

82: Cabalic visits

Scarlett stared down at the motionless bodies on the hallway floor. The Hallowed Cabal had made their move.

“There are more of them,” Fynn said, sniffing the air. He paused, looking toward her. “...They’re not guests, right?”

She shook her head. “They are not. There is no need to hold back.”

It was either them or her. She’d accepted that last time the Cabal ambushed them, and she wasn’t going to pull any punches. But to think they’d actually attack the mansion itself this time. It might be temporary or whatever, but this was still her freaking *home*.

A loud cry rang out further down the hallway.

Crap. Would they touch the staff? Most of them were in the mansion’s other wing, but that had sounded a lot like Molly...

“Follow me,” she said and started moving down the hallway in her nightgown. The cool air pushed against her exposed legs and her feet were bare against the carpeted floor, but there wasn’t much she could do about that. This was no time to stop for a change of clothes.

They soon reached the corridor where Scarlett’s office was located, and there they found Molly, hand pressed against her chest as the woman stared at another black-covered body lying on the floor. The servant was one of the few who had a room in the mansion’s east wing, so that she could be of service when Scarlett needed it.

“M-My Lady!” Molly cried out when they approached. “I-I heard a loud sound! A-and then there was a b-body!”

“I took care of him on the way,” Fynn cut in from the side.

Scarlett eyed him. Thank god she recruited him. And thought of giving him a room close to hers.

“Go back inside your room and hide. It is unlikely that the intruders will search all the rooms thoroughly so you will be safe there,” she told Molly. “Do not leave until either I or one of the other servants tell you to.”

“Y-Yes, my Lady.” Molly trembled as she tried not to look down at the body. Scarlett and Fynn followed her to her room before leaving her there and continuing deeper into the mansion.

“Are there any others in this wing?” Scarlett asked.

“There were, but I think the old man took care of them,” Fynn replied. Scarlett had given him one of her health potions to heal the gash on his arm, so now there was just dried blood left. She needed him in prime condition to deal with things.

“How many?”

“Four, I think.”

She frowned. That meant there had been at least nine Cabal Adepts just in this wing. Considering they often came in groups of four, there had to be more of them left. She looked at Fynn. “Can you sense any more of them?”

He seemed to focus for a moment, then a scowl appeared on his face. “I can’t. But there’s something weird outside.”

Damn. That meant there were other variants among these Adepts specifically meant for stealth. It probably wouldn’t have much effect against Fynn at close range, but they had larger spells that made it hard to sense things at range. That fact alone would make one suspicious, but it was good for stopping the enemy from gaining any more information.

Soon enough, the two of them made it to the mansion foyer, where Scarlett stopped upon seeing a burned body close to the entrance. Another Cabal Adept. It seems like Garside had grasped the situation quickly and was cleaning up.

Steps sounded out from the stairs as Shin and Allyssa came running into the foyer. Shin was dressed in a simple set of clothing with sword and shield in hand, and Allyssa had put on her bandolier and brown goggles along with her hand crossbow. The two young Shielders sent Scarlett questioning looks.

“What’s happening?” Allyssa asked, pausing as her eyes found the Adept’s body. “Ittar’s light...”

Shin stared at it, and the gold mask covering its face. “Who is that?”

“Intruders,” Scarlett replied promptly. “There might still be more of them around, so be careful.” Neither of the two was much stronger than a Cabal Adept. They worked best as support for Fynn in these kinds of situations.

A large burst of red light flashed through the windows facing the courtyard, along with the sound of stone shattering. Scarlett turned her eyes towards the doors, then looked back at Shin and Allyssa. “Ensure that all the staff are safe, then join us in the courtyard. Have Rosa join you if you encounter her.”

Allyssa stared at her. “What? What about you?!”

“Fynn and I will find Garside, as well as whoever is responsible for this attack. It is imperative we do not waste any time. Go!”

The two of them gave her hesitant looks, but eventually turned around and left. Scarlett glanced at Fynn briefly, then moved towards the front doors, where another explosion of sounds and light sounded out from the courtyard.

Opening the doors, they were met by the sight of a half-dressed Garside standing at the end of the entrance stairs, with a gathering of black-clad bodies spread around the courtyard. A tall

woman with braided dark hair, dressed in clothes that looked like they'd belong in an old pirate movie, jumped to the side at the other end of the courtyard as several exploding fires trailed her, blasting into even more black-clad figures in the process. A multitude of daggers and weapons hung off her belt, and after nimbly rolling away from another of Garside's attacks, she hoisted up two small axes that shot off like bullets towards the old butler. Garside cast a spell that exploded near both axes in their flight, just barely knocking them off course so that they cut into the steps behind him with a deafening sound.

Scarlett blanched. *Cut into.* The stone was like butter to those axes. Her eyes widened when she saw the handle of one dug into Garside's shoulder, his left arm hanging limply to the side.

Fynn let out a low growl as he jumped off the stairs, landing in front of Garside, near the fountain at the center of the courtyard. The fountain itself had had its side torn apart, and its water spread onto the surrounding stone.

The black-haired woman's attention turned to Fynn, and she pulled up another axe.

Scarlett blinked. Crap. She couldn't let this fight go on.

"Halt!" she called out, summoning a large sphere of blinding fire in the air above the courtyard. Everyone's heads turned away from the miniature sun, and Garside looked back to stare at her.

"My Lady! Return to the mansion!"

"I will not," she said and started moving down the stairs. She looked to the black-haired woman at the other end of the courtyard. "Stay your hand," she said as she dispelled her fire, the moon's pale light once returning to illuminate the space. Thankfully, the woman actually appeared to listen to her as she didn't immediately attack. Nor did the three Adepts that were still standing. Fynn looked ready to pounce any second, but he also seemed to be able to hold himself back.

Garside tried holding her back with his arm as she passed him. Scarlett turned to look at the old man, whose skin was growing pale as half of his body was covered in the blood pouring out of his shoulder. God. That axe had cut in *deep*. How was he still standing? A blistering violence of emotion loomed from somewhere inside her at the sight.

"Words cannot describe how much I appreciate your concern," she cut out. "But I will deal with this."

She pulled out another health potion from her pouch. It was the last normal [Health Potion] she had, but it probably wasn't enough to deal with an injury like that. Hopefully, it'd do enough for them to be able to treat him later on. The man looked like he wasn't going to accept it, and directly go against her words, but after a moment, he reached out and took the potion with a pained expression.

Scarlett passed him by, continuing towards the center of the courtyard. The black-haired woman lowered her axe. "Well, this makes things easier for me. It's no wonder the last batch never made it back. You guys are stronger than expected.

As Scarlett walked, she raced through the situation in her head, trying to think of the best resolution. The woman before her wasn't just your ordinary member of the Hallowed Cabal. Technically, she wasn't a member at all; she was a part of the Tribe of Sin, but the distinction between the two wasn't big in this case. It was surprising to see her on what was clearly a Cabal mission, but perhaps that was a sign of how busy they were at the moment. Whatever the reason, this woman was far from weak. If they all teamed up against her, they *might* stand a chance. But none of them were prepared for such a fight at the moment.

Beating her would also cause several other issues to arise. The fact that she was here to begin with meant that Scarlett's spot on the Hallowed Cabal's list of priorities had grown a lot higher than she wanted. Beating this woman meant the Cabal would raise their threat level even further, and next time, they would definitely send someone they *couldn't* deal with. This situation had to be nipped in the bud before it escalated.

Scarlett stopped near Fynn, meeting the eyes of the black-haired woman. Riya, the Tribe's mad dog. "I take it you were the ones who sent people to ambush me before as well," she said, feeling the anger slip into her voice. "I had hoped the result of that attempt would be enough for you to not barge into my affairs again."

"Wished the world worked like that, love," Riya said, hand placed against her hip. "I'll give you a choice. Either you make that old man back there stand down all nice and quiet so I can chop his head off, or I gather up all the people in this mansion in front of you and get those clothes of yours bloody."

Scarlett stared at the woman, then glanced back at Garside. He had a beaten expression on his face, but still looked ready to get back into it at the slightest hint of danger. But she couldn't imagine herself ordering him to do something like that, even for a second. The mere thought made her taste bile in her mouth. And there was no way the Hallowed Cabal would just let all these witnesses be anyhow.

She turned back to Riya, giving her a long look. "...Let us discuss this. Privately."

The woman raised a brow. "You look like you're ready to tear my throat out." She waved her hand. "But sure."

Scarlett tried to rein herself back a bit, then gave Garside and Fynn one last look before she walked up to Riya. Her heart was beating in her ears as she glanced down at the weapons hanging off the woman's side.

She spoke in a lower voice, aware that Fynn would still hear what was said. "I believe I have already ascertained which group you belong to, so I will simply say this: let us strike a deal."

Riya stared back at her. "That's not exactly on the table, love."

"I am sure it is not. But it could be, if you learned what you stood to gain from it."

The woman considered Scarlett for a while, then pulled a reflective piece of grey metal from one of her pockets. Scarlett only barely stopped herself from drawing in a breath as the mirror-like object took on a darker hue, a fog covering its surface. A moment later, a sharp voice sounded out from the [Mirror of Communion].

“What is it?” it asked.

Scarlett stilled, a sense of relief filling her. Thank god The Angler Man wasn't on the other end. That would have forced her hand.

“The target wants to strike a deal,” Riya said.

“We do not negotiate with those blind to the truth,” the voice replied.

Riya looked up at Scarlett. “You heard ‘em.” She reached for an axe.

“Wait,” Scarlett said. “I suspect I know what it is you are after.”

The woman paused. Only silence followed from the mirror.

“Well. Go on,” Riya said.

Scarlett looked between her and the [Mirror of Communion]. She had a hunch about who was on the other side of the mirror as well. “Am I correct in assuming I originally caught your attention when I dealt with the Grey Dog Gang two months ago? My investigations at that point revealed their involvement with you, and at first I believed the subsequent ambush on my carriage to be a retaliation for that. Judging from today's attack, however, I can tell that is not all.”

Riya didn't look like she had a care in the world about what she was saying, and the voice in the mirror stayed silent, but Scarlett continued.

“From your words earlier, I presume you do not wish for me dead. As such, I can only conclude you are interested in what artifact I used to resist the mental prying I encountered when I discovered that mirror artifact in the Grey Dog Gang's base. In exchange for leaving me be, I can share this information.”

The [Mirror of Communion] was silent for a moment, then an answer came. “No.”

Scarlett clenched her jaw. Of course that wouldn't be enough. They could literally just force any information she had out of her. She had to convince them she'd told them everything she knew, and that there was nothing to gain from them getting rid of her. It couldn't get to the state where she spoke with The Angler Man. This was one occasion where showcasing all her knowledge was more of a threat to her than anything.

“...I am willing to compromise,” she said. “There must be something you want. Perhaps you are not aware exactly of who I am, the influence I can bring to bear, or the connections I have. I do not feel there is much for either party to gain by us continuing to oppose each other here.”

“Riya,” the voice on the other end said.

“Yeah?” the black-haired woman looked down.

“Kill everybody but her.”

“Alright.”

“Wait!” Scarlett stepped back and raised her hands as Riya reached for an axe. “I know the location of the Seal of Thainnith!”

“Hold,” the voice immediately said, and Riya stopped. A gush of air blew past Scarlett as appeared beside her, glowing claws around his hands as he stared at Riya.

No one moved.

“Speak,” the voice said.

Scarlett wanted nothing more than to just snap and blow these people away, but she had to hold herself back. She’d just taken a huge gamble. There was literally no way for her to cleanly get out of this situation if The Angler Man were to arrive on the other end of the [Mirror of Communion]. And for something this serious, they would definitely call him, even if he was busy. But there was a chance, just a chance, that the reason he wasn’t here right now wasn’t just because he was busy, but because he *couldn’t*.

“Rimepeak. Northrest. Brinewick. Cloudmoor,” Scarlett counted off several names. “I do not think I am the only one that realizes the significance behind the places you attacked last month. But it is likely that no other individual knows the location of the Seal. I do, however, I will not share if you harm me or any of the people under me.”

Once again, silence followed from the other end of the mirror.

Scarlett held her breath.

“...We’ll speak.”

**[Quest completed: Survive the Hallowed Cabal’s assault]
{Skill points awarded: 8}**

Oh, thank god.