

Chapter 604 Dressing for the Occasion

Entering the city turned out to be just as easy as the last time she had come here. A few uses of Displacement let them avoid any guard or soldier attention as they appeared within the inner wall.

Ilea even used the same basement she had the last time, making sure to check if there were any signs of recent guests to the downright theatrical torture chamber. It turned out that there were none. Additionally the hooks on the walls where chains had been fastened to had been removed, turning this place into a normal basement.

“Seems like this place at least changed for the better,” Ilea mused and put on leather armor.

“Hmm... quite a few people know how I look like around here. Hey Fey, mind if I borrow your helmet for today?”

The elf opened a bottle of wine he found in one of the shelves, sniffing on it before he took a sip. He summoned the head piece and threw it her way.

Ilea made it vanish and appear on her head. She made sure to summon her war hammer, fastening it to her back with some stealthy ash magic usage. No normal leather strap would hold against the sheer weight of that thing.

“How do I look?” she asked, adjusting the plate helmet a little to be able to see through the slit a little better. She found the effort useless and instead pried the steel open with a precise usage of two ashen limbs.

Feyrair hissed, tasting the wine. “You’re destroying my helmet. Other than that, wonderful. Like a dull human warrior with an impressive hammer they’re too weak to wield properly. However the healer identification and high level will certainly turn some heads.”

“Most civilians won’t know the difference between a level one hundred and me or you. And I might just be an ex member of the Order of Truth, now looking to be an effective adventurer with my good friend powerful scale armor mage,” she said.

“Should I change too?” the elf asked.

“Hmm... I mean it does look comical. Why not,” she said and took off the helmet again. “This thing gets way too hot.” Instead she summoned a cloak and put the hood over her hair and brow, adding a kerchief to cover most of her face.

Feyrair switched into his wondrous human outfit and put on his helmet, his eyes shining through a little brighter with the enlarged opening.

“You don’t seem pleased,” he said.

“I’d just think a simple mask would fit you more, being a mage and all. Plus really fancy robes,” she suggested.

“I’m not fond of robes. Too constricting,” he said.

Ilea smiled. “Let’s go shopping then. I’m sure we can get you an outfit worthy of a prince.”

“Ridiculous, but not unwelcome,” he mused with a hiss. “Lead the way then, Lilith, hero of humanity,” the elf added with an exaggerated bow.

Ilea smirked and teleported them both into a nearby alley. “Now, to find a tailor... but not just anyone.”

She walked on for a minute until she came upon a beggar. A piece of silver flashed to her hand before she crouched and held it out towards the older man.

He said his thanks in the Baralia tongue.

“Do you speak Standard?” she asked.

The man glanced at the piece of silver and smiled, showing surprisingly healthy teeth. “I do, miss.”

“Who’s the best tailor in town and where can we find them?” Ilea asked.

He looked at her for a moment and considered. “Tis hard to say miss... many may guide you to Vizo’s but I’ve seen the man’s work and between the two of us... it’s nowhere near as fine as he claims. I’ve always w.... I hear that Charlson and Elaina have some of the best quality in the higher districts,” he explained.

Ilea squinted at him.

[Mage – lvl 72]

“That’s a surprisingly detailed answer from a beggar, why is a level seventy mage on the streets in the first place?” she asked.

His shirt and pants looked worn but the quality itself seemed decent. The man looked at her and smiled. “I thank you for the silver, miss. But have I not been humiliated enough? If you wish to report me to the imperials, they already interrogated me,” he explained and leaned forward a little. “If at all possible, I’d like to not repeat it.”

Ilea looked at him for a moment before she spoke. “I’m sorry. That was a little too direct. I’ve just been dealing with slavers recently. No offense meant.”

He shrugged. “None taken. The High King has played his cards and lost. We too must now pay the price. I shall not let it conquer me.”

Feyrair took a swig from his wine and looked at the man. “You could become an adventurer. Your gift of magic would surely pay better than this,” he said and glanced at Ilea. “As far as I understood, anybody can join them?”

“They can,” Ilea said. “But not all would wish to fight monsters.”

The man gulped and looked away.

“Where can we find the shop?” Ilea asked.

He gave them somewhat precise directions and bid them farewell.

Feyrair finished his bottle and made it vanish, walking next to her in his ridiculous gear. “He has power enough to face most creatures that roam the wilderness here. And yet he chooses to ask others for coins. Would it not make sense for him to use his ability for his own sake?”

“I suppose it would,” Ilea said. “But as I said before, many people don’t want to put their lives at risk, even if it means begging for copper in the streets. He didn’t strike me as a fighter either, more a scholar or businessman maybe. Though I’m sure it’s not easy finding employment at the moment,

especially as someone who was likely part of the previous nobility. That is, if you were on the wrong side,” she said as they passed into a much nicer looking area of the city.

“It’s all so complicated when he could just go out and face monsters. He would perish or prevail,” Feyrair said, ignoring the two women who walked past while giggling.

If only they knew, Ilea thought with a smirk.

“Should be somewhere around here,” she said as they came out onto a plaza. Several restaurants already served breakfast, the atmosphere noticeably lighter than the time she had last been here. It made sense of course, as she had been hunting nobles during a war. Now she was a tourist if anything.

She spotted the shop at the other end of the plaza, hidden by the leaves of a small tree.

Charlson & Elaina

The name was written in silver letters with artistic swirls. A little too much for her but she supposed it fit with a tailor shop. Dresses and formal clothing for both men and women was displayed in the two large store windows. They looked nicer than most everything she had seen before. Nothing comparable to Goliath’s armor design or even Earl’s drake scale model but perhaps more fitting for a ball.

“Seems good,” Ilea said and stepped inside. An enchantment flared up when she crossed the threshold, a chime sounding from near the counter. *Show offs*.

A woman stepped out from a back room immediately and glanced at the customers. She wore a well cut uniform with deep greens and even yellow mixed in, underlining her eyes that seemed to dance with the same combination. Long brown hair had been carefully bound with a lightly luminous ribbon. The woman was smaller than Ilea by quite a bit and probably a little younger too.

She stared at Ilea for a few seconds, her mouth opening lightly before she glanced at Feyrair, taking in his helmet, shirt, and finally his kilt. She did that take another time, her confusion building.

“Eh, hello,” Ilea said and waved at the woman lightly.

She blinked a few times before her eyes opened wide and she bowed. “Welcome to Charlson and Elaina’s. I’m Nassay, I’m sorry, what can I do for you?”

Ilea smiled. “Looking for outfits that look a little less thrown together than what we’re currently wearing.”

“We’re very busy at the moment, miss. I’m not sure if we can accommodate two outfits in the next week,” Nassay explained.

“Do you know who Lilith is?” Ilea asked, hoping for some sweet special local hero treatment.

The girl opened her eyes even wider. “Of course. The o... I mean, are you the same? I will need identification of sorts.”

Ilea spread her ashen armor and wings, summoning her Shadowbadge and showing it to the girl before she made it all vanish again. “That enough identification? Or would you like me to show you my birth certificate?”

The girl shook her head quickly and bowed again. “I’m fucking sorry!” she said before covering her mouth and running to the back, tears welling up in her eyes.

“You scared her away,” Fey mused.

“I don’t think so. What did she mean with that sentence she didn’t finish?” she asked.

He couldn’t answer as Nassay rushed back, dragging two people with her.

First a woman with ashen hair, a slightly bored expression on her face as she ripped away her hand and immediately looked over the two customers. She wore simple working clothes, slightly baggy and a little dirty. The woman quickly focused on Nassay again and whispered a few things in the Baralia tongue, apparently scolding her for one thing or the other, pulling at certain parts of the girl’s outfit before she touched her shoulder.

The man on the other hand had his full attention on the customers, a quick glance at Feyrair made him grimace before he turned his attention back to her. His deep black hair looked unnaturally glossy, his eyes the same black. He was clean shaven and dressed in black, various fabrics working together to create something akin to a military uniform and noble attire. He smiled and bowed slightly, not taking his eyes of Ilea’s. “Welcome, to our humble store. May I presume you are indeed who you claim to be?”

“What would convince you?” Ilea asked.

His smile grew wider. “A badge of your organization would be a start.”

“I don’t have a Sentinel badge myself, but it would look something like this,” she said and formed the one wing with ash, making it float towards the man who looked at it with curious interest.

“That would suffice, but I must indulge, my lady. I hear death itself is sent into the hearts of men who see the wings of ash fly past above,” he said. “My name is Charlson, and this is Elaina. We both own this establishment.”

Ilea rolled her eyes as she spread her wings once more, adding her ashen armor to the mix.

He clasped his hands together and shivered slightly. “Feral... vicious and efficient... the horned demon. Wonderfully apt description despite the usually overly dramatic disposition of the barden kind. Yes, you are her and a companion you brought as well, though I admit that while you dress plain, he is downright atrocious to look at, nigh to imagine even. Yes, whatever you need we will provide. Come, to my office, we shall discuss the details.”

“Greetings,” Elaina said finally, giving Ilea a light nod. “Maybe he should change into something less offensive or Charls’ skull might just explode. And I hate cleaning blood.”

“Hear that, Fey?” Ilea said. “Just armor is probably fine.”

The elf obliged. “Cleaning blood is quite easy, my dear,” he said to the woman and flicked a white flame alive above his palm.

“You have armor like that and choose to walk around looking like a blind mind magic victim?” Elaina asked with a deadpan expression. “Well, you do you. We’re all free now after all,” she added and followed Charlson, saying a few words to Nassay in the local language.

She glanced back at Ilea. “You don’t speak Jissu, do you?”

“Why? Did you order her to blow up the store?” Ilea asked, glancing at Nassay who took a few steps back, making a slight squealing sound.

[Tailor – lvl 83]

Though I doubt she could do something like that.

Elaina smirked for the first time. A very slight change before her lips leveled out again. “No, but it’s generally seen as rude to curse in front of customers. Not that I think you two care much for such noble gibberish.”

[Rogue – lvl 161]

Ilea smirked. “No, I do not. You’re pretty rogue like for a tailor.”

“That I am. It’s a shadier business than most would think. Plus all that experience helps me cut much better,” Elaina said and gestured them into the office.

“Flesh or fabric?” Ilea asked as she walked past.

The woman didn’t reply, closing the door when Feyrair had passed.

“Now, now. What do the famous Lilith and her companion like to drink?” Charlson asked as he opened a nearby cabinet with a collection of creatively crafted glass bottles. Various colored liquids suggested different types of alcohol.

“Something that burns,” Feyrair said. “And for her, ale.”

The man grabbed two small glasses and poured a dark near black liquid into one of them, the bottle shaped in the form of a fanged snake. He poured a clear liquid into the second glass before he glanced at Elaina. “You seem to be in luck, darling. Ale was requested.”

The woman vanished to the cellar, grabbing two horns she filled with liquid from a large barrel.

Ilea sat down on one of the large leather chairs, enjoying the comfortable cushion that came close to her own ash.

The office was rather spacious, decorated by both tasteful art pieces and a few dress forms standing prominently near the wall behind Ilea and Feyrair, currently holding no clothes or armor. Most of the building’s inside was made up of treated wood, gleaming lightly in the warm light from the magical lamp hanging overhead.

Elaina appeared again and handed Ilea the horn.

She took it and lightly tapped the woman’s half outstretched horn. Ilea had no idea if the gesture pleased Elaina or not, her face didn’t change.

Feyrair received the dark liquid and sipped on it, his eyes opening a little wider behind his scale armor. “Nice.”

“It would kill a lesser man,” Charlson said and raised his glass, taking a sip too. “Now I’m unaware of your interest in business. So far I have only dealt with an associate of an associate of an associate, though I must say the management seems to be in rather capable hands. Your hands?”

Ilea tasted the ale, finding it rather strong and surprisingly fruity. She liked it. “So I own this place?”

The man smiled before he giggled to himself. “Owning is a strong word, one we have learned to use a little less freely in these parts, as in part by your suggestion. You are however, the main investor and thus our employer. And I must say, the contract is extraordinarily fair. A sentiment that many business owners, or shall we say, managers, share in regards to your associates.”

"I do trust them to do a good job, and most of all to provide a comfortable work environment," Ilea said. "But enough about that-"

Charlson clapped and stood up. "Yes! You're here for the ball, I presume? And darling I won't let you step into the presence of high nobility in rags like those. No, you will leave an impression as dangerous as that ashen gown you showed me but a minute ago. And for you, we will create something suitable too," he said and glanced at Feyrair. "I already have eight ideas and will work out the first drafts."

"I have a few ideas as well," Elaina said.

The man looked over to her and smiled brightly, rushing her before a devastating hug nearly crushed the poor woman. He didn't say a word but the approval was downright written on his face.

The chime resounded outside, not audible as the room was enchanted but Ilea saw the enchantment light up within her sphere, a man stepping into the store and greeting Nassay. He said something that made her laugh before he looked over to the office.

His eyes were focused right at Ilea, despite a wall being between them.

"Stay here," she said to Fey.

She turned her head towards the man and cocked it lightly to the side, horn in hand before she vanished. "It's not particularly nice to stare at women," she said, standing about two meters away from him and drinking from her ale.

[Bard – lvl 275]

He wore a fancy two piece set of clothes, a dark red color with a gray piece of fabric covering one of his shoulders and going over his upper arm. Luscious wavy black hair reached his back. His face was well defined, a black mustache slightly twirled upwards adorned his upper lip and deep red eyes looked back at her.

The man didn't seem bothered in the slightest, bowing lightly without taking his eyes off of her. "My apologies. Lady Lilith I presume? Your presence is not one easily ignored, I must have lost my manners."

She expected a less dignified reaction. "Most people don't react so smoothly when I appear in front of them." It wasn't just his words. She noted that his heartbeat hadn't changed, no fear or discomfort visible to her senses. And his eyes looked interesting.

"I too enjoy the spectacle of power, from time to time. I did not aim to disappoint, lady Lilith," he said and bowed again, this time in a way that seemed official and very much trained. "Nethaniel Varay," he said smoothly. "Ambassador to Baralia, bard, and admirer. Here in fact, to pick up an order. Though I am pleasantly surprised to meet the famed ashen shadow."

"Nice to meet you too. I won't be bothering you any longer then," Ilea said with a smile.

"I assume you are present to join the celebrations?" the man asked before he smiled to Nassay, the look alone calming down the frozen girl and jolting her into action.

"I will, though I'm not entirely sure what it's about," she said.

If the answer surprised him, he didn't show it. "The liberation of our cities and our people. Not in small part thanks to you. And a dance of politics for future agreements and hostilities, as such is our purpose," he explained and gratefully took the package Nassay handed to him. "My battle dress," he

joked and smiled at them both. “Apologies again for the intrusion. I will be looking forward to seeing you again,” he added.

“Same to you, and no worries,” Ilea said with a smile, watching him step out of the store. *It’s just going to be that for the whole night, right?*