

## Chapter 357 Sanctuary

Ilea and Colin spent nearly half an hour navigating the tunnels below the forest and soon, Stormbreach itself.

The man had kept her up to date on where exactly they were, finally mentioning that they were now below the center most government buildings of the city. Very far below that was.

Water flowed through parts of the tunnel system, some of it sewage, other streams simply creeks that trickled down through the cracks of the old foundations.

Mushrooms and some vegetation grew in parts, despite the lack of light.

Collin knew his way around, that much was clear. “You just have to go up now. I think with that teleportation of yours, it will not be difficult to scout the city. I wish you good fortune.” The man said, looking to a dark pathway in the room.

A loud sob suddenly echoed through the halls, distant but piercing. Ethereal and ancient.

“What’s that?” Ilea asked, turning towards the origin of the voice.

The healer looked nervous, unsure of what to say as he opened and closed his mouth. Finally, he seemed to find resolve. “Our... Lady. She is grieving the lost.”

“That didn’t sound human.” Ilea said. “A dark one? Or something else?”

“I... this is the most sacred... outsiders are not allowed to meet her.” Collin said, aware that he wasn’t answering her question.

“Why? Because it would turn out some monster or otherworldly being is your patron saint?” She asked and chuckled.

Collin shook his head and glared at her with fury in his eyes. “You would not understand. That is the reason. Our Lady is kind and caring, more human than most of us.”

Ilea turned her head to where the noise came from, glancing at him a moment later. “You misunderstand. If she is crying over the lost souls of her town, she is less of a monster than I am.” She said and smirked. “I think I’ll meet her.”

“Impossible. Outsiders are not to meet the Lady of Benevolence, not ever.” Collin said but didn’t make a move to stop her.

“Might just be the monster that took your town that will meet her then. Or a team of Shadows sent to scout and secure the area. Do you think either will understand?” Ilea asked and walked towards the sobbing.

“She is... easily startled... her grief is overwhelming. It might be dangerous for you.” He followed her in hurried steps.

“Secret order with a monster in their basement, unable to control the demon. What’s new?” She asked and strolled closer, her sphere picking up magical reverberations after the sobs.

“Not a demon. Our city was taken. Can you blame her for getting overwhelmed?” The elder asked.

"I don't care about blame, Collin." Ilea said and reached the ripped open door leading into a dark hall.

Lines of blood marred the ancient stone floor. The smell was heavy with iron and rotting flesh.

"Please... please... please." A young woman's voice begged, her body covered in cuts and bleeding all over. Her face was in anguish, tears streaming down.

Ilea was about to interfere when she saw her teeth, sharp and long, her eyes shining in a dark red, reflecting the flickering torchlight brought by Collin.

A demon was with her, its claws digging into the woman time and time again.

Her wounds recovered but not fully. Slow and weak was her magic, sobs ripping through the monster in front of her and staggering the beast.

"My Lady... she needs blood." Collin said and stepped past Ilea, her hand moving in front to stop him. "Please... at this rate... she will die."

The demon noticed them and turned, screeching and opening the familiar maw at the newcomers.

***[Demon – lvl 38]***

Ilea looked at the woman in turn, her dress torn to shreds, revealing all of her in the dark room.

***[Spirit of Blood – lvl 283]***

The beast once more screeched and rushed at Ilea.

An ashen limb was extended and shot out, only to pierce the spirit who appeared in front of the demon.

Claws slashed into her back and blood dripped from the deep wound the ash had produced.

"Leave it be..." The ethereal voice resounded with more power than before.

Magical pressure made Collin and the demon stumble back.

"Why? It's a demon spawn, a ravenous beast only driven by hunger and its instincts." Ilea said, watching the facial muscles on the spirit twitch in pain and anger.

Somewhere in the red serpentine eyes, understanding flickered. "She was my child... a child of Stormbreach." She moved closer, the ash digging deeper into her body as the demon started slashing into her back.

"Not anymore." Ilea said and grabbed the demon with four of her ashen limbs, moving it away from the spirit and restraining it. "See for yourself."

She pushed some healing mana into the wound as she removed her ashen limb from the spirit's stomach.

The wounds were slowly closing but her condition wasn't getting much better, the bleeding still continuing.

Collin rushed in again, once more stopped by Ilea. "She needs blood. You cannot heal... what is that? Arcane... unholy, only the blood can-"

He was interrupted by a loud sob of the spirit. "My child." She hovered a couple centimeters above the floor, blood dripping down as she extended her clawed hand to the restrained demon's face.

It bit into her fingers but she didn't react.

"What did they do to you?" She turned and looked at Ilea, her eyes going wide. "What did you do!?" Blood spears formed and crashed into ashen armor, barely penetrating and stopped by the bone below.

Ilea shielded the man behind her, watching as the spirit calmed down once more.

"I... Collin, you are alive." She said with a wide smile, tears coming to her eyes as she floated towards them, suddenly falling to the floor before she caught herself once more.

"Take my blood." He said and offered his arm.

Her eyes once more opened wide, her teeth elongating as saliva started rolling down her chin. A spike of blood formed out of her hand and was thrust at the man.

Ilea stepped between them and stored her bone armor's left arm before receding her ashen shroud. "Don't kill the man. He just came to help."

Genuine terror and disgust flashed in the spirit's eyes as she moved back, tears once more streaming down her face. "I can't... please... Collin I...,"

Ash cut into Ilea's shoulder and ripped through her flesh and muscle. *Harder than I thought.* She noted but finally got through, grabbing the separated limb and stepping up to the spirit.

A new arm formed instantly and was covered by bone armor and then ash. "Here. Ilea supreme, a monster's favorite." She said and slammed the arm into the spirit's open mouth.

"Instant regeneration... arcane healing..." Collin uttered and walked up to them once more.

The spirit was ripping into her arm, most of the skill bonuses gone after the separation. She bit and slurped, ravenous just like the demon spawn that was still screeching, pushed against a wall.

Red eyes slowly seemed to calm down, the ravenous eating turned into a more collected and calm dinner. She didn't eat the meat, instead going for the veins and sucking out every last drop of blood.

Ilea watched as the spirit's wounds closed slowly, the bleeding stopping as well as her serpentine eyes focusing. Less frantic.

When she finally lowered the arm, the spirit looked at Collin and then Ilea before she lowered her gaze and turned a little red.

"Another one?" Ilea asked with a raised eyebrow.

The spirit nodded meekly, holding on to the arm with care.

Ilea chuckled and repeated the violent arm removal before she held it up to the woman.

This time, there was no saliva. Claws retracted and teeth less long and sharp.

"Here you go." Ilea said and held out the arm.

The Lady fumbled with the drained one and nearly dropped it, taking the one Ilea held out and giving back the previous one. "Th... thank you." She didn't make eye contact.

*What am I supposed to do with this?* Ilea looked at her cold and dead arm, not a drop of blood remaining inside. She shook it and got distracted by the tears she saw flowing down the spirit's face, her teeth sunken in the second arm she had provided.

“She’s crying again.” Ilea commented, not stopping Collin from going to the lady this time. The spirit seemed calm enough and obviously not a threat anymore.

The Lady wiped at her eyes, still drinking the blood from the gifted limb.

Ilea summoned a cloak and handed it to Collin. “Here, the ripped dress fit more in her blood frenzy.”

“Thank you... truly, thank you.” Collin said and grabbed the cloak, carefully covering up his lady.

She lowered the arm and tugged on the black cloak. “Healer. You have offered me your blood.”

*Oh shit, did I accidentally bind myself to some ancient evil?* Ilea was prepared to resist when she saw the woman bow.

She held out the arm. “Potent and powerful, a being of immense strength has chosen to step before me. Welcome, to Stormbreach.” She said and lifted her head, the white hair having regained some color. Her eyes too had changed, a pale gold instead of red.

Ilea leaned forward and stared at the woman. “Are you a bone mage?” She asked, releasing her ash armor and storing her helmet before she rubbed over her own teeth to clarify the question.

The spirit looked at her, first in confusion before she giggled, a hand in front of her face.

“Did you put a spell on me? Holy shit.” Ilea said, staring at the perfect beauty, her smile radiating warmth and comfort.

The spirit’s eyes twinkled. “It is only I you see.” She said, her voice sounding human. Not anymore laden with magic. “The form of a spirit is less defined, my dear human savior.”

“Shapeshifters too?” Ilea asked.

She giggled once more. “Not as freely as once might wish. This is merely how I wish to look, a manifestation of my deepest desires. I could not mimic such a striking and fierce form as yourself.”

Ilea smiled. “You’re flattering me. I don’t think I’ve seen anything as beautiful as you before. Knowing what simmers underneath only adds to the intrigue.” She grinned.

Collin slapped her shoulder and glared at her. “Don’t flirt with our patron lady, the most holy of beings.”

“Did you just slap me?” Ilea asked the man.

He gulped and took a step back, towards the spirit.

“I apologize for his grave error.” The spirit said. “He does not understand the power you wield.”

“And you do?” Ilea asked, smirking once more.

“In part, yes. I know of ash. Little, but I do know. And I know of the ancient mages trying to force reconstruction. Not through blood or life but mana alone.”

Ilea raised her eyebrows, “The Azarinth?” She asked, dropping the name.

“Was that the name? One of them perhaps. Some I have met wielded similar powers but nothing of your... grandeur.” She said and smiled brightly.

“I don’t like where this is going.” Collin said. “She is with the Medic Sentinel Corps, here to take care of the monster that took our city.”

The Lady instantly turned serious once more and turned to look at the struggling demon. “Is there no hope for them?” She asked, stepping closer again.

“I don’t know. People who get killed by a demon stand up again as one of their Spawn. I doubt there’s much left of who this originally was, other than the bones and flesh.” Ilea said.

“The muscles tense up, bones reform to allow for claws and teeth. The brain gets smaller and many of the organs simply regress and die, unused by what they become.” Collin added. “I’m afraid the people they once were, are truly gone.”

The spirit gulped. “I can’t do it.” She said and looked away.

Three spears of ash slammed into the demon a moment later. Head, chest and heart. It died instantly.

Collin patted the woman on the shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

“I will take care of the demons, will collect each one after I killed them so you can send them off the way you deem best. I suggest burning.” Ilea said and glanced at the two, the demon corpse vanishing into her necklace. “You, my lady. If you can. Will distract whatever monster is controlling them. Once I’m done, I’ll come back and kill that one too.”

“You get back your city, I finish the mission.”

The spirit looked at her and spoke. “What do you want in return?” She seemed anxious.

“Cooperation.” Ilea said.

“What do you mean?” The spirit asked. “We have no people, no wealth, no power.”

Ilea nodded. “You will have that back soon enough, in part at least. I need information, for my healing organization as well as your word that you will recognize us.”

“Your organization?” The spirit asked, an eyebrow lifted inquisitively. “I would give you my life to save this town, dear Sentinel. Information is the least we can offer.”

“And exactly what I want.” Ilea said, not saying anything about the spirit’s first remark. “Now, you fought it? The monster that took over the city?”

She nodded. “Briefly. Yet the result was absolute. It is a demon much like the one you... killed. Smarter, faster and more deadly. A ferocious beast near immune to my attacks. It wore ill fitting pieces of armor and talked of being a king.” The Lady explained and shook her head. “Near all of the survivors who had remained in Stormbreach fell to the creature or its spawn. I was forced... to flee, near succumbing to my wounds.”

Ilea nodded. “Any idea about its level?”

“Below level five hundred, I would guess. But it is a demon, so be careful.” The spirit warned. “Sentinel.” She added and summoned something to her hands. “Be it of use or not. You have returned me to sanity once more, when all hope was lost you have come to us with aid.”

She held out a small necklace towards Ilea, a thin silver chain with a red teardrop shaped stone fastened onto it. “May you be successful and survive your quest.”

Ilea smiled and received the gift. “I’ll try my best, benevolent spirit.”

***[Tear of Desolation – Rare Quality] – [Your blood regenerates more quickly]***

“Thank you.” Ilea said and looked at the elder, “I’ll scout through a part of the city and get you once I need the distraction.”

Collin nodded. “Should I come with you?”

“No, you two wait here. I’ll be faster alone.” Ilea said and blinked up. She checked her sphere as she moved through the underground, occasionally killing a demon and storing it in her necklace.

*Can I even wear two over each other?* She wondered if there was somehow a limit to magical items like that. *Level three hundred and I don’t know that.* She chuckled, ashen spears slamming through a demon that didn’t know what hit it.

*Already eight of them killed.* She had an idea who the demon could be and now, she felt confident enough to beat him.

Blinking once more, she found herself on the ground level. It was late afternoon, the suns would set soon. The floor was cobbled, houses made of stone, plants and ivy growing over many of them. Trees were all over the streets, ingrown with the city it seemed.

Stone bent to nature here instead of the other way around.

Ilea sneaked around, blinking through several abandoned houses before she appeared in one that overlooked a vast square.

Demons as well as humans and other races were standing around. *A market?* She wasn’t sure.

Looking a little farther, she saw bridges leading over some parts of the underground. *They went vertical here.* She had wondered why not more cities were going deep instead of wide. Ravenhall did both now but most towns she had visited simply sprawled above ground.

*Probably because we like the sun.* She answered the question herself and blinked down, right in front of a patrol that was walking towards the square.

A demon, human and lizardman.

The demon immediately attacked, screeching when ashen spikes on connected limbs punched through its head and heart.

The body vanished into her necklace as she watched the human and lizardman step back, weapons at the ready but wholly unprepared to deal with Ilea.

She waited for a moment. “Not attacking?”

“You’re not attacking either.” The lizardman said, a glint of amusement in his eyes.

The human was holding his rusty sword with shaking arms.

“True.” Ilea said and relaxed, most of her limbs disintegrating. “I heard there’s a new king in Stormbreach.”

“Indeed.” The lizardman spoke. “Now what would an ashen healer want with such a king?”

**[Warrior – lvl 110]**

**[Warrior – lvl 32]**

“Kill him, probably.” She said, waiting for their reactions.

The lizardman smiled, sharp teeth showing. “Finally. And here I thought we would stay his playthingss forever.”

“D... did the Lady send you?” The human asked.

“He keepss going on about the Lady of Sstormbreach. I told him we need the Sshadow’s Hand. Are you with them?” The higher leveled lizardman asked.

Ilea cocked her head to the side and chuckled. “All of that and more. So where’s the king?”

“King Green ressidess in the Ssanctuary temple. The biggest building in town.”

“King Green?” Ilea asked. *Well, I thought as much.*

“Yes, do you know him? Demon but I suppossess he’s not the worst of them, we are sstill alive after all.” The lizardman chuckled.

“I do, in fact. We have a score to settle and he’s not getting away so easily this time.” Ilea cracked her neck and smiled below her bone and ash armors.