

“The news you brought was highly disturbing,” Dagon said as he poured himself a glass of whiskey. He offered the bottle to Ilea with a questioning glance.

“Thanks, I prefer ale,” she said and sat down in the armchair opposite his large table.

Elise had joined them as well.

“Jasmine managed to get a letter out. Her theories align with what you told Claire,” she said and sighed. “To think we were controlled to such a degree.”

“What do you mean?” Ilea asked.

“The most prominent libraries, collections of knowledge of humanity, their stories, and legends... lost all records of one of the most cataclysmic events in history,” Elise explained.

Ilea crossed her legs. “I doubt it’s the only one. We stretch only through the plains...”

Dagon shook his head in a solemn way and took a sip of his drink. “Three thousand years should not be enough for us to forget. This was a conscious effort. Either by the Ascended or another perpetrator,”

Or we just forgot. Because three thousand years is a long fucking time, Ilea thought. She didn’t mention it, not about to present the two esteemed professionals with the possibility of utter human failure. Something that was more than common, she found. How much was lost with the library of Alexandria? How much would be lost if Viscera was wiped out and burned?

As long as books made of paper were the main medium of storing knowledge, there was always a possibility of eradication.

“I assume you are not here for that?” Elise asked.

Ilea felt a little reminded of her visit to Walter and his necromancers after her training in the Hand. Elise had been the one to try and dissuade her from going north in the first place. And now she had returned with even more power. They could feel it, surely.

The body language showed. Or perhaps it was merely the news she had brought several days prior.

“Apologies for not talking to you immediately. It felt a little like an interrogation the last time,” Ilea said, thinking that perhaps they had seen it as an insult of some kind.

“Not at all, dear. But you must understand that the world has expanded even farther... the implications of your information are... hard to digest,” Elise said with a weak smile.

“Of course. We will focus on what we can do to protect ourselves and expand,” Ilea said.

“The Medic Sentinels,” Dagon said with a smirk. “A grand idea. I just hope you are prepared to face the scorn of the established healing orders.”

She shrugged. “I’ll take that hurdle when I get there. For now, they have no influence here. As soon as they take us seriously, it will be too late. They will either accept our presence or they will vanish.”

They glanced at each other with uncertainty. Even fear perhaps.

Ilea sighed. "I won't incite conflict for no reason, calm down you two."

"Power tends to corrupt, even those of a good heart," Dagon said.

"Then it is your job to tell me if I do get corrupted. If creating an organization to provide healers for adventurer and Shadow teams is corruption, then perhaps we should consider the definition of the word," Ilea said. "I'm not however here to talk about my sanity, corrupted mind or moral alignment. Did your inquiries lead to anything useful?"

"We are on the same side, Ilea. We merely consider the potential real results of our actions and those of our friends. The independence of Ravenhall has so far led only to prosperity but times can change quickly. The political balance is fickle and we need to question our decisions constantly, lest we are conquered or destroyed," Dagon said as he summoned a stack of papers.

That's why I leave the details to Claire and Trian, she thought.

"Eve Aillan. A name we suspect to be entirely made up. As is the little information she provided to the Hand upon joining. Some of the testers were apparently blown away by her abilities in both mind magic and well... her ability to vanish. You should know plenty about that," the man continued.

"The contact at the library of souls offered some suggestions too, on both of the targets you mentioned. Sadly neither is listed with the names you have mentioned," Elise said.

"It took us a couple weeks to cross reference the specific abilities we know and any records we have from various adventurer guilds, libraries, information brokers, assassin guilds and our own records. We assumed looks to be deceiving but focused on the specific genders. It is possible that both Eve and the man, Albert, you have mentioned, had ways to hide such information but it is unlikely," she said and joined Dagon, moving some of the documents on the table.

"There were several girls that fit the assumed lower evolved abilities. Records of at least one hundred and twenty three point to a combination of similar classes. Around three hundred if one counts those seen as deceased. If we assume her age, size, and body type to not massively differ from what she presented to the Shadow's Hand, it narrows it down to about thirty."

"Upon further investigation, a single girl stood out. One Olivia Sarken. Born and raised in Farport, a town of about two thousand in the south eastern part of Lys. The description of her looks only loosely fits the Eve you know but it does not differ too greatly to be out of the question."

"What made you focus on her then?" Ilea asked.

"She had several encounters with the guard and local authorities. Asked questions that even the informants we contacted were wary of mentioning. It concerned local nobility. Some of which mysteriously vanished around ten years ago."

"The girl was found guilty of murder, hunted down by a group of Imperial Scouts, and killed in the woods near the town," Elise explained.

Ilea motioned for her to continue.

"The evidence to convict her was shallow at best. Connections that would make little sense to a reasonable judge but it seems the disappearance of nobility made some influential people nervous. Most of the records on her were destroyed. Her family supported the pursuit," Elise said.

“The scouts reported the target taken care of and returned to Virilya. However... they never arrived.”

The soup is getting dense, Ilea thought with a smirk.

“A stray monster ambushed and killed them, their bodies only found by a traveling merchant weeks later. Ripped apart and strewn about in a manner that shocked the man so much his business soon failed and he drunk himself to death only three months later. The case was documented and shelved. Investigations into the area were deemed too dangerous. A quest was offered to the nearest adventurer guild but nobody deemed the reward worthy enough. And that... was that.”

“Thorough investigation,” Ilea said.

“The merchant guilds do keep the best records after all. Now all that isn’t enough to warrant a connection. If it weren’t for a short interview with various guards and guild representatives in Farport. Olivia was notorious for vanishing, often associated with an eerie humming sound that resulted in a small legend that her ghost still haunts the town.”

Ilea chuckled.

Elise nodded. “Some children apparently still hum a tune associated with her and with how guarded the informants were, we believe its possible that Olivia still lives on in more than a few hearts of the town. The local nobility guards their secrets closely but it isn’t however impossible to see the connections. The average wealth of farmers increased greatly after the killings and the allocation of taxes took a swift turn to more... community oriented projects.”

“She faked her own death,” Ilea said and considered. “None of the others fit her abilities?”

“A few do... same with their age and body types but motives don’t line up, nor are many of them still alive. Even if we consider that they faked their own deaths. Olivia is your best bet. Until proven wrong, we believe it to be her,” Elise said.

Dagon nodded.

“Alright. I’ll visit the town at one point and inquire about her. Thanks for the inquiries,” Ilea said, almost at a loss about what she should do with all that. *Olivia, hmm?*

“Do you think it would be easy to find me?” she asked, the thought suddenly striking her.

Elise smiled. “Much of the detailed information about you is with us and we would not part with that except if you started to massacre whole towns for whatever reason. We have been tracking stories and information about all council members however. Ilea and Lilith come up the most. You certainly leave an impression wherever you go. However that doesn’t mean it is easy to pin you down. The abundance of information creates a veil.”

“Riverwatch, Virilya, Dawntree, Ravenhall and many other places. The general consensus is probably that you are a Shadow and armored in black. Ash and healing is mentioned often but the info on your looks, specific abilities, allegiances, and age vary so much, you might as well be thirty people,” Elise explained with a smirk.

“The time differences between emerging stories makes it hard to believe you are a single person,” Dagon added. “Considering the geography. I assume your flight speed is rather advanced.”

“That it is,” she confirmed. “What about Scipio?”

Dagon sighed. "He is a mystery. There are barrier mages that can do similar things but nothing to the extent you described and none of them is at that level. Albert is a somewhat common name but Scipio doesn't show up in any records."

"The most peculiar thing however... and potentially a better lead than even with Olivia, is the fact that we received an answer from the Foundation of Glass. Directly. Addressed to me," he said and summoned a single sheet of paper.

"Esteemed librarian of the Shadow's Hand, Dagon Keywire

I have been informed that you have inquired about an individual named Scipio. I would like to invite you to discuss his whereabouts in person.

Regards,

Evan Trayne"

Dagon handed the letter to Ilea after he had read it out loud.

"Evan Trayne is... to our knowledge, the current head of the Seekers and potentially the most influential person in the Foundation. His interest could mean many a thing," Dagon said.

"Danger most of all," Elise supplied.

"Guess I can meet him at some point. It's not a priority," Ilea said and stored the letter.

Doubt Scipio or Albert, whatever his name is, knows more than the Fae. Still worth finding, if only to pay him back for that fight we had. And if it provides a meeting with such an important guy from the Foundation, it could open a lot of doors. If I need that.

"I advise you to be careful, at the very least. The Foundation is comparable to the Shadow's Hand. Instead of mercenaries, their power comes from knowledge. Don't let it mislead you, however. They should have plenty of high level individuals," Dagon explained.

"Sure. I'm always careful," Ilea said with a grin.

Elise shook her head as Dagon finished his drink. He winked at her when he was done.

Ilea bid them farewell and joined Claire in more dancing classes, letting Cless draw her several times.

The dancing sadly didn't lead to much quite yet but the little girl didn't disappoint.

'ding' 'You have learned the General Skill: Divination Magic Resistance – lvl 1

Divination Magic Resistance – lvl 1

Be it seers, oracles, or madmen. Undeniably there are those gifted with the ability to pierce the veils of space and time itself. You must be important enough to warrant special attention, leading to a resistance to such magic. If anything, this new ability will increase said attention but at the very least, your most private moments might not be so easily perceived.

The skill was very much welcome, especially to the little voice in Ilea's head reminding her of the Ascended. She doubted the creature itself had an ability like Cless' but it wouldn't hurt to prepare herself against it.

If she ever clashed with the Elven domains, it might be useful too. And she assumed it would happen, at one point or the other.

For the night, Ilea decided to visit a new dungeon on her list. The Gem golems were certainly effective to level some resistances but none of them provided essential defenses. The undead creature that remained within its sanctum would be overshadowed by many more dangerous monsters out there and Ilea wasn't about to dismiss other locations before at least checking them out.

There were several on the map but she chose another one with a skull mark.

It led her to the west of the Ravenhall, to the Kingdom of Kroll. The dungeon was supposedly located on the mountain chain separating the Navali forest and the human plains from the Isanna desert in the south.

The flight was a little longer than visiting the Karheim dungeon but with her third tier wings, long distances weren't much of an issue anymore. Nor was the otherwise difficult to traverse geography.

Her eyes allowed her to pick up distant light sources as well as movements illuminated by the setting suns.

She found hunting parties and soldiers, lone adventurers and even a few farms. When she reached the mountainous area, Ilea decided to land near a camp fire partially hidden between a group of large boulders.

Already, she was nearly back at the height of Ravenhall. Nothing compared to the North but she assumed these to be at least moderately dangerous territories. More so than the plains at the very least.

She decided to don her casual clothes and leather armor to approach.

Several figures sat around the small fire, talking in subdued voices. A woman stood guard on top of a boulder, spotting Ilea as she closed in on foot.

A whistle from the lookout made the others scramble up, wary as they emerged from behind the rock formation.

"Who goes there!?"

Ilea waved. "Lone healer, looking for a dungeon nearby," she answered and kept her pace.

"A healer... hey Edgar, maybe she could fix your leg," one of them said as he looked to one of the men.

Ilea identified them as she approached, finding them to be between level one twenty and one forty. Two mages, a warrior and a ranger.

The latter approached her with a friendly smile. "Good to meet you, I'm Sean. We were also on the way to the dungeon."

"Ilea, nice to find a group finally," she said, noticing that the mage, Edgar, had trouble standing upright. "I planned to visit the Caverns of Rot. That the same one you're looking for?"

Sean nodded. "Yes. It's just another hour up the mountain. Are you here on order's business?"

She waved him off. "No, no. I was in the area and heard about it. Thought I might find a team already there. I don't permanently join groups. Should I have a look at his leg?"

“That would be wonderful, really,” Sean said and looked at the others. He got some looks and a couple of nods. “Do you think there’s a possibility of joining our team? I can tell you’re not a run of the mill healer but if you are looking for a group. We explored the caverns several times in the past months and know our way around.”

Ilea thought about it. They seemed nice enough and certainly capable and prepared. The fact that they had a lookout that immediately spotted her was already a good sign. They knew the dungeon and more importantly, the way there.

Might be fun, joining a team again for a little while, she thought. Good way to test my capabilities in protecting a group, helping them level. If the dungeon has something on a similar level as the Golems in it.

“Sure. I’ll join for the night. How do you share loot, or are you here on a quest?” she said.

Sean seemed relieved. “That’s great news. Thank you. We mostly protect Edgar over there as he collects herbs. If we manage to catch some Mist Butterflies, we sell the parts and split the rewards. Same with the herbs. Bloodroot and Maar grass sell quite well in Utach.”

“Ah, I see. That sounds good to me,” she said with a smile and joined Edgar.

[Mage – lvl 142]

The man was dressed in similar gear to her own, various bags and compartments tied to several belts he wore both on his waist and around his chest. He had dark skin and green eyes, a little stubble on his chin, his head otherwise clean shaven. Other than a small knife, he didn’t seem to carry any weapons. As was often the case with mages.

“Let me have a look,” she said and crouched down, touching his knee. It was swollen and slightly bent. “What happened?” she asked and poured healing mana into it. A trickle really, to make sure it didn’t immediately pop back into place.

The man looked at her with a bit of suspicion, his demeanor changing at the question as he scratched the back of his head.

“He lost a bet,” the woman said. “Sophia, nice to meet you. Completely inconspicuous high level healer who travels alone.”

“Didn’t make the jump,” the warrior and fourth member of the group said with a wicked smile, chuckling right after.

“It’s cold,” Ilea said as the knee slowly healed.

“Used some magic, helps with the swelling,” Sophia said and smiled, forming a crystal of ice in her hand.

Ilea nodded and continued with her subdued healing. The knee still soon returned to normal.

Edgar sighed and sat down on a nearby rock. “Thank you,” he said with a nod.

“No worries. Did I interrupt your dinner?” she asked and glanced at the heavy black pot in which a delicious smelling broth was cooking.

“Joined more than interrupted. Care to have a plate?” Sean asked.

“I’d love to,” Ilea replied with a smile. She noted Sophia giving her another glance before she climbed back onto the boulder, resuming her watch.