

## Chapter 461 Infiltration

“Luis Harken, hmm? Charming man,” Ilea said as she read through the notes on the man. A level one sixty two mage and the leader of this rag tag group of government funded bandits.

“You think it will work?” she asked, having outlined the rough plan.

He shrugged. The epitome of confidence.

*A shrug is enough for me.*

“Dress or roughed up leather armor?” she said.

*Armor. More believable.*

“Probably,” she murmured and let her ashen armor flow to her back. She casually slashed open her arm and rubbed some of the blood onto her face. A few rough rounds through her hair with both hands left it disheveled enough. “How do I look?”

*Rugged,* the man wrote.

“Beautiful enough to peak interest?” she asked.

He nodded.

Ilea squinted her eyes. “Are you just saying that because you think I’m your master?”

He shook his head.

*Smart man.*

The two of them casually strolled into the camp. At the sight of the slave she had come to call Steve, the guards nearly ignored her completely. Two men a little above level one hundred tried hard not to look at Steve, clasp their weapons a little more tightly.

He gestured her to continue and stepped back into the forest.

The camp was quite vast, trees felled to provide space for tents, some luxurious while most were quite simple. Moonlight shined from above, few clouds obscuring it.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” Ilea said with fake apprehension, glancing around frantically to give off the notion of a carp inside a wasp nest.

“The Vowed brought you here... who are you?” one of them asked, now quite a bit more hostile than before.

*God you are stupid. The other guy is at least respecting my level. The Vowed... of course.*

“I was separated from my team. I’d like to talk to whoever is in charge here,” she said.

The man laughed and glanced at his companion. “I’m in charge as far as I’m concerned. You want to stay the night? Have food and water? Maybe we can work something out. Not the ugliest I’ve ever had.”

Ilea took in his scent, the sweat and lack of hygiene, his aura, the feel of his magic, as dull as it was. She would find this man and she would personally rip off his head.

“We shouldn’t... what if he finds out. You know what happened to those scouts,” the other guard said.

That seemed to put a real damper on the dead man’s ambitions. He wrung with himself but finally his fear won out over his desires.

“What makes such a high level healer travel alone through here? With which order are you?” he asked.

“I would like to discuss such matters with whoever is in charge. As to your earlier comments, I hope you will fulfill my request. You know what will happen if a Corinth Order member suddenly vanishes,” Ilea said.

He turned to her and got close. “A lone healer... and you still think your order will protect you. Here? In the middle of nowhere? How will they find me, I wonder?”

“They will interrogate your friend over there. Or the silent one who brought me here. He seemed more wise than you are,” Ilea said, enjoying the twisting veins on his face.

Invoking the Corinth order’s name brought her some joy. She couldn’t agree more with the man. Nobody would come for a lone healer caught in a war camp of a bunch of slavers.

“Follow me. No crap or you will be thrown to the slaves,” he said, walking ahead through the camp.

Ilea could see the grin on his face thanks to her sphere. He believed her fate set in stone.

*I’m going to expand your world by so many dimensions, little warrior man.*

### **[Warrior – lvl 112]**

Her sphere gave her an idea of the equipment of the people here. This wasn’t a rogue team trying to get a few slaves back. This was a war camp, perhaps one of many. Why they were here instead of their own country was another question entirely.

*Is that lord really that petty? Just forget about those slaves. Get your forces behind the walls and defend against Lys.*

When she was let into the largest and most unnecessarily decorated tent, the question of pettiness answered itself.

Four Vowed ones occupied the large room, one in each corner.

Sprawled out in what looked like a couch lay a man wearing gold laced pants and no shirt.

He looked bored as he turned to her and the guard that had brought her here.

With him were nine women in a varied state of undress. And three men. They littered the floor as if they were furniture or pets. A few of them took note of Ilea but tried hard not to glance her way. The man had dark green eyes, toned muscles and wavy hair. A short beard gave his face a pleasant form as he rested on one hand.

“Who is she?” he asked in a bored tone.

“Sir, she came looking for help. She claims to be part of the Corinth order, separated from her team,” the guard helpfully informed.

“A frightened and lost cub has come to my tent. Tell me, my dear. What are the principles taught to the Corinth order?” he asked in the same monotone voice.

*Fuck*

“You got me. I’m not part of an order. The rest is true,” she said.

The guard next to her grinned.

“Oh? So you lied to us? Now that... that doesn’t paint a very bright future for you, my dear. Hmm... it has been a while however, that I have feasted on such a rough... animal. And healing powers are so, enticing. You may stay the night. With me,” the man said with a slight smile. He didn’t sound malicious, perhaps truly believing it to be a courtesy.

He stood up slowly and appeared in front of her.

**[Mage – lvl 162]**

“My name is Luis Harken. I welcome you to my tent,” he said and touched her face.

Ilea stepped closer, reaching out and stroking his arms. She brushed her still armored chest against his and found his hand, her fingers brushing the thing she was looking for.

She got close to his ear, noting that his heart rate had increased, his manhood pushing through his pants against her thigh. “Now, my dear. Promise not to scream.”

Ash spread out behind her and into the man’s mouth as she snapped off his finger and with it the signet ring. Four more limbs immobilized the guard that had brought her here as she took a step back, both men caught in her ash, the missing finger already healed.

“Shiny,” she said and looked at her outstretched hand, the golden ring topped off with a red signet. “Vowed, take a step forward.”

The four men in the corners of the tent simultaneously took a step forward.

Ilea was happy none of the slaves had spoken a word. She could tell that a few of them weren’t exactly present, their minds within a fog of ecstasy. Those that weren’t were very distressed.

“Interesting. All that is needed is this ring. Steve was right, what a surprise,” she mused to herself and looked at her captives. Their mouths were still filled with ash.

“Don’t worry, I’m here to free slaves, not kill them,” she said and crouched down in front of Luis.

“See, you’re quite attractive. I might have considered your proposal if you didn’t hold humans like cattle.”

He made a muffled noise as his body caught fire, a spell forming.

Ilea’s hand lashed out. The slap extinguished the flames entirely, the man nearly going unconscious. Her healing brought him back.

“Now, now, now. Listen to me, Luis. I want you to realize in what position you’re in,” she said as her ashen armor extended around her. The grip of her ashen limbs strengthened on both of the men. She noted that his erection didn’t wane. Quite the contrary.

*Ew, now I feel dirty.*

“Your life is in my hands, do you understand that?” she asked.

The man nodded, fear in his eyes.

“Now, I want you to answer everything I ask and do as I say. Or I will kill you. It’s as simple as that,” she said.

He nodded frantically.

“You won’t scream if I take out the ash?” she waited for the nod and then freed his mouth.

The man coughed, helped along by her healing. “You won’t get away with this, woman. My father-”

Another slap made him shut up. A few of his teeth had broken, as well as his jaw. Ilea healed it quickly as her ash kept his screaming to a minimum.

“Listen here you little shit. I really don’t want to torture you, you’re just so fucking weak I nearly kill you with a slap. Your threats aren’t very convincing with that thing poking through your pants.”

“My sexual interests matter not. You dared lay a hand on a Harken. Your life is forfeit. Unless... perhaps we can find an arrangement,” he suggested.

Ilea sighed. “Okay. First tell me what this ring can do. I can feel several uses.”

“It shows the enchantments placed within the Vowed and lets you charge them,” the man explained. He remained quite calm after his small literal outburst.

*Confident that he has the upper hand. Even bound and horny. This man hasn’t lost a single time in his life.*

“You, get every Vowed here to this tent,” she said, pointing at one of them. “You, tell the guards outside that I’m the new master. Nobody is to be let in.”

Both men vanished.

*Don’t get used to it. You will have to give away this toy. It is the ethical thing to do.*

*I can at least be evil for a little while,* she thought with a smile.

“Are you really here to retake the slaves freed and taken from your lands?” she asked.

The man looked at her as if it was the stupidest question to ask. “Of course. My father doesn’t take lightly on thievery. These lines of slaves have been held for generations. Fed and trained by us. Given purpose. A light response would not stand.”

“Really? Even though your country is at war with several nations?” Ilea asked.

“The king will prevail. And Wynehold will stand. It has been that way for centuries. The empire is weakened, wounded. It will bleed out in our lands, as will any other that dare to attack,” Luis explained.

*Is he delusional? Or does he know something I don’t. Claire seemed sure the war was at an end. Just a matter of time until the kingdom is conquered or destroyed, its parts split between the vultures.*

“Why are you so sure of victory?” Ilea said.

“My father believes the priests of the order. I personally trust more in our military might. You must understand that the siege of Virilya was merely a play. A distraction for those who wanted war, bored of the status quo. The true power of Baralia remains within our cities, none of which will be taken,” he said.

“Bored. What the fuck,” Ilea said and sat down on an ashen chair. “There is so much in this world you could discover, so many creatures to find or fight, so much land, ruins and dungeons to explore. To stave off boredom... you start a war?”

“Of course,” the man said. “What is more glorious than war?”

The question was serious.

*If everyone in that country thinks this way, this war may really go on for a little longer than the empire or Claire thinks.*

“Okay. Here’s the deal. I only kill that guard because he is a disgusting fucker and insulted me personally. I take all your slaves and you fuck off back to your country and never come back.”

The man looked at her before he burst out laughing.

“You cannot be serious... oh... you are!” He laughed even louder.

Ilea waited for him to calm down. “So you’re telling me there is no way you will retreat or stop this little play here?”

“Our people were stolen. It. Will. Not. Stand,” he said, glaring at her with unfounded confidence.

“People aren’t property,” Ilea whispered, making the man laugh again.

“You are weak. The order of the world is si-” he couldn’t finish the sentence for a lack of head.

The guard started struggling against the restraints, one of the ashen limbs piercing his skull a moment later. His limp body slumped to the ground.

Ilea sighed and looked around the tent. There were better options, she knew as much. Luis didn’t seem like he was outright evil. He grew up in a system that promoted inequality, taught him that it was the way of life. And yet he restricted and endangered the lives of every slave in this camp.

She chose the easy way out and killed him. Ilea wasn’t a saint and she didn’t judge herself as one. The man held slaves. He wouldn’t be missed. Baralia wouldn’t be missed.

A Vowed one appeared next to her in a crouch, bowing.

“You’re all here?” she asked.

Steve appeared a moment later. He nodded, looking at the corpses and the ring on her finger.

“Can I disable the enchantments?” she asked.

Steve shook his head.

“I see. Well. I will remove them later. The rest of you. I want you to call a rally with everyone present in the camp. Only those who are not slaves. Or slaves forced to work for Baralia, like you were before,” she said. “Right outside this tent, I suppose. There’s plenty of space.”

The two men nodded and vanished.

She spread a light mist of ash and healed all the slaves in the tent.

A few of them shivered or yelped when the healing suddenly flowed through them.

“You are safe now,” she said.

“Y... you killed him... what have you done?” one of the men said, carefully moving closer to Luis’ corpse. He touched it, tears flowing from his eyes.

The others didn’t seem inclined to do the same.

“You will have a choice later. To come with me to Riverwatch, get a new life there as free men and women, or to go your own way. I suggest the former. The wilderness isn’t quite as forgiving,” Ilea said.

She kept her ashen armor on now, her bone set right below.

“Thank you,” one of the women whispered. Not loud enough for the others to hear but for Ilea it was crystal clear.

“Of course,” she said.

Ilea waited in silence for the next fifteen minutes, ash lazily moving around her form as she meditated. For a few minutes she had contemplated her decisions here. Luis had not budged and neither would she. It was inevitable.

She opened her eyes when one of the Vowed appeared in front of her.

**[Mage – lvl 184]**

“Spread out and protect the slaves. Kill anybody that tries to take them, harm them or use them as hostages,” she said.

The man vanished again.

Ilea wondered how the others understood the command. Perhaps it was part of the enchantment in their teeth. Or it was an inherent ability they shared.

Either way, it was time to continue.

She grabbed Luis’ head and stepped out, ignoring the wails of the slave behind her.

Over a hundred people had gathered, all soldiers or adventurers, trained, armed and armored. Cooks, bards, administrators, scouts, rogues, and everything else a war camp required.

Before the situation could escalate, she whistled.

Everyone froze.

Hostility and aggression turned to fear and apprehension.

“If you attack me, you die. If you kill or attack the slaves. You die,” she said and threw down the head of Luis. “If you continue to intervene here. You die.”

“Return to Baralia without causing any problems and then, stay there. Leave and live,” she finished with the simple choice.

People started moving once more.

More than half immediately attacked, formations of them moving in on her and past those that were yet undecided. A few were cut down by their own, the word traitor thrown around here and there.

Ilea just stepped forward, to create some distance between herself and the command tent.

Everyone that rushed at her was ripped apart by fast moving ashen limbs. Some of them dodged or blocked a hit but every single one of them died. Not a single one of them was above level two hundred.

Their magic impacted her ash, her sphere making sure everything found its target.

*Keep them focused on me.*

She saw a few of them going for the slaves or fleeing. The former were cut down by the Vowed. The rest she didn't care about.

Ashen spears formed and skewered the mages and rangers who attacked from a distance.

It should be obvious by now that their efforts were in vain. And still dozens of them attacked.

Ilea didn't mind. They had made their choice.

A pitiful display. Only a third had fled, the only ones remaining either dying or still frozen, undecided and soiling themselves. A few were crying.

"How very unpleasant," she said with a sigh. "Why can't we just let each other live?" she asked as a few of her limbs cracked the barrier put up by the last remaining mage.

His armor and body were ripped apart in the next moment, blood and guts slowly seeping onto the ground.

She clapped a few times to get the attention of the last four standing people. A cook, warrior and two mages.

Their heart rate and location of excrement suggested not just fear but terror.

"You heard me, lads. Go back to your home and your families. And stay there," she clapped and watched them finally move, running for their lives.

If the son was an indication for the father, they would have another visit on their hands shortly. *Think not of what was lost*, she thought and looked at the slaves, shivering in their basic clothes, hope in their eyes as they tried to see her.