

Chapter 363 Breadcrumbs

Alistair carefully folded the letter before he placed it in an envelope and stamped it with a ring of his. “This might very well be the future of Riverwatch and myself as the governor.” He murmured and smirked. “Ilea. Truly, a fortunate turn that you chose to come here in these times.”

She shook her head. “Don’t mention it. I have friends and a history here. It’s the least I could do. The mission?”

Alistair nodded, still in a joyous mood. “The mission. About two months ago, a woman was found dead. Bite marks on her neck suggest some blood sucking beast. Now neither of those facts would require a Shadow nor are they exceptionally rare or noteworthy.”

He opened a drawer and searched through some files before he grabbed a specific folder and put it on the table. “In the meantime, three officials investigating the case have vanished. Six more were found dead with similar bite marks and loss of blood.”

“A vampire?” Ilea asked.

Walter chuckled, drawing both of their attention. “If a vampire was here, we would know. Everyone would.”

Alistair nodded. “I would agree with you, Walter. I have however learned never to assume anything to be impossible. Little is truly known about Vampires as are there various bloodsucking creatures more than capable of the described murders. I can tell that fighting a Vampire would be an exciting endeavor to you, Ilea. Yet the chance of it actually being such a creature is low.”

“The officials were tasked to find out more and died. Now, knowing so little I thought it best to hire a specialized mage or warrior from the Shadow’s Hand instead of wasting more resources and people. This has been going on for two months. Already various people have pestered me to have it looked into.”

“Any clues, connections between the dead?” Walter asked.

Alistair glanced at Ilea and back at the sorcerer.

She shrugged. “I’m not exactly a detective. Want to tag along Walter?”

“A Shadow mission?” The man asked.

“Come on, your spells will help. I’ll get paid and gift you a part of it after. Plus you can do something else than brewing and preparing food for once.” She said and laughed.

“Just today. I’ll go back for dinner.” Walter said, obviously interested in the change of pace.

Adventure time for the barkeeper. Ilea smirked.

“Very well then. If you help out, I’ll take that into consideration as well for your Brotherhood. I haven’t looked into the case much myself and honestly, I’m not sure why so many people cared about it so much. We’ve lost more to other criminal activities just in the past week. However the loss of officials and experienced investigators is a problem.” He moved the file over the table. “All we have is here. Names, locations and guard contacts.”

Ilea walked over and grabbed it. "Alright. We'll look into it. Anything else?" She asked the two of them.

Neither replied.

"Good. Then let's go." Ilea said.

They went through the file and visited the areas where the people were killed. Most of the murders were too long ago for any reasonable tracking or magic perception spell to do anything.

They did knock on some doors and asked the people living nearby about the dead but none offered anything useful.

The guards who found the corpses were next but again, nothing major was learned. Their findings had already been written out in the various reports and none of them added anything useful. Surprisingly the bodies themselves had already been burnt, something Ilea found especially confusing. Preventing undead from rising had a higher priority than keeping potential murder evidence.

"Great." Ilea said, leaning on a wall near where the latest murder had happened. "We woke up twelve people and found nothing."

Walter was looking over the floor, checking every little pebble, the nearby houses and the gullies. "This isn't a mere monster hunt, Ilea."

"Exactly why you're with me." She replied.

He sighed. "Too many people walk through here every day. If we had started maybe four days ago, one or two days after it happened." He paced around some more before he spoke once more. "Do you know anybody from the underground?"

"Criminals you mean?" Ilea asked. "Well, Vincent is under wraps. I doubt he could offer much, being outside of the city for so long."

"Connections. He might be able to refer us to someone else." Walter suggested.

"Trevor... was that his name? The Riversong gang. I helped them out over a year ago. Maybe they can help." Ilea said.

"Riversong. I've heard of them. Is he the leader?" Walter asked as he walked back to her.

"Yea. I think so. If he managed to get back and maintain his position." She explained.

"Any idea where to find them?" He asked.

"I remember where one of their old bases was. Maybe it's still around." Ilea said and led them through the city.

The two ran and jumped over the rooftops towards their destination. The suns would rise soon, some color already visible on the horizon.

"Is he willing to help you?" Walter asked.

“I think he made a deal with the guard even. We should at least get some info.” Ilea replied, stopping on a roof that had a view on the building she remembered.

“Looks the same it did back then.” She said and got on her bone and ash armor. “I’ll go check if he’s in there. Wait here.”

Walter nodded and crouched near the chimney reaching out of the roof.

She blinked to the other side of the road and landed on the building right next to the once hideout of the Riversong.

Another blink got her inside the attic. Her sphere reached down and informed her that there were indeed still people here. Four in fact on the first and ground floor. Two looked like thugs, armored even inside, various scars showing on their faces. None of them were Trevor.

Ilea found one of them isolated, on the toilet even. *Time to traumatize an innocent citizen.* She hoped they were actually part of the Riversong.

Her hand immediately pressed against the man’s mouth as soon as she appeared in the small toilet room. *Another thing that Riverwatch and Ravenhall have that medieval cities would likely not sport.* She marveled at the sewage system, the pipes leading down through the walls.

The man struggled against the ashen limbs that held him down, tears running down his face as he screamed against the unrelenting hand of the monster that had suddenly appeared while he was taking a dump.

Ah yes. “Calm the fuck down.” She said. “Don’t make so much noise or I’ll have to kill all of you.”

The man in fact did calm down. He was still breathing hard, staring at her eyes.

[Rogue – lvl 57]

“Is this still a Riversong site?” She asked.

He nodded weakly.

“Oh good.” Ilea sighed. “Now don’t make too much noise. I’m not here to kill any of you.”

The man remained calm after she let go of his mouth. “What do you... want, Shadow?”

“First, you get a proper job with the hunters or something. Second, I have to talk to Trevor. Beard, scar.” She motioned with her hand to indicate where the scar was on his face. “Is he still the leader?”

The man glanced around, getting more nervous. “They’ll kill me if I tell you anything.”

“I’ll kill you if you don’t.” Ilea said. “Come on, I’m a healer. You can trust me. I just need to talk to the guy, we’re old friends. I took care of Melian when she took over.”

“Melian... you’re that Shadow then. There are stories... so it’s true.” His eyes opened wide. “I’ll help... just please, don’t kill me.”

“Where is he.”

“The new headquarters is near the southern wall, only a ten minute walk from the southern gate. It’s in the restaurant called the Everlasting Ash. If he’s in the city, he might be there.” The man explained.

“Everlasting Ash.” Ilea chuckled, her limbs retreating and letting go of the man. “Thanks.” She said and vanished.

She saw him relax in her sphere, a bunch of shit splashing into the toilet.

Good thing he was already on there. She smiled and blinked over to Walter again. “I have a location.”

He nodded and motioned her to lead the way.

Ten minutes from the southern gate was quite an area to cover but random pedestrians knew the restaurant and showed guided them along the way.

“Everlasting Ash.” Walter mused and glanced at her.

The two were standing right in front of the establishment.

“Seems like you left an impression.” He chuckled.

“Shut it.” Ilea replied with a smile and opened the door.

It wasn’t closed but neither were there any patrons currently in the place. A woman was working behind the counter, glancing up to look at the two.

[Warrior – lvl 61]

“Welcome. What can I do for you?” She asked.

Ilea could tell she was highly uncomfortable with the guests. The ashen armor didn’t help. “I’m looking for an old friend. Maybe you know him.”

She saw a part of the underground structure but found her sphere broken by enchantments placed along the ceiling of the second floor.

“And who might that be?” The woman asked, trying hard to stay calm.

“Trevor, leader of the Riversong.” Ilea replied.

“And who’s asking?”

“The Shadow who helped him out with Melian.” Ilea replied and smiled at her.

“Do you have a badge or something? I can’t see your level but I know Shadows have badges.” The woman said.

Ilea summoned hers and threw it at her.

“I’ll be right back.” She said, nearly walking into the counter before she went through one of the back doors.

“You think she’s trying to fool us?” Walter asked.

“She’s taking three stairs at a time. I think she at least knows what she’s dealing with.” Ilea replied.

A couple minutes later, a group of people rushed back up the stairs, led by none other than Trevor.

He burst out the door and spread his arms. “Welcome... Ilea, was it? Yes... I know those eyes.” He said with a broad smile on his face. The beard had grown even more.

[Warrior – lvl 138]

“Trevor.” Ilea said.

“New armor. And a new friend.” He commented, glancing at Walter. “I want you gone out of here as fast as possible, so what do you want?”

“Boss, why are we working with her?” One of the men asked.

Trevor rushed over in an instant, his movements enhanced before his fist smashed into the man’s face.

He was knocked into the wall behind him, cracking a part of the stone before he slid down, unconscious.

“Anybody else have a problem with her?” He asked, finding nobody else disagreeing openly.

“Nice approach to leadership.” Ilea commented. “I’m investigating some murders. Looking for some people. Anywhere we could talk?”

“Sure.” Trevor said. “Follow me.” He glanced at the woman behind the counter. “You, make sure the wall gets fixed and bring that idiot down again before we open for the day.”

They were led into a simple room with a table and a couple of chairs. Bottles remained on the table and a map of the city was hanging on one of the walls.

Trevor sat down and motioned for the two to do the same. “Wait outside.” He said to those of the Riversong who had followed.

He sighed when the door closed. “Bad time to visit.” He grumbled and opened a chest near the table. “Still, I’m known to pay my debts.”

Three bottles of ale were placed on the table.

Walter chuckled when he saw the label.

“Yours?” Ilea asked and smiled when he nodded. She focused again on the confused Trevor. “You’re not in a position to make me feel bad about anything, Trevor. Now that I’m here... I actually have an additional question.”

He gulped and opened his bottle, taking a deep drink.

“Vincent Halligan. I killed the Baralia people he was... forced to work with. What do you think of him?” Ilea asked, leaning forward as she too cracked open the bottle.

The man sighed. “So the rumors are true. I thought it ridiculous that a Shadow would come and deal with them in a matter of a single day. If it’s you, I can see it.” He shook his head. “We’re competitors but I respect the man. Only kills when necessary and he generally stays out of other’s territories if he thinks them capable enough. Win Win really, for all involved. I try to operate in a similar manner.”

“Of course there are the occasional fights, brawls and assassination attempts but it’s part of the gig.” He chuckled. “Vincent being back actually puts in danger some of our own operations. Also puts in question at least thirty peoples’ loyalty. Real headache.”

Ilea shrugged. “Sounds like he told the truth then.”

“He’s known to be ruthless but never deceiving.” Trevor confirmed. “I hate to have him back.”

She chuckled and took a sip of her ale. "That's your problem to deal with. Now, do you know anything about these murders?" She summoned the file and moved it over the table. "The people that were killed, the murderer or monster involved or the area where the killings happened."

Trevor glanced at her and took the file, looking through the names. "Hah, this one nearly got me once. Good man. Shame." He flipped through it and stopped at the woman.

"This one seems the only one not from the guard. The rest I assume were assigned to the task. Weird though." He said, looking at the names once more. "Two months."

"What do you mean?" Walter asked.

Trevor glanced at him and back to the documents. "Nine assigned officials to a murder case. Every time one got killed, they sent one more? Sounds more like a meat grinder than anything else. Sure our lovely governor didn't just want them gone, for one reason or the other?"

Ilea tapped the table as she thought about it. "Why would he hire a Shadow to look into it then?"

"Maybe he wants the Shadow gone too." Trevor suggested but shook his head. "He wouldn't know who'd come. Plus, I doubt anything he has can kill you."

"It's not just that they only ever sent one more person to investigate. It's also the time span. Do you know how many people were killed in Riverwatch, just in the last year?"

She stopped the tapping. "I'm not sure I want to know that."

Trevor waved her off. "Many perhaps not as random and innocent as this woman seems to be but it would require a similar investigation to happen nonetheless. Usually the officials just determine criminal activity to be the reason and close the case. Sometimes there isn't even an investigation at all. It's suspicious that there were this many assigned to the case."

"Scared of vampires or bloodsucking creatures?" Walter suggested.

"Doesn't make sense. Maybe someone has a personal vendetta. Otherwise I see no reason to be this concerned. If they are then they would have sent more than a single official each time. At least two when the first one got killed." The warrior explained.

"So something might be fishy." Ilea surmised. "What else can you tell us?"

Trevor shook his head. "I don't know anything else about the officials. You would have to ask their higher ups to find out what cases they usually worked, why they were assigned this case. You should probably focus on the woman. She's the odd one out. The area has some interesting newcomers from the west. I can ask around and see if anybody has something for sucking blood. It's a trend among nobles in some of the bigger countries. Maybe they're looking to improve. Maybe one of their playthings managed to escape."

"Lots of assumptions." Walter said.

"You're probably not dealing with a beast here. It would likely be more violent, more random. And there would certainly be more clues." Trevor added. "The obvious answer is usually the right one."

"Usually." Ilea repeated.

"Yea. Well it might be here too. Maybe not either. Not my case. Neither does it make sense to me why they hired a Shadow for this." Trevor said.

"Can you ask around right now?" Ilea asked. "I don't plan to invest more than a day on this."

Trevor chuckled and got up. "Sure, to get you off my heels, anything." He opened the door and went up again to talk to some of his gang members.

"You think he is trustworthy?" Walter asked.

"No. But he made some good points." She said. "Maybe someone did have a problem with those officials. Or there is someone trying to cover up their escaped blood bag."

Trevor already came back and sat down again. "I had word sent to a couple people who know the area. It's near our territory. I try to know about possible threats at least."

It didn't take long for two people to arrive. One a woman that made big eyes when she glanced at Ilea.

"What's wrong?" Ilea asked her, trying to place the likeness.

She stuttered and shook her head. "Never mind."

"She's the one whose leg you broke over a year ago." Trevor supplied. "Came to look for a job after Melian was killed."

"Ah. Yes, I remember." Ilea said. She was still in her bone and ashen armor, making quite the impression.

The woman gulped. "Cheers for letting me live back then."

"They're looking for someone that might suck blood or likes to bleed out their slaves. In the south east noble district." Trevor interrupted.

"There's some that might fit. The Isyll fellow from Salia, the Graysword sisters from Virilya as well as Colson. Only heard rumors about them all." The man who had come spoke.

"The sisters and Colson left, each a couple weeks ago. Mansions were sold back to the city." The woman said.

"Really? Nobody saw them go." He said.

"Their servants aren't there anymore, neither was there light. If they're still around then I'm not sure what they're trying." The woman said once more.

Trevor nodded. "Isyll it is. Can you show our friends those mansions?"

The woman gulped but nodded. "Sure. Right now?"

Trevor smiled brightly and stood up. "Right now. Nice meeting you two. Don't come back."

"Don't stretch it, Tervor." Ilea warned and stood up. She knew he had a deal with Dale, which is why she wouldn't bother him anymore than she already had. Still, while below the enchantments, she made sure to check on the other rooms in range of her sphere.

Goods and gear but no obvious torture chamber or slaves. "Wait for us outside. We'll be there in a couple minutes."