

Chapter 365 Captain of the Guard

“Come in.” Dale’s voice had a defeated undertone.

“It’s me.” Ilea said, her head peeking into the door she slightly opened.

“I know it’s you.” Dale said. “Anybody else has appointments or uses the gates.”

“Really?” Ilea asked as she stepped inside. “I’m here with two guys, can they come in?” She looked around the small office.

A stack of papers were on his small wooden desk. His chair had seen better days. A small magical light provided some illumination. A bunch of file cabinets were put up on each wall, interspersed by book shelves as well as a small weapon rack. There was no carpet, just plain old wood.

“Damn, I didn’t remember this place to be so bleak.” Ilea chuckled.

“You can come in, your friends too.” Dale said, putting away the stacks. “Your help made the evaluation finish early.”

Ilea knocked on the door behind her. “Come on in.” She said and walked to the desk, sitting down on the second chair opposite the man. “So you have time?”

Dale sighed before he smiled. “Of course. I did hope to get to some other things I’ve been postponing for weeks but I suppose for you, I always have time.”

“Great.” Ilea said. “This is Walter and Kevan. They’re helping me with the third Shadow job Alistair put out.”

“Welcome.” Dale nodded to the two.

Kevan nodded and Walter smiled.

“Nice to meet you, captain.” Walter said respectfully, giving him a nod.

Ilea spent the next five minutes explaining what the mission was about and what they had already done.

“That is very weird.” Dale confirmed. “Many of the investigators as well as some officers chose their own jobs. There’s enough to do all around. They are however supposed to stay in their own district.”

He went through the files and frowned. “I’ve seen three of them before.” He removed two of the papers and put them on the desk. “I know that these two worked in different districts. At least around four months ago.”

He tapped the table and shook his head. “I should have heard about their deaths. Yet I haven’t.”

“There are hundreds, if not thousands of guards and officers. It’s not that surprising.” Walter remarked.

“You don’t understand. I’m Dale by the way.” He looked at the two men.

“Walter.”

“Kevan.” The nobleman said after Ilea tapped his side.

“I don’t use government sources only and want to stay in touch with what is happening in the city, both officially and underground. Someone didn’t want me to know or they wanted someone else to know.” He mumbled and scratched his chin.

“Who do you think would want that?” Ilea asked.

Dale thought about it but then shook his head. “I have no clue. The two officers could have been moved to another district but I don’t think either would have wanted that. Neither would they be so interested in this job or arrogant enough to go at it alone. They both had families.”

Walter gulped.

“Whoever they are, I think they wanted these officers gone. Either that or they wanted Kevan gone.” Dale surmised.

“Or both.” Kevan suggested. “I’ve been attacked by a manic Shadow in my own home and was forced to participate in this ridiculous investigation because of whoever did this.” Mana pulsed around him.

“Calm down. You’ll be there till the end.” Ilea smiled.

“Any suggestions?” Walter asked Dale.

“Find out what which cases they worked on before they died or vanished.” The captain answered.

“They all worked on this case.” Walter commented before he nodded. “I see. You think that’s not true?”

Dale tapped his table before he got a bottle from a drawer. He filled himself a glass of water. “I don’t think it’s true, no. Forged reports I assume.”

“So we find the real reports or the people who received them?” Ilea asked.

“No.” Dale said and took a sip of water. “There is simply too much paperwork to get through, too many people involved. I think your best bet is to find someone close to them. Talk to the families.”

“Aren’t there rules, what they can share with them.” Ilea commented.

“There are.” Dale said and simply gave her a look.

“I see.” She took the files and got up. “Any idea where I can find them?”

“I do. And I will come with you.” Dale said and got up, getting on the coat that hung over his chair. He grabbed his sword and fastened it to his belt. “Someone killed nine officers in my city. I will help you find out who did it and why.”

“Full team then. You talk to the families.” Ilea said. “We should get a move on. Who of you can fly?”

Dale was the only one who couldn't. He did agree to be carried by Ilea.

They rushed over the rooftops with high speed, crossing over vast parts of the huge city in mere minutes.

"Here." Dale said.

Ilea slowed down and let go of the captain when they landed on the nearby street. It didn't look like the most wealthy area.

Some of the nearby people immediately dispersed, others simply increasing their pace, trying not to attract unwanted attention.

"I think it was over there. I visited nearly a year ago for dinner." Dale said and pointed to a house.

The color it once had was fading, the windows milky. There was however dim light coming from within while smoke rose from the chimney.

The two waited for a minute until Walter and Kevan showed up and landed next to them.

"What level are you?" Kevan asked as he looked at Ilea.

"You ask that now? After your successful attack earlier?" Walter asked with a chuckle.

"Ah shut it. She's a healer, have you ever tried to kill a healer hybrid?" Kevan replied, glancing at the man with an annoyed look.

"Ready?" Ilea asked Dale, ignoring the two bickering mages.

The man nodded and walked towards the door in a brisk pace.

Ilea hung back a little and changed to casual clothes and a cloak to not scare the family.

Dale knocked on the door four times and waited. He looked up and back to Ilea. "Can you open up?"

"Sure." She said and blinked inside, unlocking the door before she opened it.

"Can you see them? First floor on the right. Young girl, fifteen or sixteen, short hair and a seven or eight year old boy." Dale asked in a whisper.

There were six apartments in the small house. Small rooms, no runes or enchantments that she could see.

Ilea looked up and smirked. "She's standing at the door, listening. Oh? Good hearing."

Dale smiled. "She's a good kid. Let's go."

Ilea followed him up and saw the girl step back from the door.

A crude knife was held in her right hand. Steady. She positioned herself between the room with her brother and the entrance.

Dale went up the stairs and knocked carefully. "Vin? It's Dale. Guard captain. We met around ten months ago."

"What's my father's name?" A quiet voice asked.

"His name is Eli. And he isn't your father." Dale replied.

The door was unlocked and opened. Blue eyes stared at them.

The girl took several steps back and watched each of the people that entered.

[Rogue – lvl 62]

“Who are they?” Vin asked.

Dale took off his coat and hung it over a nearby chair. “They’re here to help me. Did you hear about your dad?”

Walter closed the door behind him.

The girl looked uncertain, glancing over the group before her eyes stopped at Ilea. “You’re a healer.”

“I am.” Ilea said with a smile, moving back her hood. She saw the girl’s lips twitch upwards, ever so slightly.

Vin focused back on Dale. “Eli was murdered.”

Dale kept his eyes on her. “He vanished.”

“Vanished, murdered, sold. It’s all the same.” Vin replied.

“Who told you? Did anybody come to find out more or to tell you not to talk to someone?” Dale asked.

The girl shook her head. “No. I looked into it myself. He told me that he was onto something big. Smugglers. A week later, he didn’t come back. Can I trust them?” She asked Dale, looking at the others.

“I’m a friend of Dale.” Ilea said and punched the guard captain on his arm. “That dark sorcerer is a friend of mine and he’s a nobleman and suspect in this case. If he’s guilty, I’ll kill him myself. If he isn’t, there’s no reason not to trust him with this info.” Ilea explained. “Did you need a healer?” She asked, regarding the earlier question.

Vin moved the knife away from her back but kept a hold of it. “My brother isn’t well. He’s been sick for a week.”

Ilea walked into the other room, carefully opening the door.

The girl glanced at her but didn’t move in the way immediately, only following with an uncertain look and knife in hand.

Ilea knelt down next to the old mattress and put a hand on the boy’s head. *Fever. Or he’s channeling Heart of Cinder.* She chuckled at the thought and carefully moved healing mana through his body.

“Why did you chuckle?” Vin asked, her knife close to Ilea’s head.

“He’s so hot I thought he was channeling a spell.” Ilea explained and got her hand away.

The boy’s breathing slowed down, his face relaxing as his fever was removed.

“Just had a fever, also an infection on his leg. I healed both.” Ilea added.

Vin immediately crouched and grabbed her brother’s leg, moving back the pants and sock to reveal, nothing. “You’re lying. There’s nothing here.”

Ilea smiled at her. "I said I healed it."

"Prove it to me." Vin said.

"You don't trust me?" Ilea asked, moving back the sleeve of her shirt. She glanced at the knife the girl held but instead formed a thin ashen blade in front of her finger.

She slid the ash through her skin with high pressure and watched the girl. Blood started to drip to the floor before the ash disintegrated.

Ilea moved her arm in front of the girl and healed it. "Happy?"

"Does it not hurt?" Vin asked, touching the arm a moment later.

"Pain tolerance in the second tier allows you to ignore it entirely. Not that that was needed for a cut like this." Ilea explained.

"That's what it does." Kevan murmured from the door.

"They're called the Gray Company. I found a letter Eli left behind." Vin said, her eyes staring into Ilea's.

"Where's the letter?" Dale asked.

Vin glanced his way and shooed them out of the room, looking at her brother who was turning to the side.

They walked back into the other room and Vin closed the door carefully. "I burned it of course. They killed an officer. What do you think they would do to me?"

"You could have come to the guard, to me." Dale said.

"Optimistic." Vin said. "The guards at the gate would have shooed me away. Plenty of them are paid by one organization or the other. They might not lie to you but to me?" She shook her head.

The girl tugged on her short black hair. "Why are you helping him?" She asked Ilea.

"I was hired to help." Ilea said. "I'm a Shadow."

Vin stopped moving. She glanced over the group before she looked at Ilea once more. "You don't look like a Shadow."

Ilea moved her ashen armor over her body and smiled at the girl's expression.

She took a step back and lifted her knife.

"How about now?" Ilea asked.

Vin smiled nervously before she put the knife down. "You will find them?"

"What else did you find out? A place we can start?" Ilea asked.

The girl nodded. "A warehouse twenty minutes south of here. Do you know Nal's smithy?"

Dale nodded. "Heard of it."

"It's in the same street. At the very end of it." Vin added.

"Circumstances changed." Ilea said. "Walter, can you stay here and look after them?"

The man sighed but nodded. "I wanted to be back tonight. Alright, I'll take care of them."

“Who said we needed longer?” Ilea asked and looked at Vin. “Just in case you’re in danger.”

“I can take care of myself.” Vin said in a defiant tone.

“Can you fight while your brother is in there?” Dale asked.

That seemed to convince the girl. She nodded. “If... if you find anything...”

Dale touched her shoulder. “If we find anything that belonged to Eli, we’ll bring it back.”

Vin nodded, glancing once more at Ilea.

The ashen armor was gone once more before she turned and walked to the door. “Kevan, Dale.” She said simply and walked down the stairs.

“They will know an officer’s uniform.” Kevan said as they rushed over the rooftops, not flying anymore to attract less attention.

“I’ll scout ahead, see what we’re dealing with.” Ilea said.

“I know it’s not how Shadows operate but I’d like to have evidence and a trial.” Dale said.

“You’re talking to a Shadow.” Kevan commented with a laugh.

“I didn’t kill you, did I?” Ilea asked when Dale motioned them to slow down.

“We’re getting close. We should move on the streets from now on.” The captain said.

“I’ll try to hold back but I won’t promise anything.” Ilea said as she jumped down, landing in a small alley.

Dale landed next to her. “That’s all I ask.” His voice was hard.

Ilea could tell that he wouldn’t be too troubled if some people died today.

“Are you sure about this?” Ilea asked a moment later, Kevan appearing in red smoke. “You left the hunters and now you’re doing this?”

Dale didn’t smile. He kept walking, gaze forward. “Whatever they have, it’s magnitudes less dangerous than what is out there.” He said and that was that.

I don’t exactly disagree with that. Ilea thought and followed.

They crossed the distance and found the massive building. Guards stood out front but people occasionally came and went with wagons, all filled with various goods. None of it looked particularly suspicious.

“I’ll have a look inside.” Ilea said to the others.

They were sitting in a cafe that had a view onto the square and the warehouse.

“Don’t vanish or do something stupid, alright?” She said to Kevan.

“I believe my innocence is proven at this point. If you two don’t go in there, I will.” He said.

Ilea stood up before she paused. “I forgot to ask. Sunlight... no issue?” She moved a hand over her face.

“It’s slightly unpleasant. Been like that for as long as I can remember.” Kevan commented. “Why would you ask?”

“Just thought. Vampires and such.” She replied.

He looked at his mug, back to her and back at his mug. “That...,” He said. “How did I never make that connection. How do you know about this? It’s just a slightly unpleasant feeling... I would have never associated it with... that.”

Ilea shrugged. “Read it somewhere a while ago.” With that, she vanished.

Two blinks brought her close to the warehouse and into an adjacent building. Bone and ashen armor around her, she listened carefully. Her sphere went into the warehouse, not obstructed by any enchantments.

Massive crates were stacked to the warehouse’s ceiling.

She blinked behind one of them. *Potatoes*. There were at least ten crates as tall and wide as herself, if not larger.

Voices were audible but somewhat distant. Dim magical light shined from above. The warehouse was vast, sectioned into various areas with massive stone walls.

Ilea moved only with blinks, quickly mapping out most of the building. None of the cargo seemed in any way illegal. At least not to her consideration.

There were stairs leading down into a small cellar, three men and a woman playing cards on a small table. Wine barrels were lining the walls.

Why have them just protect the wine? There had been some guards as well as workers walking around but none of them in a group of four.

Perhaps she would have accepted the space to just be a break area, out of potential customers’ sight. With what she knew however, she was pretty sure there was more to it.

The area didn’t allow for her to blink down without alerting them. *Time to level my wine resistance.* Ilea thought and teleported into one of the barrels.

There was barely any air and the sudden appearance pushed out the little there was. Ilea held her breath and smirked. *Jackpot.*

Her ashen armor sizzled, acid slowly eating into it. *Wine drinkers really like their exotic stuff.* She deactivated her pain and simply watched her ashen armor regenerate continuously. *Weaker stuff than what the Taleen could cook up. Not that that was enough. Second tier level seven. Maybe I can stay here a little longer.*

Ilea blinked to the other end of the long underground hallway, dozens of barrels lining the walls.

‘ding’ ‘You have been poisoned by Unwitting brew – You resist the poison’

Switching it up at least. Ilea reached the end of the hall and put on her Drowning Bear ring, just in case she had to stay in the liquids for longer.

At the end of the hall was a stone wall. Ilea decided to risk it and simply willed herself to appear behind the wall. No enchantments glowed in her spherical perception nor was there anything she could actually see behind.

The group of guards had their attention on their cards.

In the end it didn't matter. Ilea appeared in a dark stairwell leading down. Not a soul was around. She waited for anything to happen, someone to shout or running steps to resound from the guards outside.

Nothing happened. The guards seemed to continue playing their game and whatever enchantments had hidden the entrance didn't signal anything and neither exploded.

Ilea smiled. *Now, let's see what they're hiding down here.*