Chapter 122 The Revenant

As the company registered the disbelief of my presence, they came by to slap me on the back—not gently—and congratulate me once again for a miraculous survival. I think the slaps were to make sure I was actually here and not an illusion. With the welcome done, I started eating breakfast in earnest.

I was pretty sure Firth started whispering a new nickname for me around the table: The Revenant. He thought it was funny, but I did not. Konstantine had called me that before he almost attacked me. Brutus informed me that a revenant was an undead creature that rose from its grave to avenge itself.

As the excitement of my return from the dead again ebbed, Castile got everyone’s attention, “At this point, it is safe to say Fortuna is watching over Eryk. We are going to need her supervision. We leave for the Elven Ruins of Caelora tomorrow after Konstantin and Flavius return.”

Mateo was the first to break his focus off of me, “Isn’t that the ruins we passed on that old road? The one filled with ghosts?”

Castile nodded, “Specters, not ghosts. We are going to explore the ruins and look for the entrance to a dungeon mentioned in the books recovered from the ruins a long time ago.”

Surprisingly, Benito asked a smart question: “Would we get another dungeon discovery fee from the Adventurer’s Guild if we find it?”

Delmar stepped forward, “If we find it, yes. But it will most likely be delayed. The Duchess needs to use the information to barter with the Emperor for adding the surrounding lands, and we would also have to open the trade road.”

Firth groaned, “We will have to take care of that pack of dire wolves then.”

Delmar affirmed the announcement, “Yes, the dire wolves will need to be handled, but only after we confirm the dungeon exists and is viable.”

“How are we going to kill the specters? Only Delmar and Konstantin have runic weapons,” someone asked from the table far to my right.

Castile had a smile, “The Duchess called in some favors. I have twenty runic arrows for Blaze, and fifteen for Pavel and Flavius. Delmar has been given a runic long sword, and I have two more to assign.” The company’s best archers were those three, so her division made sense.

Adrian stepped forward, “Those two blades will be wielded by the best swordsmen among you lot.”

“Should have gotten runic spears,” Firth lamented loudly for everyone to hear. He was an excellent spearman and average swordsman in the company.

Adrian snapped, “What we have are blades, Firth, and we are thankful for them. This evening, we will have everyone on the training grounds to contest for the two blades.” That got ripples of excitement from the table. Any type of competition was welcome—especially one with a reward at the end.

“We also have a kettle of souls, men. It can permanently banish a specter so it can not come back to hamper us again,” Castile added to encourage everyone. I don’t think the company men knew that the specters regenerated over time in the city. Being able to vanquish them permanently was a huge boon.

Adrian announced to the growing fervor of conversation, “You have the remainder of the day off. Rest and enjoy your time in the city. It may be a few weeks before we see the comforts of walls again.”

Firth added, “At least walls that are not manned by the spirits of the dead.” His comedic delivery got laughs from everyone as they made their way out.

Brutus came to talk with me, “Can I buy the Revenant a drink in the city?” I rolled my eyes and hoped this nickname disappeared as quickly as the last one had.

We walked together to the establishment in the city that the other men favored. Brutus told me the ale tasted foul but was strong, and the food was decent. As we entered, I noted it was also favored by all the city and citadel guards our men had been training. We found a table, and a woman came by, and Brutus said, “Two specials and two ales.”

He leaned into me eagerly, “So tell me how you escaped a dragon.”

“Not much to tell. It was not a true dragon, anyway,” I paused. I was not going to tell Brutus I could heal. “I was injured but was lucky as the elven summoner Konstantin had struck with an arrow had a healing potion.” That reminded me I had three potions I needed to be identified by the Scholar. “I was nearly killed but was able to heal. The wyvern—was exhausted from fighting Sebastion. It just lost its train of thought in the fight, and I prevailed.” I smiled, and Brutus was confused.

We sipped ale, waiting for the food as I deflected Brutus’ questions about how I prevailed. “Did Quentin have a family?” I asked after the Legionnaire, who the hill giant had killed. It was an attempt to end the endless inquiries I did not want to answer, and Brutus was frustrated at my avoidance.

“Quentin?” Brutus recalled him with a frown as he had been one of Durandus’ men with Brutus. “No, well, no wife or kids. His parents owned a few sheep farms outside a city in the western Empire. I think they were well off. He joined the Legion to learn to fight and serve the Emperor.” Death was commonplace, and besides an honoring of the dead, they were generally not discussed.

The food was brought out, and it was a small pie. Brutus paid a large copper for both of us. It was some type of fatty meat with carrots in gravy inside a thick crust. It was actually fairly good and paused the inquisition from Brutus. After the meal, I decided to go for a ride, and Brutus followed me to the stables, still asking questions. I found Ginger in the stables and she was upset I had left her for so long. At least, that is what I assumed as she kept pushing her head into my chest strongly.

“Fine, girl. We can go out for a ride. After the ride, an apple is in your future.” I saddled Ginger, and Brutus laughed at me for talking to a horse. But really, I was just trying to get away from him and his incessant questions.

“Eryk, have fun on your ride. I will see you tonight when I gain ownership of one of the runic blades,” Brutus smirked as he left. Brutus was one of the best men in the company with a spear but had also been raised a fighter.

I made my way out of the Citadel and city. The countryside was dotted with dozens of campsites surrounding wagons and shelters. The Duchess bit off more than she could chew when she opened her arms to all these refugees. It might not have been so bad if food was not going to be scarce soon.

I was taking a path through the tents to get into the woods, planning to let Ginger run a while. The closer I got to the people, the more terrible things looked for them. There was a cart from the city, and I could see two Citadel guards and some of the servants handing out food. Lareen was not among them. Right now, hunger was not a problem. When food became an issue, things would not be as safe.

I entered the woods and started into a gallop, and Ginger responded immediately, understanding she was free to go as fast as she wanted. I got my body in synch with hers as she sprinted through the woods, churring up the soft ground. The cold early morning air felt good on my face as I raced past surprised foragers. She lasted almost five minutes before easing off and panting hard. I patted her neck as she came to a stop, and I dismounted to give her an apple.

A few people nearby stared at us. I saw some viable blood grass and was considering harvesting it when a voice to my left asked a question, “Legionnaire? Is that you? The one from the baths in Macha?”

I turned to find a dirty young woman with a basket filled with tubers. Two other young women stood just behind her, just as dirty from digging in the dirt. “Carina?” I asked, recognizing the young woman from Macha.

“It is you!” She said, surprised.

“I heard about Macha falling and the city walls crumbling,” I said with a consoling tone. “Did your brother make it out alive?” I asked, remembering her brother was a member of the city guard.

Her dirty smile fell from her face, and tears started to well up. “I am sorry that I asked. You made it to a safe city.”

Her throat was a little tight as she spoke, “The Duchess is kind, but there is not much work for a bath girl in the city.” She tried to laugh, but I could tell things were not going well for her. She looked thinner than I remembered, and her clothes were soiled from digging. “We,” she indicated her two companions, “

I went to Ginger and pretended to root around. I pulled out a ten-pound block of hard cheese and a large jar of berry preserves from my dimensional space. I walked back to the three women. “Here, you can have these supplies. I know a few people in the city, and I might be able to find you some work.” The three young women had wide eyes. Carina dropped her basket and juggled the two heavy foodstuffs. “Where can I find you if I can find you some work?”

Carina was at a loss for words, so one of the thin women behind her volunteered, “The are three wagons forming a triangle outside the east gate of Sobral. We are sharing the blue-painted wagon of the three.” I nodded to her and mounted Ginger.

As I rode away, I mumbled, “You can’t save everyone, Eryk.” When we returned with the alchemist and Scholar, Adrian said the same thing to me. I would still try. I thought about finding them a job in the Citadel, as that seemed the safest place. Then I remembered how the Duchess used her servants. Not that I objected too hard to Lareen seducing me.

I rode further into the woods and started harvesting mushrooms and flora as I thought about how to help. Then I realized that I knew one job that might help Carina. The two old women herbalists, Lyla and Ria, had offered to buy my excess harvests. I had not returned them since our first meeting, but Carina and her two friends might be able to harvest for them.

I spent until mid-day harvesting an assortment. Mushrooms were scarce, and blood grass and most of the other flora were starting to wilt from the colder nights. I returned to the city with a sizable harvest and visited the two old women.

“Look who decided to return, Ria,” Lyla said as I entered their small herbalist shop. The mixture of sharp herbal scents hit me.

I bowed, “I have been kept busy by my mage commander, but I missed your wit and charm.”

“If you are here to sell, you are going to be disappointed with what we can offer,” Ria said.

I still placed everything I had found from a morning’s work on the counter while Lyla sorted through it and Ria dealt with a middle-aged male customer. When she finished, she looked up, “Three silver, fifty copper. Best we can do at the moment. Plenty of others are coming in to sell, and we can not process what we have.” Ria had joined Lyla as the customer had bought a tincture and left.

I nodded as if thinking, “What if I could find you some help? I know some of the refugees, good people.”

Ria perked up, “Experienced herbalists?” She asked, interested.

I frowned, “No, you would have to train them.”

“Not interested, then,” Ria said with a dismissive wave. “Food is scarce and coin tighter. We wouldn’t be able to feed them, pay them a little, but feed them with snow coming, no. Prices have already doubled and will double again before too long.”

“What if I could give you some food? Not from the Duchess, but some Legion stores I have access to? It is not a lot. Maybe a month’s worth for the three women. I will also pay for their housing inside your shop. A silver a week for each, fair?” The shop had a second floor, so I assumed there were multiple rooms up there.

“Three?” Lyla barked a laugh. “You are keeping three women satisfied? You should have come to us, boy. There are two of us, and we know things they don’t!” She chuckled, and I gave a weak smile, trying not to form any mental images.

I wanted to close the deal, “Is it a pact then? Three apprentices? A month’s worth of food and two gold coins to train them for a year?” I tried to force the issue.

Ria seemed to be the decision maker and held up her hand to have me pause as she thought, “No. The coin would cover housing your women, but a month’s worth of food is not enough. In a month, it is going to take two silver a week just to feed a single person. Getting through winter to spring is going to be hard.”

I did not have a shortage of coin, so I offered, “Six gold for the year, then? They are all young and eager and will be able to forage and harvest for you in the local woods.”

The two old herbalist sisters got together and discussed it privately. I waited patiently for their decision. Ria finally turned around, “The three of them will have to share a room upstairs. They will not be paid, but we will feed and house them for the next year and teach them what we know. Six gold and whatever food you can offer to help, Eryk.”

I smiled in victory, “So you did remember my name! Can I give you a little extra? I would hate for the women not to have any money to buy clothes.”

Lyla’s aged face returned it, “It was kicking around in here,” she tapped her temple. “What investment do you have in these women?” She asked curiously and maybe slightly suggestively.

I went with the truth, “I met one of them in Macha. The other two—I don’t even know their names. I found them in the woods foraging and figured I could help.”

The two sisters looked at each other, “You are a strange one, Eryk. We agree to your terms.”

The sisters left an hour later as we agreed to terms. I gave them the eight gold, mostly in silver, to take all three young women on as apprentices. They would be fed, housed, and paid fifty copper a week each. Both old women left their shop to go to the blue wagon and make them the offer. I was supposed to wait in the shop for them to return.

Instead, as soon as they left, I emptied my dimensional space of most of the food. Three jars of berry preserves, a bag of onions, thirty pounds of flour, twenty pounds of sugar, four jars of yeast, two casks of pickles, nine massive salami links, one block of hard cheese, two large bags of mushrooms, and two bags of potatoes. I decided to keep the honey and my remaining ration bars. The pile of foodstuffs looked like it was enough to feed a few people for a month. I left before the sisters returned, locking the door behind me. I did not need the adulation and was just happy to know my coin had helped some people.

I was at the stables in the Citadel and unsaddling Ginger. The stable boys were not here, which surprised me. A pair of guards walked by outside on patrol, and I asked, “Where are the stable boys?”

“They are probably in the center courtyard. Your Legion company is holding a fighting competition,” he replied before continuing to walk on his patrol with his partner. Did the contest for the runic blades start already? I rushed through Ginger’s rubdown and fed her before rushing off to the central courtyard. I thought I had a decent chance of winning one.