

87: The smaller things

“My Lady,” Garside said, lying on his bed with his back prodded up against the wall behind him. “This servant is humbled that you would take time out of your day to come visit him.”

“It is not worth mentioning,” Scarlett replied after entering the room, eyeing him for a moment. She’d been a bit worried about his current condition, so she’d decided to pay a brief visit just to check the situation. The aged butler’s face appeared pale as he looked back at her, the upper half of his left shoulder supported by thick bandages.

At Scarlett’s request, Rosa had visited the man a couple more times since the Cabal’s ambush, but the bard had said there wasn’t much more that healing magic could do for his recovery at the moment. Apparently, there was a limit to how much healing one’s body could handle all at once, and the longer you waited, the less you could do with just magic. Age was also a factor, it seemed, and while Scarlett had figured Garside to be quite vigorous for his age considering he had less issue than her climbing the Whitdown Mountains, stamina didn’t equate to better recovery in this context it appeared.

Rosa had done as much as she could already, so it was all left up to Garside himself to recover the last bit. Scarlett had what was supposedly the family physician pay a visit from the visit, but the man had said much the same. He hadn’t even been entirely certain whether Garside would regain the use of his arm.

When Scarlett had first heard that, she’d been surprised at how livid it made her. It was to the point where she’d ended up using her magic practice as an excuse to let out some of the anger, and she still occasionally found her mind wandering back to the matter, and to the Hallowed Cabal and Riya. Unbidden thoughts of what she would like to do to the woman often popped up, so she tried to ignore thinking about it as much as possible so as not to let some of her irritation slip around the others.

She had never realized she was *this* attached to the old butler. It was bound to be a vestige left by the original Scarlett, but up till now, it had been subtler than many of the other emotions left behind by the woman. She wondered if Scarlett herself had even been aware of how much she seemed to have cared about Garside.

It was a new sensation for her, to *Amy*, feeling this *strongly* about another person’s well-being.

She wasn’t sure whether she should laugh or cry at the fact that even a twisted person like Scarlett seemed to have stronger emotional attachments to others than herself.

Her eyes passed to the bed table next to Garside’s table, and the papers filled with text on it.

“I see you have deemed it fit not to abandon all of your duties while you convalesce.”

“I am this household’s sole butler, my Lady,” the man said with a certain look that belied his pale appearance. “It is only right that I maintain those duties that I can still, as long as I draw breath.”

Scarlett frowned. She didn't like the way he put that. "I am certain there are other people in this household who are capable enough to assume those responsibilities for the time being. Yet Marlon informed me you even left your quarters this morning to oversee the efforts of the masons in the courtyard." She met his eyes. "You have served this family faithfully for a long time. Do not forget that your continued well-being is necessary if you are to continue to do so in the future."

Garside gave her a long, indecipherable look. Eventually, he gently lowered his head. "You are correct, my Lady. My actions have been imprudent and disrespectful towards you and the barony. Henceforth, I will be more heedful of my condition."

"See that you are." Scarlett nodded her head before glancing around the room.

This wasn't the first time she'd visited this place, but she was still always somewhat shocked by the decor. From his personality, one would expect Garside's room to be spartan in its furnishing. Yet instead, it was filled to the brim with vases and different ceramics, some of which looked like they had been made by true masters.

Considering he was just a mere butler, Garside must have been saving for a long time in order to afford all this. Or maybe he'd gotten some as a gift. Whatever the reason, it was curious to see that the old man had such an interest.

Her eyes stopped on a vase that had strange floral patterns surrounding intricate murals on its side that seemed to tell the tale of a fisherman fighting a large, three-headed beaver-like creature.

A curious sight indeed.

She turned back to Garside. "I wished to inform you that I and the others will once more venture out tomorrow morning. We will be travelling northeast of Freybrook."

"Again, my Lady?" Garside's expression turned troubled. "What if something were to happen?"

"We will be fine. For the time being, there are none who have reason to cause me issue, nor any whom I would allow the opportunity."

The Hallowed Cabal would have already done something if they were planning on reneging on their end of the deal this early, and she doubted they were. Not until she'd either handed them the third part of the Seak of Thainnith or The Angler Man had woken up.

And as they were the only real threat to her at the moment, she wasn't afraid of leaving the mansion. They'd cleared the last dungeon in the Freybrook area a few days earlier without issue, for example. Though Garside and the others had been against that as well.

"How long will you be away?" the butler asked.

"I do not know. It is unlikely to take longer than a day, so there is no need for excessive worry."

Still, this wouldn't be the only such trip in the near future. With no other dungeons left near Freybrook, they would have to start traveling more and booking more trips through the Kilnstone network.

"I see..." Garside mumbled. "Then I pray you will return in good health, my Lady."

"I will," Scarlett said.

She exchanged a few more words with the butler, ensuring he wouldn't leave his quarters anymore to go out and work himself to death or something stupid like that anymore, before eventually leaving the room behind.

Her mind shifted to tomorrow's trip as she began making her way toward the library in the mansion's main structure. Like she'd told Garside, she wasn't *expecting* this trip to take more than a day if everything lined up with her game knowledge. But it could take far longer if things differed for some reason. That's why she'd waited to leave, so that she could receive Gaven and the Countess when they'd visited the day before.

The two of them hadn't stayed for too long, leaving during the night after Scarlett had spoken further with Gaven about his tasks and forced herself to interact a bit more with the Countess. It might be a week before they returned, and Scarlett couldn't say she was particularly excited about it. Both the next meeting itself, and the news it'd bring. Either good or bad.

Still, she couldn't complain too much. Everything had gone almost exactly as planned the previous day. The Countess had been alarmingly easy to persuade to her side, essentially not asking for anything at all in return for working with Scarlett. But things were what they were.

Scarlett would also have to come up with an explanation for the broken table. She hadn't had the servants enter the room yet, but someone would have to clean up the mess there. After visiting the library, she'd find Marlon and instruct her to send some servants to clean it up.

When she reached the library, Scarlett paused as she saw both Shin and Allyssa exiting the place together. The two young Shielders stopped and greeted her.

Scarlett glanced at the door behind the door. "Were the two of you perusing the library together?"

"Well, Shin was," Allyssa said. "I mostly just tagged along."

"I see..." Scarlett looked at the young man in question. "I hope you found something that caught your interest."

"I did," he answered, holding up a thick leather-bound book in his arms.

"What are you doing right now?" Allyssa asked, and Scarlett turned to her.

"I was planning on preparing for our excursion tomorrow."

"Oh..." Allyssa's expression grew uncertain. "Where are we going this time?"

“To a small village northeast of Freybrook. I do not think the trip itself will take much time, so most of our time will be occupied with what we will be doing there. I recommend you bring enough to be ready for any unforeseen circumstances.”

Shin raised his eyebrows. “Will we be gone for long?”

“Not necessarily,” Scarlett said. “But it is best if you prepare as if we will.”

“Okay.” The young man simply gave a nod of his head at her words.

Allyssa gave her a hesitant look, though.

Scarlett looked at the girl. “Is there something you wish to say?”

Allyssa cringed. “No, it’s just... Should we really be leaving again right now?”

Scarlett studied her for a while. Though it had not been anything especially noticeable, she felt like Allyssa had been acting somewhat awkward around her ever since the Hallowed Cabal’s attack. When they left to clear the dungeon she’d appeared somewhat against the idea as well.

“Are you perhaps afraid that we will be attacked once more during our excursion?”

The face Allyssa showed suggested she’d hit the nail on the head.

“I’m not...*afraid*,” Allyssa said. “It’s just that... It doesn’t seem to be the best idea, if people are out to kill you, right?” She looked at Shin and hit him on the back. “He thinks so as well, even if he’s too afraid to say it.”

Shin just raised his brows at her. “I never said it’s a bad idea.”

“But you were thinking it! Don’t say you weren’t!”

Scarlett eyed the two of them. She *had* been very vague when she had described the events of that day, chalking the attack up to a criminal organization that had it out for her. And while she felt these two usually accepted most of her words without too much issue, Allyssa in particular had seemed uncomfortable with not knowing more about what happened this time.

Especially after the attackers had both been allowed to leave without issue *and* pick up all their dead.

Still, both of the two Shielders had agreed to only report the part about criminals to the Shields Guild, which Scarlett was thankful for. And she supposed she couldn’t really judge them for wondering over some of her actions at this point.

“Where we are going, you will not have to worry about any further attacks,” she said. “It is also unlikely that any fighting will occur, so if you wish to stay here at the estate, you may do so.”

That might actually be better, considering where they were going.

“W-What?” Allyssa looked at her with widened eyes. “No, no, I’m not saying I won’t go. I was just wondering if what we’re doing is really necessary *right now*.”

“Being cautious is good when one can afford to be so. Unfortunately, I currently lack the freedom to postpone these matters to a later time, so excessive wariness would not serve me well.”

“Oh... So, I guess we’re going then?”

“We are, Scarlett said.”

“When are we leaving?” Shin asked.

“As early as possible. Ensure that you do not forget anything.”

“We’ll prepare everything tonight, then.” Allyssa grabbed hold of Shin’s arm and began pulling him along. “We’ll stop holding you up for now. See you later.”

Scarlett said a quick goodbye as she watched the two disappear down the corridor, then she turned to the library door.

It was time to see if she couldn’t find a really old map.