The necromancer smiled brightly. "Exactly. So show me."

Ilea smiled and followed Walter. "How have things been?" She asked. "Everyone still alive?"

"Yes. Some close calls in the west. Lately a group of Baralia led adventurers west of Riverwatch have caused problems. The boy is still here too. While I don't think Weavy is a very suitable teacher, Eyn seems to like him. His progress certainly speaks for itself." Walter said, motioning the two undead guards to open the door to the common room.

One of them walked off, likely to inform the rest of the Vultures of the guests.

"You've been to the north then?" The sorcerer asked as he stepped behind the bar and went to the kitchen to fetch some food.

"I have. Plenty to tell you about. Also some knowledge about the Elves and Taleen you might be interested in." Ilea said, glancing at a man sitting at a table in the corner of the room.

"Sounds interesting. You don't want to retell it all four times, I'm sure." He said, bringing out two plates with food. Cheese, cold cuts as well as bread and some fruits. "Oh, that's Theo. He came looking for you around a year ago."

"For me?" Ilea asked.

"Worked for some nobles in Dawntree but decided to give up on the job and join us." Walter explained and put down the plates on one of the tables.

Warm light came from the flickering flames in the hearth as well as the various lanterns hanging on the stone walls. The common room looked much less roughly constructed than the hallways leading up to it.

The sorcerer walked to Theo and touched his shoulder.

"Woah. Oh, hey Walter." The man said and sat up. "I had a weird dream. A clawed beast looking for me. When it found me though, it just offered me some food." He turned to look at Ilea and smiled. "A newcomer, nice to meet you."

"That's Ilea, the woman you were looking for initially." Walter said.

“Ah, the healer shadow. Yes, I remember.” Theo said and walked up to her. “You look less dangerous than Walter implied.”

Ilea chuckled. “Nice to meet you too. I assure you, I was dangerous then and even more so now. Why were you looking for me?”

The man scratched his graying black hair and smiled warmly. “I don’t remember.” He laughed and shook his head. “Apologies. It’s been a while.”

She nodded slowly. “Alright.”

“Alice Forkspear.” Walter supplied as he went back behind the counter, grabbing some glasses and filling one for Ilea.

“Ah, they’re still looking for her. Fucking hell.” Ilea commented. “Upgraded from the mugs?”

Walter smiled. “Yes. Trade has been a little easier lately. The guards seem more relaxed with our classes and magic. Not sure if its the governor or the world going to shit.”

“Alistair seems alright. The guards even let Maro in as soon as I explained that he was with me. No major fuss.” Ilea said and took the glass he handed to her. “Thanks. Ah and the rogue adventurers, I took care of them earlier today. They won’t be an issue.”

The barkeep nearly dropped his next glass before he stopped and looked at her. “You know the governor? And you took care of the criminals?”

She nodded and took a sip, closing her eyes as she enjoyed the beverage. “You really have to take apprentices. This is the best.”

“The governor?” He focused back on the topic.

“Yea, I wanted to check by anyway but took some jobs when I left Ravenhall. One was to take care of the criminals. The Baralia officers were mainly the issue I think. Met Alistair as well. I could talk to him you know, maybe get you some better deals.” She suggested.

The man was completely out of it, barely catching a glass he knocked over. “H...,” He shook his head. “If... I think if you could introduce us, that would be best. An immense help, really.” He stuttered out the words. “Thank you... of course, for taking care of those rogue adventurers. They’ve been complicating things around here.”

Ilea smiled and took another sip. “Why don’t you just go in. You’re level two hundred, I doubt many guards would stop you or even care.”

He sighed and shook his head again. “It’s a little more complicated. Not everyone high up has the same opinions and without anybody influential supporting us, there is little chance he would listen. I debated it, I really did. It seemed safer not to engage.”

She nodded. “Fair enough. Well I can go check it out tomorrow. There’s one job left of the three they had with the Hand.”

“What other jobs were there?” Walter asked, calming down again.

“Investigate Stormbreach. A demon took over there and forced the survivors to play to his tune. Killed him and now the Sanctuary Healing order is back in power. Until a government forms again I suppose.” She explained. “Speaking of trade, I’m sure a Spirit of Blood wouldn’t have issues working together with necromancers.”

“Spirit of Blood?” He asked, eyes going wide before he stopped her. “I need to sit down, just give me a minute.”

Ilea chuckled and helped him serve the ale.

Indra, Harthome, Celene, Neeto as well as the initiates and Eyn joined in the meantime, excited to have guests in their crypt.

She was surprised to find Eyn had reached level seventy already.

The boy was a little apprehensive of the newcomers but quickly joined Weavy and Maro in their rune discussion.

Weavy was scratching runes into the wall and discussed the various uses with Maro, laughing whenever the high level necromancer had to look away.

“So.” Ilea said and looked at Walter who was sitting opposite her. She ate a couple pieces of cheese. “The Lady of Benevolence, spirit of blood and probably the leader of the Sanctuary Healing order in Stormbreach. I think you could go there to trade. A little far I suppose but if you need anything from them, I doubt they’d decline.”

Walter chuckled. “Another avenue, that is sure. Yet if you can help me with Alistair, I think we would be fine for the time being. Riverwatch has a massive population. And they’re growing.”

“Are you level three hundred?” Celene asked suddenly. “Did you turn into something not human?” A smirk on her face as her piercing eyes glared at Ilea.

Ilea smiled and leaned forward.

Nearly two hours passed as she told the group of hers and Maro’s adventures in the north. She talked about the landscape, the storms, the monsters and dungeons as well as Hallowfort and the Dark Ones.

Lucia nearly had to gag Celene when Ilea mentioned meeting elves. The woman was of course interested in the dark ones too but she seemed to prefer dangerous beings first and foremost. The Feynor of course were also a target for questioning.

Ilea left out some details here and there. She trusted the Vultures more than others but there was no reason any of them had to know about the Teleportation key or what happened to Maro and his wife before she found them. It was his story to tell, if he wished so.

She did share some info on her evolution and that she in fact stayed human, to Celene’s disappointment. The woman had been sure there was an option to evolve into something “hotter” at some point. She made sure everyone knew that it was a big dream of hers.

Ilea didn’t much comment on that, knowing her level had barely moved from the last time they had met.

Walter’s face was resting on his hands. “That’s a lot to take in.” He said ultimately, watching Ilea eat the remains of their winter supply.

“You mean the food? I know I do eat a lot.” Ilea said after swallowing, smiling through it all.

He sighed. "That too. But what you told us about elves and the north is probably worth a thousand times what you just ate. Who knows all of this?"

"Some people in Ravenhall." Ilea said.

"I would like to know more about this Goliath fellow." Harthome said. The smith had listened attentively when the dark one had come up. "I would like to see his craft."

A black hammer appeared in Ilea's hand before she moved it over the table. "It's very heavy." She said.

The smith took one look at it and started laughing. "Please..." He said and got up, the table rattling when his knee hit into it. "That is... black obsidian. One of the heaviest metals out there. A brilliant alloy. To incorporate volcanic glass, marvelous really. I've only seen it twice before."

He stepped to the side and motioned for Ilea. "It is too heavy for me to lift, please, would you place it here?"

She shrugged and blinked to him before she placed the hammer on the stone floor with a dull sound.

"I want to hear more about the elves!" Celene shouted, escaping Lucia's grasp.

Lucia cursed and finally sighed. "No controlling that one."

Indra had been silent throughout most of it, occasionally glancing to Maro.

"You can talk to him, you know." Ilea said as she sat back down. "He doesn't bite."

"Are you sure? I don't... want to be a bother." He whispered.

Maro overheard it and walked over, clapping the man on his back. "Relax. Being such a high level just means I killed more monsters. I wouldn't dare assume I'm a more knowledgeable necromancer than you."

*A lot of assumptions there, Maro.*

"Really? Well I would like to discuss some things with you, as well as test some theories. I... lack the mana and spells for some of them. Perhaps you might be able to help." He said in a hopeful tone.

*A lot of correct assumptions.* Ilea raised an eyebrow and finished her drink.

One of the initiates poured her another immediately.

"You don't have to treat me like a bloody queen." Ilea said to the girl.

Walter chuckled. "Queen? No. You might as well be a spirit like entity at this point."

She shrugged and took another sip. "I'd like to be treated the same as you treat each other. That's why I liked it here initially. Why I brought Weavy and Eyn."

The barkeeper nodded in Maro's direction lightly, a questioning look in his eyes.

"Maybe." Ilea said. "We have something to finish up north. Maro is free to do what he likes after that."

"I'm free to do what I want, whenever." The man said, interrupting his talk with Indra and Weavy.

“I’ll drag you there if I have to. You agreed.” Ilea said in a dry tone before she focused back on Walter. “As much as it is your choice to let him come and go as he pleases.” She added. “Seems like they have a lot to talk about at least.”

Walter chuckled. “It does indeed. Well, the time when I was in control of all this has long past either way.” He sighed and looked at Harthome and Neeto trying to lift the hammer.

“Too weak.” The skeleton said, glaring at Ilea.

“Oh, almost forgot.” Ilea said. “Goliath helped make this as well.” She dumped her bone armor on the free table behind her.

“Ooooh... marvelous.” Neeto exclaimed and rushed to see the pieces. Harthome followed quickly after.

“And they sent us to look for you.” Theo commented, looking at the gear on the table, his eyes focused on the bone helmet. He smiled and took a sip of his drink. “Thank the gods we never found you.”